

Anna Brinkerhoff

Brown University
Department of Philosophy

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EMPLOYMENT

George Mason University, August 2021 – Present
Philosophy Instructor

Seattle Pacific University, January 2021 – July 2021
Philosophy Instructor

EDUCATION

Brown University, 2015 - 2021

Ph.D., Philosophy

Dissertation: “Evidence and the Rationality of Belief”

Committee: David Christensen (Chair), Nomy Arpaly, Joshua Schechter

M.A., Philosophy, May 2017

Pepperdine University, 2011 - 2015

B.A., Philosophy, *summa cum laude*

Valedictorian

RESEARCH INTERESTS

Areas of Specialization: ethics (applied and normative), epistemology

Areas of Competence: feminist philosophy, philosophy of religion

PUBLICATIONS

Forthcoming – “The Promising Puzzle,” *Philosophers’ Imprint*

2021 – “Death, Deprivation, and the Afterlife,” *Philosophia*

2018 – “Why Epistemic Partiality is Overrated,” in a special issue of *Philosophical Topics* (eds., Rima Basu and Mark Schroeder), co-authored with Nomy Arpaly

BOOK REVIEW

2015 – “Review of Christensen and Lackey (eds.), *The Epistemology of Disagreement: New Essays*,” *Analysis*, co-authored with Tomás Bogardus

PAPERS IN PROGRESS

“Silencing, Blame, and Rationality” (R&R at *Australasian*)

“Epistemic Partiality in Friendship”, co-authoring with Nomy Arpaly

To appear in *Oxford Handbook of Social Epistemology* (eds. Jennifer Lackey and Aidan McGlynn)

“The Cognitive Demands of Friendship” (under review)

“Prejudiced Beliefs Based on the Evidence: Responding to a Challenge for Evidentialism”

“Prejudiced Belief and the Moral Importance of Understanding”

PRESENTATIONS

Prejudiced Beliefs Based on the Evidence

Eastern APA

Montreal, January 2022

Good Friend: Bad Believer?

Central APA

Chicago, February 2018

Massachusetts-Rhode Island Philosophy Conference

MIT, April 2018

Problematic Irrelevant Influences

Invited Talk

Pepperdine University, April 2017

The Hart Dworkin Debate: Legal Positivism and Theoretical Disagreements

Southern California Philosophy Conference

San Diego State University, October 2014

COMMENTS

Comments on Lara Roth’s *Epistemic Processes and Socially Problematic Beliefs*

Minorities and Philosophy Conference, Brown University, April 2019

Comments on Adam Omar Hosein’s *Individualist and Structural Approaches to Discrimination*

SIPP@Brown Philosophy Conference, Brown University, July 2018

Comments on Martha Gibson’s *Physicalism, Conceivability, and Semantic Necessity*

Pacific Division Meeting of the APA, San Francisco, April 2016

TEACHING

Primary Instructor

Happiness and the Good Life, Fall 2021 at George Mason University

Contemporary Moral Issues x4, Summers 2018, 2019, and 2021 (online) at Brown University

This course was taught in condensed form for Summer@Brown, a program for high school students.

Philosophy of Religion x2, Winter 2021 and Spring 2021 (online) at Seattle Pacific University

Philosophy of Death, Fall 2018 at Brown University

Teaching Assistant

Duties include teaching sections, conducting writing workshops, holding office hours, and grading.

Psychology and Philosophy of Happiness (Bernard Reginster), Fall 2016 and Spring 2021

Ethics in the Novel (Felicia Nimue Ackerman), Fall 2020

Global Justice (Dave Estlund), Summer 2019

Place of Persons (David Christensen), Spring 2018 and Spring 2019

Philosophy of Science (David Christensen), Fall 2017

Existentialism (Bernard Reginster), Summer 2017

Early Modern Philosophy (Justin Broackes), Spring 2017

GRANTS AND HONORS

Seaver College Faculty Fellow, Pepperdine University (2020-2021)

*Declined due to COVID

Brown/Wheaton Faculty Fellow, Brown University and Wheaton College (Spring 2021)

*Cancelled due to COVID

Dissertation Fellowship, Brown University (Fall 2019- Spring 2020)

Graduate Fellowship, Brown University (Fall 2015- Spring 2016)

Conference Travel Grant, Brown University (April 2016, February 2018)

Valedictorian, Pepperdine University (May 2015)

SERVICE

Referee for *Ethics*, *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, *Philosophical Review*

Graduate Student Director for SIPP@Brown, Summer 2019

SIPP@Brown is a two-week diversity program for undergraduate students from underrepresented groups in philosophy. Duties included running the admissions process, managing logistics, assisting with coursework, organizing roundtable discussions, and working closely with Faculty Director (Nina Emery) and Co-Grad Student Director (Arianna Falbo).

Graduate Student Mentor for SIPP@Brown, Summer 2017 and Summer 2018

Duties included providing feedback on writing samples for grad school, participating in roundtable discussions, and assisting with admissions process.

Judge & Moderator for RI State Regional Ethics Bowl, Spring 2019

Organizer, Recruitment Days for Brown Philosophy (Spring 2017 and Spring 2018)

REFERENCES

David Christensen (supervisor)
Professor of Philosophy
Brown University
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Joshua Schechter
Associate Professor of Philosophy
Brown University
Joshua_Schechter@brown.edu

Nomy Arpaly
Professor of Philosophy
Brown University
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Leland Saunders (teaching)
Associate Professor of Philosophy
Seattle Pacific University
Saundersl@spu.edu

Beliefs bear a special relation to truth – beliefs, in some sense, seem to aim at truth – and so it is natural to think that there is an important link between truth and the rationality of belief. If belief aims at truth, the thought goes, then rationality is a guide to it: the rationality of belief is determined by truth-related considerations alone. One view that captures this thought is evidentialism (*evidentialism* for short): it is rational for S to believe that p iff p is supported by S's evidence. Although once widely accepted, evidentialism has recently come under question along a variety of fronts. In particular, various philosophers have advanced accounts of friendship, promising, and prejudiced belief that challenge evidentialism. These challenges, although independent of one another, all rely on a common picture of the goodness of belief, which looks like this:

Beliefs have some important social, practical, or moral role. Beliefs enable us, for example, to be supportive friends, to make sincere promises, and to think without prejudice. But there are cases when beliefs that are supported by the evidence cannot fulfill this other role. Sometimes it is socially, practically, or morally good to not have a belief that's supported by the evidence. So, there is an important social or practical or moral dimension to the goodness of belief that is independent of, and sometimes in conflict with, belief being truth- aimed.

Accepting this picture of the goodness of belief invites us to reject evidentialism. Everybody can agree that, if rationality is worth pursuing, it must promote good beliefs and discourage bad ones. But, if this picture is accurate, there are considerations in addition to truth-related ones that contribute to the goodness of beliefs. Rationality, we might conclude, is sensitive to these other dimensions of the goodness of belief: social, practical, and moral considerations get a say in what is rational to believe.

The primary goal of this dissertation is to defend evidentialism. Towards this goal, I develop an evidentialist-friendly account of friendship (chapter one), promising (chapter two), and prejudiced belief (chapters three and four). Each account is based on the rejection of one of the claims that make up the picture of the goodness of belief that underlies the relevant challenges to evidentialism. In the case of friendship, I argue that belief does not have the social role that the picture says it has: that role belongs, instead, to attention. In the cases of promising and prejudice, belief does have the practical and moral roles the picture says it has but those roles are *best* fulfilled by beliefs supported by the evidence.

The Cognitive Demands of Friendship

In chapter one, I consider the view that friendship places demands on how we think about our friends. Simon Keller and Sarah Stroud both argue that being a good friend requires us to have positively-tilted beliefs about our friends even when they go beyond or against the evidence. Call this the doxastic account of the cognitive demands of friendship. Defenders of the doxastic account are committed to making a surprising claim about epistemic rationality: either that epistemic rationality is sensitive to considerations arising from friendship or that being a good friend sometimes requires one to be epistemically irrational. After considering both motivations of and worries for the doxastic account, I develop a new one: the attentional account. I argue that the attentional account can accommodate the various considerations that motivate the doxastic account while avoiding the problems that arise when our beliefs about our friends are peeled apart from our evidence about them.

The Promising Puzzle

In chapter two, I consider a puzzle about promising that it is tempting to solve by rejecting evidentialism. The puzzle arises from the thought that we should make a promise only if our belief that we will follow through is epistemically rational. But if that is right, and if it is epistemically rational to believe only what our evidence supports, then it seems that we should not make promises to do things

our evidence suggests that there is a significant chance we will not do – things that many others, or we ourselves, have set out and failed to do. But surely *that* cannot be right! After all, these are some of our most important promises. One way to approach this puzzle is to reject evidentialism and contend that it can be epistemically rational to believe that we will follow through even when this isn't supported by the evidence. I argue against this approach, and any like it, that entails that it can be permissible to promise against the evidence. I go on to argue that, upon closer inspection, our evidence often *does* support the belief that we will do things that many others, or we ourselves, have set out and failed to do. In these cases, promising is fine. But when our evidence really does not suggest that we will follow through, promising is not the right thing to do.

Prejudiced Beliefs Based on Supporting Evidence

In chapters three and four, I focus on a challenge to evidentialism that flows from considerations about prejudice. According to evidentialists, what is rational to believe is determined just by the evidence. So, assuming that prejudiced beliefs are irrational, evidentialists say that they must not respect the evidence. Recently, philosophers have been interested in cases of beliefs that seem to undermine evidentialism: these are beliefs that seem both prejudiced (and, thus, irrational) and based on supporting evidence (and, thus, rational). For example, a server at a restaurant has statistical evidence that most Black diners tip less than average and then comes to believe that a particular Black diner will likely tip less than average. Several philosophers – call them revisionists – have appealed to these cases not only to reject evidentialism, but also to motivate moral encroachment. According to them, the server's belief is not sensitive to the relevant moral considerations and so is irrational and prejudiced, even if it respects the evidence. In chapter three, I defend evidentialism from the challenge posed to it by beliefs like the server's by arguing that the problematic intuitions can be explained away. In chapter four, I argue that the revisionist approach to cases like the server's is too strong and that the evidentialist approach is, on balance, better. I do so by arguing that the evidentialist approach, but not the revisionist approach, can give a plausible evaluation of modified versions of the cases in question in which the beliefs are embedded in an understanding of relevant moral features of the believers' socio-epistemic environment.

Taken together, these chapters contribute to a systematic defense of evidentialism. Perhaps more significantly, they tell us something important about the goodness of belief: the social, practical, and moral dimension of the goodness of belief is intimately connected with belief being truth-aimed.