

# PHIL 329: Wittgenstein

Whitman College – Fall 2010

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Tue. & Wed. 2:30 – 4:00

## Course Description and Format

Ludwig Wittgenstein was not one but two of the most important and original philosophers of the 20<sup>th</sup> 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 philosophy altogether. A decade later, he began to doubt his earlier work, and over the next 20 years developed a radically different approach to philosophy, 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 including logic, epistemology, metaphysics, philosophy of mind, and ethics. In this course, we will begin with a very brief introduction to the writings 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.

The particular course structures and assignments have been designed with two main principles in mind:

1. **Students should take significant control of our agenda.**
2. **Students should work collaboratively.**

This is an advanced course, with no goal other than to make as much progress as possible in understanding Wittgenstein's ideas. 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 rather 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 other scholars, 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*, 4<sup>th</sup> edn., Trans. Anscombe, Hacker, & Schulte (Blackwell, 2009).

In a pinch, however, a different translation of either text might be fine – I just suggest that you 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 CLEo site, for you to download and print.

Throughout the semester you should also consult additional secondary sources. This will be required for your brief essays and 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 texts. 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 to help, I've put a number of books on reserve that I think are particularly worthwhile:

For both of Wittgenstein's texts:

- Robert Fogelin, *Wittgenstein*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (Routledge, 1987).
- Hans-Johann Glock, ed., *Wittgenstein: A Critical Reader* (Blackwell, 2001).
- George Pitcher, *The Philosophy of Wittgenstein* (Prentice-Hall, 1964).

For the *Tractatus* only:

- Max Black, *A Companion to Wittgenstein's "Tractatus"* (Cornell, 1964).
- Michael Morris, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Wittgenstein and the "Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus"* (Routledge, 2008).
- H.O. Mounce, *Wittgenstein's "Tractatus": An Introduction* (UChicago, 1981).
- Erik Stenius, *Wittgenstein's "Tractatus": A Critical Exposition of Its Main Lines of Thought* (Cornell, 1964).

For the *Investigations* only:

- Gordon Baker & P.M.S. Hacker, *Wittgenstein: Understanding and Meaning* (UChicago, 1980).
- Garth Hallett, *A Companion to Wittgenstein's "Philosophical Investigations"* (Cornell, 1977).
- J.F.M. Hunter, *Understanding Wittgenstein: Studies of "Philosophical Investigations"* (Edinburgh, 1985).
- Marie McGinn, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Wittgenstein and the "Philosophical Investigations"* (Routledge, 1997).

You're perfectly welcome to consult any other secondary 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.

## 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 yourself 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, including not only Wittgenstein but also the secondary sources and your classmates' brief essays.

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 willing to struggle through it together.

### **Brief Essays – 25% of your total grade**

Before each Tuesday meeting, several students will be assigned to compose a brief essay (1000-1200 words) about the upcoming reading. The essays will be used to help shape the agenda for those meetings, so that our discussion builds from the interests and ideas of the students in the class. Each student will write three essays during the semester, with the exact dates to be set next week so that students' other assignments and plans can be taken into account.

On your assigned weeks, you will **post your essay to the class CLEo site by 8:00 p.m. the previous Saturday**, so that they can serve as a basis for other students' responses (see below) and ultimately for class discussion. There is a folder under the "Resources" tab entitled "Brief Essays," with a sub-folder for each week. You have permission in the system to upload files to those sub-folders (and also to edit and delete your own postings, if the need arises – in which case, you should be sure to let everyone know what's going on). Please post files in pdf (preferably) or Word format.

Your essay can engage in any combination of interpretation, application, and/or evaluation of the text. The topics are entirely open; the only requirement is that your essay make a single, focused point about some important aspect(s) of the day's reading.

In composing your essay, you will be required to draw on some additional secondary source(s), beyond what's assigned for everyone. The reserve books should provide a wide range of options for you, and other options can be found through the Philosopher's Index. (If you're not familiar with the Philosopher's Index, just talk with me or one of the reference librarians.) Note that your sources have to be scholarly; Wikipedia doesn't count! You should use parenthetical citations, and then include full bibliographic information at the end. And remember: using another's specific ideas without acknowledgment is **plagiarism**, so be very careful to include the needed citations!

Your essays should be typed in Times New Roman 12-point font, with one-inch margins all-around. In the upper left-hand corner of the first page, single-spaced, you should list your name, the course, my name, and the date. The body of the essay should be double-spaced, with no extra spacing between paragraphs. Pages should be numbered.

NOTE: Because other students will be depending on the timely completion of your essay, **extensions are absolutely impossible**. However, if you know in advance that you have a scheduling conflict or other difficulty, talk with me and I'll try to arrange for you to switch weeks with someone else. And of course, if you have a last-minute emergency, we'll figure out some kind of reasonable accommodation.

### **Responses – 15% of your total grade**

On the weeks that you aren't writing a brief essay, you will be assigned to compose a 300-400 word substantive response to another student's essay. That will facilitate the dialog and collaboration among students in the class, and help further refine our agenda for those meetings.

The response can be written in a somewhat informal style, but should still be philosophically well-developed. You should engage (only) with the content of the author's main idea, which you can extend, support, challenge, and/or apply in any way you think would be interesting and productive for the class to consider.

Each response should be **e-mailed to the author by 8:00 p.m. on Sunday**, so that student has some time to process the feedback on her or his ideas before our class discussion of them. It should also be **copied to me**, so that I can take it into account in finalizing the agenda for our meeting.

The responses will be graded as a whole, rather than individually. I will provide feedback and guidance on your responses as needed throughout the semester. (You are also welcome to ask for feedback at any time you wish.)

### **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. Again, you will be free to present any combination of interpretation, application, and/or evaluation. You will be encouraged, though not required, to build your term paper from one or more of your brief essays and responses. (So, you might want to keep that in mind as you're composing those shorter pieces throughout the semester.)

You will also be required to engage significantly with the secondary literature related to your topic. That typically means that you'll need to draw on several important sources, and may well need to go beyond the books that I've put on reserve. But you should 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 process.

By the week before Thanksgiving Break, 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. Then, I will meet with each of you to discuss your ideas, and provide whatever feedback and guidance I can. You won't be expected to work on the project during the Break, but you will have to be ready to begin making serious progress on it as soon as you return to campus.

In the last week of classes, each student will present a polished part of the project to the class, for our collective discussion. (More details about each of these steps will be distributed by late October.)

## **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 to prepare yourself for the brief essays, responses, and term paper. So it is **permitted** (and even recommended!) for you to: consult additional readings, search for material on the internet, discuss your ideas with other students, exchange notes with other students, and read and 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. If you have any questions about what would or wouldn't be plagiarism in this context, please just talk with me about it.

Plagiarism will *not* be tolerated in any form. **Any student caught plagiarizing will automatically fail the course, and may be expelled from the College.** For more details, see the Student Handbook.

## Tentative Schedule of Readings and Assignments

Tue. Aug. 31 Ayer, "Biographical Sketch" (CLEo)  
Derek Jarman's movie "Wittgenstein"

Thu. Sep. 2 White, pp. 1-7; Kenny, "The Legacy of Frege and Russell" (CLEo)

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Tue. Sep. 7 White, pp. 8-22; *Tractatus*, Russell's Introduction + skim all

Thu. Sep. 9 *Tractatus* Preface + 1 - 2.063; White pp. 22-35

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*\*\* essays & responses begin \*\**

Tue. Sep. 14 *Tractatus* 1 - 2.225; White pp. 36-50

Thu. Sep. 16 *Tractatus* 3 - 3.5; White pp. 50-66

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Tue. Sep. 21 *Tractatus* 4 - 4.53; White pp. 66-83

Thu. Sep. 23 *Tractatus* 5 - 5.641; White pp. 83-100

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Tue. Sep. 28 *Tractatus* 6 - 7; White pp. 100-34

Thu. Sep. 30 Eli Friedlander, *Signs of Sense*, ch. 9 (CLEo)

or Michael Hodges, *Transcendence and Wittgenstein's Tractatus*, ch. 6 (CLEo)

or Stephen Mulhall, "Words, Waxing and Waning: Ethics in/and/of the *Tractatus*" (CLEo)

or Martin Stokhof, *World and Life as One*, excerpt from ch. 4 (CLEo)

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Tue. Oct. 5 Cora Diamond, "Throwing Away the Ladder: How to Read the *Tractatus*" (CLEo)

Denis McManus, "The Method of the *Tractatus*" (CLEo)

Thu. Oct. 7 *Philosophical Investigations* §§1-25

Stern, pp. 72-90 **\*\* SWITCH W/ pp. 1-28? \*\***

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*\*\* this week's essays will relate to Thursday's readings*

*\*\* essay & response deadlines will be set by mutual agreement*

Tue. Oct. 12 NO CLASS – FALL BREAK

Thu. Oct. 14 Stern, pp. 1-28

re-read *Philosophical Investigations* §§1-25

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Tue. Oct. 19 *Philosophical Investigations* §§26-64

Stern, pp. 90-107

Thu. Oct. 21 *Philosophical Investigations* §§65-88

Stern, pp. 108-121

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Tue. Oct. 26 *Philosophical Investigations* §§89-133, 428-436  
Stern, pp. 121-38

Thu. Oct. 28 *Philosophical Investigations* §§134-184  
Robert Fogelin, *Wittgenstein*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., ch. 10 (CLEo)

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Tue. Nov. 2 *Philosophical Investigations* §§185-242  
Stern, pp. 139-51

Thu. Nov. 4 *Philosophical Investigations* §§243-268  
Stern, pp. 171-85

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Tue. Nov. 9 *Philosophical Investigations* §§269-315  
Marie McGinn, *Wittgenstein and the Philosophical Investigations*, ch. 5 (CLEo)

Thu. Nov. 11 ter Hark, "The Inner and the Outer" (CLEo)

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*\*\* last week of essays & responses \*\**

*⇒ meet with me this week about term-project idea*

Tue. Nov. 16 *Philosophical Investigations*, Motto and Preface  
Stern, pp. 29-71

Thu. Nov. 18 Cavell, "The *Investigations*' Everyday Aesthetics of Itself" (CLEo)  
Gould, "Restlessness and the Achievement of Peace" (CLEo)

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**THANKSGIVING BREAK**

Tue. Nov. 30 NO CLASS – work on your term paper!

Thu. Dec. 2 NO CLASS – work on your term paper!

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Tue. Dec. 7 \* student presentations \*

Thu. Dec. 9 semester wrap-up

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**\*\* Fri. Dec. 17 @ 4:00 p.m. – term papers due**