

Alison Fernandes
13th November 2015

Department of Philosophy Search Committee
University of Pittsburgh
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA

Dear Committee Members,

I'm writing to apply for the position of Assistant Professor in Philosophy at the University of Pittsburgh, advertised in PhilJobs (#3583). I'm currently completing a philosophy PhD at Columbia University, supervised by Professor Achille Varzi. My thesis, *A Deliberative Account of Causation: How the Evidence of Deliberating Agents Accounts for Causation and its Temporal Direction*, will be defended by May 2016. My research covers topics in philosophy of science, metaphysics and epistemology. I have teaching experience in a range of undergraduate courses, and a strong commitment to teaching and research excellence.

I research primarily in philosophy of science, metaphysics and epistemology, as evidenced by my doctoral dissertation and related work. In my dissertation, I defend a deliberative account of causation, arguing that causal relations correspond to the evidential relations we use when we decide on one thing in order to achieve another. This account explains why causal relations matter and why causes come before their effects—giving us a new way of relating temporally asymmetric phenomena like entropy and causation. Based on my dissertation, I have completed three papers for publication. One paper, 'Time, Flies, and Why We Can't Control the Past', is in press in an edited volume. Another paper, 'Varieties of Epistemic Freedom', is forthcoming in the *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*. This paper distinguishes different epistemic explanations of freedom, while raising serious problems for existing accounts. A third paper, 'A Deliberative Account of Causation', is in preparation. All these papers have been presented at refereed conferences, and by invitation, in the US, UK and Australia. I'm currently working on two further papers from my existing writing, which I intend to submit for publication: 'An Epistemic Model of Practical Deliberation' and 'I Think, therefore I Will: Fichtean Insights into Freedom and Belief'. These papers further develop and defend my preferred 'epistemic model' of deliberation, partly by drawing on the work of the German Idealist Fichte. My dissertation has also opened up further topics for future research. I gave an invited presentation, 'Propensities for Agent-based Accounts of Causation', in which I developed a positive account of the evidential relations appealed to in my account of causation. I've also presented research from two further planned papers. In 'Freedom, Self-Prediction and the Psychology of Time Travel', I use time travel cases to argue for my epistemic model of deliberation. In 'Maybe I Will, Maybe I Won't' I argue against rival attempts to use deliberation to explain the direction of causation.

My next major research project, *The Human Side of Objectivity*, concerns how standards for scientific enquiry relate to our abilities and interests. I plan to develop a broadly pragmatist account of the objectivity that science aims to provide, arguing that science does not need to be grounded in standards beyond our own, or unquestionable foundations. Instead, we need theories to be coherent and help us achieve our ends. To develop this view, I'll draw on case studies from fundamental physics, particularly quantum mechanics and statistical mechanics, as well as a range of historical and contemporary sources—including German Idealism, American Pragmatism, Humean accounts of lawhood, and unificationist accounts of explanation. I aim to emphasise how pragmatic ideals already feature in contemporary accounts, on the way to developing a rich and nuanced account of scientific objectivity. My work draws on diverse approaches in philosophy, including philosophy of science, history of philosophy (German Idealism, Pragmatism), philosophy of action, as well as more traditional areas of analytic philosophy (epistemology, metaphysics). I'm particularly interested in work at the intersection of these areas that helps broaden philosophical debate and enrich the scientific content of philosophy.

In my teaching, I aim to be stimulating and innovative, engaging students in the adventure of philosophy. As a teaching assistant, I've given lectures in five in undergraduate courses at Columbia: *Kant, Ethics, Feminism and Philosophy*, and general introductory courses. I've led discussion sections in three: *Ethics, Metaphysics* and a general introductory course. I also designed and taught my own undergraduate metaphysics course, *Time Travel, Free Will and Causation*. Here I drew on my own research interests in time, causation and deliberation, using exciting and challenging material, supported with fiction, film and art. Students investigated causal loops in *Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure*, posted on the course discussion board about representations of time in art, and delved into free will and responsibility in Bob Dylan's songs. In their final evaluations, all students 'strongly agreed' that the course was 'intellectually stimulating'. I taught this course as a six-week summer intensive, catering to students of mixed backgrounds, including philosophy majors, graduates, and those with no prior experience. I used collaborative assignments, both in class, and online, to encourage students to engage with each other's ideas. And I included activities to get students talking, thinking and writing throughout the course—including quizzes, group activities and discussion posts. I also had students present their paper topics to the class, and plan to develop more peer-feedback techniques in future courses, even for larger courses.

As mentioned, my research interests include history of philosophy, as well as metaphysics, epistemology and philosophy of science. I'd like to draw on these areas and their intersections in future courses, such as an undergraduate class on classical epistemology that includes Kant and Peirce, or a graduate-level course in realism and anti-realism that features meta-ethics, metaphysics and philosophy of science. I'm also keen to teach graduate-level philosophy of science and metaphysics courses, particularly examining the role of science in metaphysics, as well as general undergraduate courses in ethics, epistemology, philosophy of physics and history of philosophy (Kant to Hegel). I'm also interested in structuring a course around teaching the steps for successful paper writing—with assignments focussed on outlines, introductions and argument strategies. I've hosted writing workshops, and written online guides to writing philosophy papers and applying to overseas graduate programs (see my website). I plan to extend these resources to provide further support to students, in addition to personal mentoring.

In my service activities, I'm committed to playing an active role in the profession, taking on administrative duties and encouraging philosophical community. I volunteered as a student representative at Columbia University, familiarising myself with faculty procedures and coordinating with students. I inaugurated a graduate student seminar series, liaising with the department and running the seminar over two years. I've been an organiser of the New York German Idealism Workshop, and two conferences, *Naturalism in German Idealism* and the *NYU/Columbia Graduate Conference*, involving working with teams across universities. I also volunteered at the *UK Joint Session* in 2014, taking up administrative and hosting duties. And I am currently on the Editorial Board for the *Philosophy of Science Association Women's Caucus*, developing original content for the Caucus' blog. I plan to continue contributing to the profession, assisting in administration, collaborating with colleagues and developing new projects to support research and learning. I'm particularly interested in pursuing collaborative grants, fostering community through conferences, and providing teaching resources to aid in the development of original course content.

I have submitted a curriculum vitae, writing sample and a short teaching dossier, and have requested six letters of recommendation. I'm happy to provide further materials, including a full teaching portfolio, research statement and additional writing samples. Abstracts of my research are available on my website (alisonfernandes.net). I can be reached by email, skype or phone (+1 917-602-1869) and am available for interview from November. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Kind regards,
Alison Fernandes