

Lisa Doerksen

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Research Areas

AOS Philosophy of Mind, Epistemology
AOC Early Modern Philosophy, Kant, Metaphysics

Employment

2023- Postdoctoral Fellow, University of Toronto at Mississauga

Education

2023 PhD in Philosophy
University of Toronto

PhD Thesis: "Finding Oneself in the World"

Committee: Gurpreet Rattan (supervisor), Jennifer Nagel, William Seager,
Marleen Rozemond, Anil Gomes (external examiner)

2013 BA in Philosophy (Honours Specialization) and Art History (Major)
Western University

Publications

2022 "The Subject-as-Object Problem," *Inquiry*.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/0020174X.2022.2114936>

Conferences

Papers Presented

2023 "Sceptical Hypotheses and Subjective Indistinguishability" *Joint Session*,
Birkbeck & The Institute of Philosophy, University of London, July 8

2023 "Sceptical Hypotheses and Subjective Indistinguishability" *Canadian
Philosophical Association*, York University, May 31

2022 "Two Kinds of *De Se* Ignorance" *Self, Belief, and AI Workshop*, University of
Toronto and the AI & Humanity Lab at the University of Hong Kong,
July 19

2018 "On the Problem of Taking Oneself as an Object in the World" *Canadian
Philosophical Association*, Université du Québec à Montreal, June 7

- 2017 “The First-Person Perspective and the External World” *Canadian Philosophical Association*, Toronto Metropolitan University, May 29
- 2015 “The First-Person Perspective and the Knowledge Argument: A Response to Stalnaker” *MindGrad’15*, University of Warwick, Dec. 12
- 2015 “The Role of the System of Double Existence in Hume’s Account of Identity” *American Philosophical Association, Pacific Division*, April 1
- 2015 “The Role of the System of Double Existence in Hume’s Account of Identity” *Modern Philosophy Research Group*, University of Toronto, Jan. 30

Commentator

- 2023 Benjamin Winokur, “A Dilemma for Inferentialism About Self-Knowledge” *Canadian Philosophical Association*, York University, May 29
- 2017 Kirk Ludwig, "Are There Limits on Intersubjective Understanding?" Philosophy Workshop, *The Intellect and Its Philosophical Limits*, Simon Fraser University, April 7
- 2015 Fatema Amijee, “Nonsense and the First Person” *15th Annual University of Toronto Philosophy Graduate Conference*, May 1

Teaching Experience

As Course Instructor

- Fall 2023 17th and 18th Century Philosophy (first half), enrolment: 100
 Winter 2023 Existentialism, enrolment: 69
 Summer 2018 17th and 18th Century Philosophy (second half), enrolment: 41

As Tutorial Leader

- Winter 2020 Knowledge and Reality
 Fall 2017 Knowledge and Reality
 2016/2017 Introduction to Philosophy
 Spring 2016 Persons, Minds, and Bodies
 2015/2016 17th and 18th Century Philosophy

As Grader

- Spring 2015 Critical Reasoning
 Winter 2015 Aesthetics

Awards and Fellowships (Doctoral)

2023	David Savan Dissertation Prize
2023	Canadian Philosophical Association Student Essay Prize
2017-2018	Ontario Graduate Scholarship
2013-2018	UT Fellowship
2013-2017	Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) Doctoral Fellowship
2013	Mary H. Beatty Fellowship
2013	Michael J. Herman Graduate Fellowship in Philosophy
2013	Gordon Cheesbrough Graduate Fellowship in Philosophy

Professional Activities

2023-	Referee for <i>Canadian Journal of Philosophy</i> and <i>Dialogue</i>
2023	Commentator for the Socrates Project Conference, a chance for senior undergraduate students to present their work.
2022	Panel Participant for the CPA's Summer Institute, a one-week program for philosophy undergraduates from underrepresented groups.
2015	Research Assistant for Marleen Rozemond, on the topic of the Clarke-Collins Correspondence.
2014	Grant Writer for the 15 th Annual University of Toronto Philosophy Graduate Conference
2014	Participant, ATHENA IN ACTION, <i>A Networking and Mentoring Workshop for Graduate Student Women in Philosophy</i> , Princeton

References

Gurpreet Rattan (supervisor)
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Anil Gomes
 Professor of Philosophy, Trinity College, Oxford
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William Seager
 Professor Emeritus of Philosophy, University of Toronto
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Nilanjan Das
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James John (teaching mentor)
 Associate Professor of Philosophy, University of Toronto
 jim.john@utoronto.ca

Dissertation Abstract

“Finding Oneself in the World” (2023)

Thinking about oneself as the subject of a perspective *on* the world leaves unanswered the following questions about one’s identity as an object *in* the world: *Which* thing am I? What *kind* of thing am I? Do I exist as an object in the world *at all*? My dissertation is devoted to elucidating the source and significance of these questions. I construct a new framework for understanding why these fundamental questions arise and why they persist in the face of ever-increasing information about the objects we think we might be.

I begin by articulating what I call *the subject-as-object problem*, a problem for any attempt to develop an objective account of oneself *qua* subject. I argue that its source lies in the relationship between a basic precondition for inquiry – that something be present – and a framework that enables us to conceive of ourselves as inquirers in an objective world – the framework of objectivity. The subject-as-object problem opens a gap between one’s first-person perspective on the world and accounts of what one is as an object in the world. This gap makes possible a range of questions and doubts about one’s nature, one’s circumstances, and even one’s existence. This gap is experienced as a limitation on one’s ability to see how an object, with a certain set of properties, situated in a certain way, could have *this* very perspective on the world (i.e., the perspective one takes to be one’s own).

My diagnosis of the difficulty associated with inquiry into one’s identity as an object stands apart from prominent accounts of the difficulty that rest on metaphysical assumptions about the subject and the subject’s relation to objects (see, e.g., Kant, 1998; Nagel, 1986; Shoemaker, 1994; Peacocke, 2014). I articulate the difficulty *without* assuming a metaphysical picture. The motivation for this approach is straightforward: if one tries to explain the difficulty of identifying oneself, *qua* subject, as an object, by appealing to a picture on which subjects are certain kinds of things that relate to themselves and other objects in certain ways, then one’s diagnosis will be vulnerable to the kinds of questions it seeks to explain (e.g., *is that really me?* *Is that really my situation in the world?*). This does not mean that the relevant diagnosis is false, but it does mean that, to accept it as true, one must be willing to bracket these questions at a certain point. My diagnosis accounts for these questions without blunting their force, and it foregrounds their significance for the very attempt to establish a philosophical system that includes assumptions about the subject and the subject’s place in the world.

After articulating the subject-as-object problem, I show how it can help us better understand the nature of *de se* ignorance, the special status of first-person identity statements, the source of sceptical doubt about the external world, and the possibility of a challenge to Descartes’ *cogito*. In each chapter, I clarify the relevant debate using the framework I developed to formulate the subject-as-object problem, and I trace key difficulties back to the gap between one’s first-person perspective and objective accounts of oneself and one’s circumstances. Having the subject-as-object problem in view enables us to engage more deeply with these issues, and I believe that the significance of these issues motivates the philosophical importance of the subject-as-object problem.