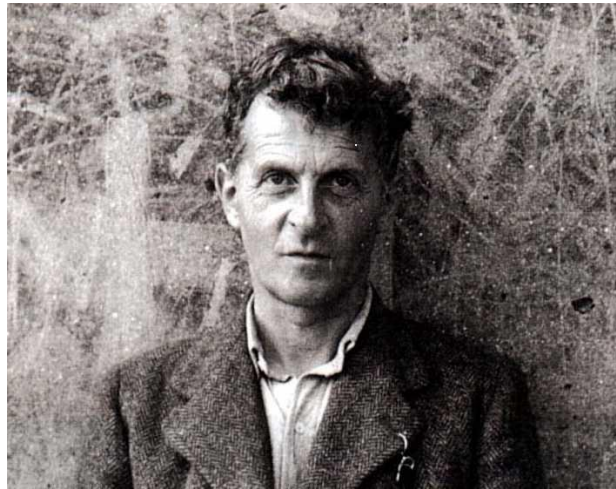


## GEOFF WILKINS' THIRD BLOG – LUDWIG WITTGENSTEIN

You've had my favourite film and writer – now, my favourite philosopher, Ludwig Wittgenstein.

A few of you may have visited my site at <http://www.wittgenstein.org.uk>, but that is really intended for those who are already enthusiasts.

Let's start again with the first paragraph of Wikipedia's entry on him:



**Ludwig Josef Johann Wittgenstein**( 26 April 1889 – 29 April 1951) was an Austrian-British philosopher who worked primarily in [logic](#), the [philosophy of mathematics](#), the [philosophy of mind](#), and the [philosophy of language](#). From 1929 to 1947, Wittgenstein taught at the [University of Cambridge](#). During his lifetime he published just one slim book, the 75-page [Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus](#) (1921), one article, one book review and a children's dictionary."

The Wittgenstein family, Jewish, were one of the richest in Europe in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century; in Austria-Hungary they were second only to the Rothschilds. But Ludwig gave away most of his share of the fortune to other members of the family.

In 1908 he studied to work as an aeronautics engineer, but developed an interest in the foundations of mathematics and logic, and in 1911 he arrived unannounced at the Cambridge rooms of the English philosopher Bertrand Russell and asked in broken English if he could study under Russell. At first Russell thought that he was a crank, but very soon decided that he was a genius. After Wittgenstein criticised some of his philosophical work Russell said, "I saw that I could not hope ever again to do fundamental work in philosophy". (He changed his mind about this later in his life!)

Wittgenstein's philosophical ideas had an early and a later period:

In the [Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus](#) he aimed to describe the relationship between logical propositions and the real world – and believed that he had succeeded, so that there was no further need for any study of philosophy, which was an attempt to explain the unexplainable - "What we can say at all can be said clearly", and "Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent".

Having solved all the problems of logic and philosophy, he went off to become a teacher in an Austrian secondary school, a job for which he was disastrously unsuited.

In 1929 Wittgenstein returned to Cambridge. The economist Maynard Keynes wrote to his wife, "Well, God has arrived. I met him on the 5.15 train." Wittgenstein submitted the *Tractatus* as his PhD thesis, and was elected a fellow of Trinity College. In 1939 he became Professor of Philosophy (and a British citizen).

In the First World War Wittgenstein had fought in the Austrian army against Britain, and was decorated for "His exceptionally courageous behaviour, calmness, sang-froid, and heroism". In the Second World War he worked as a porter at Guy's Hospital in London.

Wittgenstein's later philosophical thinking is set out in *Philosophical Investigations*, which was published in 1953 after his death. Against the *Tractatus*, he argued that confusions surrounding language-use are at the root of most philosophical problems. This argument has remained influential in philosophy up until the present day

Wittgenstein was bi-sexual, although his most important relationship, with a Cambridge student, seems to have been "platonic".

He died in Cambridge in April 1951. His last words were, "Tell them I've had a wonderful life."

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