Rice University
Department of Philosophy
P.O. Box 1892
Houston, Texas 77251-1892
(713) 348-2718
briantmiller@rice.edu
www.briantmiller.net

Brian T. Miller

Employment

Lecturer, Rice University (2016-present)

Education

Ph.D. Philosophy, University of Texas at Austin (2016)

Dissertation: *The Structure of Perceptual Justification*

Abstract: Dogmatism is the thesis that perceptual justification is both immediate and underminable. Bayesianism is a theory of coherence for partial beliefs. I develop and defend Bayesian Dogmatism.

Supervisors: David Sosa (Chair), Josh Dever, Sinan Dogramaci, Jim Pryor, Mark Sainsbury, Miriam Schoenfield

Visiting student, Arché Philosophical Research Institute at the University of St. Andrews (Summer 2015)

M.A. Philosophy, University of Colorado, Boulder (2009)

Thesis: *Seems True: A Critique of Phenomenal Conservatism*

Supervisors: Michael Tooley (Chair), David Barnett, Michael Heumer

B.A. Philosophy and Religion, Appalachian State University (2002)

Areas

AOS: Epistemology, Formal Epistemology

AOC: Early Modern, Logic, Language, Mind, Philosophy of Science

Publications

"Holistic Conditionalization and Underminable Perceptual Learning" (*Philosophy and Phenomenological Research (forthcoming)*

"Updating, Undermining, and Perceptual Learning" (*Philosophical Studies* 174.9 (2017): 2187-2209.)

"How to be a Bayesian Dogmatist"* (*Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 94.4 (2016): 766-780.)

Awards

*2017 Winner of AJP Best Paper Award for "How to be a Bayesian Dogmatist", selected by the Australasian Association of Philosophy as the best paper published in AJP in 2016

2015 *Graduate Student Executive Committee* Summer Scholarship, Department of Philosophy, University of Texas, Austin

2015 *Graduate School* Continuing Fellowship, University of Texas, Austin

2015 Cogburn Philosophical Essay Prize, first prize for "How to be a Bayesian Dogmatist"

2014 Cogburn Philosophical Essay Prize, second prize for "Risky Inference and Closure Failures"

Presentations

"Perceiving Safely" (2018)
Texas Epistemology Extravaganza

"Holistic Conditionalization and Underminable Perceptual Learning" (2017)
Texas Epistemology Extravaganza

"How To Be a Bayesian Dogmatist" (2014)
Arché Graduate Conference at Arché Philosophical Research Institute, University of St. Andrews

Comments:

"Non-inferential Knowledge and some other Concerns with Infinitism" by Brian Pollox (2014)
MLK conference, University of Texas, Austin

"Justified Group Beliefs" by Jennifer Lackey (2014)
UT Austin Graduate Philosophy Conference

"Dogmatism and Closure" by Jeremy Goodman (2011)
UT Austin Graduate Philosophy Conference

"Epistemic Modal Draconianism" by Melissa Fusco (2009)
Rocky Mountain Philosophy Conference at the University of Colorado, Boulder

Teaching

As Primary Instructor:

- Mathematical Logic (F'19)
- Topics in Early Modern Philosophy: The New Science (F'19, F'18, F'17)
- Graduate Seminar: The Factive Turn in Epistemology (F'18)
- Early Modern Philosophy (S'19, S'18, S'17)
- Introduction to Philosophy (S'19, S'18, F'16, S'16)
- Graduate Seminar: Evidence (F'17)
- Epistemology (S'17)
- Graduate Seminar: Knowledge-First (F'16)
- Symbolic Logic (Su'14)

As Teaching Assistant:

- Ancient Philosophy (S'15)
- Plan II Honors: Logic and Scientific Reasoning (F'14, F'12, F'10)
- Philosophy of Religion (S'14)
- Early Modern Philosophy (F'13, S'11, S'10)
- Science and Philosophy (S'13)
- Plan II Honors: Problems of Knowledge and Valuation (S'12, F'11)
- Introduction to Philosophy (Fall 2009)

Academic Service

Referee, *Mind*, *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, *International Studies in the Philosophy of Science*

Editorial Assistant, *Analytic Philosophy* (2013 – 2016)

Undergraduate Mentor, Intellectual Entrepreneurship Pre-Graduate School Internship program (2015)

Co-organizer, UT Austin Graduate Philosophy Conference (2011)

References

David Sosa, University of Texas at Austin
david_sosa@austin.utexas.edu

Miriam Schoenfield, MIT
mschoenfieldphil@gmail.com

Jim Pryor, NYU
jim.pryor@nyu.edu

Josh Dever, University of Texas at Austin
dever@austin.utexas.edu

Sinan Dogramaci, University of Texas at Austin
sinan.dogramaci@gmail.com

Timothy Schroeder, Rice University
Timothy.A.Schroeder@rice.edu

Mark Sainsbury, University of Texas at Austin
marksainsbury@austin.utexas.edu

Dissertation Summary:

When does a perceptual experience as of my hands provide justification for me to believe that I have hands? One initially plausible *positive* requirement is that I must have reasons to believe something else: that my experience is veridical. Also plausible is the *negative* requirement I must not have reasons to believe that my experience is non-veridical. Dogmatists about perception reject the positive requirement and embrace the negative one, holding that perceptual justification is *immediate* — it doesn't rest upon any other justification that I possess — but it is also defeasible, and in particular it is *underminable*.

Whereas Dogmatism is a theory in the epistemology of perception, Bayesianism is a theory of coherence for partial beliefs and of how coherence it to be maintained in the face of new evidence. Just as it is incoherent to believe both *I have hands* and *¬(I have hands)*, it is incoherent to be highly confident in both of those propositions. Importantly, though Bayesianism is a *theory of coherence*, it is not a *coherence theory*: it is not an attempt to explain all facts about justification in terms of facts about coherence.

I develop and defend Bayesian Dogmatism.

Due to an influential argument that the view is incoherent (by Cohen, Hawthorne, Schiffer, and White), Bayesian Dogmatism has remained undeveloped in the literature. According to that argument, Bayesians are committed to the 'positive requirement' that Dogmatists reject: that learning from an experience requires antecedent justification to believe that the experience is veridical. That's because given the Bayesian formalism, it is claimed, in order for an experience to rationally license high levels of confidence that I have hands, I must have started out confident that my hand-like experiences are likely veridical.

This line of argument is mistaken. Bayesian norms govern relations between credences, norms that I violate when my credences are probabilistically incoherent or when I fail to conditionalize appropriately. Experiences are not credences, and so they cannot enter into the type of relationship governed by Bayesian norms. It's not that Bayesians must deny that experiences affect credences, or deny that these effects are rationally evaluable. Nor is it to deny that Bayesians have a story about what I should do once an experience has affected one of my credences: I should conditionalize. It's just that the Bayesian formalism is silent on the questions of when an experience rationalizes a credence revision, or of the magnitude of that revision, or of which credences ought to be revised in response to a particular experience.

My opponent's argument against Dogmatism requires a specific account of the immediate effect of experience: upon having an experience as of my hands, I should conditionalize only upon the proposition *I've had an experience as of my hands* rather than upon *I have hands* itself. That account isn't obviously wrong, but it is optional. I argue that by updating instead (or also) on the latter — the content of the experience rather than a fact about the experience — Dogmatists are able to more faithfully represent their account of perceptual justification while avoiding their opponents' objections.

This is a very natural move for the Dogmatist, as they take the content of experience to be precisely what the experience (immediately) justifies. Dogmatists also hold that this justification is underminable, and so my proposal requires that my credence in the proposition conditionalized upon must be underminable. However, recent work has shown that underminable inputs to the Bayesian framework are problematic (Weisberg). That's due to the 'rigidity' of Bayesian conditionalization (including Jeffrey's version), which ensures that updating on P cannot change my credence in: Q conditional on P. This is inconsistent with common intuitions about how undermining defeaters work. For example, before I see the new car, *the car is green* is neither evidence for nor against *my color perception is reliable*: the propositions are evidentially independent. But once I experience the apparent greenness of the car and on that basis come to believe that it's green, then those propositions should no longer be independent: learning that my color perception is unreliable should decrease my confidence that the car is green. This is what the rigidity of conditionalization appears to rule out: *the car is green* can't lose its independence of *my color perception is reliable* through updating on the former (or the latter).

The rigidity puzzle is a problem for any Bayesian who thinks that the propositions conditionalized upon are underminable. In response I argue that, since the rigidity of conditionalization prevents the introduction of probabilistic dependence within the model, the best response is to introduce it outside of the Bayesian model, i.e. before conditionalization. This is easily accomplished at the point of selecting what to update upon (i.e. selecting the input partition), as becomes apparent upon examination of how credence revision is and how it is not constrained by the rigidity of conditionalization.

In the final chapter of my dissertation I consider an alternate response to the rigidity puzzle. Jeffrey conditionalization is sometimes criticized for being insufficiently sensitive to effect of background beliefs upon rational significance of an experience (Weisberg, Christensen). An experience as of a rhinoceros has one effect on a person who believes that they're typing at their desk — it justifies *I must be hallucinating* — and quite another for someone who believes that they're on safari. The criticism is that our update rule ought to model these effects, and Jeffrey conditionalization can't.

One possible response is to scrap Jeffrey conditionalization in favor of a more holistic updating rule. I consider and reject one such rule, on which the epistemic significance of my experience is determined by: (i) partitioning my credences by background theories; (ii) for each background theory, determining the significance of my experience on the supposition that that theory is true; and (iii) setting my new credence in P to the sum of my new values for: P conditional on each background theory, weighted according to my credence in each theory (Gallow). I argue that, formally speaking, this updating rule just is Jeffrey conditionalization together with some informal advice on choosing what to conditionalize upon. For that reason, I argue, 'holistic conditionalization' is able to resolve the rigidity puzzle only because — as I outlined above — Jeffrey conditionalization is able to resolve the rigidity puzzle as well. Hence the drastic response of rejecting Jeffrey conditionalization is unmotivated.