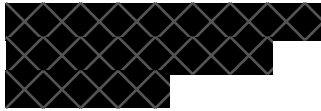


September 15 2023



Dear members of the Search Committee,

I am writing to apply for the position of Lecturer in Philosophy at the University of [REDACTED]. I am an [REDACTED] at [REDACTED] University. My areas of specialisation are philosophical logic, philosophy of language (especially formal semantics), and formal epistemology. I have additional research and teaching interests in mathematical logic, metaphysics and philosophy of mind. For the 23/24 academic year, I am a Research Fellow at the [REDACTED], directed by researchers from [REDACTED] University and [REDACTED] University. Below I detail how my application meets the search criteria.

A1. I received my PhD in Philosophy from the [REDACTED] in 2018. I was also an [REDACTED] Postdoctoral Associate at [REDACTED] University from [REDACTED] 2018 to [REDACTED] 2020.

A2. I have several research projects that lie squarely within philosophical logic, projects which have already produced published papers and which will continue to do so. One project is about the logic of ability. Being able to do something involves control: if I am able to hit a bullseye in darts, then doing so is in my control. This notion of control gives rise to logical paradoxes. Intuitively, success does not in general suffice for ability: hitting a bullseye by accident doesn't establish it's in your control. On the other hand, *can't ensures won't*: if I really can't hit the bullseye, then I won't. In classical modal logic, these two intuitions are simply, blatantly inconsistent. To reconcile them, I argue ability has non-classical logic, where ability claims can be neither true nor false. This derives from the openness in the future: in cases where it is unsettled what my actions would lead to, it's neither true nor false that I'm able to hit a bullseye. I develop this view in my paper, "[REDACTED]", published in *Nous*. I also build on this theory in work in progress. I believe that understanding control provides new arguments for intellectualism about know-how, as I argue in my paper "[REDACTED]", which is available on my website; in work in progress with [REDACTED]. I argue this also addresses other puzzling features of ability modals, such as their actuality entailments.

My second major project, which will culminate in a book manuscript, is about the logic and epistemology of indicative conditionals. Indicatives give rise to epistemic paradoxes. On the one hand, the cognitive significance of a conditional proposition seems simple: you're confident that *if A then C* just in case you would be confident in C if you learned A. But, on standard ways of thinking about propositions, it is hard to find any proposition that *could* have this cognitive significance. To solve this problem, I give a new theory of propositions, the informational theory, where conditional propositions involve a characteristic fineness of grain distinguishing them from any non-conditional propositions; nonetheless, *evidence* about conditionals supervenes on our evidence of non-conditional propositions. To date, this theory has been most thoroughly developed in my paper "Evidence and Conditional Propositions", which is under review and can be accessed on my website. An earlier precursor of this view also appears "[REDACTED]", with [REDACTED], published in [REDACTED].

In the book manuscript, I explore the upshots of the view for the nature of evidence and show how it can be motivated by accuracy arguments. The manuscript will also show that careful attention to indicative conditional epistemology has a pay off beyond just indicatives. I argue that, given connections between our knowledge of indicative conditionals and our knowledge of counterfactuals, we can help defuse the threat of counterfactual skepticism, the view that all counterfactuals are in fact false; a version of this material has appeared in my paper "[REDACTED]", published in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*. Finally, I also show how my informational view of conditional

propositions resolves famous logical paradoxes involving conditionals; some of this material appears in my manuscript "[REDACTED]", which is available on my website.

A3. I put considerable effort in my papers into showing how technical questions are connected to broader philosophical issues and I strive to communicate in intuitive terms that make both my questions and my views intelligible independently of the formalism. I am attracted to questions that are not only amenable to formal methods but which I think have general philosophical upshots: for example, in my work on ability, I argue we cannot fully understand the notion of ability, a notion central to many philosophical debates, without resolving certain logical paradoxes. Because of this, I think it's particularly important to convey the broad upshots of my work independently of the technical details. I believe that this is why, despite the formal features of my work, I have been successful in publishing in generalist philosophy journals, journals which aim to publish articles of broad relevance to philosophy. I have also presented at a large range of non-specialist conferences, such as the Eastern, Central and Pacific Divisional meetings of the APA, the Joint Session, and the Vancouver Summer Philosophy Conference.

A4. To date, I have published in top journals in linguistics in philosophy, including all of the top five journals in philosophy. "[REDACTED]" has been accepted at *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*. "[REDACTED]" has appeared in *Nous*. "[REDACTED]", has appeared in *Mind*. "[REDACTED]" has been accepted at *Semantics and Pragmatics*. "[REDACTED]" and "[REDACTED]", both co-authored with [REDACTED], have appeared in the *Journal of Philosophy*; and [REDACTED], with [REDACTED] and [REDACTED], has appeared in the *Philosophical Review*. "[REDACTED]" has received an R&R at [REDACTED]. In addition, I have also published five papers in the proceedings of major conferences in philosophical logic and linguistics. Finally, my papers "[REDACTED]" and "[REDACTED]" are under review; manuscripts of both are available on my website. I believe the former paper, along with my paper in *Nous*, is some of my most significant work to date. As mentioned, I anticipate this material will form the basis of a book manuscript.

A5. I have a track record at [REDACTED] of performing administrative work that requires working with others from outside my home department. For 22/23 I was my department's representative of [REDACTED] committee. This body, formed of faculty members from various humanities departments, assesses whether new classes should be added to the university's humanities core curriculum; it also reviews whether existing classes meet the core curriculum requirements of teaching students about methodologies in the humanities and how to apply them to various subject matters. As of Fall 2023, I am a member of the advisory board to the [REDACTED] Center. In addition to organising conferences and events, this body selects recipients for funding and assists with external funding applications.

A6. I have considerable experience teaching formal material at both undergraduate and graduate levels. At the undergraduate level, I teach Introduction to Logic at least once a year. I have also developed an Advanced Logic course, an upper level undergraduate class, which introduces students to completeness, set theory and its paradoxes, Turing machines and uncomputability, and incompleteness.

I now appreciate the challenges and the rewards of teaching formal subjects at the undergraduate level. Logic can be daunting to many undergraduates, especially those that think of themselves as "mathphobic". I try to combat this in at least two different ways. First of all, I've tried to learn from the example of successful teachers. Gilbert Strang, an MIT mathematician whose Linear Algebra lectures made him a mini-celebrity, says that when he lectures, his aim is not to present the material as a fait accompli, but to *think through* the material with the students. I've tried to implement this in my own teaching. Though they can seem alien to many students, the major ideas in logic did not appear out of thin air: there is both a context and a chain of reasoning that led these thinkers to the places they ended up. I follow this model; and in fact I find that often the best way to teach a method or concept is to put a student in a position to come up with it for themselves. For example, by making sure students have a solid grip on the concept of validity, once you teach them how to do complex truth-tables, it is actually possible to *elicit* from students themselves the truth-table method for testing for validity.

Secondly, I work hard to ensure that all my students feel comfortable participating in lecture. My style aims to be conversational and warm; and in all of my interactions with students, I try to convey that I am genuinely invested in them, that I believe every one of them can succeed. For instance, student

participation tends to lead students to publicly make mistakes in front of their peers. If these moments are not handled with care, students will understandably refuse to participate in future. I always reassure students that mistakes are a central part of learning and I often try to turn such moments into an opportunity for the whole class to learn. Students take notice of this, with one student writing in their end of semester evaluation, “when students made mistakes he was never belittling but rather used the opportunity to show us how to avoid mistakes on the future”. My Youtube videos, prepared for online teaching during the pandemic, are a good guide to my style and can be found at [REDACTED]. To combat fatigue, each of my lectures corresponds to a playlist of shorter videos. Some videos have reached an audience outside my students and have even been viewed over 1000 times.

My evaluations, which I am happy to share, are routinely very high; in Advanced Logic, I received almost perfect student evaluations. On the basis of their experience in Intro to Logic, many students also go on to take advanced classes with me. My teaching has been recognised by my department: out of a teaching body of 14, I’ve received my department’s Teacher of the Year award for the last two years running; this was awarded on the basis of both student and peer evaluations.

I have also taught a number of formal classes at the graduate level. In Spring 23, I developed a class called [REDACTED]; an introduction to modal logic with heavy focus on applications to philosophical questions, such as the internalism/externalism debate in epistemology and the metaphysics of essence. In Spring 22, I taught Introduction to Formal Epistemology, an introduction to Bayesian epistemology and decision theory. In Fall 21, I taught an online seminar in Philosophy of Language, the lectures for which can also be found on my Youtube channel. I have also supervised many MA students, who often go on to pursue PhDs at top 50 departments in the US.

C1, C2 and E1. For the last three years I have been an [REDACTED] at [REDACTED] and so I have experienced of the challenges of working as a faculty member. I have had responsibilities to research, teach and perform service duties, all at the same time. I believe that I have managed to balance these responsibilities on my own initiative. I have produced what I believe is some of the best research in my career to date while at the same time delivering high-quality teaching. As I have discussed above and will discuss further below, I have also contributed to service in the department. Every year in teaching logic I have managed TA’s, overseen grading, and scheduled and proctored exams. I believe these experiences have prepared me well for being a course coordinator in Logic and other subjects.

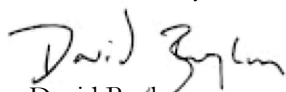
E2. Since my discipline tends not to involve the use of data or code, I do not believe there are any potential commitments to open research. (The only exception here being, of course, the standard practice of providing proofs, which of course I do.) I do, however, actively support open educational resources. In designing my online classes, I decided to make the material available on Youtube. Further developing online courses is something I would be very interested to pursue.

E3. Throughout my career I have enthusiastically taken on administrative roles. Doing one’s share keeps departments running and lessens the service burdens borne by colleagues. As well as the committees mentioned above, I have been heavily involved in graduate admissions every year at [REDACTED]. From 2022 onwards have served on the Graduate Students Committee. Last year, I was the sole organiser for our colloquium series. In addition to service work, I have tried to create opportunities for faculty to get feedback on their research. Starting in 2022, I started our department’s Brown Bag Talk series, a work in progress group for faculty to present their ideas to the whole department.

External Funding. I believe that I would be a good candidate for external funding. To date, I have received a year long Research Fellowship from the Center for [REDACTED]. I will also have experience reviewing grant applications at the [REDACTED] Center. At [REDACTED] I would initially apply to the BA Wolfson Fellowship and the Leverhulme Prize. In later years, I would also apply for AHRC fellowships and Research Grants, both of which have been awarded to researchers in my areas in recent years.

Please contact me if I can provide any additional information or materials that would be of help to you.

Yours faithfully,


David Boylan