

Matthew Carlson

Wabash College
Department of Philosophy
301 W. Wabash
Crawfordsville, IN 47933
765-361-6350 (office phone)
carlsonm@wabash.edu

1402 Durham Dr
Crawfordsville, IN 47933
812-322-7475 (mobile)

Areas of Specialization and Competence

Areas of Specialization: epistemology, philosophy of logic

Areas of Competence: philosophy of science, history of analytic philosophy, logic, philosophy of mathematics, metaphysics, philosophy of language

Employment

Wabash College Department of Philosophy, Byron K. Trippet Assistant Professor, 2014–present

University of New Mexico Department of Philosophy, Visiting Lecturer, 2013–2014

Education

PhD, Philosophy, minor in History and Philosophy of Science, August 2013
Indiana University

BA, Philosophy, May 2005
Oberlin College

BMus, Tuba Performance, May 2005
Oberlin Conservatory of Music

Dissertation

Title: *The Structure of Logical Knowledge*

Committee: Gary Ebbs (chair), David McCarty, Frederick Schmitt, Jordi Cat

Summary:

I articulate an account of the epistemology of logic according to which (1) basic logical principles are methodologically indispensable, (2) we can justifiably believe that these principles are sound, but (3) such principles are rationally revisable. I first explain why (1)–(3) appear to be in tension with one another by carefully articulating and examining several well-known arguments in the literature. I show that a key claim in these arguments is that that in making an inference, one must use or depend on a logical principle. Further, I show that an insufficiently nuanced understanding of this idea, which I call *inferential dependence*, is at the root of the apparent tension between (1)–(3). To make progress, I articulate a novel account of inferential dependence. Using this account, I show that leading theories of the justification of logical principles are faulty. Finally, I resolve the apparent tension between (1)–(3) by employing often-overlooked resources from Quine’s overall epistemology. Using these resources, I distinguish the methodological status of indispensability from the epistemological statuses of justifiability and revisability. Using this distinction, I articulate a holistic account of justification and revisability which nonetheless affords a special methodological status to basic logical principles. This

account combines the appealing features of apriorism and holism in a unified way that satisfies (1)–(3). A more detailed dissertation abstract can be found at the end of this document.

Research

Publication

“Logic and the Structure of the Web of Belief”, *Journal for the History of Analytical Philosophy* (forthcoming)

Presentations

Papers Presented

(* indicates invited)

“What’s Basic About Basic Logical Principles?”

Eastern APA meeting symposium paper, December 2013

University of New Mexico, Philosophy Department Colloquium, October 2013*

Society for Exact Philosophy meeting, October 2012

“Rule-Circularity and the Justification of Deduction”

Fourth Annual Notre Dame/Northwestern Graduate Epistemology Conference, April 2013

Midsouth Philosophy Conference, March 2010

“Logic and the Structure of the Web of Belief”

Early Analytic Philosophy Conference, Indiana-Purdue University Fort Wayne, March 2013

Graduate Student Colloquium, Indiana University Department of Philosophy, December 2012*

Society for the Study of the History of Analytical Philosophy meeting, May 2012

“Naturalism and the Structure of the Web of Belief: Quine on the Epistemology of Logic”

Eastern APA meeting, December 2012

“Why Not a Theory of Meaning?”

Second Arché Conference on the Foundations of Logical Consequence, St Andrews, June 2012

Indiana Philosophical Association meeting, April 2012

“Inferential Dependence”

James B. Nelson Lecture, Indiana University Department of Philosophy, April 2012*

Central APA meeting, February 2012

Indiana Philosophical Association meeting, April 2011

“The Obvious and the Indispensable: Quine on the Epistemology of Logic”

Seminar on Pure and Applied Logic, Indiana University Logic Group, November 2011*

Comments Presented

I served as commentator on the following papers.

“Default Reasoning with fde” (Katalin Bimbó), 2011 Central APA Meeting

“Epistemic Possibility, Affordable Information, and Let’s Go Check Cases” (Joshua Heter), Spring 2011
Indiana Philosophical Association Meeting

“Troubles for Truthmaking” (Jamin Asay), 2010 Midsouth Philosophy Conference

“Against Formal Causation in non-Conscious Nature” (Arthur Ward), Fall 2009 Indiana Philosophical Association Meeting

“Philosophy of mathematics and philosophy of art in Burke and Kant” (Charles McCarty), Fall 2007 Indiana Philosophical Association Meeting

Works in Progress

“Inferential Dependence” (under review)

“Rule-Circularity and the Justification of Deduction” (in preparation)

“Why Not a Theory of Meaning?” (in preparation)

“What’s Basic About Basic Logical Principles?” (in preparation)

Honors and Awards

Graduate Student Travel Stipend, Eastern APA 2013

Bo and Lynn Clark Memorial Essay Prize, Indiana University Department of Philosophy, 2013

Graduate Student Travel Stipend, Eastern APA 2012

Dissertation Year Research Fellowship, Indiana University College of Arts and Sciences, 2012–2013

Bo and Lynn Clark Memorial Essay Prize, Indiana University Department of Philosophy, 2012

Graduate Student Travel Stipend, Central APA 2012

Graduate Student Travel Grant, College of Arts and Sciences, Indiana University, 2011

James B. Nelson Dissertation Fellowship, Indiana University Department of Philosophy, 2011–2012

Bo and Lynn Clark Memorial Essay Prize, Indiana University Department of Philosophy, 2010

Graduate Academic Excellence Award, Indiana University Department of Philosophy, 2008

Membership in Phi Beta Kappa and Pi Kappa Lambda honorary societies, Oberlin College, 2005

Christopher P. Dahl Essay Contest winner, Oberlin College, 2005

Teaching

Teaching Experience

269: Skepticism and Knowledge (Wabash College, Fall 2014)

270: Elementary Symbolic Logic (Wabash College, Fall 2014)

272: Philosophy of Science (Wabash College, Fall 2014)

101: Introduction to Philosophy (University of New Mexico, Spring 2014)

372: Modern Social and Political Philosophy (University of New Mexico, Spring 2014)

202: Descartes to Kant (University of New Mexico, Fall 2013, scheduled for Summer 2014)

356: Symbolic Logic (University of New Mexico, Fall 2013, Spring 2014)

140: Introduction to Ethics (Indiana University, Summer 2012)

250: Introductory Symbolic Logic (Indiana University, Summer 2009, Spring 2011, Summer 2011)

150: Elementary Logic (Indiana University, Fall 2010)

105: Thinking and Reasoning (Indiana University, Spring 2009)

Undergraduate Honors Thesis Committee Member

Aaron Finn, University of New Mexico. Title: *Frege's Idea of a System in Relation to His Overall Structure of Thought*

Professional Service and Memberships

Professional Service

Reviewer, *Synthese*

Reviewer, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*

President, Graduate Association of Student Philosophers, Indiana University Department of Philosophy, Academic Year 2011–2012

Coordinator, Graduate Student Colloquium Series, Indiana University Department of Philosophy, Academic Years 2009–2011

Professional Memberships

Indiana Philosophical Association, November 2007–present

American Philosophical Association, August 2010–present

Society for the Study of the History of Analytical Philosophy, April 2011–present

Society for Exact Philosophy, October 2012–present

Dissertation Abstract

I defend the thesis that basic logical principles are (1) methodologically indispensable, (2) justifiably believed to be sound, and (3) rationally revisable. While (1)–(3) are widely accepted in the epistemology of logic, these theses appear to be jointly inconsistent. The primary tasks of my dissertation are to clearly articulate the source of this apparent inconsistency, and to develop a coherent picture of the epistemology of logic according to which (1)–(3) are all true.

The main sources of tension between (1)–(3) can be found in two problems that are widely discussed in the literature. The first is the problem of justification of deduction. According to one influential strand of literature, recently re-popularized by the work of Paul Boghossian, our beliefs in the soundness of logical principles must be justified by sound deductive argument. However, because of the methodological indispensability of logic, in making an argument to justify a basic logical principle we must use the very principle whose soundness the argument is supposed to establish. Thus, basic logical principles can be justified only by rule-circular arguments. But, if no circular argument justifies its conclusion, basic logical principles cannot be justified. The second problem is that of rational revisability. Another influential argument, recently advanced by Crispin Wright, Bob Hale, and others, purports to show that basic logical principles are not rationally revisable. According to this argument, any rational revision of a logical principle must be based on an argument that purports to show that the principle is unsound. However, due to the methodological indispensability of logic, in making any such argument we must use the very principle whose unsoundness is to be established. But, any argument of this character is self-undermining since, if its conclusion is true, the argument depends on an unsound principle.

A key feature of the arguments that generate the problems of the justification and rational revisability of basic logical principles is the use to which thesis (1), the thesis of methodological indispensability, is put. In both arguments, a key claim is that, in producing the needed argument, we must use *the very* principle whose soundness is at issue. Surprisingly, no account of the use of logical principles that could underwrite this claim exists in the literature. So, to make progress in assessing the problematic generated by these arguments, I provide an account of this phenomenon, which I call inferential dependence, in chapter 2. On my view, to depend on a principle in making or accepting an inference is to be committed to accepting that principle. More specifically, in making or accepting an inference, one is committed to accepting a principle of which that inference is an instance. But an important and often overlooked question is: *Which* principle is one committed to? To answer this question, I propose that we consider the most reasonable account one can give of the acceptability of the particular inference in question. This account will cite some features of the inference in question—e.g. formal characteristics, specific content, etc.—as reasons why the inference is supposed to be acceptable. But then, by lights of this account, *any* inference with those features should also be acceptable. That is, one is committed to accepting any inference that has the cited features. The principle whose instances are precisely the inferences with the cited features is thus the principle to which one is committed—on which one depends—in making or accepting the inference. I employ this account in chapters 3 and 4 to explain the failings of several currently prominent views, and to develop the positive view that I articulate in chapters 5 and 6.

In chapter 3, I consider Paul Boghossian's recent efforts to solve the problem of the justification of deduction. Boghossian's idea is that basic logical principles can be justified rule-circularly; that is, justified by the use of arguments employing those very principles. Using the account of inferential dependence that I develop in chapter 2, I argue that this proposal does not succeed. Closer examination of the problem in light of this result reveals that the only non-skeptical solution to the problem is to allow that not all logical principles are justified inferentially.

In chapter 4, I argue that leading accounts of non-inferential justification of basic logical principles—e.g. rational insight (BonJour), concept possession (Peacocke), cognitive mechanisms (Maddy)—fail to allow for the rational revisability of logic. This failure, I argue, stems from an ambiguity in 'basic'. By 'basic

principle' one might mean a principle that is fundamental or axiomatic in a logical system. Alternatively, one might mean a principle that is epistemically immediate; one that can justifiably be accepted without being accepted on the basis of anything else. Typical accounts of non-inferential justification attempt to account for the justification of principles that are basic in the latter sense, but the central problem in the epistemology of logic, I argue, is to account for the justification of principles that are basic in the former sense. By considering recent work of Stewart Shapiro, I argue that we must account for the justification of basic logical principles holistically; that is, by consideration of the entire logical system in which they play a foundational role.

The conclusion of chapter 4 leaves us with the following puzzle: How can there be *basic* logical principles if logic is to be justified holistically? In chapter 5, I address this question via an excursion into Quine's philosophy of science. I argue that Quine's picture of science is at once holistic and stratified into basic and non-basic elements. Basic logical principles are fundamental in an overall systematic theory, but this fundamentality does not amount to a special *epistemic* status; basic principles and statements arrived at by their use are justified alike by their membership in our current best overall systematic theory. A common objection to this sort of view, advanced by Michael Friedman and others, is that holism does not allow us to make sense of methodological indispensability. To counter this objection, I argue that basic logical principles have a special *methodological* status; namely that we can be *entitled* to accept them despite being unable to offer any non-circular reasons in favor of their acceptability.

In chapter 6, I examine the status of entitlement more closely. I begin by considering Reichenbach's attempted solution to the problem of induction and recent accounts of entitlement, such as that of Crispin Wright, inspired by it. By drawing on an analogy to Goodman's new riddle of induction, I argue that these accounts are at best incomplete because they fail to determine *which* principles in particular we can be entitled to accept. I address this shortcoming by arguing that we are entitled to accept the logical principles that are so central to our overall theorizing that, in the sense explicated in chapter 2, we depend on them in all of our theorizing, and thus, given the results of chapter 3, cannot currently offer any non-circular argument in favor of their acceptability. This bears some similarity to accounts of Hilary Putnam and Gary Ebbs, according to which we can be entitled to accept statements when, as Ebbs puts it, we cannot specify a way in which they may be false. A common objection to such accounts is that they allow us to accept basic principles "for free," and thus amount to theft rather than honest toil. While this objection does constitute a problem for those accounts, I argue that this is only because these accounts do not adequately take into consideration why we may be unable to specify a way in which a principle may be unsound. However, by employing the account of inferential dependence that I articulate in chapter 2, I explain why we cannot specify a way in which basic logical principles may be unsound. We cannot specify a way in which a basic principle may be unsound, in my sense, because we depend on that principle in a significant portion of our theorizing. Of course, the development of such a body of theory involves a significant amount of epistemic work, and thus our entitlement to accept basic principles is not objectionably easy to come by. Further, to specify a way in which such principles may be unsound would amount to describing a new overall theory that does not depend on those principles, and in some cases we are simply, given our current theoretical understanding, unable to offer such a description. But, since the principles upon which we now depend are determined by our current best accounts of the acceptability of particular inferences that we make and accept, this picture leaves open the possibility that it may someday be rational to revise or reject logical principles that we are currently entitled to accept.