

HEATHER SPRADLEY

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EDUCATION

Ph.D., Harvard University, Philosophy, expected May 2021

B.A. *summa cum laude*, Biola University, Philosophy, 2016

DISSERTATION (long abstract on page 5)

Title: *Knowing With*

Committee: Susanna Rinard (Chair), Selim Berker, Susanna Siegel

Abstract:

Just as we are members of political communities, so too are we members of epistemic communities. Just as there are values in the political arena that cannot be realized by a single individual, so too are there values in the epistemic arena that cannot be realized by a single individual—I term one such value “epistemic convergence.” My dissertation argues that there are epistemic norms governing whom we should trust and what we should inquire into that are grounded in facts about epistemic communities and epistemically communal values. I argue that *ceteris paribus* we ought to trust our epistemic communities, and that *ceteris paribus* we ought to inquire beyond our epistemic communities into the very propositions that we believe based on trust in those communities. Finally, I argue that, contrary to initial appearances, it is possible to inquire while trusting without thereby doing anything irrational, and that inquiring while trusting is a crucial epistemic balancing act. Engaging well in that balancing act helps us solve pressing social epistemic problems, such as epistemic bubbles and media bubbles.

Areas of Specialization: Epistemology, Ethics

Areas of Competence: Ethics of Technology, Philosophy of Religion, Social Philosophy, Political Philosophy, Early Modern Philosophy

PUBLISHED WORK

“The Ethics of Believing Out Loud,” forthcoming in *Analytic Philosophy*.

WORK UNDER REVIEW

“Inquiry and Trust: An Epistemic Balancing Act” (revise-and-resubmit status)

PRESENTATIONS AND COMMENTS

“Inquiring While Believing”

Meeting of the Eastern Division of the American Philosophical Association, Online, January 2021.

“Inquiry and Trust: An Epistemic Balancing Act”

Meeting of the Early Career Inquiry Network, Online, September 2020.

Graduate Student Commentator-at-Large

Penn Reasons and Foundations in Epistemology Conference, University of Pennsylvania, November 2019.

“The Ethics of Believing Out Loud”

Social Epistemology Network Event, Yonsei University International Campus, June 2019.

“The Ethics of Believing Out Loud”

International Conference on Ethics, University of Porto, June 2019.

“Escaping Epistemic Bubbles: Defending an Epistemic Norm of Inquiry”

Invited talk, Epistemology Brownbag Series, Northwestern University, April 2019.

Comments on Jason Baehr, “The Structure of Intellectual Vices”

Vice Epistemology Conference, University of Connecticut, April 2019.

“Escaping Epistemic Bubbles: Defending an Epistemic Norm of Inquiry”

Workshop on Intellectual Autonomy, Epistemic Paternalism, and Epistemic Authority, Autonomous University of Madrid, February 2019.

Comments on Jonathan Dixon, “Reliable Knowledge: A Reply to Turri”

Meeting of the Eastern Division of the American Philosophical Association, New York, NY, January 2019.

“Practically Testifying”

University of Rochester Graduate Epistemology Conference, University of Rochester, November 2018.

“Practically Testifying: A Practical Challenge for Practical Reasons for Belief”

Edinburgh Graduate Conference in Epistemology, University of Edinburgh, June 2018.

TEACHING

Harvard University, Instructor

Social Epistemology, 2021 (online)

Harvard University, Teaching Assistant

Inequality, Lucas Stanczyk, 2020 (online)

Happiness, Susanna Rinard, 2019

Philosophy of Religion, Cheryl Chen, 2018

Harvard University, Graduate Fellow

Embedded EthiCS, 2019

Designed and implemented three interactive modules on data ethics for three computer science courses (*Introduction to Data Science, Economics and Computation, and Data Systems*).

Harvard University Pre-College, Instructor

The Nature of Justice in Our World, 2019

Harvard University Pre-College, Guest Lecturer

“To Believe or Not Believe?” 2019 (in person) and 2020 (online)

Biola University, Teaching Assistant

Basic Studies in Critical Thinking and Writing, Davidson, 2014; Sprowl, 2015

Biola University, Other Academic Employment

Writing Center Consultant at Biola Writing Center, 2014-2016

Research Assistant for Dr. Jamie Campbell, 2014-2016

Paper Grader for the Torrey Honors Institute, 2014-2015

ACADEMIC HONORS, AWARDS, AND FELLOWSHIPS

American Philosophical Association

William James Prize (for “Inquiring While Believing”), 2021

Harvard University

Certificate of Distinction in Teaching, 2020

Awarded by the Derek Bok Center for Teaching and Learning.

[Learning activity](#) accepted by the ablconnect initiative at the Derek Bok Center for Teaching and Learning, 2020

Richard M. Martin Pre-Dissertation Fellowship, 2020

Harvard Graduate School of Arts and Sciences Fellowship, 2016-2018

Biola University

Epsilon Kappa Epsilon (honor society), inducted 2016

Most Outstanding Philosophy Student of the Year, 2016

Presented to two graduating students, awarded by the Department of
Philosophy at Biola University.

St. Anne's on the Hill Award, 2016

Presented to one graduating student, awarded by the Torrey Honors Institute
at Biola University.

Dean's List, 2012-2016

President's Scholarship, 2012-2016

SERVICE

Co-organizer, Emerson Hall Writing Accountability Group, 2018-2020.

Coordinator, Metaphysics and Epistemology Workshop, 2019.

Reviewer, Harvard-MIT Graduate Conference, 2017, 2018, 2019.

GRADUATE COURSEWORK (* INDICATES AUDIT)

Beyond Dualism: Descartes and His Critics.....Alison Simmons
 Embedded EthICS Teaching Lab.....Jeffrey Behrends
 *Epistemology of the Third Realm.....Michaela McSweeney (Boston University)
 Explanation.....Ned Hall and Brad Skow (cross-listed with MIT)
 First Year Colloquium (Fall).....Ned Hall and Russell Jones
 First Year Colloquium (Spring).....Gina Schouten
 *Formal Tools.....Edward Hall
 Fundamentals of Logic.....Warren Goldfarb
 Instructional Styles in Philosophy.....Bernhard Nickel
 Kant's Ethical Theory.....Christine Korsgaard
 Method, Essence, and Intuition in Metaethics.....John Bengson
 *Normative Categories.....Selim Berker
 Norms of Belief.....Selim Berker and Susanna Rinard
 *Perception.....Susanna Siegel
 Plato's *Republic*.....Russell Jones
 Practical Reasons.....Jeff Behrends
 *Punishment and Imprisonment.....Tommie Shelby
 Understanding.....John Bengson

LONG DISSERTATION ABSTRACT: *Knowing With*

In my dissertation, I explore epistemic norms that are grounded in facts about epistemic communities. Just as we are members of political communities, so too are we members of what I term “epistemic communities.” Just as our membership in political communities gives rise to political norms to which we are subject, so too, I argue, does our membership in epistemic communities give rise to epistemic norms to which we are subject. Moreover, just as there are values in the political arena that cannot be realized by a single individual, so too are there values in the epistemic arena that cannot be realized by a single individual—I term one such value, “epistemic convergence.” This framework gives rise to the two central questions of my dissertation: (1) How and when does membership in an epistemic community give rise to distinctively epistemic norms that apply to individual epistemic agents? (2) What are these individual epistemic norms to which membership in an epistemic community gives rise and how do they relate to one another?

Epistemic communities are best understood as groups of epistemic agents who routinely interact and influence one another with respect to their significant beliefs, resulting in significant overlap in their beliefs, habits of belief formation, methods of inquiry, etc. Epistemic convergence occurs when two agents or two epistemic communities come to agree about whether p and do so in a way that takes into account the agreement of the other agent or epistemic community. They thus give weight to each other’s agreement, according the other agent or community a kind of epistemic respect. Epistemic agents considered alone can pursue knowledge or justified belief, but it is only when we take into account our epistemic communities that we see the value of pursuing epistemic convergence. After all, epistemic convergence cannot even be realized by an epistemic agent in isolation.

With this picture of our epistemically communal lives as backdrop, I argue that there are epistemic norms governing inquiry and trust. These two concepts have often been relegated to the practical realm, it seems, because epistemologists have traditionally focused on the goals of individual epistemic agents alone. Since, as I argue, epistemic communities so deeply shape epistemic individuals, epistemic communities become a kind of extended self. We ought to trust our epistemic communities, then, because we trust ourselves and our epistemic communities are a kind of epistemic self. Without some positive evidence that they are not trustworthy, failing to trust those communities that shaped us would be inconsistent. Further, although inquiry and trust seem to pull in opposite directions, I argue that we also ought to inquire into those propositions that we believe based on trust in our communities in order to pursue epistemic convergence as well as knowledge. We ought to inquire outside our epistemic communities, talking to other people or reading new books, in order to prevent epistemic bubbles from forming. Epistemic bubbles insulate epistemic communities such that epistemic convergence beyond the community is impossible. We ought to inquire, then, in order to achieve epistemic convergence much more broadly.

One upshot is that choosing between trust and inquiry, because we often assume we must, is often the source of our social epistemic problems. It’s not trusting too much that locks us in epistemic bubbles but failure to inquire while trusting. I argue that it is possible and rational to trust and inquire with respect to the same proposition at the same time, even though inquiring while trusting initially appears irrational or impossible. Inquiry essentially involves open-mindedness, on my view, and open-mindedness does not require us to doubt or suspend judgment with respect to our trust-based beliefs. When we embrace inquiring while trusting and trusting while inquiring, we mitigate the risks of trust by inquiring and the risks of inquiry by trusting. Thus, inquiring while trusting is a crucial epistemic balancing act—anchoring in community while pursuing epistemic convergence. That balancing act assists us in the pursuit of knowing *with* others.

REFERENCES

Susanna Rinard

John L. Loeb Associate Professor of the Humanities

Department of Philosophy

Harvard University

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Selim Berker

Alford Professor of Natural Religion, Moral Philosophy, and Civil Polity

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