

PHIL 329: Wittgenstein

Whitman College – Spring 2020

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stop by to talk

Wed. & Thu. 2:30 - 4:00

Course Description and Approach

Ludwig Wittgenstein was not one but two of the most important and original philosophers of the 20th century. In 1921 he published the brief and cryptic *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, which he believed definitively resolved all of the main problems of philosophy. He then left the field of philosophy altogether. A decade later, he began to doubt his earlier work, and over the next twenty years developed an approach to philosophy that seemed fundamentally different, most fully expounded in his posthumously published *Philosophical Investigations*. Throughout his career Wittgenstein emphasized the importance of understanding the nature of language, through which he addressed issues related to logic, epistemology, metaphysics, philosophy of mind, and ethics. In this course, we will begin with a very brief introduction to the ideas of Frege and Russell that most influenced Wittgenstein, and then work carefully through both the *Tractatus* and a sizable portion of the *Investigations*, supplemented by relevant secondary sources.

Wittgenstein's work is, to say the least, very challenging. The organization and style of his writing are unique, radically unlike anything before or since, and his ideas are very subtle and deep. So, we'll need to work through his texts slowly and carefully, and use others' interpretations as assistance and foils. Our reading schedule has been set for a pace that I think will allow us to reach a reasonable depth of understanding, while still giving us the opportunity to explore both periods of Wittgenstein's work. But, the details of that schedule can certainly be adjusted if need be; we'll make those decisions as a group as the semester goes on.

This is an advanced course, with no goal other than to make as much progress as possible in understanding Wittgenstein's writings. So, the particular points we focus on, and how much time we spend on each section of the texts, should be determined by your interests more than mine. And along the way, our work should proceed as philosophy ideally does: through dialog, both oral and written.

In addition to developing an understanding and appreciation of Wittgenstein's work in particular, I hope that this course will also help you enhance the central abilities of academic philosophy. You will be called upon to engage in close reading and textual interpretation, to develop your own interpretive and philosophical perspective, to engage with the views of others (both classmates and professionals), and to compose a sustained and detailed interpretive and/or philosophical argument.

Course Materials

As the course description indicates, we'll work through the two main books by Wittgenstein. The translations and editions available in the Whitman College Bookstore are the ones that I think are the best:

- ★ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, Trans. Pears & McGuinness (Routledge, 1961).
- ★ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 4th edn., Trans. Anscombe, Hacker, & Schulte (Blackwell, 2009).

In a pinch, a different translation of either text might be fine – but please check with me about it first.

There are two secondary sources that we'll use as companions to Wittgenstein's texts:

- ★ Roger White, *Wittgenstein's "Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus"* (Continuum, 2006).
- ★ David Stern, *Wittgenstein's "Philosophical Investigations": An Introduction* (Cambridge, 2004).

There will also be a number of readings available on the canvas site.

Throughout the semester you should also consult additional secondary sources. This will be required for the days you co-lead discussion and for your term paper (see below). But it's strongly recommended for any other time that you find yourself particularly stumped, intrigued, or otherwise provoked by Wittgenstein's work. Take the initiative to begin following out those questions and insights yourself. After all, isn't that why you're here?

The secondary literature on Wittgenstein is *massive*, and of very uneven quality. So, I'll be providing a list of recommendations – especially for discussion-leaders (see below), but available and useful for everyone. You're perfectly welcome to consult any other sources that you please; insight can sometimes be found in and/or sparked by surprising materials. Still, I do recommend that you check with me about them, to help make sure that you have a sense of the nature and context of what you're working with.

Learning Goals

This course satisfies the Humanities distribution requirement, by pursuing the following learning goals:

- Read texts with precision and generosity.
- Analyze and interpret texts with precision, assessing their form and content both on the texts' own terms and through critical lenses informed by other texts.
- Effectively communicate, through written and spoken words, insights drawn from the works you are reading and interpreting.

The course also contributes to the curriculum in the Philosophy Department, by pursuing the following learning goals:

- Use philosophical tools for close reading, investigation, analysis, and argument.
- Discover and question hidden assumptions in the work of others.
- Develop individual insights, pursue them with depth, and present them clearly in writing.
- Develop individual insights and present these insights clearly and rigorously orally.

Support for Students with Disabilities

I believe that every student should have an equal opportunity to succeed in this course. If you are a student with a disability who might need accommodation in order to have that opportunity fully, please meet with Antonia Keithahn in the Academic Resources Center for assistance in developing a plan to address your academic needs. All information about disabilities is considered private, and so if I receive notification that you are eligible to receive an accommodation due to a verified disability, I will provide it in as discreet a manner as possible.

Summary of Requirements and Grading

Preparation and Participation – 30% of your total grade

This course will be structured as a seminar, which relies on the active and collaborative engagement of everyone in the room. Students should not just be prepared if called on, or make a point of saying one thing each meeting, as you might in a large lower-level course. Rather, you should consider yourselves jointly responsible for how productive our class meetings are, each and every day. I'll serve as the moderator of the discussion, and will sometimes shape the agenda – but you should also make sure to develop your *own* sense of the key passages, ideas, arguments, questions, and objections as you work through the readings.

In our conversations, you should address your classmates, and not just me. You should also be willing to think out loud, to raise questions that might seem basic, to offer interpretations that might seem uncertain, to propose links that might seem tenuous, to make arguments that might seem sketchy, and otherwise to take intellectual risks. This is very difficult material, and our class will only succeed to the extent that we're all willing to struggle through it together.

Co-Leading Discussion – included as part of preparation and participation

Many of our class meetings throughout the semester will include a portion that is co-led by students. That pair will be responsible for leading about 30 minutes of discussion (typically at the beginning), while I do my best to stay out of the way. Each student will co-lead discussion twice, not necessarily with the same partner.

In preparation for leading discussion, each pair will be expected to read at least one additional secondary source about that portion of Wittgenstein's text. I'll provide some recommendations, though you'll be free to use some other source(s) if you prefer – which I would strongly encourage you to check with me about in advance.

From that basis, each pair will be free to pursue whatever issues, questions, and ideas it thinks would be helpful for the group to consider. It's fine for the pair to take part of the time to explain ideas from Wittgenstein's text, from the secondary sources, and/or from their own interpretation. But for the bulk of the time, the discussion-leaders should strive to have the class as a whole actively engaged with the material.

I really hope that each pair will meet with me ahead of time, to talk through your plans for your portion of the class time. I'm here to help!

Reflections – 40% of your total grade

As we are working through this material, it is important for you to collect your thoughts about the material and to develop those thoughts in writing. Every two weeks through most of the semester (as indicated on the schedule below), you will compose and submit a brief “reflection” of around 1000-1200 words. There are only two requirements:

- (1) Each reflection must make direct contact with at least one significant idea or passage from the portions of Wittgenstein’s text that we discussed in class since the previous reflection. It’s fine for you to bring in earlier portions of his texts as well, but make sure that each reflection is largely concerned with the new material. It’s also fine for you to discuss one or more of the secondary sources, but make sure that your writing is ultimately grounded in Wittgenstein’s work.
- (2) Each reflection must develop a single direction of thought in relation to Wittgenstein’s text. That could mean that it has a specific thesis. But it could instead be more exploratory and/or ambivalent, as long as it has a clear focus. It should *not* simply summarize the recent readings nor present a series of disconnected reactions.

You are welcome to use one reflection to follow up on the topic of a previous reflection, and/or you are welcome to advance entirely different or even incompatible views across your reflections. In short, you should use the reflections in whatever ways you think will be most productive for *you* in thinking about this material and preparing yourself for the (eventual) term paper.

Your reflections should be typed in Times New Roman 12-point font, with one-inch margins all around. The body of the work should be double-spaced, with no extra spacing between paragraphs. Reflections should be submitted through the canvas site, in Microsoft Word format.

Note: I’ve set the deadline for the reflections as 4:00 on Fridays, but will be happy to provide extensions to the end of the weekend for anyone who wants one. You can ask for your deadline to be pushed back for all of the reflections, or can ask for an extension just on a particular one as needed. Longer extensions will be granted only in unusual circumstances. To arrange for an extension, you should e-mail me as far in advance as you can. Accommodations will be made after the fact only in cases of unforeseeable emergency.

Term Paper – 30% of your total grade

At the end of the semester, you will submit a full-length paper (about 4000 words) engaging in depth with any aspect of Wittgenstein’s work that particularly interests you. In the process, you will be expected to engage significantly with the secondary literature related to your topic. But you should still be careful to keep in mind that the ultimate goal is to develop your *own* views, and not just to report others’; the secondary literature should be used as a resource to help facilitate and deepen that.

By late April, you will need to have a specific idea for your paper, along with a sketch of how you plan to develop it, and which secondary sources you might draw on. I will meet with each of you then to discuss your ideas, and provide whatever feedback and guidance I can. In the last class meeting, each student will present a polished part of the project to other students for discussion.

More details about each of these steps will be shared after Spring Break. But if you have any questions or want to get started before then, just let me know.

Academic Honesty

All of the work that you submit in this course must be entirely your own. Of course, you can seek help in a variety of ways as you're working on your writing. So it is **permitted** (and even encouraged!) for you: to consult additional readings, to search for material on the internet, to discuss your ideas with other students, and to read and to discuss drafts of each other's writing. But it is **not permitted** for you to use someone else's words or specific ideas in your written work without providing a proper citation to the source. Even if it's an accident, it's still plagiarism! You have a responsibility to keep track of the origins of the words and ideas in your work, and to include citations to them.

Plagiarism will *not* be tolerated in any form. You have signed a statement indicating that you understand and will abide by the College policy on plagiarism. **Any student caught plagiarizing will be reported to the Dean of Students' office for academic misconduct.** For a first offense, the consequence could range up to failing the course. For a second offense, the consequence could range up to dismissal from the College. For more details, see the Student Handbook.

If you have *any* questions about what would or wouldn't be plagiarism in this context, please just talk with me about it *in advance*.

Tentative Schedule of Readings and Assignments

Wed. Jan. 22 A.J. Ayer, "Biographical Sketch" (canvas)
Derek Jarman's movie *Wittgenstein*

Mon. Jan. 27 White, pp. 1-7
Kenny, "The Legacy of Frege and Russell" (canvas)

Wed. Jan. 29 White, pp. 8-22
Tractatus, Russell's Introduction + skim all

Mon. Feb. 3 *Tractatus* Preface + 1 - 2.063
White pp. 22-35

Wed. Feb. 5 *Tractatus* 1 - 2.225
White pp. 36-50

* Fri. Feb. 7 * reflection due by 4:00 p.m. *

Mon. Feb. 10 *Tractatus* 3 - 3.5
White pp. 50-66

Wed. Feb. 12 *Tractatus* 4 - 4.53
White pp. 66-83

Mon. Feb. 17 NO CLASS – PRESIDENTS’ DAY

Wed. Feb. 19 *Tractatus* 5 - 5.641
White pp. 83-100

* Fri. Feb. 21 * reflection due by 4:00 p.m. *

Mon. Feb. 24 *Tractatus* 6 - 7
White pp. 100-34

Wed. Feb. 26 Eli Friedlander, *Signs of Sense*, chs. 9-10 (canvas)
or Michael Hodges, *Transcendence and Wittgenstein’s Tractatus*, ch. 6 (canvas)
or Martin Stokhof, *World and Life as One*, excerpt from ch. 4 (canvas)

Mon. March 2 Cora Diamond, “Throwing Away the Ladder: How to Read the *Tractatus*” (canvas)

Wed. March 4 *Philosophical Investigations* §§1-25
Stern, pp. 72-90

* Fri. March 6 * reflection due by 4:00 p.m. *

Mon. March 9 Stern, pp. 1-28
re-read *Philosophical Investigations* §§1-25

Wed. March 11 *Philosophical Investigations* §§26-64
Stern, pp. 90-107

SPRING BREAK

Mon. March 30 *Philosophical Investigations* §§65-88
Stern, pp. 108-121

Wed. April 1 *Philosophical Investigations* §§89-133, 428-436
Stern, pp. 121-38

* Fri. April 3 * reflection due by 4:00 p.m. *

Mon. April 6 *Philosophical Investigations* §§134-184
Robert Fogelin, *Wittgenstein*, 2nd edn., ch. 10 (canvas)

Wed. April 8 *Philosophical Investigations* §§185-242
Stern, pp. 139-51

Mon. April 13 reread *Philosophical Investigations* §§185-242
Goldfarb, "Rule-Following Revisited" (canvas)

Wed. April 15 *Philosophical Investigations* §§243-268
Stern, pp. 171-85

* Fri. April 17 * reflection due by 4:00 p.m. *

Mon. April 20 *Philosophical Investigations* §§269-315
Marie McGinn, *Wittgenstein and the Philosophical Investigations*, ch. 5 (canvas)

Wed. April 22 Michel ter Hark, "The Inner and the Outer" (CLEo)

⇒ meet with me very soon about your term paper idea(s)

Mon. April 27 *Philosophical Investigations*, Motto and Preface
Stern, pp. 29-71

Wed. April 29 Stanley Cavell, "The *Investigations*' Everyday Aesthetics of Itself" (canvas)
or Timothy Gould, "Restlessness and the Achievement of Peace" (canvas)

Mon. May 4 NO CLASS – work on your term paper!
(but stop by to talk with me if you'd like any help)

Wed. May 6 NO CLASS – work on your term paper!
(but stop by to talk with me if you'd like any help)

Mon. May 11 * student presentations *
semester wrap-up

**** Sat. May 16 @ 4:00 p.m. – TERM PAPER DUE**