

Goldfarb's Wittgenstein Seminar: Essay Questions

Answer **ONE** of the following questions:

In addressing these questions consider be sure to explain, in detail, particular relevant passages from Wittgenstein's text (including the interlocutor's proposals, what is motivating them, Wittgenstein's responses to them and the larger themes they engage with.)

1. "The work of the philosopher consists in assembling reminders for a particular purpose" (§127). Explain this remark by showing its relation to the details of Wittgenstein's discussion of one of the topics covered in this class. What "reminders" does Wittgenstein offer in his discussion of the topic you choose? What philosophical work do they do?
2. What is a "grammatical investigation"? Discuss some of the passages on reading as an example of such an investigation. How do "grammatical investigations" further Wittgenstein's philosophical purposes? How would you characterize the nature of the information a grammatical investigation provides?
3. "Could neurophysiology discover a brain state which is understanding?" What is Wittgenstein's contribution to this issue? How plausible is it?
4. "If I have exhausted the justifications I have reached bedrock, and my spade is turned..." (§217). Discuss Wittgenstein's approach to questions about justification, doubt, and explanation. Explain how his approach to such issues informs his treatment of one of the following: 1) rule-following, 2) the fixity of meaning, 3) our relation to the mental lives of others.
5. "To obey a rule, to make a report, to give an order, to play a game of chess, are customs (uses, institutions)" (§199). Explain the role played by Wittgenstein's appeal to "practices, customs, and institutions" in his treatment of rule-following.
6. "If we construe the grammar of the expression of sensation on the model of 'object and designation' the object drops out of consideration as irrelevant" (§293c). Explain what Wittgenstein is getting at here and why it is significant for his discussion of the privacy of the mental.
7. "A picture held us captive. And we could not get outside it, for it lay in our language and language seemed to repeat it to us inexorably." (§115). "What we do is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use." (§116) Is there tension between these two ideas? If so, why; and if not, why not? Defend your answer by an explication of §115 and §116 with respect to some particular section (or group of sections).

8. In his discussion of fixity of meaning, Wittgenstein mentions “ideal languages” and says, moreover, that “all this, however, can only appear in the right light when one has attained greater clarity about the concepts of understanding, meaning and thinking.” (§81) Explain what’s on Wittgenstein’s mind here. What are the connections between fixity of meaning, ideal languages, and mental “states” such as understanding and thinking? And what are the connections between Wittgenstein's discussions of fixity of meaning and understanding?

Length: 4,000-5,000 words

Deadline: June 13, 5pm.

Location: SOPHI Office

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