

SYMPOSIUM

Introduction to a Symposium on *Radical Skepticism and Epistemic Intuition*

Nathan Ballantyne

School of Historical, Philosophical, and Religious Studies, Arizona State University – Tempe Campus, Tempe, AZ, USA
Email: n.ballantyne@asu.edu

Abstract

I introduce the book symposium's five contributors.

Keywords: epistemology; skepticism; Roderick M. Chisholm; G. E. Moore; Michael Bergmann

On 7 December 2024, a group of philosophers met in West Hall on Arizona State University's campus in Tempe to discuss a recent book: Michael Bergmann's *Radical Skepticism and Epistemic Intuition*. The published symposium includes a précis by the author, replies from four commentators, and the author's reply to the commentators. I introduce the symposium's five contributors by weaving together biographical information and some personal observations.

Michael Bergmann is a professor of philosophy at Purdue University. He completed his Ph.D. at the University of Notre Dame in 1997, writing under the direction of Alvin Plantinga. A friend of mine once described Bergmann to me as “the philosophical progeny of Alvin Plantinga and Roderick Chisholm.” Whether or not that is literally true, the description is—at least if you know about the philosophical work of Plantinga and Chisholm—a useful observation for understanding Bergmann's orientation to philosophy. Just like his philosophical progenitors, Bergmann makes progress through intellectually honest, painstaking work. There are no shortcuts, only carefully crafted articles and books. A symposium in the *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* on his latest book is apt: Bergmann grew up in Revelstoke, British Columbia.

Matthias Steup is a professor of philosophy at the University of Colorado Boulder. Some years ago, my writing sample for graduate school applications focused on one of Steup's articles about perceptual justification (Steup, 2004), but we had never crossed paths in person until 7 December 2024. I had earlier encountered Steup in a different sort of way, however. I have looked through Chisholm's personal papers in Brown University's archives in an effort to understand the origin story of analytic epistemology and the professional life of one essential figure (Ballantyne, 2023). Chisholm taught at Brown from 1947 to the early '90s. In the early '80s, Steup was a Ph.D. student at Brown. I discovered a handwritten letter sent to Chisholm by Steup upon his graduation in 1985: “It was your teaching that motivated my work and showed me how to do philosophy.” Although Steup later spent eight years as Bergmann's colleague at Purdue between 2008 and 2016, Bergmann's Plantinian orientation did not taint Steup's pure Chisholmian pedigree. As it turns out, Steup is connected to Canada through a collaboration with Scott Stapleford, a philosopher at St. Thomas University in New Brunswick: they co-edit a series of epistemology books, including *Seemings: New Arguments, New Angles* (McCain, Stapleford, and Steup, 2023).

Julia Smith is an assistant professor of philosophy instruction at Hope College. Previously, she held a Social Sciences and Research Council of Canada postdoctoral fellowship at the University of Calgary and a teaching position at the University of Toronto, where she completed her Ph.D. in 2020. One of her recent articles concerns philosophical progress and agreement. Smith (2025) convincingly draws on psychological research to undermine the idea that philosophical agreement is a reliable guide to truth and, thus, challenges the view that agreement is necessary for philosophical progress. In other words, the reader should not worry too much if the contributors in the symposium do not agree—they might be making progress nonetheless. Does Smith have a Chisholm connection? Let me grasp for straws here: (1) Hope College is located in Holland, Michigan. (2) Alvin Plantinga was born, studied, and worked for much of his career a short distance from Holland in Grand Rapids. Ergo, Chisholm. (I invite the reader to supply any suppressed premise.)

Louis Doulas is a postdoctoral fellow at McGill University. In 2024, Doulas completed his Ph.D. at the University of California at Irvine, where he wrote on G. E. Moore's epistemology (Doulas, 2026). One day, I hope he writes a book on Moore that's akin to Ray Monk's well-known book on Ludwig Wittgenstein—giving us a sense not just for Moore's ideas but also for the times, people, and places that shaped his philosophical contributions. Doulas has a Canadian connection down pat. He has a Chisholm connection, too. Moore influenced Chisholm's development during the late 1930s and early '40s when Chisholm was a Ph.D. student at Harvard University. During Moore's wartime visit to the United States, Moore met Chisholm.¹ Those two philosophers are among the great twentieth-century defenders of "commonsense."

William ("Bill") Lycan is a distinguished visiting professor at the University of Connecticut, where he has taught since 2012. Earlier, Lycan taught at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and The Ohio State University. Earlier still, he received his Ph.D. from the University of Chicago at the age of 25. During Lycan's time in Chicago, Chisholm taught a seminar as a visiting professor, commuting by train between Providence and Chicago each week. Lycan can do a compelling Chisholm impression. When I invited Lycan to take part in a symposium, he reported to me that he felt an obligation to accept because Bergmann participated in a book symposium on Lycan's excellent recent book, *On Evidence in Philosophy* (Lycan, 2019; Ballantyne, 2020). Clearly, Lycan is a darned nice guy—and nice enough to count as an honorary Canadian for purposes of this symposium.

The symposium brings together epistemologists from different generations to discuss issues that have preoccupied philosophers for millennia. These issues are seriously difficult. Reading through the contributions, I am reminded of a passage in an article from 1949 by Philipp Frank titled "Einstein's Philosophy of Science":

Another day we spoke about a certain physicist who had very little success in his research work. Mostly he attacked problems which offered tremendous difficulties. He applied penetrating analysis and succeeded only in discovering more and more difficulties. By most of his colleagues he was not rated very highly. Einstein, however, said about him, "I admire this type of man. I have little patience with scientists who take a board of wood, look for its thinnest part and drill a great number of holes where drilling is easy." (Frank, 1949, 350)

¹Here is evidence for the historical claims. In an autobiographical essay written near the end of his life, Chisholm noted that during graduate school at Harvard University, he attended a visiting lecture given by Moore; seeing Moore in action, Chisholm reported, was one of the "high points of my graduate career" (Chisholm, 1997, 7). Matthias Steup recalls Chisholm saying, in the 1980s, that attending one of Moore's lectures in the '40s led Chisholm to resolve: "That is the way I will do philosophy" (email correspondence, 10 October 2025). Chisholm also mentioned that he met Moore during a visit to England in 1956 (Chisholm, 1997, 13).

When important problems remain unresolved, sometimes you need to keep drilling. And a symposium gives philosophers an opportunity to work on problems in the best possible way: together.

Nathan Ballantyne is an Associate Professor of Philosophy, Cognition, and Culture at Arizona State University. He completed an Honours B.A. at Victoria College, University of Toronto, and a Ph.D. at the University of Arizona.

References

- Ballantyne, N. (2020). *Review of On evidence in philosophy*, by W.G. Lycan. Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews. <https://ndpr.nd.edu/reviews/on-evidence-in-philosophy/>.
- Ballantyne, N. (2023). Roderick Chisholm's philosophical cartoons. *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 53(7–8), 731–735. <https://doi.org/10.1017/can.2024.19>.
- Chisholm, R.M. (1997). My philosophical development. In L.E. Hahn (Ed.), *The philosophy of Roderick M. Chisholm. The Library of Living Philosophers* (vol. 25, pp. 3–41). Open Court.
- Doulas, L. (2026). Moore's fourth condition. *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 64(1), 125–44.
- Frank, P. (1949). Einstein's philosophy of science. *Review of Modern Physics*, 21, 349–358. <https://doi.org/10.1103/RevModPhys.21.349>.
- Lycan, W. G. (2019). *On evidence in philosophy*. Oxford University Press.
- McCain, K., Stapleford, S., & Steup, M. (Eds.) (2023). *Seemings: New arguments, new angles*. Routledge.
- Smith, J. (2025). Philosophical agreement and philosophical progress. *Episteme*, 22(2), 406–424. <https://doi.org/10.1017/epi.2023.61>.
- Steup, M. (2004). Internalist reliabilism. *Philosophical Issues*, 14, 404–425. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1533-6077.2004.00036.x>.