

BENJAMIN IAN WINOKUR

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AREAS OF SPECIALIZATION

Epistemology, Philosophy of Mind

AREAS OF COMPETENCE

Philosophy of Language, Logic, Metaethics

EDUCATION

2014-present **York University:** Ph.D, Philosophy, expected May 2020
Thesis: *First-Person Authority and Privileged Self-Knowledge*
Committee: Claudine Verheggen Henry Jackman, Christopher Campbell

Abstract: An enduring philosophical tradition contends that we are *first-person authoritative* about our own minds: what we say and think about our current mental states is typically owed and in fact ceded a special sort of trust, and is uniquely immune to various sorts of epistemic criticism. A nearby tradition contends that we have *privileged self-knowledge*, in that we have especially secure higher-order access to these same mental states. Parties to both traditions typically suppose that first-person authority is a consequence of privileged self-knowledge. Against this I argue that first-person authority is a product of our capacity to directly express our first-order mental states in speech or thought, whether or not we also have privileged self-knowledge of those states. Nevertheless, I argue that we do have privileged self-knowledge. This raises anew the question of how first-person authority and privileged self-knowledge relate. I argue that, for at least some of our mental states, our ability to express them to others, and to know them with privilege when we do so, constitute jointly necessary conditions on certain forms of social cognition.

2013-2014 **Wilfrid Laurier University:** M.A, Philosophy
Thesis: *Revisiting Parfit's Impersonal Beings Hypothesis*
Supervisor: Kathy Behrendt

2009-2013 **University of Waterloo:** B.A Philosophy & Peace and Conflict Studies joint honours, summa cum laude

PEER-REVIEWED PUBLICATIONS

2017 Ontological Entanglement in the Normative Web
Dialogue: Canadian Philosophical Review, vol. 56, issue 3, pp. 483-501.

MANUSCRIPTS UNDER REVIEW

Transparent Critical Reasoning (modified title for blind review)
On Knowing How We Know Our Commitments (modified title for blind review)
Defending First-Person Authority (modified title for blind review)
Is Self-Knowledge Required for Agent-Level Inference? (modified title for blind review)

AWARDS

2019 Graduate Fellowship of Distinction in Philosophy, \$9800
2017 Ontario Graduate Scholarship (OGS), \$15000
2014 Kitty and Lou Newman Memorial Graduate Scholarship, \$5000
2013 University of Waterloo PACS Certificate Program Bursary, \$1200

REFEREED PRESENTATIONS

2020 Inference and Self-Knowledge
-The Tenth European Congress of Analytic Philosophy, Utrecht University
There Is Something to the Authority Thesis (*cancelled: COVID-19 outbreak*)
-Pacific meeting of the American Philosophical Association, San Francisco
Critical Reasoning and the Transparency Method
-Eastern meeting of the American Philosophical Association, Philadelphia

2019 There is Something to the Authority Thesis
-Expression, Communication, and the Origins of Meaning Research Group
Inaugural Graduate Conference, University of Connecticut
Metaphysically Robust Constitutivism and the Provenance of Privileged Self
Knowledge
-Eastern Meeting of the American Philosophical Association, New York

2018 -8th Annual Edinburgh Graduate Conference in Epistemology, University of
Edinburgh
Davidson, Authoritative Speech, and Privileged Self-Knowledge
-Meeting of the Canadian Philosophical Association, Université de
Montréal

2017 Davidson, Ontological Profundity, and Profound Ontological Difference
-Meeting of the Canadian Philosophical Association, Ryerson University

2016 Arguments from Indispensability and Companions in Guilt
-Meeting of the Canadian Philosophical Association, University of Calgary
-Louisiana State University Graduate Philosophy Conference

INVITED PRESENTATIONS

2019 Winget on Compassion and Procedural Liberalism
-York University Philosophy Graduate Student Association Annual
Conference: Philosophy of Emotion, York University

2018 Davidson, Authoritative Speech, and Privileged Self-Knowledge
-Wilfrid Laurier University Speaker Series, Wilfrid Laurier University

INVITED PRESENTATIONS (CONTINUED)

- 2017 Should Davidson's Theory of Mind be Normative? A Response to Curry
 -York University Philosophy Graduate Student Association, Annual
 Conference: The Legacy of Donald Davidson, York University
- 2015 On Dishaw's "A Conjecture in Assessing Reductionism about Moral Values"
 -York University Philosophy Graduate Student Association Annual
 Conference: Reductionist and Antireductionist Perspectives on
 Normativity, York University

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

- 2018 **As Course Director, York University**
Seminar in Contemporary Philosophy – Varieties of Skepticism
- As Invited Lecturer**
- MAR 2020 Dorit Bar-On's *Speaking My Mind*, for Core Theoretical Philosophy
- OCT 2019 Introduction to Derivations in Sentential Logic, for Intro to Formal Logic
- JAN 2018 Sentential Logic: Symbolization and Syntax, for Intro to Formal Logic
- OCT 2016 Donald Davidson's Epistemology Externalized, for Perception, Knowledge,
 and Causality
- OCT 2015 Descartes's Second Meditation, for Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz
- As Teaching Assistant, York University (*Weekly Tutorial Leader)**
- 2019 Introduction to Formal Logic (J. Pelham)*
 Modes of Reasoning – Reasoning About Social Issues (H. Davis)*
 Perception, Knowledge, and Causality (I. Jarvie)
- 2018 Introduction to Formal Logic (J. Pelham)*
- 2017 Introduction to Formal Logic (J. Pelham)*
 The Meaning of Life (D. Stamos)*
 Introduction to Formal Logic (J. Pelham)*
- 2016 Perception, Knowledge, and Causality (O. Ellefson)
 Perception, Knowledge, and Causality (J. Hattiangadi)
 Locke, Berkeley, Hume (A. Petrenko)
- 2015 Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz (D. Jopling)
 Critical Reasoning (L. Carozza)*
 The Meaning of Life (M. Khalidi)*
- 2014 The Meaning of Life (H. Jackman)*
- As Teaching Assistant, Wilfrid Laurier University (*Tutorial Leader)**
- 2014 Values and Society (A. Mihali)*
- 2013 Values and Society (A. Peetush)*
- Teaching Certifications**
- 2016 Senior Record of Completion in Pedagogical Research, York University
 Teaching Commons

PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

2020 Moderator, Ontario High School Ethics Bowl (UT-Mississauga)
2019-2020 President, Philosophy Graduate Student Association (York)
2018 Referee, Philosophy Graduate Student Association Conference (York)
2017-2020 Colloquium Organizer, Philosophy Graduate Student Association (York)
2017 Organizer, Philosophy Graduate Student Association Conference (York)
2015-2020 Referee, Philosophy Graduate Student Association Conference (York)
2015-2019 Vice President, Philosophy Graduate Student Association (York)
Reviewer: The Canadian Journal of Philosophy (x1)

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

2014-present Canadian Philosophical Association
2017-present American Philosophical Association

GRADUATE COURSES TAKEN

At York University (*Audit)
2020 Social Epistemology (Regina Rini)*
2019 The Objectivity of Meaning (Claudine Verheggen)*
2018 Philosophical Logic (Christopher Campbell)*
2016 The Metaphysics of Science (Muhammad Ali Khalidi)*
Hegel's Phenomenology (Jim Vernon)
Philosophy of Action (Robert Myers)
Wittgenstein & Davidson on Language and Thought (Claudine Verheggen)
2015 Philosophy of Science (Jagdish Hattiangadi)
Directed Study in Metaethics (R. Myers)
Feminist Philosophy and the Politics of Negative Affect (Alice MacLachlan)*
2014 Davidson's Triangulation Argument (Claudine Verheggen & Robert Myers)
American Pragmatism (Henry Jackman)

At Wilfrid Laurier University
2014 Metaphysics of Mind (Neil Campbell)
Studies in Moral Psychology (Gary Foster)
2013 Narrative Views of the Self (Kathy Behrendt)
Minds, Brains, and Machines (Hugh Alcock)
Epistemic Responsibility (Jill Rusin)

REFERENCES

Dr. Claudine Verheggen
York University
(cverheg@yorku.ca)
Dr. Henry Jackman
York University
(hjackman@me.com)

Dr. Christopher Campbell
York University
(ccampbell@glendon.yorku.ca)
Dr. Judy Pelham (*teaching reference*)
York University
(Pelham@yorku.ca)

Dissertation Abstract

My dissertation concerns two phenomena that have long been of interest to philosophers. The first phenomenon is *first-person authority*. Roughly, first-person authority amounts to being owed and tending to receive deference when ascribing mental states to oneself, and to have one's mental-state self-ascriptions be insulated from certain sorts of epistemic doubt, such as doubts about whether one has *misrecognized* one's mental state. The second phenomenon is *privileged self-knowledge*. Roughly, privileged self-knowledge is the seemingly easily acquired, seemingly non-inferential, non-perceptual knowledge we often have of our current mental states.

In chapter one I examine various specifications of first-person authority, most of which explicate it in terms of the *relative indubitability* or *presumptive truth* of self-ascriptions. I then defend many of these specifications against Wolfgang Barz (2018), who argues that there is no philosophically interesting and plausible first-person authority thesis.

In chapter two I consider whether we (ought to) treat self-ascriptions as first-person authoritative because they reflect one's privileged self-knowledge. I argue that there are reasons to consider an alternative, *non-epistemic* explanation. Thus, on the *expressivist* view (Jacobsen 1996, 1997; Falvey 2000; Bar-On 2004b, various), we are justified in and actually tend to treat mental state self-ascriptions as first-person authoritative insofar as they are taken to express the very mental states they self-ascribe. In other words, expressive self-ascriptions are first-person authoritative because they express the first-order mental states self-ascribed, whether or not they also express higher-order, privileged self-knowledge of those same states.

In chapter three I ask whether, in addition to enjoying first-person authority, we also have privileged self-knowledge. For various reasons, I narrow my focus to thinking about privileged self-knowledge of propositional attitudes like beliefs, desires, and intentions. Thus, I evaluate arguments which claim that, as a matter of cognitive necessity, rational agents possess privileged self-knowledge of these attitudes. On one argument, our identities as "critical reasoners" (Burge 1996; Pettit & McGeer 2002; Sorgiovanni 2019) depends on our ability to subject our mental states to higher-order evaluation. On a second argument, our identities as reasoners *simpliciter* depends on our ability to self-consciously "take" our inferential attitudes to support forming further attitudes (Boghossian 2014, 2019; Koziolok 2017; Kietzmann 2017). I argue that these authors fail to establish their desired conclusions.

In chapter four I offer an alternative account of the cognitive indispensability of our having privileged self-knowledge of these attitudes. Specifically, I argue that we require such knowledge in order to identify possible *interlocutors* and *collaborators* for group action—failing, as I say, to *track our epistemic position* relative to possible and actual epistemic peers and group actors would lead to agency-defeating forms of cognitive disorientation. For analogous reasons I argue that we must cede first-person authority to what others say about their current mental states, which we do through grasping the expressive character of self-ascriptive speech and thought. Thus, I show why first-person authority and privileged self-knowledge must come together in crucial cognitive contexts, at least as with respect to the propositional attitudes.

In the fifth and final chapter I examine possible sources of our privileged self-knowledge of our propositional attitudes. I argue for a version of constitutivism, which is the view that self-knowledge is metaphysically built into the attitudes self-known, at least for agents who are sufficiently rational and conceptually equipped. I defend constitutivism against a recent *rational fundamentalist* alternative, according to which self-knowledge is not metaphysically built into our mental states and is instead the product of a disposition, enjoyed by rational agents, to form higher-order beliefs about one's attitudes in normal cognitive conditions (Parrott 2017).