

KEVIN DORST

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AREAS OF SPECIALIZATION

Epistemology · Logic · Philosophy of Language

AREAS OF COMPETENCE

Ethics · Political Philosophy · Metaphysics

EDUCATION

PhD in Philosophy, Massachusetts Institute of Technology 2014 – present

Minor in Mathematical Logic

Dissertation: *Modest Epistemology*

Committee: Roger White (chair), Branden Fitelson, Kieran Setiya, Robert Stalnaker

B.A. in Political Science & Philosophy, Washington University in St. Louis 2010 – 2014

Summa Cum Laude

Thesis: *Reviving Joyce's Error Theory*

PUBLICATIONS

1. 'Abominable KK Failures'. (Forthcoming). *Mind*.
2. 'Evidence: A Guide for the Uncertain'. (Forthcoming). *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*.
3. 'Lockeans Maximize Expected Accuracy'. (Forthcoming). *Mind*.
4. 'Higher-Order Uncertainty'. (Forthcoming). M. Skipper and A. Steglich-Peterson (eds.), *Higher-Order Evidence: New Essays*, Oxford University Press.
5. 'Can the Knowledge Norm Co-Opt the Opt-Out?' (2014). *Thought* 3 (4): 273–282.

PUBLIC PHILOSOPHY

1. 'Why Rational People Polarize'. To appear on *The Phenomenal World*.
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AWARDS

- MIT Graduate Student Council travel grant, 2018.
 - MIT Graduate Student Council travel grant, 2017.
 - Marc Sanders Graduate Student Award for ‘A Contextualist Solution to Miner Disagreements’. (Top 3 graduate student papers at the 2016 Eastern APA.)
 - Student Scholarship to attend NASSLLI 2016.
 - Co-winner of the 2014 Nishi Luthra Prize for Excellence in Philosophy at Washington University in St. Louis.
 - 2014 Helen Stenner Memorial Essay Prize in Philosophy at Washington University in St. Louis.
 - 2013 Helen Stenner Memorial Essay Prize in Philosophy at Washington University in St. Louis.
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REFEREED/INVITED PRESENTATIONS

Evidence of Evidence: A Higher-Order Approach (with Branden Fitelson)

- The Significance of Higher-Order Evidence, University of Cologne, September 2018.
- Colloquium on Reasoning in a Social Context, University of Amsterdam, June 2018.

Rational Polarization

- Applied Epistemology Research Retreat, Prindle Institute for Ethics at DePauw University, June 2018.

Abominable KK Failures

- Central APA, Chicago, February 2018.
- The Northern New England Philosophical Association, Stonehill College, November 2017.

Two Cheers for Akrasia

- Eastern APA (Symposium), Savannah, January 2018.

Evidence: A Guide for the Uncertain

- Formal Epistemology Workshop, University of Washington, May 2017.
- The St. Louis Area Conference on Reasons and Rationality, St. Louis, May 2017.
- The Society for Exact Philosophy, University of Calgary, May 2017.
- Pacific APA (Symposium), Seattle, April 2017.
- Northern New England Philosophical Association, Keene State University, October 2016.

Trustworthy E=K Implies KK

- Mark Shapiro Graduate Conference, Brown University, November 2016.

Paradoxes of Higher-Order Evidence

- Central APA (Symposium), Chicago, March 2016.
- Decisions, Games, and Logic, London, June 2015.
- NYU-Columbia Graduate Conference, NYU, March 2015.

A Contextualist Solution to Miner Disagreements

- Eastern APA, Washington DC, January 2016. (Marc Sanders Graduate Student Award.)

Lockeans Maximize Expected Accuracy

- Epistemic Consequentialism: Problems and Prospects, University of Kent, June 2015.
- Central APA, February 2015.

Graded Epistemic Logic and a Barrier to Entailment

- The Philosophers' Cocoon Philosophy Conference, University of Tampa, July 2014.

COMMENTS

- Nevin Climenhaga, 'The Structure of Epistemic Probabilities', Eastern APA, Baltimore, January 2017.
 - Sophie Horowitz, 'Epistemic Value and the "Jamesian Goals"', St. Louis Area Conference on Reasons and Rationality, St. Louis, May 2015.
 - Ray Briggs, 'An Accuracy-Dominance Argument for Conditionalization', MITing of the Minds, Cambridge MA, January 2015.
 - Bob Beddor, 'An Attitudinal Semantics for Moral and Epistemic Evaluations', Philosophers' Cocoon Philosophy Conference, Tampa, July 2014.
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TEACHING

INSTRUCTOR

- Formal Methods in Epistemology. (Mini-course for graduate and undergraduate students, MIT January Term, 2017.)

TEACHING ASSISTANT

- The Ethics of Climate Change (Hare, Setiya), Spring 2018.
- Moral Problems and the Good Life (Setiya), Fall 2017.
- Justice (Kates), Spring 2017.
- Ethics (Shapiro), Fall 2016.
- Problems in Philosophy (Hare), Fall 2015.

TUTORING

- Philosophy in an Inclusive Key Summer Institute (PIKSI) Logic at Northeastern University, Summer 2018.
- Writing Help Desk, Washington University in St. Louis, 2011 – 2014.

GUEST LECTURES

- 'Singer's Challenge', Moral Problems and the Good Life (Setiya), Fall 2017.
- 'Countermodels in Monadic Predicate Logic, and Binary Symbolizations', Advanced Logic (Fitelson), Spring 2017.
- 'Syntax and Symbolization in Sentential Logic', Introductory Logic (Fitelson), Spring 2017.
- 'The Experience Machine and Personal Good', Ethics (Shapiro), Fall 2016.

- ‘Solving the Skeptical Problem’, Theory of Knowledge (White), Spring 2016.
- ‘Epistemic Contextualism’, Problems in Philosophy (Hare), Fall 2015.
- ‘Graded Epistemic Logic’, Modal Logic (Yablo), Spring 2015.

PEDAGOGICAL TRAINING

- American Association of Philosophy Teachers workshop, Spring 2018.
- MIT Philosophy teaching workshop, Spring 2016.

GRADUATE COURSEWORK

(* = audit)

EPISTEMOLOGY

- *Topics in Critical Social Theory: Critical Epistemologies (Haslanger; MIT), Fall 2018.
- Independent Study on Epistemic Consequentialism (White; MIT), Fall 2015.
- *Self-Knowledge (Byrne, Paul; MIT), Fall 2015.
- *Topics in Ethics and Epistemology (Hare, White; MIT), Spring 2015.
- Formal Epistemology (Staffel; Washington University), Spring 2014.
- *Topics in Epistemology (Williamson, Hawthorne, Magidor, Dorr; Oxford), Spring 2013.
- Social Epistemology (Sorensen; Washington University), Fall 2012.

LOGIC AND MATHEMATICS

- Introduction to Stochastic Processes (Bufetov; MIT), Spring 2018.
- *Calculus with Theory (McBreen; MIT), Fall 2016.
- Logic II (McGee; MIT), Spring 2016.
- *Modal Logic (Stalnaker; MIT), Spring 2016.
- Modal Logic (Yablo; MIT), Spring 2015.
- Frege’s *Basic Laws of Arithmetic* (McGee; MIT), Fall 2014.
- Philosophy of Logic (Russell; Washington University), Fall 2013.
- Computability and Logic (Russell; Washington University), Spring 2012.

PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE

- *Conditionals (Khoo, McGee; MIT), Fall 2017.
- *Vagueness (McGee; MIT), Fall 2015.
- Advanced Semantics (von Fintel; MIT), Spring 2015.
- *Introduction to Semantics (Hackl, Schwarzschild; MIT), Fall 2014.
- Pragmatics (Sorensen; Washington University), Fall 2013.

ETHICS

- British Moralists 1650–1800 (Shapiro; MIT), Spring 2017.
- *Noncognitivism (Fitelson, Spencer; MIT), Fall 2016.

- ‘Ought’ and Ought (Khoo, Spencer; MIT), Fall 2014.
- Metaethical Constructivism (Kurth; Washington University), Fall 2012.

OTHER

- Proseminar I (Spencer, Yablo; MIT), Fall 2014.
- Proseminar II (Haslanger, Rayo; MIT), Spring 2015.
- Buddhist Philosophy (Patil; Harvard), Fall 2015.

SERVICE

- MIT Conference Czar, Spring 2018 – present.
- Organizer for MIT Graduate Workshop, Fall 2016 – Spring 2018.
- Organizer for Harvard/MIT Graduate Conference, Spring 2015.
- Referee for: *Philosophy of Science*, *European Journal of Philosophy of Science*, *Episteme*, *Erkenntnis*.

DISSERTATION ABSTRACT: *Modest Epistemology*

When we face complex evidence or disagreeing peers, we should often be epistemically *modest*: unsure whether we are thinking rationally. However, it turns out that extant theories cannot account for such rational modesty: they either forbid modesty entirely, or permit modesty only by severing the connection between rationality and truth. My dissertation builds a theory that permits rational modesty while maintaining such a connection. In doing so, it lays the foundations for a theory of peer disagreement and, more generally, an epistemology that permits self-doubt—a *modest* epistemology.

More precisely, I introduce a framework that can be used to model situations in which you are rational to be unsure what the rational opinions are. I use it to argue that such rational modesty is needed to explain the epistemic force of peer disagreement, and therefore that any approach to disagreement must be based on a general theory of rational modesty. However, I argue that no extant theory is acceptable: using my framework, I show that all extant theories either (1) rule out rational modesty altogether, or (2) allow you to know that rationality is an *anti*-guide to the truth. I then show how to construct a theory that avoids this dilemma. The key principle—which I call **Trust**—formalizes the truism that *it’s likely that what the evidence supports is true*. I show that Trust permits modesty, ensures that rational opinions are correlated with truth, and vindicates the principle that you should always prefer to respond rationally to your evidence when doing so has no costs. In sum, Trust establishes that there is a coherent way for rational people to be modest, and therefore paves the way for an epistemology of disagreement and self-doubt.

REFERENCES

Roger White (advisor)

Professor, Department of Linguistics and Philosophy, MIT
rog@mit.edu

Branden Fitelson

Distinguished Professor, Department of Philosophy, Northeastern
branden@fitelson.org

Kieran Setiya

Professor, Department of Linguistics and Philosophy, MIT
ksetiya@mit.edu

Robert Stalnaker

Professor Emeritus, Department of Linguistics and Philosophy, MIT
stal@mit.edu