

DOUG KREMM

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Dept. of Philosophy, Emerson Hall 209a
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EDUCATION

Ph.D. in Philosophy, Harvard University (expected completion May 2018)

Dissertation: *Practical Cognitivism: An Essay on Normative Judgment and Objectivity*

Committee: Christine Korsgaard (Chair), Selim Berker, Allan Gibbard, Derek Parfit (until his death in 2017)

Dissertation summary: I develop and defend a metaethical view that I call ‘practical cognitivism’, which explains ethical practice as the product of a distinctively practical kind of thinking. This view best accommodates the guiding insights of the non-cognitivist tradition, and it re-orientes our thinking about foundational questions in metaethics (e.g. questions about ethical truth and objectivity) in interesting ways. It also sheds light on a variety of phenomena that are of central importance to moral philosophy, such as normative guidance, akrasia, and the place of the emotions in ethical life.

B.A. in Philosophy and English Literature (*summa cum laude*), University of Pittsburgh, 2010.

AREAS OF SPECIALIZATION

Ethics (including Metaethics, Moral Psychology, History of Ethics, Normative Ethics, Philosophy of Action)

AREAS OF COMPETENCE

Political Philosophy, Ancient Philosophy, Philosophy of Language

PUBLICATIONS

- “Metaethical Quietism” (with Karl Schafer), in Tristram McPherson and David Plunkett (eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Metaethics* (Routledge, 2017).
- “Critical Notice of Mark Schroeder, *Expressing Our Attitudes*, Vol. 2,” forthcoming in *Analysis Reviews*.

WORKING PAPERS (see website for abstracts)

- “What Is Metaethical Cognitivism?”
- “Rethinking the Motivation Problem”
- “Expressivism, Agency, and Akrasia”
- “An Ethical Defense of Metaethical Quietism”
- “Enoch on Doing with Less”

HONORS AND AWARDS

- GSAS Dissertation Completion Fellowship, Harvard University (2017-2018)
- Richard M. Martin Prize Fellowship, Department of Philosophy, Harvard University (2016, 2017)
- GSAS Merit Fellowship, Harvard University (2015) (awarded to two philosophy graduate students each year on the basis of merit)
- 2nd Prize, E.M. Adams Essay Competition for Graduate Students in Philosophy, UNC Chapel Hill

(2014) (\$10,000-dollar prize for an essay on the moral philosophy of E. M. Adams)

- Certificate of Distinction in Teaching, Harvard University (2013) (awarded to teachers who receive average student evaluations of 4.5/5 or above, from 5 or more students)
- Summer Language Study Grant, Harvard University (2013) (awarded for an intensive study of Ancient Greek)
- University Scholar, University of Pittsburgh (2008-2010) (awarded to students who attain the top two percent in cumulative undergraduate academic standing)
- Burkhart-Alumni Scholarship in English, University of Pittsburgh (2009-10) (awarded to outstanding senior majors in English literature upon faculty nomination)
- Carol Kay Award for Best Undergraduate Essay on British Literature between 1500-1900, University of Pittsburgh (2009) (awarded for an essay called “Moral Goodness and Duty in *Bleak House*”)

PRESENTATIONS

- “Two Kinds of Cognitivism.” Workshop in Moral and Political Philosophy (Harvard University, 2017)
- Commentator for “From Normative Disagreement to Normative Antirealism?” by Michelle Dyke, Harvard-MIT Graduate Student Conference (2017)
- “Expressivism, Agency, and the Akratic Mind.” Workshop in Moral and Political Philosophy (Harvard University, 2016)
- Commentator for “The Intentionality of Self-Deception” by Katia Samoilova, Eastern APA (2017)
- “Re-thinking the Motivation Problem.” Workshop in Moral and Political Philosophy (Harvard University, 2015)
- “Vindicating Normativity: An Understanding-Based Approach.” Workshop in Moral and Political Philosophy (Harvard University, 2015)
- “What the Quietist Helps Us to See, the Expressivist Must Help us to Explain.” Workshop in Moral and Political Philosophy (Harvard University, 2014)
- “Enoch on Doing with Less.” Cologne Summer School in Philosophy 2014: Practical Reasons: Their Metaphysics, Epistemology, and Creation (Universität zu Köln, 2014)
- “A Normative Defense of Meta-Normative Quietism.” Workshop in Moral and Political Philosophy (Harvard University, 2014)
- “Two Kinds of Cognitivism.” Workshop in Moral and Political Philosophy (Harvard University, 2013)
- Guest Lecture for Christine Korsgaard on Rationalism and Sentimentalism. Course: History of Modern Moral Philosophy (Harvard University, 2012)
- “In Virtue of Virtue: Why Virtue Epistemology Can't Solve the Value Problem.” Work in Progress Lunchtime Talk Series (Harvard University, 2011)

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

AS PRIMARY INSTRUCTOR:

- *Plato's Republic* (Harvard University, Fall 2016)
- *Noncognitivism in Ethics* (Harvard University, Spring 2013)

AS CO-TEACHER:

- *Philosophy and Religion in Literature* (Lexington High School, Fall 2014) (elective course for high-school seniors, co-taught with Karen Russell, English teacher)

AS A TEACHING FELLOW:

- *The Meaning of Life* (Instructor: Mathias Risse) (Harvard University, Spring 2015)
- *Philosophy of Science* (Instructor: Ned Hall) (Harvard University, Spring 2014)
- *Deductive Logic* (Instructor: Ned Hall) (Harvard University, Fall 2013)
- *History of Modern Moral Philosophy* (Instructor: Christine Korsgaard) (Harvard University, Fall 2012)

OTHER:

- *Basics of Argument Mapping* (worked as a teacher and independent consultant for ThinkerAnalytix, developing and implementing a curriculum for teaching argument mapping to high school students)

GRADUATE COURSEWORK**For credit**

First-Year Colloquium I: 20th-Century Analytic Philosophy (Ned Hall, Bernhard Nickel)

First-Year Colloquium II: Ethics (Selim Berker)

The History of Modern Moral Philosophy (Christine Korsgaard)

Explanatory Structure (Ned Hall)

Equality and Democracy (T. M. Scanlon)

Aristotle on Truth and Meaning (Russell Jones)

Epistemic Normativity (Selim Berker)

Deductive Logic (Ned Hall)

Cartesian Man (Alison Simmons)

Normativity, Ethics, Meta-Ethics (Derek Parfit)

Philosophy of Language (Mark Richard)

Instructional Styles in Philosophy (Bernhard Nickel)

Audited

Metaphysics (Farid Masrour)

Metaphysical Grounding (Selim Berker)

Knowledge and Abilities (Mark Richard)

Method, Essence, and Intuition (John Bengson)

Philosophy of Action (Doug Lavin)

Metaethics (Selim Berker)

Normative and Meta-Normative Questions (Derek Parfit and Selim Berker)

The Moral Sentiments (David Sussman)

Theories of the Good (T. M. Scanlon)

Kant's Ethical Theory (Christine Korsgaard)

SERVICE

- Referee, Harvard-MIT Graduate Student Conference (2011-2017).
- Graduate Student Representative (2016-2017). Paid elected position. Duties included: organizing and managing prospective student visits, acting as a liaison between department faculty and graduate students, managing teaching assignments within the department.

- Research Assistant for Mark Richard (2015). Compiled index for *Truth and Truth Bearers, Meaning in Context, Volume II*.
- Research Assistant for Selim Berker (2014-2015). Assisted with research on the history of 20th-century metaethics, and the history of various concepts in contemporary philosophy (e.g., supervenience vs. dependence/grounding). Met regularly to discuss ongoing research pertaining to these and other topics.
- Research Assistant for Frances Kamm (2013). Compiled index for *Bioethical Prescriptions: To Create, End, Choose, and Improve Lives*.
- Graduate-Student Events Coordinator for Harvard Philosophy Department (2011-2014).
- Co-Creator and Organizer, Harvard Talkshop (2012-2013). Informal venue for faculty and graduate students to present work in progress. (Still thriving today!)
- Co-Organizer, Harvard-MIT Graduate Philosophy Conference (2012).

LANGUAGES

- English (native)
- Advanced proficiency in Russian
- Proficiency in Ancient Greek

REFERENCES

Christine M. Korsgaard
 Arthur Kingsley Porter Professor of Philosophy
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Cheryl Chen (teaching reference)
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Dissertation Abstract

My dissertation aims to recover some key insights that have animated the so-called “non-cognitivist” tradition in ethics – insights that have been continually distorted and obscured through attempts to express them in a theoretical framework that cannot accommodate them. When properly understood, these ideas point toward a distinctive kind of metaethical view that I call ‘practical cognitivism’. This view understands ethical practice as the product of a distinctively practical kind of cognition, which we engage in by considering, adopting, rejecting, and carrying out *practical commitments*. Understanding ethical practice in this way allows us to place ethics in the natural world without distorting or undermining it, and it sheds light on a variety of phenomena that are of central importance to moral philosophy, such as normative guidance, akrasia, and the place of the emotions in ethical life.

The insights that I aim to recover from the non-cognitivist tradition are, first, that ethical thinking is fundamentally practical in a way that rules out a substantially *representationalist* account of such thinking, and, second, that purely ontological questions about the nature and existence of certain sorts of entities (e.g. ethical properties and facts) are *irrelevant* to concerns about the objectivity of ethics. The framework that structures much of contemporary metaethical theorizing has made it difficult for non-cognitivists to express these ideas in a way that does not impugn the status of ethics. If one says that ethical judgments are not substantially representational, one seems to be saying that such judgments are not genuinely *cognitive*; and if one says that such judgments are not genuinely cognitive, one seems to be saying that they are not really capable of *getting things right* – at least not in any objective sense.

I argue that we can make progress here by rejecting a widely held assumption about cognitive attitudes that is implicit in the above remarks: namely, that they are essentially mental states that aim to represent the world in some substantial sense. Instead, we should think of cognitive attitudes as mental states that aim to answer certain kinds of questions. We can then distinguish between two philosophically interesting kinds of cognitivism: theoretical and practical. The theoretical cognitivist understands ethical inquiry as an attempt to answer certain sorts of representational questions, whereas the practical cognitivist understands such inquiry as an attempt to answer questions that are *irreducibly practical*, in a sense that I explain.

I develop the central thesis of practical cognitivism by focusing on the notion of a practical commitment, which I explain in terms of our capacity to engage in a strong form of reflective agency. We engage in this kind of agency to the extent that we act with clear understanding of what we are doing and why, and to the extent that we can fully stand behind what we do. Practical commitments facilitate this kind of reflective agency, in part by regulating the functioning of other, less reflective motivational states, and in part by unifying us as agents across time. On the view I defend, ethical judgments are expressions of this kind of practical commitment. This view explains how ethical judgments are capable of playing their characteristic role in practical deliberation, and it explains what goes wrong in cases where they fail to play that role (e.g. in cases of akrasia).

Practical cognitivism re-orientes our thinking about correctness and objectivity in ethics in interesting ways. When the practical character of ethics is properly understood, concerns about ethical objectivity will no longer take the form of ontological questions about how our world could contain such things as values and obligations. Instead, such concerns will take the form of practical questions about how to arrive at a set of commitments that can withstand critical reflection. Since critical reflection in this case is fundamentally practical in character, our response to the relevant concerns must likewise be practical.

In the final chapters of the dissertation, I show how the practical cognitivist can do justice

to our concerns about correctness and objectivity by appealing to the idea of *ethical understanding*. Some ethical views are better than others, I argue, because they express a deeper or more refined understanding of how to live, where understanding how to live is not reducible to having an organized body of propositional knowledge, but is a matter of having the right kind of *practical outlook*. What counts as the “right” kind of practical outlook is an irreducibly practical question about what kinds of commitments to adopt and what kinds of emotional sensitivities to cultivate and endorse, and is thus a question that can only be answered from within the sphere of ethical inquiry. This leads to a form of “metaethical quietism,” which I clarify and defend.