

JONATHON JACOB VANDENHOMBERGH

Dept. of Philosophy
University of Wisconsin
600 N. Park St.
Madison, WI 53706

269.762.0399
vandenhomber@wisc.edu
<https://www.jonjv.com/>

AOS

Philosophy of Mind/Cognitive Science, Metaphysics, Philosophy of Language, Philosophy of Logic

AOC

Ethics, History of Philosophy, Epistemology

EDUCATION

Ph.D.	2024	Philosophy	University of Wisconsin-Madison
M.A.	2016	Philosophy	University of Houston
B.S., <i>magna cum laude</i>	2013	Philosophy, Psychology	Aquinas College

DISSERTATION

Abstract Material Objects Expected defense: 05/2024

Farid Masrour (chair); Alan Sidelle, Bruno Whittle (committee members)

PUBLICATIONS

“Consciousness, Conceivability, and Intrinsic Reduction”

Erkenntnis (85) 2020, pp. 1129-51.

“Inconceivable Physicalism”

Analysis (77)1 2017, pp. 116-25.

UNDER REVIEW

[First paper redacted while under review, after resubmission, to *The Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 28 pp.]

[Second paper redacted while under review at *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 26 pp.]

WORKS IN PROGRESS

“A Niladic Answer to the Ultimate Question,” 25 pp.

In response to a circularity challenge for the question of why anything exists—namely, that any answer presupposes the existence of something—I defend a *niladic answer*, on which anything’s existing is zero-grounded, i.e., grounded, but not by anything at all.

“A Kantian Challenge for Autonomous AI,” 15 pp.

I argue that many beneficial uses of future AI will require its autonomy, and that such uses therefore violate Kant’s principle of humanity.

“The Independent Absurd,” 20 pp.

I explore a mind-independent notion of “the absurd,” grounded in the dialetheically justified idea that the world’s existence is logically equivalent to its non-existence—and hence that its existence is metaphysically arbitrary.

PROFESSIONAL PRESENTATIONS

“A Structuralist Answer to the Ultimate Question” 11 th European Congress of Analytic Philosophy, Vienna*	2023
“The Inner Part of Chaotic Hallucination” 73 rd New Mexico Texas Philosophical Society, El Paso*	2023
“The Inner Part of Chaotic Hallucination” 114 th Southern Society for Philosophy and Psychology, Louisville	2023
“Conceptual Sieves” 69 th New Mexico Texas Philosophical Society, Houston	2018
“Conceptual Sieves” Third International Conference on Philosophy of Mind, Braga	2017
“Conceptual Sieves” 91 st Aristotelian Society and Mind Association, Edinburgh*	2017
“Conceptual Sieves” The Long Island Philosophical Society, New York City*	2017
“Continuous Qualia” 9 th European Congress of Analytic Philosophy, Munich*	2017
“Predictive Coding and Three-Dimensional Reductivism” 20 th Assoc. for the Scientific Study of Consciousness, Buenos Aires*	2016
“Phenomenal Concepts and the Disjunction Problem” 108 th Southern Society for Philosophy and Psychology, Louisville	2016
“The Logic of Quantified Two-Dimensional Conceivability Arguments” Masterclass Conference with David Chalmers, Stockholm	2015

(* denotes accepted but unable to attend)

HONORS

UW-Madison Philosophy Department Graduate Fellowship One of two cohort-wide recipients of a two-year fellowship, and recipient of a summer fellowship	2022-23, 2021, 2016-17
Marcus G and Blanche L Singer Fellowship Recipient of an endowed summer fellowship	2022
UW-Madison L&S Teaching Fellow Nominee One of two department-wide nominees for university-wide award	2021

TEACHING-FULL RESPONSIBILITY

Introduction to Philosophy (UW-Madison)

In this lecture format course, students were introduced to basic philosophical issues (the existence of God, the nature of mind, the limits of knowledge, etc.) and equipped with the tools philosophers use to examine them (conceptual analysis, deductive and inductive arguments, informal rhetoric, etc.).

Introduction to Ethics (UW-Madison and Lone Star Community College)

In this online lecture format course, students learned the background, meaning, and relative (de)merits of standard theories in metaethics (relativism, objectivism, the divine command theory, etc.) and normative ethics (utilitarianism, Kantianism, virtue ethics, etc.).

Contemporary Moral Issues (6x, UW-Madison)

In this course—taught in lecture and small class formats, both in person and online—students grappled with a range of issues in applied ethics (abortion, euthanasia, climate change, etc.) and the moral theories used to address them (utilitarianism, Kantianism, virtue ethics, etc.).

Introduction to Philosophy (11x, Lone Star Community College)

In this course—taught in lecture format, both in person and online—students were introduced to basic philosophical issues (the existence of God, the nature of mind, the limits of knowledge, etc.) and equipped with the tools philosophers use to examine them (conceptual analysis, deductive and inductive arguments, informal rhetoric, etc.).

Formal Logic (Lone Star Community College)

In this lecture format course, students were taught the fundamentals of sentential logic (translations, truth tables, natural deduction, etc.), in addition to some basic concepts from upper-level logic (predicates and quantifiers, modal operators, soundness and completeness, etc.).

TEACHING-TEACHING ASSISTANT**Elementary Logic (2x, UW-Madison, with John McKay and Josh Mund)**

In these discussion sections (both for lecture format courses), students practiced the fundamentals of sentential and predicate logic (translations, semantics, proof theory, etc.).

Introduction to Ethics (UW-Madison, with Emily Fletcher)

In this discussion (for a lecture format course), students engaged in learning activities (case studies, group debates, general discussion, etc.) centered on course readings and lectures (on ancient Chinese ethics, feministic ethics, utilitarianism and Kantianism, etc.).

Introduction to Ethics (University of Houston, with Tamler Sommers)

Grader (for a lecture format course) for participation, essays, and exams.

Introduction to Philosophy (University of Houston, with Helen Hattab)

Grader (for a lecture format course) for participation, essays, and exams.

Introduction to Mind (University of Houston, with Josh Weisberg)

Grader (for a lecture format course) for participation, essays, and exams.

SERVICE

Referee for *The Australasian Journal of Philosophy* (2x), *Erkenntnis*, and *Philosophical Psychology*.

Session Chair, 2022 Central Division Meeting of the American Philosophical Association, Chicago.

Commenter, 2018 Southern Society for Philosophy and Psychology, San Antonio.

HOBBIES

Playing music (piano, guitar, vocals)

Writing fiction (short stories, sci-fi, poetry)

Volunteering (The Literacy Network, Interim Hospice)

Cooking

REFERENCES**Farid Masrour**

Professor of Philosophy
Dept. of Philosophy
University of Wisconsin
600 N. Park St.
Madison, WI 53706

608.263.3700

masrour@wisc.edu

Alan Sidelle

Professor of Philosophy, emeritus
Dept. of Philosophy
University of Wisconsin
600 N. Park St.
Madison, WI 53706

608.263.3700

asidelle@wisc.edu

Bruno Whittle

Associate Professor of Philosophy
Dept. of Philosophy
University of Wisconsin
600 N. Park St.
Madison, WI 53706

608.263.3700

bwhittle@wisc.edu

Jesse Steinberg

Teaching Faculty, Philosophy
Dept. of Philosophy
University of Wisconsin
600 N. Park St.
Madison, WI 53706

608.263.3700

jesse.steinberg@wisc.edu

GRADUATE COURSEWORK

Courses taken in Philosophy of Mind/Cognitive Science

Externalism (Farid Masrour)
Consciousness (Josh Weisberg)
Mental Representation (Cameron Buckner)
Philosophy of Mind, 80's and 90's (Larry Shapiro)
Belief (Jesse Steinberg)
Philosophy of Cognitive Science (Cameron Buckner)

Courses taken in Metaphysics

Philosophy of Religion (Justin Coates)
Free Will (Martha Gibson)
Meta-Ethical Constructivism and Constitutivism (Mike Titelbaum)
Contemporary Big Pictures in Metaphysics (Alan Sidelle)
Grounding (Bruno Whittle)*

Courses taken in Philosophy of Language and Logic

Modal Logic (James Garson)
Philosophy of Mathematics (James Garson)
Counterfactuals (John Mackay)
Logic and Ontology (James Garson)

Courses taken in History of Philosophy

Early Analytic (Martha Gibson)
Aristotle's Scientific Method and Metaphysics (Cynthia Freeland)
Epistemology from Hume to Quine (Bredo Johnsen)

Courses taken in Epistemology

Fine-Tuning (Elliott Sober)
Philosophy of Social Science (Josh Weisberg)
Philosophy of Science (Josh Weisberg)
Epistemology of Logic (Mike Titelbaum)*

* denotes audited class

ABSTRACT MATERIAL OBJECTS

Jonathon Jacob VandenHombergh

On a standard view, all material objects are concrete. I reject this view. In fact, I claim that not only are some material objects *not* concrete, but *all* material objects are not concrete—precisely because they are *abstract* instead. There are (probably) such things as quarks, quails, quilts, and the like. It's just that these things, and all the others from across the alphabet, are *abstract material objects*.

To defend the claim that material objects are abstract, my dissertation focuses on the *problem of the many*, introduced in Chapter 1. According to that problem, there are often several, equally good candidates for uniquely making up a material object. A cloud must be composed of just one collection of water droplets at a time, for instance, but many such collections seem up to the task—this one coincident with the cloud, that one coincident with the cloud but excluding a droplet near its edge, and so on. The most popular reply, discussed in Chapter 2, says that it is simply *vague* just which candidate makes up an object. I think that this reply is wrong. It is *not* vague just which candidate makes up an object, because it is *non-vaguely* the case that *none* of them do: they're all too fine-grained for that job. So, we need an alternative.

Chapter 3 argues that the best option is that any such problematic material object is made up of an *abstract* candidate. An abstract candidate is an *abstraction from* the many candidates of a given material object: specifically, it is an object whose qualitative (or non-individualistic) properties are exactly those common to the candidates. An abstract cloud candidate, for instance, is an object that has some number of droplets (since all the cloud candidates do) but no particular number thereof (since the cloud candidates differ in this respect). In this way, and as we'd expect, material objects are indeterminate with respect to many properties. This indeterminacy is not grounded in vagueness, however, but rather in a kind of relative abstractness.

There are other merits to this approach. For instance, abstract candidates arguably avoid higher-order versions of the problem of the many, since they can be generalized to groups of groups of candidates. By their abstractness, they also seem to avoid a “revenge” problem of many abstract candidates. That said, objections also loom. These are the focus of Chapter 4. The most challenging says that, if material objects are constituted by abstract candidates, then we cannot causally interact with them. The response to this challenge is that we *do* interact with material objects, albeit *in virtue of* the fact that we interact with all of their candidates. This response faces its own challenges, of course. I take them up in this chapter as well.

If these objections can be resolved, then one might hope that the abstractionist approach works for other problems, too. Chapter 5 extends the approach to do just that. The roster of problems includes the nearby paradoxes of material constitution, such as the Ship of Theseus. It also includes less obviously related puzzles, such as the inscrutability of reference and the metaphysical underdetermination of scientific theories. Of course, these natural ways of extending the approach do not come free of their own difficulties and exceptions. This chapter, which is more exploratory than the others, considers the various moves and counter-moves for such extensions. It also concludes the dissertation with a reappraisal of the standard view.