

Briana Toole

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Curriculum Vitae (Updated October 2018)

🌐 <http://www.brianatoole.com/>

AREAS OF SPECIALIZATION

Epistemology, Philosophy of Race and Gender

AREAS OF COMPETENCE

Normative and Metaethics

EMPLOYMENT

2018 – 2019 **Post-Doctoral Research Fellow**, *Baruch College-CUNY*
Inaugural Weissman School of Arts and Sciences Fellow

EDUCATION

2013 – 2018 **PhD in Philosophy**, *University of Texas at Austin*
Dissertation: KNOWLEDGE AND SOCIAL IDENTITY

My dissertation defends the view that what an epistemic agent is in a position to know, and what knowledge she is in a position to share with others, is sensitive to non-epistemic features related to the agent's social identity. My principal aim in the dissertation is to show that standpoint epistemology, a theoretical framework that I develop and clarify, is a necessary tool in understanding, and eradicating, epistemic oppression.

Committee: Sinan Dogramaci (Supervisor), Ray Buchanan, David Sosa, Miriam Schoenfield (MIT), and Louise Antony (UM-Amherst)

2017 – 2018 **Visiting Scholar**, *Massachusetts Institute of Technology*
Funded by the Diversity Predoctoral Fellowship

2010 – 2011 **Master of Arts in Philosophy**, *University of Sheffield*
(with distinction)

2006 – 2010 **Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy**, *Florida State University*
(Magna Cum Laude)

PUBLIC PHILOSOPHY

October 2018 “Identity Matters: Standpoint Epistemology with Briana Toole”
Examining Ethics Podcast, October 2018

October 2018 Faculty Panel on Activism and Public Philosophy
MAP Oppression and Resistance Conference, New York

April 2018 “Corrupting the Public: Philosophy for the People”
MIT Day of Action, Public Session

- 2016 “The problem of diversity in philosophy: a US perspective,”
Times Higher Education, September 2016
- 2015 – Present Corrupt the Youth Philosophy Outreach Program
Founder and Executive Director
- 2014 – 2015 Writer for the Humanities Minutes Podcast Project, UT Austin College of Liberal Arts
“You Didn’t Start the Fire”, “Corrupt the Youth”, “Thought Experiments”,
“The Battle of the Sexes”, “Color Concepts”, “The Black Man’s Cogito”

PRESENTATIONS

TALKS

- April 2019 **“Rethinking Traditional Epistemology”**
Society for Analytic Feminism, APA, Pacific Division, Vancouver
- April 2018 **“On Social Identity and Epistemic Peerhood: In Defense of Epistemic Privilege”**
University of Miami – Inclusiveness Conference (Invited Talk)
- March 2018 Bates College – Colloquium
- January 2018 Claremont McKenna College (Invited Talk)
- Nov 2017 **“Demarginalizing Standpoint Epistemology”**
Princeton University (Invited Talk)
- April 2017 Epistemology Reading Group, University of Texas at Austin
- May 2017 **“Standpoint Epistemology and Hidden Ontologies”**
Toronto Philosophy Graduate Conference
- Oct 2016 **“Through the Looking Glass: A Deeper Look at Standpoint Epistemology”**
Graduate Colloquium Series, University of Texas at Austin
- Feb 2016 **“Perceptual Farce and Epistemic Blame”**
Columbia-NYU Graduate Conference
- Feb 2016 USC/UCLA Graduate Conference
- March 2015 University of Texas at Austin MLK Conference
- April 2015 **“How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Disagreement”**
APA Pacific Division, Symposium, Vancouver
- Dec 2014 Western Michigan University Graduate Conference
- Nov 2014 Epistemology Reading Group, University of Texas at Austin
- Jan 2014 **“The Causal Theory and Fictional Names”**
University of Texas at Austin MLK Conference
- April 2011 **“Fictional Entities: A Case for Neo-Meinongism”**
Indiana Philosophical Association

COMMENTS

- March 2018 **Jessie Munton’s “What’s Wrong with Accurate Statistical Generalizations?”**
APA, Pacific Division, San Diego
- February 2018 **Rima Basu’s “What We Epistemically Owe to Each Other”**
Princeton Workshop in Social Philosophy
- Aug 2017 **Kathryn Pogin’s “Confronting the Epistepocalypse with Faith”**
Vancouver Summer Philosophy Conference
- Aug 2015 **Cat Wade’s “‘Expert Sexists’: Unjust Perception and the Prediction Error Minimization Account of Mind”**
Workshop on Bayesian Theories of Perception and Epistemology

AWARDS AND SCHOLARSHIPS

- 2017 – 2018 Diversity Predoctoral Fellowship and Visiting Scholar Appointment. Linguistics and Philosophy Department, School of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences, Massachusetts Institute of Technology
- 2017 Dissertation Boot Camp Fellowship. Awarded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation
- 2014- 2017 Graduate Student Professional Development Award. UT Austin (x3)
- 2017 Pal-Make a Difference Award for Corrupt the Youth. UT Austin
- 2015 – 2017 Graduate Student Travel Award. Awarded by the University of Texas Philosophy Department (x4)
- 2015 Departmental Nominee for the Livingston Award in Graduate Teaching Excellence
- 2013 – 2016 Royal Fellowship. Awarded by the University of Texas Philosophy Department
- 2013 Graduate School Recruitment Fellowship. UT Austin

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

PRIMARY INSTRUCTOR

- Spring 2018 PHI 3990: Special Studies – Philosophy through Black Literature, Baruch College
PHI 4905: Feminism for Men, or: How to Make a Feminist, Baruch College
- Fall 2018 PHI 4900: Contemporary Debates in Epistemology, Baruch College
PHI 4905: Race and Gender in Metaphysics and Epistemology, Baruch College
- Spring 2017 PHL 310: Knowledge and Reality, UT Austin
- 2013 – 2016 PHIL 2301: Philosophy and Ethics, Huston-Tillotson University (x7)
Huston-Tillotson is an historically black college/university (HBCU) located in east Austin, Texas and serves ~1000 students. I taught as part of the adult-education program, which grants degrees to non-traditional students pursuing their bachelor’s degree.

Summer 2015 Philosophy of Time, Duke TIP East Campus
The Duke Talent Identification Program (TIP) is a summer residential program for high school students identified as talented or gifted. I taught 20 students and supervised a teaching assistant.

TEACHING ASSISTANT

Fall 2016 PHL 610QA: Problems of Knowledge and Valuation, UT Austin
Spring 2016 PHL 301: Introduction to Philosophy, UT Austin
Spring 2015 PHL 301L: Early Modern Philosophy, UT Austin
2014 – 2015 UGS 303: Medical Ethics UT Austin (x2)
Spring 2014 PHL 304: Contemporary Moral Problems, UT Austin

PEDAGOGY

Fall 2015 Teaching in Philosophy (Michael Tye)
Spring 2014 Teaching Fundamentals (Laura Beerits)
Member American Association of Philosophy Teachers

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND SERVICE

2017 – 2019 Appointed Member, APA Graduate Student Council
Summer 2017 Dissertation Boot Camp
2017 – Present Society for Analytical Feminism, Member
2016 – 2017 President, UT Austin's Minorities and Philosophy (MAP) Chapter
2015 – 2016 Organizer, Graduate Colloquium Series – UT Austin Department of Philosophy
2015 – 2016 Undergraduate Liaison, UT Austin's MAP Chapter
2015 Founder, MAP – UT Austin Chapter
2013 – Present American Philosophy Association, Member

WORKSHOPS AND SUMMER INSTITUTES

2018 Applied Epistemology Research Retreat and Workshop
The Prindle Institute for Ethics at DePauw University

2018 Princeton Workshop in Social Philosophy (PWISP)
Princeton University

2017 Vancouver Summer Philosophy Conference (formerly the Bellingham Summer
Philosophy Conference)
University of British Columbia

2016 Athena in Action: Networking and Mentoring Workshop for Graduate Student Women in
Philosophy
Princeton University

2015 Workshop on Bayesian Theories of Perception and Epistemology
Cornell University

2011

Workshop on Agency and Responsibility (NOWAR)
The Murphy Institute at Tulane University

REFERENCES

Sinan Dogramaci

Associate Professor of Philosophy, University of Texas at Austin

Ray Buchanan

Associate Professor of Philosophy, University of Texas at Austin

Miriam Schoenfield

Associate Professor of Philosophy, Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Ian Proops (*Teaching Reference*)

Professor of Philosophy, University of Texas at Austin

KNOWLEDGE AND SOCIAL IDENTITY

DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

Kathy Griffin's choice to pose with a bloodied, decapitated effigy of President Trump was met with outrage, especially given the worry that Barron Trump, the president's son, was particularly harmed by this representation. As many critics noted, however, Ted Nugent's suggestion that then President Obama be lynched was not met with similar outrage, even though he had two young daughters who might also be harmed. Why, we might ask, did the same people who *knew* that Griffin acted inappropriately, fail to know that Nugent's words were also inappropriate?

Standpoint epistemology, which claims that social identity makes a difference in what a person is in a position to know, can provide an answer. However, standpoint epistemology is met with resistance in academic philosophy, largely because it is taken to be in tension with traditional epistemology. In *Knowledge and Social Identity*, I have two aims: first, to better understand what is at the heart of the apparent tension between these two schools of thought, and second, to show that standpoint epistemology is a necessary tool in understanding, and eradicating, epistemic oppression.

My precise thesis concerns whether race or gender makes a difference to what a person is in a position to know. This is an important, but controversial thesis. It owes its controversial nature to the fact that it is in tension with at least some characterizations of traditional epistemology. And it is an important thesis, I suggest, because it sheds light on a phenomenon that emerges in our epistemic practices - epistemic oppression. Broadly speaking, epistemic oppression is the obstruction or exclusion of epistemic agents from the practices of acquiring or sharing knowledge (Fricker 1999, 2007; Dotson 2012, 2014).

In order to advance my overall aims, I set out to accomplish three tasks. I first attempt to tease out the characterization of traditional epistemology that is at odds with standpoint epistemology. The characterization of traditional epistemology that I put forth is one which endorses the thesis of *intellectualism*, the view that knowledge does not depend on non-epistemic facts. I submit that two further concepts that have been central to the critiques of leading standpoint epistemologists - the *atomistic view of knowers* and *aperspectivalism* - can be usefully interpreted as defining features of intellectualism. I argue that we ought to reject traditional epistemology so characterized. I use pragmatic encroachment as a dialectical tool to motivate the denial of intellectualism, and consequently, the denial of both supporting features.

Second, I aim to give a more concrete specification to the general framework of standpoint epistemology. To that end, I offer three interpretations of the standpoint thesis. I begin by examining the material reading, defended first by Georg Lukács (1971) and later, in its feminist approach, by Nancy Hartstock (1998). I then consider an epistemic reading, offered by Miranda Fricker (1999, 2007), among others. Lastly, I offer a novel interpretation of standpoint epistemology that draws on elements of feminist science and feminist metaphysics. I then use these readings to illuminate some well-known forms of epistemic oppression.

Finally, I argue that marginally situated knowers and dominantly situated knowers are not epistemic peers. I begin by exploring the notion of epistemic peerhood, and then using the characterizations of epistemic peerhood available in the peer disagreement literature to draw out a definition of epistemic privilege. I then draw on the concept of *double consciousness* to defend the claim that marginally situated knowers are *epistemically privileged* in the social domain.

I conclude the dissertation by evaluating how standpoint epistemology enables us to better make sense of the differential treatment afforded to Griffin and Nugent. I suggest that our understanding of incidents like these is impoverished without the theoretical framework standpoint epistemology provides.

CORRUPT THE YOUTH

PHILOSOPHY OUTREACH PROGRAM

In Spring 2016 I founded *Corrupt the Youth*, a philosophy outreach program that brings philosophy to students attending under-resourced high schools. Corrupt the Youth takes its name from the Greek philosopher Socrates, who was sentenced to death for allegedly ‘corrupting’ the youth. Socrates encouraged the Greek youth to question and, if necessary, oppose, the political and moral conventions of their society. The goal of the Corrupt the Youth philosophy outreach program is to continue that project.

We work with high school juniors at Eastside Memorial High School, a Title 1 school in east Austin, Texas.¹ Corrupt the Youth aims to bridge the gap between what students are learning in high school and what they will be expected to do in college. Part of the motivation in exposing students to philosophy at this particular stage in their high school career is to prepare them for the high-level texts with which they will be engaging, and the level of abstraction that many college-level courses require. But students can benefit from philosophy specifically because it can be useful in helping them think through the big problems and questions we all face: Are we morally obligated to help others? What is power, who has it, and why? Are the laws just? Students from disadvantaged backgrounds are rarely asked to share and develop their own views on the answers to these important questions. Corrupt the Youth aims to give the students an opportunity to clarify their own thoughts and to discover the power of their own voices.

While most philosophy outreach programs function as after-school programs, Corrupt the Youth runs like a traditional class. The curriculum is designed so that each lesson builds upon a skill or idea developed in the previous lesson. The course mimics an introductory philosophy class, so students cover topics ranging from epistemology, to ethics, to the philosophy of mind. Typically, two or three mentors from UT’s department of philosophy (undergraduates, graduate students, or professors) lead a class. We open the day’s lesson by introducing a key question. This question introduces the central topic for the day’s class. Students then focus on a short, manageable philosophy text. Students might then participate in a short activity or discussion to further their engagement with and deepen their understanding of the text. Classes conclude by connecting the key question and philosophical text to a broader question or issue.

For instance, a sample class might begin by asking the following key question: Are we good people when no one is watching? This is the question Socrates poses in “The Ring of Gyges.” In this dialogue, which the students read, Socrates suggests that most people would not behave morally without the fear of being caught and punished. We then ask students to apply this lesson to a contemporary issue: police corruption. Using the key question and the text as a guide, we encourage students to respond to the question: should police officers be required to wear body cameras? This gives students the opportunity to apply an abstract moral consideration to a real-life problem we are faced with today.

The goal of Corrupt the Youth is to provide students with a framework through which to understand, critically evaluate, and address some of the unique issues that we face today (like police brutality, dog-whistle politics, and xenophobia, to name a few). But the program primarily aims to empower students to be advocates for themselves. Through this program, students engage with complex moral and logical entanglements that they can begin to unpack and discuss, and in doing so, they not only gain tools for living, but also a sense of empowerment and agency.

¹ Title 1 schools are schools with high numbers or high percentages of children from low-income families.