



Introducing Wittgenstein

John Heaton, Judy Groves, Richard Appignanesi

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Ludwig Wittgenstein has somehow captured the popular imagination as the modern Socrates, the fascinating and attractive master of enigmatic logic. But what did Wittgenstein really say?

Introducing Wittgenstein Details

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Tomáš Prištiak says

I found this (strangely enough) comic book on W. witty, surprisingly revealing and rich in thoughts. There are not that many detailed explanations, but still it got pretty deep in pointing at basics of his concepts and it serves as a nice overview on the whole body of his work. The book also shows many peculiar details, nice pun-like points and life events in connection to his philosophy. It encourages you to dig deeper and explore the rich and mesmerising thought of the genius of Ludwig Wittgenstein.

david says

Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, Wittgenstein's only book, and less than one hundred pages, is some difficult read for this reviewer.

Even though I was a virgin in the graphic book department until this week, I needed a simplified version to understand this guy.

So, I guess I cheated.

Anyway, I now understand a little bit about his thoughts, probably as much as Ludwig himself understood them.

He is dead now. I seem to be alive. All the erudition that he received from others and I received from him, is sitting quietly in a corner of my cranium temporarily, just waiting to leak out into nothingness.

Anyway, interesting life, interesting character, interesting theories.

However, if tomorrow someone presented me with a choice, a conversation about this Austrian or a coffee almond fudge ice cream cone, I would go with the dessert.

Ruth says

Hmm, it was a comic book so I thought it was going to make things simpler but I still didn't really get a lot of the ideas, plus the drawings weren't that great. I might have been better off actually trying to read the Tractatus. There was a part in the middle about thinking that I got a little interested in, but overall I wasn't feeling it.

Charles Purpura says

Such a fun way to introduce a philosopher. Heaton uses a lot of pictures, examples, just plain text to go through and explain central themes to Wittgenstein. Albeit not comprehensive, it is an introduction and it an

awesome primer for his work.

David Balfour says

The biographical portions of this are pretty good but you can get them equally well from a quick visit to Wikipedia. The images are mostly unrelated to the content - just random, poorly-drawn comics and cheap surrealist collage that fail almost completely to supplement the text. The explanations of Wittgenstein's thought are heavily simplified and paraphrased, and lack his resonant turn of phrase. It all seems either too obvious or too obtuse, and it's hard to understand why anything he says is of interest. Heaton summarises some of Wittgenstein's statements in the broadest terms possible but gives no idea of why he actually made them. Without the reasoning behind Wittgenstein's thought, it all feels pretty shallow and wishy-washy. Heaton actually manages to diminish *and* confuse Wittgenstein's thought. Honestly, just jump straight into the *Tractatus* if you have any background in philosophy. The guide on Sparknotes was infinitely more helpful and interesting. Ray Monk's book *How to Read Wittgenstein* is also much better, being an introductory commentary on key extracts from Wittgenstein's work, including the *Tractatus*.

Daniel Chaikin says

Immediate response: It helped. This seems to be a good starting point on Wittgenstein.

A short review, from July 10:

As part of my weird quest-to-reread-Infinite-Jest, I decided I needed to read certain key influences on David Foster Wallace, including Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*...or did I? And anyway, where to start on such a book? So, I started here. The illustrations are random and vaguely pointless, but text is nice and simple. It highlights how absolutely fascinating Wittgenstein the person was. I finished quite a bit confused on *Tractatus*, but felt something of a comprehension of Wittgenstein's main later work, [Philosophical Investigations] (published posthumously). The overall effect of this book was to get me started on and interested in Wittgenstein. That's a success.

Adriana Scarpin says

Pois então, faz muito mais sentido Wittgenstein em quadrinhos ou no cinema, mais que ser lido ou ouvido, Wittgenstein deve ser visto.

Chris says

For those of you who don't know, the "Introducing" series published by Totem Books is a graphic novel presentation of big ideas and their thinkers. They are fun to read and a huge help for visual learners. It's true there isn't as much information as could fit onto a fully-worded page, but it makes up in mnemonic

assistance what it lacks in exhaustive content. Also, because there isn't as much emphasis placed on written content as pictorial interpretation, the effort to highlight central concepts is predominant. It almost felt in parts that this was Wittgensteinian philosophy in outline form, which definitely has its perks. Though, I won't lie, it did at times teeter on the edge of skimming ideas that really require much more explanation, for the most part it provided an adequate amount. The worst part of it all is that some of the illustrations were entirely gratuitous, obviously designed to fill up space, and had very little to do with the topic; but even then they help you to remember what you learned on that page even if by their utter pointlessness. Which brings me back to my point that this book is extremely helpful as a memory tool for primary principles, and since I read it in conjunction with excerpts from Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* and *Philosophical Investigations* (which I highly recommend), it served as a very enjoyable reinforcement for my understanding.

Wittgenstein was a genius, no doubt. This guy was raised in one of the wealthiest families in Vienna. He was seriously rich. His family had popular composers and artists over to the house all the time. After the war, the family increased in wealth as a result of smart stock investments in the U.S. But none of that is interesting in and of itself; what is interesting is that none of this determined Ludwig as a sybarite and dandy. When WWI broke out, he volunteered to fight on the front lines, and even then, when first seeing the enemy on the battlefield, he wrote, "Now I have a chance to be a decent human being, for I am standing eye to eye with death." When he was finally taken as a prisoner of war, he refused to accept his release until the men under his command were released with him. He even requested to be transferred from his camp to another to assist his countrymen who had contracted typhoid. Now here's a man who, when he has something to say, makes one listen.

Wittgenstein began his education and career path as an engineer, with a penchant for mathematics. His love of solving problems led him ultimately into philosophy. Many big philosophers back in the day were wealthy aristocrats, as large fortunes and prestige bring with them ample opportunities for educational advancement, recognition, and easy publication of their ideas. Bertrand Russell, Wittgenstein's mentor, was a very good example of this. But although Wittgenstein was probably one of the more wealthy philosophers in the pool of contenders across the ages, he determined not to think from the comfort of his couch. His *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (Latin for "Logical-Philosophical Treatise"), his first opus for which he was awarded a doctorate, was written while he was fighting on the front lines! His later work, *Philosophical Investigations*, was published posthumously from his lectures, and is quintessentially the heroic Wittgenstein to its core in that it unsparingly and unflinchingly debunked his own first work!

I have a lot of respect for this man, even though he made some really dumb mistakes. While he was teaching in a poor village in Austria, supposedly out of the goodness of his heart, he apparently caned boys and pulled girls' hair for wrong answers. That is most definitely NOT cool, even though the word caning makes me laugh. He was described by Russell as an intense, volatile, and "domineering" genius. Russell was often seriously concerned about Wittgenstein's mental physical health due to his obsessive compulsiveness and distress over thought-problems. Biographers of Wittgenstein's famous disagreement with Karl Popper (see my review of Wittgenstein's Poker at <http://bookburningservice.blogspot.co...>) have him wielding a hot poker at Popper for frustrating him during a routine classroom debate at the Moral Science Club, which meetings Wittgenstein was famous for crashing. But, despite losing face at the poker-debate, Wittgenstein didn't commit suicide like his other three brothers, so... Point—Wittgenstein (Ludwig).

His non-corporeal teaching methods and views on academia were the most intriguing part of his life for me. His students described his style as discursive and spontaneous. He would wrestle with questions out-loud, and invite his students into working towards the answers with him right then and there. He wanted learning to be organic and hands-on as much as possible, which probably stemmed from his engineering background. He loathed the artifice and hubris of academic atmospheres, and believed that they often encouraged

hypotheticals, tautologies, and specious reasoning which diverged widely from a real world with real problems. His style was the kind in which thought and language experiments (games) teased new solutions out of his mind and the minds of his students. He endeavored to work in concert with the brain, instead of bridling the mind's full potential within the confines of formalities and structures designed to impress other people and build an institution's reputation. He preferred real learning in the face of paper degrees, professorial bluster, and servile gpa-performance.

As I mentioned before, in tandem with reading Introducing Wittgenstein I also read selections from Wittgenstein's Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus and Philosophical Investigations. The difficulty of a layman comprehending these texts is evidenced in the first few sentences of Wittgenstein's preface to the Tractatus which included the quasi-caution, "Perhaps this book will be understood only by someone who has himself already had the thoughts that are expressed in it—or at least similar thoughts...Its purpose would be achieved if it gave pleasure to one person who read and understood it"; but his obvious lack of confidence in anyone being able to perfectly accomplish that feat was demonstrated as he patted his examiners G.E. Moore and Bertrand Russell on the back the moment after they awarded him a PhD for it, saying to them, "Don't worry, I know you'll never understand it."

One of the things I came across in this my second reading of the excerpts of Wittgenstein's Tractatus and Philosophical Investigations is his defense of common parlance against academic definitions. He attacks again and again the dissection of life for the sake of science. Life is best known when it is lived, and language is best studied as it is spoken and used, although there is some limited value in specification and definition.

To repeat, we can draw a boundary—for a special purpose. Does it take that to make the concept usable? Not at all! (Except for that special purpose.) No more than it took the definition: 1 pace = 75 cm. to make the measure of length 'one pace' usable. And if you want to say "But still, before that it wasn't an exact measure", then I reply: very well, it was an exact one. –Though you still owe me a definition of exactness...Is it even always an advantage to replace an indistinct picture by a sharp one? Isn't the indistinct one often exactly what we need? (Philosophical Investigations)

However, Wittgenstein didn't believe vagueness was always our only option, just that it was often true to the world we find ourselves in. Responding to the very real need of discovering and formulating more precise definitions at times, Wittgenstein says that there are very workable "family resemblances" between words and ideas, long before an artificial definition is set up as a warden to prevent meaning from leaking out. Consider words like 'good'. He says that "there is no one common property which the word good refers to. But there are resemblances between the various meanings of the term—like family resemblances" (Introducing Wittgenstein). These 'family resemblances' are the foundation for any definition we might come up with, and it's best we get comfortable with this notion, because it's the way cognition operates fundamentally. "We give examples of similarities and do not attempt to define them, as there are no sharp boundaries" (IW).

It may sound profound to some, or like linguistic sacrilege to others, but really, how could anyone have missed the simple truism of everyday life that every word in every mouth means something a bit different? If twenty different people use supposedly the same word to indicate twenty slightly different things, with twenty different reasons to use it, and hundreds of unique personal experiences to help define it, which passed through thousands of different meanings from different people and their own personal experiences, then why would we think a dead dictionary or an isolated professor at his lonely desk in a quiet room would ever know enough about that word and its myriad meanings to tell a person what they meant when they used it in that one unrepeatable instant? We now see the problem Wittgenstein was highlighting, for he was

always keen on turning “latent nonsense into patent nonsense.”

No doubt some good ole’ professor can arrive some original sense in our word. “[Oftentimes] the kinship [between two somewhat ‘vague’ categories like color] is just as undeniable as the difference. (PI)”, but let our esteemed lexicographers take care how they go about measuring something that’s still alive, moving, and growing.

Imagine having to sketch a sharply defined picture ‘corresponding’ to a blurred one... In such a difficulty always ask yourself: How did we learn the meaning of this word (“good” for instance)? From what sort of examples? In what language-games [unique word-play and personal communication scenarios]? Then it will be easier for you to see that the word must have a family of meanings. (PI)

The language idea basically boils down to the simple problem of thinking and ideas: thinking does not constitute reality. Our internal models of the universe are not the universe. The most complete and explicit data to be had about the universe...IS the universe. You’re welcome.

Wittgenstein, along with writers/thinkers like Jean-Paul Sartre, were the anti-academic, anti-elitist voices who challenged the high thinking and low living of many of their aristocratic contemporaries. He was unwieldy, but probably in a way that kept those around him honest and, well, caught. He was the people’s man in high places, and many will never know how successfully he may have grounded the intelligentsia from a tyrannical control of ideas which belong to the instinctual rabble as much as anyone. Who knows where fascist, top-down oppression and manipulation would occur next if not for representatives of the common man acting as saboteurs and ‘inside men’ to disrupt the haughty detachment that often infects the privileged. Wittgenstein was a hero. When he wasn’t teaching in remote villages in Austria. Or wielding hot pokers at visiting lecturers.

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Apoorva says

More biography than ideas. Still informative.

Victor Diaz Magallon says

Es un libro que te introduce de forma más amable a la filosofía Wittgensteniana.

Al estilo Rius, -con dibujitos y toda la cosa- esta publicación contiene un poco de su historia personal, académica, pero sobre todo explica -con palitos y bolitas- sus dos obras capitales: Tractatus lógico-filosófico e Investigaciones filosóficas.

Un excelente libro para comprender el pensamiento y el alcancé que ha tenido -en el arte, en la cultura y en el conocimiento de nuestra realidad- uno de los filósofos más importantes del siglo XX.

Dale says

I've been reading a few books from the 'Introducing ... A Graphics Guide' series the past several weeks. They've been surprisingly good, and this one is no exception. Over the years I've read quite a bit of Wittgenstein (Foundations of Mathematics, Philosophical Investigations, On Certainty, and the Blue and Brown books), but knew next to nothing of Wittgenstein's life and (ironically) next to nothing of his personal view of life. This little book filled in those gaps.

Wittgenstein is a deceptively difficult philosopher. When you read Philosophical Investigations, for example, you're faced with a lot of aphorisms and seemingly simple questions. You have an idea that he's aiming at something, and that you might be expected to 'get' it, but the main point always seems just out of reach. Or at least that was so for me - your mileage may vary. But one thing that comes across in everything I've read by Wittgenstein makes one thing very clear: he had an extraordinary ability to identify mental laziness and habits of thought that lead us to make unwarranted assumptions.

This book helps show some of the things that Wittgenstein was getting at. And it includes a brief bibliography at the end if you want more detail (including a reference to a 4 volume 2000 page analysis of Philosophical Investigations!).

Abdulaziz Al-Mannai says

Enjoyed reading about his interesting life, the illustrations. However, the summary of his thoughts wasn't consistent in terms of some of them were well explained and some seemed to be more complicated or perhaps too simplified that they don't make sense and could be written in a better way maybe. I have to read Wittgenstein's book myself to know that. Good book in general.

Seth says

i've realized that one of my favorite things about the philosophy classes i took at carleton was hashing it out in class with the other students. somehow, reading a condensed version of philosophy like this, without the knowledge that i'm going to take some kernel of understanding with me into a classroom, the words just don't resonate the same way. plus, the average person you talk to will treat you like a joker if you engage in the kinds of philosophical ramblings that wittgenstein will induce. still, it reminds me of my first classes on epistemology, thinking about thinking, in a good way.

Jimmy says

An example of a logical picture would be, "There is a lion in the room." But that could be true or false. We can check the room and see that it is false. One problem I have is with Wittgenstein's personal belief system. What if I said, "There is an angel in the room" or "God is in the room." Would Wittgenstein call those statements true? Possibly. Kind of defeats the purpose of what he is saying. I mean, if an angel that we do not see can be in the room, why not a lion?

Solipsism is the belief that nothing exists beyond the self. Feels that way, doesn't it? Bertrand Russell speaks of a woman who told him, "I'm a solipsist, but why aren't there more of them?" Actually, there is no "I". It's a mirage.

On Ethics: "And so it is impossible for there to be propositions of ethics. Propositions can express nothing higher."--Tractatus 6.42. "It is clear that ethics cannot be put into words. Ethics is transcendental."--Tractatus 6.421.

A Swiss girl named Marguerite visited Ludwig in Norway. She stayed with him for two weeks. Wittgenstein spent most of that time praying and meditating. He left her alone, and she left him.

Moritz Schlick, the leader of the Vienna Circle, would later be assassinated by a Nazi student.

Francis Skinner, a young undergraduate was a lover to Ludwig. He died in 1941. Then Ludwig fell in love with Ben Richards in 1946.

Ludwig worked on philosophy until his death in 1951.

When someone asked why the League of Nations had failed: "Tell him to find out first why wolves eat lambs."

On being told someone gave up on his doctorate because he had nothing original to say: "For that action alone they should give him his PhD."

When someone talked about progress and would rather live now than like the caveman did: "Yes, of course you would. But would the caveman?"

"I should not like my writing to spare other people the trouble of thinking. But, if possible, to stimulate someone to thoughts of his own."

"Our way of life is mirrored in language."

"I'd like to use as a motto, 'I'll teach you differences', from Shakespeare's King Lear."

When he speaks of language, it reminds me of teaching English as a second language in Vietnam. I would start with sentences like, "This is a chair" and "That is a chair." We work from there.

Jon(athan) Nakapalau says

Great introduction to Wittgenstein. Read it before you try to read him.
