

David W. Agler

The Pennsylvania State University
Philosophy Department
243 Sparks Building
University Park, PA 16802 U.S.A.
URL: www.davidagler.com

AOS: Charles S. Peirce • Philosophy of Language
AOC: Logic (Formal & Informal) • Bioethics • Metaphysics • Philosophy of Sport •
Philosophy of Science

Appointments

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

Education

- 2012 **PhD** in Philosophy, Penn State
Dissertation: “Pragmatic Minimalism: A Defense of Formal Semantics”
2010 **MA** in Philosophy, IUPUI
Thesis: “Vagueness and Its Boundaries: A Peircean Theory of Vagueness”
2004 **B.A.** in Philosophy, IUPUI
2004 **B.A.** in English, IUPUI

Publications & talks

Books

- 2013 *Symbolic Logic: Syntax, Semantics, Proof.* Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.
URL: <https://rowman.com/ISBN/9781442217416>

Journal articles

† = peer-reviewed, * = invited, UR = under review
url = available online, **draft** = draft of article

- 2017, **url** w/ Marco Stango. Human Body, Enhancement, and the Missing Technomoral Virtue. *Sociología y tecnociencia* 8(1):43-59.
2016†, **url** w/ Ryan Pollock. Hume and Peirce on the Ultimate Stability of Belief. *The Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 97(2):245-269.

- 2015†, [url](#) w/ Marco Stango. W. T. Harris, Peirce, and the Charge of Nominalism. *Hegel Bulletin* 36(2):135-158.
- 2014*, [url](#) 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.
- 2013†, [draft](#) w/ Deniz Durmuş. Christine Ladd-Franklin: Pragmatist Feminist. *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society: A Quarterly Journal in American Philosophy* 49(3):299–321.
- 2013*, [url](#) What Engineers Can Do But Physicists Can't: Polanyi and Margitay on Machines. *Tradition and Discovery: The Polanyi Society Periodical* 39(2):22–26.
- 2013†, [draft](#) Peirce and the Specification of Borderline Vagueness. *Semiotica* 193:195–215.
- 2012*, [url](#) Polanyi and Peirce on the Critical Method. *Tradition and Discovery: The Polanyi Society Periodical* 38(3):13–30.
- 2011†, [draft](#) 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.
- 2010†, [draft](#) The UFAIL Approach: Unconventional Weapons and their 'Unintended' Medical Effects. *Bulletin of Science, Technology & Society* 30(2):103–112.
- 2006, [url](#) The Role of Replication in the Growth of Symbols. *Semiotics 2006*. Terry J. Prewitt and Benjamin Smith (eds.): 101-112.
- 2006 The Symbolic Self. *Cognitio-Estudos: Revista Eletrônica de Filosofia* 3(1):1–9. English. Translated by Aracéli Martins into Portuguese as O Eu Simbólico.

Book Reviews & Other Publications

- 2013 What are the Most Important Things to Know? (January/February). *Philosophy Now* 94:35.
- 2012, [url](#) Review of Robert B. Brandom, Perspectives on Pragmatism: Classical, Recent, and Contemporary. In *Tradition and Discovery: The Polanyi Society Periodical* 38(3):69–71.
- 2012 Hitchcock, Ethan Allen In *The Dictionary of Early American Philosophers*. Eds. John R. Shook and Cornelis de Waal. Bristol: Thoemmes Continuum. 500 words.
- 2011, [url](#) Review of Laura E. Weed, The Structure of Thinking: A Process-oriented Account of Mind. In *Tradition and Discovery: The Polanyi Society Periodical* 38(1):66–69.
- 2011, [draft](#) Review of Alice Crary, Beyond Moral Judgment. In *The Pluralist* 6(2): 103–110.
- 2010 Book Notice for Writings of Charles S. Peirce: A Chronological Edition (1890–1892) In *The Reasoner* 4(6):93.

Conference Presentations

- 2014 Vagueness, Language, and the Problem of Heaps: Peirce's Dissolution of the Sorites Paradox. The Society for the Advancement of American Philosophy. Denver, CO.
- 2013 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.
- 2012 Peirce's Critiques of the Cartesian Maxim. The West Virginia Philosophical Society. Westminster College. New Wilmington, PA.
- 2011 Modularity and Minimalism. Pittsburgh Area Philosophy Colloquium. Washington and Jefferson College. Washington, PA.
- 2010 Peirce and Polanyi on Doubt. Polanyi Society Annual Meeting. Atlanta, GA.
- 2006 The Role of Replication in the Growth of Symbols. 31st Annual Meeting of the Semiotic Society of America. Purdue University. West Lafayette, IN.
- 2005 The Symbolic Self. 8th International Meeting on Pragmatism. Pontifical Catholic

University of Sao Paulo, Brazil & at the Institute for American Thought. Indianapolis, IN.

Teaching

Classroom

- url PHIL 001: Introduction to Philosophy (Metaphysics)
- url PHIL 010: Critical Thinking
- url PHIL 012: Symbolic Logic
- url PHIL 013: Philosophy of Nature and the Environment
- url PHIL 083S: Bioethics (First-Year Seminar)
- url PHIL 107: Philosophy of Technology
- url PHIL 102: Existentialism and European Philosophy
- url PHIL 110: Philosophy of Science
- PHIL 120: Ethics (at IUPUI)
- url PHIL 125W: Theories of Knowledge (Writing Intensive)
- url PHIL 297: Philosophy of Sport
- PHIL 426: Metaphysics
- PHIL 496: Independent Study in Advanced Logic and the Philosophy of Logic (Alex Grigas, John Ouligian, Gretha Dos Santos)
- PHIL 496: Independent Study in American Pragmatism (Nicholas Charles)

Online

- Philosophy 012: Symbolic Logic
- Philosophy 010: Critical Thinking

Designed

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

As TA

- Philosophy 001: Basic Problems of Philosophy, Instructor: Mark Fisher.
- Philosophy 010: Critical Thinking, Instructor: Mark Fisher.

Awards & Service

Awards

- 2012 PSU Philosophy Department Joseph J. Kockelmans Award in Philosophy.
- 2011 Harold F. Martin Graduate Assistant Outstanding Teaching Award – Penn State Graduate School and Office of the Vice President and Dean for Undergraduate Education.

- 2010 Jean Martin Maxwell Prize for best M.A. Thesis containing a contribution to American Philosophy.
- 2007 University Fellowship – The Pennsylvania State University.
- 2006 IUPUI Summer Research Fellowship – The Peirce Edition Project, 2006.
- 2005 IUPUI Research & Graduate Fellowship – IUPUI Philosophy Department & Peirce Edition Project.
- 2005 Co-winner of the IUPUI Philosophy Department Essay Competition, “The Symbolic Self”.

Referee, consultations, assistantships

- 2014– Referee *Semiotica*
- 2014 Editorial Consultant: Routledge
- 2014– Referee: *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*
- 2014– Referee: *Teaching Philosophy*
- 2012– Referee Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group
- 2010 Editorial Assistant: *The History of Continental Philosophy* (vol. 4), ed. Leonard Lawlor. Durham: Acumen.
- 2012 Editorial Assistant: *Teaching Philosophy*.
- 2012 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

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*
- 2013 Foundations of Online Teaching Certificate Penn State Graduate Poster Exhibition Judge
- 2008-2012 PSU Graduate Student Secretary.

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.

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.

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).

Student Rating of Teaching Effectiveness (SRTEs)

Courses Taught

Course	Course Name
PHIL001	Introduction to Philosophy
PHIL010	Critical Thinking
PHIL012	Symbolic Logic
PHIL013	Philosophy of Nature & the Environment
PHIL083S	Bioethics (First-Year Seminar)
PHIL102	Existentialism
PHIL107	Philosophy of Technology
PHIL110	Philosophy of Science
PHIL120	Introduction to Ethics (at IUPUI)
PHIL125W	Introduction to Theories of Knowledge (Writing Intensive)
PHIL297	Philosophy of Sport

SRTE Condensed Averages

Course	Course Quality	Instructor Quality	Dept. Mean
PHIL001	5.86	6.24	5.25 / 5.55
PHIL010	5.78	6.43	5.25 / 5.55
PHIL012	5.41	6.24	4.5 / *
PHIL013	6.07	6.43	5.25 / 5.55
PHIL083S	6.27	6.59	5.25 / 5.55
PHIL102	5.58	6.23	
PHIL107	5.53	6.00	5.25 / 5.55
PHIL110	5.50	6.29	
PHIL125W	5.73	6.45	5.25 / 5.55

Table 1. SRTE Averages for courses taught as sole instructor. **Dept. Mean Data** was collected via correspondence with dept. head (p.c.). **Scale:** 7=excellent; 5=good; 4=average; 3=adequate; 1=unsatisfactory. *: indicates that no data was available. See [Table 2](#) for complete SRTE data.

SRTE Averages

Term	Course	Course Quality	Instructor Quality	Dept. Mean
SP09	PHIL001	6.24	6.36	5.25 / 5.55
SP09	PHIL001	5.84	6.26	5.25 / 5.55
SU09	PHIL012	5.20	6.12	4.5/*
FA09	PHIL012	5.44	6.41	4.5/*
SP10	PHIL125W	5.73	6.45	5.25 / 5.553
SU10	PHIL012	5.32	6.32	4.5/*
FA10	PHIL012	5.67	6.48	4.5/*
FA10	PHIL012	5.74	6.58	4.5/*
SU11	PHIL001	5.50	6.10	5.25 / 5.55
SU12	PHIL012	4.75	6.50	4.5/*
SU12	PHIL010	6.00	6.91	5.25 / 5.55
FA12	PHIL012	6.07	6.33	4.5/*
FA12	PHIL012	5.40	6.60	4.5/*
FA12	PHIL012Web	5.38	5.46	4.5/*
SP13	PHIL010	6.20	6.55	5.25 / 5.55
SP13	PHIL010	5.47	6.13	5.25 / 5.55
SP13	PHIL012Web	5.71	6.00	4.5/*
SU13	PHIL083S	6.27	6.59	5.25 / 5.55
SU13	PHIL012Web	5.91	6.55	4.5/*
FA13	PHIL010	5.61	6.06	5.25 / 5.55
FA13	PHIL010Web	5.38	6.33	5.25 / 5.55
FA13	PHIL012Web	5.50	6.38	4.5/*
SP14	PHIL107	5.53	6.00	5.25 / 5.55
SP14	PHIL012Web	4.46	6.07	4.5/*
SP14	PHIL012Web	5.09	5.73	4.5/*
FA15	PHIL013	6.07	6.43	5.25 / 5.55
FA15	PHIL010Web	5.70	6.15	5.25 / 5.55
FA15	PHIL012Web	4.94	5.53	4.5/*
SP15	PHIL012Web	5.67	5.67	4.5/*
SP15	PHIL012	5.71	6.57	4.5/*
SU15	PHIL010	6.13	6.86	5.25 / 5.55
FA15	PHIL012	5.69	6.24	4.5/*
FA15	PHIL012	5.77	6.15	4.5/*
SP16	PHIL012Web	5.33	5.67	4.5/ *
SP16	PHIL012Web	4.33	5.33	4.5/ *
SP16	PHIL110	5.50	6.29	
SP16	PHIL102	5.85	6.23	
SU16	PHIL010	5.00	6.5	5.25 / 5.55
FA16	PHIL001	6.06	6.69	5.25 / 5.55
FA16	PHIL012	6.55	6.64	4.5 / *
FA16	PHIL297	6.18	6.27	

Table 2. SRTE Averages for courses taught as sole instructor. **Dept. Mean Data** was collected via correspondence with dept. head (p.c.). **Scale:** 7=excellent; 5=good; 4=average; 3=adequate; 1=unsatisfactory. *: indicates that no data was available.

Recent Student Review Comments

PHIL013 (Phil. of Nature), Fall 2014: 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.

PHIL013 (Phil. of Nature), Fall 2014: 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 (Symbolic Logic Web), Spring 2015: 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.

PHIL012 (Symbolic Logic Web), Spring 2015: 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.

PHIL010 (Critical Thinking), Summer 2015: 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.

PHIL012 (Symbolic Logic), Fall 2015: 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.

PHIL012 (Symbolic Logic), Fall 2015: 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.

PHIL297 (Philosophy of Sport, Fall 2016: 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!

PHIL012 (Symbolic Logic), Spring 2017: 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.

Last updated: May 30, 2018

www.davidagler.com