

BRETT TOPEY

Curriculum Vitae

Department of Philosophy (KGW)
University of Salzburg
Franziskanergasse 1
5020 Salzburg, Austria

+43.(0)660.4541254
brett.topey@sbg.ac.at
brettttopey.com
orcid.org/0000-0002-4603-0569

AREAS OF SPECIALIZATION: Epistemology (Traditional and Formal), Philosophy of Language, Philosophy of Logic

AREAS OF COMPETENCE: Logic, History of Analytic Philosophy, Philosophy of Mathematics

EDUCATION

2018 Brown University, Ph.D. in Philosophy
2007 Princeton University, A.B. with Honors in Philosophy

POSITIONS

2019– University of Salzburg
Postdoctoral Researcher, Department of Philosophy (KGW)
2018 Brown University
Visiting Assistant Professor, Department of Philosophy
2018 Lehigh University
Research Fellow, Department of Philosophy

PUBLICATIONS

1. “Saving sensitivity”, 2021
Philosophical Quarterly, forthcoming
Working from the idea that sensitivity is intended to serve as a proxy for a certain sort of responsiveness to the facts, I develop a new sensitivity-based anti-luck epistemological condition that’s well motivated and immune to the usual counterexamples to sensitivity conditions.
2. “Categoricity by convention” (with Julien Murzi), 2021
Philosophical Studies, forthcoming
We show, by appeal to a fairly orthodox naturalist-friendly (and realist-friendly) metasemantics, that a unified response is available to both Carnap’s Categoricity Problem for propositional logic and the Skolem–Putnam challenge to mathematical determinacy.
3. “Realism, reliability, and epistemic possibility: On modally interpreting the Benacerraf–Field challenge”, 2020
Synthese, Advance online publication (link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11229-020-02984-7)
I argue that the necessity objection to modal interpretations of the Benacerraf–Field challenge fails: what motivates an interpretation of the challenge in terms of our beliefs’ modal security also motivates an understanding of modal security in terms of epistemic possibilities rather than metaphysical possibilities.
4. “Linguistic convention and worldly fact: Prospects for a naturalist theory of the a priori”, 2019
Philosophical Studies 176: 1725–1752 (link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11098-018-1088-5)
I give a new rendering of the most influential argument against truth by convention and consider possible conventionalist responses, concluding that, even in the face of that argument, there remains a promising way forward for the conventionalist project.
5. “Quinean holism, analyticity, and diachronic rational norms”, 2018
Synthese 195: 3143–3171 (link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11229-017-1366-3)
I argue that W. V. O. Quine’s arguments against the analytic–synthetic distinction have been widely misinterpreted by his opponents and show that the Quinean position, properly understood, can’t be undermined by epistemological objections recently advanced by David Chalmers.
6. “Coin flips, credences and the Reflection Principle”, 2012
Analysis 72: 478–488 (analysis.oxfordjournals.org/content/72/3/478)
I argue that the orthodox way of understanding what imprecise credences are and how they’re updated—i.e., the credal committee model defended by Jim Joyce—leads to incoherent belief states in certain circumstances and so is untenable.

EDITED VOLUMES

Paradox, Context, and Generality (with Julien Murzi and Lorenzo Rossi)
Special issue of *Philosophical Studies*, in preparation
Revisionary Approaches to Semantic Paradox (with Julien Murzi and Lorenzo Rossi)
Special issue of *Synthese*, in preparation

RESEARCH GRANTS

2021–2025 Co-investigator, *Categoricity by Convention* (Principal investigator: Julien Murzi)
Austrian Science Fund (FWF) Stand-Alone Project P33708, €403,890.90

UNDER REVIEW

“Higher-order evidence and the dynamics of self-location: An accuracy-based argument for calibrationism”

I argue that the thesis that agents should conditionalize is, on any reasonable way of generalizing conditionalization so as to handle the evolution of self-locating belief, consistent with the thesis that calibrating is the right way to respond to higher-order evidence, and I show on this basis that calibrating maximizes expected accuracy.

“Best laid plans: Idealization and the rationality–accuracy bridge”

I argue that the “Best-Plan-to-Make” picture of the rationality–accuracy connection, to which Miriam Schoenfield and Robert Steel appeal in order to avoid concluding that rationality requires conditionalizing, can’t help them avoid that conclusion—this picture turns out to be equivalent to the picture on which the conditionalization result relies.

IN PROGRESS

Naturalism and the A Priori: A case for conventionalism in the 21st century (book project)

I explain why conventionalism—i.e., the doctrine that certain of our sentences are true by convention alone—provides our only real hope of a satisfying naturalist-friendly explanation of our knowledge in areas of discourse such as logic and mathematics, and I develop a conventionalist view that remains attractive even in the face of objections to conventionalism that have almost universally been taken to be decisive.

“Conventionalism and the nature of the in-virtue-of relation: Reply to Nyseth”

I describe the logic of the in-virtue-of relation and prove that, if a sentence is true in virtue of convention, so is the proposition expressed by that sentence. I then explain, in response to a recent objection, why this result doesn’t commit conventionalists to the thesis that straightforwardly empirical facts obtain in virtue of convention.

SERVICE

Referee, *Acta Analytica*, *Analysis*, *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, *Dialectica*, *Erkenntnis*, *Philosophia*, *Philosophical Quarterly*, *Philosophical Studies*, and *Synthese*

Co-organizer, Semantic Paradox, Context, and Generality workshop, University of Salzburg (2019)

Application reviewer, Summer Immersion Program in Philosophy, Brown University (2016–2017)

Co-organizer, Shapiro Graduate Student Philosophy Conference, Brown University (2011)

PRESENTATIONS

“Conditionalizing on higher-order evidence”

European Epistemology Network Meeting, University of Glasgow (postponed until 2021)

“Entitlement of cognitive project, epistemic analyticity, and other routes to easy knowledge of abstracta”

Abstract Objects: Deflationary Approaches workshop, University of Santiago de Compostela (postponed until 2021)

“Inferentialism and the admissibility of rules”

Convention in Logic and Language conference, University of Haifa (postponed until 2021)

“Categoricity by convention” (with Julien Murzi)

Colloquium, University of Salzburg (2020)

“Categoricity by convention” (with Julien Murzi)

EXPRESS Seminar, Institute for Logic, Language and Computation, University of Amsterdam (2020)

“Higher-order evidence and the dynamics of self-location”

Colloquium in Mathematical Philosophy: Logic and Language, Munich Center for Mathematical Philosophy, Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich (2020)

“Expected accuracy and the planning framework”

Conference for Philosophy of Science and Formal Methods in Philosophy of the Polish Association for Logic and Philosophy of Science, University of Gdańsk (2019)

“Categoricity by convention” (with Julien Murzi)

French PhilMath Workshop, Pantheon-Sorbonne University and Paris Diderot University (2019)

“Logical realism and logical reliability”

Filomena Workshop, Bergen Logic Group, University of Bergen (2019)

“Expected accuracy and the planning framework”

Bayes By the Sea conference, Marche Polytechnic University (2019)