

EMILY C. McWILLIAMS

Department of Philosophy
Harvard University
Emerson Hall 209a
25 Quincy St.
Cambridge, MA 02138

emily.mcwilliams@gmail.com
(617) 501-5582

EDUCATION

- 2016 (EXP) **Ph.D. in Philosophy**
Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts
Committee: Susanna Siegel, Mark Richard, Susanna Rinard
- 2006 **M.A. in Philosophy**
Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana
- 2005 **B.A. in Philosophy, Linguistics, and Psychology**
Minors in French and English
summa cum laude
Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana

RESEARCH INTERESTS

AOS Epistemology, Philosophy of Mind, Feminist Philosophy

AOC Philosophy of Psychology, Applied Ethics, Ethics & Social Philosophy,
Meta-Philosophy

Dissertation **BELIEF AND AMELIORATIVE EPISTEMOLOGY**
Epistemologists disagree about which accounts of normative concepts like *knowledge* and *justification* are best. I argue that these debates deserve an *ameliorative* approach, on which we start by asking what legitimate purposes we have for employing a framework of normative epistemic concepts to begin with. Given an answer to this, we can more easily determine which set of concepts is up to the task. I defend this approach in considering three different phenomena that highlight the moral dimensions of our epistemic lives: (i) a broad family of situations I call *epistemic oppression*, in which people are undermined in the capacity as epistemic agents, (ii) a perceptual belief-forming process called *thin-slicing*, in which beliefs are formed quickly and reliably, but with very little consciously available information, and (iii) a belief revision process known as *belief polarization*, in which exposure to a mixed batch of evidence causes people to increase confidence in whatever their antecedent belief was. In each case, I argue that the ameliorative approach helps us develop concepts that reveal our epistemic situation.

UNDER REVIEW

‘Belief Polarization, Re-Visited’

PRESENTATIONS

‘Epistemic Oppression and Ameliorative Epistemology’ to be presented at Ways of Knowing: Feminist Philosophy of Science and Epistemology, Society for Women in Philosophy, Ireland, November 2015.

‘What is Epistemic Oppression?’ to be presented at the Philosophers’ Cocoon Philosophy Conference, University of Tampa, USA, November 2015.

‘Epistemic Oppression and Ameliorative Epistemology’ presented at the Northern New England Philosophical Association Conference, Bates College, USA, September 2015.

‘Ameliorative Inquiry in Epistemology’ presented at Understanding Value Conference, University of Sheffield, UK, July 2015.

‘Epistemic Oppression and Ameliorative Epistemology’ presented at The Kentucky Philosophical Association Summer Workshop, Centre College, USA, July 2015.

‘What is Epistemic Oppression?’ presented at The Intersection of Epistemology and Philosophy of Mind, Bled, Slovenia, June 2015.

‘Assessing Belief Polarization in an Evidentialist Framework’ Presented at Mississippi Philosophical Association Annual Meeting, Millsaps College, USA, April 2015.

- *Awarded prize for best graduate student paper at conference.*

‘Assessing Belief Polarization in an Evidentialist Framework’ presented at Graduate Conference in Philosophy of Mind, Language, and Cognitive Science, University of Western Ontario, Canada, May 2014.

‘Belief Polarization, Re-Visited’ presented at The Senses Conference, CUNY Graduate Center, USA, April 2014.

‘Belief Polarization, Re-Visited’ presented at Northwestern/Notre Dame Graduate Epistemology Conference, Northwestern University, USA, April 2014.

‘Evidential Rationality and Belief Polarization’ presented at Evidence, Reliability, and Group Epistemology Conference, Bled, Slovenia, June 2013.

Presentations at Harvard Metaphysics and Epistemology Workshop.....

‘Epistemic Oppression and Ameliorative Epistemology’, November 2015.

‘Hermeneutic Injustice and Justification’, February 2015.

‘Epistemic Communism and Ameliorative Epistemology’, October 2014.

‘How to Believe What the Evidence Supports’, March 2014.

‘What is Evidential Irrationality?’, October 2013.

‘Evidential Rationality and Belief Polarization’, March 2013.

‘Epistemic Value Theory and Normative Ethics’, November 2012.

‘Thin Slicing and Rational Action’, April 2012.

‘On The Epistemology of Thin Slicing’, November 2011.

‘Epistemological Disjunctivism and Skepticism’, April 2011.

CONFERENCE RESPONSES

Respondent to Jason Chen’s ‘The Core of Oppression’ Philosophers’ Cocoon Annual Conference, University of Tampa, USA, November 2015.

Respondent to Enoch Lambert’s ‘Higher-Order Intentionality and Animal Mindreading: Against a Dennettian Conjecture’ Southern Society for Philosophy and Psychology Annual Conference, New Orleans, USA, April 2015.

Respondent to Thiemo Breyer’s ‘Visibility, Embodiment, and Empathy’ The Mahindra Humanities Center/Mellon Violence and Non-Violence Seminar, Cambridge, USA, October 2014.

Respondent to Chase Wrenn’s ‘Defending Epistemic Teleology’ Southern Society for Philosophy and Psychology Annual Conference, Charleston, USA, February 2014.

Respondent to Nalini Ambady’s ‘Social Judgments from Thin Slices of Behavior’ The Network for Sensory Research Workshop on Perceptual Learning and Perceptual Recognition, University of Toronto, Canada, May 2012.

SUMMER SEMINARS

Neuroscience Bootcamp, University of Pennsylvania, USA, July 2012.

HONORS AND AWARDS

Harvard University Dissertation Completion Fellowship	2015-2016
Graduate Student Paper Prize (<i>awarded by Mississippi Philosophical Association</i>)	2015
Departmental Martin Prize Fellowship	2014-2015
Harvard Graduate School of Arts and Sciences Term Time Research Award	Fall 2013
Certificate of Distinction in Teaching (for <i>The Romance: From Jane Austen to Chick Lit</i>)	Fall 2012
Harvard Graduate School of Arts and Sciences Pre-Dissertation Summer Fellowship	2012
Certificate of Distinction in Teaching (for <i>Rationality and The Emotions</i>)	Spring 2012
Certificate of Distinction in Teaching (for <i>Philosophy of Mind</i>)	Fall 2011
Graduate Prize Fellowship, Graduate School of Arts and Sciences	2008

Princeton in Asia Fellowship	2006-2007
Phi Beta Kappa	2005
The Anne Butler Hess Prize in Philosophy (<i>for best graduating senior in philosophy</i>)	2005

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

As Instructor.....

Introduction to Feminisms <i>*taught at Boston College in the Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Program</i>	Spring 2014
Colloquium: Teaching Women's Studies <i>*taught at Boston College in the Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Program</i>	Spring 2014
Social Epistemology	Spring 2014
Pedagogy: Instructional Styles in Philosophy <i>*co-taught with Bernhard Nickel</i>	Fall 2013- Spring 2014
Rationality and The Emotions	Spring 2012

As Teaching Assistant.....

The Romance: From Jane Austen to Chick Lit , T.A. for Linda Schlossberg <i>*taught in Studies of Women, Gender, and Sexuality</i>	Fall 2012
Philosophy of Mind , T.A. for Farid Marsour	Fall 2011
Metaethics , T.A. for Selim Berker	Fall 2011
Issues in Ethics , T.A. for Thomas Scanlon <i>Head Teaching Fellow</i>	Spring 2011
Moral Reasoning About Social Protest , T. A. for Susanna Siegel <i>Head Teaching Fellow</i>	Fall 2010

Advising Experience.....

Junior Year Tutorial in Studies of Women, Gender, and Sexuality <i>*One-on-one tutor for junior year research paper, in preparation for senior thesis</i>	Spring 2013
Assistant Head Tutor <i>*Academic advisor to undergraduate philosophy concentrators</i>	Fall 2012- Spring 2013

Departmental Teaching Fellow**Provided individual advising for all teaching assistants in philosophy*Fall 2013-
Spring 2014**Language Teaching (As Instructor).....****English for Social Science Research****taught at An Giang University (Long Xuyên, Vietnam)*Fall 2007-
Spring 2008**English Speaking and Listening Skills, Intermediate Level****taught at Kiên Giang Community College (Rạch Giá, Vietnam)*Fall 2006-
Spring 2007**English Speaking and Listening Skills, Introductory Level****taught at Kiên Giang Community College (Rạch Giá, Vietnam)*Fall 2006-
Spring 2007**Intermediate English Grammar and Composition****taught at Kiên Giang Community College (Rạch Giá, Vietnam)*Fall 2006-
Spring 2007**English for Reading and Research****taught at Wuhan University of Technology (Wuhan, China)*

Summer 2006

Advanced English Grammar and Composition**taught as volunteer at MET Family Literacy Program (Providence, RI)*

Fall 2005

Elementary Spanish**taught as volunteer at Lusher Elementary School (New Orleans, LA)*

Spring 2005

GRADUATE COURSEWORK*(*not taken for credit)*

Foundations of Justice*	Amartya Sen and Eric Nelson, Fall 2013
Metaphysical Grounding*	Selim Berker, Spring 2013
Topics in Philosophy of Mind*	Alex Byrne and Agustín Rayo, Fall 2012
Structural Explanation in Social Science*	Sally Haslanger, Spring 2012
Epistemic Normativity*	Selim Berker, Spring 2011
Philosophy of Language*	Mark Richard, Spring 2011
Explanatory Structure*	Ned Hall, Fall 2010
Pedagogy: Instructional Styles in Philosophy	Ned Hall and Alison Simmons, 2010-2011
Hegel and Kant	Matthew Boyle, Spring 2010
Skepticism and Epistemic Levels*	Roger White, Spring 2010
Philosophy of Perception*	Susanna Siegel, Spring 2010
The Rationalists	Jeffrey McDonough, Fall 2009
Philosophy of Biology	Peter Godfrey-Smith, Fall 2009
Epistemology*	Selim Berker, Spring 2009
Topics in Intersubjectivity	Richard Moran and Douglas Lavin, Spring 2009
First Year Colloquium in Ethics	Douglas Lavin, Spring 2009
Feminist Political Philosophy	Sally Haslanger and Rae Langton, Spring 2009
Aristotle on Justice	Gisela Striker, Spring 2009
Ethics and Action	Douglas Lavin and Matthew Boyle, Fall 2008
Deductive Logic	Warren Goldfarb, Fall 2008

First Year Colloquium on Causation

Ned Hall and Alison Simmons, Fall 2008

ACADEMIC SERVICE

Coordinator for the Harvard Minorities and Philosophy (MAP) Chapter	2013-present
Graduate Representative to the Faculty	2014-2015
Member of Graduate-Faculty Curriculum Reform Committee	2014
Research Assistant for Stanley Cavell	2014
Research Assistant for Mark Richard	2014
Departmental Teaching Fellow, Department of Philosophy	2013-2014
Assistant Head Tutor, Harvard Department of Philosophy	2012-2013
Research Assistant for Christine Korsgaard	2012
Metaphysics & Epistemology Dissertation Workshop Coordinator	2011-2012
Student Coordinator for Philosophy & Classics Department Conference	2011
Graduate Representative to the Faculty	2010-2011
Philosophy Department Representative to the Graduate Student Council	2009-2010
Student Coordinator for Philosophy of Perception Conference	2008, 2009
Copy Editor for <i>Noûs</i> and <i>Philosophy and Phenomenological Research</i>	2005

LANGUAGES

Reading proficiency in French and Spanish

REFERENCES

Susanna Siegel
Harvard University
ssiegel@fas.harvard.edu

Mark Richard
Harvard University
richard4@fas.harvard.edu

Susanna Rinard
Harvard University
susannarinard@fas.harvard.edu

TEACHING REFERENCE

Sharlene Hesse-Biber
Boston College
hesse@bc.edu

Long Dissertation Abstract

Epistemology uses normative concepts like *knowledge* and *justification* to appraise beliefs and the processes by which we form and revise them. Many debates in epistemology are about which account of knowledge or justification is best.

I argue that some of these debates deserve an *ameliorative* approach (Haslanger, 2012). Ameliorative inquiry in epistemology starts by asking what legitimate purposes we might have for employing a framework of normative epistemic concepts to begin with. What do we want these concepts to *do* for us? Given an answer to this, we can more easily determine which set of concepts is up to the task.

I defend an ameliorative approach to considering three phenomena that highlight the moral dimension of our epistemic lives: (i) a broad family of situations that I call *epistemic oppression*, which includes but is not limited to what Miranda Fricker calls 'epistemic injustice', (ii) a kind of perceptual belief forming process known as *thin-slicing*, and (iii) a type of belief-revision process called *belief polarization*.

In "Epistemic Oppression and Ameliorative Epistemology", I argue that one desideratum for normative epistemic concepts is to promote our flourishing as epistemic agents. The concept of epistemic oppression helps to do this, because it allows us to understand and identify instances where our epistemic flourishing is unfairly impeded. Epistemic oppression occurs when members of a group are subject to a systematic and unfair disadvantage within a social epistemic structure, resulting from the operation of a capacity to control exercises of their epistemic agency, thus systematically and unfairly limiting their epistemic flourishing. The concept is useful because in order to begin to think about how to address the kind of wrong that happens when once is undermined in her capacity as an epistemic agent, we have to be able to name it, and to explain why it is a problem.

I distinguish between several types of epistemic oppression, including cases in which our normative epistemic concepts *themselves* can be vehicles for epistemic oppression. The following example concerns an oppressive concept of *justification* that is embedded in our everyday social epistemic practice. In everyday interactions, it is common to ask others to cite justificatory reasons for their beliefs. If a person is unable to do so, then in the context of this practice, we conclude that her belief is unjustified. This seems to be the wrong result in certain cases where a person is sensitive to features of a situation, but unable to identify or articulate them. In such cases, we need a notion of justification that does not require the person to be able to articulate - or perhaps even access - the justificatory reasons for her belief. This is a case in which the ameliorative approach helps pick out a useful concept of justification.

In "Thin-Slicing and Epistemic Justification", I argue that this anti-accessibilist notion of justification has independent application in cases that are not instances of epistemic oppression. I consider beliefs that are formed on a perceptual basis called *thin-slicing*, which is rooted in extensive patterns of exposure that are nonetheless unavailable to consciousness. For example, marriage counselors can reliably predict within 30 seconds of seeing a couple whether their marriage will succeed, but are unable to say what those judgments are based on. The anti-accessibilist notion of justification can accommodate the idea that the counselors' beliefs are nonetheless justified. It thus gives us a good epistemological theory of thin-slicing, as a mode of forming beliefs in which a person responds to information that she in some sense has, without being aware of what information she is responding to.

Finally, I consider belief polarization, which is a belief-revision process that occurs when people who disagree about some matter of fact are exposed to a mixed body of evidence that bears on that dispute. Each person responds by focusing on the evidence that seems to disconfirm their antecedent belief, and scrutinizing it to find flaws that justify dismissing it. Meanwhile, they take confirming evidence on board without scrutiny, and use it to bolster their antecedent beliefs. So, everyone becomes more confident, and beliefs *polarize* with respect to one another. Can this response to evidence result in rational beliefs? I argue that we either need a theory on which polarized beliefs are not rational, or a pluralist theory of rational belief.