

Justin Vlasits

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Education

Ph.D. in Philosophy, UC Berkeley (Joint Program in Ancient Philosophy) 2011-Present
B.A. *magna cum laude* in English Literature and Philosophy with Honors, Columbia University 2007-2011

Research Areas

AOS Ancient philosophy, (formal) epistemology, logic.

AOC Decision theory, history and philosophy of science and mathematics, medieval philosophy.

Dissertation (full abstract below)

Platonic Division and the Origins of Aristotelian Logic

Committee: Timothy Clarke (co-chair), Klaus Corcilius (co-chair), John MacFarlane, G.R.F. Ferrari (Classics)

Aristotle's syllogistic theory, as developed in his *Prior Analytics*, is often regarded as the birth of logic in Western philosophy. Over the past century, scholars have tried to identify important precursors to this theory. In my dissertation, I argue that Platonic division, a method which aims to give accounts of essences of natural kinds by progressively narrowing down from a genus, influenced Aristotle's logical theory in a number of crucial respects. To see exactly how, I analyze the method of division as it was originally conceived by Plato and received by Aristotle. I argue that, while Plato allowed that some divisions fail to rigorously investigate the essence, he began a program continued by Aristotle (and others in antiquity and the middle ages) of seeking *norms* for division that would apply in any domain whatsoever. This idea of a rigorous, general method was taken up and developed by Aristotle in his syllogistic. Aristotle also used Plato's conception of predication as parthood in his semantics for syllogistic propositions. As part of my argument, I prove that a semantics based on Platonic divisional structures is sound and complete for the deduction system used in the literature to model Aristotle's syllogistic.

Publications

Review of Gail Fine, "The Possibility of Inquiry: Meno's Paradox from Socrates to Sextus", *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 23 (2015), 580-583.

In Progress

Knowability for Verificationists (draft available)

Using the Divine Method in Plato's Examination of Knowledge: *Philebus* 55c-59d (draft available)

Book Project

Collection of essays entitled *Epistemology after Sextus Empiricus*, co-edited with Katja Maria Vogt.

Confirmed contributors: Jessica Berry, Richard Bett, Don Garrett, Kathrin Glüer-Pagin, Marko Malink, M.G.F. Martin, John Morrison, Peter Pagin, Duncan Pritchard, Susanna Schellenberg, Kathryn Tabb, Sergio Tenenbaum, Justin Vlasits, Katja Maria Vogt.

Talks

The First Riddle of Induction: Sextus Empiricus and the Formal Learning Theorists	
Epistemology after Sextus Empiricus, UC Berkeley	3/2017
Aristotle on the (Ab)use of Platonic Division in the <i>Analytics</i>	
Reasoning and Inquiry in Ancient Philosophy, University of Chicago	5/2016
BayCAP Workshop, UC Davis	11/2014
UC Berkeley Dissertation Seminar	9/2014
Ninth Annual Marquette Summer Seminar on Aristotle and the Aristotelian Tradition	6/2014
Using the Divine Method in Plato's Examination of Knowledge	
West Coast Plato Workshop, Northern Arizona University	5/2016
How is Platonic division different in the <i>Sophist</i> and <i>Statesman</i>?	
Plato's Late Dialogues, Northwestern University	3/2016
From Platonic Division to Aristotelian Syllogistic	
Richard Wollheim Society, UC Berkeley	9/2015
4th CSLI Workshop on Logic, Rationality and Intelligent Interaction, Stanford	5/2015
Berkeley Philosophy Work in Progress Series	4/2015
Aristotle's <i>Posterior Analytics</i> II.1-2	
BayCAP Colloquium: James Lennox's <i>Aristotle on the Design of Inquiry</i> , UC Berkeley	3/2015
Probability, Information, & Rational Belief	
Berkeley-Stanford Circle in Logic and Philosophy	12/2014
Berkeley-London Graduate Philosophy Conference, Institute of Philosophy	5/2014
Aristotle's <i>Metaphysics</i> Z.17	
LMU-Berkeley Workshop on Aristotle: <i>Metaphysics</i> H	9/2014
Two Dynamic Approaches to Logical Omniscience (with Dustin Neuman)	
Formal Epistemology Workshop Poster Session, Caltech	6/2014
Platonic Collection and Division as Logic	
Richard Wollheim Society, UC Berkeley	4/2014
Aristotle's <i>Physics</i> III.1	
BayCAP Colloquium: Aryeh Kosman's <i>Activity of Being</i> , University of San Francisco	3/2014
The Structure behind Platonic Collection and Division	
Townsend Working Group in Ancient Philosophy, UC Berkeley	10/2013
Aristotle's <i>Posterior Analytics</i> II.13	
LMU-Berkeley Workshop on Aristotle: Between Sense-Perception and Knowledge	8/2013
Collection, Division, and the Origin of Aristotle's Syllogistic	
MUSAΦ Workshop on Principles and Explanation in Aristotle, LMU-Munich	6/2013
The Analyticity of Mathematics	
Richard Wollheim Society, UC Berkeley	5/2013
Ancient Logics	
UC Berkeley Undergraduate Philosophy Club	4/2013
Comments on Pavle Stojanovic, <i>Stoics on Clarity and Distinctness of Impressions</i>	
Pacific APA, San Francisco	3/2013
Aggravating Aggregations: Living with Arrow's Theorem	
Richard Wollheim Society, UC Berkeley	11/2012
The Space of Epistemic Possibilities without Logical Omniscience	
1st CSLI Workshop on Logic, Rationality and Intelligent Interaction, Stanford	6/2012
Berkeley-Stanford-Davis Graduate Philosophy Conference	4/2012
University of Toronto Graduate Conference on Varieties of Possibility	3/2012
Varieties of Inference	
Richard Wollheim Society, UC Berkeley	2/2012
From Investigation to Suspension of Judgment in Sextus Empiricus	
Society for Ancient Greek Philosophy, Fordham	10/2011
Richard Wollheim Society, UC Berkeley	10/2011

Awards and Fellowships

Jan Wojcik Memorial Prize from the <i>Journal of the History of Philosophy</i> <i>Travel grant awarded to one graduate student per year for summer research</i>	2013
James Gutman Prize in Philosophy (Columbia University)	2011
Phi Beta Kappa	2011
Garret Albert Scholarship for Summer Study in Greek Language and Culture	2010
State Department Critical Language Scholarship for Arabic Study in Tunisia	2009

Research Languages

English, German, Greek, Latin, Spanish.

Teaching (* indicates upper-level course)

As Primary Instructor

Ancient Philosophy	Summer 2016
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As GSI (=TA)

Philosophical Logic*	John MacFarlane	Spring 2016
Special Topics in Greek Philosophy: Pre-Socratics*	Timothy Clarke	Spring 2015
Medieval Philosophy*	Timothy Crockett	Fall 2014
Philosophical Methods*	Seth Yalcin	Spring 2014
Plato*	Klaus Corcilius	Fall 2013
Ancient Philosophy	Brian Berkey	Summer 2013
Philosophy of Mind*	John Searle	Spring 2013
Introduction to Logic	Sherrilyn Roush	Fall 2012
Aristotle*	Klaus Corcilius	Summer 2012

Guest Lectures

Tarski's definition of logical consequence (Philosophical Logic)	3/2016
Abelard on the problem of universals (Medieval Philosophy)	12/2014
Platonic dialectic (Plato)	11/2013
Aristotle's <i>Organon</i> (Ancient Philosophy)	8/2013

Service

- Referee for: *Philosophy Compass*, *Erkenntnis*.
- Member of GSI Assignment Committee (2015-2016)
- Organizer for Work in Progress Lunch (2015-2016)
- Project advisor for Academic Placement Data and Analysis Project (2014-Present)
- Prospective graduate student liaison (2013-2014)
- Copy editor for *Rhizomata* (2012-2014)
- Organizer of Townsend Working Group in Ancient Philosophy (2012-2014)
- Organizer of Philosophy Department Colloquium (2012-2013)
- Organizer of Richard Wollheim Society (2011-2012)

Graduate Coursework (* indicates course audited)

Aristotle's <i>Metaphysics</i> Gamma*	Timothy Clarke	Fall 2016
Advanced Greek Composition (Classics)*	Donald Mastronarde	Fall 2016
Dissertation Seminar	Daniel Warren	Fall 2016
Aristotle on Perception and <i>Phantasia</i> *	Klaus Corcilius	Spring 2016
Readings in Medieval Latin: Abelard (Classics)*	Frank Bezner	Fall 2015
Proof Theory*	Paolo Mancosu	Fall 2015
Republican Prose: Sallust (Classics)*	Chris Adams	Spring 2015
Plato's <i>Timaeus</i> *	Timothy Clarke, Klaus Corcilius	Spring 2015
Plotinus's <i>Enneads</i> 4 (Classics)*	Sara Magrin	Spring 2015
Dissertation Seminar	John Campbell	Fall 2014
Wittgenstein's <i>Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus</i> *	Paolo Mancosu, Hans Sluga	Fall 2014
Thucydides (Classics)*	Donald Mastronarde	Fall 2014
What are Plato's Forms? (Classics)*	G.R.F. Ferrari	Spring 2014
Metaphysics and Metasemantics*	Seth Yalcin	Spring 2014
Aristotle's <i>Physics</i> I*	Timothy Clarke	Fall 2013
Modality, Partiality, and Perspective*	Wesley Holliday	Fall 2013
Aristotle's Conception of Animal and Human Agency*	Klaus Corcilius	Spring 2013
Philosophy of Mathematics*	Paolo Mancosu	Spring 2013
Social Choice Theory: Social Welfare & Individual Preferences	Lara Buchak	Fall 2012
Plato's <i>Sophist</i> *	Timothy Clarke	Fall 2012
Teaching Seminar	Hannah Ginsborg	Fall 2012
Ancient Greek Music (Classics)	Mark Griffith	Fall 2012
Epistemic Logic and Epistemology*	Wesley Holliday	Fall 2012
Aristotle's Psychology	Klaus Corcilius	Spring 2012
Aristotle on Definition (Stanford)	Alan Code	Spring 2012
Probability in Epistemology*	Sherrilyn Roush	Spring 2012
Judgment, Competence, and Practical Knowledge	Barry Stroud	Spring 2012
Kant's Transcendental Deduction	Daniel Warren	Spring 2012
Empiricist Themes in Perception	John Campbell, M.G.F. Martin	Fall 2011
First-Year Seminar	Hannah Ginsborg, Barry Stroud	Fall 2011
Set Theory (Mathematics)	Thomas Scanlon	Fall 2011
Ethical Theories*	R. Jay Wallace	Fall 2011
Logic, Epistemology, and Natural Language	Seth Yalcin	Fall 2011

Qualifying Exam Topics (Passed May, 2013)

- The Analyticity of Mathematics (Paolo Mancosu)
- Ancient Theories of the Syllogism (John MacFarlane)
- Plato's *Philebus* (Klaus Corcilius)

References

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Dissertation Abstract

Aristotle's syllogistic, as developed in his *Prior Analytics*, is often regarded as the birth of logic in Western philosophy. In my dissertation, I argue that Aristotle's logical theory was influenced by Platonic division, a method which aims to give accounts of essences of natural kinds, in a number of respects.

Central to my account of Plato's method is its *normative* structure. Division has the goal of finding essences, but some divisions fail to. Once we realize this, a research program suggests itself: articulate the norms that can guide one's inquiry towards essences. I argue that Plato took himself to have made important first steps in this program, which was later continued by Aristotle and others, forming the dominant question surrounding the method of division.

The dissertation divides into parts on Plato and Aristotle. The first chapter on Plato asks what a division is generally, whether or not the divider obeyed the norms. I argue for an expansive view of division in Plato: the relation that holds between the divided kind (genus) and the kind it divides into (species) has very little structure—it need only be transitive—but might not satisfy other requirements such as exclusivity or dichotomy. The evidence for my claim comes primarily from the *Sophist* and, with this point in place, I can give a new interpretation of the puzzle of the many definitions of sophistry.

In the second chapter, I give an account of the norms Plato introduces, showing how he thought they were necessary for division to reliably achieve its goal. Division without norms was unable to reliably guide the inquirer to the essence she seeks, but are there sufficiently strong general norms that can? While Plato never articulates a fully satisfying set of norms, I argue that he has the ambition to articulate such a rigorous, scientific methodology.

In the first chapter on Aristotle, I examine his reception of division in the *Analytics*. I argue that his criticisms of division there as a method of demonstration do not undermine his commitment to its use in inquiry. I do this by giving a sustained reading of *Posterior Analytics* II.13, a contested chapter in which Aristotle says how one should search for essences. His account there includes an important role for division in the discovery of the essences, just like Plato did. His disagreement with Plato is rather in his account of what constitutes knowledge. Whereas having an account of the essence is sufficient for Plato, Aristotle also requires demonstrations based on these accounts.

Finally, I argue that Plato's idea of a rigorous, general method was taken up and developed by Aristotle in his syllogistic, as well as Plato's conception of predication as parthood. As part of my argument, I prove that several semantics based on mereological structures are sound and complete for the deduction system used in the literature to model Aristotle's syllogistic. I then compare Aristotle's achievement with Plato's, arguing that his innovation is neither to use precise semantic notions, nor to investigate reasoning at a maximal level of generality and rigor—both of these features are present in Platonic division. Rather, Aristotle's innovation was to isolate the concept of *validity* and subject it to examination.

These historical investigations suggest new directions in thinking about the nature of logic. As practiced today, logic more or less covers what Aristotle called syllogistic. However, logic is also characterized by its maximum generality. These claims are in tension, since division, and methodology more generally, is general in the relevant sense, but not part of the contemporary practice. In the conclusion, I argue that the generality of logic is well motivated and so logic ought to include the study of methodology within its purview.