Milan Mossé

mmosse19.github.io

Education

2026 (expected)	**Ph.D.**, Philosophy, UC Berkeley Committee: Johann Frick (co-chair), R. Jay Wallace (co-chair), Anna Stilz
2024	**M.S.**, Computer Science, Stanford Research supervisors: Thomas Icard, Omer Reingold, Li-Yang Tan
2020	**B.A.** Philosophy (Honors), **B.S.** Math, Stanford Thesis advisors: Michael Bratman, Barry Maguire

Areas

Specialization: Ethics (Practical Ethics; Normative Ethics; Metaethics) and Political Philosophy
Competence: Action, Language, Logic, Race, Science

Dissertation: Reasons by Request

Requesters seem to have what is, on reflection, a remarkable power: to create reasons at will. My dissertation explores this central but overlooked dimension of our normative lives. How can requesters give us reasons to do what they want, even when they stand in no relation of authority over us? And what would be lost if we saw requests as devices for communicating the existence of pre-existing reasons, rather than creating new ones? I explain how requests create reasons and how the values served by the power to request constrain its permissible use. In characterizing the valuable relationships sustained by requests, my dissertation develops a view of reciprocity that sheds new light on a wide range of further issues, including the morality of markets, duties of fairness, distributive justice, and our reasons to care about future generations.

Peer-reviewed publications   G Google Scholar ꘨PhilPapers

2026 Stable Voting and the Splitting of Cycles
Association for the Advancement of Artificial Intelligence // Wesley H. Holliday, Milan Mossé, Chase Norman, Eric Pacuit, Cynthia Wang

2025 How to Count Sore Throats
Analysis // Léa Bourguignon, Milan Mossé

2024 On Probabilistic and Causal Reasoning with Summation Operators
Journal of Logic and Computation // Duligur Ibeling, Thomas Icard, Milan Mossé

2024 Social Choice for AI Alignment: Dealing with Diverse Human Feedback
International Conference on Machine Learning // Vincent Conitzer, Rachel Freedman, Jobst Heitzig, Wesley Holliday, Bob Jacobs, Nathan Lambert, Milan Mossé, Eric Pacuit, Stuart Russell, Hailey Schoelkopf, Emanuel Tewolde, William Zwicker

2023 Probing the Quantitative-Qualitative Divide in Probabilistic Reasoning
Annals of Pure and Applied Logic // Duligur Ibeling, Thomas Icard, Krzysztof Mierzewski, Milan Mossé

2023 Multiplicative Metric Fairness Under Composition
Foundations of Responsible Computing // Milan Mossé

2022 Is Causal Reasoning Harder than Probabilistic Reasoning?
Review of Symbolic Logic // Milan Mossé, Duligur Ibeling, Thomas Icard

2022 A Generalization of the Satisfiability Coding Lemma and Its Applications
International Conference on Theory and Applications of Satisfiability Testing // Milan Mossé, Harry Sha, Li-Yang Tan (Best Theory Paper Award)

2021 Conditional Negative Sampling for Contrastive Learning of Visual Representations
International Conference on Machine Learning // Mike Wu, Milan Mossé, Chengxu Zhuang, Daniel Yamins, Noah Goodman

2019 Zero Shot Learning for Code Education: Rubric Sampling with Deep Learning Inference
Association for the Advancement of Artificial Intelligence // Mike Wu, Milan Mossé, Noah Goodman, Chris Piech (Outstanding Student Paper Award)

Revise and resubmit

⊕ Why Not Ask? (former title: "The Requesting-Offering Asymmetry")
Ethics

⊕ How Requests Create Reasons
Philosophy & Phenomenological Research

Under review

⊕ Two Kinds of Reciprocity

⊕ Modeling Discrimination with Causal Abstraction
Milan Mossé, Kara Schechtman, Frederick Eberhardt, Thomas Icard

⊕ Individualist Moral Theory and Its Limits
Léa Bourguignon, Jonas Harney, Milan Mossé

Awards & fellowships

2024-25	Fellowship from the Kavli Center for Ethics, Science, and the Public, UC Berkeley
2025	Dissertation Completion Fellowship, UC Berkeley
2023	Outstanding GSI Award (awarded to fewer than 10% of TAs), UC Berkeley
2020	Cota Robles Fellowship, UC Berkeley
2019	Major Grant, Stanford
2017-19	Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellow, Stanford

2017   Chappell-Lougee Scholarship, Stanford

Selected presentations

Modeling Discrimination with Causal Abstraction
2026   To Be or Not to Be Included in a Causal Model, University of Pittsburgh
2026   Departmental Talk, University of Michigan
2025   Departmental Talk, Emory University*
2024   CEPDISC, Aarhus University
2024   Stanford Logic Seminar*

How Questions Structure Plans (with Seth Yalcin)
2026   Eastern APA Symposium*

How Requests Create Reasons
2026   Eastern APA Symposium

Individualism and Its Limits
2025   Workshop on Moral Aggregation, University of Manchester

Equality and Alienation
2025   Political Philosophy Workshop, UC Berkeley

Treating Others Merely as Ends
2025   Rocky Mountain Philosophy Conference, University of Colorado Boulder

Reasoning about Confirmation
2025   Probability Logic Workshop, Carnegie Mellon University

Why Not Ask? (formerly "The Requesting-Offering Asymmetry")
2025   Central APA Symposium
2024   Rocky Mountain Ethics Congress, University of Colorado Boulder

Care as Respecting a Sensibility
2024   Workshop on Care and Love, Harvard University

Conditional Intention Ascriptions
2024   Agency and Intentions in Language, Harvey Mudd College

Modeling Structural Injustice
2023   Stanford Logic Seminar*

How to Count Sore Throats
2023   LSE Choice Group*

*invited; all others via application

Graduate coursework

University of California, Berkeley

Fall 2025   Philosophy of Language, with Seth Yalcin*
Spr 2025   Ethics and Time, with Johann Frick*

Fall 2024	Disagreement, with Joshua Cohen & Véronique Munoz-Dardé*
2022-23	**Qualifying Exams**
	Hume's Sentimentalism, with Olivia Bailey
	Contractualism, with R. Jay Wallace
	Question-Sensitivity, with Seth Yalcin
Spr 2022	Individual, Social, and Ethical Choice, with Wesley Holliday
Spr 2022	Thought, Character, and Action in Aristotle, with Tim Clarke
Fall 2021	Ethical Theories, with R. Jay Wallace
Fall 2021	The Common Ground, with John MacFarlane & Seth Yalcin
Spr 2021	Hume, with Olivia Bailey
Spr 2021	Pragmatism, with Shamik Dasgupta
Fall 2020	Feminist Epistemology, with Andreja Novakovic
Fall 2020	Evolutionary & Developmental Perspectives on Morality, with Jan Engelmann & R. Jay Wallace
Fall 2020	Property, with Joshua Cohen & Desmond Jagmohan
Fall 2020	Proseminar, with John Campbell & Hannah Ginsborg

Stanford University

Spr 2024	Artificial Intelligence: Principles and Techniques, with Nima Anari, Moses Charikar, and Sanmi Koyejo
Spr 2024	The Ethical Analyst, with Dale Nesbitt
Spr 2023	Decision Theory and Planning Agency, with Thomas Icard & Michael Bratman*
Fall 2020	Research Seminar in Complexity Theory, with Li-Yang Tan
Spr 2020	Complexity Theory II, with Li-Yang Tan
Win 2020	Complexity Theory, with Li-Yang Tan
Win 2020	Optimization and Algorithmic Paradigms, with Moses Charikar
Win 2020	Theory of Probability II (Statistics PhD Sequence), with Amir Dembo
Fall 2019	Theory of Probability I (Statistics PhD Sequence), with Andrea Montanari
Fall 2019	Research Seminar on Logic and Formal Philosophy, with Thomas Icard
Spr 2019	Topics in Logic, Information, and Agency, with Johan van Benthem & Thomas Icard
Spr 2019	Topics in Aesthetics, with Kendall Walton
Spr 2019	Topics in Combinatorics, with Jacob Fox
Win 2019	Algebraic Error Correcting Codes, with Mary Wootters
Spr 2018	Planning, Time, and Rationality, with Michael Bratman

*audited; all others for credit

Teaching

University of California, Berkeley

Fall 2025	TA, Philosophy of Science, with Ezra Rubenstein
Fall 2024	TA, Political Philosophy: Equality and Identity, with Véronique Munoz-Dardé
Sum 2024	Co-Instructor, Individual Morality and Social Justice, with Russell McIntosh
Fall 2023	TA, Political Philosophy, with Véronique Munoz-Dardé

Sum 2023	TA, Contemporary Ethical Issues, with Tim Crockett
Fall 2022	TA, Bioethics, with Johann Frick
Sum 2022	TA, Philosophy of Race, Ethnicity, and Citizenship, with Tim Crockett
Spr 2022	TA, Individual Morality and Social Justice, with Johann Frick
Fall 2021	TA, Nature of Mind, with John Campbell

Stanford University

Spr 2024	TA, Incentives in Computer Science, with Aviad Rubenstein
Sum 2020	TA, Design and Analysis of Algorithms, with Karey Shi
Win 2020	TA, Design and Analysis of Algorithms, with Mary Wootters
Win 2018	TA, Programming Abstractions, with Marty Stepp
Fall 2018	TA, Programming Methodology, with Mehran Sahami

Service

Diversity, equity, and inclusion

AY 2021-22, 2024-25	Graduate Representative, Equity Task Force; Focus on Trans Inclusion
AY 2021-22, 2023-24	Co-Organizer, Minorities and Philosophy
Fall 2022	Co-Organizer, COMPASS Workshop
Spr 2021	Un-Naming Proposal Co-Author, Moses Hall Name Review Committee

Other organizing, chairing, and refereeing

Fall 2025	Co-Organizer, MANCEPT Limited Aggregation Workshop
Spr 2022, 2023, 2025	Founder, Co-Organizer, & Mentor, Directed Reading Program
AY 2020-21, 2023-2024	Organizer, Graduate Work-in-Progress Talks
Spr 2023	Grad Organizer, Social Choice for AI Ethics & Safety Workshop
AY 2022-23	Grad Organizer, Department Colloquia
Spr 2021/2023, AY 2023-24	Organizer, Faculty Work-in-Progress Talks
Spr 2022	Organizer, Latin American Philosophy Reading Group
AY 2021-22	Organizer, Feminism and Masculinity Reading Group
Chair (selected)	Rocky Mountain Ethics Congress (2024); Central APA (2025); Arizona Workshop in Normative Ethics (invitation by submitted abstract)
Referee	Computational Complexity Conference (CCC); Conference on Neural Information Processing Systems (NeurIPS; ×5); International Conference on Machine Learning (ICML; ×5), International Colloquium on Automata, Languages and Programming (ICALP); International Symposium on Algorithms and Computation (ISAAC); Journal of Moral Philosophy (×5); Logic Journal of the IGPL (×3); Philosophical Studies (×2); Philosophy; Philosophy & Technology; Utilitas

Skills

Languages: Spanish (professional proficiency) and German (reading)
Coding: C, C++, Python

References

Thomas F. Icard
C. I. Lewis Professor of Philosophy and (by courtesy) Professor of Computer Science
Stanford University
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Johann Frick
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Véronique Munoz-Dardé (teaching reference)
Professor of Philosophy
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Reasons by Request
Dissertation Summary

You are not required to stop and aid every stranger lost in the subway. Upon seeing one, you might cite your discretion to defer assistance for another occasion, thinking to yourself, "I will help the next time I see someone in their shoes." But this thought rings hollow when the lost stranger *requests* your guidance. Your normative situation has changed, and you must now give a reason for not helping in this particular case, or else provide assistance. Requesters have what is, on reflection, a remarkable power: to create reasons at will. The central puzzle of requests is to explain how this is possible. What accounts for the ability of requesters to create reasons for others in this way, even in cases in which they do not stand in any special relation of authority over the requestee?

My dissertation begins by answering this question. At the center of my account is the idea that we have reasons to grant requests because doing so improves our compliance with *imperfect duties*—duties that grant us significant discretion to decide how to comply. Anytime you can help a stranger, you can also think to yourself that you will help next time, and we are correspondingly liable to fall short of our imperfect duties to help others. As a result, it is valuable for you to accept that the lost stranger's request prevents you from just citing your generic interest in discretion, by providing a reason for compliance in this particular case. Just as religious traditions improve compliance with imperfect duties to give to charities by establishing regular times and recipients for donations, requests improve compliance with imperfect duties more generally.

My account does not appeal to *pre-existing*, *intimate* relationships between the requester and the requestee. How do the values served by the power to request constrain its permissible use, given that we wield this power at will over perfect strangers? What do we owe to the recipients of our requests? I approach these questions by way of an asymmetry between requests and offers: it is often not okay to request an act, but perfectly fine to accept an offer for it. What might explain this? After all, the request and offer result in the same duty upon their acceptance, and they concern the same act. My second chapter argues that some requests are wrongful *precisely because they create reasons*. Creating a reason often generates a double-bind for the requestee: if they act as requested, they pay the practical cost of doing so; if they do not, they pay a moral cost, in the form of a reason for regret. While this double-bind does not always make requests wrongful, I show how it can be intrusive, exploitative, and coercive. Offers do not create the same double-bind, I argue, because offers do not as such create reasons.

Even if requests do not generally invoke antecedent relationships, they create reasons which incentivize us to develop them. Prior work models these relationships in terms of *material* reciprocity: the mutual exchange of benefits. I argue that requests are not just efficient vehicles for exchanging benefits, but can function to develop intrinsically valuable relationships. They thereby sustain *relational* reciprocity, which is realized when we share responsibility for deepening the value of a relationship. My third chapter defends the distinction between material and relational reciprocity and argues that it sheds new light on a wide range of further issues, including the morality of markets, duties of fairness, distributive justice, and our reasons to care about future generations.