

# Michael Bertrand

## Curriculum Vitae

Philosophy Department  
Auburn University  
Auburn, AL 36830  
mdb0068@auburn.edu  
michaelbertrandphilosophy.weebly.com

## Employment

Auburn University  
Instructor, Department of Philosophy 2016 - Present

## Education

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill  
Ph.D. in Philosophy 2016  
Dissertation: “Metaphysical Constraints: Theory, and Explanation”  
Committee: L.A. Paul (Chair), Marc Lange, and Thomas Hofweber  
M.A. in Philosophy 2012  
Thesis: “Building as Fundamental Ontological Structure”  
Committee: Thomas Hofweber (Chair), Marc Lange, and Robert Adams  
Hope College  
B.A. in Philosophy 2010  
*Summa Cum Laude*

## Research Interests

AOS: Metaphysics and Philosophy of Science.  
AOC: Epistemology, Philosophy of Mind, and Philosophy of Language.

## Publications

### Journal Articles

“Metaphysical Explanation by Constraint.” 2018. *Erkenntnis*. doi: 10.1007/s10670-018-0009-5  
“Why Christians Should Not Be Kaneans about Freedom.” With Jack Mulder. 2018. *Philosophia Christi*. 19: 2. 315 - 329.  
“Fundamental Ontological Structure: An Argument Against Pluralism.” 2017. *Philosophical Studies*. 174: 5. 1277 -97.  
“Proper Environment and the SEP Account of Biological Function.” 2013. *Synthese* 190: 9. 1503 –17.  
“God Might Be Responsible for Physical Evil.” 2009. *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 87:3: 513–15.

### Book Reviews

Review of Kenneth Aizawa and Carl Gillett’s *Scientific Composition and Metaphysical Grounding*. 2017. *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science Review of Books*.

## Work in Progress

Metaphysical Constraints, Primitivism, and Reduction (R&R)  
The Inconsistency Threat to Inter-level Metaphysics (Under Review)  
We Need Non-Factive Metaphysical Explanation (Under Review)  
Two Concepts of Grounding (In Preparation)  
More work for a Theory of Ground (In Preparation)

## Selected Presentations

University of Hamburg Workshop on the Metaphysics of Ground May 2018  
Funded Non-contributing participant  
“We Need Non-Factive Metaphysical Explanation”  
*University of South Alabama* April 2018  
Comments on Justin Zylstra’s “Essence, Necessity, and Definition”  
*Central APA Meeting, Chicago IL* February 2018  
“The Inconsistency Threat to Inter-Level Metaphysics”  
*Alabama Philosophical Society* October 2017  
“Metaphysical Explanation by Constraint”  
*5<sup>th</sup> Philosopher’s Cocoon Conference, University of Tampa* October 2017  
*2017 Society for the Metaphysics of Science Conference* October 2017  
*Hope College (Invited)* March 2016  
Comments on Evan Woods’ “Does Constitution Offer a Distinctive  
Solution to the Problem of the Many”  
*5<sup>th</sup> Philosopher’s Cocoon Conference, University of Tampa* October 2017  
Comments on Christopher Tomaszewski’s “Formal Proper Parts Through  
Strong Supplementation: A Reply to Bennett”  
*Eastern APA Meeting, Baltimore MD* January 2017  
Comments on Mary Gwin’s “Chemical Kinds and History: A Challenge to  
Modal Conventionalism”  
*Central APA Meeting, Chicago IL* March 2016

## Honors, Awards, and Fellowships

Bertha Colton Williams Fellowship Fall 2014, Spring 2014  
*Dissertation research fellowship*  
Mary Taylor Williams Fellowship Fall 2010, Spring 2011  
*Research fellowship funding a one year teaching release*  
Lilly Fellowship Fall 2010, Spring 2013  
*Competitive three-year research and mentoring fellowship awarded to  
a small number of graduate students from church related  
undergraduate institutions*  
Phi Beta Kappa, Hope College Spring 2010  
*Academic honors society*  
Charles E. Lake Memorial prize for philosophy Spring 2010  
*University-wide award presented to four undergraduates for research excellence*  
Jacob E. Nyenhuis Student/Faculty Summer Research Grant Summer 2009  
*University-wide competitive summer grant*  
Charles E. Lake Memorial junior prize for philosophy Spring 2009  
*University-wide award presented to four undergraduates for research excellence*  
Charles E. Lake Memorial prize for philosophical promise Spring 2008  
*University-wide award presented to four undergraduates for research excellence*  
Earhart Emerging Scholar Award Fall 2008  
*University-wide award presented to a small number of undergraduates  
involved in original research.*

## Professional Development and Pedagogical Training

EASL Academy	Fall 2018
<i>Four part seminar focused on engaged active student learning and classroom technology</i>	
Course (Re)Design Workshop	Summer 2018
<i>Competitive seminar focused on backward course design and active learning</i>	
Safezone Training	Spring 2017
<i>LGBTQ awareness and ally training</i>	
Metaphysical Mayhem, Rutgers University	May 2014
Research Assistant, L.A. Paul	Fall 2013, Fall 2014
<i>Assisted with <i>Causation: A User's Guide and Transformative Experience</i></i>	
Research Assistant, Jiri Benovsky	Fall 2013
<i>Assisted with <i>The Beauty of Metaphysics</i> (book project)</i>	

## Teaching Experience

### Instructor of Record

Ethics and the Health Sciences Fall 2016, Spring 2017, Summer and Fall 2018 (x13)

This seminar teaches health sciences students argumentative and critical thinking skills needed for a career in medicine. Considered issues, arranged around a central foundational unit, include paternalism and consent, euthanasia, abortion, and the right to healthcare. I employ a specification grading scheme and make extensive use of active learning techniques emphasizing case studies and collaboration. Assignments include a final assessment where students construct a “debate map” of one course question including important positions, objections, and cases.

Introduction to Philosophy Spring 2018 (x4)

This seminar teaches general education students argumentative and critical thinking skills by way of examining classic philosophical problems. Instruction emphasizes active and collaborative learning through group work evaluated by forward-looking, writing based assessments. Our discussion includes charity and just war, knowledge and skepticism, and the mind-body problem.

Introduction to Ethics Summer 2017, Fall 2017 (x6)

This discussion-based seminar teaches general education students argumentative and critical thinking skills via an investigation of utilitarianism and Kantian ethics. We better understand these theories by using them to navigate coupled applied ethical issues including hunger and charity, the death penalty, and animal rights. Instruction emphasizes student participation graded via a novel card system. Learning is evaluated via writing assignments that incorporate revision and peer review.

Experience and Reality Spring 2014

This problem based introduction to metaphysics focuses on helping intermediate students generate dialectical maps of classic epistemic and metaphysical debates and to evaluate the positions within them. Topics include external world skepticism, the mind-body problem, personal identity, time and time travel, and persistence. Learning is evaluated via writing assignments that incorporate revision.

Making Sense of Ourselves Summer 2013, 2015, 2016

This introductory course focuses on attempts made by philosophers, scientists, and theologians to understand what it means to be a human

being. The first part of this course explores accounts of what it is to be a human being and how human beings and their actions fit together with the physical world. The second part of the class concerns how we should live given what kinds of creatures we are: what makes life good and meaningful.

Introduction to Philosophy: Main Problems Summer 2012, Spring 2013  
 This problems-based introduction to philosophy teaches general education students argumentative and critical thinking skills via discussion of four classic philosophical problems: (1) What is knowledge and what can we know about the external world? (2) What reasons do we have for believing that God exists? How are these impacted by the existence of evil in the world? (3) Are we free? In light of this, can we be responsible for our actions? (4) What is morality? Should we and can we act morally?

Introduction to Philosophy: Great Works Fall 2013  
 This course explores perennial philosophical problems regarding our values, God's existence, the external world, moral decision making and obligation, the nature of the human mind, and the limits of human knowledge. It does this by engaging in selected "Great Works" in philosophy including those by Plato, Descartes, Hume, Berkeley, Mill, and Russell.

#### Teaching Assistant

Intro to Mathematical Logic (Roberts) Spring 2016  
 This course provides an introduction to propositional and first-order predicate logic with relations (but not identity).

Intro to Philosophy: Main Problems (Neta) Spring 2012  
 What kind of life is a good life for a human being to lead? Is it important to be knowledgeable, or free, or to enjoy relations of equality with other human beings? If it is important, then why is this so? What is knowledge? What is freedom? What is equality? This course will address these questions and other similar questions. Readings include Tolstoy, Plato, Descartes, Berkeley, and Rousseau.

Making Sense of Ourselves (Reeve) Fall 2012  
 This introductory course is a critical assessment of the attempts made by a series of influential writers and thinkers— some religious and some secular — to understand our lives, their meaning, and our moral values. Readings include Nietzsche, Dostoevsky and Tolstoy.

Introduction to Ethics (Sayre – McCord) Fall 2011  
 This course is an introduction to moral theory through classic texts: Plato's Republic, Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics, Kant's Groundwork for the metaphysics of morals, and Mill's Utilitarianism. It is framed by two general questions: what really matters in life and what is involved in answering this question in the first place.

#### Professional Service

Member of the Auburn University Scholarship Committee	2018 - 2019
Referee <i>Ratio</i> , <i>Synthese</i> (x2), <i>Australasian Journal of Philosophy</i> (x2)	
President, Philosophy Graduate Student Association	2013 - 2014
Work in Progress Talk Coordinator (UNC)	2010-2011, 2012 – 2013
Metaphysics at the Ranch Workshop Assistant Organizer	2013 - 2015
Carolina Metaphysics Workshop Assistant Organizer	2011 - 2013
Member of the American Philosophical Society	
Member of the Society for Exact Philosophy	

Member of the Society for the Metaphysics of Science  
Member of the American Association of Philosophy Teachers

## References

### **L.A. Paul**

Professor of Philosophy at Yale University  
la.paul@yale.edu  
send.2018.328C0D9EE4@interfolio.com

### **Marc Lange**

Theda Perdue Distinguished Professor at UNC –  
Chapel Hill  
mlange@email.unc.edu  
send.Lange.2480AAB9DC@interfolio.com

### **Thomas Hofweber**

Professor of Philosophy at UNC – Chapel Hill  
hofweber@unc.edu  
send.2018.958D9FC56E@interfolio.com

### **James Shelley**

Professor of Philosophy and Department Chair  
at Auburn University  
shelljr@auburn.edu  
send.Shelley.5548F2593E@interfolio.com

### **Ram Neta (Teaching Reference)**

Professor of Philosophy at UNC – Chapel Hill  
neta@email.unc.edu  
send.Neta.E77E175DF6@interfolio.com

### **Elay Shech (Teaching Reference)**

Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Auburn  
University  
ezs0038@auburn.edu  
send.Shech.EAB19DEF21@interfolio.com

## Dissertation Abstract

My dissertation develops resources for understanding how metaphysics explains. Though explanation is a central aim for metaphysical theories, our resources for characterizing metaphysical explanation remain sparse. I contribute new resources by introducing the notion of metaphysical constraint and offer several ways in which that notion expands and deepens our understanding of metaphysical explanation.

In my first chapter, I identify a methodological puzzle called the puzzle of unequal treatment. The puzzle begins with the observation that pairs of equally serious intuitive threats are not always treated equally: some are thought to be serious trouble while others merely invite further work. Though more familiar explanations fail, I show that this puzzle can be solved with a new bit of ideology called metaphysical constraints. Making use of metaphysical constraints, I offer the IPA method for developing metaphysical theories and apply that method to a debate concerning the metaphysics of free will.

My second chapter identifies a set of explanations that have yet to be adequately discussed in the metaphysical explanation literature. I claim that these constitute a new kind of metaphysical explanation, called metaphysical explanation by constraint, and I offer an account of them that is a significant departure from the orthodox view, which understands metaphysical explanation in terms of grounding.

In my third chapter, I offer a general objection to the argument from absence of analysis, which infers primitivism about some  $x$  on the basis of our persistent or in principle failure to provide a reductive analysis of  $x$ . Though widespread, I show that this type of argument fails to distinguish a claim about the possibility of

explanatory characterization from an ontological claim about the possibility of reductive analysis. I drive a wedge between these claims by offering explanatory characterizations backed by metaphysical constraints that are insensitive to the possibility of reduction. Using the personal identity debate as an example, I show how progress can be made in first order philosophical debates when we uncover explanatory characterizations underwritten by metaphysical constraints.