

Anna Brinkerhoff

Brown University
Department of Philosophy

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EDUCATION

Brown University, 2015 - present

Ph.D., Philosophy, in progress

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: epistemology, ethics

Areas of Competence: feminist philosophy, philosophy of religion

PUBLICATION

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

"The Cognitive Demands of Friendship" (under review)

"The Promising Puzzle" (under review)

"Death, Deprivation, and the Afterlife" (under review)

"Epistemic Partiality in Friendship", co-authoring with Nomy Arpaly

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

"Can Prejudiced Beliefs Respect the Evidence?"

"Silencing, Blame, and Rationality"

PRESENTATIONS

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

Contemporary Moral Issues x3, Summer 2018 and Summer 2019

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

Philosophy of Death, Fall 2018

Teaching Assistant

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

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

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

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*

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
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Joshua Schechter
Associate Professor of Philosophy
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Nomy Arpaly
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Tomas Bogardus (teaching)
Associate Professor of Philosophy
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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, promoting true beliefs while discourage false ones. The rationality of belief, then, must be determined alone by truth-related considerations. For the sake of simplicity, let's call all such considerations *evidence*. Accordingly, let's call the view in question – it is rational to believe that p iff p is supported by the evidence – *evidentialism* about the rationality of belief.

Although once widely accepted, evidentialism has recently come under attack along a variety of fronts. In particular, various philosophers have advanced accounts of friendship, promising, and prejudiced belief that are incompatible with evidentialism. Their rejections of evidentialism, although independent of one another, share a similar structure. First, they point out some important social, practical, or moral role of belief: beliefs enable us, for example, to be supportive friends, to make sincere promises, and to think without prejudice. Second, they argue that there are cases when beliefs that respect the evidence cannot fulfill this other role: sometimes it is socially, practically, or morally bad for a belief to respect the evidence. These philosophers agree with the evidentialist that, if rationality is worth pursuing, it must promote good beliefs, and discourage bad ones. But, they continue, there is a social or practical or moral dimension to the goodness of beliefs that is independent of their being truth-aimed. They conclude the rationality of belief is sensitive to these other dimensions and so is not determined only by evidential and other truth-related considerations.

My dissertation is intended to defend evidentialism. In each chapter, I develop an evidentialist-friendly account of friendship (chapter one), promising (chapter two), and prejudice (chapters three). I argue that these evidentialist-friendly accounts can accommodate the various considerations that motivate their evidentialist-unfriendly counterparts while also avoiding the problems and surprising epistemological commitments that arise when rationality is peeled apart from truth.

The Cognitive Demands of Friendship

Friendship places demands on what we do. Does it place demands on what we believe, too? Simon Keller and Sarah Stroud argue that it does. Specifically, they argue that we sometimes ought to have positive beliefs about our friends even when such beliefs go against the evidence. Call this the doxastic account of cognitive demands of friendship. Although there is something compelling about the doxastic account – it does seem that friends should think positively about one another – it faces a number of worries. One worry is that doxastic account has a hard time accommodating cases where being a good friend seems to require impartial thinking. In addition, defenders of the doxastic account are committed to making a surprising claim about the rationality of belief: either that the demands of rationality conflict with the demands of friendship or that rationality is sensitive to considerations arising from friendship. After considering both motivations and worries for the doxastic account, I develop a new account of the cognitive demands on friends – the attentional account – which says that friendship places demands on how we direct our attention, not on what we believe. Since it says nothing about belief, the attentional account avoids the doxastic account's surprising epistemological claims. It can also accommodate the idea that friendship requires both positive thinking and impartial thinking.

The Promising Puzzle

Here is a plausible thought: we should make a promise only if we rationally believe that we will follow through. But if that is right, and if it is 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. Think: promises to be on time or to quit smoking. But surely that cannot be right! After all, these are some of our most important promises. This leaves us with a puzzle: either accept that sometimes we should promise against the evidence or accept that we should not be making many of our most important

promises. One way of solving the puzzle is to deny that a belief is rational only if it is supported by the evidence. This is Berislav Marušić's solution: he argues that, in cases of promising, our belief about whether we will follow through is subject to practical standards of rationality so that, sometimes, that belief is rational without being supported by the evidence. I argue that this solution – and any other solution that amounts to admitting that it is permissible to promise against the evidence – is deeply morally problematic. 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 Cannot Respect the Evidence

According to evidentialists, what is rational to believe is determined alone 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 respectful of the evidence (and, thus, rational). In these cases, a believer has strong statistical evidence that most members of a social group have some property and then comes to believe that an individual member of that social group will likely have that property. 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 to motivate a new account of the rationality of belief that makes room for moral considerations. 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. My goal in this chapter is to defend evidentialism from the challenge posed to it by beliefs like the server's. First, I argue that the problematic intuitions can be explained away: it is unclear whether these beliefs have a certain implicit conjunct, and it is this unclarity that gives rise to the conflicting intuitions that they are prejudiced and respectful of the evidence. Second, I argue that evidentialists, but not revisionists, can give a plausible evaluation of modified versions of the cases in question in which the beliefs are embedded in an understanding of the moral features of the relevant socio-epistemic environment.

In summary, my dissertation advances evidentialist-friendly accounts of friendship, promising, and prejudiced thinking. In the case of friendship, I argue that beliefs do not have a purported social role that beliefs that respect the evidence cannot play: that role belongs, instead, to attention. In the cases of promising and prejudice, beliefs do have the practical and moral roles they are purported to have but those roles are fulfilled by beliefs that respect the evidence. Taken together, these accounts contribute to a systematic defense of evidentialism. They also tell us something important about the nature of belief: the moral, social, and practical dimension of the goodness of beliefs is intimately connected with their being true.