
SPENCER PAULSON

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Areas of Specialization

Epistemology; Philosophy of Mind

Areas of Competence

Moral Philosophy; Political Philosophy; Philosophy of Cognitive Science;
Philosophy of Artificial Intelligence

Education

Northwestern University

PhD – Philosophy – In Progress (Expected Defense: May 2024)

Dissertation: “Reflective Naturalism”

Committee: Sanford Goldberg (chair), Jennifer Lackey, Baron Reed, Peter van Elswyk, Mona Simion (External)

University of Houston

Master of Arts – Philosophy – 2018

University of Washington

Bachelor of Arts – Philosophy (Magna Cum Laude) – 2014

Publications

“The Burdens of Reliabilism: A Reply to Goldberg”

Analysis (Forthcoming)

“Reflective Naturalism”

Synthese (2024) 203: 13:1-21. doi:10.1007/s11229-023-04430-w

“Luck and Reasons”

Episteme (Forthcoming) 1-15. doi:10.1017/epi.2023.14

“The Very Idea of Rational Irrationality”

Politics, Philosophy & Economics (Forthcoming) <https://doi.org/10.1177/1470594X231177640>

“Epistemic Normativity & Epistemic Autonomy: The True-Belief Machine”

Philosophical Studies (2023) 180 (8): 2415-2433. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11098-023-01987-7>

“Good Reasons are Apparent to the Knowing Subject”

Synthese (2023) 202 (15): 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11229-023-04242-y>

“First-Class and Coach-Class Knowledge”

Episteme (2023) 20(3): 736–756. doi:10.1017/epi.2023.5
“Indicative Conditionals and the Expressive Conception of Logic”
Journal of Transcendental Philosophy (2022) (Special Topics Issue: Themes from the Philosophy of Robert Brandom) 3(1): 33-48. <https://doi.org/10.1515/jtph-2021-0042>

On R&R

“A Social Model of Cognitive Integration”- *Mind & Language*

Book Reviews

“Julian Wuerth, ‘Kant on Action, Mind and Ethics’” (with Colin Marshall)
Kantian Review- 2015

Service

Peer Review

Journals: *Episteme*, *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*

Conferences: Canadian Philosophical Association (x2), Northwestern/Notre Dame Epistemology Conference (x2), NU-STEP (x2)

Organizing

Conferences: Northwestern/Notre Dame Epistemology Conference (2022 and 2023)

Conferences

Presenter

Themes from the Philosophy of Robert Brandom (Marquette University) - 2019
“Indicative Conditionals and the Expressive Conception of Logic”

Commentator

Pre-APA Epistemology Conference (Northwestern University - 2022
Sarah Wright’s “Defending Autonomy as a Criterion for Epistemic Virtue”

Northwestern/ Notre Dame Epistemology Conference - 2021
Francesco Praolini’s “Uniqueness and Epistemic Obligation”

Northwestern/ Notre Dame Epistemology Conference – 2019
Evan Taylor’s “Epistemic Obligations to Know”

Chair

APA Central 2022
Kristen Irwin “Indifference and Universalis: Leibniz on Religious Toleration”

Teaching

Loyola University

Fall 2021 & Fall 2022:

Lecturer for “Philosophy and Persons” (PHIL 130)

Gave lectures, graded papers and held office hours.

Northwestern University

Fall 2023:

Teaching Assistant to Professor Chad Horne in “Bioethics”

Taught discussion sections, held office hours, met with students upon request, graded all written work including final exams.

Spring 2022:

Teaching Assistant to Professor Sanford Goldberg in “Theory of Knowledge”

Taught discussion sections, held office hours, met with students upon request, graded all written work including final exams.

Winter 2022:

Teaching Assistant to Professor Chad Horne in “Ethical Problems/Public Issues”

Taught discussion sections, held office hours, met with students upon request, graded all written work including final exams.

Spring 2021:

Teaching Assistant to Professor Baron Reed in “Early Modern Philosophy”

Taught discussion sections, held office hours, met with students upon request, graded all written work including final exams.

Winter 2021:

Teaching Assistant to Professor Megan Hyska in “Introduction to Philosophy of Language”

Taught discussion sections, held office hours, met with students upon request, graded all written work including final exams.

Spring 2020:

Teaching Assistant to Professor Kenneth Seeskin in “Introduction to Philosophy of Religion”

Taught discussion sections, held office hours, met with students upon request, graded all written work including final exams.

Winter 2020:

Teaching Assistant to Professor Axel Mueller in “Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason”

Taught discussion sections, held office hours, met with students upon request, graded all written work including final exams.

University of Houston

Fall 2017 & Spring 2018:

Teaching Assistant to Professor Joshua Weisberg in “Minds & Machines”

Held office hours, met with students upon request, graded all written work including final exams.

Spring 2017:

Teaching Assistant to Professor Gregory Brown in “Introduction to Philosophy”
Held office hours, met with students upon request, graded all written work including final exams.

Fall 2016:

Teaching Assistant to Professor Justin Coates in “Introduction to Ethics”
Held office hours, met with students upon request, graded all written work including final exams.

Graduate Coursework

Epistemology and Metaphysics

Inquiry (Goldberg)
Applied Epistemology (Lackey)
Epistemic Normativity (Oliveira)
Normative Clash (Goldberg, Audited)
Independent Study: Sellars (Weisberg)
Metaphysics (Glanzberg)
Time (Loewenstein)

Ethics and Political Philosophy

Democratic Theory (Lafont)
Valuing Attitudes (K. Ebels-Duggan)
Collective Action (White)

History of Philosophy

De Anima (Freeland)
Ancient Theories of Desire (Marechal)
Plato’s *Republic* (Kraut)
Kant’s First *Critique* (Zuckert)
Early Modern Philosophy (Reed)

Language, Logic and Mind

Proof Theory and Model Theory (Garson)
The Modal Future (Cariani)
Language and Mind (Glanzberg)
Speech Acts (Goldberg)
Consciousness (Weisberg)
Conditionals (Loewenstein)

AI: Small Problem (Cariani)
Philosophy of Cognitive Science (Buckner)
Animal Cognition (Buckner)
Philosophy of Language (Buckner)
Hermeneutics (Lafont)
Logic Requirement (S. Ebels-Duggan)

References

Sanford Goldberg: Chester D. Tripp Professor of the Humanities, Northwestern University

Contact: s-goldberg@northwestern.edu

Jennifer Lackey: Wayne and Elizabeth Jones Professor of Philosophy, Northwestern University

Contact: j-lackey@northwestern.edu

Baron Reed: Professor, Northwestern University

Contact: b-reed@northwestern.edu

Peter van Elswyk: Assistant Professor, Northwestern University

Contact: peter.vanelswyk@northwestern.edu

Mona Simion: Professor, University of Glasgow

Contact: mona.simion@glasgow.ac.uk

Dissertation Abstract:

I begin by asking what distinguishes thought from mere extraction of information. I argue that it is cognitive self-regulation. To be a thinking subject, it is not sufficient that information is processed within one. One must take an active role in the processing itself. I identify two core capacities necessary and jointly sufficient for cognitive self-regulation: causal inference and cognitive self-monitoring. However, these capacities can take qualitatively different forms in different creatures. Each form grounds distinct standards of epistemic evaluation. In species-typical humans, cognitive self-monitoring takes the form of interiorized argumentation. That is, one's causal models are deployed to run offline simulations of arguments a potential interlocutor might make, and these simulations are used to integrate the outputs of relatively isolated information-extraction processes. Our cognitive agency consists in this capacity. It grounds the epistemic standards applicable to us and it is what explains how reasons get their grip on us.

I argue in the first chapter that epistemic luck (and, by extension, knowledge) can only be understood in terms of reasons and we can't give a reductive account of them. Attempts to do so are either extensionally inadequate or they illicitly presuppose the epistemic vocabulary they are trying to reduce.

There is much debate about what reasons (metaphysically) are. Some people think they are facts, others think they are non-factive mental states. Both parties assume that reasons must really be something else: something we can identify without reference to reasons or reasoning. I argue against this. We don't get a grip on reasons by identifying them with something else that we understand without reference to reasoning itself. Rather, we understand the epistemic significance of other

things (e.g., facts and mental states) insofar as they bear on the propriety of reasoning. In the second chapter of the dissertation, I argue that the arguments that have been put forward in support of rival positions actually support the claim that reasons are just episodes of reasoning or, as Sellars would say, “moves in the game of giving an asking for reasons”.

I then go on in the third chapter to give an account of how moves in the game of giving and asking for reasons are assessed and how we internalize that form of assessment to epistemically regulate ourselves. In this chapter I discuss the implementation of this ability and the way it builds on similar capacities in non-human animals. In chapter 4 I discuss the relation between cognitive self-regulation and knowledge. I also discuss the relation between the epistemic statuses we enjoy and those of small children and non-human animals. Here I marry the traditions of defeasible reasoning and virtue epistemology. I use the account that emerges to shed light on the epistemology of inquiry. I argue that epistemology is primarily about the norms of inquiry and only derivatively about knowledge, justification, etc.

In chapter 5 I further develop the defeasible reasoning tradition to give an account of graded knowledge. In doing so I bring two long-standing debates (i.e., about perceptual Gettier cases and the possibility of knowledge inferred from false premises) to ecumenical resolutions. I end the dissertation by discussing the relation between objective normative and subjective normative reasons in Chapter 6. I argue that much of the resistance to the defeasible reasoning in recent years (as well as the attraction of rival epistemological programs) is the result of a failure of proponents of defeasible reasoning to adequately account for the relationship between subjective normative reasons of the sort that bear on epistemic justification and objective normative reasons, which bear on the Gettier problem. I argue that subjective normative reasons are reasons that are apparently objective normative to one in the subject’s epistemic position. This helps shed light on why knowledge is philosophically interesting and why it matters for creatures like us.