

John Duncan Proios  
Assistant Professor  
University of Chicago Department of Philosophy  
1115 E. 58th St., Chicago, IL 60637

---

**Area of Specialization:** Ancient Greek and Roman Philosophy

**Areas of Competence:** Philosophy of Life and Death, Buddhist Philosophy, Social and Political Philosophy (including Philosophy of Education, Race and Feminist Philosophy), Philosophy of Science

---

### Employment

Assistant Professor: University of Chicago Department of Philosophy July 2021-

---

### Education

Ph.D. (Philosophy) Cornell University 2021 (ABD May 2021)  
Dissertation: *Classifying Difference and Value: The Metaphysics of Kinds and the Search for the Good in Plato's Philebus*  
Committee: Rachana Kamtekar (Chair), Tad Brennan, Scott MacDonald, Julia Annas (External)

M.A. (Philosophy) University of Arizona 2017

B.A. with High Honors (Philosophy and Classical Studies) Swarthmore College 2015

---

### Research

#### **Publications**

Division and Proto-Racialism in the *Statesman*  
Invited contribution to Routledge, "misReading Plato", forthcoming  
Plato on Natural Kinds: The Promethean Method of the *Philebus*  
Forthcoming in *Apeiron*  
Ethical Narratives and Oppositional Consciousness  
Forthcoming in *APA Newsletter on Feminism and Philosophy*, Spring 2021 (Special Issue)  
The Cause of Cosmic Rotation in Aristotle's *Metaphysics* xii 6-7  
*Ancient Philosophy*, vol. 40, issue 2, fall 2020  
The Good as a Power  
*The Society for Ancient Greek Philosophy Newsletter*, November 2018

#### **Work in Progress Papers**

Collection and Division Plato's Feminism  
Invited contribution with co-author Rachana Kamtekar, to Routledge, "Handbook of Women and Ancient Greek Philosophy", forthcoming  
Like and Unlike: The Metaphysics of Socrates' Anti-Hedonism at *Philebus* 12c-13d  
Education as Awakening or Assimilation?

#### **Presentations** \*=Refereed

#### *Talks*

Collection and Division in Plato's Feminism, with Rachana Kamtekar  
Virtual Summer Workshop in Women & Ancient Greek Philosophy June 2021

The Metaphysics of Kinds and Plato's Revisionary Naturalizing Project Wayne State Plato Symposium	May 2021
What is Philosophical Writing? <i>with Amy Ramirez</i> Cornell MAP Teaching Workshop	March 2021
Why the Hedonist is No Expert: Pleasure and the Method of Division University of Chicago	January 2021
Cornell Philosophy Department Workshop	December 2020
Ethical Narratives about Class in Higher Education: A Reply to Morton North American Association for Philosophy & Education	September 2020*
Naturalizing Social Kinds the Promethean Way East Tennessee State University	February 2020
Cornell Graduate Workshop Series	January 2020
Cornell Ancient Philosophy Working Group	December 2019
The Metaphysics of Socrates' Anti-Hedonism: <i>Philebus</i> 12c1-13d8 Pennsylvania Circle of Ancient Philosophy	March 2019*
A Platonic Metaphysics for Intersectionality, <i>with Rachana Kamtekar</i> Cornell Work in Progress Workshop	May 2019
The Good as a Power Society for Ancient Greek Philosophy at the Eastern APA	January 2019*
St. Andrews Annual Graduate Conference in Ancient Philosophy	June 2018*
The House of the Good: A Special Kind of Cause in the <i>Philebus</i> Eastern APA, Colloquium	January 2018*
U Chicago Graduate Student Ancient Philosophy Workshop	March 2017*
How the Method of the <i>Philebus</i> Changes Cornell Work in Progress Workshop	October 2018
Some Puzzles in Gorgias and Parmenides University of Arizona Classics Graduate Student Colloquium	April 2016
<i>Posters</i>	
Education as Awakening or Assimilation? Eastern APA Teaching Hub Poster Session	January 2021*
<i>Translations</i>	
Aristotle, <i>Generation and Corruption</i> I.1 314a1-315a3 Cornell Annual Ancient Philosophy Workshop	August 2018
Aristotle, <i>Eudemian Ethics</i> VIII, 1249a17-end Cornell Annual Ancient Philosophy Workshop	August 2017
Aristotle, <i>Eudemian Ethics</i> VII.7-9, with Jeremy Reid Cornell Annual Ancient Philosophy Workshop	August 2016
<i>Comments</i>	
Jan 'Max' Robitzsch's The Epicurean Classification of Desires Revisited Eastern APA, Colloquium	January 2020
Brennan McDavid's Meddling in the Work of Another Pacific APA, Symposium	April 2018
Katherine Meadows' Teleology in <i>Metaphysics</i> Θ.8, Virginia Tech Workshop in Ancient Greek Philosophy	April 2018

---

## Teaching

### *University of Chicago*

Plato's <i>Philebus</i>	Winter 2022
Philosophy of Life and Death	Winter 2022

Plato on Knowledge	Autumn 2021
Philosophical Perspectives	Autumn 2021

### ***Cornell University***

Philosophy of Life (Prison Education Program)	Spring 2021
The Ethics of Dying in Ancient Philosophy	Fall 2019, Spring 2020
Discussions of Justice: Democracy Now	Spring 2019
Introduction to Philosophy (TA)	Fall 2018, Spring 2019
Introduction to Deductive Logic (TA)	Spring 2018
Introduction to Ancient Philosophy (TA)	Fall 2017

### ***University of Arizona***

The Ethics and Economics of Wealth Creation	Summer 2017
History of Moral and Political Philosophy	Summer 2016
The Ethics and Economics of Wealth Creation (TA)	Fall 2016
Philosophy of Happiness (TA)	Fall 2015

---

### **Service & Outreach**

<i>Executive Board Member</i> of Minorities and Philosophy (MAP), Cornell Chapter	2020-21
<i>Organizer/ Co-Organizer</i>	
MAP Inclusive Pedagogy Workshop Series	Spring 2020, 2021
Ancient Philosophy Working Group	2019-2021
Cornell Annual Ancient Philosophy Workshop	August 2019
Sage School Editing Group	2019
<i>K-12 Outreach</i>	
Guest Lecture, New Roots High School (Ithaca, NY)	April 2019
<i>Facilitator</i> for the Intergroup Dialogue Project, Cornell	August 2019-2020
<i>Mentor</i>	
Graduate Students Mentoring Undergraduates (university-wide)	2019-20
Sage School Mentorship Program (department-wide)	Fall 2018-Spring 2021
<i>Panelist</i> for Cornell First Generation and/or Low-Income Graduate Student Union, Topic: Work-Life Balance	September 2020
<i>Research Assistant</i>	
Indexing for Marta Jimenez, <i>Aristotle on Shame and Learning to be Good</i>	September 2020
Indexing for Rachana Kamtekar, <i>Plato's Moral Psychology</i>	October 2017
Proof and copy reading for Fred Miller, <i>De Anima &amp; Parva Naturalia</i>	2016-17
<i>Session Chair</i>	
Central APA	February 2019
Pacific APA	April 2016, 2017

---

### **Grants & Awards**

<i>Sage School Fellowship</i>	
Cornell University	2020-21
<i>Graduate School Travel Grant</i>	
Cornell University	2017, 2018, 2019
<i>Philosophy, Politics, Economics, and Law Fellowship</i>	
University of Arizona Center for the Philosophy of Freedom	2015-2017
<i>Dr. Nicholas Padis Memorial Graduate Scholarship</i>	
Hellenic University Club of Philadelphia	2015-2016
<i>Brand Blanshard Prize</i>	

Swarthmore College

2015

**Coursework** \*=audit, +=independent study*AOS*

*Plato's Political Philosophy Rachana Kamtekar, Cornell University	Fall 2018
Causation and Agency in Ancient Philosophy Rachana Kamtekar and Derk Pereboom, Cornell University	Spring 2018
Aristotle Rachana Kamtekar, Cornell University	Spring 2018
Ancient Greek and Indian Skepticism Tad Brennan and Rachana Kamtekar, Cornell University	Fall 2017
+Ancient Greek and Roman Philosophy of Religion Julia Annas, University of Arizona	Spring 2017
Euripides and Socrates Rachana Kamtekar, University of Arizona	Fall 2016
Plato's Natural Philosophy Rachana Kamtekar, University of Arizona	Fall 2016
Socrates and Euripides (Greek Language) Courtney Friesen, University of Arizona	Fall 2016
Aristotle's Ethics and its Appropriations Rachana Kamtekar, University of Arizona	Spring 2016
Ancient Political Philosophy Julia Annas, University of Arizona	Spring 2016
Pre-Socratics and Sophists Rachana Kamtekar, University of Arizona	Fall 2015
Greek Reading Group University of Arizona, Cornell University	2015-present
Latin Reading Group University of Arizona	2015-2017

*AOC*

MAP, Philosophy of Race Reading Group Cornell University	August 2019-May 2021
*Indian Philosophy Lawrence McCrea, Cornell University	Spring 2019
Metaethics Kate Manne, Cornell University	Spring 2018
Ancient Greek and Indian Skepticism Tad Brennan and Rachana Kamtekar	Fall 2017
+*Virtue Ethics Julia Annas, University of Arizona	Spring 2016
Ethical Naturalism Reading Group University of Arizona	Spring 2016
Kant's Ethics Mark Timmons, University of Arizona	Fall 2015
Normativity Connie Rosati, University of Arizona	Fall 2015

*Additional Coursework*

Teaching Writing Jessica Sands, Cornell University	Summer 2019
Reading Academic German	

David Dunham, Cornell University	Fall 2018
French Reading for Graduates	
Ti Alkire, Cornell University	Spring 2018
Deductive Logic	
Harold Hodes, Cornell University	Fall 2017
Epistemology	
Juan Comesaña, University of Arizona	Spring 2017
Metaphysics	
Carolina Sartorio, University of Arizona	Spring 2016

---

## References

Rachana Kamtekar (Dissertation Chair)  
Cornell University  
Professor of Philosophy and Classics  
rk579@cornell.edu

Tad Brennan  
Cornell University  
Professor of Philosophy and Classics  
tad.brennan@cornell.edu

Scott MacDonald  
Cornell University  
Norma K. Regan Professor in Christian Studies  
macdonald@cornell.edu

Julia Annas (External)  
University of Arizona  
Regents Professor of Philosophy  
jannas@email.arizona.edu

Theo Kozhukhin (Teaching)  
Johns Hopkins University  
Lecturer, Philosophy  
tk283@cornell.edu

---

## Dissertation Abstract

Title: *Classifying Difference and Value: The Metaphysics of Kinds and the Search for the Good in Plato's Philebus*

Plato's *Philebus* is a late dialogue that records a dispute between a hedonist (Philebus/Protarchus) and an advocate of the superiority of knowledge to pleasure (Socrates). My dissertation argues that it advances Plato's late method and metaphysics in the context of the ethical project at the heart of the dialogue: acquiring knowledge of the nature of the good human life. I demonstrate how Plato uses his method of collection and division, its corresponding metaphysics of kinds, and a teleological natural philosophy to continue his exploration of a science or expertise in morality familiar from dialogues like the *Republic* and *Protagoras*. Moreover, I put Plato in conversation with topics in contemporary metaphysics, philosophy of science, and social philosophy.

Chapter 1: *Like and Unlike, The Metaphysics of Socrates' Anti-Hedonism*

In chapter 1, I defend an interpretation of Plato's view about the metaphysics and epistemology of kinds, in order to make sense of the first challenge he puts to the hedonist. At the start of the *Philebus*, Socrates calls attention to the ways that, although *pleasure* is one thing, there are many different *pleasures*, claiming that this makes it possible

for some pleasures to be good, while others are bad. Many scholars have been underwhelmed by this objection, with some influential commentators labeling it a ‘trap’ and ‘naked sophism’.

I defend Socrates’ objection by arguing that it introduces a technical notion of *difference in kind* that has important parallels to the contemporary concepts of ‘determinable’ and ‘determinate’ kinds. For example, color is a determinable kind that has determinate sub-kinds like red, which is in turn determinable in relation to scarlet and maroon. I argue that Plato deploys a technical notion of difference that is akin to the difference between determinates like scarlet and maroon. On this view, sub-kinds differ from each other with respect to their shared, unifying properties, so that the superordinate kind cannot be evaluated independently of the sub-kinds. In light of this special notion of difference, a hedonist cannot defend their identification of pleasure and the good without knowing every way sub-kinds of pleasure differ from each other.

#### Chapter 2: *Naturalizing Kinds the Promethean Way*

In chapter 2, I defend a novel interpretation of the method of collection and division that Plato deploys in the *Philebus*. In order for the hedonist to meet his challenge, Socrates introduces a method of inquiry, gifted from the Titan Prometheus, and responsible for the creation of the crafts through its ability to determine the ‘natural’ number and arrangement of sub-kinds in a domain of expertise. I argue that in order to understand this method and the specific use the hedonist has for it, we need to situate it in the broader context of Plato’s natural philosophy.

Whereas some are inclined to think that natural kinds, such as *carbon element* and *deciduous tree*, exist independently of human beings, in contrast to so-called ‘social kinds’ that depend on humans, such as *zoning map* and *ethnic enclave*, Plato’s teleological conception of nature as the product of divine craft diminishes the boundaries between natural and social kinds. Plato understands the natural world, such as the structure of animal bodies, as the result of intelligent gods reasoning through how to make the most intelligent cosmos.

I argue that the Promethean method is a human tool for doing something similar: transforming the ‘material’ of a domain of inquiry into a useful schematization for a craft, thereby both expressing human intelligence and supporting intelligent development and institutionalization. It does this by mapping the relationships of causal interdependence necessary for the production of some object of craft, of which Plato has a broad and inclusive understanding, onto a scheme of super- and sub-kinds, which can then be taught across generations (e.g., as an alphabet). In the context of the *Philebus*, this method could be used to prove that pleasure is the good, if its use to count sub-kinds of pleasure resulted in the creation of a craft of living well.

#### Chapter 3: *Division and the Mixture of Pleasure and Knowledge*

In chapters 3-4, I extend my arguments from chapters 1 and 2 to Plato’s adjudication of the ethical dispute at the heart of the *Philebus*: whether pleasure is the source of human happiness or, if not, what the structure of a happy life is, including pleasure’s place in it. In chapter 3, I respond to the view of some scholars that Socrates, after introducing the Promethean method, fails to deploy it in the dialogue in a meaningful way. In response, I argue that Socrates replaces the initial project of determining a pleasure-based expertise in living well with one of determining the *actual* expertise in living well, which takes the *mixture*, that is, the life combining pleasure and knowledge, as its object. As a result, Socrates goes on to count the number and arrangement of sub-kinds in the mixture within the framework of the Promethean method.

#### Chapter 4: *Pleasure and the Method of Division*

In chapter 4, I respond to the view of some scholars that Socrates provides an account of pleasure using the Promethean method, but in a *deficient* way that fails to satisfy the standards of the method. Against this, I defend two core claims. First, Socrates’ division of pleasure into *true* and *false* allows him to identify bad pleasures. This is because, by defining pleasure as the perception of an animal’s restoration to its natural condition, Socrates is able to identify defective pleasures in the form of pleasures that involve failures on the part of our cognitive and phenomenal systems for detecting restorative processes. In particular, many false pleasures misrepresent the extent

to which a certain activity is regenerative of our nature; as a result, the perception of the underlying process is problematic for our ability to maintain our natural constitution.

Second, I defend this position against the objection in the literature that Socrates does not present a unified account of pleasure. Drawing on the *Timaeus*, I argue that each of the so-called 'pure' pleasures conforms to the model of pleasure as a feature of the restoration of an animal's natural condition. Their distinction is that they involve the restoration of the human being's natural condition as a *rational* animal with an immortal and intelligent psychic part.

*Chapter 5: Brief Remarks on the Division of Knowledge*

In chapter 5, I briefly sketch some of the issues surrounding Socrates much shorter discussion of knowledge. I argue that his account conforms to the interpretations I defend in chapters 1-4. He collects knowledge together as a determinable domain, united by the use of the knowledge-creation practices of measuring, counting, and weighing. Although each form of knowledge uses these practices for the sake of grasping the truth, only the purest form of knowledge, dialectic, perfectly instantiates this epistemic relation. This mirrors the way that each pleasure is for the sake of the natural harmony, but they differ with respect to how, such that only the purest pleasures perfectly instantiate the teleological relation characteristic of pleasure as such.