

Alexander Williams Tolbert

Assistant Professor of Data and Decision Sciences, Emory University
Secondary Appointments: Philosophy, Computer Science, African American Studies
Faculty Fellow, Emory Center for Ethics; Affiliate, Center for Mind, Brain, and Culture
alexander.tolbert@emory.edu | +1 (470) 547-2185

EDUCATION

PhD in Philosophy, University of Pennsylvania, 2019–2023. Advisors: Michael Kearns, Quayshawn Spencer, Anita Allen. Committee: Samuel Freeman, Aaron Roth, Scott Weinstein
M.A. in Statistics, Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania, 2019–2023
M.S. in Biochemistry, Virginia Tech, 2017–2019
M.A. in Philosophy, Virginia Tech, 2017–2019
B.S. in Biology, University of Mobile, 2009–2013

ACADEMIC APPOINTMENTS

Assistant Professor (2024–present), Department of Data and Decision Sciences, Emory University
Postdoctoral Researcher (2023–2024), Emory University
Visiting Graduate Scholar (2020), CUNY Graduate Center (Supervisor: Charles Mills)

AREAS OF SPECIALIZATION

Philosophy of Science, Machine Learning, Causal Inference, Philosophy, Politics, and Economics (PPE)

PUBLICATIONS

Peer-Reviewed Articles

Tolbert, A. W. (2026). Is AI ethics about AI? *Philosophical Studies*, 1–41. doi:10.1007/s11098-026-02533-x

Clay-Gilmore, M. J., Fryer, D., Peebles, I. S., Richardson, L., Taylor, M. R., Jr., Tolbert, A. W., Underwood, D., II, Washington, Y., Wiggleton-Little, J., & Wilson, A. (2026). Contemporary issues in Black philosophy [Special issue introduction]. *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 63(2), 111–117. doi:10.5406/21521123.63.2.01

Tolbert, A. W. (forthcoming). Race as a statistical regime. *Journal of Causal Inference*.

Bouyamourn, A., & Tolbert, A. W. (2026). Escaping the subprime trap in algorithmic lending. *Proceedings of the 7th Symposium on Foundations of Responsible Computing (FORC 2026)*. doi:10.4230/LIPIcs.FORC.2026.6

Tolbert, A. W., Huang, J., & Lu, J. (2026). Causal feature learning in the social sciences. *Proceedings of the ACM Conference on Equity and Access in Algorithms, Mechanisms, and Optimization (EAAMO 2026)*. arXiv:2503.12784

Blum, A., Diana, E., Ravichandran, K., & Tolbert, A. W. (2026). A theoretical model for grit in pursuing ambitious ends. *Proceedings of the AAAI Conference on Artificial Intelligence*. arXiv:2503.02952

Tolbert, A. W. (2026). The racial algorithm: AI and scientific legitimacy under the racial contract. *Critical Philosophy of Race*, 14(1), 126. Publisher

Tolbert, A. W., & Smith, B. (2025). The problem of generics in LLM training. *Proceedings of the 2025 ACM Conference on Fairness, Accountability, and Transparency*, 1275–1280. doi:10.1145/3715275.3732085

Behzad, T., Casacuberta, S., Diana, E. R., & Tolbert, A. W. (2025). Reconciling predictive multiplicity in practice. *Proceedings of the 2025 ACM Conference on Fairness, Accountability, and Transparency*, 3350–3369. doi:10.1145/3715275.3732216

Shukla, P., Chinchure, A., Diana, E., Tolbert, A. W., Hosanagar, K., Balasubramanian, V. N., Sigal, L., & Turk, M. A. (2025). Mitigate one, skew another? Tackling intersectional biases in text-to-image models. *Findings of the*

- Tolbert, A. W. (2025). An epistemic argument for reparations: A solution to the problem of social stratification in causal modeling [Published online 18 April 2025]. *Synthese*, 205(179). doi:10.1007/s11229-024-04901-8
- Tolbert, A. W. (2025). Restricted racial realism: Heterogeneous effects and the instability of race in social science. *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, 55(2), 146–164. doi:10.1177/00483931241299884
- Tolbert, A. W. (2025). Why causal inference is necessary for algorithmic fairness [Published online 10 September 2025]. *Synthese*, 206(162). doi:10.1007/s11229-025-05044-0
- Roth, A., & Tolbert, A. W. (2025). Resolving the reference class problem at scale. *Philosophy of Science*, 1–15. doi:10.1017/psa.2025.17
- Tolbert, A. W. (2024). Causal agnosticism about race: Variable selection problems in causal inference. *Philosophy of Science*, 91(5), 1098–1108. doi:10.1017/psa.2023.166
- Diana, E., Tolbert, A. W., Ravichandran, K., & Blum, A. (2025). Pessimism traps and algorithmic interventions. 6th Symposium on Foundations of Responsible Computing (FORC 2025), 329, 5:1–5:19. doi:10.4230/LIPIcs.FORC.2025.5
- Tolbert, A. W. (2026). Correcting underrepresentation and intersectional bias in machine learning. *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 63(2), 183. Publisher
- Roth, A., Tolbert, A. W., & Weinstein, S. (2023). Reconciling individual probability forecasts. *Proceedings of the 2023 ACM Conference on Fairness, Accountability, and Transparency*, 101–110. doi:10.1145/3593013.3593980

Book Chapters

- Tolbert, A. W. (2026). Algorithmic abolitionism and the racial algorithm [Invited contribution]. In K. C. Elliott & T. Richards (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of values and science*. Routledge. doi:10.4324/9781003469100-27

SELECTED TALKS AND PRESENTATIONS

Conferences

- Pacific APA, 2025 – Pessimism Traps and a Theoretical Model of Grit
- SWEET Conference, Florida, 2025 – Theoretical Model of Grit
- PPE Colloquium, Buffalo, 2024 – Causal Agnosticism About Race
- PhilML'24, Tübingen, 2024 – Causal Agnosticism About Race
- PSA Biennial Meeting, 2022 – Causal Race Agnosticism
- PSA Biennial Meeting, 2021 – Against Predictive Invariance
- APA Pacific Division, 2021 – Causation and Algorithmic Fairness
- APA Eastern Division, 2021 – Causation and Algorithmic Fairness
- BIAS Conference, 2021 – Against Predictive Invariance

Colloquia and Invited Talks

- AI Symposium, Morgan State, 2025 – Pessimism Traps and a Theoretical Model of Grit
- Tepper OR Colloquium, CMU, 2024 – Causal Agnosticism About Race
- First Paris Conference on Frontiers of Economics and Philosophy, 2024 – Algorithms, Justice, and the Urban Ghetto
- TTIC Colloquium, 2024 – Causal Agnosticism About Race
- Philosophy of AI (PhAI), 2023 – Algorithms, Justice, and the Urban Ghetto
- TOC4Fairness Seminar, Simons Foundation, 2022 – Reference Class Problems, Model Multiplicity
- Penn Law Symposium on Innovation and Criminal Justice, 2022 – Algorithms in Criminal Justice (Panel)
- Ernest E. Just Biomedical Society, Penn, 2020 – Causation and Algorithmic Fairness
- Philosophy and Physical Computing, 2019 – Dynamics and Biochemical Kinds
- Virginia Tech Biochemistry Speakers Series, 2019 – Inositol Kinase Function

Philosophy and Physical Computing, 2018 – Finding Natural Kinds

PROFESSIONAL SERVICE

Co-Editor (with Ian S. Peebles), Special Issue, American Philosophical Quarterly, 63(2), 2026

Co-Organizer, AI, Systems & Society Conference, Emory University (2025)

Founder, Black Philosophy of AI Roundtable, Emory University (2024)

UNIVERSITY AND GRADUATE SERVICE

Organizer, AI Systems and Society Reading Group, Emory QTM (2023–2024)

Founder, W. E. B. Du Bois & Ida B. Wells Symposium on Socially Aware Data Science (2022–)

Founder, Penn Philosophy of Computation and Data Workshop (2021–)

Organizer, Penn-Rutgers Philosophy of Race Reading Group (2020–)

Africana Summer Institute Fellow, University of Pennsylvania (2020–2021)

Co-President, Minorities and Philosophy (MAP), Virginia Tech (2018–2019)

Editorial Assistant, HOPOS (2018–2019)

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Amazon Web Services (Remote) – Research Scientist Intern, Summer 2021. Project: Algorithmic Framework for Bias.
Supervisor: Peter Hallinan | Language: Python

Amazon Web Services (Remote) – Research Scientist II Intern, Summer–Fall 2022. Project: Algorithmic Harm and Bias Database. Supervisor: Peter Hallinan | Language: Python

Wharton Sports Analytics and Business Initiative, UPenn – Instructor, Summer 2022. Moneyball Academy: teaching data science and coding (R) to underrepresented students

AWARDS AND GRANTS

Fontaine Fellow, University of Pennsylvania (2019–2023)

Graduate Scholar, MAOP Fellowship, Virginia Tech (2017–2019)

TECHNICAL SKILLS

Proficient: R, Python · Familiar: SQL, Java · Tools: LaTeX, Git

REFERENCES

Available upon request.