

Philosophy 426 – The Philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein  
Spring 2012 - Syllabus

**Professor:** Larry A. Herzberg

**Email:** [herzberg@uwosh.edu](mailto:herzberg@uwosh.edu)

**Phone:** 424-7313

**Schedule/Location:** Tuesdays & Thursdays 1:20-2:50, Polk 19.

**Office hours:** Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday 3:00-4:00, Clow Faculty Offices 416

**Text:** *Philosophical Investigations*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition (2009).

**About the course-** Many prominent philosophers of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century adopted the guiding assumption that the most intractable problems of philosophy arose entirely from misinterpretations of language. Better interpretations, they argued, required a sort of “deep logical analysis” that presupposed a particular view of scientific verification and utilized a mathematically precise symbolic notation. Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951) began his career advocating just such a view, but then turned passionately against it. In fact, he came to believe that most of his colleagues were desperately in need of a sort of “philosophical therapy” – one that involved carefully attending to the many ways in which words were actually used. To this end, he devised an alternative methodology that utilized “language games” to illuminate how one *should* understand linguistic meaning. We will discuss his most influential expression of this methodology in *Philosophical Investigations* (1953), a book that radically challenged the dominant philosophical paradigm of its time.

**Grading-** Your grade for this course will be based on two 5-7 page writing assignments, the first due roughly at midterm, the second due the final day of class. Although I will be assigning the topic(s) for these papers, you may suggest your own topic as long as it has my prior approval at least a week before the due date. **Each paper will be worth 33.3% of your final grade.** They will be graded on the basis of three main criteria: (1) the extent to which it demonstrates an understanding of the material covered in class, (2) the clarity and completeness of your logical reasoning, and (3) the overall quality – in terms of grammar and spelling – of the writing. Papers will be submitted and graded online via our D2L site’s Dropbox.

**The final 33.3% of your final grade will be based on your attendance and participation.** My reason for emphasizing attendance and participation to this extent in this class is simple: *most* of the knowledge you gain in this class will be from class discussions. Due to Wittgenstein’s unique style of conversing with himself, sympathetically developing the positions of his antagonists before attempting to reduce them to absurdity, the text by itself is notoriously difficult to understand. Of course, I will supply you with helpful interpretive information, such as who Wittgenstein thought his antagonists were. However, unlike my other classes, which rely heavily on handouts that “pre-digest” the material, in this class I want you to engage deeply with the text, first by reading it closely, repeatedly, and then by puzzling over the details, the most important of which we will hash out together in class. This, I believe, is how Wittgenstein would have wanted *Philosophical Investigations* taught, for, like a Zen master inviting us to contemplate paradoxical *koans*, Wittgenstein did not discourage puzzlement; on the contrary, he saw it as a necessary way-station on the long and winding road that would hopefully lead to philosophical enlightenment – a state in which *philosophical problems should simply disappear!*