

BRETT TOPEY

Curriculum Vitae

Department of Philosophy (GW)
University of Salzburg
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AREAS OF SPECIALIZATION: Epistemology (Traditional and Formal), Philosophy of Language, Philosophy of Logic

AREAS OF COMPETENCE: Philosophy of Mathematics, History of Analytic Philosophy, Logic

EDUCATION

2018 Brown University, PhD in Philosophy
2007 Princeton University, AB with Honors in Philosophy

EMPLOYMENT

2019– University of Salzburg
Postdoctoral Researcher, Department of Philosophy in the Faculty of Social Sciences
2018 Brown University
Visiting Assistant Professor, Department of Philosophy
2018 Lehigh University
Research Fellow, Department of Philosophy

GRANTS

2021–2025 Co-investigator, *Categoricity by Convention* (Principal investigator: Julien Murzi)
Austrian Science Fund (FWF) Stand-Alone Project P33708, €403,890.90

PEER-REVIEWED PUBLICATIONS

1. “Pragmatic accounts of justification, epistemic analyticity, and other routes to easy knowledge of abstracta,” forthcoming
Invited contribution, to appear in X. de Donato-Rodríguez, J. Falguera, C. Martínez-Vidal (eds.), *Deflationist Conceptions of Abstract Objects* (Springer)
Using an argument adapted from the Benacerraf–Field challenge, I show that, if our goal is to vindicate our beliefs about abstract objects, appeals to a theory on which those beliefs’ justification is easy, in the sense that it does not require that we be in contact with those objects, are hopeless.
2. “Higher-order evidence and the dynamics of self-location: An accuracy-based argument for calibrationism”, 2022
Erkenntnis, Advance online publication (doi.org/10.1007/s10670-022-00589-9)
I argue that the thesis that agents should conditionalize is, on any reasonable way of generalizing conditionalization so as to handle the evolution of self-locating belief, consistent with the thesis that calibrating is the right way to respond to higher-order evidence, and I show on this basis that calibrating maximizes expected accuracy.
3. “Best laid plans: Idealization and the rationality–accuracy bridge”, 2021
British Journal for the Philosophy of Science, Advance online publication (doi.org/10.1086/718275)
I argue that the “Best-Plan-to-Make” picture of the bridge between rationality and accuracy, to which Miriam Schoenfeld and Robert Steel appeal to avoid concluding that rationality requires conditionalizing, can’t help them avoid that conclusion—this picture turns out to be equivalent to the picture it’s intended to replace.
4. “Saving sensitivity”, 2022
Philosophical Quarterly, 72: 177–196 (doi.org/10.1093/pq/pqab015)
Working from the idea that sensitivity is intended to serve as a proxy for a certain sort of responsiveness to the facts, I develop a new sensitivity-based anti-luck epistemological condition that’s well motivated and immune to the usual counterexamples to sensitivity conditions.
5. “Categoricity by convention” (with Julien Murzi), 2021
Philosophical Studies, 178: 3391–3420 (doi.org/10.1007/s11098-021-01606-3)
We show, by appeal to a fairly orthodox naturalist-friendly (and realist-friendly) metasemantics, that a unified response is available to both Carnap’s Categoricity Problem for propositional logic and the Skolem–Putnam challenge to mathematical determinacy.
6. “Realism, reliability, and epistemic possibility: On modally interpreting the Benacerraf–Field challenge”, 2021
Synthese 199: 4415–4436 (doi.org/10.1007/s11229-020-02984-7)
I argue that the necessity objection to modal interpretations of the Benacerraf–Field challenge fails: what motivates an interpretation of the challenge in terms of our beliefs’ modal security also motivates an understanding of modal security in terms of epistemic possibilities rather than metaphysical possibilities.

7. “Linguistic convention and worldly fact: Prospects for a naturalist theory of the a priori”, 2019
Philosophical Studies 176: 1725–1752 (doi.org/10.1007/s11098-018-1088-5)
I give a new rendering of the most influential argument against truth by convention and consider possible conventionalist responses, concluding that, even in the face of that argument, there remains a promising way forward for the conventionalist project.
8. “Quinean holism, analyticity, and diachronic rational norms”, 2018
Synthese 195: 3143–3171 (doi.org/10.1007/s11229-017-1366-3)
I argue that W. V. O. Quine’s arguments against the analytic–synthetic distinction have been widely misinterpreted by his opponents and show that the Quinean position, properly understood, can’t be undermined by epistemological objections recently advanced by David Chalmers.
9. “Coin flips, credences and the Reflection Principle”, 2012
Analysis 72: 478–488 (doi.org/10.1093/analysis/ans077)
I argue that the orthodox way of understanding what imprecise credences are and how they’re updated—i.e., the credal committee model defended by Jim Joyce—leads to incoherent belief states in certain circumstances and so is untenable.

RESEARCH STAYS

2023 New York University
 Visiting Scholar, Department of Philosophy (5 weeks)

EDITED VOLUMES

1. *Paradox, Context, and Generality* (with Julien Murzi and Lorenzo Rossi), 2023
Special Issue, *Philosophical Studies* 180: 5–6 (link.springer.com/collections/fgebihefcj)
2. *Non-Classical Approaches to Paradox* (with Julien Murzi and Lorenzo Rossi), 2021–2024
Topical Collection, *Synthese* (link.springer.com/collections/aijjcbjchh)

UNDER CONTRACT

1. *Naturalism and the A Priori or: The Inevitability of Conventionalism* (under contract at Cambridge University Press)
In this book I explain why conventionalism provides our only hope of a satisfying naturalist-friendly explanation of our knowledge in areas of discourse such as logic and mathematics, and I develop a conventionalist view that remains attractive even in the face of objections to conventionalism that are generally taken to be decisive.

UNDER REVIEW

1. “Whence admissibility constraints? From inferentialism to tolerance”
I argue that, despite what most inferentialists insist, there’s no inferentialist-friendly way to motivate constraints on admissibility, which means badly behaved expressions like Prior’s ‘tonk’ turn out, from an inferentialist perspective, to be legitimate. I then explain why this isn’t actually a problem for inferentialism.

INVITED TALKS

1. “Pluralism by convention” (with Julien Murzi)
Logical Pluralism workshop, Munich Center for Mathematical Philosophy, Ludwig Maximilian University, 2023
2. “Whence admissibility constraints? From inferentialism to tolerance”
Logic and Metaphysics Workshop, CUNY Graduate Center, 2023
3. “Whence admissibility constraints? From inferentialism to tolerance”
EuPhiLo Conference, University of Padua, 2022
4. “The omega rule and the Categoricity Problem” (with Julien Murzi)
EuPhiLo Conference, University of Padua, 2022
5. “The omega rule and the Categoricity Problem” (with Julien Murzi, at home institution)
Colloquium, University of Salzburg, 2022
6. “Inferentialism and the admissibility of rules”
Convention in Logic and Language conference, University of Haifa, 2022
7. “The omega rule and the Categoricity Problem” (with Julien Murzi)
Convention in Logic and Language conference, University of Haifa, 2022
8. “The omega rule and the Categoricity Problem” (with Julien Murzi)
Perspectives on Categoricity workshop, University of Vienna, 2022
9. “Categoricity by convention” (with Julien Murzi, at home institution)
Colloquium, University of Salzburg, 2020

10. “Categoricity by convention” (with Julien Murzi)
EXPRESS Seminar, Institute for Logic, Language and Computation, University of Amsterdam, 2020
11. “Higher-order evidence and the dynamics of self-location”
Colloquium in Mathematical Philosophy: Logic and Language, Munich Center for Mathematical Philosophy, Ludwig Maximilian University, 2020

REFEREED TALKS

1. “The omega rule and the Categoricity Problem” (with Julien Murzi)
11th European Congress of Analytic Philosophy, University of Vienna, 2023
2. “The omega rule and the Categoricity Problem” (with Julien Murzi)
FilMat Conference 2022: Foundations, Definitions and Axioms, IUSS Pavia, 2022
3. “The omega rule and the Categoricity Problem” (with Julien Murzi)
uAnalytiCon-2022: Abstract Objects, Ural Federal University, 2022
4. “Entitlement of cognitive project, epistemic analyticity, and other routes to easy knowledge of abstracta”
Abstract Objects: Deflationary Approaches workshop, University of Santiago de Compostela, 2021
5. “Expected accuracy and the planning framework”
Conference for Philosophy of Science and Formal Methods in Philosophy of the Polish Association for Logic and Philosophy of Science, University of Gdańsk, 2019
6. “Categoricity by convention” (with Julien Murzi)
French PhilMath Workshop, Pantheon-Sorbonne University and Paris Diderot University, 2019
7. “Logical realism and logical reliability”
Filomena Workshop, Bergen Logic Group, University of Bergen, 2019
8. “Expected accuracy and the planning framework”
Bayes By the Sea conference, Marche Polytechnic University, 2019

COURSES TAUGHT

1. *Theories of Truth*, upper-level BA/MA seminar, University of Salzburg, 2023–2024 and 2019–2020
In this course students investigate various questions about the nature of truth by examining historical and contemporary formal and philosophical work on truth.
2. *Epistemology of the A Priori*, upper-level BA/MA seminar, University of Salzburg, 2022–2023 and 2019
In this course students investigate the possibility of beliefs whose justification is independent of experience by examining historical and contemporary work in epistemology.
3. *Knowledge and Evidence*, upper-level BA/MA seminar, University of Salzburg, 2021–2022
This course introduces students to some of the fundamental questions in epistemology, including questions about the structure of justification, the relationship between justification and knowledge, and the role of evidence.
4. *Higher-Order Evidence*, upper-level BA/MA seminar, University of Salzburg, 2020–2021
This course introduces students to a variety of puzzling features of higher-order evidence and, along the way, provides an accessible entry point into formal methods widely used by epistemologists.
5. *Understanding Arguments*, introductory course, Brown University, 2018
In this methodological introduction to philosophy, students learn how to use argument mapping to analyze and evaluate arguments from mass media and the philosophical literature.

SERVICE

Referee, *Acta Analytica*, *Analysis* (multiple), *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, *Dialectica* (multiple), *Episteme*, *Erkenntnis* (multiple), *Inquiry* (multiple), *Journal of Philosophical Logic*, *Noûs*, *Philosophers' Imprint* (multiple), *Philosophia*, *Philosophical Quarterly* (multiple), *Philosophical Studies* (multiple), *Synthese* (multiple), *Theoria*

Master's Thesis Examiner, Nina Abesadze's *The Dutch Book Argument for Probabilism and the Expected Utility Objection*, University of Salzburg (2021)

Master's Thesis Examiner, Simon Fischer's *Responding to Higher-Order Evidence by Forming Beliefs About Our Belief-Acquisition*, University of Salzburg (2023)

Co-organizer, Semantic Paradox, Context, and Generality workshop, University of Salzburg (2019)

Application reviewer, Summer Immersion Program in Philosophy, Brown University (2016–2017)

Co-organizer, Shapiro Graduate Student Philosophy Conference, Brown University (2011)