

Aaron Ancell

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AREAS OF SPECIALIZATION AND COMPETENCE

AOS: Political Philosophy, Ethics (including Applied Ethics)

AOC: Moral Psychology, Metaethics, Epistemology

Teaching: Logic

EDUCATION

Ph.D., Philosophy, Duke University

Expected
2017

Dissertation: Public Unreason: Essays on Political Disagreement

Prevailing normative theories of justice and democracy typically focus on the kinds of political disagreements that arise when everyone is more or less informed, rational, and unbiased—reasonable disagreements—while ignoring or idealizing away political disagreements rooted in ignorance, irrationality, and bias—unreasonable disagreements. I argue that this is a mistake, and consider some normative implications of taking unreasonable disagreements seriously. Along the way I draw on insights from social epistemology and empirical work on political reasoning and judgment. (For a full summary, see page 6 of this CV.)

Committee: Allen Buchanan (co-chair), Walter Sinnott-Armstrong (co-chair), Wayne Norman, David Wong

B.A. (Honors), Philosophy, Simon Fraser University

2011

PUBLICATIONS

Peer-Reviewed Articles

1. **Ancell, A.** "Democracy isn't *that* smart (but we can make it smarter): On Landemore's *Democratic Reason*." (In Press) *Episteme*. (8220 words) Online Early Access at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/epi.2015.67>
2. **Ancell, A.** & Sinnott-Armstrong, W. (2017) "How to Allow Conscientious Objection in Medicine While Protecting Patient Rights." *Cambridge Quarterly of Healthcare Ethics* 26(1): 120-131.

3. Flanagan, O., **Ancell, A.** Martin, S. & Steenbergen, G. (2014) "Empiricism and normative ethics: What do the biology and the psychology of morality have to do with ethics?" *Behaviour* (Special Issue: *Evolved Morality: The Biology and Philosophy of Human Conscience*) 151 (2-3): 208-228.
4. McColeman, C., **Ancell, A.** & Blair, M. (2011) "A tale of two processes: Categorization accuracy and attentional learning dissociate with imperfect feedback" *Proceedings of the 33rd Annual Meeting of the Cognitive Science Society*: 1661-1666.

Other Publications

1. **Ancell, A.** "Soundness" (2014) video for Wireless Philosophy (>44,000 views) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3P0fUHUaZcs>
2. **Ancell, A.** & Sinnott-Armstrong, W. (eds.) (2014) *Moral and Political Disagreement: Essays by the Spring 2014 Students of Ethics* 490. Lulu. (An anthology of undergraduate student papers)

MANUSCRIPTS UNDER REVIEW

1. Norman, W. & **Ancell, A.** "Democratic Theory and the Regulatory State" (Undergoing 2nd review at *The Journal of Social Philosophy* following revise & resubmit)

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

"The Fact of Unreasonable Pluralism" <i>American Philosophical Association, Central Division Meeting</i> Kansas City, MO	March 2017
"The Fact of Unreasonable Pluralism" <i>Canadian Philosophical Association Annual Congress</i> University of Calgary, Canada	May 2016
"The Fact of Unreasonable Pluralism" <i>North Carolina Philosophical Society Annual Meeting</i> Appalachian State University, NC	February 2016
"We Want Kids Too: Should Doctors Be Allowed to Refuse to Help Gay Couples Have Children?" (with Walter Sinnott-Armstrong) <i>Conscience and Conscientious Objection in Healthcare</i> University of Oxford, U.K.	November 2015
"Democracy and the Regulatory State: Why it's time to end the benign neglect, and how to begin to do so" (with Wayne Norman) <i>Society for Business Ethics Annual Conference</i> Vancouver, Canada	August 2015
"Democracy and the Regulatory State: Why it's time to end the benign neglect, and how to begin to do so" (with Wayne Norman) <i>Association for Social and Political Philosophy Annual Conference</i> University of Amsterdam, Netherlands	June 2015

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"Reasonable Compromises with Unreasonable Views" <i>Compromise and Disagreement</i> University of Copenhagen, Denmark	May 2015
"Weak and Strong Action-Guiding in Ideal Theories" (with Orlin Vakarelov) <i>American Philosophical Association, Pacific Division Meeting</i> Vancouver, Canada	April 2015
"Weak and Strong Action-Guiding in Ideal Theories" (with Orlin Vakarelov) <i>North Carolina Philosophical Society Annual Meeting</i> North Carolina State University, USA	February 2015
"Contrastive Closure is Still Wide Open" <i>North Carolina Philosophical Society Annual Meeting</i> University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, USA	February 2014

AWARDS AND FELLOWSHIPS

Katherine Goodman Stern Fellowship – Duke University A full-year dissertation fellowship awarded to 7-8 advanced graduate students per year from across Duke's College of Arts and Sciences.	2016-2017
Summer Research Fellowship – Duke University	2015
Summer Research Fellowship – Duke University	2014
Nannerl Keohane Distinguished Visiting Professorship Graduate Student Research Award – Duke University and University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill Awarded each year to two graduate students (one at each institution) doing research related to that of that year's Nannerl Keohane Distinguished Visiting Professor. Psychologist David Pizarro (Cornell University) was the 2014 Visiting Professor.	2014
Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council Doctoral Fellowship – Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) A four-year doctoral fellowship that pays a \$20,000 CAD living stipend annually. Awarded through a national competition of nearly 5000 applicants, with approximately 10% receiving fellowships.	2011-2015
Kenan Graduate Fellowship – Kenan Institute for Ethics at Duke University	2011-2012
National Sciences and Engineering Research Council Undergraduate Student Research Award – National Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC) A summer research fellowship for my work in the cognitive science lab of Mark R. Blair at Simon Fraser University.	2010

- Peter Horban Undergraduate Essay Prize** – Simon Fraser University 2010
Given annually to the author of the best undergraduate essay in philosophy for that academic year.
- Summit Scholarship** – Simon Fraser University 2006

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

As Sole Instructor

Duke University

Phil103S: Introduction to Philosophy

Fall 2014, Fall 2015, Spring 2016

Phil150S: Logic

Spring 2015

As Teaching Assistant

Duke University

Ethics490: Capstone Research Seminar in Ethics

Spring 2014 – with Walter Sinnott-Armstrong

Phil2013: History of Ancient Philosophy

Spring 2013 – with Michael Ferejohn

Phil262: Human Rights Theory and Practice

Fall 2013 – with Allen Buchanan

RESEARCH AFFILIATIONS

- Rethinking Regulation Program**, Kenan Institute for Ethics, Duke 2015 –
A network of faculty and graduate students from law, public policy, sociology, economics, and other disciplines whose research bears on regulatory governance.
- Public Access to Government Information**, BASS Connections, Duke 2013 – 2014
A one year interdisciplinary initiative focused on developing information technology and communications strategies for making government information more publically accessible.
- Moral Attitudes and Decisions Lab**, Kenan Institute for Ethics, Duke 2012 –
A working group of faculty and students from philosophy, psychology, neuroscience, sociology, and other disciplines that collaborate on interdisciplinary projects investigating morality.

SERVICE TO COMMUNITY AND PROFESSION

- National High School Ethics Bowl – Judge 2015, 2016
- North Carolina High School Ethics Bowl – Judge 2016

Graduate Coursework

Course	Instructor(s)	Grade
Courses Taken for a Grade		
Causation and Moral Responsibility	Sara Bernstein	A
Modern Political Theory	Ruth Grant	A
Neurophilosophy	Owen Flanagan	A
Philosophy of Biology	Robert Brandon & Karen Neander	A
The Ethics of Believing	Allen Buchanan	A
Symbolic Logic	Robert Brandon	A+
Historical and Philosophical Perspectives on Science	Andrew Janiak	A
Moral Disagreement	David Wong	A
Proseminar in Metaphysics and Epistemology	Michael Ferejohn & Karen Neander	A
Aristotle's Ethics (at UNC Chapel Hill)	C.D.C Reeve & Michael Ferejohn	A
Philosophy of Mind	Karen Neander	A
Proseminar in Ethics	Gopal Sreenivasan & Wayne Norman	A
Contrastivism	Walter Sinnott-Armstrong	A
Bioethics	Gopal Sreenivasan & Ross McKinney	A
Courses Formally Audited		
Metaphysics of Complex Systems	Carrie Figdor	N/A
Moral Psychology	David Pizarro	N/A
Moral Disagreement	David Wong	N/A
Free Will and Moral Responsibility in Light of Philosophy and Neuroscience	Peter van Inwagen & Walter Sinnott-Armstrong	N/A
Ideology and Moral Progress	Allen Buchanan	N/A
Courses Informally Audited		
Metaethics (at UNC Chapel Hill)	Geoff Sayre-McCord & Simon Blackburn	N/A
Sidgwick's <i>Methods of Ethics</i>	Jennifer Hawkins	N/A
Professional Development Courses		
Teaching Philosophy	Michael Ferejohn	N/A
Teaching Philosophy	Felipe De Brigard	N/A

DISSERTATION SUMMARY

Chapter 1: Political Disagreement: Moral and Motivated

Why are political disagreements so persistent and intractable? I argue that many of the prevailing answers in political philosophy focus too narrowly on reasonable disagreements and on the moral reasons given by opposing sides, neglecting the deeper social and psychological dynamics that explain many of the most troubling features of political disagreements such as their resistance to rational resolutions and their tendency to polarize people.

Chapter 2: The Fact of Unreasonable Pluralism

Many of our most prominent theories of justice and democracy either ignore or idealize away unreasonable political disagreements—disagreements rooted in ignorance, bias, and irrationality. I argue that this is inconsistent with the justification for one of the central assumptions of these theories: the assumption that *reasonable* disagreements are an ineliminable feature of liberal society that cannot be ignored or idealized away. The upshot is that even many “ideal theories” must accept that unreasonable political disagreements are a permanent feature of democratic life that cannot be ignored or idealized away.

Chapter 3: Can a Liberal Society Contain Unreasonable Views?

Are there effective, reliable, and permissible means of preventing or containing unreasonable disagreements so that they do not undermine the justice of society? I argue that the answer is, by and large, no. First, standard liberal rights preclude many possible means. Second, the effectiveness of permissible means, such as advances in education and restrictions on hate speech, is limited by the psychological and social mechanisms – for example, so-called “dog whistle politics” – that create and propagate unreasonable disagreements.

Chapter 4: Stability and Progressive *Modi Vivendi*

Rawls hoped to show that a society divided by moral disagreements could still stably agree on a set of principles of justice. I argue that, given my conclusions in the first three chapters, this hope is not sufficiently realistic even by Rawls’s own standards. The best we can hope for, I contend, is a kind of *modus vivendi*—a compromise that allows us to live together despite our continuing disagreements about justice. While not stable in the way Rawls hoped, I argue that such a *modus vivendi* is nonetheless morally justifiable and allows for moral progress.

Chapter 5: Reasonable Compromises with Unreasonable Views

In democratic politics, it is often impossible to secure the support of a majority without making concessions to unreasonable or unjust demands. I argue that making such concessions is often (though certainly not always) morally justified, and sometimes even morally required. Furthermore, I argue that even when the support of a majority can be secured without conceding to unreasonable demands, such concessions are sometimes still appropriate and justified in order to avoid the dangerous dynamics of alienation and polarization.