

Employment

2017– **Postdoctoral Research Fellow**, *Simon Fraser University*.

Education

2011–2017 **PhD in Philosophy**, *University of Texas at Austin*.

REASON UNBOUND: A NEO-RATIONALIST MANIFESTO

The Principle of Sufficient Reason (PSR) holds that everything has an explanation. My dissertation defends the PSR—what many take to be a prime tenet of the rationalist metaphysics of Leibniz and Spinoza—from three influential challenges: (1) that we lack reason to accept the PSR; (2) that the principle is not consistent with the now widespread recognition of metaphysically fundamental facts; (3) that the PSR entails that the world could not have been otherwise.

Committee: Profs. R. M. Sainsbury (Supervisor) and R. Koons (Supervisor), J. Wilson (Toronto), J. Litland, J. Dever, and M. Della Rocca (Yale)

2009–2010 **PhD Program in Philosophy**, *University of Western Ontario*.

2008–2009 **MA in Philosophy**, *University of Toronto*.

2004–2008 **Honours Bachelor of Arts (with Distinction)**, *University of Toronto*.

Specialists: Philosophy and Bioethics

Research Interests

AOS Metaphysics, Early Modern (including Kant)

AOC History of Analytic Philosophy, Philosophy of Race and Gender, Philosophy of Science, Ethics (Normative and Applied), Logic

Publications

forthcoming ‘Ground and the Principle of Sufficient Reason’, *Routledge Handbook of Metaphysical Grounding* (Ed. Michael Raven).

forthcoming ‘Russell’s Commitment to the Principle of Acquaintance’, *The Oxford Handbook of Bertrand Russell* (Ed. Kevin Klement).

2013 ‘The Role of Attention in Russell’s Theory of Knowledge’, *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 21 (6): 1175-1193.

Scholarships & Awards

- 2014 *The SWIP-Analytic 2014 Graduate Essay Prize* for ‘The Normativity of Non-sense’. Awarded by SWIP-Analytic
- 2014 *Cogburn Essay Prize* for ‘The Ontological Status of Identity’. Awarded by UT–Austin Philosophy Department
- 2013 *The British Society for the History of Philosophy Graduate Essay Prize* for ‘Acquaintance, Attention, and Knowledge in Russell’. Awarded by the British Society for the History of Philosophy (BSHP)
- 2009 *Dean’s Entrance Scholarship*. Awarded by the University of Western Ontario Philosophy Department
- 2009 *Chair’s Entrance Scholarship*. Awarded by the University of Western Ontario Philosophy Department
- 2008 *George Kennedy Scholarship in Philosophy*. Awarded by the University of Toronto Philosophy Department to the top graduating student in Philosophy
- 2008 *Douglas Bond Symons Prize in Philosophy*. Awarded by Trinity College in the University of Toronto to the top graduating student in Philosophy at Trinity College
- 2004 *Queen Elizabeth II Aiming for the Top Scholarship*. Awarded by the Government of Ontario to students of excellent standing who are entering their first year of university

Professional Presentations

- Jul. 2017 ‘Kant’s Humility Thesis and Grounded Appearances’, International Kant Summer School, The Johannes Gutenberg University of Mainz
- Jul. 2017 ‘The Contingency of Explanation’, University College London (Invited Talk)
- Jun. 2017 ‘The Contingency of Explanation’, University of Southampton (Invited Talk)
- Apr. 2017 ‘Grounding Perspectival Facts’, APA – Pacific Division, Seattle
- Feb. 2017 ‘The Ontological Status of Identity’, 1st eidos Graduate School in Metaphysics on Identity, Université de Neuchâtel
- Jan. 2017 ‘The Contingency of Explanation’, Simon Fraser University (Invited Talk)
- Jun. 2016 ‘Emergence and Grounded Fundamentality’, Grounding and Consciousness Conference, University of Birmingham
- Dec. 2015 ‘A Plea for Grounded Fundamentality’, The Metaphysics and Epistemology of Grounding and Fundamentality, CUNY
- Oct. 2015 ‘Emergence and Metaphysical Explanation’, Boulder Conference on the History and Philosophy of Science
- Aug. 2015 ‘Contingentism and the Principle of Sufficient Reason’, 2015 Bellingham Summer Philosophy Conference
- Mar. 2015 ‘How Nonsense Regulates Belief’, 2015 Edinburgh Foundations of Normativity Workshop, University of Edinburgh

- Nov. 2014 ‘Russell’s Principle of Acquaintance: Why Believe It?’, Early Analytic Meet-Up, University of Stirling (Invited Talk)
- Oct. 2014 ‘Identity is Not Fundamental’, The Logic, Semantics, and Metaphysics of Identity Workshop, UC Irvine (Invited Talk)
- May 2014 ‘The Normativity of Nonsense’, SWIP-Analytic Talk, The Graduate Center, CUNY (Prize Talk)
- Apr. 2014 ‘Why Identity is not a Relation’, APA – Pacific Division, San Diego
- Nov. 2013 ‘A Puzzle about Nonsense’, Russell and Wittgenstein at the Crossroads, McMaster University
- May 2013 ‘Why Identity is not a Relation’, Society for Exact Philosophy 2013 Meeting, Montreal
- May 2013 ‘Kant’s Transcendental Idealism and the Grounding Constraint’, North American Kant Society Biennial Conference, Cornell University
- Mar. 2013 ‘A Return to Neutral Relations: A Puzzle about Symmetry’, APA – Pacific Division, San Francisco
- Oct. 2012 ‘Symmetrical Relations Revisited: A Defense of Positionalism’, Society for Exact Philosophy 2012 Meeting, Ohio State University
- May 2012 ‘The Role of Acquaintance in Russell’s Philosophy’, First Annual Conference of the Society for the Study of the History of Analytical Philosophy (SSHAP), McMaster University

Graduate Conference Presentations

- Nov. 2016 ‘How a Necessary Fact can Ground a Contingent Fact’, Oxford Graduate Philosophy Conference, University of Oxford
- May 2015 ‘Nonsense and the First Person’, The University of Toronto Graduate Conference, University of Toronto
- Nov. 2014 ‘How Nonsense Regulates Belief’, Arche Graduate Conference, University of St. Andrews
- Apr. 2014 ‘Beneath Appearances’, Harvard-MIT Graduate Conference, MIT
- Apr. 2013 ‘Kant’s Transcendental Idealism and the Grounding Constraint’, Harvard-MIT Graduate Conference, Harvard University
- Mar. 2013 ‘Kant’s Transcendental Idealism and the Grounding Constraint’, 36th Annual Graduate Philosophy Conference at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, University of Urbana-Champaign
- Jun. 2012 ‘Knowledge by Acquaintance Revisited’, Graduate Conference: The Problems of Philosophy Then and Now, University of Glasgow
- Jun. 2012 ‘In Defense of Understanding-Assent Links’, Graduate Epistemology Conference, University of Edinburgh, University of Edinburgh

Commentaries

- Apr. 2017 Rebecca Chan's 'The Problem of Self-Transformation', Preconference on Themes in Transformative Experience, APA – Pacific Division, Seattle
- Mar. 2016 Justin Tiehen's 'Realization as Grounding (with a Big-"G")', APA – Pacific Division, San Francisco
- Apr. 2015 Jordan Kroll's 'Defending the Easy Road to Nominalism', UT–Austin Graduate Conference
- Apr. 2014 Kit Fine's 'Criteria of Identity and Ground' (Keynote Address), UT–Austin Graduate Conference
- Jan. 2014 Briana Toole's 'The Causal Theory and Fictional Names', Ninth MLK Conference, University of Texas at Austin
- Oct. 2013 Luis Ramon-Alarcon's 'Spinoza on Sensory Perception', UT-UNAM Workshop, UNAM
- Apr. 2013 Anthony Adrian's 'The Truth about Quantifier Variance', UT–Austin Graduate Conference
- Jan. 2013 Brian Knab's 'Mythical objects and the Hob/Nob puzzle', Eighth MLK Conference, University of Texas at Austin
- Nov. 2012 Bernard Linsky's 'Acquaintance and Certainty in *The Problems of Philosophy*', Conference for the 100th Anniversary of Russell's *Problems of Philosophy*, University of Mississippi

Other Presentations (Selected)

- Oct. 2014 'How Nonsense Regulates Belief', Epistemology Reading Group (ERGo), University of Texas at Austin
- Oct. 2014 'Should the Burqa be Banned?', Feminist Philosophy Reading Group, University of Texas at Austin
- Mar. 2014 'Can Islam and Feminism be Reconciled?', Feminist Philosophy Reading Group, University of Texas at Austin
- Mar. 2013 'Why Identity Is Not A Relation', Undergraduate Philosophy Association (UPA), University of Texas at Austin
- Jan. 2011 'The Individuation of Propositions in Russell's *Principles of Mathematics*', Sixth MLK Conference, University of Texas at Austin

Professional Development

- May 2014 Metaphysical Mayhem, Rutgers University
- June 2013 Visiting Researcher, Bertrand Russell Research Centre, McMaster University
- Jul. 2011 International Summer School in Cognitive Science and Semantics
 - Topic: David Lewis on Language and Mind
 - Coordinator: Benj Hellie (Toronto)
 - University of Latvia (Riga)
- Jul. 2010 Summer School on 'Meaning, Context, and Intention'

- Coordinator: Jason Stanley (Rutgers)
Central European University
- Summer 2010 Research Student, Joint Centre for Bioethics, University of Toronto
- Summer 2008 Research Assistant, Joint Centre for Bioethics, University of Toronto

Professional Service

- 2015-2016 Member, Dean of Students Student Advisory Council, UT–Austin
- Spring 2015 Co-Organizer, Feminist Philosophy Reading Group, UT–Austin
- Spring 2015 Vice President, MAP (Minorities and Philosophy) Chapter, UT–Austin
- Fall 2014 Organizer, ‘Women in Philosophy’ talk by Prof. Sally Haslanger, UT–Austin
- 2014 Graduate Student Representative, Philosophy Department, UT–Austin
- 2011-2016 Referee, UT–Austin Philosophy Graduate Conference
- Referee, *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, *Journal for the History of Analytic Philosophy*, *Journal of Medical Ethics*

Teaching

Course Instructor, Simon Fraser University

- Summer 2018 Topics in the History of Philosophy
- Winter 2018 Graduate: Advanced Topics in History of Philosophy (*The Principle of Sufficient Reason*) [Co-Taught with Dai Heide]
- Fall 2017 Philosophy of Race and Gender

Course Instructor, University of Texas at Austin

- Fall 2016 RHE309K: Rhetoric of Religion
- Summer 2016 PHLF304: Contemporary Moral Problems
- Spring 2016 RHE306: Rhetoric and Writing (*Race and Criminal Justice in America*)
- Fall 2015 RHE306: Rhetoric and Writing (*Race and Criminal Justice in America*)
- Summer 2015 PHL316K: Science and Philosophy

Teaching Assistant, University of Texas at Austin

- Spring 2015 PHL329L: Early Modern Philosophy (Advanced)
- Fall 2014 PHL312: Introduction to Symbolic Logic
- Spring 2014 PHL310: Knowledge and Reality
- Fall 2013 PHL309: Introduction to Philosophy of Religion
- Spring 2013 PHL301: Introduction to Philosophy
- Fall 2012 PHL329: Early Modern Philosophy (Advanced)
- Spring 2012 PHL301L: Early Modern Philosophy
- Fall 2012 PHL325L: Business Ethics

Teaching Assistant, University of Western Ontario

- 2009-2010 PHL1020: Introduction to Philosophy

Teaching Assistant, University of Toronto

Spring 2009 PHL384: Ethics, Genetics, and Reproduction

Fall 2008 PHL380: Global Bioethics

Pedagogical Training

Fall 2015 398T: Supervised Teaching Seminar in Rhetoric and Writing

Spring 2014 398T: Supervised Teaching Seminar in Philosophy

Languages

Research Languages

- English (Native), German (Intermediate reading and basic spoken), French (Intermediate reading and basic spoken), Latin (beginner)

Other Languages

- Gujarati (Native), Urdu (Fluent), Kiswahili (Fluent), Arabic (Intermediate reading and basic spoken)

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Dissertation Summary

The Principle of Sufficient Reason (PSR) holds that everything has an explanation. My dissertation defends the PSR—a principle many take to be a prime tenet of the rationalist metaphysics of Leibniz and Spinoza—from three influential challenges: (1) that we lack reason to accept the PSR; (2) that the principle is inconsistent with the now widespread recognition of metaphysically fundamental facts; (3) that the PSR entails that the world could not have been otherwise. By answering these challenges, I resist the contemporary dismissal of this central rationalist tenet. To endorse the PSR requires rejecting any view that admits unexplained or ‘brute’ facts. But such views are pervasive in contemporary metaphysics. My dissertation therefore lays the foundation for a substantial revision of the current metaphysical landscape.

I first argue that a commitment to the PSR is indispensable to metaphysical inquiry. A subject engages in ‘metaphysical inquiry’ when she seeks, for some fact, to understand why that fact obtains. Much as the indispensability of mathematical entities to scientific practice provides reason to accept the existence of these entities, the indispensability of a commitment to the PSR to metaphysical inquiry provides an answer to the first challenge. My argument rests upon a surprisingly minimal foundation. This foundation is the very general and relatively uncontroversial action-theoretic thesis that if a subject intends to perform an action, she commits herself to being able to perform that action. I use this thesis to argue that when a subject seeks to explain any arbitrary fact, she commits herself to every fact having an explanation, i.e. to the PSR.

The second challenge to the PSR presupposes a widely accepted metaphysical dogma: that a fact is fundamental just if it lacks metaphysical explanation. I answer the challenge by developing a view of fundamentality on which whether a fact is fundamental is determined relative to a building relation. In doing so, I overturn the dogmatic equation of fundamentality with the absence of any metaphysical explanation. I first show that if fundamentality is absolute inexplicability, the concept of fundamentality can neither perform necessary theoretical work, nor accommodate potential first-order commitments in metaphysics. I focus, in particular, on the commitment to metaphysical emergence. Second, I argue that my alternative conception of fundamentality not only better accommodates potential first-order commitments in metaphysics, but also better captures a prime explanatory role filled by the facts we designate as ‘fundamental’: that of providing an unproblematic stopping point for explanation.

The third challenge charges that the PSR entails that the world could not have been otherwise. I argue that it rests upon an uncritical acceptance of a principle governing metaphysical explanation: Necessitation. According to this principle, if one fact metaphysically explains another, then necessarily, if the first fact obtains then the other does as well. I answer the challenge by first establishing a crucial distinction between perspectival facts (which include the contingent facts) and non-perspectival facts (which include at least some necessary facts). I then show that Necessitation tacitly involves a principled restriction that is such that the assignment of the first fact in the principle constrains which fact can be assigned as the second fact. In particular, if the first fact is non-perspectival, the second must also be non-perspectival. I motivate this restriction by arguing for an analogous restriction in the metaphysics of time; I then show that the conclusions drawn in the temporal case extend to the modal case. My argument both entails that Necessitation holds of only some metaphysical explanations, and generates a principled way of determining those explanations for which it does not hold.