

# BENJAMIN IAN WINOKUR

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**AREAS OF SPECIALIZATION** Epistemology, Philosophy of Mind

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**AREAS OF COMPETENCE** Philosophy of Language, Logic, Metaethics

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## EDUCATION

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2014-2021 **York University:** Ph.D, Philosophy  
THESIS: *Knowing and Expressing Ourselves*  
COMMITTEE: Claudine Verheggen (supervisor), Henry Jackman, Christopher Campbell, Victoria McGeer (external examiner: Princeton/ANU)

**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 receives) deference from others. A nearby tradition contends that we have *peculiar and privileged self-knowledge* of our minds: we have a special way of acquiring highly secure self-knowledge of our current mental states. Typically, privileged and peculiar self-knowledge is thought to explain first-person authority. Against this, I argue that first-person authority results from our capacity to directly express our first-order mental states by self-ascribing them. This raises anew the question of how first-person authority relates to our privileged and peculiar self-knowledge, and of what such knowledge does explain. I argue that, for a range of mental states, our ability to directly express them through self-attribution, and to know them with privilege and peculiarity, jointly enable certain forms of social-epistemic agency.

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

## PUBLICATIONS

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### Refereed Journal Articles

- 2021b "Inference and Self-Knowledge", *Logos & Episteme*, vol. 12 (1), pp. 77-98
- 2021a "Critical Reasoning and the Inferential Transparency Method", *Res Philosophica*, vol. 98 (1), pp. 23-42.
- 2017 "Ontological Entanglement in the Normative Web", *Dialogue: Canadian Philosophical Review*, vol. 56 (3), pp. 483-501.

## INVITED, UNDER REVIEW, AND IN PROGRESS

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### Edited Collections

*Expression and Self-Knowledge* (with Dorit Bar-On), special issue of *Philosophies*  
(in progress): [mdpi.com/journal/philosophies/special\\_issues/expression\\_self\\_knowledge](https://mdpi.com/journal/philosophies/special_issues/expression_self_knowledge)

### Papers (*some titles modified for blind review*)

“Defending First-Person Authority” (conditional acceptance, final revisions completed)  
“Evaluating Expressivisms” (for *Philosophies* special issue, in progress)  
“A New Davidsonian Account of Peculiar Self-Knowledge” (under review)  
“Bots, Testimony, and Epistemic Injustice Online” (under review)  
“First-Person Authority as Easy Deference” (in progress)  
“Self-Knowledge in Social Agency” (in progress)

### Books

*The Functions of Self-Knowledge* (in progress)

### AWARDS

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2021	York FGS Thesis and Dissertation Prize (nominee, status pending)
2019	Graduate Fellowship of Distinction in Philosophy, \$9800
2017	Ontario Graduate Scholarship, \$15000
2015-2020	Graduate student travel grants, ~\$4400
2014	Kitty and Lou Newman Memorial Graduate Scholarship, \$5000

### REFEREED PRESENTATIONS

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2021	“There Is Something to the Authority Thesis” -Pacific Meeting of the American Philosophical Association, San Francisco
2020	“Inference and Self-Knowledge” -The Tenth European Congress of Analytic Philosophy, Utrecht University “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 “Constitutivism and the Provenance of Privileged Self-Knowledge” -Eastern Meeting of the American Philosophical Association, New York City
2018	-8 <sup>th</sup> 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

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- 2021 “Evaluating Expressivisms”  
-Ryerson Reason, Action, and Mind Speaker Series, Ryerson University
- 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
- 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

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- As Course Director, York University**
- 2018 Seminar in Contemporary Philosophy – Varieties of Skepticism
- As Invited Lecturer**
- APR 2021 Annalisa Coliva’s *Self-Knowledge and Commitments* (Graduate)
- MAR 2020 Dorit Bar-On’s *Speaking My Mind* (Graduate)
- OCT 2019 Introduction to Derivations in Sentential Logic (Undergraduate)
- JAN 2018 Sentential Logic: Symbolization and Syntax (Undergraduate)
- OCT 2016 Donald Davidson’s *Epistemology Externalized* (Undergraduate)
- OCT 2015 Descartes’s Second Meditation (Undergraduate)
- As Teaching Assistant, York University (\*Tutorial Leader)**
- 2020 Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz (Matthew Leisinger)
- 2019 Introduction to Formal Logic (Judy Pelham)\*  
Modes of Reasoning – Reasoning About Social Issues (Hilary Davis)\*  
Perception, Knowledge, and Causality (Ian Jarvie)
- 2018 Introduction to Formal Logic (Judy Pelham)\*
- 2017 Introduction to Formal Logic (Judy Pelham)\*  
The Meaning of Life (David Stamos)\*  
Introduction to Formal Logic (Judy Pelham)\*
- 2016 Perception, Knowledge, and Causality (Olaf Ellefson)  
Perception, Knowledge, and Causality (Jagdish Hattiangadi)  
Locke, Berkeley, Hume (Anton Petrenko)
- 2015 Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz (David Jopling)  
Critical Reasoning (Linda Carozza)\*  
The Meaning of Life (Muhammad Ali Khalidi)\*
- 2014 The Meaning of Life (Henry Jackman)\*

2014 **As Teaching Assistant, Wilfrid Laurier University (\*Tutorial Leader)**  
 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**

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2020-2021 Vice President, Philosophy Graduate Student Association (York)  
 2020 Moderator, Ontario High School Ethics Bowl (UT-Mississauga)  
 2019-2020 President, Philosophy Graduate Student Association (York)  
 2017-2020 Colloquium Organizer, Philosophy Graduate Student Association (York)  
 2017-2020 Conference Organizer, Philosophy Graduate Student Association (York)  
 2015-2019 Referee, Philosophy Graduate Student Association Conference (York)  
 2015-2019 Vice President, Philosophy Graduate Student Association (York)  
 Reviewer: *The Canadian Journal of Philosophy; Philosophies*  
 R.A: Assisting Dorit Bar-On and Crispin Wright with preparing a book manuscript

### **PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS**

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2020-present ECOM Research Group (University of Connecticut)  
 2017-present American Philosophical Association  
 2014-present Canadian Philosophical Association

### **GRADUATE COURSES TAKEN**

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**At York University (\*Audit)**  
 2020 Objectivity (Claudine Verheggen and Robert Myers)\*  
 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 and Davidson on Language and Thought (Claudine Verheggen)  
 2015 Philosophy of Science (Jagdish Hattiangadi)  
 Directed Study in Metaethics (Robert Myers)  
 Feminist Philosophy and the Politics of Negative Affect (Alice MacLachlan)\*  
 2014 Davidson's Triangulation Argument and its Consequences (Claudine  
 Verheggen and 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)  
 Epistemic Responsibility (Jill Rusin)

## REFERENCES

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Dr. Claudine Verheggen  
York University  
([cverheg@yorku.ca](mailto:cverheg@yorku.ca))

Dr. Judy Pelham (teaching)  
York University  
([Pelham@yorku.ca](mailto:Pelham@yorku.ca))

Dr. Christopher Campbell  
York University  
([ccampbell@glendon.yorku.ca](mailto:ccampbell@glendon.yorku.ca))

Dr. Henry Jackman  
York University  
([hjackman@me.com](mailto:hjackman@me.com))

Dr. Dorit Bar-On  
University of Connecticut  
([dorit.bar-on@uconn.edu](mailto:dorit.bar-on@uconn.edu))

Dr. Kathy Behrendt  
Wilfrid Laurier University  
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## EXTENDED DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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My dissertation concerns two puzzling epistemological phenomena. The first is our so-called “first-person authority”. Roughly, having first-person authority amounts to being owed (and tending to receive) deference from one’s hearers when issuing present-tense self-ascriptions of one’s current mental states. The second phenomenon is our so-called “privileged” and “peculiar” self-knowledge. Our self-knowledge often appears to be privileged insofar as our knowledge of our own current mental states seems highly secure relative to our knowledge of other minds and the wider empirical world. It appears to be peculiar insofar as it is acquired in a way that is available to no one but the agent herself.

In Chapter One I consider several, more careful ways of specifying the idea of first-person authority. Some emphasize the relative indubitability of present-tense mental state self-ascriptions, while others focus on their presumptive truth. I refine and defend specifications of both sorts against a recently articulate dilemma, which states that no way of specifying the idea of first-person authority is both (1) plausible and (2) philosophically puzzling.

In Chapter Two I consider whether first-person authority ought to be explained in terms of our privileged and peculiar self-knowledge, and I argue that we should favour an alternative explanation. Thus, on the “Neo-Expressivist” view that I defend, self-ascriptions are first-person authoritative insofar as they are actions that express (and are taken to express) the very first-order mental states they semantically represent, whether or not the expressed mental states are known with privilege and peculiarity by their possessors. However, I do not dispute that we do have privileged and peculiar self-knowledge of many of our mental states. This raises the question of what such knowledge does explain, if not first-person authority.

In Chapter Three, focusing on privileged and peculiar self-knowledge of propositional attitudes specifically, I critically examine several possible answers to this question. Some tie our privileged and peculiar self-knowledge to our reasoning capacities, while others tie such knowledge to our rationality more generally, and still others to further psychological functions such as our capacity to control when and to whom we disseminate knowledge of our minds.

In Chapter Four I offer an alternative “Social Agentalist” account of the explanatory indispensability of privileged and peculiar self-knowledge (focusing, as before, on propositional attitudes). Social Agentalism is the view that such knowledge enables social activities such as interpersonal reasoning and linguistic interpretation. Next, I address the question of how our privileged and peculiar self-knowledge relates to our first-person authority. I argue that appreciating the first-order expressive character of self-ascriptions is also crucial to certain social-cognitive functions. Thus, I show why first-person authority comes together with privileged and peculiar self-knowledge of our propositional attitudes in ubiquitous cognitive contexts, even though the latter does not explain the former.

In Chapter Five I consider possible sources of our privileged and peculiar self-knowledge of our propositional attitudes. I argue for a limited 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, lucid, and who possess the concepts required to self-ascribe their attitudes. I defend Constitutivism against what I call a “Rational Fundamentalist” alternative, according to which such self-knowledge is not metaphysically built into our propositional attitudes but is, instead, the product of a disposition, enjoyed by rational agents, to automatically form higher-order beliefs about their first-order attitudes in normal cognitive conditions.