

PL319: Wittgenstein as a Philosopher of Culture

Seminar Leader: Dr. Gilad Nir
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Office Hours: Friday, 11-12 or by appointment
Classes meet on Friday, 12:30-3:45

Ludwig Wittgenstein is widely considered one of the greatest philosophers of the 20th century. His reception has tended to focus on his theoretical philosophy — his philosophy of language, his critique of metaphysics, and his contributions to logic and epistemology. While not entirely neglecting these aspects of Wittgenstein's work, this course puts a different set of questions at the center, namely: what are Wittgenstein's contributions to our understanding of the cultural and ethical dimensions of human existence? We will see that Wittgenstein's philosophy, early and late, consists in a struggle against the problem of modernity, the corrupting influence of science on society, and the individualism and subjectivism of modern philosophy. We will find in his work deep reflections on the search for meaning, on the difficulty of intercultural understanding, and on the challenge posed by skepticism. Exploring the intellectual heritage Wittgenstein draws on, we will consider excerpts from the works of philosophers, poets and cultural critics including Kant, Uhland, Schopenhauer, Goethe, Kierkegaard, Hertz, Ernst, Tolstoy, William James, Spengler, Nestroy, Weininger, Mauthner, and others. We will see how these influences inform Wittgenstein's early and late writings, looking in particular at the *Tractatus Logico Philosophicus*, "Lecture on Ethics," *Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough*, *Philosophical Investigations*, and *On Certainty*. And we will also consider Wittgenstein's influence on later philosophers such as Stanley Cavell, Michael Fried, and Cora Diamond.

Requirements

Academic Integrity

Bard College Berlin maintains the highest standards of academic integrity and expects students to adhere to these standards at all times. Instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section 14.3 (Academic Misconduct) in the Student Handbook.

Attendance

Attendance at all classes is a crucial part of the education offered by Bard College Berlin. To account for minor circumstances, two absences from twice-per-week courses or the equivalent (e.g. one absence from a once-per-week course) should not affect the participation grade or require documentation.

Any further absences require the instructor's permission.

Bard College Berlin may not offer credit for any course in which a student has missed more than 30% of classes, regardless of the reasons for the absences. The full Bard College Berlin attendance policy can be found in the Student Handbook, Section 2.8.

Assignments

- Final paper, 3000 words, due 20.12.2023 (For graduating seniors: 18.12.2023)
Optional topics for the paper will be provided by the instructor. If you wish to write on a different topic, please submit a short expose at least one week in advanced. You are encouraged to submit a draft of your paper to the writing tutors.
- Midterm paper, 1500 words, due 28.10.2023.
- Weekly response paper, 100-200 words, due before class, on weeks 2-13. Students may skip two response papers; choose 10 out of these 12 weeks to submit your responses.

Policy on Late Submission of Papers

Essays that are up to 24 hours late can be downgraded up to one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late. Where a professor agrees to accept a late assignment, it should be submitted by the new deadline agreed upon by both parties. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment. Grades and comments will be returned to students in a timely fashion. Students are also entitled to make an appointment to discuss essay assignments and feedback during instructors' office hours.

Students receive mid- and end-of-semester grades for their seminar work. Students are entitled to make an appointment with an instructor to discuss seminar participation, or may be asked to meet with the instructor at any stage in the semester regarding class progress.

Grade Breakdown

Final paper, 45% of the final grade.

Midterm paper, 15% of the final grade.

Weekly response papers, seminar participation and attendance: 30% of the final grade.

Schedule

Week 1: Sep. 8, 2023 Problems & Riddles: Wittgenstein on the Nature of our Difficulties

Excerpts from Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (TLP), *Blue Book* (BB),
Philosophical Investigations (PU), *Philosophical Remarks*, *Cambridge Lectures*
Excerpt from Heinrich Hertz, *Principles of Mechanics*, Preface

Recommended Readings:

Cora Diamond: "Riddles and Anselm's Riddle"

Week 2: Sep. 15, 2023 Philosophy and the Limits of Language

Wittgenstein, *TLP*, selections: Preface + §§1-2.012; 2.2-3.332; 3.5-4.04; 4.1-4.1212; 4.5-5; 5.47-5.4733; 5.6-5.641, 6.5-7

Recommended Readings:

James Conant: "Must we Show What we Cannot Say?"
Cora Diamond: "What Nonsense Might Be"
James Conant: "The Search for Logically Alien Thought"
Peter Sullivan: "A version of the Picture Theory"
Juliet Floyd: "Wittgenstein and the Inexpressible"

Week 3, Sep. 22, 2023: Ethics in *TLP* and the 1929 "Lecture on Ethics"

Wittgenstein, *TLP*, excerpts: 6.4-7
Wittgenstein, "Lecture on Ethics"
Wittgenstein, Correspondence with Engelmann on a poem by Uhland

L. Tolstoy: "Hadji Murat"
L. Tolstoy: "The Three Hermits"
L. Tolstoy: Excerpts from *A Confession*

Excerpts from: Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*

Recommended Readings:
Cora Diamond: "Ethics, Imagination and the Method of the *Tractatus*"

Week 4, Sep. 29, 2023: Wittgenstein and the Crisis of Modernity

Wittgenstein, *TLP*, excerpts: 6.3-6.4
Wittgenstein, *PU (Philosophical Investigations)*, excerpts: Motto and Preface
Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Remarks*, Foreword
Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, excerpts

Excerpts from: Weininger, Ernst, Mauthner, Haecker, Spengler

Recommended Readings:
Janik and Toulmin, *Wittgenstein's Vienna*, excerpts
Mauro Engelmann: "The Significance of a Negation: Mauthner, The *Tractatus* and the Kraus Circle"
Kevin Cahill, "The Concept of Progress in Wittgenstein's Philosophy"
Kevin Cahill: "*Bildung* and Decline"

Week 5, Oct. 6, 2023: Wittgenstein on Ritual and Myth

Wittgenstein, *Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough in Philosophical Occasions*, 118-155

Recommended Readings:
Wittgenstein, *Lectures, Cambridge 1930-1933, From the Notes of G. E. Moore* (Lecture 3b, May 5, 1933 and Lecture 4a, May 9, 1933)
Peter Winch: "Understanding a Primitive Society"

Week 6: Oct. 13, 2023: On Certainty & Lectures on Religious Belief

On Certainty §§1, 32, 67-115, 155-160, 261-264, 340-344, 410-418, 519, 608-620,

653-657

Wittgenstein, "Lectures on Religious Belief"
Wittgenstein, "Notes on Conversations with Rhees"

Recommended Readings:

Cora Diamond: "Criticizing from Outside"
Cora Diamond: "Dante's Skies"
Cora Diamond: "The Gulfs Between Us"

Week 7: Oct. 20, 2023: Rotating the Axis of Our Investigation

Wittgenstein, PU §§89-133
Wittgenstein, "Philosophy" in *Philosophical Occasions*, 160-199

Recommended Readings:

David Egan: "Pictures in Wittgenstein's Later Philosophy"
Cora Diamond: "Wittgenstein changes his mind"
(Audio: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sje2AZOrww0>)
Cora Diamond: "Criss-Cross Philosophy"
James Conant: "Wittgenstein's later criticism of the Tractatus"
Oskari Kuusela - "From Metaphysics and Philosophical Theses to Grammar"

Week 8: Nov. 3, 2023: Language Games and Family Resemblances

Wittgenstein, PU §1-88

Recommended Readings:

Stanley Cavell, "The Investigations' Everyday Aesthetics of Itself"
Stanley Cavell, "The Availability of Wittgenstein's Later Philosophy"
Stanley Cavell, "Notes and Afterthoughts"

Warren Goldfarb, "I Want You to Bring me A Slab"
Hacker/Baker: "The Augustinian Conception of Language"
Warren Goldfarb, "Wittgenstein on Fixity of Meaning"

Week 9: Nov. 10, 2023: Rules and Skepticism about Meaning

Wittgenstein, PU §§ 80-88, 134-155, 179-201
Saul Kripke – *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*, Ch. 1: The Wittgensteinian Paradox

Week 10 Nov. 17, 2023: Rules, Institutions, and the Life of the Sign

Wittgenstein, PU §§19, 23, 154-5, 179, 197, 201-242; 318, 322-326, 358-360; 430-437, 453-7, 5038; 692-693, Wittgenstein, PU II xi, 338-351, Wittgenstein, BB, pp.1-5

Recommended Readings:

John McDowell “Wittgenstein on Following a Rule”

Silver Bronzo - “Wittgenstein, Theories of Meaning and Linguistic Disjunctivism”

Cora Diamond: “Rules: Looking in the right Place”

Week 11: Nov. 24, 2023: The Threat of Privacy: Skepticism About Other Minds

Wittgenstein, PU: §§243-319, 357-363

Wittgenstein, PU, II xi. §§307-364

Wittgenstein, Zettel §380-394

Recommended Readings:

John W. Cook “Human Beings”

Norman Malcolm: “Knowledge of Other Minds”

John W. Cook, “Wittgenstein on Privacy”

John McDowell: “Criteria, Defeasibility and Knowledge”

Week 12: Dec. 1, 2023: Cavell on Wittgenstein as a Philosopher of Culture

Stanley Cavell: “Declining Decline”

Recommended Readings:

Stanley Cavell “Aesthetic Problems of Modern Philosophy”

Stanley Cavell “Music Discomposed”

Week 13: Dec 8, 2023: Aesthetics after Wittgenstein: Michael Fried

Michael Fried: “Jeff Wall, Wittgenstein and the Everyday”

Michael Fried, “Absorbed in the Action” *Art Forum*, September 2006,

(<https://www.artforum.com/print/200607/michael-fried-11492>)

Recommended Readings:

Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality* (excerpts)

Michael Fried, “Art and Objecthood”

Week 14: Dec. 15, 2023: Cora Diamond on Ethical Concepts and Their Historical Contexts

Cora Diamond: “Eating Meat and Eating People”

Cora Diamond: “Asymmetries in Thinking about Thought: Anscombe and Wiggins”

Recommended Readings:

Cora Diamond: “Losing your Concepts”

Cora Diamond: “The Concept of Being Human”

Cora Diamond: “Truth in Ethics: Williams and Wiggins”

Essay Deadlines

Midterm papers due 28.10.2023.

Final papers due 20.12.2023 (for graduating seniors: 18.12.2023)

Weekly response paper due on Friday, before class.

Library and Book Purchase Policies

A reader for the course will be made available (as PDF).

Students should purchase the following book: Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, tr. Anscombe, Hacker and Schulte, Blackwell 2009