David Thorstad

Last updated September 24, 2026

CONTACT INFORMATION

Vanderbilt University
2301 Vanderbilt Place
Nashville, TN 37240-6319

Email: david.thorstad@vanderbilt.edu
Website: www.dthorstad.com

EMPLOYMENT

Vanderbilt University
Assistant Professor of Philosophy — August 2023-

Global Priorities Institute, Oxford
Postdoctoral Research Fellow — July 2020-August 2023

Kellogg College, Oxford
Junior Research Fellow (Nonstipendiary) — October 2020-August 2023

EDUCATION

Harvard University, PhD in Philosophy — May 2020
Haverford College, BA in Philosophy and Mathematics — May 2012
Global Priorities Institute, Oxford, Visiting Fellow — Summer 2019
Australian National University, Visiting Student — Summers 2017, 2018
London School of Economics, Visiting Student — Academic Year 2017-18
Pembroke College, Oxford, Visiting Student — Academic Year 2010-11

AFFILIATIONS

Vanderbilt Lab for Immersive AI Translation
Fellow — December 2024-

MINT Lab, Australian National University
Research Associate — April 2024-

Global Priorities Institute, Oxford
Senior Research Associate — August 2023-July 2025

VISITING

Institute for Ethics in AI, University of Oxford — May-July 2026
Visiting Fellow

Center for Philosophy of Science, — January-April 2026
University of Pittsburgh, Visiting Fellow

MONOGRAPH

Inquiry under bounds, Oxford University Press (2024).

Reviews: *Mind*, *Philosophical Review*.
Symposia: *Philosophical Studies*, *Syndicate Philosophy*.

EDITED VOLUME

Essays on longtermism (w/Jacob Barrett and Hilary Greaves), Oxford University Press (2025).

ARTICLES

Cognitive bias benchmarks should incorporate insights from ecological rationality, forthcoming in *Proceedings of NeurIPS ('26)*.

Attention and evidence, forthcoming in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*.

Procedurally rational framing effects, forthcoming in *Philosophers' Imprint*.

Satisficing, maximizing and bounded rationality, forthcoming in *Philosophical Quarterly*.

Cognitive bias in large language models: A vindicatory approach, forthcoming in *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science*.

Inquiry, (w/Arianna Falbo and Dennis Whitcomb), forthcoming in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

Précis of *Inquiry under bounds*, forthcoming in *Philosophical Studies*.

Reply to commentators, forthcoming in *Philosophical Studies*.

Exploitative informing, forthcoming in *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science*.

Ecological rationality without externalism, *Philosophy of Science* 93.3 (2026): 561-85.

The scope of longtermism, *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 104.2 (2026): 399-420.

The zetetic turn and the procedural turn, *Journal of Philosophy* 122.9 (2025): 483-507.

General-purpose institutional decisionmaking heuristics, *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science* 76.4 (2025): 1037-58.

The complexity-coherence tradeoff in cognition, *Mind* 134.534 (2025): 422-57.

Against the singularity hypothesis, *Philosophical Studies* 182 (2025): 1627-51.

Mistakes in the moral mathematics of existential risk, *Ethics* 135.1 (2024): 122-50.

The accuracy-coherence tradeoff in cognition, *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science* 75.3 (2024): 695-715.

Why bounded rationality (in epistemology)?, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 108 (2024): 396-413.

Against the newer evidentialists, *Philosophical Studies* 180 (2023): 3511-32.

Norms of inquiry, *Philosophical Topics* 51.2 (2023): 135-60.

High risk, low reward: A challenge to the astronomical value of existential risk mitigation, *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 51.4 (2023): 373-412.

There are no epistemic norms of inquiry, *Synthese* 200, 410 (2022).

Two paradoxes of bounded rationality, *Philosophers' Imprint* 22.15 (2022).

Tough enough? Robust satisficing as a decision norm for long-term policy analysis (w/Andreas Mogensen), *Synthese* 200 (2022): 1-26.

Inquiry and the epistemic, *Philosophical Studies* 178.9 (2021): 2913-28.

Permissive metaepistemology, *Mind* 128.511 (2019): 907-26.

SHORTER PIECES

Altruism and normative bargaining, *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 49 (2026): e156.

Replies to Peláez, Quanbeck and Shipley, *Syndicate Philosophy* (2026), https://syndicate.network/symposia/philosophy/inquiry-under-bounds/.

Exploitative informing: Can you exploit someone by giving them relevant information?, *BJPS Short Reads* (2024).

Review of *Idealization in epistemology* by Dan Greco, *Mind* fzae026, https://doi.org/10.1093/mind/fzae026.

Institutional decision-making heuristics: What lies beyond simple rules?, *BJPS Short Reads* (2024).

Accuracy and coherence: Can bounded agents have both?, *BJPS Short Reads* (2022).

FELLOWSHIPS AND GRANTS

Liverpool-Vanderbilt Joint Research Seed Grant ($15,113) 2025-6
(w/Robin McKenna), Vanderbilt University and University of Liverpool.

Greg S. Allen Dean's Faculty Fellowship ($30,000) 2025-7
Vanderbilt University.

Institute for Ethics in AI (full support), University of Oxford 2026
Visiting Fellowship.

Center for Philosophy of Science ($10,000), University of Pittsburgh 2026
Visiting Fellowship.

Mercatus Center ($750), Conference travel funding. 2026

Dean's Research Studio ($5,000), Vanderbilt 2025
Conference Grant.

Survival and Flourishing Fund ($38,000), S-Process Grant. 2024

Robert Penn Warren Center for the Humanities (50% buyout) 2024-5
Vanderbilt Faculty Fellowship.

Effective Altruism Infrastructure Fund ($24,460) 2023
Grant to support a summer diversity program.

Center for Effective Altruism (£20,000) 2023
Event Support Grant (with Bridget Williams).

John Fell Fund (£10,000), University of Oxford — 2022
Grant to support a workshop on inquiry.

Center for Effective Altruism ($40,000) — 2022
Event Support Grant (with Charlotte Siegmann).

PPE Society ($250) Travel Grant. — 2022

Provostial Fund for the Arts and Humanities ($4,000) — 2020
Harvard University, Conference Organization Grant (with Branden Fitelson and Ned Hall).

Dissertation Completion Fellowship ($32,000) — 2019-2020
Harvard University.

GSC Travel Grant ($750), Harvard University. — 2019

Frank Knox Memorial Traveling Fellowship ($25,000) — 2017-18
Harvard University.

GSAS Predissertation Summer Fellowship ($6,000) — 2015
Harvard University.

Magill-Rhoades Scholarship (full need), Haverford College. — 2008-12

AWARDS / HONORS (ACADEMIC)

Francis Bowen Prize, Harvard University. — 2020
Recognizes the best essay on a subject in moral or political philosophy.

Bechtel Prize, Harvard University. — 2019
Recognizes the best essay on a philosophical topic.

Summa Cum Laude, Haverford College. — 2012

Phi Beta Kappa (as junior), Haverford College. — 2011

Collection Prizes (all subjects), Pembroke College, Oxford. — 2010-11

AWARDS / HONORS (TEACHING)

Special Commendation for Extraordinary Teaching in Extraordinary Times, Harvard University. — 2020

Derek C Bok Award for Excellence in Graduate Student Teaching, Harvard University. — 2019
Harvard's highest graduate teaching award. 5 awarded annually university-wide.

Certificates of Distinction and Excellence in Teaching (x6), Harvard University: — 2016-19

Virtue	Spring 2019
Social epistemology	Fall 2018
Saints, heretics, and atheists	Spring 2017
Fundamentals of logic	Fall 2016
Frege, Russell, and the early Wittgenstein	Fall 2016
Logic and philosophy	Spring 2016

TALKS

(†) **Refereed**

Tempering inference to the best explanation

Inference to the Best Explanation Workshop, Univesity of Alabama	September 2026
Center for Philosophy of Science, Fellows' Working Group University of Pittsburgh	March 2026

Level separation in epistemology

University of Tennessee, Knoxville	February 2026
Normativity and Reasoning Workshop, NYU Abu Dhabi	January 2026
Southeastern Epistemology Conference, Flagler College	October 2025
† *St. Louis Annual Conference on Reasons and Rationality*	May 2025

Revisiting the shutdown problem

16th Oxford Workshop on Global Priorities Research	June 2026

Procedurally rational framing effects

Center for Philosophy of Science, University of Pittsburgh	February 2026

"Instrumental convergence and power seeking"

Interdisciplinary AI Network	June 2026
Institute for Ethics in AI, University of Oxford	June 2026
University of Pittsburgh, Seminar, *AI: Risk, alignment, obsolescence*	February 2026
AI and Humanity Lab, University of Hong Kong	September 2025
Hong Kong Catastrophic Risk Center, Lingnan University	February 2025
† *Central APA*, PPE Society Session	February 2025
† *15th Oxford Workshop on Global Priorities Research*	December 2024
† *PPE Society Conference*, New Orleans	November 2024
Global Priorities Institute, Oxford	November 2024

Inquiry under bounds

Rationality Seminar, Purdue University	September 2025
Inquiry Reading Group, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign	July 2025

Ecological rationality without externalism

Mind and Cognition Group, Purdue University	September 2025

Symposium on *Inquiry under bounds*

American Philosophical Association Central Division Meeting	February 2025

"Humility, ability and group inquiry: A counsel of moderation"

Humility in Inquiry Integration Workshop, Denver	February 2025

"Beyond longtermism"

Global Priorities Institute, Oxford	November 2024

"Cognitive bias in large language models: Cautious optimism meets anti-Panglossian meliorism"

UC Irvine, Center for Theoretical Behavioral Sciences	October 2024
† *Third International Conference on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence*, University of the Azores	September 2024
MINT Lab, ANU	August 2024

"Exploitative informing"

UC Irvine, Department of Logic and Philosophy of Science	October 2024
† *Axiology Workshop*, McGill University	October 2024

"The zetetic turn and the procedural turn"

Inquiry Workshop, Brown University	April 2024
Southeast Graduate Philosophy Conference (Keynote), University of Florida	April 2024
Workshop on the Nature and Normativity of Inquiry, University of Pavia	January 2024
Southeastern Epistemology Conference, Spartanburg, South Carolina	October 2023
† *Duke-UNC Epistemology Workshop*	September 2023
† *Australasian Association of Philosophy Annual Conference*	July 2022
Workshop on Norms of Inquiry, Complutense University of Madrid	June 2022
University of Zürich	May 2022
Groupe de Recherche Interuniversitaire Sur la Normativité (GRIN), Montreal	March 2022
Cologne Center for Contemporary Epistemology and the Kantian Tradition (CONCEPT), University of Cologne	January 2022
Ideal and Non-Ideal Epistemology Seminar Series (Organized by Robin McKenna and Michael Hannon)	December 2021

"The complexity-coherence tradeoff in cognition"

Australasian Association of Philosophy Online Conference	October 2024
Berkeley Bounded Rationality Conference	May 2024
† *Formal Epistemology Workshop*, Boston	June 2023
Formal Methods Group, King's College, London	May 2023

"Against the singularity hypothesis"

Interdisciplinary AI Network	(June 2026)
AI and the Human Seminar, Vanderbilt	April 2025
Ethics of Increasing AI Capacities, Hannover	August 2024
International Society for Utilitarian Studies Conference University College, London	June 2024
Colloquium on Artificial Intelligence and Catastrophic Risk Australian National University	March 2024

"Mistakes in the moral mathematics of existential risk"

Pitt-CMU longtermism reading group, CMU	April 2026

Moral philosophy working group, Yale	April 2024
Mimir Institute for Long-Term Future Studies, Stockholm	December 2023
7th PPE Society Conference, New Orleans	November 2023
Global Priorities Institute / LSE Joint Workshop, London	May 2023
Workshop on Pluralisms in Existential Risk Studies, Oxford	May 2023

"Why bounded rationality (in epistemology)?"

7th PPE Society Conference, New Orleans	November 2023

"Norms of inquiry"

† *Central APA*, Chicago, Illinois	February 2022
Workshop on Inquiry, Southern Normativity Group	September 2021
Aarhus University, Aarhus	May 2021
† *Southern Society for Philosophy and Psychology Annual Meeting*, Louisville, Kentucky	December 2020
Workshop on Bounded Rationality, Harvard	October 2019

"Three paradoxes of bounded rationality"

† *Between Formal and Informal Methods in Philosophy*, Warsaw	September 2021
Group for Analytic Metaphysics and Epistemology Texas A&M	July 2020
† *British Society for the Philosophy of Science Conference*, Kent	July 2020

"There are no epistemic norms of inquiry"

Episteme group, University of Cambridge	March 2023

"High risk, low reward: A challenge to the astronomical value of existential risk mitigation"

Seminar on Longtermism, Princeton	October 2025
Ethics of Human Extinction Reading Group	June 2024
† *Philadelphia Normativity Conference*, UPenn	October 2023
† *International Society for Utilitarian Studies 2023*, Rome	July 2023
† *Ethics After Parfit*, LMU Munich	January 2023
† *6th PPE Society Conference*, New Orleans	November 2022
† *Formal Philosophy 2022*, Moscow (Hybrid)	October 2022
Tenth Oxford Workshop on Global Priorities Research	June 2022
Center for Population-Level Bioethics, Rutgers	April 2022
Ninth Oxford Workshop on Global Priorities Research	March 2022

"General-purpose institutional decisionmaking heuristics: The case of decisionmaking under deep uncertainty"

17th International Congress on Logic, Methodology, and Philosophy of Science and Technology, Buenos Aires	July 2023

"The scope of longtermism"

Legal Priorities Project, Harvard — February 2022
Seventh Oxford Workshop on Global Priorities Research — June 2021

"Inquiry and the epistemic"

Oxford Epistemology Group, Oxford — November 2020
Inquiry Network, Online — November 2020

"The dual deontic role of unpossessed evidence"

† *Great Lakes Philosophy Conference* — April 2021
Siena Heights University

"Satisficing reclaimed"

† *PLM Network Conference*, St. Andrews — August 2019
Bounded Rationality Reading Group, Oxford — July 2019

"Heuristics and longtermism"

Second Oxford Workshop on Global Priorities Research, Oxford — July 2019
Global Priorities Institute, Oxford — June 2019
Future of Humanity Institute, Oxford — June 2019

"Pure time-preference: some error-theoretic remarks"

Workshop on Longtermism, Oxford — March 2019

"Omission bias revisited"

† *Australasian Association of Philosophy / New Zealand Association of Philosophy Annual Conference*, University of Wellington, NZ — July 2018
ANU Modeling Ethical Theories Reading Group — July 2018
Australian National University

"Inquiry under bounds"

LSE Work in Progress Group, London School of Economics — February 2018

"Permissive metaepistemology"

ANU Epistemology Reading Group, Australian National University — June 2018
† *Yale Graduate Philosophy Conference*, Yale — April 2017
† *UT-Austin Graduate Philosophy Conference*, UT-Austin — April 2017
† *Northwestern/Notre Dame Graduate Epistemology Conference*, Notre Dame — April 2017
† *BARSEA Epistemology Workshop*, Cambridge University — February 2017
† *UConn Graduate Philosophy Conference*, University of Connecticut Storrs — November 2016

PUBLIC TALKS

"Against the singularity hypothesis"

Apart Research — February 2025
EAGxVirtual — November 2024

"Mistakes in the moral mathematics of existential risk"

Effective Altruism Tübingen	July 2024

"Against the singularity hypothesis"

AI safety reading group	June 2024

"Existential risk pessimism and the time of perils"

ERA Fellowship, Cambridge	August 2023
EAGxCambridge	March 2023
EAGxSingapore	September 2022
EAGxOxford	March 2022

"Challenges to effective altruism"

Tarbell Fellowship Program, Oxford	March 2023

TEACHING

At Vanderbilt University

Introduction to philosophy	(Fall 2026)
Epistemology (graduate seminar)	Spring 2025
Logic	Fall 2024
Ethics of AI	Spring 2024
Introduction to philosophy of AI	Spring 2024
Introduction to philosophy	Fall 2023
Inquiry (graduate seminar)	Fall 2023

As primary instructor at Harvard University

Rationality	Spring 2020
Virtue	Spring 2019
Social epistemology	Fall 2018
Introduction to logic (Harvard Summer School)	Summers 2018, 2019

As teaching fellow at Harvard University

Saints, heretics, and atheists	Spring 2017
Fundamentals of logic	Fall 2016
Frege, Russell, and the early Wittgenstein	Fall 2016
Logic and philosophy	Spring 2016

As grader at Harvard University

Topics in logic	Spring 2017

Supervision, etc.

PhD committee member: Ismail Kurun (Vanderbilt, in progress), Cameron Pattison (Vanderbilt, in progress).

External dissertation committee member, Dario Vaccro (UT-Knoxville, in progress).

External PhD examiner, Leonardo Flamini (Zurich/Pavia, 2024).

Advisor, Global Priorities Institute Early Career Conference Program.

Thomas Rowe (2021), Paul Forrester (2022), Leah Pierson (2021 and 2023), Tena Thau (2023).

Advisor, Oxford UNIQ+ Graduate Access Program, Elsie Lidington (2023).

Fellowship supervisor, Vanderbilt Lab for Immersive AI Translation (VALIANT), Cameron Pattison (2024-), Sun Jung Han (2025-)

Honors thesis supervisor Rovier Chen (2027), Abbe Knutsson (2027), Royce Yang (2027), Thomas Edman (2025).

Honors thesis second reader: Pax Poggi (2025), Joshua Uterstaedt (2025).

Other teaching

Harvard edX, Content developer 2018-2020

Harvard Precollege Passport Program, Instructor 2019

Lawrence International High School, Mathematics teacher 2012-13

PROFESSIONAL SERVICE

Conferences organized

Workshop on non-ideal theory (with Sven Neth), Vanderbilt Unviersity (2026)

Sociotechnical AI safety for generative AI (with Robin McKenna), University of Liverpool 2026

Workshop on Beyond longtermism, Vanderbilt University 2026

Explanation (with Ted Poston), Vanderbilt University 2025

Inquiry Network workshops

- *Fourth Inquiry Network workshop*, Rhodes College (with Jared Millson) (2027)
- *Third Inquiry Network workshop*, Toronto Metropolitan University (with Arianna Falbo (lead organizer) and Dennis Whitcomb) 2026
- *Second Inquiry Network workshop*, Rhodes College (with Jared Millson) 2025
- *First Inquiry Network workshop*, Vanderbilt University 2024

Southeastern epistemology conference, Vanderbilt University 2024

Bayesianism and its rivals (with Branden Fitelson, Will Fleisher and Ned Hall), Harvard 2022

Oxford workshops on global priorities research

- *Twelfth Oxford workshop on global priorities research* (with Loren Fryxell) 2023
- *Eleventh Oxford workshop on global priorities research* (with Loren Fryxell) 2022
- *Tenth Oxford workshop on global priorities research* (with Loren Fryxell) 2022
- *Ninth Oxford workshop on global priorities research* (with Loren Fryxell) 2022
- *Eighth Oxford workshop on global priorities research* (with Loren Fryxell) 2021

Seventh Oxford workshop on global priorities research 2021
(with Loren Fryxell, Rossa O'Keeffe-O'Donovan, and Benjamin Tereick)

Sixth Oxford workshop on global priorities research 2021

Fifth Oxford workshop on global priorities research 2020
(with Andreas Mogensen and Rossa O'Keeffe-O'Donovan)

Workshop on bounded rationality 2019
(with Branden Fitelson and Ned Hall), Harvard

Harvard-MIT graduate philosophy conference 2015
(with Kevin Dorst, Jen Nguyen, and Max Siegel), Harvard

Panels organized

AI: Challenges in design and automation (with Harry Lloyd) (2026)
PPE Society Conference

Optimal altruism: Present, past and future (with Harry Lloyd) (2026)
PPE Society Conference

The moral and political implications of human extinction 2025
Central APA, PPE Society Affiliated Session

Longtermism 1 (with Emma Curran), PPE Society Conference 2024

Longtermism 2 (with Emma Curran), PPE Society Conference 2024

Non-ideal theory, PPE Society Conference 2023

Ethics and the far future, PPE Society Conference 2023

Inquiry, Southern Society for Philosophy and Psychology 2020

Reading groups organized

Critiques of effective altruism (with Jacob Barrett) 2023
Global Priorities Institute, Oxford

The scope of longtermism (with Hilary Greaves 2021
and Christian Tarsney), Global Priorities Institute, Oxford

Social justice and longtermism 2020
(with Christian Tarsney), Global Priorities Institute, Oxford

Bounded rationality reading group 2019
(with Sven Neth), Global Priorities Institute, Oxford

Epistemology reading group 2018
(Four sessions. Unit on epistemic permissivism), ANU

Formal philosophy reading group, Harvard 2016

Accuracy-first reading group, Harvard 2016

Ethics and mathematics reading group 2013-14
(with Zeynep Soysal), Harvard

Program Committee and similar

NeurIPS 2026, Area Chair, Position Paper Track 2026

Social ontology and empirical inquiry conflicts and connections, 2026
Center for Philosophy of Science, University of Pittsburgh
Program Committee

18th annual conference on artificial general intelligence 2025
Program Committee

Other organizing

Inquiry Network, Founder and co-organizer (w/Dennis Whitcomb and Arianna Falbo) 2020-

Second Open Student Workshop on Global Priorities Research (w/Bridget Williams), for members of traditionally underrepresented groups in global priorities research 2023

First Open Student Workshop on Global Priorities Research (w/Charlotte Siegmann) 2022

GPI + WANBAM (Women and Non-Binary Altruism Mentorship) workshop (w/Charlotte Siegmann) 2021

Departmental service

Search committee, Philosophy of Mind (senior) 2024-2025

Steering committee, Vanderbilt Grand Challenge on AI 2024-2025

Colloquium committee, Vanderbilt Philosophy Department 2024-

Secretary, Vanderbilt Philosophy Department 2023-

Diversity initiative Chair, Global Priorities Institute 2021-2023

College advisor, Kellogg College 2020-2023

Journal Refereeing (* denotes multiple): *AI & Society*, **Analysis*, **Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science*, **Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, *Dialectica*, **Episteme*, *Ergo*, **Erkenntnis*, *Ethics*, *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*, *Journal of Ethics*, **Journal of Philosophy*, *Journal of Social Philosophy*, **Mind*, **Noûs*, *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, *Philosophy Compass*, **Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, *Philosophical Review*, *Philosophy of Science*, **Philosophical Studies*, *Philosophical Topics*, *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science*, **Synthese*, *Utilitas*.

Other Refereeing: (* denotes multiple, † denotes program committee or similar): *†18th Annual AGI Conference, Austrian Science Fund, Bloomsbury Publishing, Cambridge University Press, *Formal Epistemology Workshop, †NeurIPS, *Open Philanthropy, Oxford University Press, Rethink Priorities, *Routledge, Schmidt Sciences, Simon Institute for Longterm Governance, Southwestern Philosophical Society, *Swiss National Science Foundation, Tennessee Philosophical Association, University of Chicago Press.

REFERENCES

Ned Hall
Norman E. Vuilleumier Professor of Philosophy and Chair, Department of Philosophy, Harvard University
ehall@fas.harvard.edu

Hilary Greaves
Professor of Philosophy and Director, Global Priorities Institute, Oxford University
hilary.greaves@philosophy.ox.ac.uk

Susanna Rinard
Professor of Philosophy, Harvard University
susannarinard@fas.harvard.edu

Susanna Siegel
Edgar Pierce Professor of Philosophy, Harvard University
ssiegel@fas.harvard.edu

Warren Goldfarb (Teaching Reference)
Walter Beverly Pearson Professor of Modern Mathematics and Mathematical Logic, Harvard University
goldfarb@fas.harvard.edu