David W. Agler, Ph.D.

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Philosophy Department
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University Park, PA 16802

Appointments

2012– present	🔖 **Assistant Teaching Professor of Philosophy**, Department of Philosophy, Penn State.
2014– present	🔖 **Teaching and Learning with Technology Coordinator**, Department of Philosophy, Penn State.
2007 – 2012	🔖 **Graduate Student Philosophy Instructor**, Department of Philosophy, Penn State.
2007 – 2007	🔖 **Lecturer**, Department of Philosophy, Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI).

AOS & AOC

🔖 **AOS:** Charles S. Peirce • Philosophy of Language

🔖 **AOC:** Logic (Formal & Informal) • Bioethics • Metaphysics • American Philosophy • Philosophy of Sport • Philosophy of Science

Education

2007 – 2012	🔖 **PhD, Penn State** in Philosophy. Dissertation Title: *Pragmatic Minimalism: A Defense of Formal Semantics.*
2004 – 2010	🔖 **MA, IUPUI** in American Philosophy. Thesis title: *Vagueness and Its Boundaries: A Peircean Theory of Vagueness.*
2000 – 2004	🔖 **BA, IUPUI** in Philosophy.
	🔖 **BA, IUPUI** in English.

Publications and Talks

Books

1. **Agler**, D. W. (2013d). *Symbolic logic: syntax, semantics, proof*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield. 🔗
   https://rowman.com/ISBN/9781442217416

Journal Articles

1. Stango, M. & **Agler**, D. W. (2017). Human body, enhancement, and the missing technomoral virtue. *Sociología y tecnociencia*, *8*(1), 43–59. 🔗
   https://revistas.uva.es/index.php/sociotecno/article/view/1707

2. Pollock, R. & **Agler**, D. W. (2016). Hume and Peirce on the ultimate stability of belief. *The Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, *97*(2), 245–269. 🔗
   http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/papq.12118/abstract

3. **Agler**, D. W. & Stango, M. (2015). W. T. Harris, Peirce, and the charge of nominalism. *Hegel Bulletin*, *36*(2), 135–158. 🔗 http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/hgl.2015.15

4 **Agler, D. W.** (2014a). Emergence from within and without: Juarrero on Polanyi's account of the external origin of emergence. *Tradition and Discovery: The Polanyi Society Periodical*, *40*(3), 23–35. 🔗 `https://philpapers.org/rec/AGLEFW`

5 **Agler, D. W.** (2013c). Peirce and the specification of borderline vagueness. *Semiotica*, *193*, 195–215. 🔗 `https://doi.org/10.1515/sem-2013-0012`

6 **Agler, D. W.** (2013e). What engineers can do but physicists can't: Polanyi and Margitay on machines. *Tradition and Discovery: The Polanyi Society Periodical*, *39*(2), 22–26. 🔗 `https://philpapers.org/rec/AGLWEC`

7 **Agler, D. W.** & Durmuş, D. (2013). Christine Ladd-Franklin: Pragmatist feminist. *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society: A Quarterly Journal in American Philosophy*, *49*(3), 299–321. 🔗 `https://muse.jhu.edu/article/536356/`

8 **Agler, D. W.** (2012b). Polanyi and Peirce on the critical method. *Tradition and Discovery: The Polanyi Society Periodical*, *38*(3), 13–30. 🔗 `https://philpapers.org/rec/AGLPAP`

9 **Agler, D. W.** (2011b). Peirce's direct, non-reductive contextual theory of names. *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society: A Quarterly Journal in American Philosophy*, *46*(4), 611–640. 🔗 `https://muse.jhu.edu/article/419995`

10 **Agler, D. W.** (2010c). The UFAIL approach: unconventional weapons and their 'unintended' medical effects. *Bulletin of Science, Technology & Society*, *30*(2), 103–112. 🔗 `https://doi.org/10.1177/0270467610361230`

11 **Agler, D. W.** (2006c). The symbolic self (o eu simbólico). *Cognitio-Estudos: Revista Electrônica de Filosofia*, *3*(1), 1–9.

Book Chapters, Dictionary Entries, Book Reviews & Other Publications

1 **Agler, D. W.** (2013b). Hitchcock, Ethan Allen. In J. R. Shook & C. de Waal (Eds.), *The Dictionary of Early American Philosophers*. 500 words. Bristol: Thoemmes Continuum.

2 **Agler, D. W.** (2012c). Review of Robert B. Brandom, *Perspectives on Pragmatism: Classical, Recent, and Contemporary*. *Tradition and Discovery: The Polanyi Society Periodical*, *38*(3), 69–71. 🔗 `https://philpapers.org/rec/AGLPOP-2`

3 **Agler, D. W.** (2011c). Review of Alice Crary, *Beyond Moral Judgment*. *The Pluralist*, *6*(2), 103–110. 🔗 `https://philpapers.org/rec/AGLBMJ-2`

4 **Agler, D. W.** (2011d). Review of *Laura E. Weed, The Structure of Thinking: A Process-oriented Account of Mind*. *Tradition and Discovery: The Polanyi Society Periodical*, *38*(1), 66–69. 🔗 `https://doi.org/10.5840/traddisc2011/201238115`

5 **Agler, D. W.** (2010a). Book notice for *Writings of Charles S. Peirce: A Chronological Edition (1890–1892)*. *The Reasoner*, *4*(6), 93.

6 **Agler, D. W.** (2006a). The role of replication in the growth of symbols. In T. J. Prewitt & B. Smith (Eds.), *Semiotics 2006* (pp. 101–112). 🔗 `https://www.pdcnet.org/pdc/bvdb.nsf/purchase?openform&fp=cpsem&id=cpsem_2006_0101_0112`

Conference Talks

1 **Agler, D. W.** (2014b). *Two criticisms of the Cartesian maxim: Peirce's rejection of the method of doubt.* The Society for the Advancement of American Philosophy. The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey. Galloway Township, NJ.

2 **Agler, D. W.** (2014c). *Vagueness, language, and the problem of heaps: Peirce's dissolution of the Sorites paradox.* The Society for the Advancement of American Philosophy. Denver, CO.

(3) **Agler, D. W.** (2012a). *Peirce's critiques of the Cartesian maxim.* The West Virginia Philosophical Society. Westminster College. New Wilmington, PA.

(4) **Agler, D. W.** (2011a). *Modularity and minimalism.* Pittsburgh Area Philosophy Colloquium. Washington and Jefferson College. Washington, PA.

(5) **Agler, D. W.** (2010b). *Peirce and Polanyi on doubt.* Polanyi Society Annual Meeting. Atlanta, GA.

(6) **Agler, D. W.** (2006b). *The role of replication in the growth of symbols.* 31st Annual Meeting of the Semiotic Society of America. Purdue University. West Lafayette, IN.

(7) **Agler, D. W.** (2005a). *The symbolic self.* 8th International Meeting on Pragmatism. Pontifical Catholic University of Sao Paulo, Brazil.

(8) **Agler, D. W.** (2005b). *The symbolic self.* The Institute for American Thought. Indianapolis, IN.

Miscellaneous

Awards and Achievements

2012	**Merit Award.** PSU Philosophy Department Joseph J. Kockelmans Award in Philosophy.
2011	**Teaching Award.** Harold F. Martin Graduate Assistant Outstanding Teaching Award – Penn State Graduate School and Office of the Vice President and Dean for Undergraduate Education.
2010	**Merit Award.** Jean Martin Maxwell Prize for best M.A. Thesis containing a contribution to American Philosophy.
2007	**Fellowship.** Graduate Fellowship (2007-2012). The Pennsylvania State University
2006	**Fellowship.** IUPUI Summer Research Fellowship. The Peirce Edition Project.
2005	**Fellowship.** IUPUI Research & Graduate Fellowship. IUPUI Philosophy Department & Peirce Edition Project.
	Merit Award. Co-winner of the IUPUI Philosophy Department Essay Competition, "The Symbolic Self".

Referee, consultations, assistantships

2014	Referee *Semiotica*
	Editorial Consultant: Routledge
	Referee: *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*
	Referee: *Teaching Philosophy*
2012	Referee: Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group
2010	Editorial Assistant: *The History of Continental Philosophy* (vol. 4), ed. Leonard Lawlor. Durhem: Acumen.
2012	Editorial Assistant: *Teaching Philosophy*.
	Editorial Assistant: Foti, Véronique M. 2012. Tracing Expression in Merleau-Ponty: Aesthetics, Philosophy of Biology, and Ontology. Northwestern University Press.
2011–2012	Research Assistant: Rock Ethics Institute, Penn State, University Park, PA
2010	Editorial Assistant: *Chiasmi International* (volume 11).
2005-2007	Research Assistant: The Institute for American Thought (Peirce Edition Project), Indianapolis, IN. Supervisor: Cornelis de Waal

Miscellaneous (continued)

Other service and professional development

2017	🔖	Peer review of three online faculty for Graduate School Certification
2014-2015	🔖	Funded a logic tutor via *Penn State Learning*
2015	🔖	Foundations of Online Teaching Certificate
2012	🔖	Penn State Graduate Poster Exhibition Judge

Teaching

Courses Taught

PHIL 001	🔖	Introduction to Philosophy (Metaphysics)
PHIL 003	🔖	Philosophy of Well-being
PHIL 010	🔖	Critical Thinking
PHIL 012	🔖	Symbolic Logic
PHIL 013	🔖	Philosophy of Nature and the Environment
PHIL 083	🔖	Bioethics (First-Year Seminar)
PHIL 101	🔖	American Philosophy
PHIL 102	🔖	Existentialism and European Philosophy
PHIL 103	🔖	Ethics
PHIL 107	🔖	Philosophy of Technology
PHIL 110	🔖	Philosophy of Science
PHIL 123	🔖	Introduction to Media Ethics
PHIL 125	🔖	Epistemology (Writing Intensive)
PHIL 297	🔖	Philosophy of Sport
PHIL 401	🔖	American Philosophy
PHIL 426	🔖	Metaphysics
PHIL 496	🔖	Independent Study (Advanced Logic) – Alex Grigas, John Ouligian, Gretha Dos Santos
	🔖	Independent Study (American Pragmatism) – (Nicholas Charles)
PHIL 512	🔖	Graduate Logic

Courses Designed

PHIL 012	🔖	Symbolic Logic, w/ Mark Fisher: Wrote content, developed online exams, quizzes, grade book, instructor's manual, video tutorials, and interactive media.

Student evaluation (qualitative)

PHIL013	🔖	**FA2014:** The instructor's enthusiasm and high energy, as well as the interesting material covered in the class made me look forward to coming to class. He did an excellent job explaining difficult concepts through humorous examples. The instructor also did a great job challenging the students and encouraging them to think critically by posing very interesting questions. I also appreciated how eager the instructor was in hearing our feedback for the course and his willingness to implement the suggestions.

Teaching (continued)

▌ **FA2014:** The teacher used many different ways to get his point across, which helped understand a lot of lessons. He used videos, drawings on the blackboard, lecture, and group thinking to get ideas across. Talking among a group made me learn the most because it helped to hear other people's interpretation of what was just being lectured.

PHIL012 ▌ **SP2015:** Of all online courses I have taken at Penn State, professor Agler has been the most successful at teaching the course and providing ample resources to students, despite the difficult online platform. While the material is difficult to understand, Agler's textbook breaks down the information in a very helpful way. His online discussion board is an invaluable resource to students that find themselves having questions on the material. Even more so, Agler's response time (usually within a few hours) proves his dedication and true care for his students' success. While sometimes difficult to explain, he takes the time to write back to every student's question. He keeps his students alert of upcoming assignments (something that is easy to forget with an online course) by sending out regular emails.

▌ **SP2015:** Normally with online courses, I am nervous about the amount of contact I will be able to have with the professor. Professor Agler extends himself to all students and makes sure they are able to contact him and get further help on the course material. He provides continuous updates and is proactive with his students.

▌ **FA2015:** Agler was very realistic throughout the course regarding pace and content-he was comfortable altering the schedule and material to accommodate the needs of the class. This allowed for extensive review and increased comprehension, especially with the more difficult content in the course. He has a great sense of humor and connected with the students on a level that most college professors are unable to achieve. As a student who ordinarily struggles with math-related classes, he provided an environment that allowed me to excel past my expectations. The youtube videos were also extremely helpful when we were initially learning about truth trees. Overall, interesting (but challenging) class and awesome professor.

▌ **FA2015:** The professor was very willing to help out students and re-word the explanations to better understand the concept. He would ALWAYS give real life examples to each new concept to help people understand at an easier level. He also found a tutor for students as well because this is known to be a relatively difficult course. He was an overall kind and understanding guy.

▌ **SP2017:** As we near the end of the course, I wanted to thank you for all of your generosity throughout the semester. In my [...] years at Penn State and [...] years of school prior, I have never had an educator more willing to help students learn. Online classes tend to be more challenging, and having you as a professor made this course significantly less stressful. I was challenged throughout the entire course, but was helped in a way that I actually learned concepts I will take with me. As I study for the LSAT, many techniques of logic learned in this course are extraordinarily helpful. You consistently helped me do my best throughout the course and you never made me feel stupid or like I was bothering you, even though I emailed you multiple times each week. Thank you for being such an outstanding professor, and your eagerness to help students is refreshing. I truly appreciate all of the additional help and encouragement you provided throughout the semester.

Teaching (continued)

PHIL010 ▌ **SU2015:** The handouts were much more efficient than other styles of teaching I have experienced. You could follow along without any confusion of where we were, and you never were behind in taking notes. Also, the demonstrations and visual representation of the topics on the chalk board made it much easier to follow along instead of just listening to lecture. It was also very helpful that we covered each topic in the same manner. The order of definition, to clarification, to examples, to creating your own examples consistently helped me learn.

PHIL297 ▌ **FA2016:** I'm going to use this space to express how much I liked David because there isn't one. David was awesome. I really enjoyed his lectures, the way he explained things, and his passion for the subjects. Great work!

Student evaluation (quantitative)

SP09	▌ PHIL001 – Course: 6.24/7, Instructor: 6.36/7
	▌ PHIL001 – Course: 5.84/7, Instructor: 6.26/7
SU09	▌ PHIL012 – Course: 5.20/7, Instructor: 6.12/7
FA09	▌ PHIL012 – Course: 5.44/7, Instructor: 6.41/7
SP10	▌ PHIL125 – Course: 5.73/7, Instructor: 6.45/7
SU10	▌ PHIL012 – Course: 5.32/7, Instructor: 6.32/7
FA10	▌ PHIL012 – Course: 5.67/7, Instructor: 6.48/7
	▌ PHIL012 – Course: 5.74/7, Instructor: 6.58/7
SU11	▌ PHIL001 – Course: 5.50/7, Instructor: 6.10/7
SU12	▌ PHIL012 – Course: 4.75/7, Instructor: 6.50/7
	▌ PHIL010 – Course: 6.00/7, Instructor: 6.91/7
FA12	▌ PHIL012 – Course: 6.07/7, Instructor: 6.33/7
	▌ PHIL012 – Course: 5.40/7, Instructor: 6.60/7
	▌ PHIL012 – Course: 5.38/7, Instructor: 5.46/7
SP13	▌ PHIL010 – Course: 6.20/7, Instructor: 6.55/7
	▌ PHIL010 – Course: 5.47/7, Instructor: 6.13/7
	▌ PHIL012 – Course: 5.71/7, Instructor: 6.00/7
SU13	▌ PHIL083 – Course: 6.27/7, Instructor: 6.59/7
	▌ PHIL012 – Course: 5.91/7, Instructor: 6.55/7
FA13	▌ PHIL010 – Course: 5.61/7, Instructor: 6.06/7
	▌ PHIL010 – Course: 5.38/7, Instructor: 6.33/7
	▌ PHIL012 – Course: 5.50/7, Instructor: 6.38/7
SP14	▌ PHIL107 – Course: 5.53/7, Instructor: 6.00/7
	▌ PHIL012 – Course: 4.46/7, Instructor: 6.07/7
	▌ PHIL012 – Course: 5.09/7, Instructor: 5.73/7
FA14	▌ PHIL013 – Course: 6.07/7, Instructor: 6.43/7
	▌ PHIL010 – Course: 5.70/7, Instructor: 6.15/7
	▌ PHIL012 – Course: 4.94/7, Instructor: 5.53/7
SP15	▌ PHIL012 – Course: 5.67/7, Instructor: 5.67/7
	▌ PHIL012 – Course: 5.71/7, Instructor: 6.57/7
SU15	▌ PHIL010 – Course: 6.13/7, Instructor: 6.86/7

Teaching (continued)

FA15   🔖 PHIL012 – Course: 5.69/7, Instructor: 6.24/7

          🔖 PHIL012 – Course: 5.77/7, Instructor: 6.15/7

SP16   🔖 PHIL012 – Course: 5.33/7, Instructor: 5.67/7

          🔖 PHIL012 – Course: 4.33/7, Instructor: 5.33/7

          🔖 PHIL110 – Course: 5.50/7, Instructor: 6.29/7

          🔖 PHIL102 – Course: 5.85/7, Instructor: 6.23/7

SU16   🔖 PHIL010 – Course: 5.00/7, Instructor: 6.50/7

FA16   🔖 PHIL001 – Course: 6.06/7, Instructor: 6.69/7

          🔖 PHIL012 – Course: 6.55/7, Instructor: 6.64/7

          🔖 PHIL297 – Course: 6.18/7, Instructor: 6.27/7

SP17   🔖 PHIL012 – Course: 5.30/7, Instructor: 6.30/7

          🔖 PHIL012 – Course: 4.30/7, Instructor: 5.11/7

          🔖 PHIL012 – Course: 4.50/7, Instructor: 6.60/7

FA17   🔖 PHIL012 – Course: 5.76/7, Instructor: 6.50/7

          🔖 PHIL426 – Course: 6.20/7, Instructor: 7.00/7

          🔖 PHIL083 – Course: 6.21/7, Instructor: 6.43/7

SP18   🔖 PHIL012 – Course: 5.80/7, Instructor: 6.18/7

          🔖 PHIL012 – Course: 5.08/7, Instructor: 6.57/7

          🔖 PHIL012 – Course: 5.82/7, Instructor: 6.68/7

SU18   🔖 PHIL003 – Course: 6.33/7, Instructor: 6.50/7

          🔖 PHIL123 – Course: 6.67/7, Instructor: 7.00/7

FA18   🔖 PHIL003 – Course: 5.69/7, Instructor: 6.00/7

          🔖 PHIL012 – Course: 5.67/7, Instructor: 6.73/7

          🔖 PHIL012 – Course: 5.70/7, Instructor: 6.20/7

          🔖 PHIL401 – Course, 6.11/7, Instructor: 6.67/7

Dissertation Abstract

Pragmatic Minimalism: A Defense of Formal Semantics
Context plays a fundamental role in interpreting the utterances of sentences in a natural language. It aids in determining what was said, what was meant, and how we choose to respond. Knowing what a particular utterance means is thus not simply a matter of knowing what the individual words in the sentence mean along with knowing a grammar. Knowing what an utterance means requires knowing how context influences the interpretation of sentences. But to what extent context shapes the interpretation of what an individual literally says (or the semantic content of an utterance) is a subject of debate, one that has philosophical, linguistic, and psycholinguistic implications. Minimalism is the theory that the role context plays in determining the literal meaning of an utterance is guided entirely by the syntactic and lexical features in the sentence. That is, if the meaning of a sentence depends upon the context in which the sentence is used, then there will be some feature in the sentence itself that conventionally directs the language user to the context. In short, language drives a turn to context. Contextualism, by contrast, is the theory that the interpretation of utterances involves a process of free enrichment, i.e. conversational or pragmatic rules are used to draw upon features from context to shape the content in ways unregulated by the syntax of the language. In short, context is sometimes free from linguistic constraints.

Dissertation Abstract (continued)

After introducing the topic of the dissertation (chapter 1), clarifying a number of distinctions and different varieties of contextualism and minimalism (chapter 2), I turn to a defense of minimalism in chapters 3 and 4. In chapter 3, I articulate and respond to the two major objections to minimalism. Incompleteness objections state that the minimalist theory does not deliver propositional (truth-conditional) content and so falls short as a semantic theory. Inappropriateness objections state that the minimalist theory may deliver propositional content but this content plays no functional role in a larger story involving human communication and cognition. In response to incompleteness objections, I offer three replies. First, there is the Pragmatic reply: the contextual information that contextualists contend is necessary for determining the semantic content of an utterance (what is literally said) is instead an ingredient needed to determine what a speaker means. Second, there is the Syntactic reply: the missing contextual information needed for an utterance of a sentence to express some proposition can be recovered once a full account of the syntactic structure of the sentence is given. Finally, there is, the Broad Language (or Semiotic) reply: the missing contextual information needed for an utterance to express a proposition can be accounted for linguistically if we appeal to a more expansive notion of language (a semiotic one where semantic interpretation runs over non-linguistic signs, e.g. gestures).

In response to inappropriateness objections, I offer two kinds of replies. The first sort of reply is offensive. I argue that the explanatory roles that linguistic intuitions (immediate linguistic judgments) are supposed to play in linguistic cognition and communication are problematic. For one, since we routinely confuse what an utterance literally means with what a speaker is trying to communicate, there is no reason to think that our linguistic intuitions track the distinction between what is literally said and what is implied. Interactions with highly pedantic interpreters often show us that our effort to say what we mean does not entail that we meant what we have said. In addition, drawing on work done by Cappelen & Lepore (e.g. Insensitive Semantics, 2005), I argue that our intuitions about true indirect speech reports (reports on what speakers say, claim, and assert) cannot be used to determine semantic content for these reports are both too permissive (latch on to content no one would say is part of the semantic content) and too restrictive (i.e., there are some straightforward semantic interpretations that are regarded as false speech reports). The second kind of reply to the inappropriateness objection (and the positive part of my argument for minimalism) is contained in chapter 4. I argue that the minimalist's notion of propositional content can and does play a role in communication and cognition as this bare bones semantic content is needed to explain how discourse participants are capable of communicating across diverse contexts, how literal semantic content is cognized in a bottom-up fashion, and what sort of content would result if discourse participants were to cancel (reject) all contextual enrichments of an utterance. In this chapter, I provide three arguments for choosing minimalism over contextualism: the Argument from Modularity, the Miracle of Communication Argument, and the Argument from Fall-Back Content. First, I argue that minimalism offers a more psychologically realistic picture of how we process language as (i) minimalism and a modular account of linguistic-processing go hand-in-hand while contextualism and modularity are inconsistent and (ii) the modular account better explains psycholinguistic disorders (e.g. Williams Syndrome) where syntactic-semantic linguistic abilities remain intact while pragmatic abilities are compromised. Second, I argue that once it is recognized that various forms of moderate contextualism are unstable and slide into a more radical version of contextualism (one that makes the transmission of semantic content depend upon understanding a variety of different contextual factors), only minimalism can provide the best explanation for the existence of cross-contextual communication whereas contextualism makes the sharing of literal semantic content a miracle. Finally, I argue that minimalism best explains fall-back semantic content, i.e., the literal (relatively acontextual) semantic content of a sentence that language users appeal to when they want their utterances to be interpreted as literally as possible.

Dissertation Abstract (continued)

Finally, in chapter 5, I discuss how the contextualist-minimalist debate has played out in the philosophy of Charles S. Peirce. Making use of a number of unpublished manuscripts, this chapter makes three original contributions. First, it considers six arguments proposed by Peirce (or Peirce scholars) that appear to support Peirce's acceptance of contextualism. I argue that none of these arguments are persuasive and conclude that Peirce's mind was not settled on the issue. Second, it offers a more nuanced account of the history of the semantics-pragmatics distinction by arguing that Peirce's role in it is not simply as someone who inspired Charles Morris to delineate semantics from pragmatics, but Peirce explicitly considered many of the arguments that are found in contemporary discussions (e.g., he made attempts to identify indexical expressions, he considered the phenomena of non-sentential assertion, and Perry's "It's raining" example). Finally, I argue that Peirce's semiotic understanding of language allowed him to consider the question of the semantic role of context in a deeper and more general way. Rather than circumscribing the debate to linguistics, Peirce considered what role context plays on the semantic interpretation of any kind of conventional sign (e.g., non-linguistic signs like gestures).

References

Available on Request