

LUKE CIANCARELLI

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EDUCATION

Harvard University, Cambridge, MA

PhD, Philosophy, expected May 2026

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

AOC: Epistemology; Continental Philosophy; Philosophy & Literature; Wittgenstein.

Yale University, New Haven, CT

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

DISSERTATION

Title: *On Dejection and the Nature of Desire*

Committee: Richard Moran (chair), Alison Simmons, Samantha Matherne, Tamar Schapiro

My dissertation considers what it is to want, desire, or take an interest in something—for example, to be drawn to a career, a way of life, or a relationship with a particular person. I argue that desiring is neither a projection of interest nor a perception of reasons, but a free, imaginative activity similar to the elaboration of a narrative. It is our effort to appreciate things as reasons-giving, and its main constitutive principle is to avoid alienation by identifying with our reasons for action. To support this idea, I renovate the contemporary Kantian conception of the human agent by drawing upon the insights of the 19th-century discussion of dejection, a condition of lost vitality in which a person experiences his or her own self-consciousness as a burden that makes happiness appear impossible.

PUBLICATIONS

“The Cartesian Passions as Inclinations and Descartes’ Alienated Anthropology,” *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, forthcoming.

“Alienation and Self-Division in Kantian Ethics,” under review.

FELLOWSHIPS AND AWARDS

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

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

Schoenberg Prize Winner, Yale English Department, 2018

Named Endowed Scholarships, Yale College, 2015-2019

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

PRESENTATIONS

“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 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-Present

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-Present

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

Senior Interviewer, Yale Undergraduate Admissions, Summer 2018

First-year Counselor, Jonathan Edwards College, Yale University, Fall 2018-Spring 2019

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

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

REFERENCES

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

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

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

Tamar Schapiro (committee member)
Professor of Philosophy, MIT
tamschap@mit.edu

Sean Kelly (teaching reference)
Teresa G. and Ferdinand F. Martignetti Professor of Philosophy, Harvard University
Dean of Arts and Humanities
sdkelly@fas.harvard.edu

Michael Della Rocca
Sterling Professor of Philosophy, Yale University
michael.della@yale.edu

Elizabeth Miller
Assistant Professor of Philosophy, Brown University
Elizabeth_miller@brown.edu

LONG ABSTRACT OF ON DEJECTION AND THE NATURE OF DESIRE

What is it to want, desire, or take an interest in something—for instance, to find oneself drawn to a career, a way of life, or a relationship with a particular person?

Desiring of this sort is not something that simply happens to us, like being pulled by a current, but it also isn't a spontaneous choice or decision, like deciding which ice cream flavor to try. The question my dissertation addresses is how to describe desiring as a kind of activity. My answer is that desiring is an imaginative activity in between perception and creation. This answer turns on the idea that our self-conscious freedom extends beyond action to our passions or desires, our receptive responses to the world.

To support this answer, I argue that we should renovate the contemporary Kantian conception of the human agent by drawing upon the insights of the 19th century discussion of dejection, a condition of lost vitality in which a person experiences his or her own self-consciousness as a burden that makes happiness appear impossible. This historical background helps illustrate the significance of my topic: for while the dissertation is an essay in moral psychology—in how to understand a person's practical orientation—its stakes are primarily ethical. In considering the nature of desire, the dissertation is also considering the nature of what we want or desire—*happiness* or *satisfaction*—and how to ground its normativity in our own self-conscious freedom.

My discussion of dejection reconstructs the arguments of Schiller, who took the prevalence of this condition in post-revolutionary Europe to be a consequence of the modern era's dawning self-consciousness. According to Schiller, this development has made many of us intensely aware of our *alienation*—our harboring of attitudes that conflict with our rational assessment of their objects—and our *fragmentation*—our highly partial and disjointed realization of the full ideal of human character. I show that Schiller and others like him understood dejection as a constriction of the imagination by a false conception of what rational self-consciousness demands of our desiring. I also explain how these authors connect this confusion to the Enlightenment's purported ethical failure to respect the significance of our intimate relationships with nature, particular places, and particular people. I focus especially on Wordsworth's response to dejection, which aims to see our desiring as a form of imaginative activity that binds us to the world and gives life in time meaning.

I apply these Romantic ideas to redevelop the contemporary Kantian conception of the agent. Compared to standard causal theories of action, the Kantian approach centers the agent's own practical perspective on what they are doing. The most prominent Kantian treatment of desire sees it as an activity, albeit the activity of an "inner animal" separate from our rational person, the side of ourselves that considers reasons for what we do. Despite sharing the Kantian ambition to see our desiring as an activity, I argue that the Kantian conception of desire is an intellectualist overreaction to empiricist tendencies in moral psychology, one that leaves us without an understanding of alienated desiring. To get out of this impasse, I follow Wordsworth in conceiving of desiring as an imaginative activity in which we try to appreciate things as reasons-giving. On this view, desiring is neither a projection of interest onto the world nor a perception of reasons in it: it is more like the elaboration of a narrative or a figurative representation. Departing from intellectualist accounts of practical irrationality, I compare alienated desiring to telling an unsatisfying story and non-alienated desiring to telling a better one. I support this analysis by adapting the resources of Kantian constructivism to argue that avoiding alienation is a constitutive principle of desiring. This principle commits every finite agent to identifying with their reasons for action, where to identify with a reason is not to form an attitude approving it, but to understand it as a fitting imaginative orientation toward the world.