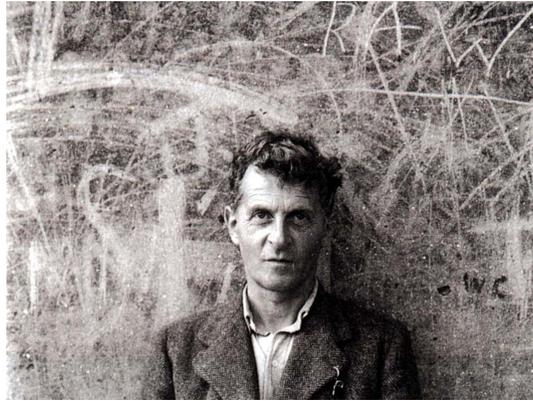


Ludwig Wittgenstein



1 Philosophical Significance

Ludwig Wittgenstein's philosophy is typically separated into "early" and "later" periods. During his early period, Wittgenstein and Bertrand Russell jointly developed a philosophy known as "logical atomism." According to this view, the world consists of ultimate logical "atoms," which are the basis for any meaningful statement. Statements could thus be *analyzed* to reveal their logical atoms (hence the name "analytic philosophy").

Wittgenstein's later philosophy represents a sharp divergence from his earlier views. His later views are much closer in spirit to the ordinary language philosophers, though some people resist assimilating him to that school because of methodological differences. He regarded himself as introducing different philosophical "therapies": methods for working oneself out of what he called "philosophical confusions," which are caused by our ways of speaking. Philosophy, he said, "is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of our language" (*Philosophical Investigations*, §109).

2 Writing Style

Wittgenstein's writing is very challenging, yet very rewarding. He thinks of himself as a guide, wanting the reader to do much of the work themselves. Thus he is fond of asking questions which he doesn't answer himself. The answers, he thinks, are things that we actually knew all along, just in virtue

of knowing our language. That being said, the Blue and Brown Books (which we will be reading) were actually notes dictated to his students. So fortunately for us, he does more of the work himself in these books, rather than asking the reader to supply the answers.

Of course, this by no means implies that the reading is easy. This is the most challenging material we will read this semester; it is entirely natural to struggle with it.

3 Reading Questions

These reading questions are intended to help you focus when doing the reading. You are not required to write up answers; this is purely for your benefit. This class tests you on how well you understand the authors that we cover, and these questions are intended to help promote that understanding.

- 1) On page 1 of the Blue Book, Wittgenstein says the following:

The questions “What is length?”, “What is meaning?”, “What is the number one?” etc, produce in us a mental cramp. We feel that we can’t point to anything in reply to them and yet ought to point to something. (We are up against one of the great sources of philosophical bewilderment: a substantive makes us look for a thing that corresponds to it.)

What does he mean by this?

- 2) What is the point of Wittgenstein’s discussion of giving someone the order, “Now pick a banjo from amongst these things”? (Hint: it has to do with the “act of interpretation.”)
- 3) How does Wittgenstein recommend that we avoid the “occult appearance of the processes of thinking”?
- 4) Wittgenstein starts out by asking, “What is the meaning of a word?” How does he recommend we attack this question? Note that he never gives us a succinct answer. Is this an oversight?