

# Yuan Tian

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Harvard University  
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## AREAS OF SPECIALIZATION AND COMPETENCE

AOS: Epistemology, Ethics

AOC: Moral Psychology, Philosophy of Mind, Early Chinese Philosophy, Philosophy of Religion

## EDUCATION

### Harvard University

Ph.D. in Philosophy, 2019–2026 (expected)

Committee: Selim Berker (chair), Richard Moran, P. Quinn White

Dissertation title: *The Epistemic Manifolds of Intimacy*

Abstract: Contrary to contemporary epistemology's focus on individual deliberators or collections of generic individual deliberators, some of our epistemic concepts are intrinsically interpersonal, and our epistemic interactions are much richer than exchanging testimony and justifications. My dissertation identifies and examines three distinct interpersonal epistemic phenomena: interpersonal faith, epistemic companionship, and interpersonal wondering. I argue that each involves epistemic engagement in which we relate to each other far more intimately than mere traders of information.

### Mount Holyoke College

B.A. *Magna Cum Laude* with high honors in Philosophy, 2015–2019

Double major in Chemistry

## PUBLICATIONS

“An Interpersonal Form of Faith,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 110:3 (2025): 959–982.

## WORK IN PROGRESS

“Epistemic Companionship”

“I Wonder About You: In Search of Interpersonal Interrogative Attitudes”

## PRESENTATIONS (\* = refereed)

“I Wonder About You: In Search of Interpersonal Interrogative Attitudes”

Central APA Colloquium, 2026\*

Harvard University Moral and Political Philosophy Workshop, 2025

Edmond & Lily Safra Center of Ethics Graduate Fellows Seminar, 2025

“Toward a Theory of Epistemic Companionship”

The Third Annual Philadelphia Normative Philosophy Conference, 2025\*

The Fourth Social Epistemology Network Event, 2025\*

Eastern APA Papers in Progress Workshop, 2025\*

Inquiry Work-In-Progress Network, 2024\*

University of Toronto Philosophy Graduate Conference, 2024\*

Edmond & Lily Safra Center of Ethics Graduate Fellows Seminar, 2024

“An Interpersonal Form of Faith”

The First Annual Laval Everything Agency Conference, 2024\*

Western Michigan University Graduate Philosophy Conference, 2023\*

Harvard University Moral and Political Philosophy Workshop, 2023

“A Form of Faith That Is Not Trust”

Harvard University Metaphysics and Epistemology Workshop, 2022

“Attachment and Inquiry”

Harvard University Philosophy Department Talk Shop, 2022

#### **- COMMENTARY -**

Comment on Alysha Banerji’s “Reading, Writing and Refuge: Resettlement Campuses in the US”

Edmond & Lily Safra Center of Ethics Graduate Fellows Seminar, 2025

Comment on Yi Ning Chang’s “Anticolonialism and What It Can Authorize: Politics and Arguments at the Bandung Conference of 1955”

Edmond & Lily Safra Center of Ethics Graduate Fellows Seminar, 2024

#### **AWARDS AND FELLOWSHIPS**

2024-2025 Graduate Fellowship, Edmond & Lily Safra Center for Ethics, Harvard University

Spring 2024 Post Prospectus Defense Fellowship, Department of Philosophy, Harvard University

2019–2020 Graduate Fellowship, Department of Philosophy, Harvard University

2019 John Martyn Warbeke Memorial Prize, Mount Holyoke College  
*Awarded to the student or students who have most successfully pursued the philosophic inquiry exemplified by the dialogues of Plato.*

2019 Phi Beta Kappa, Mount Holyoke College

2019 Mary Lyon Scholar, Mount Holyoke College

## **TEACHING EXPERIENCE (at Harvard University, unless specified)**

As Instructor on File (Responsible for course design, instruction, and grading)

*Believing with: Topics in Social Epistemology*  
Sophomore Tutorial, Expected Spring 2026

*Beyond Evidence*  
(A course on ethics of belief, trust, and testimony)  
Junior Tutorial, Fall 2023 & Fall 2025

As Teaching Assistant

*Human Ethics: A History*, Summer 2022 & Spring 2023  
Instructor: Seth Robertson

*Early Chinese Ethics*, Fall 2022  
Instructor: Seth Robertson

*Happiness*, Spring 2022  
Instructor: Susanna Rinard

*God, Perfection, and Evil*, Fall 2021  
Instructor: Cheryl Chen

*Symbolic Logic*, Mount Holyoke College, Spring 2017 & Spring 2018  
Instructor: Samuel Mitchell

As Grader

*Philosophy of Psychology*, Summer 2024  
Instructor: Denish Jaswal & Ian Martel

*Philosophy of Psychology*, Summer 2023  
Instructor: Luke Ciancarelli

Other teaching

Course mentor, *English 104: Academic Discourse for Multilingual Speakers*, Mount Holyoke College, Spring 2018  
Instructor: Mark Shea

Course mentor, *FYSM: Goodbye Conventional Wisdom*, Mount Holyoke College, Fall 2018  
Instructor: Justin Crumbaugh

## **- OTHER PEDAGOGICAL TRAINING -**

Bok Teaching Certificate. Expected Fall 2025

## LANGUAGES

Mandarin (advanced); Cantonese (intermediate)

## GRADUATE COURSEWORK (\* = audit)

At Harvard

*First-Year Colloquium: Metaethics*, Selim Berker  
*First-Year Colloquium: Hume*, Ned Hall and Alison Simmons  
*Modern Moral Philosophy and the History of Ethics*, Kieran Setiya and James Doyle\*  
*Logic*, Ned Hall  
*Perception*, Susanna Siegel  
*Early Chinese Ethics*, Seth Robertson  
*Philosophy of Mind*, Cheryl Chen  
*Plato*, Jacob Rosen and James Doyle  
*Indian Philosophy*, Parimal Patil  
*British Empiricism*, Jeffrey McDonough  
*Film and Philosophy*, Richard Moran  
*Psychology of Close Relationships*, Holly Parker  
*Social Epistemology*, Seth Robertson\*  
*Metaethics*, Selim Berker\*  
*Moral Motivation*, Zoë Johnson King  
*Consent*, Quinn White\*  
*Inquiry*, Selim Berker and Susanna Siegel\*  
*Love*, Quinn White\*  
*The Many and the Few*, Quinn White\*  
*Praise and Praiseworthiness*, Zoë Johnson King\*

At University of Massachusetts, Amherst

*Epistemology*, Hilary Kornblith  
*Ethics in Epistemology*, Hilary Kornblith  
*Bayesian Epistemology*, Christopher Meacham

## SERVICE

Minority and Philosophy (MAP) Harvard Chapter  
Co-chair (2021-2022, with John Abughattas).

Harvard Philosophy Department Talk Shop  
Co-organizer (2020-2021, with Ezra Schwarz; 2021-2022, with John Abughattas).

Harvard-MIT Graduate Conference  
Reviewer (2022, 2023, 2024, 2025)

Reading Groups Organized  
Alienation (Spring 2025)

Game and Play (Spring 2024)  
Intention (Summer 2023, Summer 2024)  
Ethics and the Metaphysics of Ethics (2022-2023)  
The Exchange of Words (2022)

The First Five-College Philosophy Conference at Mount Holyoke College, 2018  
Co-organizer

## NON-PHILOSOPHY PUBLICATION

Ziqing Lin, Shiyun Lin, Yuan Tian, Alice Van Bokkelen, Maryann Valerio, and Maria A. Gomez,  
“Oxygen Vacancies Altering the Trapping in the Proton Conduction Landscape of Doped  
Barium Zirconate,” *The Journal of Physical Chemistry C* (2020): 124 (51), 27954-27964

## REFERENCES

Selim Berker (committee chair)  
Professor, Department of Philosophy, Harvard University  
[sberker@fas.harvard.edu](mailto:sberker@fas.harvard.edu)

Richard Moran (committee member)  
Professor, Department of Philosophy, Harvard University  
[moran@fas.harvard.edu](mailto:moran@fas.harvard.edu)

P. Quinn White (committee member)  
Assistant Professor, Department of Philosophy, Harvard University  
[pqwhite@fas.harvard.edu](mailto:pqwhite@fas.harvard.edu)

Seth Robertson (Teaching Reference)  
Lecturer, Assistant Director of Undergraduate Studies  
Department of Philosophy, Harvard University  
[srobertson@fas.harvard.edu](mailto:srobertson@fas.harvard.edu)

Berislav Marušić  
Professor, Department of Philosophy, University of Edinburgh  
[bmarusic@ed.ac.uk](mailto:bmarusic@ed.ac.uk)

I wonder how you, my friend, have been doing, and I call you. You pick up and tell me about your personal dilemma. Either you stay in NYC for your legal career, or you move to California for your partner. After a long conversation, you settle on the latter option. “Retaking the bar exam is tough. I’ve made up my mind, but I’m not sure I’ll make it.” “I’m not sure either,” I say, “But I’m here and am always available to think it through with you again. And I believe in you.”

Contrary to contemporary epistemology’s focus on individual deliberators, some of our epistemic concepts are intrinsically interpersonal, and our epistemic interactions are much richer than exchanging testimony and justifications. My dissertation identifies three distinct interpersonal epistemic phenomena, and I argue that each involves epistemic engagement in which we relate to each other far more intimately than mere traders of information.

“An Interpersonal Form of Faith,” published in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, examines faith in a person. The faith receiver can reject faith because she does not want to let the faith holder down, but once she takes up the faith holder’s faith, the faith holder stands in solidarity with her in virtue of the faith. In light of these and other features, I propose that when the faithor (me) places faith in the faithee (my friend) to  $\varphi$ , the faithor does something close to inviting the faithee to (re)commit to  $\varphi$ -ing. This invitation-like move, once properly taken up by the faithee, puts both sides of the faith in a normative relationship that is in the same broad family as a promissory relationship, albeit with a different normative profile. Interpersonal faith can be rejected in the same way that an invitation can be rejected, and successful faith placing constitutes togetherness because it culminates in a relationship. Interpersonal faith cannot be fully analyzed in terms of the confidence and commitment that the faithor may unilaterally possess. We must also attend to the faithee’s side of the story and the normative relationship that holds between the faithor and the faithee.

“Epistemic Companionship” examines the phenomenon of a person thinking along with another as their companion. I can think along with my friend as she works through her question, much like walking along with her while she leads the way. Just as my friend may be grateful to me for keeping her company by walking alongside her, so too can she be grateful to me for being her companion by thinking along with her; and just as she could reasonably complain if I secretly steer her walk to a better but different location, so too could she reasonably complain if I force answers and justifications on her, even if they are epistemic goods that promote her epistemic interests. It is, however, natural to assess a companion based on the quality of epistemic goods she offers and her willingness to offer them. What is the role of epistemic goods in epistemic companionship? I propose that we should see the epistemic goods offered by a companion as akin to gifts. The deference, the mutual recognition, and the connection to relationships involved in gift exchange, when extended to the exchange of epistemic goods, reveal that the key to epistemic companionship is not the intentional promotion of someone’s epistemic interests, but rather respect for a particular other’s authority in directing her own inquiry.

“I Wonder about You” looks at an interpersonal form of wondering. Wondering has been understood as either a pro-attitude toward information that can be satisfied by the attainment of that information, or an insatiable information-gathering orientation toward a fascinating individual. I argue that interpersonal wondering is neither. I long for information about my friend when I wonder about her, but I wish to hear *from* her, and third-party testimony about her will not satisfy my longing. I propose that when a wonderer (me) wonders about a wonderee (my friend), the wonderer seeks the wonderee’s recognition and invites a range of responses from her, including telling and wondering back. The openness involved in interpersonal wondering is the openness to diverse ways of interpersonal relating. And such wondering is satisfiable, not by pieces of information, but by the presence of the wonderee and the relations established between her and the wonderer.