

# Cameron F. Coates

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## RESEARCH AREAS

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**AOS:** Ancient Greek Philosophy

**AOC:** Indian Philosophy, History of European Philosophy (esp. Medieval and Early Modern),  
20th century Continental Philosophy

## EDUCATION

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2023	Ph.D., with distinction: Philosophy, DePaul University (Chicago, IL) Dissertation: <i>Aristotle on the Concept of Life</i> Committee: Sean D. Kirkland (Director); James G. Lennox (Pittsburgh); William McNeill; Michael Naas <b>Defended November 21st, 2022</b>
2014	M.A., with distinction: Philosophy, Loyola University Chicago (Chicago, IL)
2010	B.A.: St. John's College (Annapolis, MD)

## PROFESSIONAL APPOINTMENTS

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Spring 2023	Visiting Assistant Professor, The University of the South (Sewanee)
2020—2022	Visiting Instructor, The University of the South (Sewanee)
2016—2017	Teaching Fellow, DePaul University
2015—2017	Ancient Greek Language Tutor, DePaul University Language Learning Center
2014—2016	Teaching Assistant, DePaul University
2011—2014	Teaching Assistant, Loyola University Chicago

## PEER-REVIEWED ARTICLES

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"Aristotle on the Unity of the Nutritive and Reproductive Functions". Co-authored with James G. Lennox. *Phronesis* 65 (4): 414-466. 2020.

"Cosmic Democracy or Cosmic Monarchy? Empedocles in Plato's Statesman", *Polis: The Journal for Ancient Greek Political Thought* 35 (2): 418-446. 2018.

## TRANSLATIONS

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Pierre Aubenque, "The Cosmology of Prudence" (Cosmologie de la prudence). Co-translated with Khafiz Kerimov. Forthcoming in *Contemporary Encounters with Ancient Practice* (Edinburgh University Press), R. J. Johnson, A. J. Greenstine, D. Mesing eds.

## SELECTED PRESENTATIONS

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April 2022	"Aristotle on Life". Ancient Philosophy Society (APS) Zoom session, "Graduate Student Dissertation Panel". Virtual session.
February 2022	"The Unity of Aristotle's Concept of Life". Colloquium paper. American Philosophical Society (APA), Central Division Meeting. Chicago, IL.
February 2022	"Do I Exist? Exploring Selfhood with Descartes and the Buddha". Presentation at the AAPT-APA Teaching Hub Panel "Teaching Core Ideas Using Non-Canonical Texts". American Philosophical Society (APA), Central Division Meeting. Chicago, IL.
June 2021	"The Unity of Aristotle's Concept of Life". Ancient Philosophy Society (APS). Virtual conference.
April 2021	"Indian Philosophy". Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Pedagogy Panel. Center for Teaching, The University of the South; Sewanee, TN.
July 2018	"Aristotle on Material Flux and Nutritive Self-Maintenance". Collegium Phaenomenologicum 2018: "Aristotle: <i>Phusis, Psuchē, Anthrōpos</i> ", Participants' Conference. Città di Castello, Italy.
July 2017	"Is the Productive Class a Slave Class in Plato's Ideal City?" 10th Celtic Conference in Classics (CCC): "New Approaches to Plato in Context". McGill University and Université de Montréal; Montreal, Canada.
December 2016	"Something from Nothing: Aristotle's Solution to the Problem of Simple Generation". History of Philosophy Roundtable (HOPR). Loyola University Chicago; Chicago, IL.
May 2016	"The <i>Telos</i> of Living Being". World Congress: Aristotle, 2400 Years. Aristotle University of Thessaloniki; Thessaloniki, Greece.
March 2016	"Aristotle on the <i>Telos</i> of Life". Invited presentation. DePaul Graduate Student Colloquium. DePaul University; Chicago, IL.
March 2016	"Cosmic Democracy or Cosmic Monarchy? Empedocles in Plato's Statesman". History of Philosophy Roundtable (HOPR). Loyola University; Chicago, IL.
September 2015	"Hamlet's Time". Invited presentation. Book panel on Andrew Cutrofello's "All for Nothing: Hamlet's Negativity" (MIT Press, 2014). Loyola University; Chicago, IL.
April 2015	Comments on paper: "Contemporary Panpsychism in Empedocles". Ancient Philosophy Society (APS). University of Kentucky; Lexington, KY.

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**AWARDS, FELLOWSHIPS, AND GRANTS**


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February 2022	Graduate Student Stipend, Central APA Meeting 2022 (Chicago, IL).
November 2020	Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Pedagogy Grant. For course design in support of the G7 general education requirement (Encountering Perspectives: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion). The University of the South (Sewanee). Project title: "PHIL 216—Indian Philosophy".
October 2015	DUOS Research Fellowship for undergraduate mentoring during academic year 2015/16. DePaul University, Philosophy Department. Project title: "Aristotle's Natural Teleology".
October 2015	John T. Richardson Fellowship, Spring Quarter, 2015/16. DePaul University, Philosophy Department.
August 2014	MA thesis defense: pass with distinction. Loyola University Chicago, Philosophy Department. Thesis title: "The Productive Class as a Slave Class in Plato's Republic".
May 2010	"Excellence in Speaking" Prize; awarded at graduation. St. John's College; Annapolis, MD.

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**TEACHING EXPERIENCE**


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**The University of the South, Sewanee, TN**

Spring 2023	<i>Upcoming</i> : Indian Philosophy (1 Section); Business Ethics (2 Sections)
Fall 2022	Business Ethics (1 Section)
Spring 2022	Topics in Philosophy (GFWI - Writing Intensive course) (2 Sections)
Spring 2021	Indian Philosophy (1 Section)
Fall 2020	Topics in Philosophy (GFWI - Writing Intensive course) (1 Section)
Spring 2020	Topics in Philosophy (GFWI - Writing Intensive course) (1 Section)

**DePaul University, Chicago, IL**

Spring 2017	Introduction to Philosophy (1 Section)
Winter 2016	Introduction to Philosophy (2 Sections)
Fall 2016	Introduction to Philosophy (1 Section)

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**PROFESSIONAL SERVICE**


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2022—present	Referee, <i>British Journal for the History of Philosophy</i> .
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## DEPARTMENTAL SERVICE

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2015—2017	Secretary, Philosophy Graduate Student Association (PGSA), DePaul University
2013—2014	Colloquium Representative, Association for Graduate Students in Philosophy (AGSP), Loyola University Chicago
2012—2013	Secretary, Association for Graduate Students in Philosophy (AGSP), Loyola University Chicago

## CONFERENCE AND WORKSHOP ORGANIZATION

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April 22nd, 2022	Workshop Co-organizer: Ancient Philosophy Society Zoom session, "Graduate Student Dissertation Panel"
July 9th-27th, 2018	Assistant Director: Collegium Phaenomenologicum 2018, "Aristotle: <i>Phusis</i> , <i>Psuchē</i> , <i>Anthrōpos</i> "
July 7th-8th, 2018	Conference Organizer: Participants' Conference for the Collegium Phaenomenologicum: "Aristotle: <i>Phusis</i> , <i>Psuchē</i> , <i>Anthrōpos</i> "

## ADDITIONAL TRAINING

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Summer 2020	Indian Philosophy, Summer School in Ancient Philosophy, University College London
Summer 2009	Intensive Ancient Greek, University of Chicago

## LANGUAGES

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Ancient Greek (advanced reading)  
 French (advanced reading)  
 Latin (basic reading)

## PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

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American Philosophical Association (APA), Central Division  
 Ancient Philosophy Society (APS)  
 Society for Ancient Greek Philosophy (SAGP)

## REFERENCES

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Dr. Sean D. Kirkland  
 Associate Professor of Philosophy  
 DePaul University  
 skirkla1@depaul.edu

Dr. James G. Lennox  
 Professor Emeritus of History and Philosophy of Science  
 University of Pittsburgh  
 jglennox@pitt.edu

Dr. William McNeill  
 Professor of Philosophy  
 DePaul University  
 wmcneill@depaul.edu

Dr. Michael Naas  
 Professor of Philosophy  
 DePaul University  
 mnaas@depaul.edu

REFERENCE FOR TEACHING OBSERVATION:

Dr. Mark Hopwood  
 Associate Professor of Philosophy and Co-Director for the Center of Teaching  
 The University of the South  
 mshopwoo@sewanee.edu

DISSERTATION OVERVIEW: *Aristotle on the Concept of Life*

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Aristotle claims that living things are “substances most of all”, and thus places them at the center of his ontology. In fact, living things may be the *only* things that truly count as substances for Aristotle. Yet he also claims that “life” cannot be univocally defined: it is a *homonymous* term, one that does not admit of a single essence-specifying definition. Instead, it must be defined differently according to its essentially different forms (e.g., differently for plants and for animals). This poses a fundamental problem for understanding Aristotle’s concept of life, and thus for understanding his biology and ontology. A prerequisite Aristotle sets for scientific knowledge is that its object must comprise some kind of meaningful unity—but this is exactly what life’s homonymy appears to preclude. In light of its homonymy, what kind of unity can the concept of life possess (if any)? This is the *homonymy problem*, and it is the guiding question of the dissertation.

In **Chapter 1**, I show how Aristotle finds himself in the throes of this problem. Aristotle recognizes a wide diversity of living things. Aside from plants, animals, and human beings, Aristotle is committed to the existence of immortal, living gods. Not only are the Movers of the heavenly spheres (and the Prime Mover above all) considered to be alive, but also the stars and planets themselves are “ensouled” and divine. The fundamental difference in ontological status between mortal and immortal life thus poses a general problem for definition. Yet the homonymy problem is more fine-grained for Aristotle. For he claims that life means something different even between plants, animals, and human beings, such that there is no possibility for a common definition within the subcategory of mortal life. I show how this thoroughgoing commitment to homonymy is grounded in Aristotle’s essentialism. Aristotle argues that “living is being for living things”, and thus that their life comprises their essence. If living things differ in essence, then the meaning of “life” must also have corresponding differences. Nevertheless, there are passages which clearly indicate Aristotle *does* consider “life” to be a single universal and “measure” of all living things. The rest of the dissertation undertakes to show how this is possible.

In **Chapter 2**, I examine how the homonymy problem has been addressed in the commentary tradition from Plotinus to the present day. I argue that the available solutions to the homonymy problem are unsuccessful. These interpretations seek to unify the concept of life either by reference to a *core or focal case* (i.e., the Prime Mover) or by reference to a *common principle* (i.e., the soul). While Aristotle does advocate for core dependence (or focal meaning) as a solution to other, similar homonymy problems (e.g., the problem concerning the unity of “being” in the *Metaphysics*), he never claims that “life” is a core dependent

homonym, or that the Prime Mover is the core meaning of the term. In fact, the requisite form of account dependence does not obtain between the Prime Mover and all other life, and attempts to establish it on the basis of comparisons of degrees of vitality fail (due to Aristotle's principled rejection of comparisons of degree between homonyms). Other interpreters claim that a unified account of life can be given on the basis of a common principle which all living things share: the soul. I argue such accounts also fail, due to the fact that the immaterial Movers are alive, but have no souls. As such, any account which attempts to unify life by means of this common principle will fail to have adequate extension. Here I show how Aristotle considers the soul to be a form of potentiality (i.e., a functional capacity) which constitutes the substance of ensouled things. Yet in the *Metaphysics* Aristotle argues at length that the substance of the Movers is solely activity, devoid of any potentiality. As such, the life which the Movers enjoy is unconnected to soul in any way.

Nevertheless, Aristotle's approach to defining the soul illuminates the homonymy problem from a different angle. When Aristotle attempts to articulate a single, general description of the soul, he confronts the homonymy problem on a smaller scale (given that "life" means something different for each kind of ensouled life). In other words, the homonymy problem can be considered from a *global* perspective (which considers life *as a whole*, including the soulless Movers), as well as from a *local* perspective (which considers just *ensouled* life). I argue that Aristotle's solution to the local version of the homonymy problem can provide a model for a solution to the global version of that problem.

To this end, I argue in **Chapter 3** that interpreters have generally misunderstood Aristotle's approach to defining the soul. Aristotle rejects the possibility of a univocal definition of soul. If "life" is a homonym, then so too is "soul" (because soul is the principle of life in ensouled things). Given the specific causal role Aristotle envisages for form and essence in the *Metaphysics* and *Posterior Analytics*, his conception of soul as the form of the living body requires multiple different definitions of the soul which capture the unique causal role that soul plays in each form of life. Aristotle suggests scientific demonstrations can be given which express these causal definitions; I reconstruct these demonstrations in the Chapter. Finally, I show how my interpretation is confirmed by Aristotle's claim that the various types of soul are serially ordered, and thus lack a shared genus.

In **Chapter 4**, I then turn to the question of the unity of the concept of soul. If "soul" is a homonym, what kind of unity pertains to it? Against available interpretations, I argue that "soul" comprises an *analogical* unity. First I show how Aristotle portrays unity by analogy as an alternative way in which homonyms can enjoy conceptual unity. Then I examine the biological works to show how Aristotle establishes unity across differences in genera by identifying analogies between the parts and functions of animals. Finally I turn to the *Posterior Analytics* to show how this biological conception of analogy forms an important facet of Aristotle's theory of scientific demonstration and definition. Biological capacities which are shared by plants and animals (such as nutrition) have differing causal explanations according to each kind and thus do not admit of a univocal definition. Nevertheless, insofar as such capacities play the same functional role in the lives of plants and animals, they admit of analogous causal demonstrations, where the explanatory middle terms in those demonstrations are analogues. Connecting Aristotle's theory of analogy to my account of the various causal demonstrations of soul in Chapter 3, I conclude by arguing that "soul" is a perfect example of unity by analogy, where the different capacities characteristic of each type of ensouled life share a single functional role—causing life—and thus admit of explanatory unity. This lends unity to the concept of soul as a whole, and provides a compelling solution to the local homonymy problem.

In **Chapter 5**, I use that solution as a model for understanding the type of unity which belongs to life as a whole. Understanding the basis of this unity requires appreciating Aristotle's overarching ontology of life. Just as the soul admits of a single "common account" which is posed as a certain *modal structure* (i.e., a relationship between activity, fulfillment, and potentiality), Aristotle also characterizes life as a modal structure. Here I show how distinctions drawn in the *Protrepticus* inform his characterizations of life across the corpus. "Life" is meant in two ways: according to activity (*kat' energeian*) and according to capacity (*kata dunamin*), with the former being the conceptually primary meaning. I then turn to *Metaphysics* Book © to illustrate Aristotle's robust ontological analysis of life as activity. The activity of life is *identity-realizing*: it makes each living thing the kind of thing it is. This is why Aristotle argues in *Meta.* ©.8

that such activity constitutes the form and substance of living things. Living is thus the *self-constituting* activity by virtue of which living things have identity and being. I show how this characterization of life as a modal structure can accommodate *all* forms of life (both mortal and immortal) while also setting clear criteria for distinguishing living from nonliving things. Nevertheless, the account of life's modal structure respects life's homonymy: it does not specify the *essence* of life, but rather the *ontological framework* which any specific essence will necessarily inhabit. To conclude, I argue that the unity of the concept of life is guaranteed by this underlying ontology. The identity-realizing function of living provides the basis for a rigorous analogy between plants, animals, human beings, stars, and gods. In this way, Aristotle offers us a compelling solution to the homonymy problem concerning "life".