

George Wrisley

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Areas of Specialization

Metaphysics and Philosophy of Language

Areas of Competence

Epistemology, Logic, Ethics

Education

Ph.D. Philosophy, University of Iowa.

Received: May 2008

Dissertation: "Realism and Conceptual Relativity." Completed under a Seashore Dissertation Year Fellowship (University-wide competition for the fellowship)

M.A. Philosophy, Georgia State University

Received: May 2002

2001-02 Semester at Universität Bielefeld, Germany to study German and work on Wittgenstein with Eike von Savigny and Joachim Schulte.

Master's Thesis: "Wittgenstein's Conception of the Autonomy of Language and its Implications for Natural Kinds." (Recognized as a Thesis of Distinction)

B.A. Philosophy, University of Georgia

Received: August 1998

Teaching Experience

North Georgia College and State University

- **Happiness and Suffering**, 1 section (Visiting Professor) **Fall 2011**.
- **Metaphysics**, 1 section (Visiting Professor) **Spring 2011**.
- **Ethics from a Global Perspective**, 4 sections (Visiting Professor) **Summer 2011 – Fall 2011**.
- **Introduction to Philosophy**, 6 sections (Visiting Professor) **Fall 2010 – Fall 2011**.
- **Logic**, 5 sections (Visiting Professor) **Fall 2010 – Fall 2011**.

The George Washington University

- **Introduction to Logic**, 3 sections (Adjunct Instructor) **Fall 2009 – Spring 2010**.

The Catholic University of America

- **Symbolic Logic**, 1 section (Adjunct Instructor) **Spring 2010**. Included philosophy graduate students.

Texas Lutheran University

- **Introduction to Philosophy**, 3 sections (Adjunct Instructor) **Fall 2008 – Spring 2009**.

Texas State University, San Marcos, Texas

- **Philosophy and Critical Thinking**, 4 sections (Adjunct Instructor) **Fall 2008 – Spring 2009**.

Northwest Vista College, San Antonio, Texas

- **Ethics**, 2 sections (Adjunct Instructor) **Fall 2008**.

Teaching Experience (As Graduate Student):**University of Iowa**

- **Introduction to Philosophy**, (Instructor) **2005-2007**. Full teaching responsibility.
- **Principles of Reasoning**, (Instructor) **2004-2005**. Full teaching responsibility.
- **Philosophy and the Just Society**, Prof. Fumerton. **Spring 2004** (Discussion Leader). Responsible for facilitating weekly discussion and grading.
- **Philosophy and Human Nature**, Prof. Williams. **Fall 2003** (Discussion Leader). Responsible for facilitating weekly discussion and grading.

Publications

- “Davidson on the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme.” In *Just the Arguments: 100 of the Most Important Arguments in Western Philosophy*. Eds. M. Bruce and S. Barbone. Wiley-Blackwell, forthcoming: October 2011.
- “Wittgenstein’s Private Language Argument.” In *Just the Arguments: 100 of the Most Important Arguments in Western Philosophy*. Eds. M. Bruce and S. Barbone. Wiley-Blackwell, forthcoming: October 2011.
- “Wherefore the Failure of Private Ostension?” *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*. 89:3, September 2011. 483-498.
- “Conservation Easements.” In the *Encyclopedia of Environmental Issues*. Ed. C.W. Allin. 4 Volumes. Salem Press. May 2011. 294-296.
- “Natural Capital.” In the *Encyclopedia of Environmental Issues*. Ed. C.W. Allin. 4 Volumes. Salem Press. May 2011. 858-859.
- “Escaping the Island of Ethical Subjectivism: Don’t Let Ben Help to Bring You Back.” In *Lost and Philosophy*, 2nd Edition. Ed. S. Kaye. The Blackwell Philosophy and Pop Culture Series. November 2010. [Revision of Wrisley 2007.]
- “Private Language,” with Stewart Candlish. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Ed. E. N. Zalta. <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/private-language/> September 2008. In 2007 Candlish invited me to take over responsibility for revising the article every four years. For the 2008 edition I am responsible for sections 1.1 and 1.2, as well as minor revisions throughout.
- “The Island of Ethical Subjectivism: Not the Paradise of *Lost*.” In *Lost and Philosophy*. Ed. S. Kaye. The Blackwell Philosophy and Pop Culture Series. November 2007.
- “Rules, Language, and Reality.” *Philosophy Now: a magazine of ideas*. Issue 58. November/December 2006. 15-18.

Review

- Review of *Wittgenstein's Account of Truth*. By Sarah Ellenbogen. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), *Philosophy in Review – Comptes rendus philosophiques*, Volume XXIII, No. 6 (2003): 383-385.

Presentations**Refereed Conferences**

- “Why Happiness is not *the* Proper End of a Human Life.” Kentucky Philosophical Association spring conference, April 2011.
- “Truth, Nonsense, and the Meaningfulness of Ostensive Gestures.” North American Wittgenstein Society group meeting at the 2010 Pacific Division meeting of the American Philosophical Association in San Francisco, March 2010.
- “Is Putnam’s Notion of Conceptual Relativity an Ontological Godsend?” Iowa Philosophical Society Conference, September 2006.
- “Realism, Putnam, and Multiple Descriptions of the World.” Midsouth Philosophy Conference, February 2006.

In-House Conferences**University of Iowa Graduate Philosophical Society Conferences**

- “Is the Metaphysical Realist Committed to There Being One True and Complete Description of the World?” November 2006.
- “Realism and Multiple Descriptions of the World,” November 2005.
- “Nietzsche, Two Ideals, and the Meaningfulness of Suffering,” November 2004.
- “The Importance of Being Seemly: The Role of *Decorum* in Cicero’s *De Officiis*,” April 2004.

University of Iowa Jakobson Conferences

- “Realism, Putnam, and Multiple Descriptions of the World,” (revised) March 2006.
- “The Viability of Kuhn’s Later Notion of Local Incommensurability,” April 2005.

Georgia State University Phi Sigma Tau Colloquiums

- “Wittgenstein’s Conception of Grammar,” 2001.
- “Wittgenstein’s Private Language Argument,” 2000.

Commentary

- Commentator on: “An Affront Against Life: Nietzsche’s Critique of Christianity and His Redemption of the World” by A.J. Snelson. Kentucky Philosophical Association spring conference, April 2011.
- Commentator on: “How Not to Read Quine on Underdetermination” by Rogerio Severo. University of Iowa Graduate Philosophical Society spring conference, 2006.
- Commentator on: “Depicting Reality: Pictures and Isomorphism” by Todd Kukla. Midsouth Philosophy Conference, February 2006.
- Commentator on: “An ‘Understanding of PI §43 Aided by a Genetic Analysis of the *Philosophical Investigations*” by Craig Fox. University of Iowa Graduate Philosophical Society spring conference, 2005.

Scholarly Activities

- Research Assistant to David Stern, 2003-2004. Journal research and proof reading for *Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations: An Introduction*. (Cambridge University Press, 2004.)
- Responsible for the original English translation from the German of "Taking avowals seriously: The soul a public affair." By Eike von Savigny. In *Working Papers from the Wittgenstein Archives at the University of Bergen*. Eds. Alois Pichler and Simo Säätelä., No. 17, 2005.
- Edited English translation, "Private Language – Private Rules – Private Sensations: A Draw Position?" By Eike von Savigny. In *Wittgenstein and the Future of Philosophy: A reassessment after 50 years*. (Wien) 2002, 389-398.

Honors and Awards**University of Iowa**

- Seashore Dissertation Year Fellowship 2007-2008.
- Summer Research Fellowship, 2006.
- Teaching Assistantship 2003-2007.
- Fellowship 2002-2003.

Georgia State University

- *Phi Sigma Tau*, National Honor Society for Philosophy. Recognized for exceptional academic achievement and scholarship, 2000 and 2001.

Service**To the Profession**

- Referee for the *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*

To the University of Iowa Department and Colleagues

- Webmaster, University of Iowa Graduate Philosophical Society, 2005-2008.
- Vice President, University of Iowa Graduate Philosophical Society, 2004-2005.
- Cofounder and Vice President of the University of Iowa Graduate Philosophical Society, Spring 2004.
- Co-organizer of four University of Iowa Graduate Philosophical Society conferences Spring 2004- Spring 2005.

To Fellow Students

- Senator for Graduate and Professional Student Senate, 2004-2005.

Languages

- Proficient in reading, writing, and speaking German

Technical and Specialized Skills

- Proficiency with *Dreamweaver* and *MS Office Frontpage*, and the creation and management of websites.

Professional Affiliations

- American Philosophical Association, 2005-present.

- University of Iowa Graduate Philosophical Society, 2004-2008.

References

- Richard Fumerton. University of Iowa. (Dissertation Director)
Email: richard-fumerton@uiowa.edu **Phone:** (319) 335-0022
- David Stern. University of Iowa.
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Realism and Conceptual Relativity (Dissertation Abstract)

The nature and possibility of humans understanding and representing the world through thought, language, and perception has been at the center of western philosophy since at least Descartes. Accounting for the possibility of true representations was one of Kant's most explicit concerns. Firmly situated in this tradition, Hilary Putnam has long grappled with the nature and implications of how language hooks onto the world. Putnam's views on these issues have changed radically over his career from a kind of realism to a kind of antirealism.

According to the realist view, the mind essentially attempts to mirror the world through its representations. Truth consists of a correspondence between language and a world whose nature is independent of our representations. Call this form of realism *alethic realism*. According to the antirealist view, the mind does not simply mirror the world; rather, it somehow contributes structure and content to the world. Language and reality are not cleanly separable as the alethic realist believes.

Putnam abandoned alethic realism due to perceived problems with its being able to account for true representations of reality. Putnam became convinced that alethic realism leads to skepticism; since mind/representation and world are separable, it is theoretically possible that even an ideal theory or description of the world could be false. Further, because alethic realism holds that the world is representation-independent, Putnam takes it to imply that there is only one true description of the world. Conversely, if there is more than one true description of the world, then the world is not representation-independent.

Putnam's continued rejection of alethic realism is due principally to his argument from conceptual relativity. The central idea of which is that the "same" state of affairs can be described in *incompatible but equally true ways*. Putnam denies that the incompatibility is such that the descriptions are contraries; nevertheless, he holds that they cannot be simply conjoined into a single description.

Over the years Putnam has illustrated conceptual relativity with a number of different examples, but there is one that he returns to repeatedly. It involves the purported possibility of being able to describe what Putnam calls three "individuals," x_1, x_2, x_3 (three marbles, say) as either three objects or seven objects. If one countenances mereological sums, i.e., the idea that the sum of *any* two things is itself an object, then there are supposed to be seven objects. That is, the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd objects are each of the three individuals, the 4th the sum of x_1 and x_2 , the 5th the sum of x_1 and x_3 , the 6th the sum of x_2 and x_3 , and the 7th object is the sum of x_1, x_2 , and x_3 . But if one denies that there are mereological sums, then there are only three objects.

According to Putnam, the realist will insist that both counts cannot be right, since she is supposed to be committed to a fixed totality of representation-independent objects. Against this, Putnam claims that we can choose to talk either way and still speak truthfully. However, we cannot simply conjoin the descriptions into one description the way we can "John's hair is brown" and "John's eyes are green." The descriptions need to be non-conjoinable because they are supposed to be about the "same" state of affairs without "object" having a different meaning in each description. If the descriptions simply differed in meaning, then they would be about different things; and if they were contraries or contradictory, then they could not both be true. And if they differed in meaning or couldn't both be true, then the purported examples of conceptual relativity would *not* pose a problem for alethic realism.

Much of Putnam's effort is spent defending the idea that there can be incompatible but equally true descriptions. As we began to see above, he faces a dilemma. Two descriptions, A and B, are either consistent or not. If they are not consistent, then the proponent of conceptual relativity is committed to the truth of contradictions. If they are consistent, then they are simply

about different things and are thus conjoinable. So, Putnam's views on conceptual relativity are either irrational or they are consistent with alethic realism.

In order to try to steer his way through this dilemma, Putnam distinguishes between the *meaning* and *sense* of a word. The idea is that the meaning of "object" is in some sense the same when counting mereological sums or leaving them out; however, "object" differs in regard to its use or sense. So, when one person says, "There are three objects," and another says, "There are seven objects," they are using "object" with its ordinary meaning but in different senses. Thus, according to Putnam, they do not contradict one another, nor do they talk past one another.

I criticize Putnam's views on conceptual relativity along three lines. First, I argue that despite his meaning/sense distinction, Putnam's views on conceptual relativity still fall prey to the second horn of the above mentioned dilemma. Thus his attempt to hold that there are (in some sense) incompatible descriptions of the "same" state of affairs is untenable. The problem is that it is not clear why the supposed incompatible descriptions cannot be conjoined once it is clear that "object" is used in different senses. For example, "There are three non-mereological objects and there are seven mereological objects" is as unproblematic as, "There are three square objects and there are seven triangular objects." However, the question still remains as to whether *any* two concrete objects are themselves an object.

Therefore, second, I call into question Putnam's views on mereological sums, specifically the claim that *any* two concrete objects are themselves an object. While it is less problematic to think that some objects are mereological sums of their parts, e.g., a fleet of ships or an archipelago, it is not clear that just any two concrete objects are themselves an object. It is not my intention to argue that Putnam's views on mereology are false, but rather to emphasize that they are not as unproblematic as Putnam seems to believe.

Third, I argue that since "object," is not a true sortal term, i.e., it does not provide for individuation of objects on its own, Putnam's mereological sums example fails to undermine alethic realism. That is, Putnam asks the alethic realist to count the number of objects, and then argues that there is no determinate, representation-independent answer. However, we should not be surprised if there is not some fixed totality of objects *qua* "object." Rather, the totality of objects to which our language corresponds, and which we can count, are objects *qua* trees, rivers, tables, rocks, houses, etc.

Lastly, I close the dissertation by arguing that from the remains of Putnam's views on conceptual relativity, the alethic realist can salvage the idea that knowledge is objective even though it may be relative to different perspectives. Different languages or conceptual schemes can provide for different ways of conceptualizing the world without that entailing any form of radical subjectivism or relativism. Recognizing this objective but perspectival nature of knowledge is only a problem for the alethic realist if she also endorses a kind of scientism according to which it is finished science alone that tells us what really exists.