

The Possibilities of Sense

Edited by

John H. Whittaker

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- 2 See Socrates' discussion of courage and philosophical virtue in the *Phaedo*.
- 3 Phillips, 'Ethics and Humanistic Ethics: A Reply to Dilman', in *Ethics and Understanding*, ed. Alanen et al., p. 165.
- 4 Dostoevsky, Fyodor, *Crime and Punishment*, trans. by David Magarshack (London: Penguin Classics, 1956), p. 68.
- 5 Phillips, in *Ethics and Understanding*, pp. 164–5.
- 6 Dilman, in *Ethics and Understanding*, p. 151.
- 7 *Ibid.*, p. 136.
- 8 Phillips, in *Ethics and Understanding*, sec. 3, pp. 155–9.
- 9 *Ibid.*, p. 158.
- 10 *Ibid.*
- 11 See Dilman and Phillips, *Sense and Delusion* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971), chs. 2 and 4.
- 12 Phillips, in *Ethics and Understanding*, p. 173.
- 13 Compare with Ivan Ilych's terror when he realizes that he is going to die. Leo Tolstoy, trans. and ed. Leo Weiner, *The Complete Works of Count Tolstoy* (AMS Press, 1968), vol. 13, pp. 45ff. *passim*.
- 14 Phillips, in *Ethics and Understanding*, sections 6–9.
- 15 *Ibid.*, p. 167.
- 16 *Ibid.*
- 17 *Ibid.*, p. 168.
- 18 I have argued this in Dilman, *Morality and the Inner Life, A Study in Plato's Gorgias* (London: Macmillan, 1979); see chapters 7, 'Development and Character', and 8, 'Character and Morality'.
- 19 I have discussed this question in Dilman, *Love and Human Separateness* (London: Macmillan, 1987), chapter 7.
- 20 Dilman, *Philosophy and Life, Essays on John Wisdom* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1984), chapter 8.
- 21 *Ibid.*, p. 158, emphasis added.
- 22 Phillips, in *Ethics and Understanding*, pp. 170–1.
- 23 *Ibid.*
- 24 *Ibid.*, pp. 161–2.
- 25 Simone Weil, *La Pesanteur et la Grâce* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1948), p. 82.

5

On Going the Bloody *Hard* Way in Philosophy

James Conant

Rush Rhees tells us: 'Wittgenstein used to say to me, "Go the bloody *hard* way".' And, Rhees adds: 'I remember this more often, perhaps, than any other single remark of his.'¹ This essay is about what Wittgenstein meant when he spoke of going the bloody *hard* way in philosophy.

Ethics?

'Nothing is hidden' is, for Wittgenstein, an ethical as well as a logical remark.

Ray Monk²

Rhees connects what Wittgenstein means by going the bloody hard way with the manner in which Wittgenstein himself sought to practise philosophy:

Unless one understands this, then I do not think one can understand Wittgenstein's conviction that philosophy is important. . . . Philosophy, as he practised it, was 'the bloody hard way'. . . . And it was not only a way of thinking and working, but a way of living as well. And the '*hardness*' was really a criterion of the sort of life that was worthwhile. Perhaps I should add 'for him'.³

This suggests that the injunction to go the bloody hard way is an injunction to *lead a certain sort of life*. (And that, as far as it goes, is surely right.) That might suggest, in turn, that, in so far as 'going the bloody hard way' is the description of a demand that one ought to place on oneself in philosophizing, it primarily has to do with those 'areas of philosophy' that are most intimately connected with – or somehow bear most directly on – 'the task of living'. It is a short step from here to the conclusion that – alongside logic, epistemology, metaphysics, philosophy of language, philosophy of mind, etc. – Wittgenstein has interesting 'views' on ethics. And if one starts looking

through Wittgenstein's corpus for his remarks that seem to touch on 'ethical' topics, they may appear to be scattered all over the place.⁴ And, in particular, if one looks for remarks that touch on the topic of going the bloody hard way, one won't have far to look.

Consider the following five passages from Wittgenstein:

1. You cannot write anything about yourself that is more truthful than you yourself are.⁵
2. Nothing is so difficult as not deceiving oneself.⁶
3. If anyone is *unwilling* to descend into himself... he will remain superficial in his writing.⁷
4. Working in philosophy... is really more a working on oneself.⁸
5. That man will be revolutionary who can revolutionize himself.⁹

Numerous remarks similar to these can be found scattered throughout Wittgenstein's writings.¹⁰ Such a remark – when one comes upon it, in the middle of an extended Wittgensteinian philosophical investigation (on, e.g., whether it is possible for me to give myself a private ostensive definition, or for another person to have my pains, or for there to be only one occasion on which someone obeys a rule, etc.) – is apt to strike one as a *non sequitur*. Why do such remarks crop up in the midst of Wittgenstein's philosophical investigations, apparently changing the topic and interrupting the course of the investigation?

Having read thus far, the reader may have formed the impression that the topic of this essay is one that could be summarized under the heading 'Wittgenstein on Ethics', or at least 'Wittgenstein's Remarks about Ethics'. Is that my topic? Are these remarks about ethics? It depends upon what you think 'ethics' is. Stanley Cavell remarks upon the 'pervasiveness of something that may express itself as a moral or religious demand in the *Investigations*', and goes on to observe that 'the demand is not the subject of a separate study within it, call it Ethics'.¹¹ I take the five remarks from Wittgenstein quoted above to be attempts to articulate (aspects of) that demand. But what sort of a demand – or 'something' (that 'may express itself as a moral or religious demand') – is this? In what way is it present in a work such as Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*? And how can it be the case that it is *pervasively* present in that work? After all, isn't most (if not all) of that work concerned with 'topics' that have nothing to do with (what we usually call) 'ethics'?

In a previous paper, in which I touch very briefly on questions such as these, I had occasion to quote these same five remarks from Wittgenstein; and D.Z. Phillips, in a reply to my paper, observed that Wittgenstein, in each of these five passages, should be understood as 'referring to difficulties in *doing philosophy*, difficulties in giving the problems the kind of attention philosophy asks of us'.¹² I agree with this.¹³ If this is right, it helps to explain

why these remarks are not *non sequiturs*, and how it is that they touch on a dimension of difficulty which is pervasively, if often only tacitly, in play in Wittgenstein's investigations. We can put Phillips's point this way: when such a remark occurs in the midst of one of Wittgenstein's investigations, it does not introduce an abrupt change of topic; it interrupts the investigation in order to step back for a moment and comment on a difficulty in doing philosophy which one runs up against in such investigations. Thus one will not understand what such remarks are about, unless one understands why they occur in the contexts they do.¹⁴

Rhees makes it clear that he takes Wittgenstein's injunction (to go the bloody hard way) neither to be a mere idiosyncrasy of Wittgenstein's 'style' of philosophy, nor to bear on one particular 'area of philosophy' (say, 'ethics') to the exclusion of others. In support of this, he draws on a variety of related remarks of Wittgenstein's:

'Go the bloody *hard* way.' I have said that for him philosophy was this. And this was not just a personal matter: it was not just the spirit in which he happened to pursue philosophy. In the manuscript books on which I am working he makes remarks like, 'In logic one cannot by-pass any difficulty.' (...[H]e often spoke of 'logic' when he took it to cover the whole of philosophy.) Or again he said: 'In logic there is no substitute.'... Put it another way: If you see the kind of difficulty that is raised in philosophy, you will see why there cannot be a simplified way of meeting it.... And this means: take the *difficulties* seriously: 'unless you recognise that they *are* difficulties; unless you recognise that they are difficult – unless they make things difficult.'¹⁵

The sorts of difficulties that are at issue here are evidently not tied to some particular subject matter. (Indeed, the term 'ethics' in Wittgenstein's vocabulary no more names an independent subject matter or separable area of philosophy than does the term 'logic'.¹⁶ For Wittgenstein, logic and ethics are each, and each differently, concerned with a pervasive dimension of human thought and action.¹⁷) For Wittgenstein, it is an integral aspect of what it is to confront a philosophical difficulty that one 'see why there cannot be a simplified way of meeting it'. Progress in philosophy, on such a conception, always depends in part on overcoming one's own powerful inclination to evade seeing the difficulties as the kind of difficulties they are – overcoming one's reluctance to face up to the genuine hopelessness of a philosophical difficulty, given the terms in which one, all but inevitably, seeks to frame it.¹⁸ The reluctance is tied to the fact that it often seems as if one can cease to frame the difficulty in the terms in question only at tremendous cost. Doing what Wittgenstein's investigations ask of us – loosening our determination to represent the difficulty in the terms in which it initially presents itself to us – 'seems only to destroy everything

interesting, that is, all that is great and important'.¹⁹ It thus is essential to an appreciation of Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy that one appreciate (not only that he sees our philosophical perplexities as arising from certain forms of confusion and their dissolution as calling for the attainment of certain forms of clarity, but) that he sees us as deeply attached to our confusions, resistant to giving up the ways of looking at things upon which they rest.

Phillips goes on to remark that the sort of difficulties that are at issue in the five passages from Wittgenstein quoted above will be 'missed if one equates the difficulties with *personal* difficulties'.²⁰ This is surely right if by '*personal* difficulties' Phillips means *merely* personal (as opposed to philosophical) difficulties. But it is equally wrong if by this Phillips means 'philosophical, and therefore in no way personal, difficulties'.²¹ Erecting an opposition here between mutually exclusive categories of 'the personal' and 'the philosophical' will block the way to understanding why Wittgenstein thinks that work in philosophy (properly conducted) is a kind of working on oneself, and why he thinks that one cannot be any more honest in one's philosophical thinking than one can be with oneself, and why he thinks that the greatness of a philosophical work is expressive of the greatness of the particular human being that is its author. Phillips is certainly right that the wrong sort of insistence on the (idea that the sorts of *difficulty* with which Wittgenstein, in his philosophical work, is concerned are) '*personal*' can lead to disastrous misinterpretations of Wittgenstein's work.²² But too sharp a recoil from such misinterpretations – with its complementary insistence upon too sharp a separation between ethical and philosophical difficulty – is equally obstructive of an understanding of Wittgenstein's conception of the nature of the difficulty of philosophy.

Wittgenstein's remark that 'nothing is so difficult as not deceiving oneself' is neither more nor less a remark about a particular difficulty which arises in philosophy than it is a remark about a general ethical difficulty. For Wittgenstein's thought here is that one's ability to avoid self-deception in philosophy can be neither more nor less than one's ability to avoid it outside philosophy. (Wittgenstein concludes a meditation on the effects of the all but inevitable tendency to 'lie to oneself' on one's writing with the remark: 'If you are unwilling to know what you are, your writing is a form of deceit'.²³) If you are unwilling to descend into yourself, then you will remain superficial in your thinking and writing generally, and *a fortiori* you will remain superficial in your efforts to write philosophy. Hence Wittgenstein writes to Malcolm: 'You can't think decently if you don't want to hurt yourself'.²⁴ The issue here – as in each of the five remarks from Wittgenstein quoted above – is at once personal and philosophical.

'If anyone is *unwilling* to descend into himself. . . he will remain superficial in his writing.' Wittgenstein is equally committed to the converse of this remark: if someone remains superficial in his thinking or writing this can

(where it is not a function of immaturity or ineptitude) be a reflection of the character of the person whose thinking and writing it is. It is, for Wittgenstein, not only possible to discern aspects of a person's character in the character of their philosophizing, but essential to the formation of any true estimate of their philosophy that one be able to do so. The exercise of such discernment is never far below the surface in the judgements Wittgenstein himself offers of the value of the philosophical work of others.²⁵ But this means that the line between 'the personal' and 'the philosophical' cannot be as sharp, for Wittgenstein, as Phillips imagines it to be. To put the point more positively and in a more Wittgensteinian idiom: the spirit of a person shows itself in the spirit of his philosophy, which in turn shows itself in the way he philosophizes.

The numerous remarks about other thinkers sprinkled throughout Wittgenstein's notebooks and recorded conversations furnish vivid documentation of the manifold sorts of ways in which Wittgenstein himself exercises such discernment. When Wittgenstein says about Frank Ramsey: 'Ramsey's incapacity for genuine enthusiasm or (what is really the same thing) reverence came to disgust me more and more',²⁶ he is commenting on something about Ramsey's sensibility that reflects itself in, but certainly not only in, the character of his response to philosophical ideas. What is at issue here is a kind of limitation of sensibility that is neither merely personal nor merely philosophical, but rather equally – and, in Wittgenstein's eyes, equally fatefully – both. When Maurice Drury tells Wittgenstein: 'I always enjoy reading William James. He is such a human person,' Wittgenstein responds: 'Yes, that is what makes him a good philosopher; he was a real human being'.²⁷ That James is 'a real human being' is something Wittgenstein takes himself to be able to discern as a reader of James's philosophical writings. And the estimate he forms in this regard of James *qua* person is not – and, for Wittgenstein, cannot be – utterly independent of his estimate of James *qua* philosopher. When Wittgenstein remarks about A.J. Ayer: 'He has something to say but he is incredibly shallow',²⁸ this is, in the first instance, of course, a remark about the shallowness of Ayer's philosophizing. But it is not *merely* a remark about the quality of Ayer's efforts at philosophizing, and as such wholly without bearing on an estimate of the shallowness or depth of the sensibility of the person whose philosophizing it is.²⁹ Similarly, when Wittgenstein says about James Frazer: 'Frazer is much more savage than most of these savages',³⁰ this is a comment on both the man and his thought. It is a comment on something that shows itself in Frazer's writing about the forms of life and modes of thought of the primitive peoples he studies – where part of what shows itself is something about what sorts of possibilities of thought and life are (and are not) closed to Frazer himself.

'You cannot write anything about yourself that is more truthful than you yourself are.' That is simultaneously a remark about a personal and a

philosophical difficulty. (If you cannot write anything that is more truthful than you yourself are, then you cannot write anything *in philosophy* that is more truthful than you yourself are.) For Wittgenstein, the two difficulties are inseparable – they are aspects of a single difficulty.³¹ One can, if one will, take the words ‘perspicuity’ and ‘clarity’ to stand for things Wittgenstein struggles to attain in philosophy. And one can, with equal justification, take the words ‘honesty’ and ‘*Anständigkeit*’ to stand for things Wittgenstein thinks everyone should struggle to attain in life. If you do not think of yourself as ever practising philosophy, then you may take yourself only to have reason to think of yourself as caught up in the second of these two kinds of struggle.³² If you evidently do practise philosophy, but most decidedly not in the spirit of Wittgenstein, then these two struggles may strike you as utterly independent of one another. (Though, it is worth remembering, they did not seem so to philosophers as different from one another as Socrates, Augustine and Nietzsche.) But if you wish to think of yourself as practising philosophy in anything like the spirit of Wittgenstein, then these two struggles must become for you – as they did for Wittgenstein – twin aspects of a single struggle, each partially constitutive of the other.

When Wittgenstein writes ‘*Call me a truth-seeker and I will be satisfied*’, he specifies the character of his striving in terms of something which is for him equally a philosophical and an ethical ideal.³³ All philosophical thinking and writing accordingly has, for Wittgenstein, its ethical aspect. Wittgenstein thought that what (and more importantly *how*) we think is revelatory of who we are (and how we live), and that learning to think better (and, above all, to *change* the ways in which one thinks) is an important means to becoming a better – i.e. to becoming (what Wittgenstein calls) ‘a real’ – ‘human being’.³⁴ So, even though Wittgenstein, in one sense, ‘has no ethics’ (if ‘ethics’ names a branch of philosophy with its own proprietary subject matter), in another sense, his thinking and writing – on every page of his work – takes place under the pressure of an ethical demand. Any writing answerable to Wittgenstein’s conception of the nature of the difficulty of philosophy – of what it means to acknowledge a philosophical difficulty to be the kind of difficulty it is – necessarily has *ein Ethischer Sinn*.³⁵

But the question still remains: what sort of ‘difficulties in doing philosophy’ are these (that require that one go the bloody hard way)? In what way can ‘working in philosophy’, as Wittgenstein seeks to practise it, really be said to be a case of ‘working on oneself’? Or to put the same question differently: when and how can failure in philosophy be a function of failure of character, or of will, or of soul – rather than mere failure of acumen, or of wit, or of intellectual penetration? Or conversely: how can success in philosophy depend upon the formation of character, the cultivation of will, or (as Socrates likes to put it) ‘the state of one’s soul’?

Schopenhauer’s cab

Wittgenstein’s writing is deeply practical... the way Freud’s is. And like Freud’s therapy, it wishes to prevent understanding which is unaccompanied by inner change.

Stanley Cavell³⁶

I must quickly make a short digression, to avoid the risk of your imagining that this therapeutic work is accomplished too easily. From what I have said so far... [the problem] would seem to be the result of ignorance – a not knowing about mental events that one ought to know of... So it ought not to be very difficult [for the therapist]... to restore the patient by communicating his knowledge to him thus remedying his ignorance... If only that was how things happened!... Knowledge is not always the same as knowledge: there are different sorts of knowledge, which are far from equivalent psychologically... The knowledge [the patient requires] must rest on an internal change in the patient.

Sigmund Freud³⁷

I want to start with a comparatively straightforward example of one philosopher charging another philosopher with a deficiency in his philosophy of a sort which is inseparable from a moral criticism of the philosopher himself. For it to be an example of the relevant sort, the charge must be directed in the first instance at the character of the philosophy – at the *thought* itself – and not merely at the character of the man. Yet it must not be directed at the character of the thought to the exclusion of that of the man. Rather it must be directed at the character of the thinker as revealed in and through the character of his thought. Thus what is uncovered through an examination of the thought is a deficiency of virtue in the thinker, not merely a deficit in his intellectual candlepower.

Consider the following criticism which Schopenhauer makes of Spinoza:

Spinoza, who always boasts of proceeding *more geometrico*, has actually done so more than he himself knew. For what to him was certain and settled from an immediate perceptive apprehension of the nature of the world, he tries to demonstrate logically and independently of this knowledge. But of course he arrives at the intended result predetermined by him, only by taking as the starting-point concepts arbitrarily made by him... and allowing himself in the demonstration all the freedom of choice for which the nature of those wide-ranging concepts afforded convenient opportunity.³⁸

The first sentence of this passage presupposes a familiarity with Schopenhauer’s theory of geometry – in particular, with his doctrine that

'geometry... always proves only that of which we are already convinced through another kind of knowledge'.³⁹ In the case of geometry, Schopenhauer thinks, no self-deception need be involved in the activity of furnishing ourselves with proofs of conclusions of whose truth we are already convinced by other means. The discipline of offering proofs can play an important role in articulating and systemizing our knowledge of geometrical truths, without pretence to being the sole foundation upon which such knowledge rests. And, in principle, it ought to be possible for proof to play a similar role in philosophy. But Schopenhauer's complaint about Spinoza is that he doesn't offer his proofs merely as a means of systemizing truths to which he has legitimately helped himself by other means. Rather, he represents his conviction in his conclusions as if it derived solely from his demonstrations. Yet his demonstrations appear to succeed only because they have been carefully tailored by him to vindicate their 'predetermined' results. The assumption implicit in Schopenhauer's charge against Spinoza here is that anyone with an equal talent for constructing 'demonstrations', but with a predilection for a divergent set of predetermined results, could have succeeded equally well in 'proving' the opposite of what Spinoza alleged to have succeeded in proving. The implicit charge is one of *intellectual dishonesty*: of pretending to explore the logic of our concepts, while actually curbing and bending them to one's own ends – of pretending to follow the lead of reason, while herding it in the direction one antecedently wants it to go.

My interest, for present purposes, is not in the broader questions of philosophical methodology which this passage might be taken to raise (e.g., what is the proper role of argument or proof in philosophy?) nor in any questions of Spinoza exegesis (e.g., is this passage fair in its criticism of Spinoza?). I want rather to attend only to the character of the criticism and, in particular, to the ethical demand which Schopenhauer takes Spinoza to have failed to have respected. The implicit demand might be formulated as follows: it is our obligation, in philosophy (and not only philosophy), to *think things through* – and not (in the guise of thinking things through) to tailor our arguments so as to predetermine the outcome of our investigations. Schopenhauer makes no secret of the fact that he sees his fellow-philosophers (with the notable exception of Kant) as everywhere failing to accede to this demand.

Schopenhauer's criticisms of his fellow philosophers serve as particularly vivid examples of the sort I said I wanted to begin with – of a philosopher criticizing other philosophers for failings that go beyond the merely intellectual. Schopenhauer offers a clear case of this because when he seeks to expose a failing in his contemporaries of the relevant sort, it is generally hard to miss the acerbic moralizing note (the note of accusation, contempt and dismay) sounded in his descriptions of their work. His remarks take on a bitingly ironic, witheringly disapproving edge, leaving no doubt that in his

view the species of failure he seeks to expose is not merely due to a lack of intellectual acuity.⁴⁰ Let us take a look at one example of such a passage:

What have our own worthy honest German professors of philosophy done on their part for their dear cosmological proof... – they who value intellect and truth above all else?... They know that a first cause is just as inconceivable as is the point where space has an end.... For every cause is a *change*, and here we are necessarily bound to ask about the change which preceded it, and by which it had been brought about, and so on ad infinitum, ad infinitum! Not even a first state of matter is conceivable from which... all subsequent states could have proceeded. For if in itself it had been their cause, they too would have had to exist from all eternity, and hence the present state would not be only at this moment. But if that first state began to be causal only at a certain time, then something must have *changed* it at that time for its inactivity to have ceased. But then something came about, a change occurred, and we must ask at once about its cause, in other words, about a change which preceded it, and again we find ourselves on the ladder of causes up which we are whipped by the inexorable law of causality higher and higher, ad infinitum, ad infinitum.... The law of causality is therefore not so obliging as to allow itself to be used like a cab which we dismiss after we reach our destination.... And so what did they do, these noble and sincere friends of truth?... What did they do for their old friend, the hard-pressed and prostrate cosmological proof? They thought of a clever ruse.... They said: ... [Y]our theme will now have the name of 'the Absolute'; this has a foreign, decent, and aristocratic ring; and we know best what can be done by Germans by assuming an air of superiority. Everyone, of course, understands what is meant and thus thinks he is a sage.... You shout (and we accompany you): 'The Absolute, confound it, *this must exist*, otherwise there would be nothing at all!' (With this you bang on the table.) But where does this come from? 'Silly question! Haven't I said that it was the Absolute?'⁴¹

Schopenhauer's ire is directed at those who employ a principle for as long as it suits their purposes, and then conveniently abandon it as soon as its consequences fail to lead in the direction which suits them. The specific target in the above passage is those 'worthy honest German professors of philosophy' who seek to argue for a *causa sui* of the universe by first employing the principle of causality ('Every event has a cause') in order to trace the chain of causes back to an earlier and still earlier stage and, then, refrain from applying the principle as they (allegedly coming upon that most exalted of causes: 'the Absolute') reach the point at which their 'demonstration' arrives at its 'intended and predetermined result'.

Schopenhauer characterizes the principle in question as refusing to allow itself to be *dismissed like a cab* ('The law of causality is . . . not so obliging as to allow itself to be used like a cab which we dismiss after we reach our destination'), thus implying that, once the principle no longer suits their purposes, the parties in question actively seek to dismiss it. The subtextual allegation here is that, in suddenly at a certain point actively seeking to dismiss it, these parties betray an awareness that if they want to be able to be rid of the principle at just the right moment, they will need to get rid of it themselves – as if they knew that, apart from such an active effort on their part to rid themselves of it, the principle would inconveniently remain in effect, hindering their purposes. This bit of hyperbole, sounding the note of purposive agency, highlights the sort of case with which Schopenhauer is concerned. It is not one in which someone merely *happens* to fail to do something – merely happens, say, to fail to draw the requisite inference (due to a deficit of, say, attentiveness, or intelligence, or nourishment). The sort of failure with which Schopenhauer is concerned, whenever he adopts his characteristic ironically moralizing tone, is a *motivated* one. It is a failure that is alleged to be at some level *wilful*. Hence Schopenhauer's sense of entitlement to his tone of moral condemnation.

I say 'at some level wilful' in order to register a question about how one should characterize the degree of consciousness which accompanies such failure. How, after all, can such a form of failure – one of the will, and not merely of the intellect – be operative here, if it is true, as it generally seems to be (and, as Schopenhauer himself seems to think), that the guilty parties in such cases are also in some sense 'unaware' of their misdeed. They didn't ever *decide* to bring their train of thought to a halt at some point short of thinking things through. Indeed, they are of the belief that they have gone as far as they can go (all the way to the Absolute!): they need to be brought to see that their thinking is characterized by a failure to think things through; and it may be quite difficult to convince them that this is so. If to dismiss something like a cab involves full-blooded agency, then how is one able to pull the trick off *unknowingly*? More puzzling still: how can one not only will oneself to be blind to something one thus in some sense *does* (such as dismissing an argument like a cab once it has ceased to serve one's purposes), but also will oneself to be blind to the fact that one so wills? How can one be in a state in which one both knows and yet does not know that one is cheating (both oneself and others) in one's thinking? To ask such questions is to enter into a consideration of certain very puzzling kinds of self-blindness and self-knowledge. As Freud says, one will need to distinguish different kinds of 'knowing' in order to make sense of such operations of the will; and one will need to find ways to make the subject herself aware that that which she (in one sense) does not know she nevertheless (in another sense) does know. Hence Schopenhauer's devices of irony and hyperbole. The aim of these devices is to bring to a person's consciousness that which she cannot help but, and yet simultan-

eously is somehow able not to, know – to make vivid a sort of rupture between will and understanding that is peculiarly invisible to the person who suffers from it. Such failures of self-transparency are matters that belong to something one might call the ethical dimension of intellectual confusion.⁴² A preoccupation with this dimension, on the part of authors such as Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and Kierkegaard, is part of what is responsible for the jarringly ethical note in the midst of discussions of an otherwise apparently purely metaphysical or narrowly philosophical nature (such as whether there can be such a thing as a first cause). What such authors share with Wittgenstein is the belief that philosophical criticism when pushed to its deepest level – when it seeks to identify the most fundamental forms of confusion and dishonesty in our thinking – operates at a level at which it is necessarily no longer possible neatly to distinguish between criticism of the thought of a person and criticism of the person whose thought it is. And this is one of the (many) reasons why the works of such authors will always fit at best uncomfortably into the curriculum of a university.

Wittgenstein's relative estimate of Frege and Russell

The style of my sentences is extraordinarily strongly influenced by Frege. And if I wanted to, I could establish this influence where at first sight no one would see it.

Wittgenstein⁴³

A man's style is a picture of him.

Wittgenstein⁴⁴

In order to see further how 'nothing is hidden' could be, for Wittgenstein, an ethical as well as a logical remark, it might help to consider Wittgenstein's relative estimate of Frege and Russell. But first, a word regarding what I mean – or rather do not merely mean – by 'Frege' and by 'Russell' when I speak of 'Wittgenstein's relative estimate of Frege and Russell': what will be at issue, in what follows, is neither *merely* Wittgenstein's relative estimate of two individual persons named Frege and Russell (if such an estimate is taken to be something distinct from his estimate of their philosophies), nor *merely* his relative estimate of their writings (if such an estimate is taken to be something that has no bearing on an estimate of the persons who are the authors of those writings). 'Frege' and 'Russell' will refer, in what follows, to the whole of the respective sensibilities expressed through – i.e. which *show themselves* in – the writings of Frege and Russell.

Elizabeth Anscombe writes:

Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* has captured the interest and excited the admiration of many, yet almost all that has been published about it has been

wildly irrelevant. If this has had any one cause, that cause has been the neglect of Frege. . . . In the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein assumes, and does not try to stimulate, an interest in the kind of questions that Frege wrote about.⁴⁵

How can the neglect of Frege be the reason why much of the commentary on Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* is wildly irrelevant to a proper understanding of that work? What more widely accepted platitude about that book could there be than that it develops and responds to ideas put forward by Frege and Russell? But Anscombe's point presumably is not that Frege is seldom mentioned in discussions of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*. Her point must rather be that we do not know who Frege is for the author of the *Tractatus*.⁴⁶ One part of what this means is: an appreciation of Wittgenstein's early work presupposes an immersion in a particular philosophical background ('an interest in the kind of questions that Frege wrote about') which most of the commentary on that work has lost sight of. It is not that we are unfamiliar with Frege's or Wittgenstein's texts, but that we have failed to see what it is that is at issue in them. We fail to get hold of the questions that figure most centrally in these texts and of the kind of questions these questions are for Frege and for Wittgenstein. But another part of what it means is: we fail to appreciate how Wittgenstein's conception of what it is to engage a philosophical problem is indebted to the example Frege afforded of what such engagement, at its bloody hardest, involves.

In the opening section of this essay, following the lead of Rhees, I suggested that the sorts of failures to think things through in philosophy that most exercised Wittgenstein are by no means limited to cases where the failure to carry through on the part of a philosopher can easily be traced to overtly moral or religious evasions or predilections on his part. Now, following the lead of Anscombe, I want to suggest that apart from an appreciation of what honesty in thinking (or the exposure of dishonesty in thinking) comes to for Wittgenstein – how an effort to accede to such a demand ought to pervade every page of one's writing – it is impossible to understand why Wittgenstein, throughout his life, holds Frege (whose work is taken up almost exclusively with problems in the philosophy of logic and mathematics) in the sort of esteem which he otherwise reserves for thinkers such as Søren Kierkegaard and Karl Kraus. Frege's critiques of philosophical 'positions' – such as 'formalism', 'empiricism', 'idealism', 'psychologism', etc. – represent, for early and later Wittgenstein, guiding paradigms of the manner in which philosophical elucidation, at its most penetrating, is able to reveal how a philosophical 'ism', fully thought through, can be shown 'in the end to coincide' with the very 'ism' which is its alleged opposite. In particular, Frege's attempt to demonstrate how psychologism, when thought through *bei grösster Folgerichtigkeit* – 'with the utmost consequentiality' – can be seen 'to flow into' solipsism⁴⁷ serves as perhaps the example

par excellence for Wittgenstein, throughout his life, of what it means to think a 'position' through in philosophy all the way to the point where it collapses in on itself.⁴⁸ Such a mode of critique, Wittgenstein believes, inevitably lays bare the degree to which unclarity in one's philosophizing is a function of forms of residual dishonesty in one's thinking *überhaupt*. Apart from an understanding of what it means in such cases to think the matter through *bei grösster Folgerichtigkeit* – and thus why Wittgenstein is able to regard Frege's critiques of philosophical 'positions' as paradigmatic demonstrations of what it is to do this – there will be no understanding Wittgenstein's own descriptions of the peculiar sort of ground he seeks to traverse (and calls upon his reader to traverse) in philosophy. To take one example: there will be no understanding what Wittgenstein means when he talks about 'strictly thinking something through' or 'strictly following something through' in philosophy – as, for example, when he says: 'idealism, strictly thought out [*streng durchgedacht*], leads to realism';⁴⁹ or: 'solipsism, strictly followed through [*streng durchgeführt*], collapses into pure realism'.⁵⁰ And apart from an appreciation of what is involved in thus strictly thinking or following matters through in philosophy, there is no understanding Wittgenstein's work. For in his philosophical work, early and late, Wittgenstein, in a sense, attempts nothing more nor less than to furnish the reader with examples of what it is strictly to think through what it is that we (his readers) imagine we mean when we say the sorts of things that we find ourselves, in taking the pressure of philosophical thought, wanting to say.

One frequently finds commentators on Wittgenstein's work either implicitly or explicitly committing themselves to a thought along the following lines: 'If, on the one hand, we wish to understand Wittgenstein's views on the nature of facts, propositions, or logical necessity, then we should begin by reading the writings of Frege and Russell; if, on the other hand, we wish to understand his views on "ethical" topics [as touched on in remarks such as the five quoted above], then we should begin by looking at the writings of figures such as Schopenhauer, Tolstoy and Kierkegaard.' Surely, there is much that is sound in this advice. But there is a possible implication in such advice (exacerbated by the presence of the words 'on the one hand' and 'on the other hand' in the above wording of the advice) that is worth making explicit. It might be taken to imply: 'If you seek illumination on the topic of seemingly "ethical" remarks, such as the five quoted above, then exploring Wittgenstein's admiration for a thinker such as Frege (or his dissatisfaction with aspects of Russell's work regarding the nature of facts, propositions, logical necessity, etc.) will be of no avail; you must turn instead to what Wittgenstein admired in the writings of thinkers such as Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard and Tolstoy – only then will you understand the import of remarks such as the five quoted above.' This is (at least with respect to the five remarks quoted above), in one sense, exactly wrong.⁵¹ For it implies that the high esteem in which Wittgenstein holds, e.g., Frege

throughout his life is in no way tied to the topic of what it is to go the bloody hard way in philosophy, and thus obscures from view how the character of Frege's attention to philosophical problems is able to represent for Wittgenstein a touchstone of what honesty and resoluteness in philosophical thinking ought to come to.

It is, Wittgenstein writes in his Preface to the *Tractatus*, 'to the great works of Frege and the writings of my friend Bertrand Russell that I owe in large measure the stimulation of my thoughts'.⁵² Anscombe comments: 'Wittgenstein's relative estimate of Frege and Russell comes out in the acknowledgment he makes in the Preface to the *Tractatus*'.⁵³ This is surely right. This is not to deny that if one wants to know what Wittgenstein's philosophical problems were, during the period that led up to the writing of the *Tractatus*, then one should look, above all, to various writings of Russell's. For it is undeniable that Wittgenstein's thinking about the questions which centrally preoccupy the *Tractatus* originates in his struggles with problems that arise in Russell's philosophy. But to concede this does not require that one deny that if one wants to know what the author of the *Tractatus* thinks *great* philosophy is then one should look, above all, to 'the great works of Frege'.

Now, if Rhees is right (if 'going the bloody hard way' is what philosophy was for Wittgenstein, because 'in logic one cannot by-pass any difficulty' and seeing the kind of difficulty that is raised in logic requires seeing 'why there cannot be a simplified way of meeting it') and if Anscombe is right (that 'Wittgenstein's relative estimate of Frege and Russell comes out in the acknowledgment he makes in the Preface to the *Tractatus*'), then it should be possible, by trying to see the work of Frege and Russell through Wittgenstein's eyes, to shed some light on Wittgenstein's conception of what going the bloody hard way with respect to a philosophical difficulty ought and ought not to involve. So, in what follows, I will attempt briefly to explore wherein Wittgenstein took the greatness of 'the great works of Frege' to lie and why he took 'the writings of [his] friend Bertrand Russell' to fall short of such greatness – and, more particularly, how the contrast that he discerned in this regard (at least at the time of writing the *Tractatus*) between the work of his two philosophical mentors helped to shape his own conception of what he sought to accomplish in philosophy. I hope thereby to shed some light on what it means, for Wittgenstein, 'to take the difficulties [we encounter in philosophy] seriously', 'to recognise that they are difficulties', and to allow them to 'make things difficult'.⁵⁴

Russell and the problem of the unity of the proposition

I have an uneasiness about philosophy altogether; what remains for me to do in philosophy (I mean in technical philosophy) does not seem of first-rate importance.

Russell, 13 December 1911⁵⁵

I have developed a certain nausea for the subtleties and distinctions that make up good philosophy; I should like to write things of human interest, like bad philosophers, only without being bad. But perhaps it is the badness that is interesting.

Russell, 27 December 1911⁵⁶

One way of summarizing a recurring dissatisfaction that Wittgenstein had with the work of his friend and mentor Bertrand Russell during their years of close collaboration would be to say that he believed that Russell did not take the difficulties that kept recurring in his philosophical work seriously enough; rather than seeking a way *through* the difficulties – allowing them to 'make things difficult' – Russell was inclined to seek a way *around* them.

The shape of a central problem in Wittgenstein's early notebooks and other writings, which Wittgenstein inherits from Russell, can be put as follows: '[T]he point . . . is to say how propositions hang together internally. How the *propositional bond* comes into existence'.⁵⁷ Wittgenstein's thinking about these questions has its overt source in troubles inherent in Russell's notion of *logical form*. However, the guise in which the problem first arises in Russell's philosophy is as a problem about *the unity of the proposition*; and this problem, in turn, first arises as a problem about *the difference between verbal nouns and verbs as verbs*. (These problems, as we shall see, closely parallel problems Frege encounters in his philosophy.) Here is Russell, in 1903, on the problem of the difference between verbal nouns and verbs as verbs:

It is plain . . . that the concept which occurs in the verbal noun is the very same as that which occurs as verb. . . . [E]very constituent of every proposition must, on pain of self-contradiction, be capable of being made a logical subject. . . . Thus the very verb which occurs as verb can occur also as subject. The question is: What logical difference is expressed by this difference of grammatical form? . . . And it is plain that the difference must be one in external relations. But in regard to verbs, there is a further point. . . . 'Caesar died' and 'the death of Caesar' will illustrate this point. If we ask: What is asserted in the proposition 'Caesar died'? the answer must be 'the death of Caesar is asserted'. In that case, it would seem, it is the death of Caesar which is true or false; and yet neither truth nor falsity belongs to a mere logical subject. . . . [I]t is quite plain that ['the death of Caesar'] . . . is never equivalent to 'Caesar died'. There appears to be an ultimate notion of assertion, given by the verb, which is lost as soon as we substitute a verbal noun. . . . Thus the contradiction which was to have been avoided, of an entity which cannot be made a logical subject, appears to have become inevitable. This difficulty, which seems to be inherent in the very nature of truth and falsehood, is one with which I do not know how to deal satisfactorily.⁵⁸

We have here the general shape of a problem that continues to haunt Russell's thinking for the next decade and a half – until, that is, he quite explicitly cedes the problem (and with it 'the fundamental problems of logic') to Wittgenstein. Russell here, in 1903, wants to maintain both: (1) that 'every constituent of every proposition must... be capable of being made a logical subject' (to deny this he thinks would be self-contradictory and, moreover, would strike at the root of his entire atomist metaphysics and its correlative conception of analysis), and (2) that there are cases of 'entities' which apparently cannot be made into logical subjects (the case which here gives Russell pause being that which is expressed by *the verb functioning qua verb in a proposition*). Taking advantage of his conclusion above that 'this difficulty... seems to be inherent in the very nature of truth and falsehood', Russell goes on, in the remainder of *The Principles of Mathematics*, §52, to give a very weird reason for why he can afford to leave the issue unresolved:

The nature of truth... belongs no more to the principles of mathematics than to the principles of everything else. I therefore leave this question to the logicians with the above brief indication of a difficulty.⁵⁹

Russell seeks to excuse himself here from further exploring the problem by consigning it to a different 'area' of philosophy. Since the difficulty is not peculiar to the philosophy of mathematics, which is the official topic of Russell's book, it can be postponed for a more suitable occasion. That he should allow himself to rest content with thus leaving the question (to the logicians!) becomes all the more puzzling, two sections later, when it emerges that this problem (concerning the elusiveness of that which is expressed by the verb as verb) is really a version of a more general problem (concerning the nature of the unity of the proposition):

The twofold nature of the verb, as actual verb and as verbal noun, may be expressed, if all verbs are held to be relations, as the difference between a relation in itself and a relation actually relating. Consider, for example, the proposition 'A differs from B'. The constituents of this proposition, if we analyze it, appear to be only A, difference, B. Yet these constituents, thus placed side by side, do not reconstitute the proposition. The difference which occurs in the proposition actually relates A and B, whereas the difference after analysis is a notion which has no connection with A and B... A proposition... is essentially a unity, and when analysis has destroyed the unity, no enumeration of the constituents will restore the proposition. The verb, when used as verb, embodies the unity of the proposition, and is thus distinguishable from the verb considered as term, though I do not know how to give a clear account of the precise nature of the distinction.⁶⁰

Given the generality the problem here assumes, it becomes all the more remarkable that Russell takes the difficulty in question to be one that can be postponed for a later occasion. This deferral takes on an even more puzzling aspect when, later in the same work,⁶¹ Russell gives Frege credit for 'recognizing the unity of the proposition' only, two sections later, to refuse Frege the pinch of salt that Russell himself seemingly required in his own earlier discussion of the verb as verb. Russell here vehemently rejects Fregean *Begriffe* on what he is here prepared to represent as decisive grounds: if *Begriffe* cannot 'be made into logical subjects without change of meaning' any attempt to talk about them will reduce one to stammering, thus any theory that purports to say something about them contradicts itself.

The problem that Russell faces in the above passage is that of saying what the difference is between a proposition and a mere list (e.g. the difference between the proposition 'A differs from B' and the list consisting of the constituents of that proposition – 'A', 'the relation of *differing from*', and 'B' – placed side by side). Versions of this problem continue to haunt Russell's work, and become vividly manifest to him, nine years later, while trying to write an essay entitled 'What is Logic?'. In that essay, he attempts to introduce a notion that explains how the constituents of a proposition are *united*: the notion of *logical form*. As Russell later formulates it: the logical form of a proposition is the way in which the constituents of the proposition are put together. The difference between a proposition and a list is that in the latter the constituents merely co-occur in a single sequence whereas in the former they figure in a complex united by a logical form. Russell thus defines logic as 'the study of the forms of complexes'. This naturally raises the question: what exactly are these forms? The purpose of the essay was to have been to answer this question. But after declaring 'We *must* take *form* as a primitive', Russell is able to furnish only negative answers to this question (and hence to the question posed by the title of his essay): 'A *form* is... not a constituent of complexes having this form. A *form* is not a mere symbol: a symbol composed entirely of variables symbolises a form, but is not a form';⁶² and so on. Every answer Russell canvasses in this essay (purporting to furnish a positive characterization of the nature of logical form) he rejects on the grounds that it threatens to transform logical form into something which itself 'is not a form' but rather only a constituent or symbolic counterpart of a form. In his attempts to offer a theoretical characterization of logical form, Russell here finds himself on the verge of the very sort of stammering that he previously castigated Frege for having acknowledged as an inevitable consequence of any attempt to convert *Begriffe* into logical subjects. The closest thing to a positive statement on the subject of the nature of logical form Russell ever manages to offer anywhere in his unfinished essay 'What is Logic?' is the following: 'A *form* is something.'⁶³ This leaves him with nothing more, by way of answer to his title question, than roughly: 'Logic is the study of something.' Russell wants to have something *positive* to say

(about what kind of a 'something' a logical form is), but every positive characterization he tries out is manifestly flawed.⁶⁴ He again feels a strong inclination to sidestep the topic and leave it to someone else – this time someone in particular. Announcing his decision to leave the essay unfinished, he writes Ottoline Morrell: 'I can't get on with "What is Logic?", the subject is hopelessly difficult, and for the present I am stuck. I feel very much inclined to leave it to Wittgenstein.'⁶⁵

Wittgenstein, in the years that follow, in both discussion and correspondence, continues to try to force Russell's attention on the question of 'the nature of the form of complexes', thus making Russell increasingly aware of problems such as the following:

The proposition 'if Socrates is human, and whatever is human is mortal, then Socrates is mortal' might be thought, at first, to be a proposition of logic. But it is obvious that its truth is in no way dependent on any peculiarity of Socrates or humanity or mortality, but only on the *form* of the proposition. . . . Thus we arrive at the pure logical proposition: 'Whatever x and α and β may be, if x is α and whatever is α is β , then x is β '. Here there is no longer any constituent corresponding to Socrates and humanity and mortality: the only thing that has been preserved is the pure *form* of the proposition, and the form is not a 'thing', not another constituent along with the objects that were previously related in that form. . . . [It] represents merely the way in which the constituents are put together. This cannot be a new constituent, for if it were, there would have to be a new way in which it and the other constituents are put together, and if we take this way again as a constituent, we find ourselves embarked on an endless regress.⁶⁶

This is from a never-finished book entitled *Theory of Knowledge*. Here, in 1913, Russell forthrightly concludes that logical forms cannot occur as constituents of propositions, thus violating the principle he enunciated ten years earlier (that any theory which purports to treat of entities which cannot 'be made into logical subjects without change of meaning' contradicts itself). This reopens the very problem which generated Russell's resistance to such a conclusion in 1903: Russell himself talks about logical forms at length in *Theory of Knowledge* and discusses particular examples of logical forms. A dilemma looms: either the logical forms he there discusses figure as constituents of the propositions in which they occur or they do not – if they do, they are not examples of logical forms; if they do not, he has failed to talk about them. Consider, for example, Russell's series of declarations, with regard to the nature of 'Whatever x and α and β may be, if x is α and whatever is α is β , then x is β ', such as that 'here there is no longer any constituent corresponding to Socrates and humanity and mortality', and that 'here . . . the only thing that has been preserved is the pure *form* of the

proposition', and that this form 'is not a "thing", not another constituent along with the objects that were previously related in that form'. Now with regard to each of these statements, we can ask: does the aforementioned logical form occur as the logical subject – and thus as a logical constituent – of the statement in question or not? If it does so occur: then it looks as if, by Russell's own lights, that which so occurs is not an example of a logical form after all (for a logical form is, by definition, something which cannot occur as a constituent of a proposition). If it doesn't so occur: then the following question becomes urgent: what is the logical subject of these statements? And if it is not a logical form, then it would seem to follow that nothing about any logical form is actually 'said' in any of these remarks, thus forcing the reader to the conclusion that none of these remarks (successfully) engages the topic that they purport to engage. It looks as if, if what Russell himself says about the nature of logical forms is true, then, by his own lights, many of the sentences in his manuscript (from which the above quotation is drawn) are nonsense (including much of that quotation itself). Russell – unlike Frege – never faces up to this problem.

When Russell (re-)encounters this version of his old problem, his inclination is to react much the same way as ten years earlier, essentially leaving it to others; and indeed he concludes his discussion of the topic in his manuscript with the remark: 'In the present chaotic state of our knowledge concerning the primitive ideas of logic, it is impossible to pursue this topic further.'⁶⁷ Russell, however, here in 1913, is no longer able to get around the problem by confining his attention to the topic officially announced in the title of the book (in this case the theory of knowledge, rather than the principles of mathematics) – by, as it were, leaving it to the logicians – because Russell is convinced in 1913, and constructs the design of the entire manuscript around the principle, that 'it is impossible to assign to the theory of knowledge a province distinct from that of logic'.⁶⁸ That the problem is an urgent one is repeatedly borne in on him by Wittgenstein in both correspondence and conversation. Wittgenstein, at the same time, makes things worse by suggesting that Russell's 1913 manuscript runs into an additional, related problem – a problem that arises in the theory of judgement.

Judgement, according to Russell, is the mental act by means of which objects are united so as to form propositions. But once he introduces the notion of logical form into his theory of the nature of logical complexes, difficulties creep into his theory of judgement. As we saw before: any collection of objects for which there is no corresponding logical form cannot be united into a proposition – it can be arranged at most into (a constellation that has 'the form' of) a mere list. Thus, for Russell, logical form becomes the source of the constraints on what can (and cannot) be judged: the totality of possible logical forms determines the range of possible judgeable contents. Russell, however, has no account of why certain collections of objects can

and others cannot be combined into logically unified complexes, and thus no account of why we can only judge of some things and not others – that is, of why we cannot judge a nonsense. In his conversations with Russell at the time, Wittgenstein hammers away at this point. He formulates the dimension of this problem that touches on the theory of judgement in the *Tractatus* as follows: ‘The correct explanation of the form of the proposition “A judges that *p*” must show that it is impossible to judge a nonsense. (Russell’s theory does not satisfy this condition.)’⁶⁹

The details of this objection (and why it is that Russell should find *this* objection – of the several fundamental objections Wittgenstein urges against Russell’s doctrines in 1913 – to be particularly troubling) do not matter for our present purpose. What does matter is Russell’s initial reaction to Wittgenstein’s initial (apparently rather inept) attempt to formulate his objection to Russell’s theory:

He said it was all wrong, not realizing the difficulties – that he had tried my view and knew it wouldn’t work. I couldn’t understand his objection – in fact he was very inarticulate – but I feel in my bones that he must be right, and that he has seen something I have missed. If I could see it too I shouldn’t mind, but as it is, it is worrying, and has rather destroyed the pleasure in my writing – I can only go on with what I see and yet I feel it is probably all wrong, and that Wittgenstein will think me a dishonest scoundrel for going on with it.⁷⁰

The thought that Wittgenstein will think him ‘a dishonest scoundrel for going on with it’ doesn’t of itself deter Russell from going on with it. For Russell has been trying to convince Wittgenstein for some time that he really ought to relax his own unreasonably exacting standards with regard to the writing of philosophy (and the evaluation of the writing of others) – at least enough to allow himself actually to finish writing something (and to allow Russell to publish what he has finished writing without drawing his student’s anger and contempt). Russell sums up his own view of Wittgenstein’s tormented relation to philosophical writing in a letter to Ottoline Morrell in the following terms: Wittgenstein’s ‘artistic conscience gets in the way’ so that if he can’t ‘do it perfectly’ then he would rather not do it at all.⁷¹

Ray Monk has suggested that Russell continues to ‘go on with it’ – ‘appealing to the results of a theory of logic in the absence of a theory’ – in part because he was assuming: (1) that, even if it turned out he himself wouldn’t ever be able to figure out what to do about the difficulty, Wittgenstein surely would, and (2) that whatever Wittgenstein came up with in his concurrent work on ‘the problem of logical complexes’ would fit perfectly into Russell’s own plans for the book.⁷² But the direction in which Wittgenstein’s own thinking was moving proved increasingly less serviceable to

Russell’s purposes. Whereas Russell wanted a *theory* of the nature of logical forms (and the nature of our acquaintance with them) to serve as a foundation for his epistemology, Wittgenstein was slowly moving in the direction of becoming more and more convinced not only that no such theory was possible but that the goal should be to show why all such theories are superfluous. Even if one thinks Monk’s suggestion uncharitable, it is incontrovertible (as evidenced, for example, by numerous remarks in Russell’s correspondence with Ottoline Morrell, F.H. Bradley, and others during this period) that the person Russell looks to for a solution to this problem is his student Wittgenstein – naturally enough, since this student keeps insisting, from a very early point on, that the problem is ‘a very fundamental one’, that Russell himself has failed to grasp what is required in the way of a solution, and that he (Wittgenstein) himself is on the verge of seeing his way clear to a (dis)solution of it.

As with his earlier essay ‘What is Logic?’, rather than leaving his discussion of these fundamental ideas in their ‘present chaotic state’, Russell decides to leave the entire manuscript unpublished. He decides it is the only intellectually honest thing to do, since the rest of his manuscript quite explicitly presupposes and builds on the very theory of logical forms which he never successfully works out. But he achieves this realization only after continuing to work on the manuscript for a period while trying to believe that the problem ‘wasn’t so bad’. Eventually, however, the worry that Wittgenstein will think him ‘a dishonest scoundrel for going on with it’ is eclipsed by the worry that Wittgenstein might be right in so thinking. Russell later describes his behaviour during this period as a ‘failure of honesty’ with regard to his work:

All that has gone wrong with me lately came from Wittgenstein’s attack on my work – I have only just realised this. It was very difficult to be honest about it, as it makes a large part of the book I meant to write impossible for years to come probably. I tried to believe it wasn’t so bad as that. . . . And the failure of honesty over my work – which was very slight and subtle, more an attitude than anything definite – spread like a poison in every direction.⁷³

As the epigraphs to this section indicate, as early as 1911, Russell (in the immediate aftermath of the completion of *Principia Mathematica*) begins to be beset with doubts about his ability to continue to do important work in technical philosophy; Russell’s inability to bring his manuscript on *Theory of Knowledge* to completion, however, vastly exacerbates these doubts. Three years later, he writes to Ottoline: ‘His [Wittgenstein’s] criticism . . . was an event of first-rate importance in my life, and affected everything I have done since. I saw he was right, and I saw that I could not hope ever again to do fundamental work in philosophy.’⁷⁴

In at least one sense of 'facing up to the problem', Russell, as signalled by his decision to abandon the 1913 manuscript, faces up to the problem in the following by no means trivial (but, from Wittgenstein's point of view, none the less minimal) sense: he acknowledges that he has no solution to the problem, that he needs one, and that he ought to look for one. (In response to criticisms from F.H. Bradley not all that dissimilar to ones Wittgenstein had already raised, Russell writes to Bradley, in 1914: 'I fully recognise the vital importance of the questions you raise. ... I recognise that it is my duty to answer if I can, and if I cannot, to look for an answer as long as I live.'⁷⁵) And it is equally evident, despite the persistent recurrence of a problem of this sort in his work (be it in the guise of the problem of the unity of the proposition, the verbal noun, the Fregean *Begriffe*, the violation of logical type or the nature of logical form), that Russell remains uncomfortable with the problem, and is, accordingly, reluctant to face it head on. As soon as he identifies a problem as being one of this general shape, he begins either to run from it or to search for a technical fix – thus leaving himself always in the position of having to treat the symptoms of the problem without ever confronting their source.⁷⁶ Although he increasingly comes to suspect that there might not be any 'simplified way of meeting the difficulty', Russell never sees why there cannot be one and never ceases to hanker after one – which means that, by Wittgenstein's lights, Russell never genuinely *encounters* (what Wittgenstein takes to be) the difficulty. Or to put it more precisely: Russell never sees the difficulty as bearing the features of that peculiar species of difficulty that Wittgenstein calls 'philosophical' – that is, he never sees it as an instance of the kind of difficulty which Rhees has in mind (in explicating what Wittgenstein means by the need to 'go the bloody hard way' in philosophy) when he quotes Wittgenstein as saying that the sorts of difficulties that most concern him are ones of the sort that one cannot by-pass.

What could Russell have done which, by Wittgenstein's lights, would have counted as his having taken a first step towards going the bloody hard way here? A first step would have been for him to *acknowledge* the difficulty as the kind of difficulty that (Wittgenstein thought) it was. This would have required him to affirm a pervasive and apparently irremediable inadequacy in his mode of expression in his discussions of the topic. Indeed, in the eyes of the author of the *Tractatus*, the courageous (and ultimately philosophically fruitful) way with this difficulty would have been for Russell forthrightly to highlight that which was logically defective in his own formulations, thereby flagging that in order for his reader to understand what Russell wanted to – but was unable to – say (about the nature of logical forms), the reader would first need to come to appreciate that which was defective in Russell's avowedly unsuccessful efforts to try to say it. Thus Russell, if he had wished to retain the notion of logical form he develops in his 1913 manuscript, might, for example, have acknowledged that he had reached an

impasse in his thought which required him to make something along the lines of the following (Fregean) sort of admission concerning the status of his own talk about logical forms:

I admit that there is a peculiar obstacle in the way of an understanding with the reader. By a kind of necessity of language, my expressions, taken literally, miss my thought; I mention a constituent of a proposition when what I intend is a logical form. I fully realise that I am relying upon a reader who is ready to meet me half-way – who does not begrudge a pinch of salt.

This (fictitious) admission – in regard to logical forms – resembles in certain ways the (actual) admission – in regard to *verbs qua verbs* – made in *The Principles of Mathematics*, ten years earlier; but the latter admission tends in the direction of treating the problem as a merely 'technical' one which further efforts at analysis will eventually clear up, whereas the former (fictitious) admission is sensitive to the depth of the problem and forthright about the implications the problem has for the status of any philosophical prose which purports to engage it. As we shall see, Frege makes just this former sort of admission (when he confronts a version of Russell's problem) in his own attempts to shed light on the nature of concepts. It is perhaps, above all, this moment in Frege's work which comes to epitomise for early Wittgenstein the difference in the character of Russell's and Frege's respective responses to a fundamental philosophical difficulty.

As Wittgenstein comes to appreciate the *depth* of this difference, it becomes increasingly clear to him that his own and Russell's ways in philosophy must permanently diverge. Seven years after the original publication of the *Tractatus*, and hence at a time when he was already a world-famous philosopher, Wittgenstein found himself (in order to satisfy certain bureaucratic requirements of Oxford University) in the humorous position of needing a *PhD*. As a way around the problem, the *Tractatus* was declared his 'thesis' and, in accordance with university regulations, an oral examination took place, with Moore and Russell serving as Wittgenstein's examiners. Monk recounts the episode as follows:

Russell advanced his view that Wittgenstein was inconsistent in claiming to have expressed unassailable truths by means of meaningless propositions. He was, of course, unable to convince Wittgenstein, who brought the proceeding to an end by clapping each of his examiners on the shoulder and remarking consolingly: 'Don't worry, I know you'll never understand it.'⁷⁷

Wittgenstein's confidence that Russell would never understand his book is not a function of his estimate of Russell's logical acumen (which he held in high esteem), but of his *sensibility*.⁷⁸ Nine years earlier, in 1920, Wittgenstein

had vehemently refused to allow a German translation of Russell's 'Introduction' to the *Tractatus* to be published as an introduction to the then planned German-language edition of the book (which refusal at the time cost Wittgenstein what appeared to be the only chance of ever getting the book published). He refused on the grounds that, once 'all the refinement of... [Russell's] English style was lost in the translation... what remained was superficiality and misunderstanding' – not only where Russell is critical but even where he was 'simply trying to make clear [klarlegen] the point of view' of Wittgenstein's book.⁷⁹ What Wittgenstein had become confident of, by 1929, was that Russell would never be willing to do what that book asks of its reader – namely, 'strictly follow through' on the very difficulties which Russell, in Wittgenstein's eyes, had always sought a way around.

Russell not infrequently made remarks regarding Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* of the following sort: 'I think (though he wouldn't agree) that what he likes best in mysticism is its power to make him stop thinking.'⁸⁰ There is considerable irony in this. For Wittgenstein (who, as Russell says, certainly wouldn't have acceded to this description of himself) did come to think something quite analogous to be true of Russell – and, moreover, thought that, with each passing year, it came to be increasingly true: namely, that what *he*, Russell (though he wouldn't agree), liked best about certain (putatively 'scientific') ways of approaching philosophical problems is that they held out the promise of relieving him of the obligation to have to think the problems through all the way.⁸¹

Frege on the elucidation of that which is logically primitive

There is no more light in a genius than in any other honest man – but he has a particular kind of lens to concentrate this light into a burning point. ... One might say: 'Genius is talent exercised with courage'.
Wittgenstein⁸²

Frege's courage as a philosopher clearly inspired Wittgenstein; his own conception of what philosophy might demand of one reflects his view of Frege's response to those demands.
Cora Diamond⁸³

A version of the problem which Russell first explicitly stumbles over in 1903 (when he asks about the difference between using an expression to signify a verbal noun and using it to signify a verb as verb) also occurs in Frege's work – most famously, as a question about what the difference is between using an expression to signify a concept and using it to signify an object. And Frege's most famous discussion of that question is to be found in his article 'On Concept and Object' – an article which is structured round his reply to an objection put forward by Benno Kerry.

Kerry objects to Frege's claim that concepts cannot be objects and objects cannot be concepts. Kerry proposes, as a counter-example to Frege's claim, the statement 'the concept *horse* is a concept easily attained'. This statement seems to assert that something – the concept *horse* – falls under a concept (namely, that of being a concept easily attained). Now anything that falls under a (first-level) concept must – on Frege's conception of an object – be an object. That is what it is to be an object for Frege – to be the kind of a thing of which concepts can be predicated. So, for Frege, the grammatical subject of Kerry's statement – the concept *horse* – (since it falls under a concept) must be an object. But, if what the statement says is true, then it is a concept easily attained; and if it is a concept easily attained then it is a kind of a concept. The two prongs of Kerry's argument, based on his putative counter-example, can thus be summarized as follows: (a) given Frege's conception of what it is to be an object, we have reason (by virtue of its logical role in the statement) to conclude that 'the concept *horse*' is an object; and (b) given the (apparent) truth of what the statement itself asserts, we have reason to conclude that it is a concept. So Kerry concludes that his statement furnishes us with an example of something – the concept *horse* – that is both an object and a concept.

Frege's article responding to Kerry begins with the following remark:

The word 'concept' is used in various ways; its sense is sometimes psychological, sometimes logical, and perhaps sometimes a confused mixture of both. Since this license exists, it is natural to restrict it by requiring that when once a usage is adopted it shall be maintained. What I decided was to keep to the strictly logical use. ... It seems to me that Kerry's misunderstanding results from his unintentionally confusing his own usage of the word 'concept' with mine. This readily gives rise to contradictions, for which my usage is not to blame.⁸⁴

Frege insists here that he uses the word 'concept' in 'a strictly logical sense' and that Kerry's misunderstanding of his view is due to his failure to appreciate this. In particular, Frege will charge that Kerry's apparent counter-example is generated by equivocating between 'a strictly logical' and (what Frege will call) a 'psychological' sense of the term 'concept'.⁸⁵ But what is it to use the word 'concept' in a strictly logical sense? This question is best approached through a consideration of Frege's three principles:

- In the enquiry that follows, I have kept to three fundamental principles:
- [1] always to separate sharply the psychological from the logical, the subjective from the objective;
 - [2] never to ask for the meaning of a word in isolation, but only in the context of a proposition;
 - [3] never to lose sight of the distinction between concept and object.⁸⁶

These three principles are closely linked: to deny any one of them is to deny each of the other two. Frege himself immediately goes on to explicate how a denial of the first principle leads to a denial of the second:

In compliance with the first principle, I have used the word 'idea' always in the psychological sense, and have distinguished ideas from concepts and from objects. If the second principle is not observed, one is almost forced to take as the meanings of words mental pictures or acts of the individual mind, and so to offend against the first principle as well.⁸⁷

If we disobey the second principle and ask for the meaning of a word in isolation, we shall look for an answer in the realm of the psychological – we shall explain what it is for a term to have a meaning in terms of mental accompaniments (such as the psychological associations the word carries with it), or in terms of mental acts (such as the linguistic intention with which we utter it); and *that* will constitute a violation of the first principle. Underlying these principles is a doctrine of the primacy of judgement. Frege writes: 'I do not begin with concepts and put them together to form a thought or judgement; I come by the parts of a thought by analyzing the thought.'⁸⁸ Frege here opposes the intuitive view of how we come by a thought which Russell takes for granted: we grasp a thought by taking hold of its independently thinkable components and putting them together so as to form a coherent whole.⁸⁹ The sort of 'parts'⁹⁰ which are at issue when we speak of the 'parts of a thought', according to Frege, are only to be identified by comparing and contrasting the logical structure of whole propositions and seeing how the respective 'parts' resemble and differ from one another in the contributions they make to the respective wholes.⁹¹ In order to determine the meaning of a word, according to Frege, we need to know what logical role it plays in the context of a judgement. What we want to discover is thus not to be seen at all, if we look at the mere isolated word rather than at the working parts of the proposition in action. When Frege insists that he is going to keep to a strictly logical use of the word 'concept', he is declaring his interest in how a certain kind of working part of a judgement contributes to the sense of a judgement as a whole.

But Frege finds that he runs into a peculiar sort of trouble when he tries to say in a straightforward fashion just what it is that he wants to mean by (his 'strictly logical use' of) the word 'concept' or (by 'his strictly logical use' of) any of the other words – such as 'object' – he employs to denote something logically primitive. There are no symbols for terms such as 'concept' (or 'object') in Frege's *Begriffsschrift* – his logical symbolism. Nevertheless, these terms play an ineliminable role in his explanations of his symbolism. He thinks that an understanding of such terms is required if one is to master the notation of the symbolism and properly understand its significance. Yet he also insists that what he thus wishes to draw our attention to – when he

employs, for example, the word 'concept' in its strictly logical sense – is not something that can be properly defined. It can only be exhibited through an activity (which Frege calls that) of *Erläuterung* – (which I will henceforth translate as) elucidation.⁹² Elucidations, in turn, play only a transitional role: once they have successfully conveyed the logical distinctions which form the basis of Frege's *Begriffsschrift*,⁹³ we are to see that there is no way to express the thoughts which they (appear to be attempting to) convey in a *Begriffsschrift*.⁹⁴ Yet if we appreciate the logically fundamental character of the distinctions upon which Frege's *Begriffsschrift* is based, then we will see that anything which can be thought can be expressed in *Begriffsschrift*. In grasping the distinction between that which can and that which cannot be expressed in a *Begriffsschrift*, we furnish ourselves with a logically precise articulation of the distinction between that which ('in a strictly logical sense') is, and that which is not, a *thought*. Thus Frege's elucidations are meant to play the role of a ladder which we are to climb up and then throw away.⁹⁵ Frege might have said about his own elucidatory remarks, echoing §6.54 of the *Tractatus*: 'My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: he who understands me recognises that my propositions cannot be expressed in my *Begriffsschrift*, once he has used them – as steps – to climb up beyond them. He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has used it to climb up to my *Begriffsschrift*.'

The distinction between elucidation and definition in Frege rests upon a prior distinction between what is primitive and what is defined in a theory. Any theoretical term which is not susceptible of a formal definition requires elucidation. Every science must employ some primitive terms whose meanings must be presupposed from the outset. Even in a logically perfect language there will be some terms which are not (and cannot be) introduced by definition and which must remain indefinable. The purpose of elucidations is to convey the meanings of such terms. In 'On Concept and Object', Frege is concerned with only one species of the genus elucidation, namely the activity of elucidating what is *logically* primitive. When one is engaged in this particular species of elucidation, Frege thinks one is compelled to come out with sentences which cannot be translated into a proper *Begriffsschrift*. For something to count as a definition, for Frege, it must be possible to invoke it in proofs. Wherever the *definiendum* occurs in a sentence, it must be possible to replace it with the *definiens*. Nothing of the sort is possible, Frege maintains, for those terms occurring in his elucidatory remarks which refer to logically primitive categories.⁹⁶ Their meaning must be presupposed from the outset. The most one can do is to lead the reader to what is meant by such terms – what it is one's words are trying to gesture at – by means of a series of *hints*.⁹⁷ Early on in his reply to Kerry, Frege insists upon the ineliminable role of hints in offering an elucidation of that which is logically fundamental and hence indefinable:

On the introduction of a name for what is logically simple, a definition is not possible; there is nothing for it but to lead the reader or hearer, by means of hints, to understand the word as it is intended.⁹⁸

The term 'elucidation', in this context, stands for the activity of leading the reader by means of hints to what is intended by a term which denotes something logically primitive. This requires not only that we count on the patience and goodwill of our audience while we encourage them to guess at our intended meaning, but also that – here in the antechamber to that most precise of all sciences: the science of logic – we resort to figurative modes of expression. Worse still, Frege thinks that in the elucidation of logically primitive notions (such as that of *concept* or *object*) there is an ineliminable role to be played by (the artful employment of) nonsense. Thus, from the point of view of the author of the *Tractatus*, Frege here encounters the fundamental difficulty – common to Frege's and Russell's philosophies, and which each of these philosophies, in its own way, renders unavoidable – but Frege, unlike Russell, recognises it as a *difficulty* (in the sense of that phrase which Rhees attempts to elucidate in the service of explicating Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy).

Frege frankly concedes that such a process of offering hints and relying on guesswork might, in principle, never culminate in the desired meeting of minds between the elucidator and the audience of an elucidation. He hastens to reassure us, however, that it turns out that, in practice, we are quite good at guessing what another person means even when all we are offered is a series of such hints. It is, moreover, of crucial importance when offering an elucidation, Frege says, that the originator of the elucidation himself understand the transitional character of the talk that he engages in:

Theoretically, one might never achieve one's goal this way. In practice, however, we do manage to come to an understanding about the meanings of words. Of course we have to be able to count on a meeting of minds, on others guessing what we have in mind. But all this precedes the construction of a system and does not belong within a system.⁹⁹

Once the elucidation is successful the recourse to figurative modes of speech and bits of nonsense can be dispensed with; the elucidations will have served their transitional pragmatic purpose and are to be thrown away. The activity of elucidation 'has no place in the system of a science'. Its role is entirely that of a propaedeutic.¹⁰⁰ Thus Frege, that most precise of modern philosophers and logicians, frankly acknowledges that the sort of discourse one most resort to in order to elucidate the meaning of that which is logically primitive has no place in a logically well-regimented system of discourse.

The elucidatory strategy of the essay 'On Concept and Object' can be seen as proceeding in five steps: (1) to make explicit a logical distinction implicit in our everyday linguistic practices, (2) to demonstrate that Kerry's employment of the terminology of 'object' and 'concept' fails to track the distinction in question, (3) to furnish statements (employing the terminology of 'object' and 'concept') that aim to track the distinction in question, (4) to elicit an appreciation of what is defective about such statements, and (5) to indicate how a recognition of the defective character of such statements enables one to attain an insight (into, e.g., what a concept is) which could not have been communicated in any other way. Thus Frege might have said: He who *recognizes* my elucidatory remarks in 'On Concept and Object' as *defective* understands me. Frege thus makes the very acknowledgement that Russell awkwardly tries to evade: he acknowledges that the modes of expression he employs are, by his own 'strictly logical' lights, irremediably defective; and, without flinching from the consequences, he tries resolutely to *think through* what this entails about the status of his own philosophical procedures.

One example of Fregean elucidation occurs in a letter to Russell:

In the proposition 'Something is an object', the word 'something'... stands for a proper name. Thus whatever we put in place of 'something', we always get a true proposition; for a function name cannot take the place of 'something'. Here we find ourselves in a situation where the nature of language forces us to make use of imprecise expressions. The proposition 'A is a function' is such an expression: it is always imprecise; for A stands for a proper name. ... While I am writing this, I am well aware of having again expressed myself imprecisely. Sometimes this is just unavoidable. *All that matters is that we know we are doing it and how it happens.*¹⁰¹

When Russell uses the term 'function' to make statements like 'A is a function', he wants to be saying something informative: he wants to be telling us something about the nature of A. Frege wants to show Russell that attempts to say what one wants to say misfire when one attempts to say something about functions by some means other than by using functions as functions. The proposition 'A is a function' is here invoked by Frege as an example of the paradoxical character inevitably attaching to the sort of utterances one comes out with when one attempts to elucidate what a function is. To see why Frege thinks that the endeavour in question necessarily leads to paradoxical assertions, consider the following four propositions:

- (1) 'A is an object.'
- (2) 'Everything is an object.'
- (3) 'A is a function.'
- (4) 'Nothing is a function.'

In (1), the word 'A' stands for a proper name; and so, by Frege's lights, whatever we plug in for 'A' will occupy the argument place for an object, and thus (according to Frege's second principle) will be an object. Thus it would appear that no matter what we plug in for 'A', (1) will be true. But if (1) is true no matter what we plug in for 'A', it would seem to follow that (2) is true! Similarly, in (3), as in (1), the word 'A' stands for a proper name; and so, once again, whatever occupies this argument place will be an object. Thus it would appear in this case that no matter what we plug in for 'A', (3) will be false. But if (3) is false no matter what we plug in for 'A', it would seem to follow that (4) is true! The point of this elucidation is not to secure the truth of the paradoxical claim that 'Nothing is a function' (or 'There are no functions'). On the contrary: it is to offer a *reductio ad absurdum* of the idea that the proposition 'A is a function' can just straightforwardly say what Russell (for the sake of his argument with Frege) wants it to. The point is to show that sentences in which the expression 'function' occurs misfire, and to show that – as long as we know what we are doing with such sentences – such self-defeating sentences can none the less be put to use to communicate an insight into what a function is. What matters when we employ such sentences, as Frege's final sentence (in the passage quoted above) indicates, is that we know what we are doing (i.e. uttering nonsense) when we come out with them, and that we know how it has come to pass that we find ourselves doing it.

The point of the paradoxical assertions that comprise the preceding elucidation is to show us (i) that we end up speaking nonsense when we try to say what a function is, (ii) that we here 'find ourselves in a situation where the nature of language itself' makes it impossible for us to say that which we want to say, (iii) that to grasp how it is that the nature of language itself thus stands in the way of saying what we want to say (when we want to say what a function is) is to grasp what a function is. The point is thus not merely to *expose* what we end up saying (when we employ such a term) as nonsense – in order, say, to debar us from engaging in such ways of speaking – but, rather, to teach us how *self-consciously* to cultivate such ways of speaking (in order to allow us to attain insight into the nature of functions). The point of cultivating such ways of speaking is to enable us to recognize *why* it is that we end up with nonsense when we try to say such things. The attainment of such a recognition constitutes the sign that we have grasped an elucidation of the meaning of a term (such as 'function') which denotes something logically primitive.

Frege repeatedly says, when offering such elucidatory examples, that he is *forced* or *compelled* to express himself in an infelicitous manner: he is attempting to struggle against 'an imprecision forced on us by the nature of language', one which 'compels' him 'to use an inappropriate expression which obscures – falsifies – the thought'. Frege (1) takes himself in such cases to be trying to say something which, properly speaking, *cannot* be said,

and (2) speaks in such cases of there being a *thought* which his words struggle but fail adequately to express. In a famous passage in 'On Concept and Object', Frege makes the admission I alluded to earlier in order to prepare the contrast between the character of Frege's admission and the sorts of admission one characteristically finds in Russell's writings (with regard to the parallel problem in Russell's philosophy). Here is Frege:

I admit that there is a quite peculiar obstacle in the way of an understanding with the reader. By a kind of necessity of language, my expressions, taken literally, sometimes miss my thought; I mention an object when what I intend is a concept. I fully realise that in such cases I was relying upon a reader who would be ready to meet me half-way – who does not begrudge a pinch of salt.¹⁰²

His words miss his thought (and end up being nonsense); so there is a thought they are aiming at: an understanding of what his words intend to say depends upon his reader latching onto the thought his words fail properly to express. This failure is due, according to Frege, to 'a kind of necessity of language'. If the author is to convey the thought he here seeks to convey he has no alternative but to have recourse to (elucidatory) nonsense. Frege's reader is therefore left with the task of doing something with the words that the author here provides. It does not suffice here for the reader to do what one ordinarily does with an author's words: to shape up to agreeing (or disagreeing) with that which the words themselves (appear to) say. The point of the exercise which, by a kind of necessity of language, Frege is forced to bequeath to the reader is: first to come to see why the author's words necessarily fail to say what they (at least at first) appear to say and, secondly, to grasp the point behind the author's availing himself of such an intentionally self-defeating form of expression.

This passage represents the very moment in Frege's work which is perhaps most frequently adduced as an example of how the fact of even the great Frege were made of clay. Yet this moment in Frege's work is, arguably, inseparable from those aspects of his work that constitute the essence of what *for Wittgenstein* was great about 'the great works of Frege'. The very moments in Frege, such as the one represented in the passage above, which are bound to appear most embarrassingly disastrous (when viewed from the vantage point of a certain species of professionalized philosophical common sense) epitomize, for Wittgenstein, that which is most exemplary in Frege: his refusal to accept a technical or makeshift fix – one which would allow him to by-pass the difficulty – and his correlative willingness to take the *difficulty* seriously, think it through to the point where he can begin to see why there cannot be a simplified way of meeting it, and then, having thought it through, to allow the difficulty itself to make things difficult and see where it leads him. The author of the *Tractatus* does not think that

Frege manages, by any means, to come to the end of the philosophical task of seeing where this particular difficulty leads.¹⁰³ But he does think that Frege has an appreciation of the *kind* of task this is and why it is bloody *hard*, thus furnishing Wittgenstein with an example (of what it means to try to think things through in philosophy) that he strives to emulate in all of his own subsequent philosophical work.

To understand the sense in which Wittgenstein strives, in his philosophical work, to emulate Frege's example (and thus the sense in which Wittgenstein's early book is rightly said to be indebted, above all, to the great works of Frege) it is crucial to understand wherein Wittgenstein thinks the greatness of Frege's work lies. It is not that Frege, in Wittgenstein's estimation, possesses a greater degree of sheer philosophical candlepower than, say, a Ramsey or a Russell. It is rather that, when faced with certain fundamental difficulties, Frege exhibits honesty and courage of a sort which furnishes him with 'a particular kind of lens to concentrate the light into a burning point'. When, in an effort further to concentrate the light, Wittgenstein himself emulates (what he takes to be most important in) Frege's example, directing his own particular kind of lens at the same burning point, the difficulties in question – those which Wittgenstein inherits from Frege and Russell – are consumed in that burst of philosophical flame now known to us as the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*.

Going against the grain

You are inclined to put our difference in one way, as a difference of opinion. But I am not trying to persuade you to change your opinion. I am only trying to recommend a certain sort of investigation. If there is an opinion involved, my only opinion is that this sort of investigation is immensely important and very much against the grain.

Wittgenstein¹⁰⁴

The *Tractatus* represents the first of many steps in a lifelong effort on Wittgenstein's part to apply – and, in the process of applying, increasingly radicalize – what he learned from Frege's exemplary effort to engage in that peculiar form of philosophical activity that Frege calls 'elucidation'. In §4.1212 of the *Tractatus*, we are told that a work of philosophy 'consists essentially of elucidations' – where the term 'elucidation' is a rendering of the same German word, *Erläuterung*, which, as we have seen, figures prominently in Frege's writings. 'Philosophy' here means: philosophy as practised by the author of the *Tractatus*. The notion of elucidation is tied in §4.1212 to the idea of philosophy being a certain kind of activity: 'Philosophy is not a theory [*Lehre*] but an activity. A philosophical work consists essentially of elucidations.' Wittgenstein here declares that the work of philosophy, as he pursues it, does not consist in putting forward a theory or a doctrine but

rather in *doing* something – namely, in engaging in the activity of elucidation. How do such 'elucidations' elucidate? The answer to this question comes in the notorious penultimate section of the *Tractatus*, where we again come upon the term 'elucidation' [*Erläuterung*]:

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 out through them, on them, over them.¹⁰⁵

This passage tells a reader of the work what he must 'eventually recognize' in order to understand its author. The author's 'propositions' serve as elucidations by *our* – that is, the reader's – coming to *recognize* them as nonsensical. That is, everything depends on the reader doing something – attaining a certain kind of recognition – on his own. Wittgenstein does not ask his reader here to 'grasp' the 'thoughts' which his nonsensical propositions seek to convey. He does not call upon the reader to understand his sentences, but rather to understand *him*: namely the author and the kind of activity in which he is engaged. An understanding of this activity can be achieved only by the reader who engages in this activity himself, that is, who practises elucidation on himself, as Wittgenstein practises it – as the author of the *Tractatus* exhibits the practice of it – on himself. In not asking the reader to understand (and thus be in a position to 'agree with') his propositions, Wittgenstein therefore is not asking of him what most authors ask: to believe something – perhaps something the reader, prior to reading the book, does not (yet) believe. Wittgenstein is rather asking the reader to do something here which he anticipates will 'go against the grain'. (Thus Wittgenstein anticipates no one will understand his book.¹⁰⁶) It goes against the grain both because the form the 'solution' to the problems takes ('the problems are dissolved in the actual sense of the word – like a lump of sugar in water'¹⁰⁷) is one which the reader takes himself to know in advance cannot satisfy him and because the reader can only discover it does satisfy him (indeed 'complete satisfaction comes, since *no* question remains'¹⁰⁸) if he is first willing to move in a direction in which it is bloody hard to go (because 'what has to be overcome is not a difficulty of the intellect, but one of the will'¹⁰⁹).

This essay began with a quotation from Wittgenstein as reported by Rhees; it is fitting that it should end the same way. Wittgenstein, Rhees tells us, summed up what he does *not* want (but anticipates the reader will think he must want) and what he *does* want (but anticipates he will not get) from his reader in the following proposition: 'I don't try to make you *believe* something you don't believe, but to make you *do* something you won't do.'¹¹⁰ Wittgenstein's eventual disappointment with Russell's and correlative esteem for Frege's philosophical work can each be understood in relation to what Wittgenstein here asks of his reader. Russell keeps trying to hit upon

a thing to *believe* – a doctrine ('the right theory of logic') – that would make the philosophical problem go away; so that all that would then be required of a reader of a work that 'contained' its 'solution' would be to familiarize himself with the doctrine in question and thereby convince himself that someone else (namely Russell) had said everything which needed to be said in order to dispense with the problem. Whereas Frege asks his reader to *do* something – participate in an activity in which he must struggle to meet the author half-way – where the culmination of the activity lies in the reader's eventually coming to recognize that there is nothing (of the sort he originally imagines) to be said and hence nothing (of the originally imagined sort) to be believed either. Thus Frege, in the practical demonstration he furnishes of what it means strictly to think a problem all the way through, helps to bring into focus the possibility of a certain conception of what it means genuinely to make progress – a conception which Wittgenstein makes his own – with regard to the problems of philosophy and the problems of life: '[W]hen there is no question left... just this is the answer. The solution of the problem... is seen in the vanishing of the problem.'¹¹

Whatever else one thinks of this conception, one has only to look around in order to convince oneself of the following: it goes – both inside and outside of (those circles that now fly the banner of) philosophy – very much against the grain.¹²

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Notes

- 1 Rush Rhees, 'The Study of Philosophy', in *Without Answers* (New York: Schocken, 1969), p. 169. For an example, see Wittgenstein's letter to Rhees of 28 November 1944; quoted in Ray Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius* (New York: Free Press, 1990), p. 476.
- 2 Ray Monk, 'Philosophical Biography – The Very Idea', in *Wittgenstein: Biography and Philosophy*, ed. James Klagge (forthcoming).
- 3 Rhees, 'The Study of Philosophy', pp. 169–70.
- 4 'They may appear to be scattered all over the place' both in the sense that there may appear to be hardly any consecutive discussion of 'ethics' and in the sense that there may appear to be remarks on 'ethics' making odd appearances in unlikely locations all over Wittgenstein's corpus.
- 5 *Culture and Value*, ed. G.H. von Wright, tr. Peter Winch (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 33.
- 6 *Ibid.*, p. 34.
- 7 Rush Rhees, ed., *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Personal Recollections*, p. 193.
- 8 *Culture and Value*, p. 16.
- 9 *Ibid.*, p. 45.
- 10 'But these passages', someone might complain, 'are mostly taken from a single work: *Culture and Value* – the work which Wittgenstein devotes exclusively to topics in ethics, aesthetics and religion!' This is not true. Wittgenstein never

wrote (nor ever planned to write) such a work. The passages in *Culture and Value* are drawn from all over Wittgenstein's *Nachlass*. The passages from *Culture and Value* which are quoted here (like many such passages) occur, in their original home in Wittgenstein's manuscripts, in the midst of investigations of questions such as what is it to follow a rule?, or name an object?, or understand the meaning of a word?, etc. In the opening sentence of his editor's preface to the volume, G.H. von Wright suggests that the remarks he has chosen to bring together in *Culture and Value* are remarks of Wittgenstein's 'which do not belong directly with his philosophical works although they are scattered amongst the philosophical texts' [my emphasis] (*ibid.*, p. i). One aim of the present essay is to cast doubt on (the italicised portion of) this description of these remarks.

- 11 Stanley Cavell, *This New yet Unapproachable America* (Albuquerque: Living Batch Press, 1989), p. 40.
- 12 D.Z. Phillips, *Philosophy's Cool Place* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), p. 46.
- 13 Phillips seems to assume that I would disagree with this. (I presume this is because he – mostly rightly – takes himself to disagree with so much of what I say elsewhere in my paper.)
- 14 To put a somewhat more polemical edge on the point: one cannot understand many of the remarks that occur in a text such as *Culture and Value* by engaging in a close reading of that 'work' alone and neglecting Wittgenstein's investigations of the sorts of questions with which the bulk of his work is concerned (questions such as is it possible for me to give myself a private ostensive definition?, or for another person to have my pains?, or for there to be only one occasion on which someone obeys a rule?, etc.) – neglecting, that is, what he thought philosophy is.
- 15 Rhees, *op. cit.*, pp. 170–1.
- 16 The entire conception of philosophy as a subject that can be divided into 'areas', which comes so naturally to us, is utterly alien to Wittgenstein.
- 17 See Cora Diamond's 'Ethics, Imagination, and the Method of the Tractatus' in R. Heinrich and H. Vetter, eds., *Bilder der Philosophie* (Vienna: Oldenbourg, 1991), pp. 55–90; and her 'Wittgenstein, Mathematics, and Ethics: Resisting the Attractions of Realism', in H. Sluga and D. Stern, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Wittgenstein* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
- 18 Hence the frequency of similes such as the following in Wittgenstein's writings: 'A human being is imprisoned in a room, if the door is unlocked but opens inwards; he, however, never gets the idea of pulling instead of pushing against it'; *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, tr. G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1956), p. 125.
- 19 *Philosophical Investigations*; eds. G.E.M. Anscombe and R. Rhees, tr. G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1953), §118.
- 20 Phillips, *Philosophy's Cool Place*, p. 46.
- 21 And this does appear to be what Phillips means. The most he seems to be prepared to concede by way of a connection between 'the personal' and 'the philosophical' is an *analogy* between working on philosophical problems and working on moral problems' (*ibid.*, p. 46). Phillips is unwilling to allow for any connection more intimate than this because it seems important to him to be able to maintain that 'Wittgenstein... is not saying, as Conant thinks, that a shoddiness in how we speak is, at the same time, a shoddiness in how we live' (*ibid.*).
- 22 Many of these misinterpretations have been occasioned by picking up Wittgenstein's oft-repeated analogy between philosophy and therapy from the wrong end.

- 23 Quoted by Rush Rhees in *Recollections of Wittgenstein*, ed. Rush Rhees (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 174.
- 24 Letter to Norman Malcolm, 16 November 1944; quoted in Norman Malcolm, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Memoir* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).
- 25 Such discernment is essential to the capacity for distinguishing (genuine) philosophy from, what Wittgenstein was fond of calling, (mere) cleverness – a distinction which underlies a great many of Wittgenstein's judgements of the work of other 'philosophers'.
- 26 *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Denkbewegungen, Tagebücher 1930–1932/1936–1937*, ed. Ilse Sommariva (Innsbruck: Haymon-Verlag, 1997), p. 21.
- 27 'Conversations with Drury', in *Recollections of Wittgenstein*, p. 106.
- 28 *Ibid.*, p. 159.
- 29 See, in this regard, Ray Monk's review of Ben Rogers's *A.J. Ayer: A Life*, in *The Sunday Times*, 13 June 1999, Book Section, p. 12.
- 30 *Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough*, ed. Rush Rhees; reprinted in *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Philosophical Occasions, 1912–1951* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993), p. 131.
- 31 A related double-faced 'difficulty' that surfaces repeatedly in Wittgenstein's notebooks as an urgent topic for him is the danger of *pride* (or *vanity*). Consider the following remark: 'The edifice of your pride has to be dismantled. And that is terribly hard work' (*Culture and Value*, p. 26). Phillips's mutually exclusive opposition between the personal and the philosophical gets in the way of an understanding of this remark. The question 'Is "dismantling the edifice of one's pride" a personal or a philosophical difficulty?' is, by Wittgenstein's lights, misconceived from the start. In one of the possible prefaces he drafts for a possible book, Wittgenstein writes:
- I would like to say 'This book is written to the glory of God', but nowadays that would be chicanery, that is, it would not be rightly understood. It means the book is written in good will, and in so far as it is not so written, but out of vanity, etc., the author would wish to see it condemned. *He cannot free it of these impurities further than he himself is free of them.* [my emphasis] (*Philosophical Remarks* (ed. R. Rhees, trs. R. Hargreaves and R. White; Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1975), Preface)
- 32 Though it is a mistake to assume, as some commentators do, that Wittgenstein thinks that there can be a kind of person – call him an 'ordinary' person or a 'non-philosopher' – who is in full possession of his intellectual faculties and yet utterly free from philosophical perplexity and hence the need for philosophy and the forms of perspicuity and clarity which it aims to confer.
- 33 The remark occurs in a letter to his sister; Letter to Helene Salzer (née Wittgenstein), quoted in M. Nedo and M. Ranchetti, eds., *Ludwig Wittgenstein, Sein Leben in Bildern und Texten* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1983), p. 292.
- 34 Wittgenstein therefore does not only think that the limitations of a person *qua* person limit his possibilities of imagination and reflection *qua* philosopher; he also thinks that the activity of philosophy itself represents a possible means of overcoming such limitation in oneself. Hence both the promise and the danger of philosophy. Throughout Wittgenstein's life, an important ground of his motivation to philosophy (to, that is, what he hopes philosophy, at its best, can be) – and of his fear of philosophy (of, that is, what he knows philosophy, at its worst, can do to a person) – is the thought that in developing her philosophical sensibility a person is thereby (for better or worse) profoundly shaping herself as a person.
- 35 Wittgenstein, Letter to Ludwig von Ficker: 'In Wirklichkeit ist [der Stoff meines Buches] Ihnen nicht fremd, denn der Sinn des Buches ist ein Ethischer' (reprinted in *Prototractatus*, eds. B.F. McGuinness, T. Nyberg, and G.H. von Wright, trs. D.F. Pears and B.F. McGuinness; Ithaca: Cornell University Press), p. 15.
- 36 Stanley Cavell, 'The Availability of Wittgenstein's Later Philosophy', in *Must We Mean What We Say?* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969), p. 72.
- 37 Sigmund Freud, *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1969), pp. 280–1.
- 38 Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, Vol. I, tr. E.F.J. Payne (New York: Dover, 1969), p. 76n. (I have amended the translation.)
- 39 *Ibid.*, p. 76. (I have amended the translation.) I, of course, do not mean here to be endorsing Schopenhauer's theory of geometry.
- 40 The strident moralism of Schopenhauer's tone marks an important difference between Schopenhauer's work, on the one hand, and that of Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein, on the other. Neither Kierkegaard nor Wittgenstein are as anxious as Schopenhauer (at least often appears to be) to make it clear that they themselves are free of the sorts of intellectual failings they seek to make their reader aware of in herself.
- 41 Schopenhauer, *The Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason*, tr. E.F.J. Payne (La Salle: Open Court, 1974), pp. 58–60.
- 42 But these are not matters that are generally taken up – or at present could easily be taken up – under the heading of (what analytic philosophers call) 'Ethics'. (They are more likely to come up under some heading such as 'paradoxes of irrationality'.) Yet they are integral to the category of the ethical as marked off in the writings of Kierkegaard. Here, as elsewhere, Wittgenstein's ways of thinking and talking about philosophical problems bear the trace of Kierkegaard's influence. I discuss the parallels here between Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein in my 'On Putting Two and Two Together: Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein and the Point of View for Their Work as Authors', in *The Grammar of Religious Belief*, edited by D.Z. Phillips (New York: St Martin's Press, 1996), pp. 248–331; and my 'Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein and Nonsense', in *Pursuits of Reason*, edited by Ted Cohen, Paul Guyer and Hilary Putnam (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 1992), pp. 195–224. For a critique of my way of aligning Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein, see Phillips's *Philosophy's Cool Place*, pp. 13–64.
- 43 Zettel; eds. G.H. von Wright and G.E.M. Anscombe, tr. G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1967), §712.
- 44 *Culture and Value*, p. 78.
- 45 G.E.M. Anscombe, *An Introduction to Wittgenstein's Tractatus* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971), p. 12.
- 46 Anscombe's point might also be put as follows: we are not able to appreciate what Wittgenstein means (when he writes in the preface of the *Tractatus*) about the 'greatness' of Frege's work or (when he writes Frege himself) about how the *Tractatus* owes 'a great debt' [*eine grosse Dankeschuld*] to Frege's work. ('Gottlob Frege: Briefe an Ludwig Wittgenstein aus den Jahren 1914–1920', in *Wittgenstein im Brennpunkt*, ed. Brian McGuinness and Rudolf Haller (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1989), p. 16.)
- 47 'So wird schliesslich Alles in das Bereich der Psychologie einbezogen.... So mündet denn Alles in den Idealismus und bei grösster Folgerichtigkeit in den Solipsismus ein' (*Grundgesetze der Arithmetik* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1962), p. xix). Montgomery Furth translates the passage as follows: 'In the end everything is drawn [by the

- psychologistic theorist of logic] into the sphere of psychology... Thus everything drifts into idealism and from that point with perfect consistency into solipsism' (*The Basic Laws of Arithmetic*, tr. M. Furth (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), p. 17). What this translation slightly obscures is that thinking the matter through *bei grösster Folgerichtigkeit* and seeing what it flows into [*einmündet in*] requires that we think it through – i.e., that we follow through and draw the *richtige Folgen* ourselves.
- 48 For further elaboration and defence of this claim, see my 'The Search for Logically Alien Thought: Descartes, Kant, Frege and the *Tractatus*', in *Philosophical Topics*, Vol. 20, No. 1, 115–80.
- 49 *Notebooks: 1914–1916*, eds. G.H. von Wright and G.E.M. Anscombe, tr. G.E.M. Anscombe (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), p. 85. I have emended the translation.
- 50 *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trs. David Pears and Brian McGuinness (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963), §5.64. I have emended the translation.
- 51 Wittgenstein's sense of the urgency of achieving honesty in one's thinking may well have been sharpened or otherwise refined by his reading of Tolstoy, Schopenhauer and/or Kierkegaard. I have no wish to deny that by studying these three authors, and seeking to understand what Wittgenstein admired in their works, we can deepen our understanding of wherein Wittgenstein took such honesty to consist. But to attain such understanding requires not merely canvassing what it is that these authors have to say about ethical and religious matters, but rather being struck by the character of the attention they give to any matter to which they give thought (regardless of whether the matter be of an overtly 'ethical' nature or not).
- 52 *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, p. 29.
- 53 Anscombe, *op. cit.*, p. 12.
- 54 Before turning to Russell and Frege, a cautionary note should be sounded: what follows will be an unabashedly partial and unbalanced selection of moments from Russell's and Frege's philosophies respectively. The only justification for the cursory and partisan character of the selection lies in its capacity to shed light on the respects in which Wittgenstein was able to view Frege as an example of a philosopher who went the bloody hard way and Russell as an example of one who tended to shrink from doing so. Thus the exercise will, by design, leave out of account numerous estimable things about Russell and some inestimable things about Frege. The aim is not to deny either the former or the latter, but simply to try to illuminate the grounds for the relative estimate of Frege and Russell implicit in Wittgenstein's prefatory acknowledgement in the *Tractatus* and in many of his other remarks about each of them.
- 55 Letter to Ottoline Morrell, 13 December 1911; in *The Selected Letters of Bertrand Russell*, Vol. I, ed. N. Griffin (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1992), p. 403.
- 56 Letter to Lucy Donnelly, 21 January 1912; quoted by Ray Monk in *Bertrand Russell: The Spirit of Solitude* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1996), p. 296.
- 57 Wittgenstein, *Notebooks: 1914–1916*, eds. G.H. von Wright and G.E.M. Anscombe, tr. G.E.M. Anscombe (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), p. 5.
- 58 Bertrand Russell, *The Principles of Mathematics* (New York: Norton, 1903), §52.
- 59 *Ibid.*
- 60 *Ibid.*, §54.
- 61 In his appendix on Frege; *ibid.*, §481.
- 62 Russell, *The Collected Paper of Bertrand Russell*, Vol. 6, ed. by John G. Slater (London: Routledge, 1983), pp. 55–56.
- 63 *Ibid.*, p. 56.
- 64 Indeed, the author of the *Tractatus* would reject 'Logic is the study of something' as an equally flawed characterization.
- 65 Letter to Ottoline Morrell, 27 September 1912; quoted by John G. Slater in a prefatory note in *The Collected Paper of Bertrand Russell*, Vol. 6, p. 54.
- 66 Russell, *Theory of Knowledge: The 1913 Manuscript* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 98.
- 67 *Theory of Knowledge*, p. 99.
- 68 *Ibid.*, p. 46.
- 69 *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, §5.422. The point is formulated in *Notebooks: 1914–1916* as follows: 'Every right theory of judgement must make it impossible for me to judge that this table penholders the book. Russell's theory does not satisfy this requirement' (p. 103).
- 70 Letter to Ottoline Morrell, 27 May 1913; *The Selected Letters of Bertrand Russell*, Vol. I, p. 459.
- 71 Letter to Ottoline Morrell, 9 October 1913; *The Selected Letters of Bertrand Russell*, Vol. I, p. 479.
- 72 Ray Monk, *Bertrand Russell: The Spirit of Solitude*, p. 296.
- 73 Letter to Ottoline Morrell, 19 June 1913; *The Selected Letters of Bertrand Russell*, Vol. I, ed. N. Griffin, p. 462.
- 74 Letter to Ottoline Morrell, 1916 (exact date unknown), quoted in *The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell*, Vol. II (London: George Allen & Unwin), p. 57.
- 75 The letter to Bradley continues: 'Chiefly through the work of an Austrian pupil of mine, I seem now to see answers about unities; but the subject is so difficult and fundamental that I still hesitate' (Letter to Bradley, 30 January 1914; *The Selected Letters of Bertrand Russell*, Vol. I, *op. cit.*).
- 76 The discomfort is perhaps connected with the fact that, throughout his life, Russell takes the very idea that there are inexpressible yet significant truths – i.e., that there are 'entities' that are (1) incapable of becoming the logical subjects of propositions, and none the less (2) possible and important objects of contemplation – to be constitutive of *mysticism*. Moreover, he identifies logic as a branch of 'scientific philosophy', and he insists that mysticism and scientific philosophy are 'fundamentally irreconcilable tendencies of the human spirit'. As Ray Monk's *Bertrand Russell: The Spirit of Solitude* vividly depicts, Russell was, throughout this same period, alternately attracted to and repelled by (what he regarded as) the mystical mode of thought – the one constant in his attitude during this period being that, whatever the merits of mysticism might be, it was necessarily fundamentally opposed to the scientific mode of thought. That early Wittgenstein 'detested' what Russell himself wrote about mysticism is well known; and that Russell viewed the *Tractatus* as evidence that Wittgenstein had capitulated to mystical modes of thought (of a sort putatively to be found in authors Wittgenstein happily admitted to admiring such as Kierkegaard, Tolstoy and William James) is equally well known. What is less well known is that the *Tractatus* aims to turn the tables on Russell by showing that Russell's own conception of logic entails a doctrine which is (by Russell's own lights) a species of mysticism: for Russell's logical theory presupposes a conception of logical form which requires both that (1) logical forms are the proper objects of contemplation for logical theory and that (2) they are not possible subjects of discourse!
- 77 Ludwig Wittgenstein: *The Duty of Genius*, p. 271.

- 78 Phillips might wish to protest at this point: 'But Wittgenstein's confidence here would rest on his assessment of (the limitations of) Russell's *philosophical* sensibility.' Yes, of course. But this returns us to the topic of the first section of this paper. Wittgenstein's estimate of Russell's philosophical sensibility cannot be divorced from his estimate of Russell as a person – of his estimate of Russell's capacities for imagination, reflection, and response generally. One's philosophical sensibility is not independent of one's sensibility *tout court*.
- 79 Letter to Russell, 6 May 1920 and the previous undated letter; both in *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Cambridge Letters*, eds. B. McGuinness and G.H. von Wright (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1995), pp. 152, 154. It should be an urgent question for contemporary commentary on the *Tractatus* why Wittgenstein thought that even Russell's attempts merely to expound the teaching of the book were full of 'superficiality and misunderstanding', since – at least in broad outline – Russell's exposition does not differ substantially from that offered by most contemporary commentators.
- 80 Letter to Ottoline Morrell, 20 December 1919; quoted by G.H. von Wright in an editor's note in *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Letters to Russell, Keynes and Moore* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1974), p. 82.
- 81 Wittgenstein would have found a similar irony in the parallel sorts of remark about his later philosophy that Russell, in his later years, was equally fond of making – such as the following:

The earlier Wittgenstein was a man addicted to passionately intense thinking, profoundly aware of difficult problems of which I, like him, felt the importance, and possessed (or at least so I thought) of true philosophical genius . . . The later Wittgenstein, on the contrary, seems to have grown tired of serious thinking and to have invented a doctrine which would make such an activity unnecessary. (*My Philosophical Development* (London: Unwin, 1959), p. 161)

- 82 *Culture and Value*, pp. 35, 38.
- 83 The sentence in Diamond's essay which immediately precedes the one quoted here is equally pertinent: 'Frege's writings shaped, to a great extent, the problems Wittgenstein confronted in his own thought – and not just the problems, but also methods of approach, and ideas about what could count as a satisfactory solution.' (Cora Diamond, 'Inheriting from Frege', in *The Cambridge Companion to Frege*, ed. Thomas Ricketts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).)
- 84 *Collected Papers on Mathematics, Logic, and Philosophy*, ed. Brian McGuinness (London: Blackwell, 1984) [henceforth referred to as *CP*], p. 182.
- 85 This charge is expressed more emphatically in the unpublished version of 'On Concept and Object':

In my view the reason for the sorry state of affairs we find in Kerry, where the distinctions between concept and object, characteristic mark and property, are effaced is that logical and psychological questions and viewpoints are scrambled together. . . . He will speak now of a concept, then of the idea of a concept, now of an object, then of the idea of it, without its even being wholly clear whether it is one or the other that is in question, whether we are engaged in a logical or psychological inquiry. . . . [H]ere Kerry has simply succumbed to a widespread sickness. (*Posthumous Writings*, ed. H. Hermes, F. Kambartel, and F. Kaulbach (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1979) [henceforth *PW*], pp. 104–5)

- 86 *The Foundations of Arithmetic*, trans. J.L. Austin (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1980) [henceforth *FA*], p. x.
- 87 *FA*, p. x.
- 88 *PW*, p. 253.
- 89 In conformity with this doctrine of the primacy of judgement, Frege's concept-script forbids the isolated occurrence of designations for the various possible components of a judgement:

[I]nstead of putting a judgement together out of an individual as subject and an already previously formed concept as predicate, we do the opposite and arrive at a concept by splitting up the content of possible judgement. . . . But it doesn't follow from this that the ideas of these properties and relations are formed apart from their objects: on the contrary they arise simultaneously with the first judgement in which they are ascribed to things. Hence in the concept-script their designations never occur on their own, but always in combinations which express contents of possible judgement. . . . A sign for a property never appears without a thing to which it might belong being at least indicated, a designation of a relation never without indication of the things which might stand in it. (*PW*, pp. 15–17)

- 90 Frege does sometimes speak of a thought's having 'parts' out of which it is 'built up' (see, e.g., *PW*, p. 225), and of how we can 'distinguish parts in the thought corresponding to parts of a sentence, so that the structure of the sentence can serve as a picture of the structure of the thought' (*CP*, p. 390). But Frege immediately follows this latter remark with the observation:

To be sure, we really talk figuratively when we transfer the relation of whole and part to thoughts; yet the analogy is so ready to hand and so generally appropriate that we are hardly bothered by the hitches that occur from time to time. (*CP*, p. 390)

What kind of hitches? Hitches, for example, of the sort Kerry fails to notice when he imagines that he can get hold of a concept merely by employing an expression which elsewhere, in its usual employment, is able to symbolize a concept. Frege thus worries that the all but unavoidable (and in itself potentially innocent) locution of a thought's having 'parts' or 'components' will mislead one into attributing a false independence to the parts of a thought – so that we imagine that the parts could retain their identity apart from their participation in a whole of the appropriate structure:

But the words 'made up of', 'consist of', 'component', 'part' may lead to our looking at it the wrong way. If we choose to speak of parts in this connection, all the same these parts are not mutually independent in the way that we are elsewhere used to find when we have parts of a whole. (*CP*, p. 386)

Frege's context principle – and the correlative doctrine of the primacy of judgement (which refuses to allow that the parts of the whole are 'mutually independent' in the way that we are elsewhere used to find when we have parts of a whole) – in thus insisting upon the *unity* of a thought or a proposition, in no way denies the compositionality of either thought or language. It insists only upon the mutual interdependence of compositionality and contextuality.

- 91 Gilbert Ryle attempted to summarize this 'difficult but crucial point' of Frege's by saying that the meanings of words 'are not proposition components but propositional differences':

Frege's difficult but crucial point... [is] that the unitary something that is *said* in a sentence or the unitary sense that it expresses is not an assemblage of detachable sense atoms, of, that is, parts enjoying separate existence and separate thinkability, and yet that one truth or falsehood may have discernible, countable, and classifiable similarities to and dissimilarities from other truths and falsehoods. Word meanings or concepts are not proposition components but propositional differences. They are distinguishables, not detachables; abstractables, not extractables. (Gilbert Ryle, *Collected Papers, Volume 1* (London: Hutchinson, 1971), p. 58)

- 92 The ensuing discussion is indebted to Joan Weiner's *Frege in Perspective* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), chapter 6 and to her 'Theory and Elucidation: The End of the Age of Innocence' (in *Future Pasts: Reflections on the History of Analytic Philosophy*, eds. J. Floyd and S. Shieh (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001)).
- 93 The sign that such a Fregean elucidation has been successful – that the desired 'meeting of minds' between the elucidator and his audience has been achieved – is that the other person is able to go on as a user of *Begriffsschrift* on his or her own in the right way. Frege therefore has an answer to an obvious objection (voiced by some commentators on the *Tractatus*) with regard to the doctrine that there are fundamental logical distinctions which underlie but cannot be expressed in language. The objection goes as follows: there is no way to adjudicate the success of an attempt to communicate such distinctions – for there is no way for someone who has grasped such a distinction to exhibit his mastery of the distinction. But Frege furnishes a touchstone of success: the sign that we have grasped his elucidations is that we emerge masters of his symbolism. A reader can be said to have grasped one of Frege's elucidations (for example, his elucidation of the distinction between concept and object) if he is able to employ the appropriate elements of the symbolism (the symbol for an object only if an object is denoted, etc.) when segmenting judgements and translating them from ordinary language into *Begriffsschrift*. His segmentation of the judgement can, in turn, be checked by making sure that the translation of the judgement into *Begriffsschrift* preserves the appropriate inference and substitution licences between the judgement in question and other judgements.
- 94 This and related aspects of Frege's conception of elucidation are discussed in illuminating detail in the final chapter of Joan Weiner's book *Frege in Perspective* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990).
- 95 Peter Geach is one of the few commentators who sees a connection between this moment in Frege's work and the concerns of both the *Tractatus* and Wittgenstein's later work:

One thing I learned from Wittgenstein, in part from the *Tractatus* but still more from personal contact, is that philosophical mistakes are often not refutable falsehoods but confusions; similarly the contrary insights cannot be conveyed in proper propositions with a truth-value. I offer as [an] instance... of such [an] insight... Frege's distinction between concept and object ('No concept is an

object' has no translation into a well-constructed symbolism)... Such insights cannot be demonstrated as theses, but only conveyed dialectically; the dialectic process largely consists in the art, whose practice I have perhaps learned in some measure from Wittgenstein, of reducing to patent nonsense the buried nonsense that is found in attempts to reject these insights. We cannot refute nonsense by a straightforward process; as Frege said, logic cannot deal with nonsense, but only characterise it as being nonsense.

Having come to Frege by way of the *Tractatus*, I could see that his difficulties in expressing himself about function, concept, and object were not from a muddled self-bemusement but from the nature of the case. (Peter Geach, 'Philosophical Autobiography', in *Peter Geach: Philosophical Encounters*, ed. Harry A. Lewis (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1991), pp. 13–14, 16)

It is remarkable how little of the secondary literature on the *Tractatus* has interested itself in this moment in Frege's thought. The contrast Max Black draws in the following passage between Frege (who has no use for the idea that nonsense can be illuminating) and Wittgenstein (who does have a use for the idea) is typical of the sort of contrast between Frege and Wittgenstein one finds throughout the secondary literature on the *Tractatus*:

Is the *Tractatus* self-defeating? Nothing in the book has aroused more interest or provoked more scandal than its concluding remarks... [T]he very words in which our predecessors' errors were castigated have to be acknowledged as nonsensical... With what relish Frege would have assaulted this position. One can imagine him smacking his lips over the deliciously absurd notion that 'nonsense' can be understood. 'If we understand the conclusion', he might well have said, 'then it *cannot* be nonsensical. Since it implies its own lack of sense it must at best be false. For, if it were true, it would have to be nonsensical, and hence without truth-value, which is a contradiction. So, the supposed conclusion is at best *necessarily* false. But all this is unnecessary – we can't begin to take seriously a statement that claims to imply its own absurdity.' (Max Black, *A Companion to Wittgenstein's Tractatus* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), pp. 378–9)

This stock contrast of Frege and Wittgenstein renders invisible how Wittgenstein's notion of elucidation (in, e.g., *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, §§4.112, 6.53) inherits and reshapes Frege's notion of elucidation.

- 96 The word 'categories' won't really do here. Russell happily speaks of 'entities', whenever he runs up against this problem, emphasizing how extraordinarily inclusive this 'category' is. (Russell's willingness to lapse into such an idiom is itself a symptom of his having failed, by Wittgenstein's lights, to have faced up to the difficulty here.) There is, according to Frege, no word that will do. I finesse this problem here by pretending that talk of 'logical categories' is able to possess greater referential powers than Frege thinks it can. For both Frege and early Wittgenstein such talk is permissible only if it is self-consciously employed as a ladder which the listener/reader is to climb up and then throw away.
- 97 Here are some representative passages:

[T]he question arises what it is that we are here calling an object... It is only possible to gesture towards [*hinzuweisen*] what is meant. (CP, p. 147)

If... the meaning to be assigned is logically simple, then one... must confine oneself to warding off the unwanted meanings among those that occur in linguistic usage and to pointing to the wanted one, and here one must always rely on being met half-way by an intelligent guess. (*Philosophical and Mathematical Correspondence*, ed. B. McGuinness, tr. H. Kaal, Oxford: Basil Blackwell [henceforth *Corr*], p. 37)

It is not possible to give a definition of what a function is... It is only possible to hint at what is meant and to make it clearer by relating it to what is known. Instead of a definition we must provide elucidations [*Erläuterungen*]; here of course we must count on a meeting of minds. [Frege's emphasis] (*PW*, p. 235)

I must confine myself [in attempting to explain the 'unsaturatedness' of functional signs] to hinting at what I have in mind by means of a metaphorical expression, and here I must rely on my reader's meeting me half-way. (*CP*, p. 292)

98 *CP*, pp. 182–3.

99 *PW*, p. 207 [I have emended the translation].

100 Here are two representative passages:

We must admit logically primitive elements that are indefinable. Even here there seems to be a need to make sure that we designate the same thing by the same sign (word)... Since definitions are not possible for primitive elements, something else must enter in. I call it elucidation [*Erläuterung*]. It is this, therefore, that serves the purpose of mutual understanding among investigators... We may relegate it to a propaedeutic. It has no place in the system of a science; in the latter, no conclusions are based on it. [I have emended the translation] (*CP*, pp. 300–1)

I should like to divide up the totality of mathematical propositions into definitions and all the remaining propositions (axioms, fundamental laws, theorems)... One can also recognize a third kind of proposition, elucidatory propositions, but I would not want to count them as part of mathematics itself but refer them to the antechamber, the propaedeutics. (*Corr*, p. 37)

101 My emphasis; *Corr*, p. 136. The conclusion of this passage – the idea that what matters in such cases (where we are forced to make use of such inappropriate forms of expression) is that 'we know we are doing it and how it happens' – parallels the conclusion of 'On Concept and Object':

[O]ver the question of what it is that is called a function in Analysis, we come up against the same obstacle; and on thorough investigation it will be found that the obstacle is essential, and founded on the nature of language; that we cannot avoid a certain inappropriateness of linguistic expression; and that there is nothing for it but to realise this and always take it into account. (*CP*, p. 194)

102 *CP*, p. 193.

103 Why the author of the *Tractatus* did not think that Frege had come to the end of the philosophical task of seeing where this difficulty leads (and where this

difficulty does lead, once 'strictly thought through' by the author of the *Tractatus*) is a tale I try to tell in my 'The Method of the *Tractatus*', in *From Frege to Wittgenstein: Perspectives on Early Analytic Philosophy*, edited by Erich H. Reck (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

104 *Wittgenstein's Lectures on Foundations of Mathematics*, Cambridge, 1939, ed. Cora Diamond (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1976), p. 103.

105 *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, §6.54 [my translation].

106 'I've written a book called *Logisch-Philosophische Abhandlung*. ... Nobody will understand it'; Letter to Russell, 13 March 1919; in *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Cambridge Letters*.

107 *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Philosophical Occasions, 1912–1951*, p. 183.

108 *Ibid.*, p. 183.

109 *Ibid.*, p. 161.

110 Quoted by Rush Rhees in *Discussions of Wittgenstein* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970), p. 43.

111 *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, §§6.52–6.521.

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