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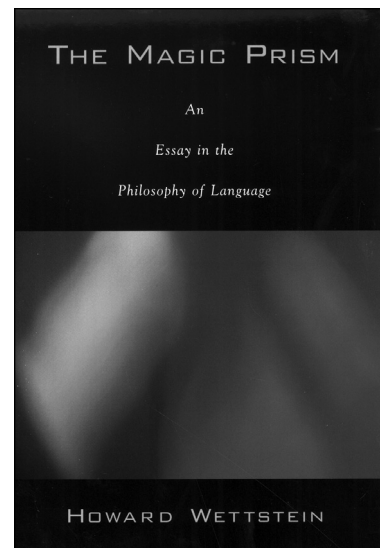
# THE MAGIC PRISM

*An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*  
Howard Wettstein

“Wettstein proposes to *dissolve* these puzzles by showing that our capacity to talk about things is ultimately mundane and bereft of mystery. His book is thus a unique attempt to combine a sophisticated historical and substantive discussion of reference with a loosely speaking Wittgensteinian perspective on language and Wittgensteinians have much to learn from the result. Wettstein is also one of those increasingly rare mainstream analytic philosophers to speak with a voice which is distinctive without being obtrusive, and to display how even highly *récherché* debates can profit from the occasional input of common sense and wisdom. Wettstein has provided a highly illuminating and thought-provoking anthropology of our practice of using words to refer to things. It provides the perfect antidote to the widespread tendency of distorting this practice because of theoretical fancies and *l’art pour l’art* technicalities.”—*Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews*.

The late 20th century saw great movement in the philosophy of language, often critical of the fathers of the subject—Gottlieb Frege and Bertrand Russell—but sometimes supportive of (or even defensive about) the work of the fathers. Howard Wettstein’s sympathies lie with the critics. But he says that they have often misconceived their critical project, treating it in ways that are technically focused and that miss the deeper implications of their revolutionary challenge. Wettstein argues that Wittgenstein—a figure with whom the critics of Frege and Russell are typically unsympathetic—laid the foundation for much of what is really revolutionary in this late 20th century movement.

The subject itself should be of great interest, since philosophy of language has functioned as a kind of foundation for much of 20th century philosophy. But in fact it remains a subject for specialists, since the ideas are difficult and the mode of presentation is often fairly technical. In this book, Wettstein brings the non-specialist into the conversation (especially in early chapters); he also reconceives the debate in a way that avoids technical formulation. *The Magic Prism* is intended for professional philosophers, graduate students, and upper division undergraduates.



Howard Wettstein is Professor of Philosophy at the University of California, Riverside.

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