

Laurenz S. Ramsauer  
Curriculum Vitae (updated October 2023)

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## EDUCATION

PhD (Philosophy), University of Chicago, expected 2024

LLM, University of Cambridge, 2018

LLB, King's College London, 2017

## AREAS OF SPECIALIZATION

Kant, ethics, philosophy of law

## AREAS OF COMPETENCE

Social and political philosophy, post-Kantian German philosophy

## DISSERTATION

*Form and Therapy: Kant on the Purpose and Limits of Moral Philosophy*

My dissertation provides a new account of the practical purpose and corresponding limits of Kant's moral philosophy. I argue that the practical purpose of Kant's Categorical Imperative is not to supply a test or decision-procedure for the derivation of concrete duties, but to provide the resources for a therapeutic way of reflecting. This therapeutic reflection makes explicit the true form of practical judgment that has been obscured by opposing inclinations. Getting clear about the practical purpose of Kant's moral philosophy opens up a new way of critically engaging with Kant's ethics: it allows us to see it as more coherent from the early *Groundwork* up to the late *Metaphysics of Morals*, to dispense with some spurious objections to Kant's ethics, and also to better understand the challenge of 'formalism' in Kant's moral philosophy.

Committee: Candace Vogler (chair), Matthias Haase, Matthew Boyle, Stephen Engstrom (Pittsburgh)

## PUBLICATIONS

### Peer-Reviewed Journal Articles

- forth. 'Kant's Derivation of Imperatives of Duty,' *Kantian Review* (open access)
- 2023 'Kant's Racism as a Philosophical Problem,' *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, <https://doi.org/10.1111/papq.12444> (open access)
- 2023 'Is the rule of recognition really a duty-imposing rule?' *Journal of Legal Philosophy* vol. 48, no. 2, pp. 83-102, <https://doi.org/10.4337/jlp.2023.02.01> (open access)
- 2023 'Between Thinking and Acting: Fichte's Deduction of the Concept of Right,' *Manuscripta* vol. 46, no. 2, pp. 1-42, <https://doi.org/10.1590/0100-6045.2023.V46N2.LR> (open access)

## AWARDS AND HONORS

- 2023 Graduate Council Research Award, University of Chicago
- 2022 Graduate Council Research Award, University of Chicago
- 2019 Ernst Freund Prize in Law and Philosophy, University of Chicago Law School
- 2018 St Edmunds College Prize, University of Cambridge
- 2017 Dickson Poon School of Law Prize in Tort, King's College London

## FELLOWSHIPS

- 2023-24 Affiliated Doctoral Fellow, Franke Institute for the Humanities, University of Chicago
- 2023-24 UC Mellon Dissertation Completion Fellow, University of Chicago
- 2019 Visiting Doctoral Fellow, Forschungskolleg Analytic German Idealism, University of Leipzig
- 2018 Visiting Doctoral Fellow, Forschungskolleg Analytic German Idealism, University of Leipzig
- 2017 King's Undergraduate Research Fellow, King's College London

## PRESENTATIONS

### Invited Presentations

- 2020 Participant at panel on teaching jurisprudence at the launch of the *Cambridge Companion to Philosophy of Law*, King's College London (online), July 13<sup>th</sup>

### Peer-Reviewed Presentations

- 2023 'Dehumanization and the Metaphorical Structuring of Social Experience,' X. Congress for Practical Philosophy, Universität Salzburg, September 29<sup>th</sup>
- 2023 'Kant's Derivation of Imperatives of Duty,' Leuven Kant Conference, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, June 2<sup>nd</sup>

- 2022 'Kant's Racism as a Philosophical Problem,' IX. Congress for Practical Philosophy, Universität Salzburg, September 29<sup>th</sup>
- 2022 'Kant's Racism as a Philosophical Problem,' Munich Graduate Conference in Ethics, Ludwig-Maximilians Universität München, July 28<sup>th</sup>
- 2022 'Kant's Racism as a Philosophical Problem,' UCSD Modern Philosophy Graduate Workshop, University of California, San Diego, May 20<sup>th</sup>
- 2021 'Is the Rule of Recognition really a duty-imposing rule?' Symposium at the APA Central Division Meeting, online, February 25<sup>th</sup>
- 2020 'Epistemic Rules, Rule-Following, and the Rule of Recognition,' 11<sup>th</sup> Annual Wittgenstein Conference, Wittgenstein: Law and Action, University of Surrey, July 24-25 (cancelled due to COVID-19)
- 2020 'Kant's Reciprocity Thesis,' Symposium at the APA Central Division Meeting (presented by Jenna Zhang as substitute speaker), Chicago, February 26<sup>th</sup>
- 2020 'Kant's Reciprocity Thesis: Positive and Negative Freedom in Groundwork III,' Conference of the Israeli Philosophical Association, Tel Aviv University, February 26<sup>th</sup>
- 2019 'Reframing the inner morality of law,' Annual Conference of the Australasian Society of Legal Philosophy, University of Sydney, July 18<sup>th</sup>
- 2019 'Reframing the inner morality of law,' Graduate Workshop of the Australasian Society of Legal Philosophy, University of Sydney, July 18<sup>th</sup>
- 2019 'Kant's Reciprocity Thesis,' Göttingen/Leipzig/Chicago Graduate Philosophy Conference, Georg-August Universität Göttingen, June 28<sup>th</sup>
- 2019 'Kant's Reciprocity Thesis: an exegesis and defense' University of Iowa Graduate Philosophical Society Conference, University of Iowa, April 13<sup>th</sup>

### Departmental Presentations

- 2023 'The Emotional Labor of Enlightenment,' German Philosophy Workshop, University of Chicago, December 1<sup>st</sup> (upcoming)
- 2023 'The Efficacy Puzzle,' Practical Philosophy Workshop, University of Chicago, October 23<sup>rd</sup>
- 2023 'Dehumanization, Metaphor and Irony,' Practical Philosophy Workshop, University of Chicago, April 14<sup>th</sup>
- 2022 'The Post-Colonial Critique of Kant,' German Philosophy Workshop, University of Chicago, November 4<sup>th</sup>
- 2022 'Kant on Reflection in Moral Knowledge,' Practical Philosophy Workshop, University of Chicago, May 30<sup>th</sup>
- 2021 'Kant's Racism as a Philosophical Problem,' Practical Philosophy Workshop, University of Chicago, November 29<sup>th</sup>

- 2021 'Kant on the Purpose of Moral Philosophy,' German Philosophy Workshop, University of Chicago, October 29<sup>th</sup>
- 2021 'Hegel's Empty-Formalism Charge,' German Philosophy Workshop, University of Chicago, January 29<sup>th</sup>
- 2020 'Fichte's Deduction of the Concept of Right,' German Philosophy Workshop, University of Chicago, May 29<sup>th</sup>
- 2020 'The 'inner morality' of law,' Practical Philosophy Workshop, University of Chicago, May 15<sup>th</sup>

## TEACHING

### Undergraduate Level Courses

- 2022 'The Nature of Law,' University of Chicago, Spring quarter

### As Teaching Assistant

- 2022 'Philosophy of Economics,' University of Chicago, Winter quarter
- 2021 'Introduction to Marx,' University of Chicago, Autumn quarter
- 2021 'History of Philosophy III: Kant and the 19<sup>th</sup> Century,' UChicago, Spring quarter (online)

## SERVICE TO PROFESSION

### Conference Submission Reviewing

- 2020 Chicagoland Graduate Philosophy Conference: Self and Other

### Panels Moderated

- 2023 Panel on practical reasoning in environmental ethics, X. Congress for Practical Philosophy, Universität Salzburg, September 29<sup>th</sup>
- 2022 Panel on emissions and climate justice, IX. Congress for Practical Philosophy, Universität Salzburg, September 29<sup>th</sup>

## DEPARTMENTAL SERVICE

- 2022 Grad student/faculty committee on pedagogy and professionalization, University of Chicago
- 2020-21 Workshop coordinator, Practical Philosophy Workshop, University of Chicago
- 2020 Conference coordinator, 'Kant's Doctrine of Right,' University of Chicago
- 2019-20 Graduate student representative, Department of Philosophy, University of Chicago

## LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

German: reading, speaking, writing (native)

English: reading, speaking, writing (fluent)

French: reading

Latin: reading

Ancient Greek: basic reading knowledge

## REFERENCES

Candace Vogler

David B. and Clara E. Stern Professor of Philosophy, University of Chicago  
[vogue@uchicag.edu](mailto:vogue@uchicag.edu)

Matthias Haase

Assistant Professor of Philosophy, University of Chicago  
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Matthew Boyle

Emerson and Grace Wineland Pugh Professor of Humanities, University of Chicago  
[mbboyle@uchicago.edu](mailto:mbboyle@uchicago.edu)

Stephen Engstrom

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Anton Ford (teaching reference)

Associate Professor of Philosophy, University of Chicago  
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## LONG DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

*Form and Therapy: Kant on the Purpose and Limits of Moral Philosophy*

Contemporary readers of Kant are almost unanimously united in assuming that the practical purpose of the Categorical Imperative is to serve as a test or decision-procedure for determining which actions are right. In my dissertation, I argue that this assumption is mistaken, and that framing Kant's main contribution to moral philosophy in terms of a test or decision-procedure distracts from his most important insights. The traditional understanding of Kant's ethics relies almost exclusively on a highly ambitious reading of Kant's famous four examples of 'derivation of imperatives of duty' in section II of the *Groundwork* as exemplifying a test or decision-procedure. By contrast, I argue that the main insight of Kant's 'derivation of imperatives of duty' was to show how his analysis of the form of moral judgment is presupposed in all four types of moral imperatives that philosophers of his time recognized. This reading is supported by an exegesis of the first sections of the *Groundwork*, its historical-philosophical context, as well as Kant's response to an often-misidentified (and still untranslated) review of the *Groundwork* by G. A. Tittel.

By contrast to the standard reading, I argue that the practical purpose of Kant's moral philosophy is to help overcome what Kant called the 'natural dialectic': the temptation to rationalize away the requirements of moral judgment in favor of opposing inclinations. Thus, Kant's moral philosophy should be understood as providing the resources for a therapeutic way of reflecting, in which we make explicit the original form of practical judgment that has been obscured by opposing inclinations. Importantly, this interpretation fits significantly better with Kant's depiction of moral reasoning throughout his work. For Kant describes moral judgment both as immediate while also claiming that all judgment requires reflection. By building our understanding of the practical purpose of the categorical imperative on Kant's discussion of the natural dialectic, we can better appreciate how moral judgment can be both immediate while also requiring further (therapeutic) reflection for its durability.

This therapeutic reading of Kant's ethics also allows us to see it as more coherent from the early *Groundwork* up to the late *Metaphysics of Morals*. While prominent readers (Timmermann, Siep, Anderson) have traditionally assumed a break or tension between Kant's early and late works on moral philosophy, I argue that these assumptions are unfounded. On the received reading, Kant intended the *Groundwork* to provide a derivation of concrete duties from a priori cognition, but later abandoned this project of a test or decision-procedure in favor of an already given union between a priori principles and anthropological knowledge in the *Metaphysics of Morals*. By contrast to this received view, I argue that in both Kant's early and late works, the project of a 'metaphysics of morals' is an attempt to analyze the principles of practical judgment that underlie our common moral cognition and their systematic interconnection. In this way, my reading of Kant's ethics allows us to see it as coherent from the early 1780s to the late 1790s. Moreover, this project of a 'metaphysics of morals' also plays a role in the practical purpose of moral philosophy. Specifically, I argue that Kant's 'casuistical questions' in the *Metaphysics of Morals* articulate the various moral difficulties which he believed we face because our natural inclinations can cloud the form of practical judgment. In this way, Kant's ethics is not about solving difficult questions by recourse to a test or decision-procedure; instead, Kant's ethics helps us understand why some moral questions are

difficult by giving us the resources to reflect on the underlying principles of practical judgment and what might have clouded them.

My reading also sheds new light on Hegel's criticism of emptiness. While the dominant readings of Hegel's empty-formalism charge are unable to adequately account for Hegel's simultaneous high praise of Kant, my reading shows how Kant was both right about the nature of moral judgment while also lacking Hegel's ambitions for a theory of right action. Specifically, I argue that Hegel correctly recognizes the Categorical Imperative as the form of practical reason enabling moral judgments, and that form and content of concrete moral judgments cannot be separated in a way that would allow the Categorical Imperative to also function as the test or decision-procedure that is often ascribed to Kant's ethics. Hence, despite adequately capturing the form of practical judgment, the Categorical Imperative turns out insufficient for determining which actions (rather than maxims or intentions) are right and wrong.

This assessment finally opens up a new way of critically engaging with Kant's ethics by asking us to consider whether Kant's critical philosophy has the resources to accomplish the ambitious project Hegel thought necessary. The final chapter of my dissertation locates the proper place of resolving this question as lying beyond Kant's Categorical Imperative and its formulas. While the modest ambitions of Kant's analysis of moral judgment can partially deflect Hegel's empty-formalism charge, I argue that these limited ambitions entail a challenge that becomes especially apparent within Kant's racism. Contrary to the tacit assumption of most contemporary readers (Kleingeld, Allais, Mills, Eze), I argue that the moral egalitarianism entailed in Kant's analysis of the form of practical reason is consistent with his anthropological racism and cultural chauvinism: although reflection on the form of practical reason can uncloud moral judgment, such reflection does not, by itself, add the substantive knowledge that would be required in order to overcome Kant's racism. In order to go beyond this limitation, I argue that we have to determine if Kant's practical philosophy beyond the Categorical Imperative has the resources to provide an account of history and shared practices that might overcome his own racism.