

CHAD T. MARXEN

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EDUCATION

PhD | **Brown University** | **Philosophy** | 2021 (Expected)

Dissertation: "Truth-Aimed Epistemology"

Committee: David Christensen (chair), Joshua Schechter, Adam Pautz, James Dreier, and Richard Pettigrew (Univ. of Bristol)

Master of Arts | Brown University | Philosophy | 2017

Bachelor of Arts | Pepperdine University | Philosophy | *summa cum laude* | 2014

Minor | Pepperdine University | Mathematics, Hispanic Studies | 2014

RESEARCH AREAS

AOS: Epistemology (Traditional and Formal)

AOC: Logic, Ethics (including Applied Ethics and Metaethics), Metaphysics

PUBLICATION

1. "On the Epistemic Rationality and Significance of Self-Fulfilling Beliefs" | *Synthese* | Forthcoming
2. ["Yes, Safety is in Danger" \(Co-authored with Tomás Bogardus\)](#) | *Philosophia* 42:2, 321-334 | 2014

BOOK REVIEW

1. [Review of Richard Pettigrew's Accuracy and the Laws of Credence \(Co-authored with Gerard Rothfus\)](#) | *Philosophy of Science* 85:2, 316-320 | 2018

UNDER REVIEW

1. "Closing the Case on Self-Fulfilling Beliefs"
2. "Epistemic Utility Theory's Difficult Future"

WORKS IN PROGRESS

1. "Betting Against Permissivism"
2. "Closing the Case on Self-Frustrating Beliefs"

REFEREED AND INVITED TALKS*On the Epistemic Rationality and Significance of Self-Fulfilling Beliefs*

- Modal Metaphysics: Issues on the (Im)Possible IX at the University of York [Fall 2021]
- Modal Metaphysics: Issues on the (Im)Possible VIII in Bratislava, Slovakia (cancelled due to COVID-19) [Aug. 2020]
- Syracuse Graduate Conference (occurred online due to COVID-19) [July 2020]
- University of Iowa Graduate Philosophical Society Conference (cancelled due to COVID-19) [April 2020]

Closing the Case on Self-Fulfilling Beliefs

- Notre Dame/Northwestern Graduate Epistemology Conference (postponed due to COVID-19) [May 2020]

Epistemic Utility Theory's Difficult Future

- Pepperdine Philosophy Colloquium [March 2017]

COMMENTARIES

- Kevin Dorst, "Trustworthy E = K implies KK", Brown Graduate Conference [Nov. 2016]
- Meghan Sullivan, *Time Biases: A Theory of Rational Planning and Personal Persistence*, SIPP Conference at Brown [July 2016]
- Nick Leonard, "The Transmission View of Testimony and the Problem of Conflicting Justification", Brown Graduate Conference [Nov. 2015]
- Andrew Brenner, "Composition and Personal Ontology", Pacific APA, S.F. [April 2016]
- Michael Hannon, "The Thresholds for Knowledge", Pacific APA, Vancouver B.C.

[April 2015]

- Christopher Tomaszewski, “The Principle of Sufficient Reason Defended: There is No Conjunction of All Contingently True Propositions”, Brown Graduate Conference [Nov. 2014]

TEACHING

Primary Instructor

Quest for the Good Life | Salve Regina University | *Fall 2020*
 Contemporary Moral Problems | Brown University | *Spring 2018*
 Western Culture III | Pepperdine University | *Summer 2017*

Teaching Assistant

Moral Philosophy | Nomy Arpaly | *Spring 2020*
 Skepticism and Knowledge | Felicia Nimue Ackerman | *Fall 2019*
 Epistemology | David Christensen | *Fall 2017*
 Aristotle | Mary Louise Gill | *Spring 2017*
 Mathematical Logic | Josh Schechter | *Fall 2016*
 Place of Persons | David Christensen | *Spring 2016*
 Philosophy of Science | David Christensen | *Fall 2015*
 Intro. to Philosophy | Mason Marshall | *Fall 2013*
 Intro. to Philosophy | Mason Marshall | *Fall 2012*

Guest Lecturer

Epistemology (4x) | David Christensen | *Fall 2017*
 Moral Theories (2x) | Nomy Arpaly | *Fall 2017*
 Aristotle | Mary Louise Gill | *Spring 2017*
 Intro. to Philosophy (2x) | Mason Marshall | *Fall 2013*

Miscellaneous

Writing Tutor | Brown University | *2016–2017*
 Math and Logic Tutor | Independent | *2016–2018*
 Math Tutor | Pepperdine University | *2013–2014*

AWARDS

1. Graduate Travel Grant [Brown University, 2017-2018, 2020]
2. Selected Participant for the Summer Seminar in Philosophy [CU Boulder, 2013]
3. Golden Key Honor Society [Pepperdine University, 2011-2014]
4. Phi Sigma Tau Philosophy Honor Society [Pepperdine University, 2013–2014]
5. Dean's List [Pepperdine University, 2011-2014]
6. Summer Research Project Grant [Pepperdine University, 2013]
7. Humanities Division Special Scholarship [Pepperdine University, 2012-2014]
8. Student Rep. for Academic Integrity Committee [Pepperdine University, 2013-2014]

DEPARTMENTAL AND PROFESSIONAL SERVICE

- Referee for *Erkenntnis*, *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*
- Liaison for the Sheridan Center for Teaching and Learning at Brown University [2020]
- Research Assistant for David Estlund [2017, 2020]
- Chief organizer for the prospective doctoral-student visit at Brown University [2017]
- Guest lecturer for David Christensen (4x) [2017]
- Guest lecturer for Nomy Arpaly (2x) [2017]
- Guest lecturer for Mary Louise Gill [2017]
- Mentor for the Summer Immersion Program in Philosophy at Brown University [2015]

REFERENCES

- David Christensen (Chair) | Royce Family Professor of Teaching Excellence, Professor of Philosophy | david.christensen@brown.edu
- Joshua Schechter | Associate Professor | josh_schechter@brown.edu
- Nomy Arpaly | Professor of Philosophy | nomy_arpaly@brown.edu
- Adam Pautz | Professor of Philosophy | adam_pautz@brown.edu
- James Dreier | Judy C. Lewent and Mark L. Shapiro Professor of Philosophy | james_dreier@brown.edu
- Richard Pettigrew | Professor of Philosophy | Richard.Pettigrew@bristol.ac.uk

DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

Truth-Aimed Epistemology

It has long been thought that there must be some strong connection between epistemic rationality (justification) and truth or accuracy. Recently, a research program has developed around using formal techniques to understand this Truth Connection, and then apply it in supporting attractive epistemic norms, such as Probabilism and Conditionalization. Appealing to plausible measures of accuracy, formal epistemologists have produced accuracy theorems showing, roughly, that things will go poorly for you accuracy-wise if you violate these norms. For these accuracy results to have upshots for epistemic rationality, these epistemologists appeal to *teleological* theories of justification, where epistemic norms are *instrumental* norms centered on the aim of acquiring epistemic goodness: what's definitive of epistemic norms is that you can expect to best attain epistemic rationality's aim (i.e. acquiring epistemic goodness) if you follow these norms. Identifying epistemic goodness with accuracy yields accuracy-centered teleological theories (hereafter 'teleological theories') with accompanying theories of the Truth Connection. This has given rise to a flourishing research program in epistemic utility theory.

But despite the many merits of teleological theories like epistemic utility theory and the accompanying theories of the Truth Connection, they are still a matter of much debate. This dissertation—which is at the intersection of traditional and formal epistemology—consists of three papers (all currently under review) which push this debate forward in two central ways. First, using a variety of different sorts of counterexamples, they argue that teleological theories like epistemic utility theory are not in the end correct. Second, they develop a diagnosis of where these theories go wrong. The diagnosis rests on distinguishing two ways of understanding the Truth Connection which are superficially similar, but come sharply apart in certain cases: in particular, cases where a certain proposition is (a) unlikely to be true (on the agent's evidence), but (b) likely to be true (on the agent's evidence) *if* the agent believes it. The dissertation argues that we should understand the Truth Connection as the claim that epistemic rationality fundamentally guides us toward the propositions that are likely to be true (independent of whether we believe them) and not toward the propositions that are likely to be true *if* we believe them. More concisely, epistemic rationality is a guide to true propositions rather than true beliefs.

While some have worried about the verdicts of teleological theories in so called trade-off cases, promising responses to this sort of problem have been given by defenders of epistemic utility theory. So instead of focusing on tradeoff cases, I focus on cases involving potential beliefs about the future. In these cases, teleological theories say that even though certain propositions are not likely to be true (on your evidence), they're epistemically rational to believe because they're likely to be true (on your evidence) if you believe them. Let us call these "self-fulfilling" cases. I argue that if we zero in on real-life examples of self-fulfilling cases, teleological theories give extremely counterintuitive verdicts in a plentitude of different situations. Take, for example, a case where the proposition that today will be terrible is unlikely to be true. Nonetheless, this proposition is likely to be true if Friedrich believes it. After all, he knows that believing that today will be terrible will make him depressed. In a self-fulfilling case like this, teleological theories say that even though this proposition is unlikely to be true, it's epistemically rational to believe because it's likely to be true if he believes it. Additionally, I argue that well-motivated teleological theories have incorrect verdicts in many cases where you're aware that believing certain propositions (that are likely to be true) will lead to a worse epistemic future than if you disbelieve these propositions. To illustrate, consider a case where a pesticide researcher's research for the government has come to a halt the past few years because he's come to doubt the proposition that the government is only using his research for benign purposes. He knows that if he only believed this evidentially-unsupported proposition, his recovered motivation would lead him to an epistemically-valuable future as he would discover the answers to a multitude of his research questions. Given that well-motivated teleological theories are

sensitive to facts about the epistemic goodness of future beliefs, they deliver implausible verdicts in this case and many others.

Not only are teleological theories extensionally inadequate, but they also clash with epistemic rationality's essential roles. I argue that one of epistemic rationality's essential roles is that it is *actionable*: when p is epistemically rational for a person to believe, then it's practically rational for that person to act as if p is likely to be true. I then argue that if epistemic rationality has this role of being actionable, then teleological theories are not true. This can be seen, for example, by reflecting on the aforementioned case involving Friedrich where the proposition that today will be terrible is unlikely to be true, but is likely to be true if Friedrich believes it. Since it's unlikely to be true, it's not practically rational to act if it's likely to be true. But since it's likely to be true if Friedrich believes it, teleological theories say that it's epistemically rational to believe. Assuming epistemic rationality is actionable, there are two other significant epistemic upshots: epistemic rationality is a guide to true propositions rather than true beliefs, and a popular argument for permissivism about epistemic rationality fails.

Epistemic rationality has another essential role, which is that it is sensitive to logic. For example, epistemic rationality is closed under disjunction. Thus if p is epistemically rational for someone to believe, then $(p \text{ or } q)$ is epistemically rational for the person to believe too. Appealing to this extremely plausible closure principle, I argue that teleological theories are not true. This can be seen by considering versions of the previous case involving Friedrich. If the proposition that today will be terrible is epistemically rational to believe, then the disjunction consisting of this proposition and any other proposition would also be epistemically rational to believe. But for many of these disjunctions, the disjunction is not likely to be true even if Friedrich believes it. Accordingly, the disjunction is not epistemically rational to believe. Since teleological theories say that the proposition that today will be terrible is epistemically rational to believe, they clash with the fact that epistemic rationality is sensitive to logic.

I argue that we can diagnose each of our problems for teleological theories as stemming from a central feature. Teleological theories assume what can be called *true-belief-aimed epistemology*, on which epistemic rationality is a guide to true beliefs, and the fundamental explanatory property for epistemic rationality is being (likely to be) *true if believed*. Standing in contrast to true-belief-aimed epistemology is a conception of the connection between epistemic rationality and truth, which we might call *truth-aimed epistemology*. On this conception of the Truth Connection, epistemic rationality is a guide to true propositions, and being (likely to be) *true* is the fundamental explanatory notion. There's a powerful case for truth-aimed epistemology. This can be appreciated by focusing on the important truths about epistemic rationality that are present in each of our problems for teleological theories. After all, truth-aimed epistemology says that what's epistemically rational to believe must be likely to be true, and this idea fits nicely with: our intuitive verdicts about epistemic rationality in self-fulfilling or trade-off cases; the fact that epistemic rationality is actionable; and the fact that epistemic rationality is sensitive to logic. Moreover, truth-aimed epistemology meshes well with the plausible idea that while the norms of practical rationality direct us to conform the world to our mind (desires), the norms of epistemic rationality direct us to conform our mind (beliefs) to the world.