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Introduction

Life

Ludwig Wittgenstein, the youngest of eight children, was born in Vienna on April 26, 1889.¹ His parents—Karl and Leopoldine (“Poldy” née Kalmus)—possessed considerable wealth, which Karl had acquired as a businessman in the steel industry. Karl Wittgenstein was an impressive figure, and it was not only his business competitors who found him threatening. No one dared oppose his views.² His way of life was extravagant. It included a mansion in the city, a number of houses and parcels of land in the country, and the maintenance of the artists he admired—including Klimt and the Secessionists. He demanded that his sons subject themselves to his will and study to become “respectable” businessmen, engineers, or (best of all) both. The mother concerned herself with music, especially the piano, while the children were reared mostly by nannies, governesses, and private tutors. Karl Wittgenstein was of Jewish descent, Leopoldine partly so. But the family was completely assimilated. (Ludwig’s final school diploma shows his best grade to be an “excellent” in Roman Catholic doctrine.) He attended a public school in Linz for just three years. Before that he had been privately tutored, but—as his father later discovered much to his chagrin—he learned in the process as little as his siblings had learned

1. Biographical sources are mentioned in the bibliography.

2. There is a collection of Karl Wittgenstein’s newspaper articles and speeches. See bibliography.

before him. Early on he showed a talent for mechanical things, and as a child he built a tiny sewing machine that actually worked.

The first college Wittgenstein attended was the *Technische Hochschule* in Berlin-Charlottenburg, where he studied three semesters of engineering, and where he seemed to have enjoyed the musical scene. (He later reported that back in Berlin he went to see Wagner's *Die Meistersinger* thirty times.) After leaving Berlin he went to Manchester, England, where he worked very enthusiastically on numerous technical projects at the university, without ever finishing one of them. Among other things, he participated in a series of kite-flying and weather-watch experiments and, towards the end of his stay in Manchester, was busy with the construction of an airplane propeller.

Through a remark in a document that was, by chance, preserved, we know that as early as 1909 Wittgenstein tried to solve Bertrand Russell's well-known "paradox," namely, the contradiction that arises from assuming the existence of a set of all sets that does not contain itself as an element.³ His interest in problems of mathematical logic dates back at least to this point. But the official transfer to the study of logic and philosophy did not occur until he enrolled at Trinity College at the beginning of 1912, following a trial visit to Cambridge in 1911. The suggestion to study with Russell in Cambridge possibly came from Gottlob Frege, whom Wittgenstein had visited at his home in Jena in 1911. At that time, and for a long time after, Frege's *Fundamental Laws of Arithmetic* and Russell's *Principles of Mathematics* were Wittgenstein's favorite books. Whatever else he became acquainted with in philosophy he considered confused, even when (as in the case of G. E. Moore, for example) he admired the author personally.⁴ (He ap-

3. McGuinness, *Wittgenstein: A Life*, p. 81.

4. It is impossible to determine what Wittgenstein did *not* read. He himself talked about his reading only sporadically. And, although reports from friends and students allow us to determine authors with whom he was familiar and books he had read, reports on Wittgenstein's *lack* of knowledge have to be approached very carefully—especially since Wittgenstein enjoyed

pears to have read hardly any philosophy except for Schopenhauer.⁵)

With Russell, to whom Wittgenstein introduced himself as a prospective “pilot” or “aeronaut,” there began a warm (but for Russell, often distressing) friendship.⁶ Wittgenstein sought out the older man daily, discussing logical or philosophical problems with him for hours, refusing to be disturbed even when Russell had visitors or needed to change for dinner. Russell thought highly of him, soon recognizing his genius; and when his sister Hermine (Minnie) visited, he frankly told her: “We expect the next big step in philosophy to be taken by your brother.”⁷

Wittgenstein developed a close friendship with David Pinsent, a younger man who finished studies in mathematics before deciding to study law. (The *Tractatus* is dedicated to him.) In 1912 Wittgenstein and Pinsent went on vacation to Iceland and in 1913 to Norway. During this time in Cambridge, he came to know a number of people, including G. E. Moore and John Maynard Keynes, who were to become very important for him—people who often later provided advice or help. The trip to Norway was important because it was there that Wittgenstein decided to seclude himself in order to continue his logical studies in peace and quiet. After dictating parts of his first writings (“Notes on Logic”) in Russell’s presence at the end of 1913,

emphasizing, perhaps exaggerating, his lack of extensive book learning. See Drury, “Conversations with Wittgenstein,” p. 171, and Mays, “Recollections of Wittgenstein,” p. 84. What we can say, in light of the existing reports, is that Wittgenstein’s approach to the authors he did read was not that of a scholar. He was not interested in completeness. But he experienced with great intensity whatever he did read or hear about and kept coming back to it.

5. See his first extant letter to Russell (probably June 1912).

6. In his autobiography and in other writings, Russell describes his relationship with Wittgenstein (a relationship that was later to cool down considerably). More reliable than these descriptions are Russell’s letters to Lady Ottoline Morrell, which are quoted in detail in McGuinness, *Wittgenstein: A Life*; and Clark, *The Life of Bertrand Russell*.

7. Hermine Wittgenstein, “My Brother Ludwig,” p. 3.

Wittgenstein left Cambridge and moved to Norway where Moore visited him in April. Subsequently they quarreled over an examination formality and, as a result, it was fifteen years before they spoke to each other again.

In Norway, Wittgenstein probably wrote parts of the notes which later provided the basis for the work on the *Tractatus*. While staying in Austria in the summer of 1914, he hastened to donate part of the wealth he had inherited from his father in 1913 to needy artists.⁸ For advice on the distribution of the sum of 100,000 kroners, he contacted Ludwig von Ficker, editor of a periodical much admired by the famous Austrian social critic Karl Kraus called *Der Brenner*. In this way, Rilke, Trakl, Else Lasker-Schüler, and Oscar Kokoschka obtained support from Wittgenstein. War was declared right after that, and, in spite of a double hernia, Wittgenstein volunteered to serve and was accepted.

What Wittgenstein liked least about war was his fellow soldiers. He showed great bravery, was decorated a number of times, and had reached the rank of lieutenant by the time he was taken prisoner, just before the armistice. The war's effect on him can be seen when comparing photographs taken before the war with those taken later. Amazingly often he was able to work on his book in spite of the adverse conditions. Three manuscripts that were preserved from this time represent a considerable part of the preliminary work for his book, which was finished during his last leave from the front (July to September 1918). The book, *Logisch-philosophische Abhandlung* (Logical-Philosophical Treatise) is better known by the title inspired by Moore and later given to the English edition, namely, the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*.

While attending officer's school in Olmütz, Wittgenstein met a circle of young people with whom he stayed in contact for a long time. The main friendship he developed

8. Characteristic of Wittgenstein's attitude towards death is a letter to Russell written on January 21, 1913: "Yesterday afternoon my father died. He had the nicest death I can imagine; he fell asleep like a child without any pain. During the last hours I was not sad for a moment, but full of joy. I believe that this death was worth an entire life."

there was with an interior designer and student of Adolph Loos, Paul Englemann. (Englemann was to write exceptionally penetrating recollections of Wittgenstein's personality and historical circumstances.) Wittgenstein's sister Mining writes in her notes that "already back then there were signs in Ludwig of the profound transformation that was to come to fruition only after the war The other soldiers called him 'the man with the Gospel' because he always carried Tolstoy's adaptation of the Gospels with him."

In the summer of the last war year, Wittgenstein learned that his friend David Pinsent had died in an accident. Maybe it was because of this that he wanted to commit suicide at this time, but his Uncle Paul convinced him to work on his book instead—for which Wittgenstein thanked him in the first draft of the *Tractatus*.⁹ Suicidal thoughts tormented Wittgenstein again and again, and three of his four brothers did commit suicide.¹⁰

Wittgenstein spent ten months as a prisoner of war in Italy, where he got to know the teacher Ludwig Hänsel and the sculptor Michael Drobil. Upon his release in August 1919, he returned to Vienna. He made it very clear to his family that he wanted to start a new life: He gave his

9. *Prototractatus*, p. 2.

10. On the theme of suicide, two testimonies are to be considered: (1) *Notebooks*, 1/10/1917:

If suicide is allowed, then everything is allowed.

If anything is not allowed, then suicide is not allowed.

This throws light on the nature of ethics. For suicide is, so to speak, the elementary sin.

And when one investigates it, it is like investigating mercury vapor in order to comprehend the nature of vapors.

Or is even suicide in itself neither good nor evil!

Compare Schopenhauer's thoughts about suicide, which Wittgenstein certainly knew.

(2) Letter to Englemann dated 6/21/1920:

I know that suicide is always a dirty business. For there's no way at all that one *can* will one's own annihilation, and everyone who

fortune to his brothers and sisters (his only possession was the cottage he had built in 1914 in Norway, and even that he tried to give away a few times). Then he registered and enrolled at the teacher training school in Vienna's "Third District," close to which he later built the house for his sister Gretl Stonborough, which has been restored. In 1920, after one year of studies, and after he had worked for a while as a gardener's assistant in the monastery at Neuberg, he became a grammar school teacher and began his work in Lower Austria, near Kirchberg am Wechsel.

He remained a grammar school teacher until 1926.¹¹ Because he took his responsibilities seriously, he was, time and again, at odds with the parents of his pupils and often depressed. Apparently he had prescribed this work for himself as a kind of medicine that was to enable him to lead a "decent" life. ("Decent" was a word that Wittgenstein used again and again with special emphasis. In this situation he no doubt wanted most of all to be engaged in selfless activity and work himself to exhaustion, creating a prophylaxis against the "vanity" which he feared.) He describes his activities in characteristic language in a letter to Keynes dated October 18, 1925:

I have resolved to remain a teacher as long as I feel that the difficulties I am experiencing might be doing me some good. When you have a toothache, the pain from the toothache is reduced by putting a hot water bottle to your face. But that works only as long as the heat hurts your face. I will throw away the bottle as soon as I notice that it no longer provides that special pain that does my character good.

has ever imagined what's involved in suicide, knows that suicide is always a *taking oneself by surprise*. But nothing is worse than being compelled to take oneself by surprise.

Cf. McGuinness, *Wittgenstein: A Life*, p. 157.

11. Concerning this period, see Wünsche's study, *Der Volksschullehrer Ludwig Wittgenstein*. This volume contains a number of interesting documents, for example the letters of Wittgenstein (and his sister Mining) to Ludwig Hänsel.

A letter written two years later included the laconic footnote: "I could no longer stand the hot water bottle."

Wittgenstein's first and only philosophical book published during his lifetime appeared while he was serving as an elementary school teacher. Without success, he had tried several times to interest various publishers—first of all, and significantly, the publishers of Karl Kraus and Otto Weininger—in his *Logical-Philosophical Treatise*. He met with Russell again at the end of 1919, in Amsterdam, for lengthy discussions of that treatise. When Russell offered to help by contributing a foreword, Wittgenstein felt that he had no choice but to tell his friend clearly that he did not want to have his book appear with that foreword (cf. letter of May 6, 1920). In the end, he gave up his own efforts to get it published and turned matters over to Russell and Russell's friends. Consequently, first publication was in Wilhelm Osterwald's *Annalen der Naturphilosophie* (1921); a year later it was published in England as a dual-language book.

The question as to who actually translated the book into English has not been completely settled. The young Frank Ramsey, a very gifted mathematician from Cambridge with whom Wittgenstein was corresponding at the time, had an important part in this work. Ramsey visited Wittgenstein while the latter was a schoolteacher in Lower Austria and had conversations with him that he subsequently reported to Keynes. It was through the help of these two friends that Wittgenstein again visited England in the summer of 1925 after an absence of eleven years, an event which occasioned the remark in the letter to Keynes already quoted, to the effect that if he were to give up school teaching, he probably would look for a position in England.

But things did not happen quite that quickly. After quitting the teaching profession, he busied himself with the construction of a house for his sister—work that fascinated and absorbed him. Superficially showing the influence of Loos, in many ways the building reflects Wittgenstein's own personality: there is a sober matter-of-factness combined with the solemn upward thrust of a

cathedral, a painstaking exactness in the completion of each detail, and a total lack of concern for the comfort of the person living there.

By the end of 1928 this work too was finished. The time for return had come—for return to philosophy, to Cambridge, and to a freer way of life. But there is a story even behind this change, which seemed to come about so quickly. The members of the Vienna Circle, who were so interested in philosophy, mathematics, and science and who were so important for the development of analytical philosophy and philosophy of science, already had attempted to make contact with Wittgenstein by the mid '20s, at first with no success at all. It was not until two or three years later, while Wittgenstein was still busy building the house for his sister, that a meeting between Moritz Schlick and Wittgenstein became possible. Later on there were conversations with Waismann, Carnap, Feigl, and the woman Feigl later was to marry. However, Wittgenstein often refused to talk about philosophy and enjoyed reading poetry aloud while turning his back on the respectful, but confused, scientists.¹²

Philosophical discussions eventually evolved with Schlick and his assistant Friedrich Waismann. Waismann kept notes on many of these discussions and collaborated on a book project with Wittgenstein into the early 1930s.¹³ Through this association with some of the members of the Vienna Circle, Wittgenstein came into contact with new thinking in the philosophy of mathematics, especially with the ideas of the intuitionist Brouwer. (He no doubt already had heard some of these ideas from Ramsey.) When

12. Cf. Mrs. Schlick's recollection of her husband's first visit with Wittgenstein: "Again . . . I observed with interest the reverential attitude of the pilgrim. He returned in an ecstatic state, saying little, and I felt I should not ask questions." Quoted in the editor's forward to *WVC*, p. 14.

13. Announced repeatedly since 1930 in advertisements for the writings of the Vienna Circle, the book finally appeared in 1976 as Waismann's *Logik, Sprache, Philosophie*. It is among the most important sources of information on Wittgenstein's thinking during the early thirties. [The English version appeared in 1965, under the title *The Principles of Linguistic Philosophy*.]

Wittgenstein attended a lecture by Brouwer in Vienna in the spring of 1928, his interest was awakened. This was possibly the first, or the decisive, step towards his return to philosophy.

In early 1929 Wittgenstein arrived in Cambridge. He was a "research student" until June, when, on the merits of the *Tractatus*, he received a doctorate. His old friends—Russell, Keynes, Ramsey, and Moore—spoke in his behalf. At first he received a stipend, but shortly after completing the doctorate, was awarded a fellowship at Trinity College—a temporary appointment, but one which he held until 1936. In no time his lectures became much talked about. In addition to class notes and elaborations, several descriptions of Wittgenstein's lectures graphically depict his pedagogical procedures. Norman Malcolm describes them as follows:

It is hardly correct to speak of these meetings as "lectures," although this is what Wittgenstein called them. For one thing, he was carrying on original research in these meetings. He was thinking about certain problems in a way that he could have done had he been alone. For another thing, the meetings were largely conversation. Wittgenstein commonly directed questions to various persons present and reacted to their replies. Often the meetings consisted mainly of dialogue. Sometimes, however, when he was trying to draw a thought out of himself, he would prohibit, with a peremptory motion of the hand, any questions or remarks. There were frequent and prolonged periods of silence, with only an occasional mutter from Wittgenstein, and the stillest attention from the others. During these silences, Wittgenstein was extremely tense and active. His gaze was concentrated; his face was alive; his hands made arresting movements; his expression was stern.¹⁴

During these years Wittgenstein became a legendary figure. He showed a touching and, in the opinion of some of

14. Malcolm, *Memoir*, p. 25. Compare with the introduction of *WLL*, and the editor's preface to *WLA*. See further the description of D. A. T. Gasking and A. C. Jackson in Fann, ed., *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Man and His Philosophy*, pp. 49–55.

his contemporaries, much too tyrannical concern for his students. His influence on them was enormous. Fania Pascal, Wittgenstein's Russian teacher, reported in her memoirs that she saw people in the 1960s whom she had never seen before and could tell at once that they had been influenced by Wittgenstein, for they had adopted expressions and mannerisms of speech that could have come only from him.¹⁵

Immediately after his return, Wittgenstein began to write. The conversations he had with Ramsey until the latter's early death in 1930 probably had a great influence on his themes and method.¹⁶ Almost daily he made notes, made changes, dictated, had copies made, and then formulated everything all over again. In this way a lot of very comprehensive, typed manuscripts were produced in rapid succession, which Wittgenstein at first attempted to rework, but then neglected because his thoughts were moving in a different direction. Several works were dictated to students and then reproduced in very small editions. The *Blue Book* and the *Brown Book* circulated in this manner for many years before they finally were published in book form in 1958.

In 1935 Wittgenstein traveled for several weeks in the Soviet Union. He originally had planned to go with his friend and former student Francis Skinner, but an illness prevented Skinner from making the trip. For some time Wittgenstein had taken private lessons in Russian and apparently was a very talented student. There are some notes in Russian among his papers. Earlier he had shown a strong attraction to Russia, not only with regard to the works of its great writers, Tolstoy and Dostoyevski, but also with regard to several typical characteristics that he associated with the Russian people, their habits, and their customs. At the time he obviously wanted to determine

15. Pascal, "Wittgenstein: A Personal Memoir," p. 37.

16. Cf. preface to *PI*: "I was helped to realize these mistakes—in a measure that I myself am hardly able to estimate—by the criticism which my ideas encountered from Frank Ramsey, with whom I discussed them in countless conversations during the last two years of his life."

whether he might want to move there and take up a profession. Although the thought of Russia as a spiritual refuge is mentioned in his last letter to Engelmann, dated June 21, 1937,¹⁷ Fania Pascal probably was correct in her impression that almost immediately after visiting Russia, Wittgenstein decided not to settle there.

The year 1936 was a turning point for Wittgenstein. The position at Trinity College expired, and the contract could not be extended. He decided to travel to Norway in order to work there again in solitude. In fact, he remained there, with only a few short interruptions, until the end of 1937 and wrote parts of what we have come to know as the *Philosophical Investigations* and the *Remarks On the Foundations of Mathematics*. Concentrating on the presentation of his ideas, which he had only gradually modified in the earlier writings of the 1930s, he was led in the end to reformulate them radically. In 1938 Wittgenstein returned to Cambridge. Because of the annexation of Austria to the German *Reich*, he had to decide whether to become a German citizen or to apply for British citizenship. As he wrote to Keynes on March 18, 1938, the idea of becoming an "imitation Englishman" had never appealed to him; however, the thought of becoming a German citizen was, aside from the abominable consequences, just "DREADFUL."¹⁸ Thus, he became a British subject.

As a member of the Cambridge faculty, Wittgenstein held classes and applied for Moore's chair when it became vacant. For this purpose he and his student and friend Rush Rhees translated the existing part of the *Philosophical Investigations*, sending it to Keynes, who had a voice in the appointment procedure. Wittgenstein was offered the

17. Pascal, "Wittgenstein: A Personal Memoir," p. 44; cf. Rhees, ed., "Postscript," pp. 219ff.

18. This does not, of course, mean that Wittgenstein harbored anti-German sentiments. On the contrary, he regarded himself as belonging to the German cultural sphere and seems to have taken more from the Germans than from the Austrians in technical and military matters. For understandable reasons, however, he felt no sympathy for the German regime then in power.

position in the beginning of February 1939, and when he heard that his colleague and intellectual adversary C. D. Broad had expressed the opinion that "to deny Wittgenstein the chair would be the same as denying Einstein the chair in physics," he was very moved.¹⁹ He wrote to Keynes, "Well now I *hope* that I will be a decent professor."

Officially Wittgenstein was a professor for about eight years after that; however, in reality he occupied the position only sporadically, for right after the outbreak of the war he enlisted in various support services. At first he worked in Guy's Hospital in London; later he worked in Newcastle with a physiological research group. In 1944 he retreated to Swansea, where he continued the work on the *Philosophical Investigations* in relative solitude. (The preface, which of course relates only to the [not yet completed] Part I, is dated "Cambridge, January, 1945.") Even during the war he repeatedly returned to Cambridge to hold occasional seminars; however, it was not until toward the end of 1944 that he once again resumed actual teaching responsibilities.

In the first half of 1947, Wittgenstein came to feel that he was no longer able to combine teaching with writing. In a letter to Moore dated February 18, 1947, he asks "whether it really did make sense to husband his strength in order to be able to teach people, most of whom were not able to learn anything." On the 27th of August he wrote to Malcolm, "I really would like to be some place by myself and attempt to write and at least get one part of my book ready for publication. I will never be able to do that as long as I am teaching here in Cambridge. I also feel that, aside and apart from writing, I need to catch my breath and to be alone to think without having to speak to anyone." Then the decision was made. Wittgenstein resigned his position and was released from duties in the last trimester of 1947. Visibly relieved, he wrote to Malcolm on the 16th of November:

19. Drury, "Conversations with Wittgenstein," p. 156.

... I shall cease to be professor on December 31st at 12 p.m. *Whatever* happens to me (& I am not at all sanguine about my future), I feel I did the only natural thing.

Following the war, Wittgenstein worked mainly on topics in philosophy of psychology. He continued to work on them in the following year and a half, a period he spent partly in Dublin and partly in various remote places in Ireland. Occasionally he interrupted these sojourns in order to travel to Cambridge or Vienna. The so-called Part II of *Philosophical Investigations* was for a long time the only testimony to the work of those years. The *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology* and *Last Writings on the Philosophy of Psychology*, which have appeared in the meantime, provide additional information on the direction of his thought during that time.

In July of 1949 Wittgenstein traveled to North America in order to visit his friend and former student Norman Malcolm.²⁰ He remained until October but in the meantime had become seriously ill. A medical examination, however, revealed no cause for concern. It was only after his return to England that prostate cancer was diagnosed. Wittgenstein traveled twice to Vienna and even to Norway toward the end of 1950. He lived either with Georg Henrik von Wright, his successor to the chair at Cambridge, with his former student Elizabeth Anscombe in Oxford, or in the London apartment of Rush Rhees. Often he was unable to work, perhaps because of the treatment with hormones and radiation. Occasionally, however, and particularly during the last months of his life, he wrote down thoughts that, as von Wright correctly says, "are the equal to the best he produced."²¹

Wittgenstein did not want to die in the hospital and was glad when his Cambridge physician, Dr. Bevan, offered to let him live in his house during the last weeks. He

20. Malcolm's well-known account of this stay is now supplemented by O. K. Bouwsma's *Wittgenstein: Conversations 1949-1951*.

21. von Wright, *Wittgenstein*, p. 31.

stayed there beginning in February 1951, continuing to write notes on the topic of certainty and visiting friends for light-hearted conversation. (On April 21 he visited the ailing von Wright, assuring him that it was not he himself but his astral body who was paying the call.) He died on April 29, 1951. Mrs. Bevan, who stayed up with him that night, reported that his last words were, "Tell them that I had a wonderful life." Some, remembering Wittgenstein's severity, tortured intensity, and often acerbic criticism were amazed when they heard that. Perhaps they would have been less amazed had they given more thought to the man's accomplishments.

Personality

"I find it impossible to say even a single word in my book about all that music has meant for me in my life. So how can I hope that anyone will understand me?"²² In this remark, from a 1949 conversation, Wittgenstein is referring to the *Philosophical Investigations*, which was then in manuscript form. An important part in his life, music was a determining factor in the way Wittgenstein interacted with many of his friends and acquaintances.

Although he came from a very musical family and grew up in a house where Brahms and many other celebrities of the Vienna music world felt at home, for the longest time Wittgenstein himself played no instrument. As a youth he took piano lessons for a short time, but learned nothing. Music, especially the piano, was the most important thing in his mother's life, and his father played the violin. His eldest brother, the first to commit suicide, was a musical prodigy; Paul Wittgenstein, who was only little older, became a concert pianist. Paul lost an arm in the war, but stayed with his profession, playing with his left hand and commissioning compositions that he played in public. Ravel, for example, composed his piano concerto for the left hand for him. Ludwig cared little for these performances, which

22. Drury, "Conversations with Wittgenstein," p. 160.

he compared to circus acts, nor did he care for Paul's musical style. On the other hand, he had great respect for the performances and (apparently) the compositions of the blind organist, Labor, who enjoyed a special status in the Wittgenstein household.

Wittgenstein's own musical talent was expressed mostly in his ability to explain music and show how it should be played, and in a phenomenal talent for whistling, remarked on by those who knew him. He repeatedly demonstrated his critical, analytical ability to explain music. When professional musicians failed to take him seriously, he explained a piece of music until it was clear to them (much to their embarrassment) how much they had not understood of it, whereupon they enthusiastically begged him to explain everything. He regularly practiced his gift for whistling with many of his serious musician friends—for example by learning Schubert *lieder* with them and interpreting the vocal part through his whistling. When he became a teacher, he had to learn an instrument, and he decided on the clarinet. His sister Mining remarked, "I believe that was the beginning of his strong feeling for music. At any rate, he played with great musical sensitivity and found much pleasure in that instrument. Instead of keeping it in a case, he customarily carried it around in an old sock. . . ."23

In countless conversations about music, often after concerts or after listening to records at the house of a student or friend, Wittgenstein revealed time and again how intensely he listened and the extent of his ability to recognize musical connections. It was characteristic of him that breadth of knowledge was never important to him; what he wanted was in-depth penetration and understanding down to the smallest detail of whatever it was that occupied him at the moment. This was his customary approach to everything. He read his favorite books over and over

23. Hermine Wittgenstein, "My Brother Ludwig," p. 9. In a letter there is talk about his playing the clarinet part in Schubert's "The Shepherd on the Rock." This is the only concrete indication I have been able to find on Wittgenstein's abilities as a clarinetist.

again and always with the greatest attention to detail. He once advised a friend to pick out only one picture in a museum, take his time studying it, and then leave.

Musically—as in many other things—Wittgenstein was a man of the nineteenth century, especially the first half of the nineteenth century. Although Beethoven, Schubert, and Schumann were perhaps preeminent for him, other musical figures sometimes preoccupied him, depending probably on what concerned him most intensely at the time. Thus there was a period when he wanted to hear only Bach, and one when Brahms was especially important to him. And, as already mentioned, he claimed that during his time in Berlin he attended thirty performances of *Die Meistersinger*.

Among Wittgenstein's scattered written statements on music, most of them collected in the *Culture and Value*, a few are revealing about Wittgenstein himself. For example, there is a series of comments on Mendelssohn, for whom Wittgenstein felt a certain affinity (no doubt, in part, because he was Jewish): "Mendelssohn is not a peak, but rather a plateau. His Englishness. . . . Mendelssohn is like a person who is jolly only when everything is amusing anyway, or good when everyone around him is good; not really at all like a tree that stands fast no matter what is going on around it. I myself am like that too and am inclined to be that way" (1929, CV, p. 2). The comparison with Brahms is, therefore, also interesting because Brahms represents something that, in Wittgenstein's opinion, he himself lacked but which he would have liked to have had:

There is definitely a certain relationship between Brahms and Mendelssohn, but I am not referring to the parts of Brahms's works reminiscent of Mendelssohn. What I have in mind could be expressed by saying: "Brahms does with perfect discipline what Mendelssohn did halfheartedly" or "Brahms is often perfected Mendelssohn." (1931, CV, p. 21).

Jewishness was an important theme for Wittgenstein, although precise statements in this regard are difficult to make on the basis of available evidence. Like Otto

Weininger, whom he admired, Wittgenstein tended (but less crassly) to attribute weak or feminine (though not necessarily negative) characteristics to what he considered Jewish. That sentiment is expressed in his notebooks primarily when he speaks of originality and reproduction, as in the following—a passage in which he also mentions the authors he felt had influenced his thinking.

The Jewish “genius” can only be a saint. The greatest Jewish thinker is just talented. (Like me, for example.)

There is, I believe, some truth in the thought that in my thinking I am merely reproductive. I do not believe that I have ever come up with a new way of thinking; on the contrary, it was always given to me by someone else. I only seized it passionately and applied it to my elucidations. I have been influenced in this way by Boltzmann, Hertz, Schopenhauer, Frege, Russell, Kraus, Loos, Weininger, Spengler, Sraffa. Can one add Breuer and Freud as examples of Jewish reproductivity?—What I come up with are new *metaphors*. (1931, *CV*, pp. 18–19).

Eight or nine years later he describes these circumstances in a similar manner and comes back to the comparison with Breuer and Freud:

My originality (if that is the right word) is, I believe, an originality of the soil, not the seed. (Perhaps I do not have any seed of my own.) Cast the seeds onto my soil, and they will grow differently than on any other.

Freud’s originality was of this type too, I believe. I have always thought—without really knowing why—that the true seed of psychoanalysis came from Breuer, not from Freud. The seed grains from Breuer can only have been very small. *Courage* is always original. (1939/40, *CV*, p. 36).

Such statements must always be interpreted very carefully, for we do not know what the external and internal conditions were in Wittgenstein’s life when he wrote them. In any case, he had a high regard for Freud as well as for himself, but he always saw the danger of vanity and the possibility that his thoughts—like Freud’s—could become

fashionable and trivialized into mere jargon. The fear that a fate similar to that of Freud's could befall his work was certainly one reason he did not publish his later writings.

The music of the nineteenth century was a natural part of Wittgenstein's life, and the same can be said of the literature of that period. Goethe is for Wittgenstein in many ways the "given and the accepted" model, the highest realization of what literature can be. Not given to quotation, Wittgenstein was fond of quoting Goethe, and the thought processes of the two have a certain similarity.

The great Russians, Tolstoy and Dostoyevski, played a special role. Again and again, Wittgenstein recommended Tolstoy's folk tales and Dostoyevski's *Brothers Karamasov* to his friends. However, he did not like everything of Tolstoy's—as is revealed in the following passage from a letter to Malcolm dated September 20, 1945—a passage that tells us something about his aesthetic ideals:

I once tried to read *The Resurrection* but couldn't. You see, when Tolstoy simply tells a story, he impresses me infinitely more than when he addresses the reader. When he turns his back on the reader, then he seems to me *most* impressive. . . . His philosophy seems to me completely true when *hidden* in the story.

The impression of Wittgenstein expressed by Fania Pascal in her memoir is surely correct:

To my mind, his feeling for Russia had more to do with Tolstoy's moral teaching, with Dostoyevski's spiritual insights, than with any political or social matters. He would view the latter, which certainly were not indifferent to him, in terms of the former.²⁴

Wittgenstein also knew a few English authors, probably Dickens best of all. And, once he learned Norwegian, he read Ibsen and Bjørnson. His preference was, however, for Mörike and Keller, and he always had a weakness for Austrians like Grillparzer and Lenau, Nestoy and Kraus:

24. Pascal, "Wittgenstein: A Personal Memoir," p. 57.

I think that good Austrian work (Grillparzer, Leanu, Bruckner, Labor) is especially difficult to understand. It is in a certain sense more *subtle* than anything else, and its truth is never on the side of probability. (1929, CV, p. 3).

One should not overlook the fact that the motto of the *Philosophical Investigations*, as of the *Tractatus*, came from Austrian authors. The saying, "Progress characteristically appears greater than it really is," is from Nestroy's play, *The Protege*, while the quotation, ". . . and everything one knows, as opposed to having heard as just so much noise, can be stated in three words," is from *Literary Matters of the Heart* by Ferdinand Kürnberger (a passage, by the way, also quoted by Karl Kraus²⁵).

Even mottos long considered but not selected are of interest here. The following lines are to be found among these unused quotations:

See the moon above?—
Only half of it can be seen
And yet it is full and round!

by Matthias Claudius, and

Nature has neither core
Nor husk,
It is all one.
Test yourself relentlessly,
To see if you are a core or a husk.

by Goethe. Gordon Baker and Peter Hacker correctly point out in their commentary that these and some of the other quotations considered for mottos play on the contrasts of exterior and interior, visible and invisible, reality and appearance.

In addition to the various mottos, Wittgenstein's prefaces and drafts of prefaces reveal his view of his work and the world. The preface to the *Tractatus* will be discussed later, in Chapter 2. Here we shall discuss what is perhaps

25. Cf. McGuinness, *Wittgenstein: A Life*, p. 251.

the most straightforward record of his personal viewpoint, namely the brief (barely a half page long) foreword to the *Philosophical Remarks* of 1930. The first paragraph is as follows:

This book is written for those who can appreciate its spirit. This is a spirit different from that of the main current of the European and American civilization of which we all are part. *This latter* (second) spirit expresses itself through progress, through the construction of forms that are ever larger and ever more complicated; the other (first-mentioned spirit), in a striving for clarity and perspicuity in whatever structure. The second spirit attempts to understand the world from the periphery, in its multifaceted appearance; the first, in its center or essence. So the second spirit strings together one formation with another, ascending, as it were, from step to step ever higher, while the other remains where it is, always attempting to comprehend the same thing.

Here again, as in the motto for the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein takes issue with an optimistic faith in progress. Employing striking combinations in an earlier draft, he speaks of the "spirit of this civilization whose expression is the industry, architecture, music, fascism, and socialism of our time." He sees himself on the side of those who want to understand the essence of things, and it is interesting that he does not associate this quest for the essence with the image of ascending through stages, employing this image rather to characterize the quest for progress. The view that those seeking the essence are ever looking for the same thing is a view that (more in tenor than content) anticipates ideas in the *Philosophical Investigations*, for example, the idea that philosophy leaves everything the way it is (*PI*, § 124). The idea of a "striving for clarity and perspicuity, no matter what the structure" is perhaps the most striking thing in the quoted paragraph.

Interestingly enough, there always have been those who see in Wittgenstein a kind of positivist, or even a thinker driven by a delusion of scientific exactness to interpret everything in mathematical and technical formu-