



MICHAEL SMITH *FAHA FASSA FAAAAS*  
McCOSH PROFESSOR OF PHILOSOPHY  
Princeton University  
Department of Philosophy



THOMAS SCHMIDT  
LEHRSTUHL FÜR PRAKTISCHE PHILOSOPHIE/ETHIK  
Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin  
Department of Philosophy

## **Princeton-HU Strategic Partnership Grant Application** *Practical Normativity: Reasons, Morality, and Rationality*

### ***Overview***

In 2015-16, a Princeton-HU Strategic Partnership seed grant funded the first step towards the establishment of an on-going series of events that bring together faculty and graduate students from Humboldt and Princeton to work on a variety of topics under the general heading of *Normativity: its nature, history, and varieties*. That first step was a graduate seminar, *Ethical rationalism vs. sentimentalism*, co-taught by Smith (Princeton) and Schmidt (HU) during the summer of 2016 that took place partly at Humboldt and partly at Princeton. The success of the graduate seminar emboldened us to expand the group of participants, experiment with more innovative teaching methods and connect teaching and research more explicitly.

We propose a series of Summer Institutes on the theme *Practical Normativity: Reasons, Morality, and Rationality* to take place in the summer months of 2018, 2019 and 2020—we request a deferral of part of the Princeton funding for the second and third of these Summer Institutes (details below). These Summer Institutes will involve faculty and graduate students from Humboldt, Princeton, and the Australian National University, with a Summer Institute taking place at each location. The Summer Institutes will combine student presentations on literature, course-work and literature review sessions, student and faculty presentations of research, individual supervision, and mentoring sessions.

The backbone of this project is the cooperation between Princeton and HU under the Strategic Partnership. We are happy to report that the philosophers at ANU are willing to join in and that they have already secured funding for their participation in the series. This application is to secure funding for the participation of those from Humboldt and Princeton.

### ***Background***

The Institut für Philosophie at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin has emerged as one of the leading analytic philosophy departments in Europe, enjoying remarkable success in international rankings (in the 2016 QS ranking, the Humboldt philosophy department was on place 14 of all philosophy departments worldwide, and ranked as best philosophy department outside the anglophone world). The Philosophy Department at Princeton University has long been ranked one of the top three or four philosophy departments worldwide, and the School of Philosophy at

the Australian National University has long been ranked the best philosophy department in Australia, with its core group of researchers attracting a large number of visiting philosophers from North America and Europe each northern summer (for the latest rankings see the *Philosophical Gourmet Report 2015*: <http://www.philosophicalgourmet.com/overall.asp>).

The philosophers who specialize in practical normativity at Princeton, ANU, and Humboldt have developed especially strong ties in recent years. These ties include, in chronological order:

- shared faculty in these areas between Princeton and ANU: Professor Philip Pettit and Dr Victoria McGeer are currently both 50-50; Professor Michael Smith (Princeton) was formerly a faculty member at ANU 1995-2004; Professor Frank Jackson (ANU) was formerly a faculty member at Princeton 2007-2015;
- the appointment of Professor Michael Smith (Princeton), sponsored by Professor Thomas Schmidt (Humboldt), at Humboldt on a *Forschungspreis* from the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation in AY 2010-2011, where he ran a year-long reading group on recent work in ethics/practical philosophy;
- a workshop on topics in ethics/practical philosophy in Summer 2011 featuring talks by junior faculty members throughout Germany, and with comments by senior faculty members, convened, inter alia, by Schmidt and Smith, and sponsored by the philosophy departments at Humboldt and Princeton;
- the Humboldt-Princeton Graduate Student Workshop, with graduate students from each department presenting their research, which has been held annually in Berlin since Summer 2011, and in Princeton as well in 2016;
- moral philosophy workshops, one convened by Smith held at Princeton in 2013, and another convened by Dr Nic Southwood (ANU) held at ANU in 2014, involving faculty from both Princeton and ANU funded in part by CRNAP (Co-operative Research Network in Analytic Philosophy), a project for which the philosophers at Princeton were given a large grant from Princeton's Council for International Teaching and Research;
- the appointment of Benjamin Kiesewetter (Humboldt) as Research Associate at ANU in Spring/Summer 2014;
- Nic Southwood's (ANU) visit to Humboldt for a talk and a series of informal meetings in Summer 2016;
- the Humboldt Normativity Conference 2016, a major international conference organized by Gertken, Kiesewetter and Schmidt (all Humboldt), at which Smith was one of the keynote speakers;
- the appointment of Andreas Müller, when he was still a PhD student of Schmidt, as Visiting Student Research Collaborator at Princeton to work with Smith in Spring 2012, and the subsequent appointment of Smith as external examiner of Müller's PhD dissertation in Spring 2014; the appointment of Schmidt's PhD student Simon Gaus as another Visiting Student Research Collaborator at Princeton to work with Smith in Spring 2016;
- and, most recently of course, Smith and Schmidt's *Ethical sentimentalism vs ethical rationalism*, the graduate seminar held in the summer of 2016 for graduate students from Humboldt and Princeton funded by a seed grant from the PU-Humboldt Strategic Partnership.

The aim of *Practical Normativity: Reasons, Morality, and Rationality* is to harness and strengthen these ties by bringing together faculty and graduate students from the three institutions working on practical normativity, broadly construed, in a format that integrates

teaching and research in ways and to a degree that, to our knowledge, has not hitherto been achieved.

The format builds on the positive experiences that Schmidt and Smith had when they co-taught *Ethical sentimentalism vs ethical rationalism* in the summer of 2016, and the constructive feedback they received from the participating graduate students and faculty from Humboldt and Princeton. The following emerged as the major factors that explained the success of that project:

- the overall topic of the course and readings were closely related to the research projects of not just Schmidt and Smith, but also the graduate students involved, so that everybody was able to profit from the discussions with regard to his/her own research agenda;
- in terms of areas of interest, philosophical background, and quality, the participating Humboldt and Princeton students were in the same area and league;
- Schmidt and Smith's teaching styles naturally complement each other;
- everybody was prepared to invest an enormous amount of time and intellectual energy in preparing for the seminars;
- we had one session where the author of one of the readings was a guest speaker, a session was agreed by all concerned to be among the very best;
- the Humboldt-Princeton Graduate Student Workshop that took place in two halves immediately after each half of the course focused on presentations by students participating in the course on topics that related to the course;
- after each part of the course, there was a major international conference which at least some of the course participants stayed on to attend (the Humboldt Normativity Conference 2016 after the Berlin part, the CHillMeta Conference 2016 in Chapel Hill after the Princeton part);
- there was significant built-in "down time" where faculty and students met in informal settings and conversation moved naturally back and forth between substantive points of philosophy and mentoring: that is, a discussion of the social, strategic, and work-life balance issues that inevitably arise for young scholars who are trying to make their way into a profession whose history and norms they don't yet fully understand.

In our view, the key in moving forward is thus to modestly expand the group so as to give our students access to more points of view and to get faculty working in the same field to work even closer together with each other and with graduate students—ANU is the obvious choice, given the many links that already exist between our three institutions and the comparable quality of their faculty and graduate students—and to move to a format that integrates graduate coursework, student conferences/colloquia, guest speakers, research conferences, and mentoring. This is what we aim to do with our Summer Institutes.

Schmidt and Smith began preliminary talks about this cooperative arrangement with the philosophers at ANU some time ago. These preliminary talks were prompted by a conversation between Smith and Anastasia Vrachnos at Princeton after some administrators from ANU visited Princeton to discuss the possibility of institution-wide collaborations. On the basis of these preliminary talks, and without Schmidt and Smith being able to give them any guarantee that the Humboldt-Princeton Strategic Partnership would provide funding, the Chair of Philosophy at ANU, Seth Lazar, approached ANU's administration about funding, and they in turn provided a guarantee of AUD50,000 over three years for ANU faculty and students to participate in

whatever cooperative arrangement emerges at whatever level is feasible at that level of funding. The text of the email from Seth Lazar confirming this is in Appendix A.

### *Proposal*

We propose to hold a series of Summer Institutes, one at each of the participating institutions, that bring together faculty, graduate students, and academic visitors from those institutions. At each Summer Institute, there will be up to six students and two faculty members from each of the two non-hosting institutions, and up to ten students and faculty members from, and academic visitors present at, the hosting institution. In this way each Summer Institute will be limited to at most twenty-six participants, which we believe is about the upper limit for a setting in which everyone gets to contribute to the conversation.

The Summer Institutes will cover problems in the general area of practical normativity, where this area includes questions about the nature of reasons, about how we are to distinguish between moral and non-moral reasons, about how conflicts between moral and non-moral reasons are to be adjudicated, about the nature and scope of requirements of rationality and the relationship between requirements of rationality and reasons. This area is especially chosen because it is an area of research strength of the faculty and graduate students at all three participating institutions—CVs of Schmidt and Smith are attached; for brief profiles of them and the other participating faculty at Humboldt, Princeton, and ANU see Appendix B. It is also an area in which all three institutions are getting increasing numbers of high-quality graduate applicants.

The overarching foci of the Summer Institutes will be current issues in the philosophy of practical normativity relating to *practical reasons* (2018, held at ANU), to *morality* (2019, held at Princeton) and to *rationality* (2020, held at Humboldt). The details of the programme of each Summer Institute will be made dependent on the specific research foci of the participating staff and students, but in general terms the issues to be addressed will be as follows.

*Practical reasons at ANU.* The notion of a practical reason has come to occupy centre stage in the philosophy of practical normativity. Practical reasons are the sorts of considerations that we appeal to in *justifying* our choices and actions, and they are also the sorts of considerations that *guide* our choices and actions insofar as we are rational. An appeal to practical reasons has been thought to be essential to an understanding of deliberation itself; to make sense of oughts, obligations, rights, values, and other important normative phenomena (Gertken and Kiesewetter forthcoming); to make sense of the possibility of conflicts of values (Schmidt 2016); and for an understanding of regret, guilt, shame, indignation, and a range of other emotions (McGeer and Pettit 2015). But all such appeals to practical reasons leave an important further question unanswered. Are practical reasons *basic* items in the normative realm, or can they be explained in other terms? Some philosophers (Parfit 2011, Scanlon 2014) argue that they are basic normative items, whereas others (Korsgaard 1996, Smith 2013) argue that they can be explained in other terms, notably in terms of rationality.

*Morality at Princeton.* One of the most difficult questions in the philosophy of practical normativity is whether there is a deep distinction between moral and other forms of practical normativity, and, if so, how that distinction is to be drawn. One possibility is that there is a philosophically deep distinction between moral and non-moral practical reasons. Another possibility is that moral obligations have a distinctive relational character that is familiar from the ways in which we hold people accountable when they wrong us, and that obligations in other domains of practical normativity lack that relational character (Darwall 2006, Owens 2012, Wallace 2013; Frick forthcoming). Yet another possibility is that the distinctive feature of moral obligation is that it is backed by general principles that can be given a public statement and defence. Related to this is the question whether we can provide a convincing epistemology for

the moral domain. Outlooks such as these stand in sharp contrast to views according to which there is no deep distinction between the moral and the non-moral (Raz 1999).

*Rationality at Humboldt.* As already mentioned, many theorists think that all facts about practical reasons can be explained by facts about rationality. The important tasks for such theorists are, first of all, to provide the promised explanation, and second, to tell us in what sense rationality is itself normative. This connects with another important thread in the current discussion. To the extent that practical reasons are to be understood as facts that speak in favour of acting in certain ways or forming certain intentions, and to the extent that rationality is a matter of coherence amongst mental states, reasons and rationality, at least on the face of it, are distinct. It becomes an open question whether there are any reasons to be rational—and of course if there are no reasons to be rational, then we are once again left with the question whether rationality is normative at all (Kolodny 2005). Some have claimed that the answer to this question is bound to be ‘no’, while others have tried to vindicate the normativity of rationality (Southwood 2008, Kiesewetter forthcoming).

While the topics that will serve as the focal points of the Summer Institutes at the different locations will be different—practical reasons, morality, rationality—the general structure of the events that take place will be the same. The format will combine discussions of the current literature (this is a standard format for graduate seminars in philosophy), presentations by graduate students about that literature, followed by discussion (another common format for graduate seminars in philosophy), presentations by graduate students about their own projects, followed by discussion (thereby, taking up elements from graduate conferences and graduate colloquia), talks by faculty (thereby, taking up elements from conferences), individual philosophical discussions between faculty and students (thereby, taking up elements from individual supervision), and individual discussions about general career-related matters (thereby, taking up elements from mentoring sessions). The overall number of hours will be such that the student’s participation in a Summer Institute will qualify as having taken a course.

We plan to be flexible about the details of the program, but the default plan is to run the Summer Institutes over two full weeks with 23 hours per week being divided between literature reviews (3 x 2 hour sessions); student presentations on literature (3 x 1 hour sessions); student presentations of research (4 x 1 hour sessions); faculty-presentations of research (2 x 2 hour sessions); and mentoring sessions (3 x 1 hour sessions); individual supervision (3 x 1 hour sessions).

We expect the structure of each week to be as follows:

	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri
morning	student presentations on literature			mentoring sessions	student/faculty presentations of research
	literature reviews				
afternoon	individual supervision				
	student/faculty presentations of research				

The crucial building block in determining the specific program of each Summer Institute will be the choice of specific readings and graduate students to participate. Smith and Schmidt will take charge of this.

Those eligible to apply will be either MA or PhD students, or in exceptional circumstances, an undergraduate. Applicants will each be asked to submit (a) a proposal for a talk on their project that they would be willing to present if selected, and (b) 3-4 important papers from the current

literature that are central for their research project and about which they would also be willing to give a presentation. Both the proposed talk and the proposed papers will be required to fit to the overall topic of the Summer Institute: that is, reasons at ANU, morality at Princeton, rationality at Humboldt. On the basis of these proposals, Schmidt and Smith, after consulting with the other participating faculty, will choose the students to participate in the Summer Institutes, and put together the program, thereby ensuring a match between the literature to be discussed and the talks by faculty and students, all of which will reflect the research interests of the participating students and faculty.

### ***Long-term benefits***

We are convinced that this project will have significant effects well beyond the original funding period. Among these are the following:

- The academic networks of each of the participating staff and students will be extended considerably, resulting in bilateral ties that will lead to further academic exchanges in the future, e.g. interactions about common research interests via e-mail and Skype, individually arranged visits, invitations to conferences, joint workshops, etc.
- There will be more formal staff and student exchanges, e.g., we expect an increasing number of applications for Alexander von Humboldt-Fellowships and relevant DAAD grants by international researchers wishing to visit Humboldt, and the same goes for Visiting Student Research Collaborator and Visiting Faculty applications at Princeton, and Visiting Fellow and Program Visitor applications at ANU.
- We expect that the published versions of the papers presented by students and faculty at the Summer Institutes will acknowledge the impact the Summer Institutes had on the development of their authors' ideas.
- If the project turns out to be the success that we think it will be, we would do all we can to secure additional funding to continue, over and above long-term effects of the sort just mentioned, further such Summer Institutes. The prospects for doing so seem promising: ANU is committed to funding international collaborations anyway; the same is true at Princeton where the Philosophy Department is also seeking to raise its own funds for international teaching and research through Princeton's Development Office; and the Institut für Philosophie at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin is committed to finding sponsors in Germany as well, from sources such as the DFG, the Thyssen Foundation and others.

### ***Facilities and administrative support***

We do not anticipate that there will be costs associated with procuring the necessary rooms required for the graduate seminars and workshops. The departments will arrange for seminar rooms for the activities that take place in their department. The departments will also provide the administrative support required for the dispersion of funds to faculty and graduate students in each department.