

AOS Philosophy of Mind, Epistemology, Value Theory
AOC Aesthetics, Metaethics, Ancient Philosophy

EMPLOYMENT **Swarthmore College** *Visiting Assistant Professor* 2025-

EDUCATION PhD Philosophy *University of Pittsburgh* 2025

Fellow in Philosophy *Harvard University* 2024

MA Philosophy *Brandeis University* 2017

MSc. Art, Culture, and Technology *Massachusetts Institute of Technology* 2012

BFA Visual Art *The Cooper Union for the Advancement of Art and Science* 2008

DISSERTATION *On the Affective Disclosure of Value in Perception*

Can our experiences guide us about what matters? Perceptions—hearing beautiful music or stubbing one’s toe—can *feel good* or *bad*. I articulate a way in which such affectively valenced experiences can disclose the value of objects to subjects. My account appeals to a normative epistemic principle I call ‘*inheritance*’: whether an *experience* is good or bad for a subject is a function of whether its *objects* are good or bad for that subject. If experience is governed by inheritance, it suggests that all perceivers are directly aware of value *de re* through their pleasant and painful experiences and that such experiences motivate intelligent action independently of the intellect’s powers. I argue against representationalist alternatives, which rely on the idea that all epistemically significant features of an experience have truth or accuracy conditions. We can avoid this core cognitivist epistemic principle if we look at value perception as a matter of *being positively and negatively affected* by the objects of perception, rather than one of *ascribing evaluative properties*. Such a view allows us to understand the epistemic and motivational significance of pleasurable and painful experiences, and thus how humans and animals alike are capable of moving from perception to action without the aid of cognitive inferences. The normative dimension of perception, understood in terms of its affective character, may be what puts us in immediate moral contact with our community and makes us naturally susceptible to aesthetic value.

Committee: Anil Gupta (chair), L. Nandi Theunissen, Sara Magrin, Matthew Soteriou, Samantha Matherne.

PUBLICATIONS “The Metaphysical Weight of ‘Perspective’” in *Perception and Subjectivity: On the Subjective Dimension of Conscious Experience* forthcoming

“Presentationalism and Affective Character” in *Reformed Empiricism and its Prospects*. 2026

“Accounting for Tastes: On the Epistemic Significance of Affective Character” at *Philosophical Studies*. 2025

	“Does NEDS Really Illuminate the Connection Between Perceptual Experience and Perceptual Belief?” in <i>Empirical Reason and Sensory Experience</i> , Vuletić, M., & Beck, O. Eds. Springer.	2024
UNDER REVIEW	“Perception Discloses Value Affectively” A paper defending the principle of inheritance. Available upon request. “Aesthetic Sensibilities” A paper arguing that aesthetic sensibilities or tastes involve the unified operation of emotional and perceptual capacities. Available upon request.	
IN PROGRESS	"Against Aesthetic Cognitivism" A defense of a novel solution to the question of how we discern aesthetic properties and values through perception without cognitively representing them.	
EDITED VOLUMES	<i>Perception and Subjectivity: On the Subjective Dimension of Conscious Experience</i> Co-edited with Will Conner and Alexander Johnstone Kuhnert	
FELLOWSHIPS & AWARDS	Consortium for Faculty Diversity Fellowship, <i>Swarthmore College</i> Dean's Tuition Scholarship, <i>University of Pittsburgh</i> Athena in Action Workshop <i>University of Notre Dame</i> APA Central Meeting Graduate Student Stipend Michael R. Bennett Prize in Philosophy for “Accuracy Conditions and Affective Character” <i>University of Pittsburgh</i> (awarded to a graduate student essay “found to be of extraordinary quality”) Allen Ross Anderson Fellowship <i>University of Pittsburgh</i> (awarded to one graduate student annually)	2025 2025 2024 2024 2023 2019, 2023
PRESENTATIONS *refereed	"Aesthetic Sensibilities" *<i>American Society of Aesthetics, Rocky Mountain Division</i> *<i>Emotion and Society Lab</i> “Perception Discloses Value <i>Affectively</i>” <i>TU Dortmund, Naive Realism Under Pressure</i> (invited) *<i>Groningen Metaethics Workshop</i> “The Odd Intentionality of Pain” <i>Auburn University</i> (invited) “From Perception to Action: Intelligent Action in the Absence of the Intellect.” <i>Swarthmore College</i> (invited) "Accuracy Conditions and Affective Character" *<i>American Philosophical Association, Central Division, Symposium</i>	July 2026 Nov 2025 Nov. 2025 April 2025 Feb. 2025 Feb. 2025 Feb. 2024

	“Is Feeling Pleasure Perceiving Value?” <i>University of Pittsburgh</i>	Nov. 2020
	“Aesthetic Experience and the Question of Value’s Source” <i>University of Pittsburgh</i>	Sep. 2019
	“Two Variations of Empirical Justification” <i>University of Pittsburgh</i>	Feb. 2019
COMMENTS	Xinyi Yang: "Epistemic Accessibility, Conceivability, and Self-Evidence" <i>APA Eastern</i>	Jan. 2027
	Mica Rapstein: "Moral Epiphany" <i>APA Eastern</i>	Jan. 2026
	Matthew Soteriou: "Subjectivity, Objectivity, and Perspective" <i>PEER 2025: The Subjective Dimension of Experience, University of Pittsburgh</i>	Dec. 2025
	Duygu Aktas: “The Dynamic Unity of Phenomenal Consciousness” <i>*Athena in Action Workshop</i>	June 2024
	Crispin Wright: “Two Conceptions of Empirical Justification: Do their Differences Matter?” <i>PEER 2021, University of Pittsburgh</i>	Dec. 2021
	Ram Neta: "Rationality, Success, and Luck" <i>*RecapITTulate</i>	April 2020 (cancelled due to covid)
TEACHING	<i>Primary Instructor, Philosophy, Swarthmore College</i>	
	Philosophy of Mind	Spring 2027
	Value and Reason (postponed due to birth of a child)	Fall 2026
	Aesthetics	Spring 2026
	Aesthetics and Experience	Fall 2025
	<i>Primary Instructor, Philosophy, University of Pittsburgh</i>	
	History of Ancient Philosophy	Summer 2024
	Introduction to Philosophical Problems (covered by another instructor due to the birth of a child)	Spring 2022
	Concepts of Human Nature	Summer 2021
	<i>Primary Instructor, Visual Arts</i>	
	Arts Council of Mongolia, Advanced Photography	Summer 2011
	Arts Council of Mongolia, Intermediate Photography	Summer 2011
	The Saturday Outreach Program, Cooper Union, Painting	2008-2009
	The Saturday Outreach Program, Cooper Union, Painting	2007-2008
	<i>Recitation Instructor, Philosophy, University of Pittsburgh</i>	
	Concepts of Human Nature	Fall 2022
	Philosophy of Science	Spring 2019
	Philosophy and Public Issues	Fall 2018
	<i>Teaching Assistant, Brandeis University</i>	
	War and Morality (Philosophy)	Spring 2016
	Science on Trial (School of Law)	Fall 2016
	Introduction to Philosophy (Philosophy)	Fall 2016

STUDENT SUPERVISION	Luna Guo, Summer Research Grant: The Paradox of Taste	2026
REFEREING	Analytic Philosophy, Philosophical Quarterly, Synthese, Review of Philosophy and Psychology	
SERVICE *professional	Organizer <i>PEER 2025: The Subjective Dimension of Experience Conference, University of Pittsburgh</i>	2025
	Member <i>Hiring Committee (World, Race, Gender), University of Pittsburgh</i>	2024
	Founder <i>Undergraduate Diversity Initiative, University of Pittsburgh</i> (an ongoing graduate-led course series aimed at diversifying the undergraduate curriculum and improving access)	2019-ongoing
	Organizer <i>PEER 2021: Empirical Experience and Perceptual Reason Conference, University of Pittsburgh</i>	Dec 2025
	Mentor <i>Open Doors Philosophy Academy, University of Pittsburgh</i> (a week-long academic program supporting application to PhD programs among groups underrepresented in academic philosophy)	July 2023
	Organizer <i>History and Philosophy of Aesthetics Reading Group</i>	2023
	Member <i>Hiring Committee (Ethics), University of Pittsburgh</i>	Fall 2022
	Organizer <i>Perceptual Experience and Empirical Reason Conference, University of Pittsburgh</i>	Dec. 2021
REFERENCES	Anil Gupta: agupta@pitt.edu Alan Ross Anderson Distinguished Professor of Philosophy <i>University of Pittsburgh</i> Nandi Theunissen: lit44@pitt.edu Associate Professor of Philosophy <i>Rice University</i> Matthew Soteriou: mjs589@pitt.edu Professor of Philosophy <i>University of Pittsburgh</i> Grace Helton: ghelton@ur.rochester.edu Associate Professor of Philosophy <i>University of Rochester</i> Preston Werner: pjwerner1@gmail.com Senior Lecturer (tenured) <i>Hebrew University of Jerusalem</i> Sara Magrin: magrin_s@pitt.edu Associate Professor of Philosophy <i>University of Pittsburgh</i> Teaching Krista Thomason: kthomas2@swarthmore.edu Associate Professor and Chair of Philosophy <i>Swarthmore College</i> Peter Baumann: pbauman1@swarthmore.edu Charles and Harriett Cox McDowell Professor of Philosophy <i>Swarthmore College</i>	

GRADUATE
COURSEWORK
*audit

Metaphysics, Epistemology, Perception

Plato's Epistemology (Sara Magrin)
Directed Study on Evaluative Perception (John McDowell)
Perception (Anil Gupta)
Perception (Mazviita Chirimuuta)
Perception (Jennifer Marušić)
Realism (Mazviita Chirimuuta)
Philosophical Foundations of Cognitive Science (Colin Allen)
Metaphysics and Epistemology Proseminar (Dmitri Gallow)
Mental Action (Wayne Wu)
The Philosophy of Wilfred Sellars* (Robert Brandom)
Philosophy of Psychiatry* (Jonathan Fuller)
Rationality* (Kevin Dorst)
Reasons (Berislav Marušić)
Phenomenology and Existentialism (Avner Baz)
Philosophy of Mind* (Richard Holton)
Philosophy of Mind (Farid Masrour)
Philosophy of Language* (James Shaw)
Philosophy of Language (David Denby)
Personal Identity (Eli Hirsch)

Ethics

Is Ethics Objective?* (Zoë Johnson King)
Wellbeing* (Jeff Behrends)
Value Theory (L. Nandi Theunissen)
Philosophy of Action* (John McDowell)
Foundations of Normative Ethics (L. Nandi Theunissen)
Ethics Proseminar (Michael Thompson and Jed Lewinsohn)
Philosophy of Action (Berislav Marušić)
Ethics and the Emotions (Berislav Marušić)

History

Aristotle on Cognition* (Jennifer Whiting)
Plato's Republic (Jessica Gelber)
Plato's Epistemology* (Sara Magrin)
Hegel (Robert Brandom)
Kant's First Critique (Stephen Engstrom)
Leibnitz (Nicholas Rescher)
The British Empiricists; Locke, Berkeley, Hume (Jennifer Marušić)

DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

Our multifaceted sensory experience of the world does more than describe facts about the environment—it seems to *evaluate* its objects, portraying them in light of how they matter to us practically. My dissertation is devoted to understanding the affective dimension of experience and its empirical role: how the good taste of coffee informs us that coffee is good to drink or the bad smell of garbage that garbage is bad. I argue that the affective character of perceptual experience is (pro tanto) a function of the value of its objects. Thus, the bad smell of garbage is inherited from the negative axiological relation in which garbage stands to the perceiver, and the good taste of coffee from the positive axiological relation in which coffee stands to the perceiver. I call this principle '*inheritance*' and argue that it is a concealed epistemic norm governing perceptual experience. Experiences which conform to *inheritance* put perceivers in better empirical contact with reality than those that do not.

A different norm has been nearly universally taken to characterize experience—a representational norm, which says that experience *describes* how the world is by representing it as such. Experiences conform to this cognitive norm when their contents are true or accurate. This cognitive norm is fundamentally different from the non-cognitive norm of *inheritance*. Thus, the epistemic significance of experiences that inherit the value of their objects does not depend on whether they have representational content, including representational content that concerns value properties.

I argue that representational accounts of perception's valenced or affective character face a dilemma: they must locate the source of valence in *either* representational content or psychological attitude. Those who identify affective character with *content* can accommodate the epistemic significance of valenced states, but they struggle to provide a principled explanation of why such content is intrinsically *affective* and why it seems to exhibit a necessary relationship to motivation. Those who identify affective character with *attitude*, on the other hand, can accommodate its motivational character and phenomenology. However, this view is inconsistent with the claim that affective character is empirically significant, informing subjects about empirical truths. Thus I find representationalism inadequate to the phenomenon.

A relationalist account of perception's affective dimension is better able to capture its empirical, motivational, and phenomenological character. Positive and negative valences are exhibited across the canonical sensory modalities—vision, hearing, taste, smell, and touch—as well as by interoceptive experiences like pain. The relationalist account I advocate—called *affectivism*—holds that valenced sensory experiences have a source in the external world (as opposed to purely internal conative states), but that their mark is not truth-conditional content but rather *affective character*: when experiences *feel good or bad*. In turn, valenced perceptions can inform and motivate apt practical judgments, such as a decision to drink coffee or take out the garbage. Having these two features—an external source and an ability to ground judgment—marks inheritance as a general epistemic norm on experience, in the same category as the cognitivist principle.

The omission of inheritance from our epistemology overintellectualizes and underpowers perception. A snail can navigate off hot sand and onto a damp rock without cognizing that the sand is dry or the rock is damp, much less that this makes the sand bad for it and the rock good for it. We too can directly navigate circumstances of benefit and harm given that our perceptions are similarly valenced. I advocate that the forms of value to which perception can be sensitive are not restricted to the biological—entities we encounter hold practical, cultural, aesthetic, and ethical value as well. Variations in what is good for an individual can explain wide variations in valence across perceivers. Failures of evaluative perception occur, but they are not so pervasive as to make affective character uninformative. *Inheritance* is able to do crucial work in explaining the epistemic unity between simple perceivers like the snail and sophisticated perceivers like us, as well as recognizing that the scope of evaluative perception is far broader than merely biological goods.

In contrast to theories of the perceptual representation of value, *affectivism* supports the claim that, in general, affective states have legitimate empirical credentials. This position aligns with cognitivist theories of emotion, which treat emotions as judgments or perceptions of value. Building on this foundation, I argue for *epistemic sentimentalism* in aesthetics: the view that aesthetic pleasure is the basic source of aesthetic knowledge. Critics object that aesthetic pleasure varies faultlessly across subjects, making universal agreement in aesthetic judgments impossible to explain. However, affectivism offers a crucial line of defense by distinguishing two types of aesthetic value relations. Individual aesthetic values (concerning e.g. gustatory tastes) can differ without disagreement, while universal aesthetic values (concerning e.g. works of art) generate genuine disagreement only when one judgment is mistaken. This framework reconciles aesthetic realism with pleasure-based aesthetic knowledge.

Accounting for the evaluative character of perception in axiological rather than representational terms can help us understand how agency develops prior to intellectual maturity. It addresses the neglect of affective experience in perceptual epistemology, highlighting the centrality of pleasure and pain to our sensory lives. Finally, it reconceives how our perceptual capacities enable aesthetic experience, shedding light on quotidian choices such as what to eat, what to wear, who to spend time with, or how to arrange our lived environments. In sum, affectivism suggests that evaluation is more primitive than conceptualization, and that a subject's desires and beliefs primarily reflect truths about what is beneficial and harmful to them as particular beings that they are.