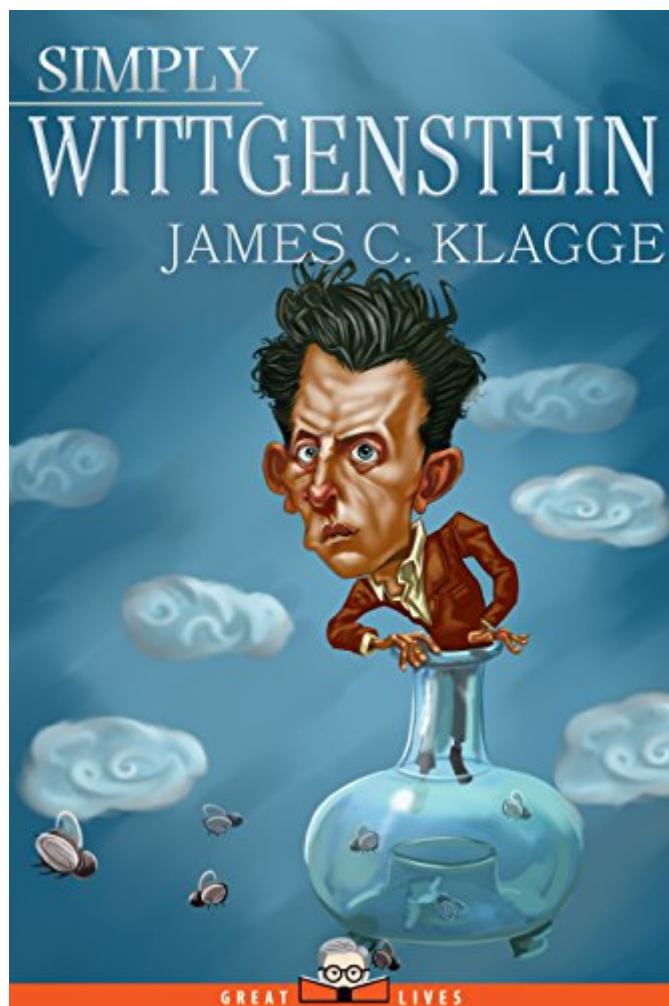


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# Simply Wittgenstein



## Synopsis

"There are many introductions to the life and work of Ludwig Wittgenstein, but I think James Klagge has produced the very best. Taking as his premise that his reader may know nothing about Wittgenstein or, for that matter, about philosophy, Klagge gives a lucid, charming, and wholly convincing account of Wittgenstein's basic ideas, his way of thinking, his views on religion, culture, ethical behavior, and so on. He is especially good at explaining the root concepts like "language game," "form of life," and "private language." But perhaps the highlight of this book is its set of applications: that is, how do Wittgenstein's concepts and writings help us to understand the events of our time from courtroom cases to the bombing of the Twin Towers on 9/11. Wittgenstein, Klagge shows, literally helps us to live our lives: he is the philosopher par excellence of the twentieth and now the twenty-first centuries. Klagge's own clarity is exemplary: he never condescends to the reader and yet makes Wittgenstein's thought wonderfully clear." —Marjorie Perloff, Sadie Dernham Patek Emerita Professor of Humanities at Stanford University

Born in Vienna into an extremely wealthy and highly cultured family, Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951) grew up surrounded by art, music, and a disturbing amount of dysfunctional behavior. After studying mechanical engineering and developing an interest in aeronautics, he became obsessed with mathematics and logic, which led to his life's work exploring the relationship between language, philosophy, and reality. In *Simply Wittgenstein*, James Klagge presents a fascinating portrait of this brilliant and troubled man, while exploring his two extraordinary books—the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* and *Philosophical Investigations*—in which he gave concrete form to his singular and perplexing ideas. Drawing on 30 years of teaching about Wittgenstein at both the undergraduate and graduate level, Klagge provides a clear and accessible introduction to these seminal works, helping the reader understand the revolutionary nature of Wittgenstein's insights and the reason they continue to resonate in our own time. Though Wittgenstein himself was convinced that he would never be properly understood, *Simply Wittgenstein* shows, with brevity and lucidity, that his ideas have had a profound and enduring effect on how we think about language and life.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

its a small book, surely I can read it in one night. Or so I thought when I ordered it for my Kindle a month ago. I'm still struggling to understand. But the author Klagge has done a good job introducing Wittgenstein to the world and convincing us of his importance to modern philosophy. This is not light reading but a good intellectual challenge.

This is an amazing introduction to Wittgenstein, beyond my wildest expectations. Even though it is a concise book, it explains Wittgenstein's philosophy, early and late, with clarity as well as critical reflection. What helps is the author's perfect knack for delineating the sorts of problems or issues Wittgenstein was coming to grips with in developing his ideas, followed by well chosen examples to illustrate the ideas. This book delivers Wittgenstein's thought more effectively than do ten longer books. The author, James C. Klagge, also makes subtle references to Wittgenstein's background and certain key experiences that inclined him to develop his thought in certain ways. I'd like to mention several strengths of this book. The author treats Bertrand Russell fairly by registering that the nuts and bolts portions of Tractates were addressed to Russellean issues. He explains how the core issue of Tractates evolved from the fundamental form of the proposition to the doctrine of showing and saying. This change enhanced Tractates and allowed Wittgenstein to go from

technical Russelleian issues to wider issues concerning how language is used, say, to show and say indications about broader and deeper questions, such as concerning ethics and the meaning of life. The author relates the story of Wittgenstein participating in discussions of the Vienna Circle by sitting with his back to them and reciting poems by Tagore while they debate issues of scientific theory -- in order to show how far removed he was from philosophical scientism. He tells of how, ten years after Wittgenstein had published *Tractates* and left philosophy, when hearing just part of a lecture by the philosopher of mathematics, Brouwer, Wittgenstein felt charged to reenter philosophy with new questions and approaches. This book is especially good on Wittgenstein's later thought, in which language is regarded as an integral form of life, as natural to human beings as eating, breathing, playing, and walking. Speaking is continuous with human action. Speaking takes place in definite social or interpersonal context which Wittgenstein calls language games (literally language play). Through the rich variety of human activities and their ingredient language games, concepts develop with porous borders and groups of meanings like family resemblances. The author gives full quotations regarding these Wittgensteinean ideas, and then develops them with acute fresh examples. I was particularly struck how the author applied Wittgenstein's later thoughts on language use to understand the evolving meaning of "religion" in the American legal system from being defined analytically as a belief system in a higher power to a wide range of belief systems, with higher powers or not, with ethical convictions or not, that is, illustrating the notion of family resemblances. He also took up the issue of the Confederate flag to examine how words and symbols have their now basic contents, with reference to history or testaments, and how they can be viewed or interpreted in different ways, in this case, according to whether one is a supporter who thinks the flag signifies individual liberty and freedom from big government or opposed as someone who feels offended by past associations of the flag with slavery and racism. Wittgenstein's approach seems to offer a lucid, fluent way to understand issues like the evolving meaning of religion in the American courts as well as how so many different patterns of meaning can attach to the Confederate flag. Let me finally mention that the author takes up issues surrounding the possibility of AI in the light of the opposed approaches of Wittgenstein and Alan Turing. For Turing, the question of AI can be determined by whether a machine or organism can respond significantly to a protocol of questions. He sees mastery of the rules of logic and discourse as the bottom line. For Wittgenstein, only of an organism that is very much like a human being could we possibly think of thinking, because what we regard as thinking is intimately bound up with our lives, interactions, our language games. Interestingly, this response leads us to a sort of vicious circle as to whether thinking has to be so bound up with human needs and characteristics. My comments only scratch

the surface of what this book covers in accurate and interesting ways. My congratulations to the author and the editor for writing and publishing this wonderful book

This book provides an engaging and briskly-paced introduction to Wittgenstein's ideas and life. A pleasure to read and a good resource for identifying further reading.

The best summary of Wittgenstein's work i've ever read.

Of course I am the author of this book, so you shouldn't take my word for the rating. But just to offer some info:-This is written at a genuinely beginning level. You do not need to be a philosopher to read it, though you should be interested in philosophy. The book primarily focusses on Wittgenstein's two great books: Tractatus and Philosophical Investigations. You don't have to have read them already, but I do hope you will read them in conjunction with reading this, or go on to read them after reading this. I hope I have put you in a position to get the important things out of those books. And my book is especially suitable for those who have TRIED to read either of these books in the past and given up in disgust!-I have taught Wittgenstein many many times in the last 30 years and this book is based on how I teach the material to my own students. It includes a lot of applications of Wittgenstein's ideas to interesting issues, including issues that he never considers, so it is not a narrow book.-I just read straight through the book looking for any typos or other problems, and it took me about 3 hours. I hope it goes into enough detail to be genuinely substantive, without getting away from the idea that it is truly an introduction.-I have my own "take" on Wittgenstein, which I have presented in "Wittgenstein in Exile," but I only mention bits of that here and there in this book.Hope you enjoy it!

I have read many books by Wittgenstein and on Wittgenstein. I was surprised that this short and pithy book completely changed my views on Wittgenstein's philosophy. I was a big fan of the early W, particularly of the Tractatus Logicus Philosophicus (TLP). I really agreed with W when he expressed that the TLP had solved all the problems of Philosophy.I was kind of disconcerted by the late W and his Philosophical Investigations and the way he - apparently - detracted from previous views on Language and Logic. Well, that state is over after reading Professor Klagge's book. He wove the two phases of W's work with such a mastery that I don't see contradictions any longer. What i see now is an evolution in his thought. In spite of my admiration for Ray Monk's biography, Dr Monk described the issue as a total rupture between the early and late W. This book solves the

issue for me and I am ready to deeply immerse myself into the late W. Another rarity of the book is that it is great for both beginners and connoisseurs of the fabulous work of W. to very common in philosophical studies. I highly recommend it to any one interested in - at least for me - the most fascinating and wonderful philosopher of all time.

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