

Ian J. Martel
Curriculum Vitae

**CONTACT
INFORMATION**

Department of Philosophy
Harvard University
Cambridge, MA 02138

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**AREAS OF
SPECIALIZATION**

Kant and post-Kantian philosophy, twentieth century continental philosophy, twentieth century analytic philosophy, pragmatism

**AREAS OF
COMPETENCE**

Early modern philosophy, metaphysics, epistemology

EDUCATION

Harvard University 2015-2024
PhD, Philosophy
Dissertation: *The Possibility of Critical Realism*
Committee: Sean Kelly, Samantha Matherne,
Warren Goldfarb, & David Cerbone

Harvard University 2015-2021
MA, Philosophy
Thesis: "Ontology, Philosophy, and the Human Element"
Advisor: Sean Kelly

University of Vermont 2009-2014
BA, Philosophy & English
Minors: Biology & Psychology

**DISSERTATION
ABSTRACT**

I argue that critical philosophy is compatible with realism by working through three major attempts to reconcile them: Kant's empirical realism, Heidegger's ontical realism, and Putnam's internal realism. While none succeeds, they collectively show us how to make *critical realism* possible. For a critical philosopher, the most realism can meaningfully demand is that things are intelligible as independent of us according to experiential or practical standards, which is straightforwardly true. If it makes no sense to ask whether things are *really* independent of us – over and above those standards – then it makes no sense to answer "yes" with the metaphysical realist or "no" with the transcendental idealist.

AWARDS & HONORS	Bechtel Prize in Philosophy, Harvard University <i>for best essay on a philosophical topic</i>	AY 2020-21
	Certificate of Distinction in Teaching, Harvard University	Spring 2021
	Certificate of Distinction in Teaching, Harvard University	Fall 2020
	John Dewey Prize in Philosophy, University of Vermont <i>for outstanding undergraduate work in philosophy</i>	May 2014
	English Departmental Honors, University of Vermont	May 2014
	Honors College Scholar, University of Vermont	May 2014
	Phi Beta Kappa, University of Vermont	May 2014
	Magna Cum Laude, University of Vermont	May 2014
PAPERS	“Time and Being: Heidegger’s Temporal Idealism”	(in preparation)
TALKS	“Time and Being: Heidegger’s Temporal Idealism” Harvard European Philosophy Workshop	December 2024 (expected)
	“Kant and Critical Metaphilosophy” Kant Graduate Student Forum, Harvard University	December 2022
TEACHING	Sole Instructor	
	Tutorial: Pragmatism	Fall 2024
	Tutorial: Dissolving Skepticism	Spring 2023
	Tutorial: Pragmatism	Fall 2022
	Tutorial: Between Realism and Relativism	Spring 2022
	Tutorial: Dissolving Skepticism	Fall 2021
	Tutorial: Pragmatism	Spring 2021
	Writing Fellow	
	A Humanities Colloquium from Homer to Joyce 2, David Elmer, Louis Menand, Beth Blum, Tara Menon, Samantha Matherne, & Jay Harris	Spring 2025 (expected)
	A Humanities Colloquium from Homer to Joyce 1, Stephen Greenblatt, Louis Menand, Jesse McCarthy, Kathleen Coleman, Alison Simmons, & Adam Walker	Fall 2024
	Teaching Assistant	
	The True and the Good, Bernhard Nickel	Fall 2020
	Reclaiming Argument: Logic as a Force for Good, Ned Hall	Spring 2020
	Heidegger’s <i>Being and Time</i> , Sean Kelly	Spring 2019
	Existentialism in Literature and Film, Sean Kelly	Fall 2018
Later Heidegger, Sean Kelly	Spring 2018	
Logical Reasoning, Ned Hall	Fall 2017	

Grader

The Philosophy of Psychology, Luke Ciancarelli Summer 2020
 Existentialism, Luke Ciancarelli Summer 2020

**GRADUATE
COURSEWORK**

The Art of Living: Nineteenth Century Philosophy, Samantha Matherne** Fall 2024
 The Later Philosophy of Wittgenstein, Warren Goldfarb* Spring 2024
 German Idealism, Sean Kelly* Fall 2023
 Kantian and Post-Kantian Theories of Freedom, Sean Kelly & Samantha Matherne* Spring 2023
 Self-Knowledge and Reflection, Richard Moran* Spring 2023
 Wittgenstein, Warren Goldfarb* Fall 2022
 The Philosophy of Bernard Williams, Richard Moran** Fall 2022
 Heidegger's Nietzsche, Sean Kelly* Spring 2022
 Conceptual Engineering, Mark Richard** Spring 2022
 The British Empiricists & Company, Jeffrey McDonough** Spring 2021
 Beyond Dualism: Descartes & His Critics, Alison Simmons** Spring 2021
 Philosophy, Genealogy, History, Michael Rosen & Sean Kelly* Fall 2020
 The Later Philosophy of Wittgenstein, Warren Goldfarb** Spring 2020
 Ordinary Language Philosophy, Warren Goldfarb* Fall 2019
 The Rationalists, Jeffrey McDonough** Fall 2019
 Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, Samantha Matherne** Fall 2019
 Phenomenology of Lived Experience, Samantha Matherne** Spring 2019
 Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, Samantha Matherne* Fall 2018
 The Later Philosophy of Wittgenstein, Richard Moran* Spring 2018
 Instructional Styles in Philosophy 2, Bernhard Nickel Spring 2018
 Instructional Styles in Philosophy 1, Bernhard Nickel Fall 2017
 Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, Warren Goldfarb* Fall 2017
 Medieval Philosophy, Jeffrey McDonough* Fall 2017
 From Frege to Gödel, Warren Goldfarb* Spring 2017
 Philosophy and Literature: Proust, Richard Moran* Spring 2017
 Marx and Marxism, Tommie Shelby Spring 2017
 Heidegger's *Being and Time*, Sean Kelly Spring 2017
 Philosophy in Translation 2: French, Richard Moran Spring 2017
 Philosophy in Translation 1: French, Richard Moran Fall 2016
 Hume's Ethical Theory, Christine Korsgaard Fall 2016
 Plato's *Republic*, Rusty Jones Fall 2016
 Frege, Russell, and the Early Wittgenstein, Warren Goldfarb Fall 2016
 Quine, Warren Goldfarb Spring 2016
 Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, Matthew Boyle Spring 2016
 Logic and Philosophy, Warren Goldfarb Spring 2016
 First Year Colloquium 2: Metaethics, Selim Berker Spring 2016
 First Year Colloquium 1: Perception & Epistemology, Susanna Siegel & Susanna Rinard Fall 2015

* audited

** read along

Nietzsche, Peter Burgard	Fall 2015
The Later Philosophy of Wittgenstein, Warren Goldfarb	Fall 2015
Stoicism, James Doyle*	Fall 2015

READING GROUPS	Kant Reading Group, Samantha Matherne	Fall 2019 – Spring 2024
	Descombes Reading Group, Richard Moran	Spring 2023
	Pragmatism Reading Group, Zachary Gabor	Summer 2020

LANGUAGES	English (native), French (intermediate), German (reading), Russian (beginner), Ancient Greek (beginner)
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REFERENCES

Sean Kelly (dissertation committee chair)

Teresa G. and Ferdinand F. Martignetti Professor of Philosophy
Department of Philosophy, Harvard University

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Samantha Matherne (dissertation committee member)

Professor of Philosophy
Department of Philosophy, Harvard University

smatherne@fas.harvard.edu

Warren Goldfarb (dissertation committee member)

W. B. Pearson Professor of Mathematics and Mathematical Logic
Department of Philosophy, Harvard University

goldfarb@fas.harvard.edu

David Cerbone (dissertation outside reader)

Professor of Philosophy
Department of Philosophy, West Virginia University

cerbone@wvu.edu

Bernhard Nickel (teaching reference)

Department Chair & Professor of Philosophy
Department of Philosophy, Harvard University

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The Possibility of Critical Realism

In a bar in Paris in 1951, A. J. Ayer ran into Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Georges Bataille, and until nearly three o'clock in the morning he tried – without success – to get them to admit that there was a sun before human beings existed. What was there to disagree about?

The French philosophers' disagreement was motivated by what we might call (following Kant) their *critical* philosophy, according to which meaningful claims about the world must be grounded in facts about our experience or activity. So, for example, the claim that Mars is inhabited is meaningful because it's possible in principle for us to go and see whether it is. They took issue with Ayer's claim about the sun because the absence of all human beings seems to preclude the possibility of any such grounding for it.

Ayer's verificationism makes him a critical philosopher too. And, insofar as nobody was present who could have verified that the sun existed before we did, there's a real question of whether he is entitled to his claim that it did. This suggests a potential incompatibility between critical philosophy and *realism*, the view that (at least some) things are independent of us. The need to ground meaningful claims about the world in facts about our experience or activity threatens to leave us incapable of affirming that it exists altogether independently of us.

I argue that critical philosophy is compatible with realism. My argument proceeds by working through three major attempts to reconcile them: Immanuel Kant's empirical realism, Martin Heidegger's ontical realism, and Hilary Putnam's internal realism. While their attempts differ and none ultimately succeeds, they collectively show us how to make *critical realism* possible.

Kant's attempt fails due to his transcendental idealism, which implies that things are intelligible to us – as 'appearances' – only if they are dependent on us. He tries to appeal to 'things in themselves,' which would be independent, but the claim that they exist is cognitively empty by his own lights. In a striking parallel, Heidegger and Putnam both try to radicalize Kant by arguing that, since the notion of a thing in itself that transcends all our experience and activity is empty, the most realism can meaningfully demand is that things are intelligible as independent of us according to 'immanent' experiential or practical standards, which is straightforwardly true.

However, Heidegger and Putnam each retain an idealistic throwback to Kant. Heidegger's temporal idealism and Putnam's 'interface' model of cognition both reinstate the Kantian predicament where intelligibility implies dependence, so their attempts ultimately fail too. This shows they're still not radical enough; if it makes no sense to claim that things transcend our sense-making capacities, it makes no sense to deny it either. By deploying the critical element of our Kantian inheritance against its idealistic element, we can open the route to critical realism.

The way forward, I suggest, is to use Heidegger and Putnam as mutual correctives. We should reject Putnam's 'interface' model in favor of Heidegger's conception of the experiential subject as always already in the world. And we should reject Heidegger's temporal idealism in favor of Putnam's conception of space and time as robustly real features of that world. As it happens, in later work, each of them moves in the other's direction – toward a shared recognition that we are in and of a genuinely independent world. I argue that they're right: critical realism is possible.