

Ian J. Martel
Curriculum Vitae

**CONTACT
INFORMATION**

Department of Philosophy
Harvard University
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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 (expected)
Dissertation: *Critical Metaphilosophy*
Committee: Sean Kelly, Samantha Matherne, Warren Goldfarb

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

University of Vermont 2009-2014
BA, Philosophy and English, 2009-2014

**DISSERTATION
ABSTRACT**

An investigation into the prospects for 'critical metaphilosophy,' the view that traditional philosophy violates the conditions of its own intelligibility. After giving an account of its nature and history from Kant to analytic and continental philosophy, I consider two recurring problems. First is a tendency toward incompatibility with realism, which I examine by looking to the important attempts at 'critical realism' by Kant, Heidegger, and Putnam. Second is a tendency toward self-stultification, which I examine by looking to the important attempts at 'metacritique' by post-Kantians, Davidson, and Wittgenstein.

AWARDS AND FELLOWSHIPS	Certificate of Distinction for Teaching, Harvard University	Spring 2023
	Bechtel Prize in Philosophy, Harvard University for best essay on a philosophical topic	AY 2020-21
	Certificate of Distinction for Teaching, Harvard University	Spring 2021
	Certificate of Distinction for Teaching, Harvard University	Fall 2020
	Sosland Family Graduate Fellowship, Harvard University	Spring 2018
	John Dewey Prize in Philosophy, University of Vermont for outstanding undergraduate work in philosophy	May 2014
	Phi Beta Kappa, University of Vermont	May 2014
PRESENTATIONS	“Kant and Critical Metaphilosophy” Kant Graduate Student Forum, Harvard University	December 2022
TEACHING	Sole Instructor	
	Tutorial: Dissolving Skepticism	Spring 2023
	Tutorial: Pragmatism	Fall 2023
	Tutorial: Between Realism and Relativism	Spring 2022
	Tutorial: Dissolving Skepticism	Fall 2021
	Tutorial: Pragmatism	Spring 2021
	Teaching Fellow	
	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	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

* audited

** read along

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 <i>Critique of Pure Reason</i> , Samantha Matherne**	Fall 2019
Phenomenology of Lived Experience, Samantha Matherne**	Spring 2019
Kant's <i>Critique of Pure Reason</i> , 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 <i>Tractatus</i> , 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 <i>Being and Time</i> , 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 <i>Republic</i> , Rusty Jones	Fall 2016
Frege, Russell, and the Early Wittgenstein, Warren Goldfarb	Fall 2016
Quine, Warren Goldfarb	Spring 2016
Kant's <i>Critique of Pure Reason</i> , 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
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 – Fall 2023
	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
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Samantha Matherne (dissertation committee member)

Gardner Cowles Associate Professor of the Humanities
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Warren Goldfarb (dissertation committee member)

W. B. Pearson Professor of Mathematics and Mathematical Logic
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Bernhard Nickel (teaching reference)

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Critical Metaphilosophy

‘Critical metaphilosophy’ is the view that traditional philosophy violates the conditions of its own intelligibility. This definition casts a wide net in the history of philosophy; it’s meant to capture different kinds of negative, deflationary, or skeptical appraisal of philosophy by philosophers – especially in and after Kant. What those conditions are supposed to be and how traditional philosophy is supposed to violate them vary drastically, but the general idea is that philosophers have historically tried to do something that can’t be done because of certain limits to thought or language. Typically, this involves a rejection of aprioristic ‘armchair’ approaches to philosophizing, or a denial that we can achieve a detached, external perspective on the world.

The dissertation is an investigation into the nature of and, especially, the prospects for critical metaphilosophy. In the introduction, I give an account of the view and its varied history from Kant into analytic and continental philosophy. The rest of the dissertation is devoted to considering two problems that have faced versions of the view again and again.

The first problem is that critical metaphilosophy tends to be incompatible with realism, the view that at least some things are independent of us. For example, the basic insight of critical metaphilosophy is that our concepts are not autonomous. Their proper application is grounded in and so limited by our experience or activity. This threatens to leave us incapable of applying our concepts beyond the field of all our experience and activity, which would make it unintelligible for us to affirm that things exist independently of ourselves.

I examine this problem by working through three important attempts at ‘critical realism’: Immanuel Kant’s empirical realism, Martin Heidegger’s ontical realism, and Hilary Putnam’s internal realism. Each attempt is problematic in its own way, but a promising strategy for reconciling critical metaphilosophy and realism emerges: an ‘immanent’ conception of realism as requiring that, *given* the conditions of intelligibility, at least some things are (correctly) intelligible as independent of us (according to experience- or practice-immanent standards). The success of this strategy turns on whether we can separate out the conception from the idealistic commitments that tend to accompany it.

The second problem is that critical metaphilosophy tends to be self-stultifying. For example, the existence of violable conditions of intelligibility implies the existence of a limit to intelligibility. But a limit is intelligible only if both of its sides are intelligible, so talk of a limit to intelligibility presupposes the intelligibility of the unintelligible. Critical metaphilosophy, then, threatens to violate the very conditions of intelligibility that it accuses traditional philosophy of violating.

I examine this problem by working through three important attempts at ‘metacritique’: the post-Kantian critique of the thing in itself, Donald Davidson’s critique of conceptual relativism, and Ludwig Wittgenstein’s self-critique. After some reverse engineering, three promising strategies for resisting the charge of self-stultification emerge: a Kantian formalist approach, an early Wittgensteinian ostensive approach, and a later Wittgensteinian methodological approach. Each has its pros and cons, and there is a surprising amount of overlap between them. Ultimately, I suggest that a methodological approach is most promising.