Major Philosophers of the Twentieth Century:
Ludwig Wittgenstein and the *Philosophical Investigations*

**Description:** We’ll study the work of Ludwig Wittgenstein (b. Vienna, Austria 1889, d. Cambridge, UK 1951). Our main text will be the best known writing of his later period, the *Philosophical Investigations* (published posthumously in 1953).

Wittgenstein is generally counted as one of the founders of the analytic tradition of philosophy. He is as significant to the development of that tradition as Frege, Moore, Russell or members of the logical empiricist school (such as Carnap and Reichenbach). The extent and significance of his influence on contemporary analytic philosophy is, however, controversial in several ways. Above all, many contemporary philosophers reject his conception of philosophy. It is interesting and valuable to study Wittgenstein for that reason: He discusses topics in contemporary philosophy from an unfamiliar and critical perspective.

*Philosophical Investigations* ranges over topics in philosophy of language, logic, mind and even philosophy of mathematics and it connects those topics in surprising ways. The book is—by design—difficult to survey or summarize in the usual ways. I’ll discuss several strands which run through the text: Wittgenstein’s conception of philosophy, his ideas about clarification, explanation and definition and his discussions of rule following and, to the extent that time permits, “private language”.

**Texts:** The main text for this course is:


(Earlier editions are useable.) It will be useful to bring the text to lecture. Other readings will be made available on the course webpage.

**Course work:** Written work will consist of (i) Weekly homework assignments. (ii) Take-home midterm exam and (ii) take-home final exam. The midterm and final will take the form of short essays on topics set in advance; each will require a total of eight to ten pages of writing. The written work will count for 20%, 40% and 40% of the course grade, respectively. Notes: (i) Course grades based on written work may be raised by up to 1/3 letter grade for excellent contributions to discussion. (ii) All written work will be submitted to turnitin.
Having recently taught this course, I’m pretty set about the readings, although I’m still thinking about what secondary readings (commentaries, discussions, criticisms, etc.) might be useful, so I might make some changes to the reading list.

1. Wittgenstein’s conception of philosophy
   *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* [TLP], Author’s Preface; ss. 4.003-4.0031, 4.111-4.116 and 6.53
   *Philosophical Investigations* [PI], Author’s Preface; ss. 89-97, 109-133 esp. 122-124 and 126-129
   Optional: *Philosophical Remarks* [PR], epigraph and Foreword.

   1.1 Some examples of philosophical problems associated with “pictures”
   PI ss. 89-90
   Optional: Augustine, *Confessions XI* passim, esp. XI, xiv, 17-XI, xv, 18
   PI ss. 422-427

2. The Augustinian picture and its treatment
   Augustine, *Confessions* I, vi, 8; I, vi, 11, I, vi, 13
   PI ss. 1-64
   TLP ss. 3.2-3.221, esp 3.203
   Optional: *Blue Book* pp. 1-6

3. Languages and rules
   PI ss. 53-54, 65-88

4. Understanding and rules
   PI ss. 138-155, 179-242
   Robert Arrington, “Following a Rule”

5. “Private language”
   PI ss. 243-309

Other readings:

If you have difficulty finding your bearings in *Philosophical Investigations*, you might want to take a look at the following, clearly written introduction:


The following work is a lucidly written and helpful overview of Wittgenstein’s entire philosophical career:


In addition, PI is served by two scholarly, section-by-section English commentaries: