

DAVID THORSTAD

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EDUCATION	Harvard University , PhD in Philosophy	May 2020 (expected)
	Dissertation: Inquiry under bounds Committee: Ned Hall (Supervisor), Susanna Rinard, Susanna Siegel	
	Abstract: By the lights of traditional normative theories, human inquiry is substantially irrational. Humans regularly violate normative constraints set out by logic, probability theory, and decision theory. Traditional normative theories blame the agent, taking these findings to show that humans are irrational. By contrast, I suggest it is often better to blame the theory. Many seeming irrationalities are instances of rational inquiry by bounded agents. To defend this claim, I develop a consequentialist account of rational inquiry and metacognition. This view explains the value of rationality, accounts for duties to gather evidence, and is our best hope for vindicating empirically demonstrated biases as instances of rational inquiry.	
	Haverford College , BA in Philosophy and Mathematics	May 2012
	Global Priorities Institute, Oxford , Visiting Fellow	Summer 2019
	Australian National University , Visiting Student	Summers 2017, 2018
	London School of Economics , Visiting Student	Academic Year 2017-18
	Pembroke College, Oxford , Visiting Student	Academic Year 2010-11
AOS/AOC	Areas of specialization: Epistemology, decision theory, cognitive science Areas of competence: Logic, ethics, philosophy of mind, philosophy of social science	
PUBLICATIONS	Permissive metaepistemology , <i>Mind</i> 128 (2019): 907-26.	
AWARDS AND HONORS	Derek C Bok Award for Excellence in Graduate Student Teaching (\$5,000), Harvard University	2019
	Harvard's highest graduate teaching award. 5 awarded annually university-wide.	
	Bechtel Prize (\$3,000), Harvard University	2019
	Recognizes the best essay on a philosophical topic.	
	GSC Travel Grant (\$750), Harvard University	2019
	Certificates of Distinction and Excellence in Teaching (x6), Harvard University, awarded for:	2016-19
	• Virtue	Spring 2019
	• Social epistemology	Fall 2018
	• Saints, heretics, and atheists	Spring 2017
	• Fundamentals of logic	Fall 2016
	• Frege, Russell, and the early Wittgenstein	Fall 2016

• Logic and philosophy	Spring 2016
Frank Knox Memorial Traveling Fellowship (\$25,000), Harvard University	2017-18
For travel to LSE and ANU during academic year 2017-18.	
GSAS Predissertation Summer Fellowship (\$2,920), Harvard University	2015
Summa Cum Laude , Haverford College	2012
Phi Beta Kappa (as junior), Haverford College	2011
Collection prizes (all subjects), Pembroke College, Oxford	2010-11
Magill-Rhoades Scholarship (full need), Haverford College	2008-12

TALKS

“Norms of inquiry”	
• <i>Southern Society for Philosophy and Psychology</i> , Louisville, KY	May 2020
• <i>Workshop on bounded rationality</i> , Harvard	October 2019
“Satisficing reclaimed”	
• <i>PLM Network conference</i> , St. Andrews	August 2019
• <i>Bounded rationality reading group</i> , Oxford	July 2019
“Heuristics and longtermism”	
• <i>Second Oxford workshop on global priorities research</i> , Oxford	July 2019
• <i>Global Priorities Institute</i> , Oxford	June 2019
• <i>Future of Humanity Institute</i> , Oxford	June 2019
“Pure time-preference: some error-theoretic remarks”	
• <i>Workshop on longtermism</i> , Oxford	March 2019
“Omission bias revisited”	
• <i>Australasian Association of Philosophy / New Zealand Association of Philosophy Annual Conference</i> , University of Wellington, NZ	July 2018
• <i>ANU modeling ethical theories reading group</i> , Australian National University	July 2018
“Inquiry under bounds”	
• <i>LSE work in progress group</i> , London School of Economics	February 2018
“Permissive metaepistemology”	
• <i>ANU epistemology reading group</i> , Australian National University	June 2018
• <i>Yale graduate philosophy conference</i> , Yale	April 2017
• <i>UT-Austin graduate philosophy conference</i> , UT-Austin	April 2017

- *Northwestern/Notre Dame graduate epistemology conference*, April 2017
Notre Dame
- *BARSEA epistemology workshop*, Cambridge University February 2017
- *UConn graduate philosophy conference*, November 2016
University of Connecticut Storrs

TEACHING

As primary instructor at Harvard University

- Rationality Spring 2020
- Virtue Spring 2019
- Social epistemology Fall 2018
- Introduction to logic (Harvard Summer School) Summers 2018, 2019

As teaching fellow at Harvard University

- Saints, heretics, and atheists Spring 2017
- Fundamentals of logic Fall 2016
- Frege, Russell, and the early Wittgenstein Fall 2016
- Logic and philosophy Spring 2016

As grader at Harvard University

- Topics in logic Spring 2017

Other teaching

- **Harvard edX**, Content developer 2018-present
Developed content for MOOC “Logical Reasoning”.
Instructor: Ned Hall
- **Harvard Precollege Passport Program**, Instructor 2019
Developed interactive lecture, “The magnificent puzzles of Raymond Smullyan”
Class size \approx 100 students
- **Lawrence International High School**, Mathematics teacher 2012-13

PROFESSIONAL SERVICE

Conferences organized

- *Bayesianism and its rivals* October 2020
(with Ned Hall and Branden Fitelson), Harvard
- *Workshop on bounded rationality* October 2019
(with Ned Hall and Branden Fitelson), Harvard
- *Harvard-MIT graduate philosophy conference* April 2015
(with Kevin Dorst, Jen Nguyen, and Max Siegel), Harvard

Panels organized

- *Inquiry*, Southern Society for Philosophy and Psychology March 2020

Reading groups organized

- *Bounded rationality reading group* 2019
(with Sven Neth), Global Priorities Institute, Oxford
- *Epistemology reading group* 2018
(Four sessions. Unit on epistemic permissivism), ANU

- *Formal philosophy reading group*, Harvard 2016
- *Accuracy-first reading group*, Harvard 2016
- *Ethics and mathematics reading group* (with Zeynep Soysal), Harvard 2013-14

Other service:

- Refereeing: Mind, Noûs.

GRADUATE COURSEWORK

History of Philosophy

Advanced topics in British empiricism	Simmons
Plato	Jones
The rationalists	McDonough
Wittgenstein	Goldfarb

Value Theory

The ethics of belief	Rinard
Metaethics	Berker
Normative categories (*)	Berker
Normative and meta-normative questions	Parfit, Berker
Topics in global priorities research (*Oxford)	MacAskill, Tarsney

Metaphysics and Epistemology

Philosophy of science (*)	Hall
Topics in explanation (*)	Hall, Skow

Logic

Logic and philosophy (*)	Goldfarb
Set theory	Koellner
Set theory II	Koellner

Other

Beginning German	DeMair
First-year colloquium (Hume and David Lewis)	Hall, Simmons
First-year colloquium (Philosophy of language)	Richard
Instructional styles in philosophy	Hall

* denotes audit

DISSERTATION Inquiry under bounds

Humans are bounded agents. We have limited cognitive abilities and we must ration scarce cognitive and physical resources to achieve the best outcomes possible given our abilities. The study of *bounded rationality* asks what rationality comes to for bounded agents.

Rational choice theory is typically *outcome focused*, asking how features of beliefs and actions count in favor of adopting them. However, cognitive resources and abilities constrain not only the beliefs and actions we adopt, but also the process of inquiry by which we adopt them. For this reason, bounded rationality is *process*

focused, focusing on the higher-order question of how rational agents should inquire.

My project is to develop an account of rational inquiry for bounded agents. I carry out this project in four parts. Part 1 introduces the project and raises a skeptical challenge: empirical work in judgment and decisionmaking seems to suggest that humans often inquire irrationally. I suggest that existing epistemological views are unlikely to resolve the skeptical challenge, but argue that we can make good progress on the skeptical challenge by recasting empirical observations as the results of rational inquiry by bounded inquirers.

Part 2 develops a consequentialist account of rational inquiry for bounded agents. On this account, inquiries are rational if they are expectedly best given available information. Part 3 constructs three arguments for this account.

The first argument considers duties to gather evidence as a case study. I develop a consequentialist account which relates duties to gather evidence to the expected value of information gathered. I argue that this view outperforms competing accounts of duties to gather evidence developed by ethicists and epistemologists.

The second argument takes up Niko Kolodny's value question: why be rational? I argue that this question makes trouble for a number of traditional epistemological views. These views open a gap between the good and the rational, raising the challenge of why we should do what is rational instead of what is best. Consequentialism provides the natural answer: we should do what is rational because it is best.

The third argument returns to the skeptical challenge raised in Part 1. I argue that a consequentialist view is best suited for vindicatory epistemology, the project of recasting seemingly irrational behaviors as instances of rational inquiry or metacognition. I discuss three examples: conditional reasoning, anchoring and adjustment, and error monitoring.

My consequentialist account of rational inquiry raises a puzzle. How can bounded agents comply with consequentialist norms without engaging in expensive cognitive calculations? This is a question about rational metacognition: monitoring and control of inquiry. Part 4 compares a Bayesian account of rational metacognition with an alternative account developed by Joelle Proust. I provide descriptive evidence in a Proustian account and use this account to explain how bounded agents manage to inquire well without undue cost.

REFERENCES

Ned Hall (Supervisor)

Norman E. Vuilleumier Professor of Philosophy and Chair, Department of Philosophy, Harvard University
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Andreas Mogensen

Associate Professor of Philosophy, Oxford University
andreas.mogensen@philosophy.ox.ac.uk

Susanna Rinard

Associate Professor of Philosophy, Harvard University
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Susanna Siegel

Edgar Pierce Professor of Philosophy, Harvard University

ssiegel@fas.harvard.edu

Warren Goldfarb (Teaching Reference)

Walter Beverly Pearson Professor of Modern Mathematics and Mathematical Logic,

Harvard University

goldfarb@fas.harvard.edu