

Seth Robertson

Curriculum Vitae

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Department of Philosophy
Dale Hall Tower 612
Norman, OK 73019

Areas of Specialization: Ethics (moral psychology)

Areas of Competence: Philosophy of social science (psychology), social / political philosophy, early Chinese philosophy

Education

University of Oklahoma

PhD in Philosophy (Expected completion: Spring 2019).

Dissertation: “Character and Moral Judgment: Designing Right and Wrong”

Advisor: Nancy Snow

Committee: Martin Montminy, Amy Olberding, Linda Zagzebski, Carolin Showers

Dissertation Abstract: I argue that an adequate theory of rightness should meet two distinct conditions: a “Consequences Condition” according to which the rightness or wrongness of some, but not all acts should be determined conclusively by the act’s outcomes on welfare, and a “Character Condition” according to which the rightness or wrongness of some, but not all acts should be influenced by aspects of the moral character of the person who committed the act. In the course of making the case for the Consequences and Character Conditions, I develop and argue for a novel version of metaethical Humean Constructivism that I call “perspectival naturalism,” which I then apply in support of the Consequences and Character Conditions.

University of Houston

M.A. in Philosophy, 2013.

Juniata College

B.A. in Philosophy, Politics, and Economics, 2007.

Publications

1. Forthcoming. Jing Hu and Seth Robertson. “Constructing Morality with Mengzi: Three Lessons on the Metaethics of Moral Progress.” In *Comparative Metaethics: Neglected Perspectives on the Foundations of Morality*, ed. Colin Marshall. Under contract, Routledge.
2. Forthcoming. “Korean Nunchi and Well-being.” *Science, Religion, and Culture*. Special Issue: Cross-cultural Studies in Well-being, issue eds. Owen Flanagan and Wenqing Zhao.
3. 2019. “Nunchi, Ritual, and Early Confucian Ethics.” *Dao: An Journal of Comparative Philosophy*.
4. 2018. “Power, Situation, and Character: A Confucian-Inspired Response to Indirect Situationist Critiques.” *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*.

5. 2017. Heather Demarest, Seth Robertson, Megan Haggard, Madeline Martin-Seaver, and Jewelle Bickel. "Similarity and Enjoyment: Predicting Continuation for Women in Philosophy." *Analysis*.

Manuscripts Under Review / In Preparation

6. "Revenge, Forgiveness, and Exemplarist Moral Theory"
7. With Alex Danvers. "Good for What? Power, Character, and Moral Judgment"

APA Main Program and Group Presentations

1. 2018. "How Social Models of Disability Support Mengzi's Criticisms of Impartial Care." Central Division. International Society for Chinese Philosophy Panel.
2. 2017. "Confucianism and the Power Problem for Situationist Ethics." Pacific Division, International Society for Chinese Philosophy Panel on Chinese Philosophy and Public Life.
3. 2017. "Revenge and Exemplarist Virtue Theory: Three Arguments Not to Make." Central Division, main program.
4. 2016. Sula You and Seth Robertson. "Classroom Exercises for Helping Students Understand Philosophical Concepts from Asian Traditions." Eastern Division, Society for Asian and Comparative Philosophy Panel on Practical Steps for Introducing Asian Concepts into Standard Philosophy Courses.

Other Conference Presentations

1. 2019. "Epistemic Injustice and Rhetorical Injustice." Bled Philosophical Conference: Social Epistemology and the Politics of Knowing." Bled, Slovenia.
2. 2018. Jing Hu and Seth Robertson. "Constructing Morality with Mengzi: Three Lessons on Moral Discovery and Meta-ethics." Lost Voices in Metaethics Conference. University of Washington.
3. 2018. Jing Hu and Seth Robertson. "Constructing Morality with Mengzi: Three Lessons on Moral Discovery and Meta-ethics." The Northeast Conference on Chinese Thought / Midwest Conference on Chinese Thought Joint Conference. University of Connecticut.
4. 2017. "Nunchi, Ritual, and Early Confucian Ethics." Society for Asian and Comparative Philosophy Conference. Peking University. Beijing, China.
5. 2017. "Confucianism and the Power Problem for Situationist Ethics." International Conference on Chinese Philosophy. Nanyang Technological University, Singapore.
6. 2017. "Nunchi, Ritual, and Early Confucian Ethics." Harvard East Asia Society Conference. Harvard University.
7. 2016. "Exercises and Activities to Help Integrate Asian Philosophical Texts into the Classroom." American Association of Philosophy Teachers International Workshop / Conference.

Conference Presentation Comments

1. 2018. Commentator for Jing Hu's "Wang Fuzhi's Neo-Confucianism on Human-Nature Relationship – An Alternative to Anthropocentrism." Central Division, APA, International Society on Chinese Philosophy Panel.
2. 2018. Commentator for Mariam Kazanjian's "Reacting to Moral Ignorance." Eastern Division APA.
3. 2017. Commentator for Charlie Kurth's "Anti-Realist Moral Progress and the Problem of Moral Reformers." Pacific Division, APA.

Curated Blog Posts

1. 2017. Kelly Epley and Seth Robertson. "Using the Deviant Philosopher This Fall." Blog of the American Philosophical Association
2. 2017. "The Deviant Philosopher – A Teaching Resource." Blog of the American Philosophical Association.
3. 2016. "A Quick Grasp of Micro-Ethical Situations." Blog of Duke's Center for Comparative Philosophy.

Awards and Other Distinctions

1. 2018. Hugh Benson Graduate Research Prize. University of Oklahoma Philosophy Department.
2. 2017-18. Dissertation Research Fellowship. Institute for the Study of Human Flourishing.
3. 2017-18. Appointed to American Philosophical Association Graduate Student Council.
4. 2017. Ken Merrill Teaching Award. University of Oklahoma Philosophy Department.
5. 2016. Selected Participant. American Association of Philosophy Teachers Seminar on Teaching and Learning in Philosophy.
6. 2014. Selected Participant. Graduate Teaching Academy. University of Oklahoma.

Conferences Organized

1. 2015, 2016 University of Oklahoma Graduate Philosophical Association Writing Sample Workshop.

Service – Profession

1. Communications Representative. Graduate Student Diversity Survey Research Project – collaboration between APA Graduate Student Council and APA Data Task Force. 2018.
2. Appointee. American Philosophical Association Graduate Student Council 2017-18.
3. American Philosophical Association Graduate Student Council Liaison to American Philosophical Association Committee on Teaching. 2018.
4. Co-creator of "The Deviant Philosopher" Teaching Resource – www.thedeviantphilosopher.org
5. Referee. Hypatia, Dao.

Service – Department & University

1. 2017-18. Graduate Student Representative to Faculty. University of Oklahoma Philosophy Department.
2. 2016-17. President of University of Oklahoma Graduate Philosophical Association.
3. 2015, 16. University of Oklahoma Graduate Teaching Assistant Orientation. Panelist on Panel of Experienced Teaching Assistants.
4. 2015 – Present. Organizer, University of Oklahoma Philosophy Department Ethics Reading Group. Topics: Philosophy of Education, Philosophy of Disability, Smith’s *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Sidgwick’s *The Methods of Ethics*
5. 2015-Present. Co-creator, University of Oklahoma Graduate Philosophical Association Writing Sample Workshop.
6. 2014-16. Graduate Student Liaison to Faculty Undergraduate Recruitment and Diversity Committee.
7. 2014-15. Treasurer of University of Oklahoma Graduate Philosophical Association.

Courses Taught

University of Oklahoma

- PHIL 1213 – Introduction to Ethics. Summer 2018.
 PHIL 1713 – Justice in Society. Fall 2015.
 PHIL 1223 – Introduction to Asian Philosophy. Spring 2016.
 PHIL 3811 – Philosophy Writing Workshop. Fall 2016, Fall 2018.

Rose State College

- PHIL 1103 – Introduction to Philosophy. Spring 2017.

Teaching Assistantships

University of Oklahoma

- PHIL 3503 – Self and Identity. Instructor: Heather Demarest, Spring 2015.
 PHIL 1013 – Introduction to Philosophy. Instructor: Zach Miller, Fall 2014.
 PHIL 1223 – Introduction to Asian Philosophy. Instructor: Amy Olberding. Spring 2014.
 PHIL 1213 – Introduction to Ethics. Instructor: Brian Chance. Fall 2013.

University of Houston

- PHIL 1321 – Introduction to Logic. Instructor: Christy Mag Uidhir. Spring 2013

Research Assistantships

- 2017, Spring. Wayne Riggs.
 2016, Summer. Wayne Riggs.
 2014, Summer. Heather Demarest.

Graduate Courses Taken

University of Oklahoma

- Moral Responsibility (Independent Study). Martin Montminy.
 Epistemology of Perspectives. Wayne Riggs.
 The Analects and the Xunzi. Amy Olberding.

Moral Psychology (in University of Oklahoma Psychology Department). Carolin Showers.
Modal Logic and Metaphysics. James Hawthorne.
Plato. Hugh Benson.
Moral Exemplarism. Linda Zagzebski.
Plato's Theaetetus. Hugh Benson.
Empiricism. Matt Priselac.
Philosophy of Economics. Steve Ellis.
Early Chinese Philosophy. Amy Olberding.
Epistemology. Matt Priselac.
Metaphysics. Heather Demarest.
Philosophy of Biology. James Hawthorne.
Political Philosophy. Zev Trachtenberg.

University of Houston

Logic III – Advanced Mathematical Logic. James Garson.
Mill, Sidgwick, Moore, & Ross (Independent Study). David Phillips.
Plato and Aristotle's Theories of Psychology. Cynthia Freeland.
Philosophy of the Special Sciences. Cameron Buckner.
Feminist Philosophy. Cynthia Freeland.
Ethical Theories of Leibniz and Spinoza. Greg Brown.
Metaethics. David Phillips.
Philosophy of Art. Christy Mag Uidhir.
Philosophy of Science. Josh Brown.
Philosophy of Language: Theories of Meaning. James Garson.
Philosophy and Logic. Josh Brown.
17th Century Philosophy. Greg Brown.

Dissertation Abstract (Full):

In this dissertation, I argue that most (but not all) major theories in normative ethics have an important flaw by way of arguing that most (but not all) major theories in metaethics have a (different) important flaw. In particular, I argue that an adequate normative ethical theory of right and wrong should meet at least two conditions: the Consequences condition and the Character Conditions. The Consequences condition states that we should treat the rightness or wrongness of some, but not all acts, as determined conclusively by those act's consequences (or some proper subset of those consequences): that is, no other moral considerations about the act could overturn our judgment of rightness or wrongness. This condition is in friction with many non-consequentialist normative theories. The Character condition states that we should treat the rightness or wrongness of some, but not all acts, as determined partially by the moral character of the person who committed the act. This condition is in tension with aspects of many consequentialist normative ethical theories. But, before I can even begin the argument supporting these revisionary Consequences and Character conditions, I need to dislodge firmly-held commitments and intuitions about rightness and wrongness. To do so, I present the radical debunking argument.

The radical debunking argument is a supplement to recent “evolutionary debunking arguments” of moral realism (Street 2006; Joyce 2007) which aim to show that the degree to which natural selection has influenced and constrained our moral beliefs should undermine our confidence that we could ever learn objective moral truths. I argue that when these traditional debunking arguments are combined with two independently plausible epistemic principles, they succeed against all major replies. However, in addition to undermining our confidence in moral realism, debunking arguments, which take our moral psychologies and values as a starting position, should also undermine our confidence in moral nihilism. Instead, they suggest a version of anti-realist constructivism and more specifically a view I call “perspectival naturalism” according to which ethics is partially a *design* problem: we seek to design the moral systems that best express *and* manage all our moral values, our goals, our needs, our desires, and our abilities and circumstances. As with any design process, our moral systems are essentially open to revision and thus our established intuitions and commitments about rightness and wrongness are also essentially open to revision. Additionally, this view provides several guidelines and strategies for justification normative theories that I then apply in support of the Consequences and Character Condition. I argue in Chapter 4 that theories of rightness that capture the Consequences and Character Conditions are *better designed for us* than theories of rightness that do not.

I begin by comparing the Consequences Condition and to the *Never*-Consequences Condition, according to which the consequences of an action should *never* conclusively determine our judgment of the rightness of that action. I provide several arguments that the *Never*-Consequences Condition is worse designed than the more moderate Consequences Condition: that the *Never*-Consequences Condition fails to capture intuitions about certain “obvious choice” cases (in which the only difference between two options was a massive difference in the harm done between them), that it fails to fulfill one of the most useful functions of the concept of rightness (serving a clear and quick notice that a certain action is especially helpful or harmful), and finally that given empirical evidence that our moral minds are tuned to notice harm and to connect it with moral judgments, a theory of rightness should, lacking strong countervailing reasons not to, try to harness and utilize this tendency rather than try to override it. This leaves open the possibility that we should prefer the *Always*-Consequences Condition (according to which the consequences of an act should always conclusively determine the rightness of an action) to the Consequences Condition. I begin my case against the *Always*-Consequences Condition by providing an error theory for it: I point out that the Consequences Condition is able to capture all of the intuitive cases that might support the *Always*-Consequences Condition. Then, since the *Always*-Consequences Condition is incompatible with the Character Condition, I develop the case in favor of the Character Condition. I argue that the Character Condition nicely utilizes our natural evaluative tendencies, that it nicely captures what we value about certain acts of attachment and virtue (see Philip Pettit 2015) and about certain acts influenced by individual differences in moral character, and finally that the Character Condition helps us avoid a certain kind of moral absurdity.