

# MICHAEL FUERSTEIN

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## EDUCATION

Columbia University, PhD candidate, Philosophy, 2003-2009 (expected)

Tufts University, BA, Philosophy, 1995-2000

*Highest Thesis Honors*: "Metaphilosophical Dispute: Quine and Carnap on the A Priori"

*Magna Cum Laude*

New England Conservatory of Music, BM, Jazz Studies (Saxophone Performance), 1995-2000\*

*Academic Honors*

(Tufts and New England Conservatory degrees jointly awarded in a dual-degree program)

## AREAS OF SPECIALIZATION

Social and Political Philosophy, Epistemology (esp. social), Philosophy of Science (social aspects of science)

## AREAS OF COMPETENCE

Ethics, Pragmatism

## DISSERTATION

*The Scientific Public: Epistemic Norms in Democratic Society*

Committee: Philip Kitcher (advisor), Akeel Bilgrami, Joseph Raz

I argue that fulfillment of the democratic ideal is predicated on a "scientific public": a citizenry committed to and capable of reasoning in accordance with scientific norms of inquiry on matters of public concern. I understand those norms, most crucially, in terms of the commitment to employ observation as the primary basis for knowledge claims. The importance of that commitment derives from two distinctive features of observational epistemology: First, the capacity to observe competently is distributed widely across the diverse social groups that constitute political society and, second, observers wield a uniquely high degree of control over the causal chain through which knowledge is acquired. The first of these features allows for the widespread social contestation of knowledge claims, while the second, I argue, allows citizens to harness competition among those claims for epistemic progress. It is only given this kind of progressive and widespread contestation that democracies can adequately bring information to bear on the relations, in practice, among the diverse and dynamically interactive political ends they must serve.

## PUBLICATION

"Epistemic Democracy and the Social Character of Knowledge", *Episteme* 5 (2008): 74-93

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\* Recording available upon request or at my homepage (see above).

## UNIVERSITY TEACHING

Instructor, Contemporary Moral Problems, Columbia University, 2007

- Full teaching responsibilities, including syllabus
- Participated closely in the design and proposal of a new course

Teaching Assistant, Columbia University, 2004-2007

- Grading, office hours, review sessions, discussion sections, and guest lectures
- Courses: Methods and Problems of Philosophical Thought, Akeel Bilgrami, 2007  
Morality, Self, and Society, Jason Hill, 2006  
Social and Political Philosophy, Arthur Kuflik, 2006  
Metaphysics, Christopher Peacocke, 2005  
Elementary Logic, Achille Varzi, 2004, 2005

## OTHER TEACHING

Academic Tutor, Good Shepherd Services, Brooklyn, NY, 2002-2003

- Math, science, and humanities tutoring to underprivileged public high-school students

Standardized Test-Prep Instructor, Kaplan Inc., Boston, MA, and New York, NY, 2000-2003

- Classroom and individual instruction for SAT, GMAT, LSAT, and GRE tests, including math, verbal, analytical and written sections; class sizes of approximately 10-50 students
- Selected to teach on location for major corporate clients, including Goldman Sachs, Lehman Brothers, Morgan Stanley, and Simpson, Thacher, and Bartlett LLP

## AWARDS/FELLOWSHIPS

DeKármán Fellowship, 2008-2009

*full funding for dissertation completion*

Whiting Fellowship, Columbia University, 2008-2009 (declined to accept DeKármán)

*full funding for dissertation completion in the humanities*

Mellon Interdisciplinary Graduate Fellowship, Institute for Social and Economic Research and Policy, Columbia University, 2008-2009

*interdisciplinary doctoral research group*

Charles Frankel Memorial Fellowship, Columbia University, 2007-2008

*awarded to "a distinguished graduate student" in philosophy at Columbia*

Humane Studies Fellowship, 2007-2008

*partial funding for graduate study*

Philosophy Department Summer Stipend, Columbia University, 2006, 2008

Tufts University Philosophy Prize, 2000

## SCHOLARLY PRESENTATIONS

"The Idea of a Political Research Agenda", Northeastern Political Science Association Meeting, 2008

“The Scientific Public: Epistemic Norms at the Foundations of Democracy”, Humane Studies Fellows Research Colloquium, 2007

Comment on Roald Nashi, “A Makeover of the Pure Causal Theory of Knowledge”, Columbia/NYU Graduate Conference in Philosophy, 2004

## COURSEWORK

### *Social, Political, Legal, and Moral Philosophy*

The Justification of Public Action, Joseph Raz  
Evolution, Altruism, and Morality, Philip Kitcher  
Modern Legal Philosophy: The Books, Jeremy Waldron  
Freedom: Personal and Political, Akeel Bilgrami, Jon Elster, Brian Barry  
Secular Liberalism and Identity, Akeel Bilgrami, Jon Elster, Jeremy Waldron\*  
Philosophy of Social Science, Jon Elster\*

### *History*

Classical Political Economy, Philip Kitcher  
Kant’s Ethics, Patricia Kitcher  
Pragmatism, Philip Kitcher  
Early-Modern Scepticism, Christia Mercer\*  
Aristotle’s *Categories*, Wolfgang Mann\*

### *Metaphysics, Epistemology, and Philosophy of Science*

Representing Mental States, Christopher Peacocke  
Probability and Induction, John Collins  
Modal Logic, Achille Varzi  
Mind and Language, Akeel Bilgrami  
Directed Study: Philosophy of Science, Philip Kitcher  
Language and Mind, Jerry Fodor, Christopher Peacocke (NYU)\*  
Events, Achille Varzi\*  
Science and Values, Philip Kitcher\*  
Mind, Brain, and Space, Achille Varzi\*

(\* indicates registered audit; all courses taken at Columbia University unless noted otherwise)

## LANGUAGES

French, intermediate reading and speaking ability (passed doctoral proficiency exam)

## ACADEMIC SERVICE

Referee, Columbia/NYU Graduate Conference in Philosophy, 2004-2008

Co-organizer, Columbia/NYU Graduate Conference in Philosophy, 2004

Organizer, Philosophy of Science Reading Group, 2004

## REFERENCES

Philip Kitcher, Columbia University Dept. of Philosophy, [psk16\[AT\]columbia.edu](mailto:psk16@columbia.edu)

Akeel Bilgrami, Columbia University Dept. of Philosophy, [ab41\[AT\]columbia.edu](mailto:ab41@columbia.edu)

Joseph Raz, Columbia Law School and Oxford University, [jr159\[AT\]columbia.edu](mailto:jr159@columbia.edu)

David Estlund, Brown University Dept. of Philosophy, [David\\_Estlund\[AT\]brown.edu](mailto:David_Estlund@brown.edu)

Jason Hill, DePaul University Dept. of Philosophy, [jhill6\[AT\]depaul.edu](mailto:jhill6@depaul.edu) (teaching letter)

## DISSERTATION ABSTRACT (EXTENDED)

*The Scientific Public: Epistemic Norms in Democratic Society*

Committee: Philip Kitcher (advisor), Akeel Bilgrami, Joseph Raz

My central claim is that fulfillment of the democratic ideal is predicated on a "scientific public": a citizenry committed to and capable of reasoning in accordance with scientific norms of inquiry on matters of public concern. I defend that claim by elucidating the distinctive social-epistemic challenges that democratic societies confront, and then showing how an epistemology of deliberation, grounded in appeals to observable evidence, is specially suited to meet them.

I begin with the observation that the knowledge necessary for the solution of political problems is scattered widely across the political community. Consequently one can only expect effective governance given both (a) widespread and ongoing consultation with that community, and (b) a means of assimilating the knowledge thereby collected into coherent policy. Therein lies the critical role of deliberation, which provides a means of knowledge-assimilation that also preserves the necessary transparency of political justification to citizens.

But standard conceptions of deliberative democracy – in particular, Habermasian and post-Rawlsian conceptions – frame the objectives of deliberation in terms of consensus rather than epistemology. I argue that consensus is ill-conceived as the objective of deliberation because the process of contestation and inquiry that constitutes deliberation is premised on evaluative distinctions among possible points of consensus, distinctions that make no sense unless the object of deliberation is some consensus-independent value. A substantive account of deliberative norms must proceed from an understanding of how deliberation contributes to that value, and this fact points naturally to a concern for deliberation's epistemic benefits.

The guiding norms of epistemic deliberation derive from the distinctive challenges that the political context poses. The success of political deliberation depends on the capacity of citizens to offer and accept knowledge claims in good faith. That requires a degree of mutual confidence, however, that the political context seems tailored to undermine, given (i) the extraordinary diversity and difficulty of the epistemic domains involved, (ii) the height of the moral stakes, and (iii) the deep conflict among the values and interests of deliberators. I argue that, given these circumstances, the possibility of mutual confidence requires a commitment among the citizenry to a norm of *public appraisability*: all defend their use of political power strictly by appeal to those arguments whose epistemic quality can be competently evaluated across social divisions of interest and value.

Using the paradigmatic case of science, I then show how an observational epistemology provides an ideal framework for satisfaction of public appraisability. Science has a special capacity to harness the social features of inquiry because (1) the capacity to observe competently is widely distributed across agents with diverse evaluative attitudes and cognitive properties and (2) inquirers have the capacity to manipulate, to a high degree of refinement, the causally relevant features of the context in which observations are made. Whereas (1) ensures a valuable diversity of competing theories, (2) allows inquirers to translate that diversity into shared research programs directed at the progressive resolution of controversy. In this way, the scientific community exploits theoretical conflict for epistemic gain.

That, in turn, suggests a model for political deliberation: social diversity produces competing policy arguments that are subject to ongoing, common appraisal. But how can an observational epistemology be applied in political disputes? The answer arises from a pragmatist conception of how political ends are to be appraised. The key question in deciding to pursue a given end is not whether that end is valuable in itself but, rather, whether the consequences of *pursuit* of that end – including the consequences of achieving the end itself – are valuable. Because the consequences of pursuing a given end inevitably interact in dynamic fashion with our pursuit of other vital ends, the question of how to value a given end can only be intelligently answered given ongoing observation of those consequences in the full richness of human practice.