

PHIL 4085/5085: Wittgenstein

Fall 2025 | Tues/Thurs 11:15 am – 12:30 pm | Blegen 205

Instructor:

Dr. Philip Bold

Email: bold0169@umn.edu

Office: Heller 805

Office hours: Tues/Thurs 10:10 – 11:00 am

Course Description:

This course offers an in-depth study of Ludwig Wittgenstein's philosophy, both early and late. Our discussions will focus primarily on Wittgenstein's two major works: *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (*Logisch-philosophische Abhandlung*) and *Philosophical Investigations* (*Philosophische Untersuchungen*). Along the way, we will pay special attention to his views on self and personhood, ethics, religion, and mysticism. The course will conclude with a consideration of the distinctly poetic aspects of Wittgenstein's philosophical style.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES:

Students in the course **can identify, define, and solve problems.**

Addressing the outcome

In this course, students will engage with some of philosophy's most enduring and challenging questions. Through the lens of Ludwig Wittgenstein's work, they will explore how these problems can be clearly formulated and examine his proposed resolutions. Students will also critically assess these solutions and develop their own informed positions.

Assessment of learning related to the outcome

This learning outcome will be assessed through class participation, a series of critical papers in which students articulate their reasoning on specific themes, and a final paper offering an extended critique of a central course issue.

Required Texts:

- Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (any version)
- Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (any version)

All other readings will be made available on Canvas.

Course Requirements for Undergraduate Students

1. Weekly Discussion Posts (10 total) 10%
2. Critical Essay 1 (4-6 pages) 20%
3. Critical Essay 2 (4-6 pages) 20%
4. Participation 50%
 - a. Attendance
 - b. Class Discussion
 - c. Quality of Discussion Posts

Major Deadlines:

Discussion Posts	Wednesdays before midnight
Critical Essay 1	Sat Oct 18 by midnight
Critical Essay 2	Sat Dec 20 by midnight

Course Requirements for Graduate Students

1. Weekly Discussion Posts (10 total) 10%
2. Instructor Meeting 1 5%
3. Instructor Meeting 2 5%
4. Term Paper (10-20 pages) 30%
5. Participation 50%
 - a. Attendance
 - b. Class Discussion
 - c. Quality of Discussion Posts

Major Deadlines:

Discussion Posts	Wednesdays before midnight
Meeting 1	no later than Fri Oct 31
Meeting 2	no later than Sun Nov 30
Term Paper	Sat Dec 20 by midnight

Description of Undergraduate Requirements

1. Weekly Discussion Posts (10%): Weekly posts in which students will either respond to a prompt assigned by the instructor or raise a thoughtful question about the course material in preparation for class discussion.

Students are allowed to skip 2 of the assigned discussion posts. Since 12 discussion posts are assigned, students are required to complete 10 discussion posts throughout the semester.

2. Critical Essay 1 (20%): Students are required to write a 1200 to 1800-word essay that critically evaluates (and/or interprets) Wittgenstein's views in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*.

3. Critical Essay 2 (20%): Students are required to write a 1200 to 1800-word essay that critically evaluates (and/or interprets) Wittgenstein's views in the *Philosophical Investigations*.

4. Participation (50%): Students are expected to attend all class meetings and actively participate in discussions. Participation grades are based on attendance, thoughtful contributions to discussions, and the quality of discussion posts. To succeed, students must complete assigned readings before each class. The instructor will provide participation grade estimates twice during the semester. **Electronic devices are not permitted in class unless the student has received special permission from the University and the instructor has been formally notified. Please bring a notebook and writing utensil to every class.**

Description of Graduate Requirements

1. **Weekly Discussion Posts (10%):** (Same as undergraduate.)
2. **Meeting 1 (5%):** Graduate students must arrange a meeting with the instructor to begin brainstorming their term paper, no later than Friday, October 31st.
3. **Meeting 2 (5%):** Graduate students must arrange a meeting with the instructor to propose their term paper plan, no later than Sunday, November 30th.
4. **Term Paper (30%):** A substantial paper (between 10 and 20 pages) that makes a serious academic contribution to Wittgenstein scholarship or related philosophical issues.
5. **Participation (50%):** (Same as undergraduate.)

Course Schedule

* Schedule is subject to change. * Complete readings prior to class.

INTRODUCTION

Tues Sep 2 Course Syllabus

Thurs Sep 4 Historical Background

(Optional: Plato, “Allegory of the Cave”; René Descartes, *Meditations*;
John Locke, “Of Words”; David Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature*;
Frege, “Thought”; Russell, “On Denoting”)

TRACTATUS LOGICO-PHILOSOPHICUS (THE “EARLY” WITTGENSTEIN)

(Optional Supplementary Text: James Klagge, *Tractatus in Context*)

Tues Sep 9 Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (TLP), Preface, 1 – 2.225

(Optional: James C. Klagge, *Simply Wittgenstein*, pp. 1 – 10)

Thurs Sep 11 TLP, 3 – 3.328; 3.334 – 3.4; 3.42 – 4.0141

(Optional: Klagge, *Simply Wittgenstein*, pp. 11 – 20)

Tues Sep 16 TLP, 4.015 – 4.041; 4.05 – 4.1251; 4.126 – 4.1272; 4.1274 – 4.26; 4.3 – 4.411;
4.441; 4.46 – 4.4661

(Optional: Klagge, *Simply Wittgenstein*, pp. 21 – 30)

Thurs Sep 18 TLP, 4.5 – 5.01; 5.11 – 5.131; 5.132 – 5.143; 5.2 – 5.24; 5.3; 5.32 – 5.41;
5.453 – 5.4541; 5.47 – 5.5; 5.502 – 5.511; 5.524, 5.525; 5.5262, 5.53;
5.5302, 5.5303; 5.533 – 5.535; 5.541 – 5.5421; 5.5423 – 5.5521;
5.556 – 5.5571

(Optional: Klagge, *Simply Wittgenstein*, pp. 31 – 39)

Tues Sep 23 TLP, 5.6 – 6.001; 6.1 – 6.12; 6.121 – 6.1231; 6.124 – 6.126; 6.1265 – 6.23;
6.341 – 6.36; 6.3611; 6.363 – 7

(Optional: Klagge, *Simply Wittgenstein*, pp. 40 – 51)

Thurs Sep 25 Silver Bronzo, “The Resolute Reading and its Critics”
P.M.S. Hacker, “Was He Trying to Whistle It?”

Tues Sep 30 Wittgenstein, “Lecture on Ethics” (1929)

Thurs Oct 2 P.M.S. Hacker, “The Color Exclusion Problem”
(Optional: Frank Ramsey, “Critical Notice of Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*”)

PHILOSOPHICAL INVESTIGATIONS (THE “LATER” WITTGENSTEIN)

(Optional Supplementary Text: G.P. Baker & P.M.S. Hacker, *Exegesis*)

Preliminary Overview

Tues Oct 7 Wittgenstein, *The Blue Book* (selections)
(Optional: Klagge, *Simply Wittgenstein*, pp. 52 – 62)

The Augustinian Picture

Thurs Oct 9 Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (PI), 1 – 20

Language Games

Tues Oct 14 PI, 20 – 40

Thurs Oct 16 *No Class*

FIRST PAPER DUE SATURDAY OCT 18 BY MIDNIGHT

Critique of Tractarian Analysis

Tues Oct 21 PI, 40 – 60
(Optional: Robert J. Fogelin, “Simples”; Philip Bold, “Hume on Simple and Complex Ideas: A Wittgensteinian Reappraisal”)

Family Resemblances

Thurs Oct 23 PI, 60 – 80

In what way is logic something sublime?

Tues Oct 28 PI, 80 – 100

Philosophy as Therapy

Thurs Oct 30 PI, 100 – 133

(Optional: Philip Bold, “Wittgenstein’s Therapeutic Conception of Philosophy”)

Following Rules

Tues Nov 4 PI, 185 – 242

(Optional: Philip Bold, “Crossing Pictures of ‘Determination’”)

Critique of Private Language

Thurs Nov 6 PI, 243 – 292

Tues Nov 11 PI, 293 – 309

Thurs Nov 13 Norman Malcolm, “Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations*”

(Optional: Stanley Cavell, “The Availability of Wittgenstein’s Later Philosophy”)

SPECIAL TOPICS: SELF AND PERSONS

Tues Nov 18 Wittgenstein, *The Blue Book* (selections), PI 398 – 416

Thurs Nov 20 Philip Bold, “Dissolution of the Metaphysical Self in Wittgenstein’s *Blue Book*”

THANKSGIVING BREAK

Tues Nov 25 *No Class*

Thurs Nov 27 *No Class*

SPECIAL TOPICS: ETHICS, RELIGION, AND MYSTICISM

Tues Dec 2 Wittgenstein, “Remarks on Frazer’s *Golden Bough*”

Thurs Dec 4 Wittgenstein, “Remarks on Frazer’s *Golden Bough*”

(Optional: Wittgenstein, “Lectures on Religious Belief”)

SPECIAL TOPICS: WITTGENSTEIN AND POETRY

Tues Dec 9 Marjorie Perloff, “Writing Philosophy as Poetry: Literary Form in Wittgenstein”

James C. Klagge, “Wittgenstein’s Poems”

Thurs Dec 11 Philip Bold, “The Role of Metaphor in Wittgenstein’s Therapeutic Philosophy”

FINAL REFLECTIONS

Tues Dec 16 Open Discussion

Thurs Dec 18 *Optional Office Hour*

FINAL PAPER DUE SATURDAY DEC 20 BY MIDNIGHT

Course Policies

- 1. No Technology in Class:** Students may not use electronic devices during class unless they have received special permission from the University and the instructor has been formally notified.
- 2. Late Work:** Late work will be penalized unless permission has been granted from the instructor.
- 3. Grading:** Final grades will be calculated as follows.

Letter Grades are translated to the following numerical scores.

A+ = 100	C+ = 78
A = 95	C = 75
A- = 92	C- = 72
B+ = 88	D+ = 68
B = 85	D = 65
B- = 82	F = 50

Final letter grades will be calculated using the following scale.

97-100 = A+	77-79 = C+
93-96 = A	73-76 = C
90-92 = A-	70-72 = C-
87-89 = B+	67-69 = D+
83-86 = B	60-66 = D
80-82 = B-	50 = F

Below is a list of general criteria that will be used to evaluate your writing assignments.

- Quality of ideas (50%)
 - *Range and depth of argument; fair representation of philosopher’s position; logic of argument; quality and/or originality of thought; appropriate sense of the complexity of the topic; appropriate awareness of opposing views.*

- Organization and Argumentation (40%)
 - *Clarity of thesis statement in the introduction; logical and clear arrangement of ideas; effective use of transitions; unity and coherence of paragraphs; good development of arguments through supporting details and evidence.*
 - Clarity, style, and grammar (10%)
 - *Ease of readability; appropriate voice, tone, and style for the assignment; clarity of sentence structure; grammatically correct sentences; accurate spelling; careful proofreading.*
4. **Plagiarism:** Plagiarism will result in a final grade of F for the course. If you have any questions about plagiarism or how to properly cite sources, do not hesitate to ask. According to the UMN Student Conduct Code: “Plagiarism shall mean representing the words, creative work, or ideas of another person as one’s own without providing proper documentation of source.”
 5. **Use of AI:** Students are strongly discouraged from using AI platforms to complete any writing assignments.
 6. **Disability Accommodations:** If you have, or think you have, a disability that would affect your performance in this course, please contact the Disability Resource Center (DRC) <https://ars.unc.edu/> to arrange confidential discussion regarding equitable access and reasonable accommodations.
 7. **Sexual Misconduct.** Sexual misconduct (sexual harassment, sexual assault, stalking, and relationship violence) includes unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and/or other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature. Such behavior is prohibited in the University setting.

Per the [U of M policy on sexual harassment](#), I am required to share information that I learn about possible sexual misconduct with the campus Title IX office. Within the requirements of my job, I will be as responsive as possible to your requests for confidentiality and support. You can also, or alternately, choose to talk with a confidential resource that will not share information that they learn about sexual misconduct. Confidential resources include:

- The Aurora Center 24hr Helpline (612-626-9111)
- Boynton Mental Health (612-624-1444)
- Student Counseling Services (612-624-3323)

8. Other Useful Resources:

- Technology resources for remote learning: <https://it.umn.edu/working-learning-campus/get-internet-access-campus>
- University Policies: <https://policy.umn.edu/>
- Student Writing Support: <http://writing.umn.edu/sws/>

- Disability Resource Center: <https://disability.umn.edu/>
- Student Counseling Center: <https://counseling.umn.edu/>
- The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: <https://plato.stanford.edu>