

# ERIC SAMPSON

## ADDRESS

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## CONTACT INFO

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## EDUCATION

Ph.D.	Philosophy	University of North Carolina	(expected 2020)
M.A.	Philosophy	University of North Carolina	2017
M.A.	Philosophy	University of Wisconsin	2015
M.A.	Philosophy	Texas Tech University	2012
B.A.	Philosophy	University of Tennessee	2009

**AOS** Ethical Theory, Epistemology

**AOC** PPE, Political Philosophy, Applied Ethics (esp. bioethics), Philosophy of Religion

## PUBLICATIONS

1. “How Rational Level-Splitting Beliefs Can Help You Respond to Moral Disagreement” (with Margaret Greta Turnbull) in Michael Klenk (ed.), *Higher Order Evidence and Moral Epistemology*. New York: Routledge. 26pp. (forthcoming).
2. “The Self-Undermining Arguments from Disagreement” in Russ Shafer-Landau (ed.), *Oxford Studies in Metaethics* 14 (2019): 23-46.
3. “Against Scanlon’s Theory of the Strength of Practical Reasons” *Journal of Ethics and Social Philosophy* 3 (2015): 1-6.
4. “On Believing the Error Theory” (with Alexander Hyun) *Journal of Philosophy* 111 (2014): 631-640.
5. “Parsimony and the Argument from Queerness” (with Justin Morton) *Res Philosophica* 91 (2014): 609-627. Guest editor, Terence Cuneo

## PAPERS UNDER REVIEW

- “Can We Rationally Believe Conciliationism?” (under review, 20 pp.)  
“Do the Standards of Rationality Depend on Resource Context?” (under review, 15 pp.)

## PAPERS IN PROGRESS

- “Intellectual Courage in the Face of Intractable Normative Disagreement” (full draft, 28 pp.)  
“What if Ideal Agents Disagree?: A Dilemma for Idealizing Reasons Subjectivism” (full draft, 26 pp.)  
“The Semantic (In)significance of Fundamental Moral Disagreement” (full draft, 22 pp.)  
“What Makes Something Rationally Evaluable and Why?” (full draft, 20 pp.)  
“Moorean Arguments against Normative Error Theory” (full draft, 20 pp.)  
“What Good are Bioethicists if they Disagree So Much? (in preparation)  
“Effective Altruism, Disaster Prevention, and the Possibility of Hell” (in preparation)

## PEER-REVIEWED PRESENTATIONS

- “Intellectual Courage in the Face of Intractable Normative Disagreement”
- Tennessee Philosophical Association, Vanderbilt University (November 2019)
- “Effective Altruism, Disaster Prevention, and the Possibility of Hell”
- Religious Perspectives on Effective Altruism, U of Fribourg, Switzerland (September 2019)
- “What if Ideal Agents Disagree?: A Dilemma for Idealizing Reasons Subjectivism”
- International Conference on Ethics, University of Porto, Portugal (June 2019)
  - Cyprus Metaethics Conference, University of Cyprus (April 2019)
  - South Carolina Society of Philosophy, University of South Carolina (March 2019)
  - Alabama Philosophical Society (September 2018)
- “The Self-Undermining Arguments from Disagreement”
- MadMeta: 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Madison Metaethics Workshop (September 2017)
- “What Good are Bioethicists if they Disagree so Much?”
- Penn Bioethics Bootcamp, University of Pennsylvania (June 2017)
- “Can We Rationally Believe Conciliationism?”
- 1<sup>st</sup> Annual Social Epistemology Networking Event, University of Oslo (May 2018)
  - APA Central Division, Chicago (February 2018)
  - Social Epistemology Summer School, University of Madrid (August 2017)
  - Northwestern-Notre Dame Epistemology Conference (April 2017)
  - IIFS-UNAM Philosophy Conference, Mexico City (February 2017)
- “Group Conciliationism”
- Workshop on Groups and Disagreement, University of Copenhagen (March 2017)
- “Why You Should Be Agnostic about Composite Objects” (with Justin Morton)
- Rocky Mountain Philosophy Conference, U of Colorado-Boulder (April 2015)
  - Western Michigan Graduate Student Philosophy Conference (December 2014)
- “Parsimony and the Argument from Queerness” (with Justin Morton)
- 40<sup>th</sup> Conference on Value Inquiry: The Foundations of Morality (May 2014)
- “On Believing the Error Theory” (with Alex Hyun)
- Wisconsin Philosophical Association Annual Meeting (April 2014)
  - The Arizona State University Philosophy Graduate Conference (April 2014)
- “How (Not) to Solve the Problem of Uninstantiated Concepts”
- University of Western Ontario Conference in Philosophy of Mind, Language, and Cognitive Science (May 2013)
  - University of Iowa Graduate Student Conference (April 2013)
  - Talbot Philosophical Society Conference (March 2013)

## COMMENTS

- Comments on Evan Williams’s “An Actualist Argument for Scalar Consequentialism”
- APA Central Division, Chicago (March 2020)
- Comments on Stan Husi’s “Das Nichts Nichter”
- RoME: Rocky Mountain Ethics Congress (August 2019)
- Comments on Marc-Kevin Daoust’s “Apparent Reasons and Second-Best Epistemology”
- SLACRR, St. Louis Area Conference on Reasons and Rationality (May 2019)

Invited Commentator-at-Large

- Penn Reasons and Foundations of Epistemology Conference (November 2018)

Comments on Susanne Mantel's "Levels of Reasonableness and Worldly Reasons"

- Rationality & Reasonableness Conference, University of Cologne (April 2018)

Comments on Aaron Wolf's "Do Reasons Drain Away?"

- APA Central Division, Chicago (March 2016)

## TEACHING EXPERIENCE

### *Instructor of Record*

Bioethics (Online)	UNC	Summer 2019
Political Philosophy	UNC	Spring 2019
The Ethics of Peace, War, and Defense	UNC	Fall 2018
Philosophy of Western Religion	UNC	Summer 2018
Bioethics	UNC	Spring 2018
PPE: Philosophy, Politics, & Economics	UNC	Fall 2017
Intro to Ethics	TTU	Spring 2012
Intro to Philosophy (x4)	TTU	Fall 2011- Summer 2012

### *Teaching Assistant*

PPE: Philosophy, Politics, and Economics	UNC	Spring 2017
The Ethics of Peace, War, and Defense	UNC	Fall 2016
Bioethics (x2)	UW	Spring 2014, Spring 2015
Logic (x2)	UW	Fall 2010, Spring 2013
Contemporary Moral Issues	UW	Fall 2012
Intro to Philosophy (x2)	UW	Fall 2013, Fall 2014
Intro to Ethics	TTU	Spring 2011

## SERVICE

Referee: *Philosophical Quarterly*, *Journal of the American Philosophical Association* (x2), *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* (x2), *Journal of Moral Philosophy*, *The Journal of Ethics* (x2), *Erkenntnis*

PPE Reading Group Leader: Locke's *Second Treatise* and *A Letter Concerning Toleration*

PPE Graduate Student Advisor (2018-19)

Planning Committee Member: PPE Society Meeting in New Orleans (2019)

UNC Graduate Mentor (2018-19)

Research Assistant: Russ Shafer-Landau's *Living Ethics*

Research Assistant: Elliott Sober's *Ockham's Razors: A User's Manual*

Judge: North Carolina High School Ethics Bowl (2016, 2017, 2018, 2019)

Judge: National High School Ethics Bowl Championships (2016, 2017, 2018, 2019)

## HONORS & AWARDS

### *North Carolina*

Adam Smith Fellow, Mercatus Center (Fall 2019 – Summer 2020)

Langman PPE Fellow (Fall 2017- Spring 2018)

Penn Bioethics Boot Camp Participant (Summer 2017)

### *Wisconsin*

College of Letters and Sciences Teaching Fellow Nominee (Spring 2014)

Early Excellence in Teaching Nominee (Fall 2013)

### *Texas Tech*

Graduate Part-Time Instructorship (Summer 2011 – Spring 2012)

Jerry V. Fox Memorial Scholarship (2011-2012)

## GRADUATE COURSEWORK

### *Ethics and Metaethics*

Normative Concepts (Geoff Sayre-McCord)  
New Work on Moral Realism (Russ Shafer-Landau, Mike Titelbaum)  
The Weight of Normative Reasons (Russ Shafer-Landau, independent study)  
New Work in Metaethics (Russ Shafer-Landau)  
Metaethics Survey (Russ Shafer-Landau)  
Practical Reasons and Rationality (Alex Worsnip)  
Irrationality (Alex Worsnip)  
Agency and Practical Rationality (Sarah Paul)  
Early Modern Moral Philosophy (Thomas Hill)  
Kant's Ethics (Claudia Card)  
Kant's Moral Philosophy (Jeremy Schwartz)  
Utilitarianism (Susan Wolf)  
Utilitarianism: Sidgwick and Hare (Jeremy Schwartz)  
Contemporary Virtue Ethics (Howard Curzer)  
Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (Paula Gottlieb)  
Aristotle's *Politics* (C.D.C. Reeve)  
Plato on Friendship and Love (C.D.C. Reeve)  
Plato's Moral Psychology (Emily Fletcher)  
Well-Being (Jennifer Hawkins – Duke)  
Feminist Philosophy (Susan Wolf)

### *Metaphysics and Epistemology*

Metaontology (Peter van Inwagen – Duke)  
Nihilisms in Philosophy (Thomas Hofweber)  
Ockham's Razor (Elliott Sober)  
Philosophy of Mathematics (Marc Lange)  
Bayesian Epistemology (Mike Titelbaum)  
Rule-Following (Ram Neta)  
Personal Identity (Alan Sidelle)  
Objects and Modality (Alan Sidelle)  
Supervenience (Darren Hick)  
Contemporary Metaphysics (Darren Hick)  
Advanced Logic (Gillian Russell)  
Philosophy of Religion (Mark Webb)  
Epistemology of Religious Experience (Mark Webb)

### *Other Courses*

Twentieth Century Analytic Philosophy (Mike Titelbaum)  
Contemporary Aesthetics (Darren Hick)  
Philosophical Psychology: Concepts (Jake Beck)  
Early Modern Philosophy (1600-1800) (Francesca di Poppa)  
Seminar in Teaching Philosophy (Daniel Nathan)

## REFERENCES

**Geoffrey Sayre-McCord**

Morehead-Cain Alumni Distinguished Professor  
University of North Carolina  
Chapel Hill, NC 27599

**Russ Shafer-Landau**

Professor of Philosophy  
University of Wisconsin  
Madison, WI 53706

**Sarah Stroud**

Professor of Philosophy  
University of North Carolina  
Chapel Hill, NC 27599

**Alex Worsnip**

Assistant Professor of Philosophy  
University of North Carolina  
Chapel Hill, NC 27599

**Matt Kotzen** (teaching reference)

Associate Professor of Philosophy  
University of North Carolina  
Chapel Hill, NC 27599

# Eric Sampson

## *Dissertation Abstract*

Ordinary folks disagree all the time about normative matters such as ethics, politics, and epistemology (what it makes sense to believe)—always have, always will. It would be nice if we could just defer to the people who study these matters for a living and have them settle our disputes, as we often can with scientific matters that are controversial among ordinary folks (e.g., controversy about the age of the Earth, climate change, the safety/harmfulness of vaccines). But philosophers disagree like crazy, too—always have, probably always will. That’s especially troubling. If the people who study these matters for a living come to all sorts of different conclusions, despite their best efforts to discover the truth, then how can anyone justifiably believe that their own views are correct? Maybe there’s something defective about our methods of normative inquiry (an epistemological worry). Maybe there are no normative truths at all (a metaphysical worry). Or perhaps our normative judgments are really just expressions of non-cognitive attitudes such as feelings of (dis)approval, goals, or desires, rather than beliefs that aim to represent normative reality (a semantic worry since it’s about the *meaning* of our normative judgments). Any of these hypotheses would go some distance toward explaining the long history of intractable normative disagreement in philosophy. So what attitude should we take toward our own (often dearly held) normative views in light of these considerations? And if we conclude that we *ought* to take a skeptical attitude, won’t we have reached a normative conclusion that is highly controversial? And won’t we have reached it on the basis of normative reasoning—reasoning about what is *rational*, or *justified*, given the evidence? How can we coherently reason to the conclusion that we *ought* to think that even our best reasoning about normative matters is no good?

These are questions I attempt to answer in my dissertation “Intellectual Courage in the Face of Intractable Normative Disagreement”. It consists of four papers. In the first three, I argue that recent metaphysical, epistemological, and semantic challenges to ordinary moral belief that rely on appeals to intractable normative disagreement (especially among philosophers) fail. I take these three papers to defeat the supposed defeaters to ordinary normative belief presented by arguments from disagreement in metaethics. But, even if I’m correct about all of this, we’re still left wondering what we ought to think about the justification of our own normative views in light of all this intractable disagreement. In the fourth paper, I explain how, even in these epistemically hostile times, we can sometimes be justified (both epistemically and morally) in holding on to our deepest normative views. Here’s a more detailed outline.

1. In **“The Self-Undermining Arguments from Disagreement”** (forthcoming in *Oxford Studies in Metaethics*) I argue that recent metaphysical and epistemological challenges to our moral beliefs self-undermine because they employ premises that are at least as controversial among the relevant parties as the normative claims such arguments are intended to discredit.
2. In **“Can We Rationally Believe Conciliationism?”** (under review), I argue that recent attempts to defend Conciliationism, a popular view in the epistemology of peer disagreement, against its well-known self-undermining problem are not successful and that the problem is unlikely to be fixed given its structure.
3. In **“The Semantic (In)significance of Fundamental Normative Disagreement”** (full draft), I argue that semantic challenges intended to vindicate expressivism or co-reference failure about normative discourse overgeneralize. If they succeed, they would, contrary to what their proponents argue, vindicate global expressivism (i.e., expressivism about *all* apparently descriptive discourse) or global co-reference failure, which is deeply implausible.
4. Finally, in **“Intellectual Courage in the Face of Intractable Normative Disagreement”** (full draft), I diagnose the problem with arguments for agnosticism about our controversial normative views that depend on appeals to intellectual humility. I argue that just as humility is constrained by courage in the practical domain (e.g., if you’re an able-bodied adult, it’s not humble to refuse to jump into a pool to save a drowning child on the grounds that you’re “not a strong swimmer”, it’s cowardly) so humility is constrained by courage in the epistemic domain (e.g., it’s not intellectually humble to believe you have no hands just because a smart philosopher argues that you don’t, it’s intellectually cowardly). I go on to give an account of intellectual courage, an oft-neglected virtue of the mind concerned with epistemic risk and caution. It lies in a mean between intellectual cowardice and intellectual recklessness. The intellectual coward is unduly epistemically cautious and not sufficiently concerned with believing the truth, while the intellectually reckless person is unduly credulous and not sufficiently concerned with avoiding error. Both fail to respect the truth appropriately (just as the morally cowardly and reckless persons fail to respect the good appropriately). And just as there are some practical goods for which it’s worth risking your practical welfare, there are, I argue, intellectual goods for which it’s worth risking your intellectual welfare (i.e., risking being wrong). Thus, I argue, intellectual courage often permits (and sometimes requires) taking risks for the sake of great moral and intellectual goods. Those who always abandon their normative beliefs because (due to disagreement from excellent philosophers) they’re worried they might get things wrong display intellectual cowardice—excessive concern for falling into error. I argue that the prospect of the great intellectual and moral goods secured by having true normative belief is sometimes worth the risk of being mistaken.