

Ben Vilhauer

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Department of Philosophy
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SPECIALIZATIONS: Ethics, Metaphysics, Modern Philosophy.

COMPETENCIES: Political Philosophy, Comparative Philosophy, Aesthetics.

EDUCATION

1996-2002 **Ph.D., Philosophy, University of Chicago, 2002.** Dissertation: An Interpretation and Defense of Kant's Theory of Free Will.

1991-1996 **A.B. magna cum laude, Philosophy, Harvard University, 1996.**

ACADEMIC POSITIONS

2005-present **Assistant Professor of Philosophy,** William Paterson University of New Jersey.

2003-2005 **Visiting Assistant Professor of Philosophy,** Claremont McKenna College.

1999-2000 **Teaching Assistant,** University of Chicago.

PUBLICATIONS

Articles in Refereed Journals

"Free Will Skepticism and Personhood as a Desert Base", forthcoming in the *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* (accepted 2008).

"Free Will and Reasonable Doubt", forthcoming in the *American Philosophical Quarterly* (accepted 2008).

"The Scope of Responsibility in Kant's Theory of Free Will", forthcoming in *The British Journal for the History of Philosophy* (accepted 2006).

"Hard Determinism, Humeanism, and Virtue Ethics", *Southern Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 46, No. 1, 2008, pp. 121-144.

Articles in Refereed Journals, Continued

"**The Theme of Time in Thoreau's *Cape Cod***", forthcoming in *Concord Saunterer*, the journal of the Thoreau Society (accepted 2006).

"**Hard Determinism, Remorse, and Virtue Ethics**", *Southern Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 42, No. 4, 2004, pp. 547-564.

"**Can We Interpret Kant as a Compatibilist about Determinism and Moral Responsibility?**", *The British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, Vol. 12, No. 4, 2004, pp. 719-730.

"**On a Tension in Diamond's Account of Tractarian Nonsense**", *Philosophical Investigations*, Vol. 26, No. 1, 2003, pp. 230-238.

Book Chapters

"**Incompatibilism and Ontological Priority in Kant's Theory of Free Will**", forthcoming in *Rethinking Kant: Current Trends in North American Kantian Scholarship*, ed. Pablo Muchnik (accepted 2007). Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing (for the North American Kant Society).

"**Kant and Santaraksita on the Infinite Divisibility and Insubstantiality of Matter**", forthcoming in *Studies on Santaraksita*, ed. Paul Bernier, Marie-Louise Friquegnon and Philippe Turenne (accepted 2005). New York: Global Scholarly Publications.

Reviews

Review of Graham Bird's *The Revolutionary Kant*, *Kantian Review*, Vol. 12, No. 2, 2007, pp. 158-164.

Book Project

Tentative title: *Kantian Free Will Skepticism*. Kant holds that we can only have free will if we are agent-causes with special causal powers, and that while it is possible that we are such agent-causes, there is no empirical evidence that we are. I argue that he is right about this, and that he can consistently hold that determinism is true and also that it is possible for us to have robust alternative possibilities of action. This is because in Kant's system it is possible for an agent-cause to be metaphysically responsible for the deterministic causal laws governing her free choices. But Kant holds that the mere possibility that we are such agent-causes is enough to license us in believing that we have free will, at least when it comes to thinking about how we should act. I think that Kant is only partly right about this. The mere possibility that we have free will is probably enough to justify praise, at least in cases where there are no morally significant downsides to praising somebody (such as damaging the self-esteem of third parties who are excluded from praise). But the mere possibility is not enough to justify retribution, at least not when serious harm is at stake. People deserve the benefit of the doubt.

Book Project, Continued

So, Kant makes a mistake about the burden of proof in the free will debate. This means that the belief in free will cannot be the kind of foundation for Kant's ethics that he wants it to be. But a substantial part of his ethics can be preserved despite this. Here is an example. Kant thinks that, to regard ourselves as having moral reasons, we must believe that we have free will. This is because of the way he interprets the "can" in the "ought implies can" principle. But I argue that it is enough to support the "can" in the "ought implies can" principle to believe that it is possible that we have free will. It is not necessary to believe that we actually have it. Here is another example. Many philosophers suppose that all claims about what we deserve are based on claims about freely willed actions. Kant seems to be among these philosophers. If we accept this view, and we doubt that anyone has free will, then we should doubt that anyone deserves anything. But when we properly analyze desert claims, we will see that some desert claims are not based on claims about freely willed actions. Some are based on the sheer fact of our personhood, and worries about the metaphysics of free will do not undermine these desert claims. Personhood-based desert claims include our claims to deserve respect, access to our rights, and to be treated equally before the law. There is nothing any person could conceivably do that would justify us in disregarding such desert claims, so we cannot suppose that they are based on claims about freely willed actions. We deserve to be treated in these ways simply because we are persons. I argue that the categorical imperative can also be formulated as such a desert claim: persons deserve not to be treated as mere means, simply because they are persons.

Articles Under Review

"The Asymmetrical Justifiability of Holding Morally Responsible"

Articles Being Written

"Kantian Phenomena as Second-Order Relations"

"Free Will Skepticism, Manipulation, and Consent"

PRESENTATIONS

Selected Refereed Presentations

"Free Will and Reasonable Doubt", 2007 Northwest Philosophy Conference and 2008 Pacific APA.

"The Scope of Responsibility in Kant's Theory of Free Will", 2007 Eastern Study Group of the North American Kant Society.

"Moral Responsibility and Personhood as a Desert Base", 2006 Eastern APA and 2006 Northwest Philosophy Conference.

Selected Refereed Presentations, Continued

"Consciousness, Desire, and Enlightenment", 2006 Eastern APA. Also presented on an invited basis at Asia Society Manhattan in 2006.

"Hume, Hard Determinism, and 'Ought Implies Can'", 2006 Central States Philosophical Association Conference.

"Kant and Santaraksita on the Infinite Divisibility and Insubstantiality of Matter", 2006 Central APA.

"Humean Strategies for Hard Determinism", 2006 Southern Society for Philosophy and Psychology Conference.

"Hard Determinism, Remorse, and Virtue Ethics", 2004 Mountain-Plains Philosophical Association Conference.

"Kant on Timeless Agency and Causation", 1999 Midwest Study Group of the North American Kant Society.

"Kuhn and Davidson on Conceptual Schemes", 1998 Illinois Philosophical Association Conference.

Selected Invited Presentations

"Kant's Theory of Free Will", 2006 Long Island University Free Will Seminar.

"Free Will Rejectionism, Spontaneity, and the Space of Reasons", 2006 William Paterson University Philosophy Department Colloquium.

"Kant and Santaraksita on the Infinite Divisibility and Insubstantiality of Matter", 2005 Fordham University Ancient Philosophy Conference.

"Giving Up Moral Responsibility Without Punishing the Innocent", 2005 William Paterson University Philosophy Department Colloquium.

"Remorse and Empathy", 2005 Empathy Program at Scripps College Humanities Institute.

Comments on Conference Papers

Comments on Joseph Keim Campbell's "Incompatibilism and Free Will Skepticism", Northwest Conference, 2007.

Comments on Linda Palmer's "Kantian 'Common Sense': A Testable Hypothesis?", Northwest Conference, 2006.

COURSES TAUGHT

Ethics

Modern Philosophy

Political Philosophy

Aesthetics

Introduction to Philosophy

Asian & Western Comparative Philosophy

Questions of Civilization (an interdisciplinary humanities course)

AWARDS

Summer Research Fellowship, Research Center for the Humanities and Social Sciences, William Paterson University, 2006, 2007, and 2008.

Shaw Dissertation Fellowship, Department of Philosophy, University of Chicago, 2001-2002.

Century Fellowship, Department of Philosophy, University of Chicago, 1996-2001.

Manley Thompson Memorial Prize, Department of Philosophy, University of Chicago, 1999.

Florence James Adams Prize, Division of Humanities, University of Chicago, 1999.

Stewart Prize, Lowell House, Harvard University, 1995.

SERVICE TO THE DISCIPLINE

Article manuscript referee for *Philosophia*, 2007.

Book manuscript referee for Westview Press, 2006.

SERVICE TO THE INSTITUTION AT WILLIAM PATERSON UNIVERSITY

Advisor, Department of Philosophy, 2006-present.

Philosophy Club Coordinator, Department of Philosophy, 2005-present.

Philosophical Films Series Coordinator, Department of Philosophy, 2005-2007.

Curriculum Committee Member, College of the Humanities and Social Sciences, 2006-2007.

Curriculum Committee Co-Chair, College of the Humanities and Social Sciences, 2008-present.

Institutional Review Board Member, 2008-present.

University Library Advisement Committee, 2008-present.