

He was born into the second-wealthiest family in Europe, but he gave up his entire inheritance to his siblings and lived in poverty. As a child he attended world premiers of compositions by Brahms and Mahler, conducted by the composers themselves, in his own home. He himself had absolute pitch. He was Jewish, and a schoolmate of Hitler. He only published one book in his lifetime, but he wrote the two most-frequently-cited philosophy books of the twentieth century. He wrote the first draft of that one published book, a treatise on philosophical logic, in muddy trenches as a soldier in WWI. Cambridge University gave him a degree he didn't earn just so they could hire him to teach there, but angry parents ran him out of the Austrian village where he taught grade school. One of his sisters helped Freud escape from Hitler's Vienna; Maurice Ravel's "Concerto for the Left Hand" was written for one of his brothers, a concert pianist who lost his right arm in WWI; he himself, an engineer by training, designed a house that still stands, and is now a tourist attraction, in Vienna. He's had novels written about him, and movies made about him. He claims in his major early book that "My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical, when he has used them — as steps — to climb up beyond them" and in his major later book that "My aim is: to teach you to pass from a piece of disguised nonsense to something that is patent nonsense."

He also wrote once: "I find it important in philosophizing to keep changing my posture, not to stand for too long on one leg, so as not to get stiff. Like one on a long uphill climb who walks backwards for a while so as to revive himself and stretch some different muscles."

If it's time to stretch some different muscles on your climb, it might be time to walk backward for a semester with Ludwig Wittgenstein.

### **PHIL 3000**

**Topics: Wittgenstein**

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