

Alexander Warnke Stern

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EDUCATION & EMPLOYMENT Postdoctoral Research Fellow, Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main 2017–2018

Instructor, Philosophy Department, University of Notre Dame 2015–2017

PhD, Philosophy, University of Notre Dame, 2017 2010–2017
Dissertation: *Fallen Language: Benjamin and Wittgenstein on the Aesthetics of Meaning*
Committee: Fred Rush (chair), Karl Ameriks, Steve Watson, Curtis Franks

Dissertation research, Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main, Institut für Philosophie & Exzellenzcluster: Normative Orders 2014

New School for Social Research, Graduate Studies in Philosophy 2009–2010

MA, Philosophy, University College Dublin 2008– 2009
Thesis: *Between Self and Subject: Irony and the Pursuit of Nothingness*
Supervisor: Brian O'Connor

BA, Film Theory and Criticism, Columbia University 2004–2008

GRANTS & AWARDS Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst (DAAD) Postdoctoral Fellowship 2017–2018

Eli J. and Helen Shaheen Award, nominee 2017
Notre Dame, Philosophy Department nominee
Awarded to an outstanding graduate student from each division of the Graduate School

Professor Magennis Memorial Prize 2010
University College Dublin

Awarded to the highest ranking graduating MA student in Philosophy

University Writing Essay Prize, Morning Side Review,
Columbia College, Columbia University

2005

**SPECIALIZATION
& COMPETENCE**

Areas of Specialization:

- German philosophy from Kant to Habermas, including German Idealism, Romanticism, and Critical Theory
- Social and Political Philosophy

Areas of Competence:

- Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art
- Philosophy of Language

**ACADEMIC
PUBLICATIONS**

Book

The Fall of Language: Benjamin and Wittgenstein on Meaning ([Harvard University Press](#))

Forthcoming,
April 2019

Articles & Book Chapters

“Guilt and Mourning: Adorno’s Debt to and Critique of Benjamin” in the *Blackwell Companion to Adorno*, eds. Peter E. Gordon, Espen Hammer, and Max Pensky (Wiley-Blackwell)

Forthcoming,
2019

“‘The Familiar Face of a Word’: Benjamin and Wittgenstein on the Experience of Meaning,” *European Journal for Philosophy* (Wiley-Blackwell). [Full text.](#)

Mar. 2018

“‘The Mother of Reason and Revelation’: Benjamin on the Metaphysics of Language,” *Critical Horizons* (Taylor & Francis). [Full text.](#)

Oct. 2017

“Aboutness and Aura: Toward a Benjaminian Critique of Danto,” *Proceedings of the European Society for Aesthetics*, Volume 8 (2016), 471-479. [Full text.](#)

Dec. 2016

**WORKING
PAPERS**

“The Linguistic U-Turn: Fritz Mauthner’s Influence on the Late Wittgenstein,” *manuscript*

“Thought and Language in Hamann and Herder,” *manuscript*

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS	“Guilt and Mourning: Adorno’s Debt to and Critique of Benjamin” Colloquium, Philosophy and the Social Sciences; Academy of Sciences Prague	May 2018
	“‘The Familiar Face of a Word’: Benjamin and Wittgenstein on the Experience of Meaning” The American Philosophical Association, Pacific Division Meeting San Diego	Mar. 2018
	“The Aesthetics of Meaning: Benjamin on Fallen Language” Colloquium, Philosophy and the Social Sciences; Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic Prague	May 2016
	“The Aesthetics of Meaning: Benjamin on Fallen Language” International Critical Theory Conference Rome	May 2016
	“From Name to Sign: Walter Benjamin on Fallen Language” Poetry and Philosophy: Old Quarrels, New Concord; Catholic University of America Washington, D.C.	Feb. 2016
	“The Last Aesthete: Heidegger, Nietzsche and the End of Art” Conference of the European Society of Aesthetics; Dublin, Ireland	June 2015
	“Names and Words: Walter Benjamin’s Philosophy of Language” Art, Language & Poetry; University of Kent	Sept. 2014
SELECTED NON-ACADEMIC PUBLICATIONS	“ Is That Even a Thing? ” <i>The New York Times</i> , <nyti.ms/1qBURzp>	
	“ When Analogies Fail ,” <i>The Chronicle of Higher Education</i> , <t.co/Y5ZwKBPHCf>	
	“ The Art of Thinking in Other People’s Heads ,” <i>Humanities</i> magazine <aldai.ly/2iG3DJA>	
	“ How Reality TV Explains Trump’s ‘Authenticity,’ ” <i>Washington Monthly</i> , <t.co/BOAH5aKsH6>	
	“ Science and Religion: Conflict or Consonance? ” <i>Big Questions Online</i> <t.co/GPFrlsuNwH>	
	“ Bingespeak ,” <i>The Los Angeles Review of Books Quarterly Journal</i> <t.co/yyaQrNewJ1>	

“[The Cost of Convenience](#),” *The Los Angeles Review of Books*
ow.ly/ZyYE30o5QMi

TEACHING EXPERIENCE	Instructor, University of Notre Dame	
	Self & Society (a survey of social and political philosophy)	Spring 2017
	Philosophy & Film	Fall 2015, Fall 2016
	Aesthetics & the Philosophy of Art	Spring 2015
	Teaching Assistant, University of Notre Dame	
	Formal Logic; Instructor: Curtis Franks	Fall 2013
	Philosophy of Religion; Instructor: Stephen Dumont	Spring 2013
	Ancient Wisdom, Modern Love; Instructor: David O’Connor	Fall 2012
	Paradoxes; Instructor: Jeff Speaks	Spring 2012
	Death & Dying; Instructor: Ted Warfield	Fall 2011

REFERENCES	Professor Fred Rush, University of Notre Dame, Philosophy Dept., rush.12@nd.edu, +1.574.631.4187
	Professor Karl Ameriks, University of Notre Dame, Philosophy Dept., ameriks.2@nd.edu, 1.574.631.7951
	Professor Curtis Franks, University of Notre Dame, Philosophy Dept., cfranks@nd.edu, +1.574.631.5049
	Professor Charles Taylor, McGill University, cmt111111@aol.com
	Professor Hans Sluga, University of California at Berkeley, Philosophy Dept., sluga@berkeley.edu, +1.510. 296.5926
	Professor Brian O’Connor, University College Dublin, Philosophy Dept., brian.oconnor@ucd.ie, +353.1.7168141
	Professor Jeff Speaks, University of Notre Dame, Philosophy Dept. (teaching reference), jspeaks@nd.edu, +1.574.631.7579

SERVICE	Manuscript reviewing for Bloomsbury Publishing
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GRADUATE
COURSES
TAKEN

University of Notre Dame

Historical Foundations of Quantum Theory (Don Howard)
 Kant's First Critique (Karl Ameriks)
 Radical Politics II: Socialism (Fred Rush)
 Phenomenology (Stephen Watson)
 Frege (Patricia Blanchette)
 Philosophy of Science (Don Howard)
 Heidegger and the Germans (Fred Rush)
 Wittgenstein: *Philosophical Investigations* (Curtis Franks)
 Boethius: *Consolation of Philosophy* (Stephen Gersh)
 Hellenistic Ethics (Gretchen Reydam-Schils)
 Hermeneutics (Stephen Watson)
 Intermediate Logic (Timothy Bays)
 Human Nature and Human Function in Aristotle (Joseph Karbowski)
 Foucault (Gary Gutting) (audit)
 Kant's Practical Philosophy (Karl Ameriks) (audit)
 Dewey, Quine & American Naturalism (Don Howard) (audit)
 The Concept of Aesthetic Experience (Fred Rush) (audit)

University of Chicago (audits)

Film Aesthetics (Robert Pippin and Jim Conant)
 Wittgenstein's Tractatus (Jim Conant and Irad Kimhi)

Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main (audits)

Drei Kunstwerkaufsätze: Benjamin – Heidegger – Panofsky (Axel Honneth,
 Christoph Menke, and Martin Seel)
 Kritische Theorie des Rechts (Christophe Menke)
 Johann Gottfried Herder: Abhandlung über den Ursprung der Sprache
 (Martin Seel)

The New School for Social Research

The Problem of Time (James Dodd)
 Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* (J.M. Bernstein)
 Kant's Critique of Pure Reason (Patricia Kitcher)
 Kant's Practical Philosophy (Agnes Heller)
 Torture & Dignity (J.M. Bernstein)

University College Dublin

Kant's & Hegel's Aesthetics (Andrew Haas)
 Paradigms of Cultural Criticism (Maeve Cooke)
 Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* (Timothy Mooney)
 Husserl's *Crisis of the European Sciences* (Dermot Moran)
 Heidegger: From *Dasein* to the *Kehre* (Joseph Cohen)
 Critical Theory (Brian O'Connor)

**PROFESSIONAL
AFFILIATIONS**

American Philosophical Association

American Society for Aesthetics

The European Society for Aesthetics

The British Wittgenstein Society

**FOREIGN
LANGUAGES**

German (proficient)

Latin (reading)

French (reading)

**DISSERTATION
ABSTRACT**

The dissertation explicates Benjamin's early writing on language, explores its historical sources, and analyzes it in relation in particular to the late Wittgenstein's thought on language. Borrowing from J.G. Hamann's understanding of God's creation as communication to humankind, Benjamin writes that all things express meanings, and that human language does not impose meaning on the objective world but translates meanings already extant in it. He describes the transformations that language as such undergoes while making its way into human language as a fall — analogous to Adam and Eve's fall — from names, or language that responds mimetically to reality, to signs, which designate reality arbitrarily.

While Benjamin's approach initially seems alien to Wittgenstein's, both reject a designative understanding of language; both are preoccupied with Russell's paradox; and both try to treat what Wittgenstein calls "the bewitchment of our understanding by means of language." Putting Wittgenstein's work in dialogue with Benjamin's sheds light on its historical provenance and on the turn in Wittgenstein's thought.

The book is a reworked and expanded version of the dissertation.

**BOOK
ABSTRACT**

This book offers a critical analysis of Walter Benjamin's philosophy of language, finding in it a common root with Ludwig Wittgenstein's thought on language, and traces the historical foundation of both accounts of meaning to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century German philosophy. I argue that Benjamin's and Wittgenstein's views on language are complementary and together pose a fundamental challenge to mainstream twentieth- and twenty-first-century philosophy of language.

The book's first part reconstructs Walter Benjamin's philosophy of language, especially as it is expressed in 1916's "On Language as Such and the Language of Man." I read Benjamin's theory as a contribution to what Charles Taylor has

called the “expressivist” tradition, which includes 18th-century thinkers like J.G. Herder and J.G. Hamann.

In elucidating Benjamin’s dense theory, I emphasize Benjamin’s attempt to reorient the Kantian project around language—the medium in which knowledge is expressed—and his concern with the logical understanding of language espoused in the work of Bertrand Russell and Gottlob Frege. The result is a radical model of the relationship between language, experience, and the world that sees “absolutely everything” as linguistic in a broadened sense and which sees the logical or designative capacities of language as grounded in an aesthetic foundation. The famous “Epistemo-Critical Preface” to his book on German tragic drama is an extension of the theory of language into a metaphilosophy. Benjamin develops a full-fledged theory of concept use and a view of philosophy as criticism.

The book’s middle chapters trace the main sources of Benjamin’s ideas, as well as the import of this expressivist tradition for the turn in Wittgenstein’s thought. The most important figures for Benjamin are Hamann, Herder, and Friedrich Schlegel. This expressivist tradition is influential in the 19th century in the works of, among others, Fritz Mauthner, whose influence on the late Wittgenstein has been recognized, but not treated in detail. I read the turn in Wittgenstein’s thought as a turn back to this tradition through Mauthner. The *Philosophical Investigations* radicalizes certain strains in Mauthner’s thought, ridding it of some of its empiricist biases and thereby drawing expressivism closer to its roots in the work of Hamann, whom Wittgenstein also read.

The work of the late Wittgenstein’s shares much of its impetus and some of its substance with Benjamin’s theory. The two are read in the book’s third and final part as complementary to one another, sharing, among other things, comparable critiques of empiricism and comparable accounts of concept use, linguistic understanding, and the relation between experience and language. Ultimately, however, this similarity breaks down over Wittgenstein’s account of the “experience of meaning,” which is drawn out in his remarks on aspect seeing, seeing a particular figure *as* a particular subordinated to his account of meaning as use. I argue, in spite of this, that Benjamin’s theory of language can productively address some unresolved issues in Wittgenstein’s understanding of meaning.