

## Statement of Future Research

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My ongoing and planned research projects lie in contemporary metaphysics, the history of early modern philosophy, the history of analytic philosophy, and the philosophy of race and gender. My dissertation lays the groundwork for several of these projects; I have also done foundational work in separate papers presented at a variety of conferences and workshops.

### I Metaphysics

My major ongoing project in metaphysics is to complete the examination of the Principle of Sufficient Reason (i.e. the claim that everything has an explanation, hereafter ‘PSR’) begun in my dissertation. As I outline in my dissertation summary, my dissertation answers three longstanding challenges to the PSR. My immediate goal is to publish my three main dissertation chapters as separate articles.

Aside from my work on the PSR, I have three planned or ongoing projects in metaphysics. The first is a defense of ‘Hume’s Dictum’, the widely endorsed metaphysical principle that there are no necessary relations that hold between distinct things. Hume’s Dictum underlies many central commitments in metaphysics, including the highly influential combinatorial account of modality. But to date, there has been no good argument for the principle. An influential recent critique by Wilson (2010) has made the need for such an argument quite pressing. Wilson argues that Hume’s Dictum is neither intuitive nor analytic, and concludes on that basis that there remains no real argument for the principle. If Wilson is right, much contemporary metaphysics is built on a bed of sand. I plan to answer Wilson’s challenge by developing a positive argument for Hume’s Dictum. I will show first that a necessary relation between distinct things is such that it is necessarily metaphysically unexplained or ‘brute’. I will then argue that necessarily brute facts are unintelligible, and that we therefore ought to reject such facts (and so endorse Hume’s Dictum). The seeds for this argument were sown in a paper on numerical identity I have presented at numerous conferences (more on that paper below), as well as in work on intelligibility and metaphysical explanation completed in my dissertation.

A second planned project, closely related to the first, concerns metaphysical overdetermination. A vast literature examines whether and when causal overdetermination is problematic. By contrast, its counterpart for metaphysical explanation—metaphysical overdetermination—remains largely unexplored. Drawing upon recent work on explanatory redundancy (Cf. Della Rocca 2014), I will show that metaphysical overdetermination is problematic when it violates a redundancy constraint on metaphysical explanation. Building on this result, I will show how the demand to avoid problematic metaphysical overdetermination constrains candidate accounts of how the world is structured.

My third project, which is already in progress, concerns the nature of numerical identity (hereafter ‘identity’). Identity facts pose a special problem for any account of fundamental facts. On the one hand, they seem to be good candidates for non-fundamental facts: they are not facts God would have had to create when she created the universe (they come along ‘for free’). But on the other hand, it is difficult to see which facts could ground facts about what is identical to what. My project examines the metaphysical status of identity facts. I argue that a commitment to identity facts is ultimately unintelligible. I have presented a working paper on numerical identity at several conferences and workshops, including a meeting of the American Philosophical Association, the Society for Exact Philosophy, and an invited workshop at UC Irvine.

## II Kant and Early Modern

While my dissertation belongs primarily to contemporary metaphysics, it is informed (and inspired) by early modern philosophy. As a result, I have a pair of ongoing research projects in the history of early modern philosophy (including Kant). The first project focuses on an aspect of Kant's discussion of the Principle of Sufficient Reason. Kant restricts the Principle of Sufficient Reason to so-called 'appearances', and so does not extend it to so-called 'things-in-themselves'. I plan to argue that Kant's restriction of the PSR sheds light on his important thesis that things-in-themselves are in-principle unknowable. That is, things-in-themselves are unknowable because they cannot be metaphysically explained. I therefore plan to show that Kant did not view his restricted PSR as a mere 'regulative ideal', as many have proposed, but instead as a substantive principle that follows from his other metaphysical commitments. The foundation for this project was laid in talks I gave at a number of conferences, including the biannual meeting of the North American Kant Society.

My second historical project explores the relationship between Kant's unknowability principle (i.e. the principle that things-in-themselves are unknowable) and Leibniz's unknowability principle. I focus in particular on Eberhard's Leibniz and the Kant-Eberhard controversy over the nature of the 'ground' that underlies appearances. While for Kant the unknowability of the thing-in-itself is an in-principle unknowability, for Leibniz it seems to merely be an in-practice-but-not-in-principle unknowability. On Leibniz's view (as expounded by Eberhard), the objective grounds of appearances (i.e. Leibnizian things-in-themselves) are in fact unknown, yet still knowable. I intend to explore the implications of such differences between Kant and Leibniz's views about our ignorance of the ground of appearances for their respective commitments to the Principle of Sufficient Reason.

## III Early Analytic Philosophy

While my work mainly falls within metaphysics and the history of early modern philosophy, I also have longstanding research interests in the history of analytic philosophy. An ongoing project concerns Russell's Principle of Acquaintance. This principle states a necessary condition on understanding. It says that one must be acquainted with every constituent of a proposition one understands. There are at least two questions one might ask about this principle: (1) Why did Russell hold it? (2) Do *we* have any reason to hold it? I plan to answer both these questions. The foundation for this project was laid in my 2013 publication in the *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*. I have subsequently presented early work from this project at an invited workshop at the University of Stirling.

A second ongoing project belongs not to the history of analytic philosophy proper, but takes as its starting point the disagreement between Russell and Wittgenstein over whether Russell's multiple relation theory of judgment can rule out believing 'nonsense'. In 'How Nonsense Regulates Belief', a paper I have workshopped at several venues, I argue that belief is subject to a norm according to which, for every proposition  $p$ , one ought to believe  $p$  only if  $p$  is not nonsense (where nonsensical propositions are those that involve a violation of semantic categories). Call this the 'nonsense norm'. I show that the nonsense norm is both distinct from a truth norm for belief (i.e. believe  $p$  only if  $p$  is true), and no less fundamental than it. I also argue that the nonsense norm has its roots in the asymmetry between first and third personal access to the contents of our thoughts.

#### IV Philosophy of Race and Gender

My work in feminist philosophy asks whether feminism can be reconciled with patriarchal structures present in organized religions, particularly Islam. Recent attempts to reconcile the two have been text-focused. Prominent Islamic scholars and feminists claim to find evidence in Islamic texts (particularly the Quran) for women's rights and equality between the genders. These attempts to re-interpret the text have taken one of two forms. Some scholars argue that the original verses are not sexist (or are at least less sexist than originally rendered, cf. Barlas 2008). Others insist that the original verses should be interpreted in light of the historical context in which they were revealed, taking into account the moral universe and social conditions of the people to *whom* they were revealed. I have a paper-in-progress on this topic, 'Can Islam and Feminism be Reconciled?' that I have workshopped at the Feminist Philosophy Reading Group at the University of Texas at Austin. In that paper, I argue that both approaches face serious challenges in their attempts to provide more egalitarian interpretations of Quranic verses. The first approach faces a significant textual obstacle: many verses in the Quran simply resist egalitarian readings. The second approach runs into a different problem. The project of re-interpretation furthers feminist goals only if it retains the prescriptive force of the Quran; if it doesn't, the re-interpretations will carry no religious weight with Muslims. However, in turning the Quran (and religious texts more generally) into historically contingent documents, the second approach robs it of its prescriptive force and universality. In the second half of my paper, I defend a strategy for reconciling feminism with Islam that does not focus on the interpretation of religious texts. I argue that the content of a religious text is not central to the sociopolitical forces that govern a religious society, and so these texts should not be our focus when remedying the ill of gender inequality in religious structures. I argue that reconciliation instead requires direct intervention to change religious practice.

My ongoing research project in the philosophy of race tackles a dilemma for accounts of racism that seek to explain the moral wrongness of racism. The project has largely grown out of my teaching interests in the philosophy of race (I have had the opportunity to design and teach two courses on the topic at the University of Texas at Austin). The dilemma for accounts of racism can be put as follows. If a racist is someone who falsely believes that there are morally relevant differences (e.g. differences in intelligence, trustworthiness, courage, etc.) between groups he perceives to be unified by certain inherited features (Cf. Appiah 1990), then insofar as false beliefs in general do not constitute a moral wrong, racism is not a moral wrong; but racism *is* a moral wrong. Faced with this dilemma, I aim to answer the following question: putting aside a view (such as Clifford's) on which doxastic shortcomings are also moral shortcomings, what further conditions must be met in order for a false belief to count as a moral wrong (cf. Arpaly 2002, 2014)? This question becomes particularly pressing if belief formation is involuntary, since subjects are not in general held accountable for involuntary acts. I will show that even if belief formation is involuntary, we can capture the moral wrongness of racism by appeal to a subject's motivations for maintaining her beliefs. I will argue that if these motivations stem from a subject's need to maintain a position of privilege over a certain group, then maintaining the belief is morally wrong. This wrongness will remain even if belief formation is involuntary, since (as I will show) a subject's failure to acknowledge evidence contrary to her racist beliefs can be voluntary even if her original belief formation was involuntary.