

Jordan Baker

Curriculum Vita

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Employment

Post-doctoral Teaching Lecturer

University of Tennessee at Knoxville (2019-Present)

Education

Ph.D. in Philosophy (2019)

University of Tennessee—Knoxville, Tennessee

Dissertation: “Action as Essential Metaphysical Dependence”

Dissertation Committee: David Palmer (Chair), Nora Berenstain, EJ Coffman, Bruce MacLennan

M.M. in Musicology (2012)

University of Tennessee—Knoxville, Tennessee

Thesis: “‘Sing to the Lord a new song’: Memory, Music, Epistemology and the Emergence of Gregorian Chant as Corporate Knowledge”

Thesis Committee: Rachel Golden (Chair), Leslie C. Gay, Jr., Allison Robbins

B.M. in Music Theory, Interdisciplinary Honors Minor (2010)

Union University—Jackson, Tennessee

Areas of Specialization

Philosophy of Action, Metaphysics

Areas of Competence

Ethics, Bioethics, Philosophy of Mind

Publications

1. “Rejecting Pereboom’s Empirical Objection to Agent-Causation”, *Synthese* (2017) Vol. 194/8
2. “Group Agents and the Phenomenology of Joint-Agency,” (forthcoming in a special issue of *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*), Co-authored with Michael Ebling

Work in Progress

1. “Agency-First Non-causalism,” (under review)

Teaching Experience

Post-doc Teaching Lecturer in Philosophy, University of Tennessee

1. Introduction to Philosophy (Phil 101) Spring 2020, Fall 2021
2. Critical Thinking (Phil 130) Fall 2021, Spring 2022
3. Contemporary Moral Problems (Phil. 252) Spring 2020
4. Bioethics (Phil 345) Fall 2019
5. Professional Responsibility (Phil. 244) Fall 2019, Fall 2020 [Online], Spring 2021[Online], Spring 2022

Teaching Associate (Primary Instructor) in Philosophy, University of Tennessee

1. Contemporary Moral Problems (Phil 252) Spring 2016, Spring 2017
2. Introduction to Philosophy (Phil. 101) 2014-15

Teaching Assistant in Philosophy, University of Tennessee

1. Contemporary Moral Problems (Phil. 252) Fall 2016, Spring 2018, Spring 2019
2. Bioethics (Phil. 345) 2013-14
3. Introduction to Philosophy (Phil. 101) 2012-13, Fall 2017, Fall 2018

Grader in Musicology, University of Tennessee

1. Introduction to Western Music (Mus. 110) 2010-12
2. Soundscapes: Exploring Music in a Changing World (Mus. 290) Spring 2011
3. Music in World Cultures (Mus. 380) Spring 2011

Presentations

1. “Non-Causalism as Metaphysical Dependence”
American Philosophical Association- Pacific Division
(San Diego CA, March 2018)
2. “Dispositional Essentialism and the Problem of Structural Properties”
North Carolina Philosophical Society Conference
(North Carolina State University, Raleigh NC, February 2015)
3. “Wild Coincidences and Agent-Causes”
Florida State Free Will, Moral Responsibility, and Agency Conference
(Florida State University, Tallahassee FL, October 2013)
4. “‘With One Voice:’ Memory, Chant, and the Performance of Christian Identity”
47th International Congress on Medieval Studies
(University of Western Michigan, Kalamazoo MI, May 2012)
5. “*Melos Dulcis*: ‘Sweet Melody’ and the Concept of Music as Food in the Middle Ages”
American Musicological Society- South Central Conference
(Union University, Jackson TN, March 2012)

Awards

1. John Hardwig Excellence in Teaching Award (2019)
2. College of Arts and Sciences-Spring Dissertation Fellowship (Spring 2019)
3. Thomas Fellowship, UTK (2017-18)
4. Richard Aquila Paper Prize [Best Graduate Student Paper among UT Philosophy Graduate Students], University of Tennessee (2017)
5. Ray M. Longyear Award [Best Student Paper at AMS-SC Conference], American Musicological Society- South-Central Chapter (2012)
6. Academic Medal for Excellence in Music Theory, Union University (2010)

Service

1. Journal Reviewer (*Inquiry: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy*- 2019; *Synthese*- 2020-21; *Philosophy*- 2020)
2. Ethics Bowl Volunteer—Judge, high school liaison, moderator, general volunteer: (2016-22)
3. National Bioethics Bowl— Judge (2021)
4. Graduate Representative to the Social Committee (2017-18)
5. Graduate Representative to the Faculty (2015-17)
6. Graduate Student Senate Representative (2013-14)

Graduate Coursework

1. “Late-Antiquity and Early Christian Philosophy” [independent study], Clerk Shaw, Fall 2015
2. “Mathematical Structures in Scientific Reasoning”, Nora Berenstain, Spring 2015
3. “Ethical Naturalism”, Kristina Gehrman, Spring 2015
4. “Kant and the Concept of *A Priori* Justification”, Marcus Kohl, Fall 2014
5. “Naming and Necessity”, Jon Garthoff, Fall 2014
6. “Ideal and Non-Ideal Theory”, Jon Garthoff, Spring 2014
7. “Philosophy of Mind”, David Palmer, Spring 2014
8. “Dispositions, Properties, and Laws”, Nora Berenstain, Fall 2013
9. “Skepticism and Naturalism in Hume”, Marcus Kohl, Fall 2013
10. “Moral Obligation”, Jon Garthoff, Spring 2013
11. “Moral Responsibility”, David Palmer, Spring 2013
12. “Intermediate Logic”, John Nolt, Spring 2013
13. “Virtue Epistemology”, EJ Coffman, Fall 2012
14. “Virtue Ethics”, Clerk Shaw, Fall 2012
15. “Advanced Survey of Epistemology”, EJ Coffman, Spring 2011

References

1. David Palmer, Associate Professor of Philosophy, dpalmer6@utk.edu (research letter)
2. Nora Berenstain, Associate Professor of Philosophy, nberenst@utk.edu (research letter)
3. EJ Coffman, Professor of Philosophy, ecoffma1@utk.edu (research letter)
4. David Reidy, Professor of Philosophy, dreidy@utk.edu (teaching letter)
5. John Hardwig, Professor Emeritus, jhardwig@utk.edu (joint-teaching letter)
6. Kristina Gehrman, Assistant Professor of Philosophy, kgehrma1@utk.edu (joint-teaching letter)

DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

What makes an event *count* as an action? What makes the difference between my lifting my arm and a gust of wind moving it instead? The standard answer to this question—causalism—claims that if an event is caused *in the right way* it counts as an action. This view is mistaken. Causal deviance objections undermine the explanatory power of causalist accounts both in explaining what makes an event count as an action as well as explaining its unique connection to agency. Non-causal theories of action offer a promising alternative; however, they *also* raise a myriad of difficulties. Many non-causal arguments against causalism unintentionally lead to dialectical stalemates, which are methodologically undesirable. I offer a theory between these two inadequate accounts that synthesizes the strengths of non-causalism with insights from agent-causal theories. I agree with traditional non-causalists that action explanations cannot be causally reduced; however, unlike traditional non-causalists I agree with causal theories that an *extrinsic* relation between the agent and the event makes the difference between mere events and actions. I call this account an “agency-first” theory of action since it neither reduces agency—as in causalism—nor does it ignore agency to focus on the intrinsic features of actions—as in non-causalism. Instead, I claim we must not lose sight of the *agent* when analyzing action and thus posit the non-causal, yet extrinsic, relation of essential metaphysical dependence to explain action *in terms* of agency without losing the distinctive character of either concept.

My argument is roughly divided in two parts. The first half—articulated in chapters 1 and 2—sets-up the debate by first presenting three important non-causal views and considering their objections to causalism. First, the “weak” non-causalism of Ginet (1990), which allows for the possibility that our actions are caused. Second, the “strong” non-causalism of McCann (1998) and Goetz (2008), who both claim that our actions *must* be uncaused to be actions at all. I emphasize and

support the criticisms that these non-causalists raise against standard causal accounts while also defending them against common causalist objections. I conclude that while their objections *to* causalism are successful, non-causalists are vulnerable to several counter-arguments. I also raise a concern that non-causal arguments often lead to unproductive dialectical stalemates within philosophy of action.

The second half of my argument—found in chapters 3 and 4—articulates my positive account. Given the failures of both standard causal views and traditional non-causal alternatives, a successful account of action must synthesize elements from both theories. To this end, I articulate an “agency-first” account in which a non-causal, yet extrinsic, relation of *essential metaphysical dependence* explains what makes an event count as an action by explaining how actions are grounded in agency. I describe this relation in detail, apply it to the domain of action, and defend this account from several objections. Finally, the relation of dependence is commonly thought to be transitive, which entails a final significant objection—if actions depend on agency, and agency depends on non-agential forces, then actions are not *really* explained by dependence on agency. This counter-argument is also unsuccessful. I argue that plausible accounts of agency’s metaphysical emergence provide an ontological “gap” that blocks the transitivity objection. I conclude that my agency-first theory adequately addresses what makes an event count as an action, while at the same time keeping the agent in view.