

# AMA Announcement: Wednesday 10/12 11AM ET - Geoff Pynn (Northern Illinois) on epistemology and philosophy of language

A Definite Description<sup>1</sup> and r/Science AMAs<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Affiliation not available

April 17, 2023

## Abstract

As previously announced, /r/philosophy is hosting an AMA series this fall semester which kicked off with AMAs by Caspar Hare (MIT), Kevin Scharp and Kenneth Ehrenberg. Check out our series announcement post to see all the upcoming AMAs this semester. We continue our series this upcoming Wednesday with Geoff Pynn, Associate Professor of Philosophy at Northern Illinois University. Hear it from him: Geoff Pynn is an associate professor of philosophy at Northern Illinois University. He earned his PhD from Yale University; specializes in epistemology and philosophy of language; and regularly teaches early modern European philosophy, philosophy of religion, and logic. He is also interested in the philosophical problems posed by addiction, anarchism, conspiracy theories, moral panics, and social justice movements. His favorite philosophers are Baruch Spinoza, David Hume, and the nineteenth-century anarchist feminist Voltairine De Cleyre. His most recent published work is on contextualism in epistemology. You can download all his papers from his [academia.edu](http://academia.edu) page. He has a number of Wi-Phi videos on: Critical thinking Deductive arguments Abductive arguments Inductive arguments (coming soon!) The tracking theory of knowledge Virtue epistemology Contextualism (coming soon!) Geoff's current research focuses on social epistemology. Miranda Fricker coined the phrase "testimonial injustice" to describe what occurs when some prejudice or bias causes a person's testimony to be granted less (or more) credibility than it deserves. For example, imagine a police officer who refuses to believe a suspect's truthful eyewitness testimony simply because the suspect is black. Or consider how someone's rural accent or stilted English can make you more skeptical than you'd otherwise be about whether he is telling the truth. Intuitively, it seems wrong to let your prejudices sway your credibility judgments, and it seems like people who are disbelieved because of someone else's bias have a right to complain. But it's hard to say why such treatment is wrongful. In one paper, Geoff is developing an account of the harm of testimonial injustice. The basic idea is that when you let your prejudices sway your credibility judgments, you're degrading the speaker. Degradation is a complex social harm where a person is mistreated in a way that represents her as if she deserved the mistreatment in virtue of the kind of person she is. Epistemic degradation may not be as dramatic or painful as torture, revenge porn, or public humiliation, but it can be extremely demoralizing and have lasting effects. Like all forms of degrading treatment, biased credibility judgments reduce a person's social standing, encouraging and rewarding behavior that treats them as if they deserved disrespect. (Working on this paper has also sparked Geoff's interest in degradation, humiliation, shame, and other forms of psycho-social harm.) Geoff's other current project is on testimonial injustice, plea bargaining, and false confessions. More than 90 percent of criminal cases in the U.S. never go to trial. Instead, a prosecutor extracts a guilty plea from a suspect by either promising him a reduced sentence in exchange for a guilty plea, or threatening him with a more severe charge should his case go to trial. While many people who accept plea bargains are guilty, at least some plead guilty simply to avoid the risk of a more severe punishment. Such cases involve a particularly nasty form of testimonial injustice: enticing a speaker to lie in order to treat her lie as if it were credible enough to justify punishing her. Geoff is also the graduate adviser for Northern Illinois University's top-rated philosophy MA program, which caters primarily to students who want to get a PhD in philosophy, but do not have the background to get into a PhD program directly. Like many other terminal MA programs, NIU's offers full funding and living stipends, and Geoff maintains a guide to funding opportunities at terminal MA programs. He's happy to talk about any aspect of philosophy grad school. Some relevant papers: An overview of contextualism in epistemology (forthcoming in Oxford Handbooks) A piece on the "intuitive argument" for contextualism (forthcoming in the Routledge Companion to Epistemic Contextualism) A new form of contextualism, designed to side-step a slew of objections

to the view that emerged in the early 2000s. An explanation of the “illusion of ignorance” produced by skeptical arguments. A sort of math-y piece dismantling a popular criticism of the Moorean response to skepticism. AMA Professor Pynn will join us Wednesday for a couple hours of live Q&A on his research in epistemology, the philosophy of language and other areas. Please feel free to post questions for Professor Pynn here. He will look at this thread before he starts and begin with some questions from here while the initial questions in the new thread come in. Please join me in welcoming Professor Pynn to our community!

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ADEFINITEDESCRIPTION [R/SCIENCE](#)

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[Critical thinking](#)

[Deductive arguments](#)

[Abductive arguments](#)

Inductive arguments (coming soon!)

[The tracking theory of knowledge](#)

[Virtue epistemology](#)

Contextualism (coming soon!)

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Some relevant papers:

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[An explanation of the "illusion of ignorance" produced by skeptical arguments](#)

A sort of math-y piece [dismantling a popular criticism of the Moorean response to skepticism](#)

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