

PHIL 3920/5920
Spring 2022
Thursdays 4:30–7pm
Classroom: Furman 106

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Wittgenstein, Skepticism, and Language

Course Description

This seminar is dedicated to Ludwig Wittgenstein's magnum opus, the *Philosophical Investigations*. Published posthumously in 1953, the *Investigations* is among the most important and influential works of philosophy in the twentieth century. Wittgenstein takes on a startlingly broad range of philosophical problems and themes, including: the nature of language and meaning; the foundations of logic and mathematics; our capacity to know and to acknowledge others' pains, emotions, and other 'inner' states; our capacity to learn and participate in social practices and norms; the nature of consciousness and self-consciousness; and questions concerning the limitations, methods, and pathologies of philosophy itself. The *Investigations* is also responsible for introducing several now widespread terms into our contemporary philosophical vocabularies, for example, the notions of *forms of life*, *language-games*, *family resemblances*, *grammar*, and *seeing aspects*. Our goal in this class shall be to engage in a close reading of the *Philosophical Investigations* while simultaneously gaining an appreciation of the history of its reception by reading a selection of texts that comment upon, criticize, or extend Wittgenstein's text. Towards this end, we shall pay special attention to the work of Stanley Cavell, particularly his focus on the themes of skepticism and language in his book, *The Claim of Reason*. Other authors to be read include Elizabeth Anscombe, Veena Das, Cora Diamond, Juliet Floyd, Saul Kripke, John McDowell, Iris Murdoch, and Peter Winch, among others.

Course Texts

The following two books are required and have been ordered to the university bookstore:

1. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*. Trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, P.M.S. Hacker, and Joachim Schulte. Revised 4th Edition. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009.
2. Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy*. New Edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979.

Additional readings will be provided as PDFs on Brightspace.

Evaluation

This is a mezzanine course, which means that there are separate evaluative pathways for students registered in different levels of the course (3000-level vs. 5000-level). That distinction applies only at the point of evaluation. In practice, we will be together as one scholarly community.

UNDERGRADUATE 3920		GRADUATE 5920	
Participation	20%	Participation	20%
Reading Notes	20%	Reading Notes	20%
Midterm Paper	30%	Final Paper	60%
Final Paper	30%		

Participation

Philosophy involves not only reading and writing, but also respectful discussion and debate. Each member of the class is expected to contribute consistently. Such contributions may take the form of asking questions, raising objections, or offering reasoned responses. Each member of the class is also expected to develop and demonstrate their abilities as an interlocutor, abilities which should be exhibited by attentive listening, charitable interpretation, and offering constructive feedback.

For 5920 students only: Once during the semester, graduate students will give a brief presentation to the class on the week's assigned reading. Your presentation should be 10-15 minutes long. You should concentrate on a particular argument, idea, or portion of the text rather than attempting to cover the entire reading. I recommend both that you make use of secondary material and that you discuss the content of your presentation with one of your instructors beforehand. You are welcome to include a handout or powerpoint presentation

Reading Notes

By our second meeting, students will be divided into two groups, Group A and Group B. Each week that you see your group listed in the reading schedule below, you will complete a set of Reading Notes for that each week's reading. The point of these Notes is twofold: to help you to clarify your thoughts about some dense and tricky material as you would in preparing to teach it or write about it; and to get us engaged with the texts in a way that promotes real discussion. Notes will be submitted the day before class by 5:00pm via Brightspace. A template will be provided to you.

Reading Notes will be graded as follows: a "0" for missing, late, or inadequate notes, a "1" for satisfactory notes, and a "2" for especially thoughtful, thorough, and clear notes. If you turn in all five of your Reading Notes and get all "1's," you will receive a "B" for this portion of your grade. For each "0" you receive, your Reading Notes grade will decrease by one half grade (e.g., B to B-).

For each “1” you receive, your Reading Notes grade will increase by one half grade (e.g., B to B+) to a maximum of A+.

Midterm Paper (3920 Students Only)

All undergraduate students will write a midterm paper (5 to 7 pages), due by the date listed on the schedule below. It should be uploaded to Brightspace under “Assignments.” A grading rubric will be provided. Paper topics may include any of the readings covered during the first half of the course.

Final Paper

For 3905 students: A final paper (5 to 7 pages) is due one week after our final class. It should be uploaded to Brightspace under “Assignments.” A grading rubric will be provided. Paper topics may include any of the readings covered during the second half of the course.

For 5905 students: A final paper (15 to 20 pages) is due one week after our final class meeting. It should be uploaded to Brightspace under “Assignments.” Though the paper should engage primarily with texts assigned in class, I encourage you to go deeper by exploring additional relevant literature in your paper topic area.

Grading Scale

Letter Grade	Numerical Equivalent
A	93-100
A-	90-92
B+	87-89
B	83-86
B-	80-82
C+	77-79
C	73-76
C-	70-72
D+	67-69
D	63-66
D-	60-62
F	0-59

Accessibility

Vanderbilt University is committed to providing reasonable accommodations for all persons with disabilities. To receive such accommodations students are to apply for services through the Student Access Center. The Center can be reached at disabilityservices@vanderbilt.edu and is located in the Baker Building, Suite 108.

Academic Integrity

All students are required to make themselves familiar with the Vanderbilt University Undergraduate Honor Code:

Vanderbilt University students pursue all academic endeavors with integrity. They conduct themselves honorably, professionally, and respectfully in all realms of their studies in order to promote and secure an atmosphere of dignity and trust. The keystone of the honor system is self-regulation, which requires cooperation and support from each member of the University community.

As individuals, each person is called to uphold this code as described in the undergraduate honor code pledge:

I pledge to pursue all academic endeavors with honor and integrity. I understand the principles of the Honor System, and I promise to uphold these standards by adhering to the Honor Code in order to preserve the integrity of Vanderbilt University and its individual members.

In any case of suspected misconduct in this course, the case in question will be submitted for review by the Honor Council.

Reading Schedule

Week	Date	Readings	Assignments Due
1	1/20		<u>Watch</u> : “A Guided Tour of the Syllabus” video on Brightspace
2	1/27	Wittgenstein, <i>Philosophical Investigations</i> , Preface and §§1–20 Warren Goldfarb, “I Want You to Bring Me a Slab: Remarks on the Opening Sections of the <i>Philosophical Investigations</i> ” (PDF)	
3	2/3	Wittgenstein, <i>Philosophical Investigations</i> , §§21–43 Stanley Cavell, “Notes and Afterthoughts on the Opening of Wittgenstein’s <i>Investigations</i> ” (PDF)	Group A

4	2/10	Wittgenstein, <i>Philosophical Investigations</i> , §§44–88 Warren Goldfarb, “Wittgenstein on Fixity of Meaning” (PDF) Renford Bambrough, “Universals and Family Resemblances” (PDF)	Group B
5	2/17	Wittgenstein, <i>Philosophical Investigations</i> , §§89–133 Cora Diamond, “Criss-Cross Philosophy” (PDF) Stanley Cavell, “The Availability of Wittgenstein’s Late Philosophy” (PDF)	Group A
6	2/24	Wittgenstein, <i>Philosophical Investigations</i> , §§134–184 Warren Goldfarb, “Wittgenstein on Understanding” (PDF) John McDowell, “Are Meaning, Understanding, etc., Definite States?” (PDF)	Group B
7	3/3	Wittgenstein, <i>Philosophical Investigations</i> , §§185–242 Saul Kripke, <i>Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language</i> , Preface and Chap. 1 & 2 (PDF) Elizabeth Anscombe, “Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language” (PDF)	Midterm Paper (3920 students only)
	3/5– 3/13	Spring Break	
8	3/17	Wittgenstein, <i>Philosophical Investigations</i> , §§243–315 Iris Murdoch, “Wittgenstein and the Inner Life” (PDF)	Group A
9	3/24	Wittgenstein, <i>Philosophical Investigations</i> , §§316–427 Stanley Cavell, “Knowing and Acknowledging” (PDF)	Group B

10	3/31	Wittgenstein, <i>Philosophical Investigations</i> , PI §§428–693 Juliet Floyd, “ <i>Lebensformen</i> : Living Logic” (PDF)	Group A
11	4/7	Wittgenstein, “Philosophy of Psychology – A Fragment” (formerly Part II of the <i>Investigations</i> , included in our edition, pp. 182–244). Peter Winch, “Eine Einstellung Zur Seele” (PDF)	Group B
12	4/14	Stanley Cavell, <i>The Claim of Reason</i> , Part One, Chap. I, II, and III (pp. 3–64)	Group A
13	4/21	Stanley Cavell, <i>The Claim of Reason</i> , Part One, Chap. IV and V (pp. 65–125) Veena Das, “Ordinary Ethics” (PDF)	Group B
14	4/28	Stanley Cavell, <i>The Claim of Reason</i> , Part Two, Chap. VII (pp. 168–190) and selections from Part Four (pp. 329–354, 370–383, 403–416)	