

Jason Lee Byas

ACADEMIC EMPLOYMENT

Georgetown University (Georgetown Institute for the Study of Markets & Ethics, McDonough School of Business) – Junior Faculty Fellow. 2025 – Current.

EDUCATION

University of Michigan (Ann Arbor) – PhD, Philosophy. Graduation: Summer, 2025.

Dissertation: [*Decriminalizing Crime: Accountability Without the Retributive Ritual*](#)

Committee: Elizabeth Anderson (chair), Renée Jørgensen, Gabriel Mendlow, David Sussman (Indiana).

University of Illinois (Urbana-Champaign) – PhD, Philosophy. Attended from 2017 – 2019, transferred to Michigan.

Georgia State University – M.A., Philosophy. Graduation: Summer, 2017.

Thesis: *Rights, Alienation & Forfeiture*

Committee: Andrew I. Cohen (co-chair), Andrew J. Cohen (co-chair), Andrew Altman, Christie Hartley

University of Oklahoma B.A., Philosophy & Sociology. Graduation: Spring, 2014.

RESEARCH AREAS

Areas of Specialization: Ethics; Political Philosophy; Philosophy of Law

Areas of Competence: PPE (Philosophy, Politics & Economics); Social Philosophy (including Philosophy of Race & Feminist Philosophy); Metaethics

AWARDS & GRANTS

1. **Charles L. Stevenson Prize**, *University of Michigan*. 2023 – 2024. [Awarded to the best dissertation prospectus each year.]
 2. **Adam Smith Fellowship** (awarded 6x, 2017 – 2024), *Mercatus Center*. [Highly interdisciplinary program for reading, discussing, and writing work in political economy.]
 3. **Junior Fellows Program** (awarded 2x, Summer 2023 & 2024), *Institute for Humane Studies*. [Invited interdisciplinary program for developing academic work over a summer.]
 4. **Humane Studies Fellowship** (awarded 5x, 2017 – 2021), *Institute for Humane Studies*. [General support for PhD students in humanities and social sciences.]
 5. **Graduate College Distinguished Fellowship**, *University of Illinois*. Fall 2017 – Summer 2019. [Additional support offered to one prospective PhD student per cycle.]
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REFEREED PUBLICATIONS

1. “Two-Tiered Mixed Theories of Punishment Are Not Safe from the Angry Mob.”
Australasian Journal of Philosophy (2025).
2. “Entrepreneurship as Political Action.”
Public Affairs Quarterly (2025).
3. “‘By Any Means Necessary’: Violence, Nonviolence & Signaling Seriousness.”
Journal of Pacifism & Nonviolence (2025).

INVITED PUBLICATIONS

1. **“Order vs. Obedience: A Political Paradox for Rule-Following”**
The Legacy of James M. Buchanan, eds. Rosolino Candela, Mikayla Novak & Alain Marciano, Lexington Books (**Forthcoming**)
2. **“Politics Without Romance, Without Romance: A Meta-Problem for Virginia Political Economy”**
Political Process: New Perspectives on the Virginia and Bloomington Schools, eds. Christopher J. Coyne, Donald J. Boudreaux & Brian Kogelmann, Lexington Books (**2025**).
3. **“Aggression Abroad: Noninterventionism Without National Sovereignty”**
Global Federalism: Liberty and Security in an Anarchical World, ed. Brandon Christiansen, Palgrave MacMillan (**2024**).
4. **“Seeing the State Through *For a New Liberty*.”**
Independent Review, Vol. 28, No. 4: 553-565 (**2024**).
5. **“Rectification & Historic Injustice”**
Routledge Companion of Libertarianism, eds. Matt Zwolinski & Benjamin Ferguson, Routledge: 427-440. (**2022**).
6. **“Methodological Anarchism” (with Billy Christmas)**
Routledge Handbook of Anarchy and Anarchist Thought, eds. Gary Chartier & Chad van Schoelandt, Routledge: 53-75. (**2021**).
7. **“Supplying the Demand of Liberation: Markets as a Structural Check Against Domination”**
Molinari Review, Vol. 1, No. 2: 9-23 (**2019**).
8. **“The Political Is Interpersonal”**
The Dialectics of Liberty: Exploring the Context of Human Freedom, eds. Roger E. Bissell, Chris Matthew Sciabarra & Edward W. Younkins, Lexington Books: 307-324. (**2019**).

ACADEMIC PRESENTATIONS

* = Refereed

1. **“Distributed Justice”**
APA (Eastern Division), Baltimore, MD. January, 2026.
2. **“The Vocabulary of Society” * (as part of a jointly-refereed session)**
PPE Society, New Orleans, LA. November, 2025.
3. **“Distributed Justice” * (as part of a jointly-refereed session)**
PPE Society, New Orleans, LA. November, 2025.
4. **“Wading in Leviathan’s Waters” * (as part of a jointly-refereed session)**
Markets & Society, Falls Church, VA. October 18, 2025.
5. **“How to Abolish the Criminal Law”**
APA (Pacific Division), San Francisco, CA. April 17, 2025.
6. **“The Problem of Pervasive Historic Injustice.” ***
Michigan-MIT Social Philosophy Workshop, Ann Arbor, MI. March 14, 2025.
7. **“The Vocabulary of Society: Feasibility & Fit in Expressive Arguments.” ***
APA (Eastern Division), New York, NY. January 10, 2025.
8. **Commentary on John Hasnas’s *Common Law Liberalism*. * (as part of a jointly-refereed session)**
PPE Society, New Orleans, LA. November 16, 2024.
9. **“Systems of Social Worth.”**
Purdue PPE Workshop Series, West Lafayette, Indiana. September 20, 2024. [Pre-read.]
10. **“The Problem of Pervasive Historic Injustice.” ***
Anarchy, State & Utopia at 50, Kandersteg, Switzerland. September 3, 2024.

11. **“Retributive Failure.”**
2024 IHS Junior Fellows Program, Second Session, Raleigh, NC. August 16, 2024.
12. **“Retributive Failure.”**
2024 IHS Junior Fellows Program, First Session, Raleigh, NC. May 17, 2024.
13. **“Beyond Reform & Revolution, or, How to Abolish the Criminal Law.” ***
Michigan-MIT Social Philosophy Workshop, Cambridge, MA. April 6, 2024.
14. **“The Problem of Pervasive Historic Injustice.”**
APA (Eastern Division), New York, NY. January 16, 2024.
15. **Commentary on Jesse Spafford’s *Social Anarchism & the Rejection of Moral Tyranny.* * (as part of a jointly-refereed session)**
PPE Society, New Orleans, LA. November 2, 2023.
16. **“The Vocabulary of Society.”**
2023 IHS Junior Fellows Program, Second Session, Raleigh, NC. August 11, 2023.
17. **“The Vocabulary of Society.”**
2023 IHS Junior Fellows Program, First Session, Raleigh, NC. May 19, 2023.
18. **“Retribution: An Abolitionist Translation.”**
APA (Pacific Division), San Francisco, CA. April 5, 2023.
19. **“An Argument Against Deserved Suffering and Flourishing.”***
APA (Pacific Division), San Francisco, CA. April 5, 2023.
20. **“Aiming at a New Theory of Well-Being.”***
APA (Central Division), Denver, CO. February 23, 2023.
21. **“Mixed Theories of Punishment Are Not Safe from the Angry Mob”***
APA (Eastern Division), Montreal, QC, Canada. January 5, 2023.
22. **“Retributive Failure.”* (as part of a jointly-refereed session)**
PPE Society, New Orleans, LA. November 3, 2022.
23. **“Property, Interpretation & Contestation.”***
Michigan-MIT Social Philosophy Workshop, Cambridge, MA. April 23, 2022.
24. **“Stolen Bikes & Broken Bones: Restitution as Defense,” * (as part of a jointly-refereed session)**
PPE Society, New Orleans, LA. February 4th, 2022.
25. **Commentary on Matthew C. Altman’s *Justifying Punishment: Deterrence, Retribution & the Aims of the State.* * (as part of a jointly-refereed session)**
Northwest Philosophy Conference, Portland, OR. November 12, 2021.
26. **“Stolen Bikes & Broken Bones: Restitution as Defense”**
APA (Pacific Division), Virtual. April 5, 2021.
27. **“Stolen Bikes & Broken Bones: Restitution as Defense,”**
Research Colloquium, Institute for Humane Studies, Virtual. March 26, 2021.
28. **“Alienation, Forfeiture & Two Concepts of Natural Rights,”**
APA (Eastern Division), Virtual. January 14, 2021.
29. **“Aiming at a New Theory of Well-Being”* (Accepted, conference canceled due to COVID-19).**
UIUC Graduate Philosophy Conference, Urbana, IL. April 2020.
30. **“Alienation, Forfeiture & Two Concepts of Natural Rights” (Conference canceled due to COVID-19.)**
APA (Pacific Division), San Francisco, CA. April, 2020.
31. **“Stolen Bikes & Broken Bones: Restitution as Defense” *(as part of a jointly-refereed session) (Did not attend due to COVID-19.)**
PPE Society, New Orleans, LA. March, 2020.
32. **“Retribution: An Abolitionist Translation” ***
Michigan-MIT Social Philosophy Workshop, Cambridge, MA. March 7, 2020.
33. **“What Is Violence?” †**
APA (Eastern Division), Philadelphia, PA. January 9, 2020.

34. **“The Meaning of Mass Incarceration” ***
North American Society for Social Philosophy, San Francisco, CA. July, 2019.
35. **“Vindicating Hampton’s Expressive Retributivism as a Theory of Rebuke.” ***
American Philosophical Association (Pacific Division), Vancouver, BC. April 19, 2019.
36. **“Retribution: An Abolitionist Translation” *(as part of a jointly-refereed session)**
PPE Society, New Orleans, LA. March 29, 2019.
37. **“The Meaning of Mass Incarceration” ***
Georgia Philosophical Society, Macon, GA. February 23, 2019.
38. **“The Meaning of Mass Incarceration” ***
GSU Graduate Philosophy Symposium, Atlanta, GA. February 22, 2019.
39. **“The Political Is Interpersonal” †**
APA (Eastern Division), New York, NY. January 7, 2019.
40. **“Vindicating Hampton’s Expressive Retributivism as a Theory of Rebuke.” ***
Indiana Philosophical Association, Bloomington, IN. November 16, 2018.
41. **“Judging Retribution”**
Fall Research Colloquium, *Institute for Humane Studies*, Arlington, VA. October 13, 2018.
42. **“Mutations of the Utility Monster” ***
Wisconsin Philosophical Association, Oshkosh, WI. April 28, 2018.
43. **“Beyond Reform & Revolution”**
APEE, Las Vegas, NV. April 4, 2018.
44. **“Methodological Anarchism: Practicing Safe Politics” ***
Association of Practical & Professional Ethics, Chicago, IL. March 2, 2018.
45. **“Methodological Anarchism: Politics Beyond Policy” (paper with Billy Christmas) ***
Philosophy Graduate Conference, *Loyola University (Chicago)*, Chicago, IL. Oct 6, 2017. (Sole presenter)
46. **“Methodological Anarchism: Politics Beyond Policy” (paper with Billy Christmas) ***
PPE Society, New Orleans, LA. March 18, 2017. (Billy Christmas delivered main presentation, questions handled jointly)
47. **“Why Natural Rights Must Be Inalienable Rights” ***
Brave New World Graduate Conference, *MANCEPT*, University of Manchester, Manchester, UK. June 21, 2016.
48. **“Prisons & Slavery”**
APEE, Las Vegas, NV. April 4, 2016.
49. **“Supplying the Demand of Liberation.”**
APA (Eastern Division), Philadelphia, PA. December 29, 2014.

COMMENTS ON ACADEMIC PRESENTATIONS

1. **Comments on Matt Ferkany’s “From Biology to Moral Realism? No Real Path”**
APA (Central Division), Online. February 28, 2025.
2. **Comments on Aaron Elliott’s “A Right-Libertarian Argument for Left-Libertarianism”**
APA (Central Division), New Orleans, LA. February 24, 2024.
3. **Comment on Joshua Kissel’s “Adequacy, Positional Goods, and Social Change: A Critique of Anderson”**
UIUC Graduate Philosophy Conference, Urbana, IL. April 21, 2018.
4. **Comment on Karolina Wisniewska’s “Plans, Projects, and Policies: How Temporal Extension of Agency Can Justify Paternalism”**
UIUC Graduate Philosophy Conference, Urbana, IL. April 20, 2018.
5. **Comment on Gaetano Venezia III’s “The Liberal Ironist & the Other”**
Georgia Philosophical Society, Young Harris, GA. April 8, 2017.

6. Comment on Matt Jeffers's "Egalitarianism and Economic Sovereignty"

GSU Graduate Philosophy Symposium, Atlanta, GA. February 17, 2017.

TEACHING

1. Instructor of Record, *Markets & Morality*, Georgetown University. Fall 2025.
 2. Instructor of Record, *Contemporary Moral Problems*, University of Michigan. Summer 2025.
 3. Instructor of Record, *Introduction to Philosophy*, Georgia State University. Spring 2017 (2 classes.)
 4. Instructor of Record, *Introduction to Philosophy*, Georgia State University. Fall 2016 (2 classes.)
 5. Instructor of Record, *Introduction to Philosophy*, Georgia State University. Summer 2016.
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TEACHING ASSISTANTSHIPS & RESEARCH ASSISTANTSHIPS

1. Graduate Student Instructor, Introduction to Ethics (Lead Instructor: Dan Lowe), University of Michigan. Fall 2024. (2 sections of 1 class.)
 2. Head Graduate Student Instructor, *Minds & Machines* (Lead Instructor: Eric Swanson), University of Michigan. Winter (Spring) 2023. (2 sections of 1 class + assisting other GSIs.)
 3. Graduate Student Instructor, *Introduction to Political Economy* (Lead Instructor: Dan Lowe), University of Michigan. Fall 2022. (2 sections of 1 class.)
 4. Graduate Student Instructor, *Introduction to Philosophy* (Lead Instructor: Sarah Moss), University of Michigan. Winter (Spring) 2022. (2 sections of 1 class.)
 5. Graduate Student Instructor, *Introduction to Political Philosophy* (Lead Instructor: Dan Lowe), University of Michigan. Fall 2021. (2 sections of 1 class.)
 6. Graduate Student Instructor, *Contemporary Moral Problems* (Lead Instructor: Dan Lowe), University of Michigan. Winter (Spring) 2021. (2 sections of 1 class.)
 7. Graduate Student Instructor, *Contemporary Moral Problems: Rights & Races* (Lead Instructor: Daniel Herwitz), University of Michigan. Fall 2020. (2 sections of 1 class.)
 8. Research Assistant, Andrew Jason Cohen, Georgia State University. Spring 2016.
 9. Supplemental Instruction Leader, *Critical Thinking*, Georgia State University. Fall 2015.
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GRADUATE COURSEWORK

At Michigan:

- Proseminar (Ishani Maitra)
- Axiology (David Manley)
- Consequentialism (Daniel Jacobson)
- Interest-Relative Theories of Knowledge (Brian Weatherston)
- James C. Scott (Christian Davenport) (Political Science)
- Moral Communication & Moral Repair (Elizabeth Anderson)
- Intention (Ishani Maitra)
- Law & Language (Eric Swanson)
- Philosophy of Law (Scott Hershovitz) (Law) (audit)
- Moral Rights & Social Norms (Renée Jørgensen) (audit)
- The Political Economy & Moral Psychology of Egalitarianism (Elizabeth Anderson) (audit)
- Directed Readings Course: Punishment & Moral Repair (Elizabeth Anderson)
- Candidacy Seminar (Eric Swanson) (x2) (non-graded)
- Philosophy of Law Workshop (Ekow Yankah & Sarah Moss) (audit)
- Socialism (Elizabeth Anderson) (audit)

- Philosophy of Law Workshop (Sarah Moss & Nico Cornell) (audit)
- Self and Others (Sarah Buss) (audit)
- Metaethics (Peter Railton) (audit)

At Illinois:

- Philosophy of Law & State (Jochen Bojanowski)
- Kant's Moral & Political Philosophy (Helga Varden)
- Skepticism (Shelley Weinberg)
- Transitional Justice (Colleen Murphy) (Law)
- Jurisprudence & Philosophy of Law (Michael Moore) (Law)
- Free Will & the Reactive Attitudes (David Sussman)
- Justice (Colleen Murphy)
- Metaphysics of Composition (Noël Saenz)
- Medieval Philosophy (Robert Wengert)
- Hannah Arendt (Helga Varden)
- Punishment (David Sussman)

At Georgia State:

- Egalitarianism (Christie Hartley)
- Survey of Social & Political Philosophy (Andrew I. Cohen)
- Ancient Ethics (Tim O'Keefe)
- Teaching Philosophy (Sandra Dwyer)
- Survey of Philosophy of Law (Andrew I. Cohen)
- Toleration (Andrew J. Cohen)
- Marxism (Andrew Altman)
- Symbolic Logic (Ed Cox)
- History of Analytic Philosophy (Ed Cox)
- Aristotle (Tim O'Keefe) – (audit)
- Reparations (Andrew I. Cohen)

READING GROUPS & WORKING GROUPS

- Working Group on the Philosophy of Policing & Punishment (Summer 2023 – Present)
- *Self-Constitution* by Christine Korsgaard (Summer 2024)
- *Democratic Reason* by Hélène Landemore (Spring 2024)
- *Value in Ethics & Economics* by Elizabeth Anderson (Summer 2020)
- Republicanism (Summer 2020)
- Individualist Anarchism (Fall 2017)

SERVICE TO THE DEPARTMENT & THE PROFESSION

Referee for: *American Philosophical Quarterly*; *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*; *Economics & Philosophy*; *European Journal of Political Theory*; *Journal of Ethics*; *Philosophy & Public Affairs*; *Public Affairs Quarterly*; *Res Publica*; and an edited anthology for Routledge.

Organizer for: Michigan-MIT Social Philosophy Workshop 2021 – 2023; Michigan Ethics Discussion Group (“EDGe”) 2021 – 2024.

Dissertation Abstract

Decriminalizing Crime: Accountability Without the Retributive Ritual

When someone has clearly committed egregious wrongdoing and they either go unpunished, or are very lightly punished, this provokes in us a sense of outrage. This provides a simple, yet compelling argument for retributivists, who believe there is something morally important about punishment regardless of whether it provides further social benefit, and a simple, yet compelling problem for abolitionists who reject punishment as unjust. The aim of this dissertation is to provide a very complicated answer to this simple argument.

The short version of that answer is as follows: it is morally significant, independent of further social benefit, to condemn wrongdoing and vindicate victims, which is a role currently served by punishment. Yet this purpose does not necessarily depend on punishment in particular, and it is a live question whether it could be adequately or even better served by abolitionist alternatives to the criminal law, such as expanding tort restitution and restorative justice. Our outrage in cases of non-punishment, then, is outrage towards the failure to hold someone accountable, given our socially contingent system of accountability. The more conservative version of my conclusion is thus that retributivism requires substantive criminological inquiry to justify punishment; the less conservative version is that the abolitionist rejection of punishment is compatible with the basic retributivist intuition.

I begin with an **introduction** that explains the basic question in greater detail, while also explaining my own motivations in wanting to answer it. Then, in **the first substantive chapter**, “A Dilemma for Desertism,” I argue against the version of retributivism that says wrongdoers simply deserve to suffer by arguing that this sense of desert is either morally objectionable or reduces to mere shorthand for other moral concerns. In **the second chapter**, “Systems of Social Worth,” I reconstruct a version of the expressive retributivist framework that seems correct: on this picture, we must condemn wrongdoing and vindicate victims in order to socially realize the value of victims.

This social realization, I argue, ends up being protection within a shared set of stable social norms, and this task, I further argue, could in principle be satisfied by something other than punishment. Part of this depends on whether alternatives could meaningfully count as condemnation, and whether something expresses a given value judgment is partly a matter of convention. Thus, **the third chapter**, “The Vocabulary of Society” turns to the question of how we can judge which conceivable modes of expression are feasible and fitting. With respect to fit, my answer ends up being

that a mode of expression is more fitting to the extent that it is the one you would choose if you sincerely cared about the values in question. In the case of condemning egregious wrongdoing, this will partly depend on what actually reduces the incidence of that wrongdoing, and so substantive criminological inquiry should matter for the expressive retributivist, even if it does not matter in the same way that it does for the straightforward penal consequentialist. **The conclusion**, “Retribution: An Abolitionist Translation,” then returns to the cases motivating simple retributivist intuition, and shows how the machinery of the three core chapters helps to “translate” that intuition into something more amenable to the abolitionist.