

ALIYAR OZERCAN

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RESEARCH PROFILE

My research concerns the representational foundations of mind: what formats and structures cognitive capacities minimally require, and what evidence warrants attributing them. This unifies two research programs. At the intersection of philosophy of cognitive science, philosophy of psychology, and developmental science, I develop mechanistic accounts of early social cognition. I argue that affective appraisal, factive access-tracking, and relational control can explain infant mindreading, deception, and helping without presupposing belief representation. Combining philosophical analysis, formal modeling, and empirical evidence, this work generates discriminating predictions for developmental research. In philosophy of mind, epistemology, and philosophy of language, I extend this approach to inquiry, curiosity, assertion, epistemic commitment, and object-directed attitudes, asking how minds represent unknown or objectual targets and how representational modes structure epistemic engagement.

AREAS OF SPECIALIZATION AND COMPETENCE

AOS: Philosophy of Cognitive Science; Philosophy of Psychology; Philosophy of Mind

AOC: Epistemology; Philosophy of Language; Logic; Cognitive Neuroscience; Neurobiology of Language.

EDUCATION

University of Connecticut (UConn) <i>Ph.D. in Philosophy</i> • Dissertation: “The Sub-Theories of Mind” • Chair: William G. Lycan; Committee: Jonathan Phillips, Mitchell Green, Richard Moore	2018 – 2025 <i>Storrs, CT</i>
University of Connecticut (UConn) <i>Graduate Certificates (Ph.D. Minors)</i> • Neurobiology of Language • Cognitive Science • Logic	2019 – 2025 <i>Storrs, CT</i>
University of Connecticut (UConn) <i>M.A. in Philosophy</i>	2018 – 2020 <i>Storrs, CT</i>
Middle East Technical University (METU) <i>M.A. in Philosophy</i> • Thesis: “The Maxims of Relevance Theory for Determining the Referent of a Proper Name” • Chair: Teo Grünberg; Committee: David Grünberg, Sandy Berkovski	2013 – 2016 <i>Ankara, Turkey</i>
Middle East Technical University (METU) <i>B.A. in Philosophy</i>	2009 – 2013 <i>Ankara, Turkey</i>

PUBLICATIONS

Journal Articles

- 1. The Puzzle of Early Deception: Lying Before Belief Representation** (Forthcoming in *Cognition*)
Philosophy of Cognitive Science, Developmental Psychology, Philosophy of Mind
 - Argues that early deception relies on access-gated, factive tracking rather than belief manipulation: selective denials precede belief-content reasoning, supporting an alternative to belief-first and association-only accounts.
- 2. Representation of the Unknown: A Theory of Indefinite Targeting** (*Synthese*, 2026)
Epistemology, Philosophy of Mind, Philosophy of Science [doi:10.1007/s11229-026-05541-w](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11229-026-05541-w)
 - Introduces “indefinite targeting,” a flexible representational format that explains how inquiry can remain directed through radical misdescription, null results, and non-unique outcomes.

Books & Edited Volumes

1. *Language, Logic, and Empirical Knowledge: Collected Papers of Teo Grünberg (1965–2005)* (2017)
Co-edited with D. Grünberg; METU Press Ankara, Turkey
2. *Symbolic Logic Manual* (2014)
METU Press Ankara, Turkey

REVISE AND RESUBMIT

1. **Emotion-First Mindreading in Infancy: A Theory of Emotion** (R&R at *Mind & Language*)
Philosophy of Mind, Developmental Psychology, Cognitive Science
 - Argues that mindreading begins with a domain-specific “Theory of Emotion”: a developmental ladder from affective resonance to practical metarepresentation, integrating evidence from comforting, social referencing, and early humor, and proposing a three-condition operational standard for testing emotion attribution in preverbal infants.
2. **Emotion Reading as Mindreading in Infancy: A Complexity-Cost Criterion** (R&R at *New Ideas in Psychology*)
Philosophy of Psychology, Developmental Cognitive Science, Infant Social Cognition
 - Develops a complexity-cost criterion for identifying belief-independent infant mindreading and applies it to emotion–goal conflict, convergent comforting, and active probing, deriving explicit falsifiers and prospective study-quality constraints.
3. **Proto-Social Cognition: A Relational Framework for Infant Sociality** (R&R at *Cognitive Development*)
Cognitive Science, Developmental Psychology, Philosophy of Mind
 - Argues that infants’ earliest social system is a relational controller for live interaction, not mental-state inference; explains contingency, integration, and generalization, and predicts a coordinative-action anticipation advantage and re-engagement bids scaled to a partner’s perceptual access.
4. **Two Curiosities, Not One** (R&R at *Analysis*)
Epistemology, Philosophy of Mind, Cognitive Science
 - Argues that topic-curiosity and episodic curiosity are distinct inquiring attitudes, satisfied by structural adequacy versus gap-closure; rejects the iteration and master-question reductions and grounds the bifurcation in developmental evidence that episodic curiosity operates before cross-episode integration emerges.

UNDER REVIEW

1. **Helping Without Beliefs: Teleological Alignment in Early Instrumental Helping** (Under review)
Developmental Psychology, Philosophy of Mind, Cognitive Science
 - Argues that the canonical toddler helping profile (selectivity, targeting, efficiency) can be generated by a belief-free predictive control architecture, *Teleological Alignment*, on which helping is completion-based repair triggered by mismatch between publicly recoverable goal structure and observed action, without presupposing belief attribution, moral concern, or shared commitment.
2. **Finding Enough: From Candidate Answers to Accepted Facts** (Under review)
Epistemology, Philosophy of Science, Decision Theory
 - Develops an account of “finding enough” as the transition by which an agent treats a candidate answer as sufficient for the next step in inquiry, and offers a decision-theoretic framework for choosing whether to wait, seek further evidence, proceed provisionally, or move on.
3. **Pointing as Adaptive Social Regulation** (Under review)
Philosophy of Mind, Cognitive Development, Minimal Cognition
 - Argues that infant pointing is best explained as a minimal regulatory architecture for managing another agent’s attention: richer than conditioned association, leaner than propositional mindreading, and capable of explaining partner-sensitivity, communicative repair, and the imperative/declarative profile.

4. The Strength of Assertion Is Two-Dimensional

(Under review)

Philosophy of Language, Epistemology, Linguistics

- Argues that assertoric strength varies along two independent dimensions, commitment to p and public liability for warrant, using English epistemic *must* and the Turkish evidential *-mİş* to show the two come apart and to reorganize the norm-of-assertion debate.

PAPERS IN PREPARATION

1. The Attitude-Side of Objectual Intentionality

(In preparation)

Philosophy of Mind, Philosophy of Language, Philosophy of Emotion

- Argues that a restricted family of objectual attitudes (fear of the dog, anger at Anna) are *target-mode* states: the target anchors directedness while the mode fixes aptness conditions, motivational profile, and salience; distinguishes them from propositional attitudes by factorability rather than by mode, completing the attitude-side account objectualism lacks.

ACADEMIC AFFILIATIONS, VISITING POSITIONS, AND ADDITIONAL TRAINING

Institute for the Brain and Cognitive Sciences (IBACS)

2021 – present

Affiliated Researcher

Storrs, CT

Expression, Communication, and Origins of Meaning (ECOM) Research Group

2018 – present

Affiliated Researcher; Research Group Manager (2018 – 2024)

Storrs, CT

Boğaziçi University

2016 – 2018

Ph.D. Coursework in Philosophy; transferred to UConn

Istanbul, Türkiye

University of California, Davis

2015 – 2016

Visiting Scholar in Philosophy

Davis, CA

Harvard University

2011

Graduate Coursework and Research

Cambridge, MA

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

Research Group Manager

2018 – 2024

University of Connecticut, Expression, Communication, and Origins of Meaning (ECOM)

Storrs, CT

- Co-organized ten international, interdisciplinary conferences connecting philosophy, linguistics, psychology, and neuroscience. Keynote speakers included:
 - *Expression, Language, Music 2* (2024): Ani Patel; Paul Boghossian; Philippe Schlenker
 - *Kinds of Consciousness* (2024): Jonathan Birch; Elizabeth Schechter
 - *Millikanfest* (2023): François Recanati; David Papineau; Robyn Carston; Josh Armstrong; Dan Dennett
 - *Kinds of Action* (2023): Lucy O'Brien; John Schwenkler
 - *Expression, Language, Music* (2022): Tecumseh Fitch; Kathleen Higgins; Ray Jackendoff; Jerrold Levinson; Isabelle Peretz
 - *Expression, Language, Music* (scheduled 2021; postponed to 2022)
 - *Kinds of Mindreading* (2021): Jonathan Phillips; Helen Tager-Flusberg
 - *Kinds of Knowledge* (2020): Alex Byrne; Kristin Andrews
 - *Communication, Context, Conversation* (2019): Robyn Carston; Danielle Matthews; Mandy Simons
- Hosted and facilitated 55 invited talks; coordinated speaker series, schedules, publicity, and post-talk research networking across departments.
 - Invited speakers included William Snyder; Letty Naigles; Robyn Carston; Disa Sauter; Ani Patel; Peter Gärdenfors; Richard Moore; Jonathan Prather; Crispin Wright; Emily Myers; Peter Langland-Hassan; Cameron Buckner; Jill de Villiers; and others.
- Secured internal and external funding through grant writing and resource coordination; managed budgets and reporting for ECOM events.

IBACS Fellowship on NIH and NSF Grants

2022

IBACS (Institute for the Brain and Cognitive Sciences)

Storrs, CT

- Awarded a \$5,000 competitive fellowship for graduate research in Brain and Cognitive Sciences.
- Completed an intensive multi-week grant-writing workshop focused on NIH F31 and F32 proposals; drafted Specific Aims and core research sections with faculty feedback.
- Served on a mock NIH review panel to score and discuss proposals; gained practical insight into NSF GRFP and NRSA processes.

Research Assistant in Neuroimaging

2019 – 2021

IBACS (Institute for the Brain and Cognitive Sciences) and BIRC (Brain Imaging Research Center)

Storrs, CT

- Managed and preprocessed multimodal neuroimaging data, including fMRI and EEG, using BIDS apps and preprocessing pipelines (fMRIPrep, XCP Engine).
- Performed quality control and motion correction; slice timing correction; coregistration; normalization; spatial smoothing.
- Analyzed task-based and resting-state fMRI data using FSL (FEAT) and AFNI; conducted ROI and whole-brain analyses; integrated FreeSurfer-based anatomy.
- Computed connectivity metrics (seed-based correlation, ICA, ALFF) and network-level interactions across subjects; contributed to multivariate analyses for cognitive and clinical projects.
- Programmed cognitive tasks for fMRI and EEG using PsychoPy and Python for adult and clinical populations.
- Developed reusable documentation and Python scripts for automated analysis pipelines and lab-wide task deployment.
- Trained in MRI and EEG hardware operation, safety protocols, and participant preparation; supported scanner bookings, stimulus setup, and troubleshooting.

Research Assistant

2014 – 2016

METU, Laboratory for Computational Ontology

Ankara, Turkey

- Contributed to the project “In Pursuit of the Missing Premise,” investigating foundational gaps in theoretical models of reasoning.
- Translated philosophical accounts of agency into formal, computable models of agent-based reasoning: specified an ontology for agents, actions, goals, and epistemic constraints; defined class hierarchies and relational schemas; created test queries to probe inferences, defeaters, and exception handling.
- Bridged theory to implementation by developing rule- and belief-update procedures; wrote formal specifications that informed prototype computational agent design.

INVITED TALKS

“Propositional Minds,” Department of Philosophy Colloquium, University of Connecticut, Storrs, CT, February 2024

“Sub-Theories of Mind,” Cognitive Science Research Club, Middle East Technical University, Ankara, Turkey, December 2023

“Sub-Theories of Mind,” Department of Psychology Seminar, Bilkent University, Ankara, Turkey, December 2023

“How to Beat Dr. Frankenstein?,” Institute for the Brain and Cognitive Sciences (IBACS), University of Connecticut, Storrs, CT, October 2020

“Evidentiality and Its Challenge to Propositional Theories,” Boğaziçi Linguistics Circle, Boğaziçi University, Istanbul, Turkey, December 2019

“Indexicality of Proper Names,” Altmann Lab Talk, University of Connecticut, Storrs, CT, September 2019

PRESENTATIONS

“Representations, Descriptions, and Propositional Attitudes in Animals” at International Society for the Philosophy of the Sciences of the Mind (ISPSM), December 2023

“XII Edition Workshop of Philosophy of Biology & Cognitive Sciences,” November 2023, University of Málaga, Spain

“Sub-Theories of Mind,” November 2023, University of Connecticut, Storrs, CT

“Representations, Descriptions, and Propositional Attitudes in Animals” at 14th Annual Northwestern/Notre Dame Graduate Epistemology Conference, May 2023, Northwestern University, Illinois

“Third-Person to First-Person: Understanding Others’ Mental States” at First-Person Science of Consciousness Conference, May 2023, Witten/Herdecke University, Germany

“Descriptions, Representations, and Prepositional Attitudes in Animals,” 73rd New Mexico-Texas Philosophical Society Meeting, University of Texas at El Paso, El Paso, Texas, April 2023

“Why would you say that?” October 2022, University of Connecticut, Storrs, CT

“How to satisfy your curiosity?” May 2022, IHPST Graduate Conference, University of Toronto, Toronto, Canada

“How to satisfy your curiosity?” April 2022, University of Connecticut, Storrs, CT

“Evidentiality and Its Challenge to Propositional Theories,” December 2020, University of Connecticut, Storrs, CT

“Animal Curiosity,” October 2019, Bleen Conference, University of Connecticut, Storrs, CT

“Bir Hatanın Peşinde” (In Pursuit of a Mistake) December 2017, 2nd METU Philosophy Graduate Students Conference, METU, Ankara, Turkey

“Dinleyici İçin Kurallar” (The Maxims of the Audience) May 2016, 1st METU Philosophy Graduate Students Conference, METU, Ankara, Turkey

“In Pursuit of the Missing Premise,” co-authored with O. Akçelik, September 2015, British Logic Colloquium, Cambridge University, Cambridge, UK

AWARDS, FELLOWSHIPS, AND GRANTS

UConn Doctoral Fellowships (3 awards; total \$4,750)	2019, 2023
ELM Fellowships (3 awards; total \$4,600)	2020, 2022, 2023
ECOM Research Fellowships (4 awards; total \$4,500)	2019 – 2023
UConn Conference Award (\$2,000)	2023
UConn Doctoral Dissertation Fellowship (\$2,500)	2022
IBACS and BIRC Fellowships (3 awards; total \$15,000)	2020 – 2022
Provost’s Teaching Excellence Award	2019
Visiting Research Grant to UC Davis (\$5,000)	2015
Laboratory for Computational Ontology Research Grant (\$1,000)	2015
Akbank Research Project Contest Winner (\$100,000)	2012

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Principal Instructor (17 sections)

Neuropsychology 4 sections <i>Phillips Academy Andover</i>	Summer 2022, 2023, 2024
Social Psychology 2 sections <i>Phillips Academy Andover</i>	Summer 2022 and 2024
Philosophy and Logic 1 section <i>UConn Stamford</i>	Spring 2024
Philosophy and Social Ethics 5 sections <i>UConn Storrs; UConn Hartford; UConn Waterbury</i>	2020 – 2023
• Sections taught: Waterbury (Fall 2023), Hartford (Spring 2023), Storrs (Summer 2021, Summer 2020).	
Problems of Philosophy 4 sections <i>UConn Storrs; UConn Hartford; UConn Waterbury</i>	2021 – 2022
• Sections taught: Waterbury (Fall 2022, Fall 2021), Storrs (Summer 2022), Hartford (Spring 2022).	
History of Science 1 section <i>Bartın University (Turkey)</i>	2017

Teaching Assistant (18 sections)

Philosophy and Logic 2 sections <i>UConn Storrs</i>	Spring 2019
Problems of Philosophy 4 sections <i>UConn Storrs</i>	Fall 2018
Introduction to Logic 2 sections <i>Bartın University (Turkey)</i>	Fall 2017
Logic I 2 sections <i>Bartın University (Turkey)</i>	Fall 2017
Logic II 2 sections <i>Bartın University (Turkey)</i>	Spring 2018
Modern Logic II 2 sections <i>METU (Turkey)</i>	Fall 2014 and 2015
Modern Logic I 2 sections <i>METU (Turkey)</i>	Spring 2013 and 2014
Introduction to Logic 2 sections <i>METU (Turkey)</i>	Fall 2012 and 2013

TECHNICAL SKILLS

Programming: Python

Developer Tools: Git; Docker; Visual Studio Code

Neuroimaging & Experimental: PsychoPy; BIDS Apps (fMRIPrep, MRIQC, XCP Engine); FSL; AFNI; FreeSurfer

Analysis & Modeling: GLM; functional connectivity (seed-based correlation, ICA, ALFF); mixed-effects group analysis; task design for fMRI and EEG

Learning Management Systems (LMS): Canvas; Blackboard

REFERENCES

William (Bill) G. Lycan, Professor

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