

# Applied Ethics Book Club: Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*

Dr. Jared Parmer

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[Dates and location removed]

## Description and Learning Outcomes

This book-club-style seminar is a sustained, active reading of Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* (*Philosophische Untersuchungen*), a book of immense philosophical significance, unusual form, and intensely original argumentation. The principal goal is for us – students, instructor, and guests – to come to grips with this difficult text. Unlike as in more conventional seminars, your instructor is not an expert on this particular text, but will use his background philosophical training and experience to guide our activity.

The formal requirements of this course reflect how experienced philosophers approach unfamiliar texts. In meeting those requirements, students will practice careful and close reading, and philosophical comprehension at multiple levels of granularity.

## Required Course Material

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Philosophical Investigations* / *Philosophische Untersuchungen*.

The edition I recommend is the Wiley-Blackwell revised 4th edition, with English translation by G.E.M. Anscombe, P.M.S. Hacker, and Joachim Schulte. ISBN: 9781444307979.

- Side-by-side German / English text, and the English translation has a good reputation.
- Available from Dussmann in PDF for a reasonable price (€20) [here](#).

As this is a book club, you are *required* to get a copy of the text.

## Assessment

[Curriculum-specific details removed] Grades in this course are determined by several components. All students must pass Active Participation to receive any credit (pass/fail or numerical grade); only students seeking a numerical final grade must write a passing Final Close-Reading Paper.

## Active Participation

First, attendance to every meeting is expected – two absences with good reason will be permitted (sent to me by email in advance and approved). In truly exceptional cases, contact me.

Second, you must actively participate in each session's discussion and activities. Always **bring at least once question you have** concerning the text for that week's session.

Third, you will be expected to lead at least one meeting as 'discussion leader'. Your goal is to get discussion started, not to be an 'expert' on the reading for the week. There are at least two options:

1. Sketch an argument you take Wittgenstein to be making, over one or several sections, and pose a few critical questions about it. If the argument's from one short section, aim bigger.

2. If it *feels* like Wittgenstein is making a particular argument over a few sections, but you simply cannot make out what it is, lead us through a *very close reading* of those sections, offering your best attempt at an interpretation along the way.

You should **take notes in preparation**. If you just wing it, we'll be able to tell (I promise), and it will threaten your grade.

Fourth, all students will be expected to contribute to our 'community index' of the PI. This is just like the index you'll find at the back of scholarly books, except we'll build it ourselves as we go. A few students per week will be assigned this role, and each student will have this role at least twice.

- I will send you an invitation email to the Google Doc.
- **Important:** be sure to set the button in the top right of the screen to 'Suggesting' before you start to write into the index. *Do not use 'Editing'!*
- **Important:** be sure that your suggestions appear *under your name*, not under 'Anonymous Scarab' or some other form of anonymous animal.

*You must pass all four components of Active Participation to earn any credit for this course.*

### Final Close-Reading Paper

You will be expected to write a paper of **approximately 5,000 words**, in which you develop and defend an extended reading of one topic or theme from the PI. In particular, you are to *articulate an argument* that you take Wittgenstein to be giving, provide textual evidence to support ascribing that argument to him, and subject it to critical scrutiny. Here, 'critical scrutiny' means to reckon with alternative interpretations of the relevant passages (especially those that arise among us over the course of this semester) and the general plausibility and validity of the argument you ascribe to Wittgenstein.

*Your own reading* of Wittgenstein must be your principal guide for this paper. Secondary literature (i.e., work written by later scholars *about* the PI) is acceptable to use, but *very sparingly*.

Time permitting, we will workshop initial ideas for your final papers in class together. You also have the option of submitting an outline of your Final Close-Reading Paper to me, at the very end of the lecture period. I will give you feedback and help you figure out this assignment, which might be unusual for you. You are very strongly encouraged to take me up on this offer, as your paper entirely determines your numerical grade for this book club!

Schedule [student identities anonymized]

	Reading	Discussion Leader	Indexers
08.04		N/A – Introductory session	
15.04		No meeting – Good Friday / Karfreitag	
22.04	§§1–58	Jared	Student A
29.04	§§32–59	Student B	Student C
06.05	§§60–89	Student D	Student E
13.05	§§89–140	Student D	Student B
20.05	§§141–184	Student E	Student C
27.05	§§185–243	Student C	Student A
03.06		No class – Jared away	
10.06		No meeting – Pentecost Week / Pfingstwoche	
14.06	§§244–316	Student B	Student D
24.06	§§316–409	Student E	Jared
01.07	§§409–494	Student A	Student B
08.07	§§494–590, §§591–end	Student A, Student C	Student E, Student D
15.07	papers		
		Due 05.08: Final Paper Outline (optional)	Due 26.08: Final Paper