

# LUKE CIANCARELLI

Department of Philosophy, Harvard University, Cambridge MA 02138

[lukeciancarelli@g.harvard.edu](mailto:lukeciancarelli@g.harvard.edu) ☎ (973) 362-5347

## EDUCATION

**Harvard University**, Cambridge, MA

**PhD**, Philosophy, expected May 2027

AOS: Ethics; Philosophy of Mind; History of Modern Philosophy (especially Early Modern and Post-Kantian).

AOC: Logic; Kant (theoretical and practical); 20<sup>th</sup> century philosophy.

**Yale University**, New Haven, CT

**BA**, *Magna cum laude*, Honors in Philosophy and English, May 2019

## DISSERTATION

Title: *The Recovery of the Imagination*

Committee: Richard Moran (chair), Samantha Matherne, Alison Simmons, Sean Kelly

My dissertation interprets German and English Romanticism (1790-1850) as an essentially ethical movement by focusing on its conception of the creative imagination. The Romantics understand the creative imagination to be our power to create works of art as well as our power to want or desire something—for example, to be drawn to a career, a way of life, or a relationship with a particular person. They thus believe that our desiring is neither a projection of interest onto the world nor a perception of reasons within it, but a creative imaginative response to it. The dissertation reconstructs this conception of the imagination, argues that it resolves a paradox about desire that contemporary accounts do not adequately address, and shows how it supports a distinctive ethic of responsive love.

## PUBLICATIONS

“The Cartesian Passions as Inclinations and Descartes’ Alienated Anthropology,” 2026, *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 34(4), 604–627.

## FELLOWSHIPS & AWARDS

Alternate for Junior Fellowship, Harvard Society of Fellows, 2025

Fellow in Values Engagement, Edmund and Lily Safra Center, Harvard University, 2023-24

Certificates of Distinction in Teaching, Harvard University, Fall 2021-Spring 2024

Sholom & Marcia Herson Scholarship Prize, Yale English Department, 2019

The Elizabethan Club Prize, Yale College, 2019

Schoenberg Prize Winner, Yale English Department, 2018

Thouron Scholarship, Yale/University of Cambridge, Pembroke College, 2017

Named Endowed Scholarships, Yale College, 2015-2019

Morehead-Cain Scholarship, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (declined), 2015

## PRESENTATIONS & TALKS

“The Romantic Imagination,” Harvard University, European Philosophy Workshop, upcoming, December 2026.

“On the Source of the Perfectionist Demand, ‘Be True to Yourself,’” with Austin Wang, Sapienza Università di Roma, Stanley Cavell at 100: An International Centennial Conference, June 2026.

Chair of invited symposium session on formal causation in early modern philosophy, Eastern APA, January 2025.

“Cartesian Virtue and the Remedy for the Passions,” The University of Sydney, Workshop on Epistemic Virtue from the Ancient to Early Modern Period, April 2022.

Comments on “Russell’s Principle and Intentional Action” by Rhys Borchert, Harvard-MIT Graduate Student Conference, April 2022.

“What Is Philosophy?” Harvard Summer School Academic Explorations Program, once in June, July, and August 2022.

## TEACHING EXPERIENCE

**Undergraduate Studies Fellow**, Harvard Philosophy Department

PHIL 99a. Thesis Workshop, Fall 2024, 2025

PHIL 99b. Thesis Workshop, Spring 2025, 2026

*Responsibilities:* run senior thesis workshop, guiding students on a year-long individual research project and providing them with a venue to present their work; provide advising in the philosophy major; offer special administrative support to undergraduate studies team.

**Senior Thesis Co-Advisor**, Harvard English Department

ENG 99R. Tutorial – Senior Year, AY 2024-25. With Jesse McCarthy. Thesis student: Jonathan Schneiderman. Awarded the Hoopes Prize, the Bell Prize, and the Sohler Prize.

**Head Instructor**, Tutorial, Harvard Philosophy Department

PHIL 97. Kant’s Practical Philosophy, Spring 2024

**Head Instructor**, Harvard Summer School (2-week course for high school juniors & seniors)

PHIL P-11170. Existentialism. 2022, 2023

PHIL P-17570. The Philosophy of Psychology. 2022, 2023

**Teaching Fellow**, Harvard College

PHIL 188. Philosophy and Literature: Proust (Moran), Fall 2023

PHIL 8. Self and World: An Introduction to Early Modern Philosophy (Simmons), Spring 2023

PHIL 30. Existentialism in Film and Literature (Kelly), Fall 2022 [Head TF]

HUM10B. A Humanities Colloquium: From Ellison to Homer, (Lepore), Spring 2022

HUM10A. A Humanities Colloquium: From Homer to Valeria Luiselli (Camoizzi-Pistoja),

Fall 2021

**Course Assistant**, Yale College  
PHIL 267. Mathematical Logic (Shin), Fall 2018

## PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE & SERVICE

*Undergraduate Studies Fellow*, Harvard Philosophy Department, Harvard College, Fall 2024-Spring 2026

*Resident Tutor*, Dunster House, Harvard College, Fall 2023-Present

*Responsibilities*: I advise Dunster students on applying for major academic fellowships, applying to graduate school, making career decisions, choosing an academic concentration, and simply finding their place at Harvard and in the House. In addition to supervising a student entryway, I help write supporting letters for Dunster students competing in national fellowship competitions and prepare them for external fellowship interviews. I have also worked with the fellowships office to help score and eventually endorse students in various fellowships competitions.

*Co-Organizer*, Harvard-MIT Grad Conference, Spring 2023

*Assistant Organizer*, Harvard History of Philosophy Workshop, Fall 2019-2022

*Executive Board Member (Sergeant at Arms)*, Harvard Graduate Student Union, Fall 2024-Spring 2026

*Research Assistant*, Kyunghwa Lee (Architect and Visual Artist), Fall 2021-Spring 2022

*Pianist, Accompanist, and Organist*, Tri-State Area and MA, 2011-Present

## COURSEWORK

### Harvard

\**Being and Time*, Peter Gordon

\**Kant's First Critique*, Samantha Matherne

*19th-Century Philosophy*, Samantha Matherne

\**Self-Knowledge and Reflection* (grad seminar), Richard Moran

*Beyond Dualism: Descartes and his Critics* (grad seminar), Alison Simmons

\**German Idealism* (grad seminar), Sean Kelly

*British Empiricism* (grad seminar), Jeffrey McDonough

*Anscombe's Intention*, James Doyle

*Philosophy of Mind*, Cheryl Chen

*Metaethics*, Selim Berker

\**The Cosmos of the Divine Comedy*, Ambrogio Camozzi-Pistoja

\**The Philosophy of Bernard Williams* (grad seminar), Richard Moran

*Later Wittgenstein*, Richard Moran

*Philosophy & Literature: Proust*, Richard Moran

*The Rationalists* (grad seminar), Jeffrey McDonough

*Plato's Gorgias*, James Doyle

*First-Year Graduate Student Colloquium*, Alison Simmons and Edward Hall

### Yale

*Reconsidering Rationalism*, Michael Della Rocca

*Philosophy of Law: Normative Jurisprudence*, Gideon Yaffe

*Philosophy of Quantum Mechanics*, Elizabeth Miller  
*Recent Work in Ethical Theory*, Stephen Darwall  
*Computability and Logic*, Sun-Joo Shin

\*= audited

## LANGUAGES

French, German, Italian, Latin (primarily reading proficiency)

## REFERENCES

Richard Moran (committee chair)  
Brian D. Young Professor of Philosophy, Harvard University  
[moran@fas.harvard.edu](mailto:moran@fas.harvard.edu)

Samantha Matherne (committee member)  
Professor of Philosophy, Harvard University  
[smatherne@fas.harvard.edu](mailto:smatherne@fas.harvard.edu)

Alison Simmons (committee member)  
Samuel H. Walcott Professor of Philosophy, Harvard University  
[asimmons@fas.harvard.edu](mailto:asimmons@fas.harvard.edu)

Sean Kelly (committee member)  
Teresa G. and Ferdinand F. Martignetti Professor of Philosophy, Harvard University  
Dean of Arts and Humanities, Harvard University  
[sdkelly@fas.harvard.edu](mailto:sdkelly@fas.harvard.edu)

Michael Della Rocca  
Sterling Professor of Philosophy, Yale University  
[michael.della@yale.edu](mailto:michael.della@yale.edu)

Elizabeth Miller  
Assistant Professor of Philosophy, Brown University  
[Elizabeth\\_miller@brown.edu](mailto:Elizabeth_miller@brown.edu)

My dissertation interprets German and English Romanticism (1790-1850) as an essentially ethical movement by focusing on its conception of the *creative imagination*. The Romantics understand the creative imagination to be our power to create works of art as well as our power to want or desire something—for example, to be drawn to a career, a way of life, or a relationship with a particular person. Like artistic production, desiring is thus supposed to be a creative, imaginative activity. The dissertation reconstructs this conception of the imagination, argues that it resolves a paradox about desire that contemporary accounts do not adequately address, and shows how it supports a distinctive ethic of responsive love.

The puzzle about desire arises from two apparently inconsistent observations about its nature. On the one hand, conditions like dejection—in which we perceive that something is desirable but do not desire it—suggest that desiring something is more than perceiving that it is desirable. On the other hand, if desiring is supposed to be a response to what is desirable in things, then it seems it cannot be anything more than the perception that something is desirable. Desiring thus seems like it must be, and yet cannot be, something more than the perception of a thing's desirability.

The Romantics felt that even the most promising Enlightenment conceptions of practical thought could not address this problem. On the Romantic accounting, these Enlightenment outlooks are limited by the specious division they draw between the free, self-conscious mind and the natural world. I argue that contemporary conceptions of desire also falter in the face of this puzzle, but that the Romantic conception of the imagination exemplified by Wordsworth can resolve it.

Unlike what authors in the period call the “reproductive imagination,” our power to revive past experiences, the creative imagination is a power of *productive expression*: it is a faculty that takes in disparate materials and “presses them out” in a new and original form. In its conative employment, the creative imagination builds on a perception of something's appeal, whatever makes it fitting to desire. Every such perception “calls out” for a response: indeed, on this analysis, part of what it is to perceive something's appeal is to recognize it would be fitting to take a fitting interest in it. Yet there is no rule or concept one can apply to determine what interested response would fit the object's appeal; the individual must creatively determine as much. To do so is to perform the imaginative act of desiring, a creative response to something's appeal that is partially grounded in this perception.

In addition to solving the earlier puzzle about desiring, this conception of the creative imagination and its conative use opens a comparatively under-explored domain for ethical reflection. This domain of ethical significance is co-created by unthinking nature and human beings, neither of whose contribution is conceivable independently from the other. While artists open a view to this domain in their artwork, each of us necessarily moves through and thereby adds to it just in living our lives. It is reality's symbolic dimension, one that would not exist without us, but which we do not merely project onto the world nor discover there. We receive warrant for thinking the world has this dimension, I argue, from the foregoing analysis of what it is to take an interest in things.

The Romantics also use this conception of the imagination and its domain to support a distinctive ethic of responsive love or—what I argue is an equivalent notion—authenticity. According to the Romantic perspective I reconstruct, the world is essentially “incomplete” because we are: in our form of life, the task of living is to help complete the world by infusing it with our own passionate interest, pursuing this ethical ideal through the exercise of the creative imagination.