

# Matthew C. Weiner

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## Areas of Specialization

Epistemology, Philosophy of Language.

## Areas of Competence

Ethics and Practical Reason, Philosophy of Action, Philosophical Logic,  
Probability and Decision Theory.

## Academic Positions

Department of Philosophy, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, TX.  
Assistant Professor, Fall 2005-present.

Department of Philosophy, RSSH, Australian National University, Canberra, ACT  
Australia.

Visiting Fellow, June-July 2006.

Department of Philosophy, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Milwaukee, WI.  
Adjunct Assistant Professor, Fall 2004—Spring 2005.

Department of Philosophy, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, UT.  
Visiting Assistant Professor, Fall 2003—Spring 2004.

## Education

University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, PA; Fall 1994—Spring 2003.

Ph.D., Philosophy, April 2003.

M.A., Philosophy, April 1998.

Harvard College, Cambridge, MA; fall 1988—spring 1992.

B.A., Philosophy and Mathematics, June 1992.

## Papers

“Must We Know What We Say?” *Philosophical Review*, April 2005 (vol. 114 no. 2). (Note: forthcoming as of July 2006.)

“Are All Conversational Implicatures Cancelable?” *Analysis* April 2006 (vol. 66 no. 2), pp. 127-30.

“Why Does Justification Matter?” *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, September 2005 (vol. 86 no. 3), pp. 422-444.

“How Causal Probabilities Might Fit into Our Objectively Indeterministic World” (with Nuel Belnap). *Synthese*, forthcoming.

“Accepting Testimony.” *Philosophical Quarterly*, April 2003 (vol. 53 no. 211), pp. 256-264.

### **Comissioned Reviews** (in progress)

Review of *Epistemological Contextualism*, ed. Martijn Blaauw. *Philosophy in Review*.

“Norms of Assertion.” Review article. *Philosophical Compass*.

### **Dissertation**

*Testimony: Evidence and Responsibility*.

Committee: Nuel Belnap (director), Michael Thompson, Joseph Camp, Thomas Fararo (Sociology, University of Pittsburgh).

### **Presentations (excluding Job Talks)**

“Practical Reasoning and the Concept of Knowledge.” Epistemic Value Conference, Stirling, UK, August 2006.

“The Two-Envelope Problem: Extensions and Prospects.” Australasian Association of Philosophy Meeting, Canberra, Australia, July 2006.

“The Uses of Relativism.” Epistemic Modality Conference, Australian National University, June 2006.

“Does Knowledge Matter?” Texas Tech University, November 2005.

“How to Stop Being Gullible.” Illinois Wesleyan University, May 2005.

“The Practical Importance of Knowledge (Such as It Is).” APA Central Regional Meeting, Chicago, IL, April 2005.

“An Incoherence Theory of Knowledge.” University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, February 2005.

“Deductive Closure and the Sorites.” APA Pacific Regional Meeting, Pasadena, CA, March 2004.

“The Norms of Assertion.” University of Utah, December 2003.

“How Many Things Can You Say at Once?: The Varieties of Content.” Rosenblatt Lunchtime Talk Series, University of Utah, November 2003.

### **Teaching Experience**

A complete teaching dossier is available on request.

#### Texas Tech University

Logic and Epistemology: Modal Logic and Counterfactuals (graduate)

Epistemology (advanced undergraduate)

Advanced Logic (advanced undergraduate)

Business Ethics (graduate and undergraduate sections)

#### University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

Introduction to Social and Political Philosophy

Great Moral Philosophers (advanced undergraduate)

Modern Deductive Logic (graduate/undergraduate)

Rationality and Morality (graduate/undergraduate)

#### University of Utah

Philosophy of Action (graduate/undergraduate)

Deductive Logic (two sections)  
Epistemology (graduate/undergraduate)  
Theory of Knowledge (two sections)

University of Pittsburgh

*Full Responsibility for Course:*

Introduction to Symbolic Logic (four times; once as lecture course, including supervision of teaching assistants)  
Introduction to Existentialism (lecture course, including supervision of teaching assistants)  
Introduction to Philosophical Problems (twice)  
Philosophy of Religion (four times)  
Business Ethics

*Responsible for Recitation Sections:*

Social Philosophy  
Philosophy of Religion  
Introduction to Symbolic Logic  
Introduction to Existentialism  
Introduction to Philosophical Problems (twice)  
Introduction to Ethics

*Supervision of Directed Study:*

Philosophy and Film (advanced undergraduate)

*Responsible for Grading:*

Logic Core, Graduate Level

### **Courses Prepared to Teach**

*Graduate*

Philosophy of Language, Epistemology, Speech Act Theory, Topics in Philosophical Logic, Graduate-Level Introduction to Logic, Practical Reason, Logic of Time

*Advanced Undergraduate*

Philosophy of Language, Epistemology, Advanced Undergraduate Logic, Ethics and Practical Reason, Decision Theory and Probability, Philosophy of Religion, Philosophy of Action, Intensional Logic, Wittgenstein, Free Will and Determinism

*Introductory Undergraduate*

Philosophical Problems, Logic, Ethics, Social Philosophy, Existentialism, Philosophy of Religion, Business Ethics

## Service

Referee for Oxford University Press, *Noûs*, *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, *Philosophical Quarterly*, *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, *Dialectica*.

Speakers Committee, Texas Tech University, Fall 2005-present.

Faculty Search Committee, Texas Tech University, 2005-2006 (including interview committee).

Phi Sigma Tau Advisor, Texas Tech University, 2005-2006.

Departmental Teaching Mentor, Dept. of Philosophy, University of Pittsburgh, Fall 2001-Spring 2002.

Colloquium Coordinator, Dept. of Philosophy, University of Pittsburgh, Fall 1996-Spring 1998.

Work-In-Progress Colloquium Coordinator, Dept. of Philosophy, University of Pittsburgh, Fall 1999-Spring 2000.

## Languages

French (reading knowledge).

## Research Project

My current project is to explore how beliefs should be evaluated and to argue that evaluation of beliefs should be multi-dimensional. In particular, I will argue *against* the view that the paramount epistemic question is when beliefs count as knowledge. Rather, there are many individually important epistemic questions, such as whether the belief is true, justified, counterfactually stable, and likely to hold up in the light of further evidence. Saying that S knows that *p* is a quick way of saying that S's belief that *p* scores well on several of these dimensions.

One stage of this project consists of debunking the idea that knowledge is the paramount epistemic status, with an importance beyond the importance of the other epistemic dimensions. This means arguing against many accounts on which knowledge has a special role to play in some practice that truth, justification, etc. cannot play. Thus I attack the idea that knowledge is the norm of assertion in favor of the account (given in my dissertation) on which the primary norm of testimony is truth. I also argue that knowledge does not have a distinctive role in practical reasoning, and that testimony may not transmit knowledge if knowledge is taken as a purely epistemic status. Furthermore, a conception of knowledge that was well-suited to a special role in one of these practices would be ill-suited to others.

This is more than a negative argument. The argument that knowledge does not play various special roles illuminates the concepts that do play these roles. The primary norm of assertion turns out to be that an assertion should be true, with secondary norms governing how well justified an assertion should be; these norms affect the speaker's credibility and when it is appropriate to blame her for a false assertion. Many different concepts have a key role in practical reasoning, depending on the standpoint we adopt on practical reasoning. Truth and justification are two of the most practically important epistemic concepts, but stability of belief and of justification also turn out to be important.

The project also provides an account of how knowledge attributions, an alternative to contextualism, invariantism, and relativism. If knowledge attributions provide quick ways of saying that a belief has several desirable characteristics, different knowledge attributions may ascribe different desirable characteristics in different combinations. Do knowledge ascriptions vary with the situation of the ascriber or with the situation of the knower, or some third alternative? My hope is that my analysis will explain why we have use for a conception of knowledge that makes this question so difficult to answer, while also showing that answering the question is not as important as it seems.

### **Abstracts of Selected Papers**

Full versions of all these papers are available on request; they can also be downloaded from <http://mattweiner.net/papers.html>.

#### *Must We Know What We Say? (forthcoming in *Philosophical Review*)*

The knowledge account of assertion holds that it is improper to assert that  $p$  unless the speaker knows that  $p$ . This paper argues against the knowledge account of assertion; there is no general norm that the speaker must know what she asserts. I argue that there are cases in which it can be entirely proper to assert something that you do not know. In addition, it is possible to explain the cases that motivate the knowledge account by postulating a general norm that assertions would be true, combined with conversational norms that govern all speech acts. A theory on which proper assertions must be true explains the data better than a theory on which proper assertions must be known to be true.

#### *Does Knowledge Matter?*

In *Knowledge and Lotteries*, Hawthorne argues for a view on which whether a speaker knows that  $p$  depends on whether her practical environment makes it appropriate for her to use  $p$  in practical reasoning. It may seem that this view yields a straightforward account of why knowledge is important, based on the role of knowledge in practical reasoning. I argue that this is not so; practical reasoning does not motivate us to care about knowledge in itself. At best, practical reasoning motivates us to care about several other concepts in themselves, and ascriptions of knowledge provide economical summaries of these independently important desiderata.

#### *The (Mostly Harmless) Inconsistency of Knowledge Ascriptions*

I argue for an alternative to invariantist, contextualist, and relativist semantics for 'know'. This is that our use of 'know' is inconsistent; it is governed by several mutually inconsistent inference principles. Yet this inconsistency does not prevent us from assigning an effective content to most individual knowledge-ascriptions, and it leads to trouble only in exceptional circumstances. Accordingly, we have no reason to abandon our inconsistent knowledge-talk.

#### *Are All Conversational Implicatures Cancelable? (published in *Analysis*, vol. 66)*

This brief essay argues against the widely held view that all conversational implicatures must be cancelable. A putative act of cancelation may itself be governed by

conversational rules. Accordingly, a cancelability test for the presence of conversational implicatures will not always work.

*Accepting Testimony* (published in *Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 53)

The author defends the Acceptance Principle for Testimony (APT), that hearers are justified in accepting testimony unless they have positive evidence against its reliability, against Fricker's local reductionist view. Local reductionism, the doctrine that hearers need evidence that a particular piece of testimony is reliable if they are to be justified in believing it, must on pain of skepticism be complemented by a principle that grants default justification to some testimony; it is argued that (APT) is the principle required. Two alternative principles that are weaker than (APT) are considered as complements to local reductionism; one principle yields counterintuitive results if we accept it and do not accept (APT), while the other principle is too weak to enable local reductionism to avoid skepticism.

*Why Does Justification Matter?* (published in *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 86)

It has been claimed that justification, conceived traditionally, is not an epistemologically important property. I argue for the importance of a conception of justification that is completely dependent on the subject's experience, using an analogy to advice. When giving advice, we sometimes have to choose between advising an action whose successful performance guarantees achievement of the advisee's goal and advising an action that is within the advisee's capabilities. Similarly, when endorsing a property of beliefs as epistemologically important, we can either endorse a property that guarantees the epistemic goal of attaining truth and avoiding falsehood, or we can endorse a property that depends only on the information available to the believer. A property that depends only on the available information can be valuable in the same way that advice that is within the advisee's capabilities is valuable. Justification is such an epistemic property.

*How Causal Probabilities Might Fit into Our Objectively Indeterministic World* (with Nuel Belnap; forthcoming in *Synthese*)

We suggest a rigorous theory of how objective single-case transition probabilities fit into our world. The theory combines indeterminism and relativity in the "branching space-times" pattern, and relies on the existing theory of *causae causantes* (originating causes). Its fundamental suggestion is that (at least in simple cases) the probabilities of all transitions can be computed from the basic probabilities attributed individually to their originating causes. The theory explains when and how one can reasonably infer from the probabilities of one "chance set-up" to the probabilities of another such set-up that is located far away.

## **Dissertation**

*Testimony: Evidence and Responsibility.*

Director: Nuel Belnap.

Committee: Michael Thompson, Joseph Camp, Thomas Fararo (Department of Sociology, University of Pittsburgh).

### *Brief Abstract*

Testimony is an indispensable source of justification. If not for what others tell me, I would know almost nothing about the world beyond my immediate experience, and I would not understand much of that experience. Testimony is also a voluntary act subject to norms. The teller chooses what to say, and can be held responsible for that choice. This dissertation brings together the epistemic and normative aspects of testimony, showing how the justification that testimony provides depends on the teller's responsibility for her testimony, and how the teller's responsibility follows from the epistemology of testimony.

In testimony, the teller makes herself responsible for her testimony by offering the hearer an assurance of its truth. This assurance is necessary for distinctively testimonial justification; only in non-standard cases can the hearer be justified in believing what the teller says without accepting the teller's assurance. It may seem as though this assurance-based justification must be pragmatic or moral rather than evidential, since the teller brings the justification simply by willing it. I argue that the justification is evidential. Accepting the teller's assurance means taking her to be sincere and knowledgeable about the topic of her testimony, and that is a way of taking her testimony as evidence for what she has said.

The way in which the teller takes responsibility for her testimony follows from the epistemology of testimony. The teller makes herself responsible by staking her future credibility on her testimony's truth. When someone tells a falsehood, it tends to cast doubt on the reliability of her future testimony. So, simply as a matter of the epistemological norms that apply to the hearer, a teller of falsehoods ought to lose the power to induce belief through testimony. Thus the epistemology of testimony helps determine its normative status, as the normative status of testimony constrains its epistemology.