

Han Li

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Education

Brown University

Ph.D., Philosophy, expected completion May 2017

Cornell University

B.A., Philosophy and Government (double major), *cum laude*, May 2011

Research Interests

Areas of Specialization: Epistemology (traditional and formal)

Areas of Competence: Ethics, Decision Theory, Logic, Philosophy of Science

Dissertation

The Demands of Epistemic Rationality: Permissivism and Supererogation.

Explores issues surrounding permissivism about epistemic rationality, and develops a theory of epistemic supererogation as a plausible form of permissivism.

Committee: David Christensen (principal advisor), Joshua Schechter, Christopher Meacham (UMass – Amherst)

Publications

(Forthcoming): “A Theory of Epistemic Supererogation,” *Erkenntnis*.

(Forthcoming): “Fool Me Once: Can Indifference Vindicate Induction?” (with Zach Barnett). *Episteme*.

(2016): “Conciliationism and Merely Possible Disagreement,” (with Zach Barnett). *Synthese*: 193(9): 2973-2985. doi:10.1007/s11229-015-0898-7

Papers Under Review

“How Epistemic Supererogation Can Save Intrapersonal Permissivism”

“The Trouble with Having Standards”

“Why Is Rationality Morally but Not Epistemically Permissive?” (with Bradford Saad)

Teaching

As Primary Instructor:

Phil 0220: Introduction to Philosophy (Spring 2017)

CEMA 0909: Logic & Paradox (Summer 2016, Summer@Brown Pre-College Program)

Phil 0230: Human Knowledge and Truth (Spring 2015)

As Teaching Assistant:

Phil 0500: Moral Theories, Fall 2013 and Fall 2016 (graded papers, held office hours, gave guest lectures)

Phil 1590: Philosophy of Science, Spring 2014 (graded papers, held office hours)

Phil 0540: Logic, Fall 2012 and Fall 2014, (graded papers, held office hours, ran weekly homework sections, gave guest lectures, ran review sections)

Phil 0010: The Place of Persons, Spring 2013, (graded papers, held office hours, ran weekly discussion sections)

Certificates:

Sheridan Center Teaching Seminar, Certificate I (“Reflective Teaching”) Recipient

Presentations

“How Supererogation Can Save Intrapersonal Permissivism,” Meeting of the Eastern Division of the American Philosophical Association, Baltimore. January 5th, 2017.

“Selection and Merely Possible Disagreement,” (with Zachary Barnett) Princeton-Rutgers Graduate Conference in Philosophy, Rutgers University. April 6th, 2014.

“Selection and Merely Possible Disagreement,” (with Zachary Barnett) Meeting of the Eastern Division of the American Philosophical Association, Philadelphia. December 30th, 2014.

Service

Referee, *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*

Chair, “Symposium: Permissiveness about Epistemic Rationality.” Meeting of the Eastern Division of American Philosophical Association, Washington, D.C., January 7th, 2016.

Student Adviser, The Summer Immersion Program in Philosophy, Brown University, June 2015

Organizer, 8th Annual Shapiro Graduate Conference, Brown University, November 15-16, 2013

Co-Founder, Brown Epistemology Reading Group

Courses Taken/Audited

Phil 1300: Philosophy of Mathematics (Fall 2011)

Joshua Schechter

Phil 2020M: Speech, Thought, and Agency (Fall 2011)

Jaegwon Kim

Phil 2050F: Recent Work in Epistemology (Fall 2011)

David Christensen

Phil 2200: Graduate Proseminar (Fall 2011)

Katherine Dunlop

Phil 1550: Decision Theory (Spring 2012)

Jamie Dreier

Phil 2100I: Groups as Agents (Spring 2012)

David Estlund

Phil 2140E: The A Priori (Spring 2012)

Joshua Schechter

Phil 2200: Graduate Proseminar (Spring 2012)

Nomy Arpaly

Phil 1710: 17th Century Rationalism (Fall 2012)

Charles Larmore

Phil 1810B: Expressivism (Fall 2012)

Jamie Dreier

Phil 2030A: Moral Psychology (Fall 2012)

Nomy Arpaly

Phil 2190C: Aristotle and the Mind/Body (Fall 2012)

David Charles

Phil 1890D: Theories of Truth (Spring 2013)

Richard Heck

Phil 2040I: Parfit On What Matters (Spring 2013)

Charles Larmore

Phil 2980: Independent Study (Spring 2013)

David Christensen

APMA 1650: Statistical Inference I (Fall 2013, *Audit*)

Caroline Klivans (Applied Math)

Phil 2300: Epistemic Significance of Etiology (Fall 2013)	David Christensen, Joshua Schechter
Phil 2300A: The Metaphysics of Chance (Spring 2014)	Nina Emery
24.805: Topics in the Theory of Knowledge (Spring 2014, <i>Audit</i>)	Roger White (MIT)
APMA 1690: Computational Probability & Statistics (Fall 2014)	Stuart Geman (Applied Math)
Phil 2070J: Measuring Value (Fall 2014, <i>Audit</i>)	Jamie Dreier
Phil 2140F: Non-Causal Explanations (Spring 2015, <i>Audit</i>)	Joshua Schechter
Phil 2050G: Higher Order Evidence (Spring 2016, <i>Audit</i>)	David Christensen

References

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Dissertation Summary

My dissertation, which consists of three connected papers, concerns the question of how much leeway agents have in forming rational beliefs. There is some intuition that rationality gives agents at least some leeway – it seems that two agents can rationally disagree about some topic even with the same evidence. If this is right, then rationality is *permissive*. Despite the intuitive appeal of permissivism, there are theoretical obstacles in formulating a plausible version of the view. In the dissertation, I argue that the best way to defend permissivism is to embrace the existence of epistemic supererogation – which allows agents to form one of multiple beliefs, even if some of the beliefs are rationally superior to other rationally permissible ones.

The *uniqueness* thesis is the claim that in any given evidential situation, there is only one rational belief that an agent can form. Permissivism can be seen as the denial of uniqueness. Broadly speaking, there are two types of permissive theories. One form of permissivism is *interpersonal* permissivism – the view that two different agents may be rational in holding different beliefs even on the same evidence. *Intrapersonal* permissivism is stronger: it holds that the *same* agent can be rational in holding one of two different beliefs on the same body of evidence. If intrapersonal permissivism is true, then even from the point of view of a particular agent, there are epistemic situations where the agent can go one of two ways, and be rational either way.

The most popular form of permissivism is what I call the Epistemic Standard View (ESV). This is the topic of the first paper. The ESV claims that agent can have different “epistemic standards,” which encode different ways to form beliefs in response to evidence. Since different epistemic standards may rationalize different doxastic states on the same body of evidence, this view gives us a form of permissivism. From the perspective of any one agent, however, there is only one doxastic response to any body of evidence.

Though it is central to their theory, proponents of the ESV have paid surprisingly little attention to what it means to *have* a particular standard. I argue, however, that the motivations for the ESV impose requirements on an adequate theory of standard-possession. Then I argue that no extant view manages to satisfy these requirements, and that there are reasons for pessimism about whether the requirements can be jointly satisfied. Thus, there is a serious obstacle to formulating a complete and satisfying version of the ESV.

With the failure of the ESV – a form of interpersonal permissivism – the second paper turns its attention to intrapersonal permissivism. This view, however, seems to face a serious problem: the arbitrariness objection. In short, if an agent is in an intrapersonally permissive situation, and she knows it, then forming any of the permitted beliefs seems *arbitrary* from the agent’s own perspective. The agent seems to have no reason for any one belief over the other. After all, she will end up with a rational belief no matter which one she picks. Forming beliefs for no reason, however, seems patently irrational. But if the agent is not rational in forming either belief, then the situation cannot be rational in the first place. So we arrive at a paradox.

Nonetheless, I argue that there are ways for intrapersonal permissivists to respond to the arbitrariness objection. They all involve allowing agents to be in a certain type of ignorance about their situation. Unfortunately, the ignorance required in these responses seem *a priori* preventable – and therefore, irrational. At the very least, the doxastic states of these ignorant agents cannot be maximally rational. If such states are still epistemically permissible, then we

clearly need a to allow for the possibility of beliefs which are less than maximally rational, yet rationally permissible nonetheless. But this requires a conception of epistemic supererogation, since it would require the existence of beliefs that are better than some other rationally permitted belief available to the agent. Thus, I argue that intrapersonal permissivists need a conception of epistemic supererogation.

The final paper develops a positive theory of epistemic supererogation. Though moral supererogation is an often-discussed phenomenon, the epistemic analogue has never been posited. Exploring such a possibility, at the very least, will elucidate structural analogies between the two fields. My theory of epistemic supererogation – which is modeled on a popular theory of ethical supererogation – involves thinking about two separate epistemic virtues. The first virtue is the more everyday virtue of correctly assessing the support relationships between various hypotheses and a body of evidence, while the second virtue involves coming up with the hypotheses themselves. The proposal, roughly, is that epistemic rationality only *requires* agents to successfully evaluate whether a given hypothesis is well supported by the evidence. It does not require agents to come up with new hypotheses. But since it is epistemically better to come up with hypotheses that are well supported by the evidence, doing so is epistemically supererogatory.

Defending this theory of epistemic supererogation allows us to adopt an understanding of rationality consistent with permissivism while also embracing a certain limited form of uniqueness. For any body of evidence and any set of hypotheses that an agent is already entertaining, there is only one doxastic state the agent can form that is consistent with full rationality. But since different agents who have come up with different hypotheses can rationally form different beliefs on the same body of evidence, we still end up with a permissive theory. The end result is a view that fulfills theoretical desiderata on both sides. Thus, this theory of epistemic supererogation stands as a compelling and plausible form of permissivism.