

Matthew Watts | Curriculum Vitae

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AOS | **Philosophy of Mind, Philosophy of Cognitive Science, Philosophy and Ethics of AI, Philosophy of Technology**

AOC | **Ethics, Metaphysics, Social and Political Philosophy, Philosophy of Science, History of Philosophy**

Education

PhD Candidate (ABD), University of Miami; Expected 2026

M.A. in Philosophy, University of Miami; 2021

B.S. in Philosophy, Portland State University; 2017

Publications

Semantic Memory, Mnemonic Effort and Mnemonic Habit. In Aldini, A., and Temperini, M. (eds) *Cognition: Interdisciplinary Foundations, Models and Applications*. 2024. Springer Nature

Robots, Cyborgs, and Synths: Exploring Personhood Through Artificial Beings. Forthcoming in Kellen, N, Sheff, N, and Heter J. (eds) *Fallout and Philosophy*. Wiley-Blackwell

The Ms. Frizzle Approach: Integrating Playfulness and Creativity in Philosophy Teaching. Forthcoming in R. Scott (ed) *Are We Having Fun Yet? Joy and Playfulness in Teaching & Learning Philosophy*, vol. 11 of *AAPT Studies in Pedagogy*. American Association of Philosophy Teachers.

Under Review

Humility Pumps and Rawlsian Justice

Argues that informal social practices—“social leveling mechanisms”—are necessary complements to Rawls’s institutional model of justice, illustrating through ethnographic examples how humility-enforcing customs sustain equality and self-respect in stable societies.

Panpsychism and Pan-niftyism

Uses the fictional view of “pan-niftyism” to show that panpsychism’s introspective justification leads to metaphysical indeterminacy rather than explanatory progress.

The Alignment Problem, and Video Games

Proposes a novel approach to AI alignment grounded in virtue ethics, arguing that role-playing game simulations can mirror the socialization processes through which humans develop moral character. By training AI systems through interactive, narrative-based environments, it suggests a new path toward cultivating prosocial values and ethical reasoning in artificial agents.

Essays & Public Philosophy

Immersive Experience and Virtual Reality in the Classroom, The Miami Hurricane; 2023

Philosophy of Sex and Love, APA Syllabus Showcase - American Philosophical Association (APA) Blog; 2023

Teaching Ethics Using Immersive Virtual Reality (Op-Ed), News@theU - University of Miami; 2023

Awards, Grants, and Scholarships

Oxford University Press Teaching with Technology Prize, American Philosophical Association; 2024
Honorable Mention

Corporeal Writing Scholarshi; 2024

APA Graduate Student Travel Stipend, Pacific Meeting; 2024

AFAF Award, Portland State University; 2023

PSUFA Instructional Technology Grant, Portland State University; 2023

Curriculum Development Stipend, Science and Society, Portland Institute; 2022

PSUFA Professional Development Grant, Portland State University; 2022-2023

Kriloff Scholarship for Graduate Student Travel, College of Arts and Sciences Travel Award, University of Miami; 2022-2024

GAFAC Travel Award, University of Miami; 2022-2024

Summer Doctoral Research Fellowship, University of Miami, *in collaboration with the Institute for Bioethics and Health Policy*

“Panpsychism and Pan-niftyism” \$3000; Summer 2020

“Is Sight Visual In Nature?” \$3000; Summer 2019

“Teaching Ethics in High Schools” \$3000; Summer 2018

The Eklund Family Award, The Eklund Family Trust; 2017

Outstanding Student Philosophy Paper, Portland State University; 2017

Presentations

“AI, the Alignment Problem, and Role-playing Games”

- Mindfest 2025, Center for the Future Mind, Florida Atlantic University, (2025)
- CAIR AI4Society Symposium AI in the Military Domain, University of Pretoria, Online (2024)
- Second International Conference on the Ethics of AI (2ICEAI), University of Porto, Portugal (2023)

“Memory and the Metaphor of Origami”

- Issues in Philosophy of Memory 3.5, Centre for Philosophy of Memory Université Grenoble Alpes (2023)

"Semantic Memory: Mnemonic Effort and Mnemonic Habit"

- Graduate and Postdoctoral Research Symposium, University of Miami, Poster Presentation, (2025)
- 2nd Annual Web Conference, The International Society for the Philosophy of the Sciences of the Mind, Online (2024)
- APA Pacific Division Meeting 2024, Portland, Oregon (2024)
- Society for Philosophy and Psychology, University of Pittsburgh (Poster Presentation) (2023)
- 114th Annual Southern Society for Philosophy and Psychology Meeting, Louisville, Kentucky (2023)

"Virtual Reality and Teaching Philosophy"

- Teaching Hub Poster Session, APA Pacific Division Meeting 2024, Portland, Oregon (Poster) (2024)
- Virtually Human: Philosophizing Through Games and Virtual Worlds, Molloy University (2023)
- Inaugural Computing Day Symposium, Institute for Data Science and Computing, Frost Institute for Chemistry and Molecular Sciences Building (Poster) (2023)

"Incorporating Virtual Reality Into Our Courses"

- Teaching Hub: Outreach and Growth, APA Pacific Division Meeting 2024, Portland, Oregon (2024)

"Is Sight Essentially Visual?"

- Biological and Artificial Minds, APA Central Division Meeting 2024, New Orleans, Louisiana (2024)
- University of Miami, Workshop, Summer Ethics and Philosophy Internship (2019) *early draft*

"Artificial Intelligence and the Mnemonic Effort and Mnemonic Habit Distinction in Semantic Memory"

- CIFMA 2023, 5th International Workshop on Cognition: Interdisciplinary Foundations, Models, and Applications, Eindhoven University of Technology, The Netherlands (2023) *Presented Under a Different Name

"A World of Niftiness: From Panpsychism to Pan-niftyism"

- The Science of Consciousness 2023, Taormina, Italy (Poster Presentation) (2023)
- Philosophy Research Forum, University of Miami (2022) *early draft*.

"The Learning Object Assignment"

- Teaching Hub: Innovative Pedagogy 3, APA Pacific Division (Canceled Due to Sickness) (2023)

"Ethics, Race, and Technology: Using Virtual Reality and Memory Cultivation in the Pursuit of Overcoming Bias"

- 2023 Great Lakes Philosophy Conference, Siena Heights University (2023)

"Immersive Video Games, Ethics, and Memory Cultivation"

- Video Games and Ethics Conference, Harriet L. Wilkes Honors College Florida Atlantic University (2023)

“Semantic Memory as Attributable to Operations Taking Place at Retrieval”

- Issues in the Philosophy of Memory 3, Duke University (2022)

“Sensory Modalities and Sensorimotor Equivalence Criterion”

- Philosophy Research Forum, University of Miami (2020)
- Cognitive Studies Research Symposium, University of Miami (2017)

“The Illusion of the Broken Straw: Explaining Illusory Phenomena Through Perceptual Constancy”

- Philosophy Research Forum, University of Miami (2019)

“The Veridical Illusion: A New Problem of Illusion”

- Philosophy Research Forum, University of Miami (2019)

“Teaching Ethics in High Schools: Importance, Utility, and Methods”

- University of Miami, Workshop, Summer Ethics and Philosophy Internship (2018)

“An Enactivist Account of Perceptual Modality”

- 21st Annual Philosophy Conference, Pacific University (2017)

“The Sensorimotor Approach and the Explanatory Gaps of Nagel and Chalmers”

- 3rd Annual PSU Student Research Symposium, Portland State University (2016)

"The Sensorimotor Approach to Color and the Necessity of Socio-cultural Considerations for Color Perception"

- 3rd Annual PSU Student Research Symposium. Portland State University (2016)

"A Universe from Nothing: A Tractarian Understanding of Krauss' Concept of Nothing"

- 20th Annual Philosophy Conference, Pacific University (2016)

Teaching

Instructor of Record

Superhuman Mind. University of Miami, Spring 2026; in person

Philosophy of Mind. University of Miami, Summer 2022-2023; online. Spring 2026

Immersive Experience and Virtual Reality. University of Miami, 2022-2025; in person
Virtual Reality Course - This course makes extensive use of virtual reality technology as well as other immersive experiences.

Social and Ethical Issues in Computing. University of Miami, 2022-2025; in person

Metaphysics. University of Miami, Summer 2025; online

Science and Society. Nanking Institute of Technology in collaboration with Portland State University, Spring 2023; online

Critical Thinking. University of West Georgia, Spring 2023; online

Social and Political Philosophy. University of Miami, Fall 2022; in person
Civic Engagement Course (Service-Learning)- Developed in Collaboration with the Office of Civic and Community Engagement.

Philosophy of Sex and Love. Portland State University, Spring 2022; online

Environmental Ethics. University of Miami, Spring 2022; in person

Existentialism. University of Miami, Spring 2020; in person

Introduction to Ethics. Miami Dade College, 2022-2025; online.

Introduction to Philosophy. Miami Dade College, 2022-2025; online.

Introduction to Philosophy. University of West Georgia, 2022-2025; online.

Modern Philosophy. University of Miami, Spring 2020; in person

Introduction to Philosophy. University of Miami, Spring 2018; in person. 2021; online.

Contemporary Moral Issues. University of Miami, 2018- 2019; in person. 2021; online.

Teaching Assistant

Science and Pseudoscience, Portland State University, 2017; in person

Critical Thinking, Portland State University, 2017; in person

Professional and Service Activities

Service

XR and Virtual Reality Consulting:

Untitled Project, University of Miami, School of Communications

- Consultation on immersion and empathy pump aspects of Rafal Sokolowski's immersive VR project targeted at overcoming implicit bias in the medical profession

P4C (Philosophy for Children) of South Florida, Founder; 2023-2025

Commentator, Northwest Conference, Portland State University; 2021

Ethics Bowl Judge, Southeast Regional Intercollegiate Ethics Bowl; 2021

Online Course Development Assistant, Science and Pseudoscience; 2017

Online Course Development Assistant, Critical Thinking; 2017

Ethics Bowl Session Chair, 2nd Annual Oregon High School Ethics Bowl; 2016

Instructor, Philosophy for Children, Portland State University; 2016

Ethics Bowl Team Coach, Various, Oregon High School Ethics Bowl; 2015-2017

Ethics Bowl Organizational and Recruitment Member, Oregon High School Ethics Bowl; 2014-2017

University and College Level Service, University of Miami

Empower Me First Mentorship Program, University of Miami, Office of Academic Enhancement (2025)

E-Board Member, Graduate Students with Children, University of Miami Graduate Student Association (2018-2023)

Jobs Committee Chair, University of Miami Graduate Student Association (2023)

Committee Member, Social and Community Engagement Committee, Graduate Senate, University of Miami Graduate Student Association (2023)

Graduate Senator, University of Miami Graduate Student Association (2021-2025)

Graduate Students with Children Initiative, Expansion of Services for Graduate Student with Children (2021-2022)

- Collaborated with the Executive Director of the Graduate School to develop inclusive institutional practices to support student parents

Co-Founder, Graduate Students with Children, University of Miami Graduate Student Association (2018)

University of Miami, Philosophy Department

Philosophy XR (Extended Reality) Initiative - Lead; 2022-Present

- Facilitated purchasing and set up equipment: computers, VR systems, storage, security, applications
- Organized IT support; Trained users on the use of equipment
- Developed procedures, and resources for VR implementation; Course VR integration

Philosophy for Children Initiative; 2022-2023

- Developed partnerships with local area schools, and university departments
- Coordinating school scheduling instructor training; Organizing after school events and clubs

Workshop Chair, Philosophy for Children Training Workshop, Philosophy Department; 2022

Instructional Design Mentor; 2021-2022

- Mentored new graduate student instructors
- Organized and led teaching workshops on key pedagogical topics, including inclusive teaching strategies, course design, and effective grading
- Developed the Teaching Success Resource Folder

Teaching Success Resource Folder, Developer; 2021

- Digital resource providing early career instructors with course design and teaching strategy resources.

Graduate Student Advisor, University of Miami Undergraduate Philosophy Club; 2021-2022

Co-Organizer, Grad Student Pedagogy Workshop, Philosophy Department; 2019

Memberships and Affiliations

2024-	PLATO - Philosophy Teaching and Learning Organization
2023-	American Association of Philosophy Teachers
2023-	Society for Philosophy and Psychology
2023-	Southern Society for Philosophy and Psychology
2021-	American Philosophical Association

Professional Certificates

Higher Education Teaching Online Certificate, Quality Matters

References

Mark Rowlands	Mrowlands [at] miami [dot] edu
Berit Brogaard	Brogaardb [at] gmail [dot] com
Eli Chudnoff	E.chudnoff [at] miami [dot] edu
Tom Seppalainen	Seppalt [at] pdx [dot] edu
Javier Gomez-Lavin	Jglavin [at] purdue [dot] edu

Dissertation Abstract

A Procedural Account of Semantic Memory

Remembering that Neil Armstrong was the first person to walk on the Moon feels like pulling a fact from storage somewhere in the mind. But is this really how we know things about the world? My dissertation challenges the orthodox view of semantic memory as a passive storehouse of facts and develops a constructive, procedural alternative. I argue that remembering is not retrieval from storage but the skilled reconstruction of knowledge through flexible, embodied abilities. On this view, what is retained are not discrete facts but the procedural know-how for rebuilding them as needed. This framework resolves long-standing conceptual tensions about abstraction, generalization, and the nature of memory traces, while integrating insights from enactivism and cognitive science. Reconceived in this

way, semantic memory emerges as an active, generative capacity underlying imagination, counterfactual reasoning, and socially embedded knowledge practices.