

# ZOË A. JOHNSON KING

CONTACT	(+1) 734-383-1216 <a href="mailto:zoejk@umich.edu">zoejk@umich.edu</a> <a href="http://www.zoejohnsonking.com">www.zoejohnsonking.com</a>	Department of Philosophy University of Michigan, Ann Arbor 435 S State St, Ann Arbor, MI 48108
SPECIALIZATIONS	Ethics, Metaethics, Epistemology	
COMPETENCIES	Applied Ethics, Philosophy of Law, Decision Theory, Logic	
EDUCATION	University of Michigan, Ann Arbor: PhD in Philosophy, 2018 Thesis: <i>Trying to Act Rightly</i> Committee: Brian Weatherston (chair), Sarah Buss, Maria Lasonen-Aarnio, Allan Gibbard, Scott Hershovitz (UM Law school)	
	Canterbury Christ Church University: Postgraduate Certificate in Education (Teach First programme), 2012 – Passed as Outstanding	
	University of Cambridge: M.Phil in Philosophy, 2011 – Passed with Merit Thesis: <i>Genealogical Debunking in Metaethics</i>	
	B.A. in Philosophy, 2010 – Double First, highest marks in the year Dissertation: <i>The Nature and Ethics of Trust</i>	
PUBLICATIONS	We Can Have Our Buck and Pass It, Too Provisionally forthcoming in <i>Oxford Studies in Metaethics</i> , vol. 14	
	Review of Neil Sinhababu's <i>Humean Nature</i> (invited) Provisionally forthcoming in <i>Ethics</i> 128:4, July 2018	
HONORS & AWARDS	Rackham Predoctoral Fellow, University of Michigan, 2017-18 \$32,000 award for “unusually creative, ambitious, and impactful” work	
	Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Prize, University of Michigan, Fall 2017 Inaugural prize, awarded in recognition of outstanding work to enhance diversity, equity, and inclusiveness on campus and beyond	
	Charles L. Stevenson Prize, University of Michigan, 2017 \$3,000 prize for most promising dissertation prospectus of the year	
	John Dewey Prize, University of Michigan, 2015 \$1,000 prize for excellence in undergraduate teaching	
	Arts of Citizenship Grant in Public Scholarship, 2014-15 \$8,000 grant awarded to expand outreach program into schools in Detroit	

HONORS &  
AWARDS  
*(continued)*

Arts and Humanities Research Council, Research Preparation Masters Award (in partnership with the University of Cambridge), 2010-11  
£9,490 award plus full funding for M.Phil

Scholar of the Year, Fitzwilliam College (University of Cambridge), 2010  
Awarded to the most promising graduating scholar of the College

Craig Taylor Prize, University of Cambridge, 2009 and 2010  
Awards for attaining highest marks in the year in Part I and Part II

Class of 1912 scholarship 2009-10, Mary Lucking prize 2009-10,  
Sir John Stratton scholarship 2007-08, Burton prize 2007-08,  
Irene Hill scholarship 2008-09, A. J. Watson prize 2008-09  
Funding for BA at Cambridge from Fitzwilliam College's alumni donations,  
all awarded for academic merit

PRESENTATIONS &  
CONFERENCE  
PARTICIPATION

"We Can Have Our Buck and Pass It, Too"  
Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM) graduate conference,  
March 2018\*

Symposium session, APA Central Division meeting, March 2018\*

Wisconsin Metaethics Workshop (MadMeta), September 2017\*

Princeton-Michigan Workshop on Metanormativity, August 2017

Vancouver Summer Philosophy Conference (VSPC), July 2017\*

"Don't Know, Don't Care?"

Workshop on Virtue and Moral Reasoning Under Oppressive Social  
Conditions, Concordia University in Montreal, February 2018\*

Women In Philosophy In the Chicago Area workshop, Northwestern  
University, June 2017

Mount St. Mary's University, February 2017

"Interactive Formative Assessment"

APA/AAPT Teaching Hub, APA Eastern Division meeting, January 2018\*

"Backwards Planning and Differentiated Course Design"

APA/AAPT Teaching Hub, APA Eastern Division meeting, January 2018\*

Comments on Nicholas Sars' "Non-Identity and Reactive Attitudes"

APA Eastern Division meeting, January 2018

"Standing Up For Blame: What the Nature of Standing Tells Us About the  
Nature of Blame" (co-authored with Mariam Kazanjian)

Midwest Society for Women in Philosophy (SWIP), November 2017\*

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*Conference participation marked with an asterisk (\*) was invited following blind review of submitted papers or abstracts.*

PRESENTATIONS &  
CONFERENCE  
PARTICIPATION  
*(continued)*

“Higher-Order Uncertainty”  
Reading Ethics and Political Philosophy (REAPP) workshop on Moral and  
Rational Uncertainty, University of Reading, October 2017\*  
Formal Ethics, University of York, June 2017\*  
Decisions, Games and Logic (DGL), July 2016\*

“Accidentally Doing the Right Thing”  
Rocky Mountain Ethics Congress (RoME), August 2017\*  
USC-UCLA Graduate Conference, March 2017\*  
Great Plains Philosophy Symposium, October 2016\*  
Princeton-Michigan Workshop on Metanormativity, September 2016

Comments on Rachel Johnson’s “Practical Reasoning and Background  
Conditions on Normative Reasons for Action”  
St. Louis Annual Conference on Reasons and Rationality, May 2017\*

Comments on Holly Smith and David Black’s “Asymmetrical Assignments of  
Value to Fulfilling and Violating Duties”  
Inaugural Michigan Philosophy Alumni Conference, May 2017

Comments on Robin Dembroff’s “Oppressive Truths”  
Michigan Philosophy Spring Colloquium: Theory, Practice, and the  
Contemporary Experience of Gender, March 2017

“Assessment for Learning”  
AAPT group session, APA Central Division meeting, March 2017\*

“Trying is Good”  
Brown University Graduate Student Speaker Series, May 2017  
USC Speculative Society, February 2017  
Northwestern University Society for the Theory of Ethics and Politics  
(NUSTEP), May 2016\*  
Pittsburgh-CMU Graduate Conference, March 2016\*  
Princeton-Michigan Workshop on Metanormativity, September 2015

Graduate student “commentator-at-large”, Penn Reasons and Foundations of  
Epistemology Conference (PeRFECT), November 2016\*

Session chair, Chapel Hill Metaethics Workshop (CHillMeta), September 2016\*

Session chair, “Athena in Action” Networking and Mentoring Workshop for  
Graduate Student Women in Philosophy, Princeton University, August 2016\*

“The Trouble With Standards of Proof”  
Harvard Graduate Legal Philosophy Symposium, March 2016\*

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*Conference participation marked with an asterisk (\*) was invited following blind review of papers, abstracts, or applications.*

## TEACHING

Michigan High School Ethics Bowl Coach, October 2017 to present  
Designing and delivering tailored courses in moral and political philosophy at high schools in Ann Arbor and Detroit

Graduate Student Instructor – Lead instructor:

Phil 181: Is Morality Objective?, University of Michigan, Summer 2016

Graduate Student Instructor – Section leader:

Phil 232: Philosophical Problems, University of Michigan, Winter 2016

Phil 303: Intermediate Logic, University of Michigan, Fall 2015

Phil 180: Introductory Logic, University of Michigan, Winter 2015

Phil 361: Ethics, University of Michigan, Fall 2014

Teacher of Citizenship and Religious Studies at The Quest Academy, Croydon, September 2011 to August 2013

Full-time teacher of 25 classes, approx. 500 students total, ages 11-18

Pastoral tutor for 15 students, ages 11-13

Teach First programme – passed as “Outstanding”, final observation rated Outstanding in every category

72% of my students attained A\*-C grades at GCSE; school average 46%

Supervisor and Grader:

Part IA Logic, University of Cambridge, September 2010 to May 2011

## VISITS

Visiting Research Fellow, Brown University, Spring 2017

Visiting student, University of Southern California, Winter 2017

Visiting student (Summer University course in Moral Epistemology), Central European University, Summer 2014

## SERVICE

Chair of the APA Graduate Student Council, 2017-19

Elected by APA graduate student members to serve on inaugural Council, appointed as Chair by councilmembers; this involves reporting to the APA’s Board of Directors on matters of concern to graduate students

Outreach Coordinator, University of Michigan, Fall 2013 to present

Co-founder of the Michigan High School Ethics Bowl, in partnership with a local community group and with 13 local schools; this involves coordinating school coaching, a two-day annual competition, and an annual conference

Mentor, Michigan Minorities and Philosophy (“MAP”) COMPASS workshop for undergraduates from underrepresented backgrounds, September 2017

Organizer, The Inaugural Michigan Philosophy Alumni Conference, May 2017

SERVICE  
(continued)

Organizer, Michigan Philosophy Spring Colloquium: Theory, Practice, and the Contemporary Experience of Gender, March 2017

Social Chair, University of Michigan, 2016-17

Dissertation Writing Group Leader, University of Michigan, Fall 2016

Appointed by Rackham Graduate School and Sweetland Center for Writing to run an interdisciplinary writing group for PhD students in the humanities

Graduate Assistant, Philosophy in an Inclusive Key ("PIKSI") Summer Institute, Pennsylvania State University Rock Ethics Institute, Summer 2016

Mentor and section leader for 4 students, and instructor for 16 students, all members of historically underrepresented groups in Philosophy

Co-Editor, *The Philosophers' Annual*, 2015

Admissions Committee, University of Michigan, 2014-15

Events Committee, University of Michigan, 2013-14

Chair of Staff-Student Committee, University of Cambridge, 2009-10

Undergraduate Representative to the Philosophy Faculty Board, University of Cambridge, 2008-09 and 2009-10

GRADUATE  
COURSEWORK

Postgraduate Certificate in Education, Canterbury Christ Church University:  
Specializations: Syllabus design, Differentiation, Assessment for Learning

M.Phil, University of Cambridge:

Papers on Adaptive Preference, Aesthetic and Moral Value, and Well-Being and Mental Health. Thesis on Genealogical Debunking. Passed with Merit.

PhD, University of Michigan:

Probability, Profiles and Proof (Scott Hershovitz, UM Law School), grade A+

Formal Methods (Sarah Moss), grade A

Aristotle (Victor Caston), grade A+

Hume (Louis Loeb), grade A

Topics in Epistemology (Maria Lasonen-Aarnio), grade A+

Normative Uncertainty (Brian Weatherson), grade A

Practical Incoherence (Sarah Buss), grade A

Formal Epistemology (Jim Joyce), grade A

Practical Reasoning (Rich Thomason), grade A

Global Expressivism (Allan Gibbard), grade A

Rational Choice (Jim Joyce), grade A

Philosophy of Language (Ishani Maitra), grade A

Proseminar (Brian Weatherson), grade A

## DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

My doctoral dissertation defends the value of *trying to act rightly*. This is a complex state that an agent can be in only over a period of time, which comprises (a) wanting to act rightly, (b) thinking about which actions are right, and (c) doing the things that you think are right, and doing them *because they are right*.<sup>3</sup> Each of these components comes in degrees, so the extent to which someone counts as trying to act rightly over a period of time also comes in degrees. I think that it is good to try to act rightly, so construed.

Others disagree. Many ethicists and metaethicists hold that good people are motivated by the features that *make* actions right, e.g. by fairness, honesty, or the promotion of well-being, rather than by rightness itself. These authors think that wanting to act rightly is not especially good. And some think it is a bad thing – a “fetish or moral vice”, in the words of one early proponent of this view (Michael Smith). The first paper of my dissertation argues that this popular view is mistaken: if being motivated by right-making features is praiseworthy, then so is being motivated to act rightly. I argue that intuitions to the contrary result from poorly-constructed comparison cases that do not offer genuine minimal pairs, and that well-constructed cases show the two types of motivation to be on a par. In particular, I address the main ground for suspicion of the value of trying to act rightly – that it can lead people to act in ways that are in fact horribly wrong, if they have false moral beliefs – by arguing that this applies equally to motivation by right-making features, since people can be motivated by a right-making feature without knowing the precise nature and extension of this property, and even while having false beliefs about which acts possess it. I then discuss some options for evaluating these well-meaning but morally mistaken agents and their actions.

The second paper goes on the offensive, arguing that trying to act rightly is necessary for moral worth. I defend the Kantian view that acts have moral worth only if their agent does the right thing because it's the right thing to do, and challenge the modern view that being motivated by right-making features is sufficient for moral worth (defended by Nomy Arpaly and Julia Markovits). I first note that all parties agree that an action lacks moral worth if it is a case of someone's merely *accidentally* doing the right thing. I then defend the general principle that if someone has no idea that her action possesses a certain property at the time when she performs it, then she accidentally performs an action with this property. It follows that someone – like the much-discussed character of Huckleberry Finn – who is motivated by a right-making feature but has no idea that it is right-making, and thus no idea that his action is right, accidentally does the right thing. This is inconsistent with the modern view of moral worth. I suggest that actions have moral worth iff they are instances of someone's *deliberately* doing the right thing, and I close by discussing what this requires.

The third paper addresses a different kind of challenge to the value of trying to act rightly. Some authors (e.g. Philip Stratton-Lake, Jonathan Dancy) have argued that the moral rightness of an act is not a reason to perform it, from which it follows that people who do the right thing because it is right cannot be acting for good reasons. I argue that *both* the rightness of an act *and* its right-making features are reasons to perform it. The main criticism of this view is that it licenses illicit “double-counting” of an agent's reasons. I address this by noting that the criticism generalizes; it arises whenever one fact that counts in favor of performing some act is partially metaphysically constituted by another fact that also counts in favor of performing the same act – as, for example, when a salad both *is healthy* and *contains vegetables*. I then argue that we should abandon the project of examining these metaphysical hierarchies to find out where the reason “really” lies, because this project is confused. I argue that every fact that counts in favor of performing an act is a genuine reason, and that double-counting worries should be understood as pointing to constraints on how we may aggregate reasons in particular conversational contexts, not on which facts can be reasons.

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<sup>3</sup> When I say “right” I mean *morally* right: the property of being required by the true first-order moral theory.