
Wittgenstein

Biography and Philosophy

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Philosophy and Biography*

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The biographies and autobiographies, . . . lives of great men, . . . that stand cheek by jowl with the novels and poems, are we to refuse to read them because they are not "art"? Or shall we read them, but read them in a different way, with a different aim? . . . How far, we must ask ourselves, is a book influenced by its writer's life – how far is it safe to let the man interpret the writer? How far shall we resist or give way to the sympathies and antipathies that the man himself rouses in us – so sensitive are words, so receptive of the character of the author? These are questions that press upon us when we read lives and letters, and we must answer them for ourselves.

– Virginia Woolf¹

How about the biographies and autobiographies – in short, the lives – of great *philosophers* (those many books that stand in our libraries and bookstores cheek by jowl with the volumes of their philosophy), are we to read them or not; and, if so, how? Let's call this "the first question." It is a very general question.

And how about the possibility of a certain genre of biography (or autobiography) – which I will call *philosophical biography* – a mode of representation of the life of an individual philosopher that aspires to facilitate the understanding of that individual qua philosopher? A philosophical biography (or autobiography) aspires to confer through the genre of biography (or autobiography) – that is through the depiction of a life – a sort of understanding that itself has a claim to being termed *philosophical*. Is such a genre of biography so much as possible? Let's call this "the second question." It is a fairly specific question.

It is difficult to get a hearing for the second question. The possibility of its being heard, let alone addressed, tends to be drowned out by the din of controversy surrounding various specifications of the first question, such as the following: Are we to refuse to read biographies and autobiographies of

philosophers because they are not "philosophy"? Or shall we read them, but read them in a different way, with a different aim? If so, *how* differently? Are we to read them with the aim of learning some "background" that will help us to a better understanding of the philosophical writings of the person whose writings they are? Or are we to read them with an interest in the person of the philosopher that is only permissible if kept clearly distinct from an interest in his or her philosophical work proper? How far shall we resist or give way to the sympathies and antipathies that the philosopher himself or herself (as revealed, say, through biography or autobiography) rouses in us? To what extent do the sympathies and antipathies thus roused bear on an estimate (not only of the person, but) of the philosophical work itself? Can the words that comprise the philosophical work be expressive of the character of the author in a way that makes an assessment of that character integral to an assessment of that work? Or is an estimate of the person of the philosopher always irrelevant to an understanding of his or her philosophical work?

I take these to be important and difficult questions. In what follows I will have something to say about each of them. Like the first question, however, I do not think any of them admits of a general answer; I will, accordingly, not attempt anything of the sort here. Insofar as they do admit of answers, they are the sorts of questions we must each answer for ourselves and on a case-by-case basis. The trouble is that it is easy to fall into the confusion of thinking that questions such as these do admit of a general answer, thus obstructing our view of the second question.

The aim of this paper is to lend credence to two suggestions: first, that the answer to the second question should be affirmative, that is, that philosophical biography (in the sense of the term specified above) is possible, not that it is *always* possible (i.e., possible for all philosophers, regardless of the character of their work), nor that it is sometimes *indispensable* (i.e., that there are philosophers whose work cannot be understood without the aid of this genre), but merely that it is *possible*; and second, the suggestion that, where it is possible, it can also sometimes be a good thing.

A Deadlock

Nowadays there seem to be two standard ways to understand the relation between philosophy and biography: the first contends that biography holds *the secret* to understanding the work of a philosopher, the second that the understanding of a philosopher's life is *irrelevant* to an understanding of his work. I will call these *reductivism* and *compartmentalism*, respectively. The reductivist and the compartmentalist have this much in common: each thinks that the first question – Are we to read these books or not; and, if so, how? – admits of a general answer.

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The reductivist thinks that if we learn enough about a philosopher's life, we will see why he wrote what he did and thereby discover the real meaning of his work. There are many models for how to write a reductivist biography. There is (what we might call) *the psychoanalytic model*, in which one looks for the real causes and hidden meanings latent in an author's work by pointing to the symptoms of pathology therein and then weaves them into a narrative of the aetiology of the broader pathological symptoms that marked his life as a whole. There is also (what we might call) *the Marxist model*, in which one looks for the real causes and hidden meanings latent in an author's work by pointing to the way in which his life is shaped by the ideological false consciousness of the class into which he is born, and examining how that consciousness gradually evolves (and perhaps breaks up) as he struggles to come to terms with the contradictions inherent in a capitalist form of social organization. There are many other such models of reductivist biography. (I do not mean to suggest that psychoanalytic theory, on the one hand, or Marxist theory, on the other, cannot shed a great deal of light on why an individual acts or thinks as he or she does; but only to suggest that, when such theories are employed *reductively* in the practice of writing biography, the resulting brew is inevitably a travesty of both biography and psychoanalysis or Marxism.)

The mark of such reductivist varieties of biography is that they seek to understand and evaluate an author's work by locating his work in a broader set of *causal* forces acting upon him. The work comes to be viewed as an *effect* of those forces, and evaluation of the work is grounded in features of the author's life that are *external* to his work. Compartmentalism is best seen, I think, as arising out of a kind of recoil from these evils of reductivism. Part of the reason that compartmentalism is the dominant point of view in serious intellectual circles today is because we have so few good examples of the practice of intellectual biography. Most biographies, where they are not utterly superficial and without pretense to confer intellectual understanding, tend to slide, to some degree, into reductivism. The compartmentalist rightly senses first that there is something wrong with restricting one's view of an author's life to a causal analysis of how he came to think and act as he did (e.g., "Wittgenstein was obsessed with issues of purity because of his childhood toilet training"), and second that there is something wrong with evaluating an author's work in terms of criteria drawn from wholly outside that work (e.g., "You only have to consider the way Russell treated his many wives and lovers to see that *Principia Mathematica* cannot be the work of a great mind"). This leads the compartmentalist to conclude that an understanding of the life is utterly irrelevant to an understanding of the work.

The compartmentalist therefore has (at least) two sound reasons for resisting reductivism: so as not to mistake a story about the external causes that

might have led a philosopher to say certain things for an internal understanding of the work itself; and so as not to base an evaluation of a philosopher's work solely on an evaluation of the man. I will call the conjunction of these two sound reasons for resisting reductivism "the truth in compartmentalism." The question that I want to explore in a moment is the following: can we hold on to the truth in compartmentalism while rejecting the main thesis of compartmentalism?

The compartmentalist concludes that everything that is relevant to an understanding of a philosopher's work is to be found in the pages he wrote. To look beyond the pages he wrote to anything of a more "personal" nature, whether said to a friend, or written in a diary or in private correspondence, is to look to something that is not part of the work, and thus without bearing on the task of seeking insight into what is happening on the pages of the philosopher's work. The compartmentalist can allow that we may have our reasons for being curious about the lives of great men and women, and that there is nothing wrong, in and of itself, with the practice of reading and writing about the lives of such men and women; and he can allow that there is much that we can seek to understand about why these lives come to assume the sorts of shapes that they do. Nonetheless the compartmentalist thinks that we should not confuse the task of understanding these lives and what happens in them with the utterly distinct task of learning to understand the philosophical works written by the individuals who happened to live those lives. Each of these activities – biography and philosophy – is fine in its place, says the compartmentalist, but they should be kept wholly apart and should never be confused with one another. These two activities should take place in separate compartments of *our* intellectual lives and what goes on in each of these compartments should be kept from spilling over into the other.

Contemporary thinking about the topic of philosophical biography thus tends to find itself in the following deadlock: we are offered a forced choice between reductivism and compartmentalism – an understanding of an author's work is to be found *wholly outside* his work (in the external events of his life) or an understanding of the work is to be sought by attending solely to what lies *wholly within* the work (and the life is held not to be part of the work).

An Example of an Ancient Philosopher: Socrates

With a view to easing this deadlock, it might help to consider Socrates. Precisely because he did not *write* anything, the example of Socrates forces us to clarify our thinking about the crudely drawn distinction between "life" and "work" that informs the debate between reductivists and compartmentalists. Socrates's life is his work and his work is his life. He strived to live –

and to provide an example of what it means to live – a certain kind of life: the life of one who loves wisdom, a practitioner of *philo-sophia*. There is no understanding of his philosophy apart from an understanding of the sort of life he sought to live.

What the example of Socrates makes immediately evident is that, at least in the case of this philosopher, we need a nonreductive conception of philosophical biography: a way of understanding the relation between philosophy and life that preserves the truth in compartmentalism without its compartmentalization of philosophy and life. We need a way of understanding a philosopher's life that allows us to see that life (not as an effect of forces wholly external to his philosophy, but rather) as something that is internally related to his philosophy – as an *expression* of his philosophy. When and how Socrates challenges the charge (of corrupting the youth of Athens) brought against him, when and how he accepts the verdict of the court against him, when and how he refuses the opportunity to flee from prison, when and how he behaves in his final moment when he drinks the hemlock and lies down to die: these are all expressions of his philosophy. No understanding of what Socrates thought philosophy was is possible apart from an appreciation of how philosophy is meant to find expression in a life such as *this* – that is, in a life such as the one that Socrates himself sought to live.

A compartmentalist might reply by protesting: "Yes, but Socrates is a very special case just because he did not write anything: there is no place to look for his philosophy but in his life; but other philosophers, however, do write things and, in such cases, we must separate the task of understanding what they wrote from the task of understanding how they lived."

What is odd about this reply might be put as follows: it seeks to marginalize the fountainhead of Western philosophy. When Aristotle asks his rhetorical question "What more accurate standard or measure of good things do we have than the Sage?" he is the first of a long line of philosophers to bear implicit witness to the way in which the figure of Socrates leaves its mark on the whole of ancient philosophy.² If one turns to the great schools of Hellenistic philosophy – the Skeptics, the Stoics, the Epicureans, the Neo-Platonists – they all sought to practice (what we might call) a broadly "Socratic" conception of philosophy; that is, they all sought to encourage the pursuit of a kind of life – the life of the Sage – for which, for all their differences, they all took Socrates to offer a (more or less adequate) model. Philosophy was not something you simply learned – say, by reading certain books and taking an examination on them – it was something you practised. Yes, of course, it consisted, among other things, of long stretches of argument; but those arguments were an integral part of a set of (what Pierre Hadot has called) "spiritual exercises" through the employment of which one sought to transform oneself. (This is perhaps particularly clear in the case of the ancient skeptics. You will have misunderstood the role of any particular

argument, as deployed within the practice of the ancient skeptics, if you think the skeptic wants you, in the end, to prefer that argument over the equipollent argument for the opposite conclusion.) The spiritual disciplines internal to each of the Hellenistic schools of philosophy seek to promote a certain kind of existential *telos* – for the Skeptics, the *telos* is *ataraxia*; for the Neo-Platonists, it is ecstatic union with the cosmos, and so forth – and the *telos* in question is not a merely theoretical (as opposed to practical) matter: it is a matter of successfully giving a certain sort of shape to one's self and this is achieved in part by giving a certain sort of shape to one's life.

A nostalgia for this aspect of ancient philosophy, along with the correlative contrast between ancient and modern philosophy, is a theme common to the writings of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. A contemporary scholar of ancient philosophy who has picked up their theme, and laid particular emphasis on its importance for a proper understanding of the ancients' conception of philosophy, is the French historian Pierre Hadot. During the Hellenistic and Roman eras, philosophy was, Hadot tells us, "a way of life":

This is not only to say that it was a specific type of moral conduct. . . . Rather it means that philosophy was a mode of existing-in-the-world, which had to be practised at each instant, and the goal of which was to transform the whole of the individual's life. For the ancients, the mere word *philo-sophia* – the love of wisdom – was enough to express this conception of philosophy. . . . Philosophy was a method of spiritual progress which demanded a radical conversion and transformation of the individual's way of being. . . . Thus, philosophy was a way of life, both in its exercise and effort to achieve wisdom and in its goal, wisdom itself. For real wisdom does not merely cause us to know: it makes us "be" in a different way.³

On this conception of philosophy, a philosopher's life is the definitive expression of his philosophy. For such a philosopher, his writings (i.e., that which we are tempted to identify as his "work") are a mere means to facilitate the achievement of that work on the self that is (properly identified as) a philosopher's work. This has implications for the sorts of roles that writings that aim to depict the life of the philosopher are able to assume in ground-level philosophical practice. It also helps to explain the frequent deployment of anecdotes regarding the lives of philosophers in ancient Greek and Roman texts. Anecdotes about philosophers wedded to this or that philosophical teaching often seem to be adduced by the ancients as an instrument not only for describing but also for *evaluating*, the teaching in question.⁴ Arnaldo Momigliano, in *The Development of Greek Biography*, writes:

Anecdotes served to characterize modes of life, of thought, of style. If Phanias of Eresus in his book on the Socratics said that Aristippus was the first of the Socratics to pay for tuition and to make money by teaching, the story must have been meant to characterize, or perhaps to discredit, the hedonistic inclinations of Aristippus. Books of this type on philosophic schools, though probably first written in the Peripatos, soon became the common patrimony of Hellenistic culture.⁵

Mornigliano distinguishes, quite properly, this ancient practice of liberally deploying anecdotes from the ancient practice of biography proper (i.e., the practice of constructing a narrative of an individual's life from birth to death). Nevertheless, he argues that the two practices had this much in common: both were "used by philosophers at large as a weapon against hostile schools."⁶ Arnold Davidson (commenting on the implications of Hadot's thesis that philosophy for the ancients was a way of life) develops the point:

The significance of philosophy as a way of life can be seen in the importance given to biographies in ancient philosophical work. . . . [A] philosophical biography was not predominantly a narrative intended to allow one to understand an author and his doctrines; it was not just a report of what the author said and believed. Rather, "it was, in the first place, a tool of philosophical battle", since one could defend or condemn a philosophy by way of the characteristics of the mode of life of those who supported it.⁷

The role of biography in the practice of ancient philosophy was not limited to this purely negative polemical function. It served an important positive function as well: to provide a representation of the philosophical life. The tradition of philosophical biography, so conceived, was initiated by Plato's and Xenophon's respective accounts of the life of Socrates. The influence of this mode of representing a life was not confined to the representation of the lives of philosophers. In ancient Greek and Roman times, all biography contained an element of philosophical biography. The life that the ancient art of biography seeks to depict, whatever else it may be, will be the embodiment of a conception of philosophy. Biography, so conceived, is an account of the life of the individual – whether it be the life of a poet, statesman, general, or saint – qua hero. What such an account aims to highlight is that which is *exemplary* in such a life.⁸ This life, for the ancients, is not, and could not be, independent of what philosophy is. (Thus, for example, Plutarch's depiction of the life of, say, a statesman will aim to show how *philosophia* finds expression in *that* life).

If historians such as Hadot and Mornigliano are right about the role that depictions of the lives of philosophers play in the ancients' understanding of the practice of philosophy, then the problem that the compartmentalist so evidently faces in the case of Socrates – whose writing cannot be understood apart from his life because he wrote nothing – confronts him no less pointedly in the shape of the whole of ancient philosophy. For, if they are right, then, at least for much of the corpus of ancient philosophy, the only understanding of those writings available independently of an understanding of the lives its authors aspired to lead is an anachronistic one.⁹

To this a compartmentalist might reply: "O.K. Perhaps you have a point about ancient philosophy. Perhaps philosophy was *once* about living a certain sort of life – and you are right that there is, in such a case, perhaps no

separating an understanding of the life that a particular philosophy enjoins its practitioners to lead from an understanding of the philosophy itself. But my objection is to biographies of *modern* philosophers. The relation between one's life and one's philosophy is no longer *for us* what it was for the ancients. We, contemporary philosophers, no longer look to the *Sage* for an accurate standard or measure of anything. Nowadays, we look only to the well-reasoned philosophical *theory*; and one does not need to be a sage to put forward exemplary instances of such theory – all one needs to be is a good philosopher."

The compartmentalist has a point here. His point does not secure his thesis; but it forces one to reflect on what has become of the ancient conception of philosophy in the course of the development of philosophy in the modern era. To put the point simply, there is certainly this much of a difference between ancient and modern philosophy: what Kierkegaard and Nietzsche claim was generally true of ancient philosophy is by no means generally true of modern philosophy. Hence the possibility of their interest in the *difference* between ancient and modern philosophy. (But why were these two *philosophers* so interested in this difference? Their interest was not confined to the scholarly ambitions of the historian of ideas but was itself philosophically motivated. This interest was premised precisely on a refusal to accept the difference in question as a difference in kind with regard to the possibilities for philosophy in the modern era.) What is sound in the compartmentalist's "point" above is perhaps best formulated as two separate points: (1) the relation between philosophy and life is no longer as perspicuous as it once was, and (2) there is no longer, in contemporary philosophy, any such thing as *the* relation between philosophy and life – there are as many species of this relation as there are conceptions of philosophy, and, across these conceptions, widely varying degrees and kinds of intimacy obtain among the relata.

An Example of a Modern Philosopher: Wittgenstein

Wittgenstein is a useful example of a modern philosopher who shows that the separation that the compartmentalist seeks to effect between ancient and modern philosophy has, at the very least, its exceptions. In a manner strikingly reminiscent of ancient accounts of a philosopher's thought, many recent accounts of Wittgenstein's philosophy adduce a wealth of anecdotes and biographical details regarding Wittgenstein's life. Wittgenstein, like Socrates or Pythagoras, seems to many of his expositors to call for this sort of treatment. This is surely not merely because Wittgenstein lived in a manner that caused anecdotes about him to proliferate, but because the authors of such accounts believe that the anecdotes and details in question illuminate something about Wittgenstein qua philosopher. Yes, he was an odd fellow

who lived an unconventional life; and, yes, of course, this provides colorful material for the occasional entertaining digression. Yet the authors of the accounts of Wittgenstein's philosophy at issue here do not take themselves to be *digressing* when adducing the material in question; they tend to see an intimate if elusive connection between the extraordinariness of Wittgenstein's life and the difficulty of his thought.¹⁰ It is doubtful that most of them would imagine that they are able to see such a connection if they did not take themselves to be encouraged to look for one by something in Wittgenstein's philosophical writings. By what?

Consider the following five passages from Wittgenstein:

1. You cannot write anything about yourself that is more truthful than you yourself are.¹¹
2. Nothing is so difficult as not deceiving oneself.¹²
3. If anyone is *unwilling* to descend into himself . . . he will remain superficial in his writing.¹³
4. Working in philosophy . . . is really more a working on oneself.¹⁴
5. That man will be revolutionary who can revolutionize himself.¹⁵

Numerous remarks similar to these can be found scattered throughout Wittgenstein's writings.¹⁶ Such a remark, when one comes upon it in the middle of an extended Wittgensteinian philosophical investigation – on, for example, 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, etcetera – is apt to strike one as a nonsequitur. 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?

There are various ways one might answer this question. The reductivist and compartmentalist will each favor a certain direction of answer to this question. Reductivists of a certain stripe might want to insist that the real sources of Wittgenstein's philosophical preoccupations come to the surface in remarks such as these: it is through a prior and independent understanding of what prompts Wittgenstein to break out into remarks such as these that one finds the wellsprings of his philosophy. The reductivist thereby seeks an understanding of such remarks in a prior understanding of his life. He thus takes himself to be able to arrive at a key to understanding Wittgenstein's philosophy via a route that enables him to understand such remarks prior to understanding the rest of Wittgenstein's corpus. This inevitably prompts a certain stripe of compartmentalist to insist that these remarks (not only do not provide a key to understanding Wittgenstein, but) do not really belong to Wittgenstein's philosophical corpus at all: he used his notebooks to record all sorts of observations and a good editor of his philosophical manuscripts

would have sound grounds for culling such remarks from a final published edition of his (properly) *philosophical* writings. (Such a compartmentalist would concede that it is, of course, still fine to collect and publish such jottings separately, as long as one does not fall into the confusion of thinking they are part and parcel of the philosophy proper.¹⁷) Thus this stripe of compartmentalist seeks to understand Wittgenstein's philosophy independently of any understanding of such remarks.¹⁸

In a previous paper, I had occasion to quote these same five remarks from Wittgenstein.¹⁹ 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."²⁰ I agree with this.²¹ And if this is right, it helps to explain why these remarks are not nonsequiturs, and how it is that they touch on a dimension of difficulty that is pervasively, if often only tacitly, in play in Wittgenstein's investigations.²² 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 that 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 sorts of contexts in which they characteristically do.²³

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."²⁴ This is surely right if by "*personal* difficulties" Phillips means *merely* personal (as opposed to philosophical) difficulties. Yet it is equally wrong if by this Phillips means "philosophical, and therefore *in no way* personal, difficulties."²⁵ 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 who 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.²⁶ Yet too sharp a recoil from such misinterpretations – with its complementary insistence upon too sharp a separation between (merely) personal and (properly) philosophical difficulty – is equally obstructive of an understanding of Wittgenstein's conception of the nature of the difficulty of philosophy.

Wittgenstein's remark "nothing is so difficult as not deceiving oneself" is neither more nor less a remark about a particular difficulty that 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 that the all but inevitable tendency to "lie to oneself" has on one's writing with the remark, "If you are unwilling to know what you are, your writing is a form of deceit."²⁷) 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 Malcolm, "You can't think decently if you don't want to hurt yourself."²⁸ 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 judgments Wittgenstein himself offers of the philosophical work of others.²⁹ Yet 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 of Frank Ramsey: that his "incapacity for genuine enthusiasm or (what is really the same thing) reverence came to disgust me more and more," 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.³⁰ 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."³¹ 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. 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," this is, in the first instance, of course, a remark about the shallowness of Ayer's philosophizing.³² Still it is not *merely* a remark about the quality of Ayer's efforts at philosophizing or wholly without bearing on an estimate of the shallowness or depth of the sensibility of the person whose philosophizing it is.³³ Similarly, when Wittgenstein says about the anthropologist James Frazer: that he "is much more savage than most of this savages," this is a comment on both the man and his thought.³⁴ It is a comment on something that shows itself in Frazer's writing about the forms of life he studies – where part of what shows itself pertains to the sorts of possibilities of thought and life that 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.³⁵ 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 practicing 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.³⁶ If you evidently do practice 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.) Yet if you wish to think of yourself as practicing 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.

Ray Monk puts it well when he says, " 'Nothing is hidden' is, for Wittgenstein, an ethical as well as a logical remark."³⁷ Thus when Wittgenstein writes to his sister, "Call me a truth-seeker and I will be satisfied," he specifies the character of his striving in terms of something that for him is equally a philosophical and an ethical ideal.³⁸ 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 – what Wittgenstein calls a “real” – human being.³⁹ 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.⁴⁰ If as a biographer (or reader of biography) one turns to examine his life, and has the eyes to see (which requires that one have some understanding of his philosophy), one will discover the pressure of such a demand equally pervasively manifest in the conduct of his life and in his understanding of the relation between his philosophy and his life.

Such a philosopher will naturally attract biographers. If those biographers have reductivist proclivities, their biographical narratives will necessarily give a distorted picture not only of the life but also of the thought. They will give a distorted picture of the life of a philosopher such as Wittgenstein because there is no understanding the life of such a man apart from an understanding of his thought.⁴¹ They will give a distorted picture of his thought because there is no understanding the thought of any interesting philosopher – and certainly not this one – as a straightforward function of his life, especially when the requisite understanding of the life is taken to be unproblematically available independently of an understanding of the thought.⁴²

All of this naturally feeds the compartmentalist’s anxieties and leads to his overreaction. I take it to be an overreaction because the compartmentalist’s thesis goes well beyond the perfectly sensible claim that (*pace* reductivist biographers of Wittgenstein) it is both possible and important to attain an understanding of Wittgenstein’s philosophy independently of making a study of his life. The compartmentalist insists that attention to a thinker’s life cannot possibly shed any light on his thought. Thus the compartmentalist ends up attempting to enforce a veto on that genre of biography – (which I have been calling) philosophical biography – in which the biographer seeks to illuminate aspects of a philosopher’s thought through an attention to his life. And, in the case of a philosopher such as Wittgenstein, whose thought embodies an understanding of what it is to lead the philosophical life, which is in turn reflected in how he lived, such a veto deprives us of a non-negligible resource for better understanding (that unity comprising both) the philosopher and his philosophy.

In the case of a philosopher such as Wittgenstein, the compartmentalist would deprive us of a genre of writing about the philosopher that, if it is done well, can be a good thing. The problem is that it almost never is done well, thus fuelling the suspicion that there is no possible thing of the relevant sort to do well.

Two Examples of Philosophical Biography

One time-honored way of demonstrating the possibility of something is to demonstrate its actuality. It is in this spirit that I conclude by considering two actual examples of philosophical biography: Ray Monk’s biographies of Wittgenstein⁴³ and Russell.⁴⁴

Ray Monk’s biography of Wittgenstein not only shows that Wittgenstein’s conception of philosophy is broadly “Socratic” (in the sense elucidated above), but it shows it in a way that only (that genre of writing known as) biography can – that is, by literally *showing* it: by presenting us with a picture of Wittgenstein’s life. As anyone who reads Monk’s biography is put in a position to see: Wittgenstein neither wanted to, nor thought he could, separate the task of becoming the sort of human being he wanted to be from the task of becoming the sort of philosopher he wanted to be. Indeed, it would be missing the point of Monk’s biography to think that its gist could be summarized as follows: there were two different things Wittgenstein wanted to do – become a certain kind of person and become a certain kind of philosopher – but he thought that these two pursuits somehow presupposed one another or were in some way entangled in one another. These were not “two different things Wittgenstein wanted to do.” There is only one “thing” here – the kind of living that is here in question and the kind of thinking that is here in question were, for Wittgenstein, two different aspects of a single unitary pursuit – which Wittgenstein called, as did the ancients, “philosophy.”⁴⁵

The compartmentalist might now venture the following reply: “O.K. I see that there are certain modern philosophers who should be exempted from my veto on trying to understand the work of a philosopher in tandem with trying to seek an understanding of how and why they lived as they did. There are philosophers, such as Wittgenstein, whose conception of philosophy and whose conception of how one should live are so deeply integrated that biography becomes a useful tool for illuminating the spirit in which such individuals seek to do philosophy and thus attaining a proper view of what philosophy is for philosophers of this funny sort. But, among modern philosophers, these philosophers are the exception. For most modern philosophers – for a typical analytic philosopher like Bertrand Russell – philosophy is one thing and life is another.”

The example conveniently adduced here by the compartmentalist allows me to move straight to the following observation: Ray Monk’s recent biography of Russell shows not only that this reply works almost as poorly in the case of Russell as it does in that of Wittgenstein, but also that the line that the compartmentalist seeks here to draw (between two kinds of philosophers) is in fact very difficult to draw – it is a difference in degree and not in kind.

It is the rare person whose motivations to philosophy are completely out of touch with the original ancient – we might call them “Socratic” – motivations to philosophy. It is even more rarely the case that such motivations are wholly absent from the work or life of a truly great philosopher (that is, a philosopher whose biography we might have some interest in reading).⁴⁶ There is certainly something right about the thought that among modern – unlike among ancient – philosophers there is a great deal of variety in the ways in, and the degrees to, which such a Socratic moment is legible in the life and the work, and in the ways in, and degrees to, which life and work do or do not form a genuine unity. Monk’s two very different biographies illustrate two very different ways in which such a Socratic moment can be legible in the life and work of a twentieth-century philosopher, as well as two very different ways in, and degrees to, which life and work may cohere with one another.

Monk’s biography of Russell shows how deeply divided a person Russell is and how those divisions shape and are given shape by the movement of his philosophical thought. Russell is, of course, famous for being a philosopher who changed his mind a lot. But what Monk’s biography makes almost painfully vivid is that Russell not only changed his mind with alarming frequency when it came to his first-order philosophical convictions – about topics such as the existence of abstract entities, the nature of perception, the structure of judgment, or the analysis of matter – but that he was equally fickle in his second-order convictions about the nature, purpose, and value of philosophy as such. This shows itself, above all, in the breathtaking fluctuations in Russell’s understanding of his own motivations to philosophy. Is this irrelevant to an understanding of his philosophy? Before addressing that question, perhaps a brief sample of the evidence is in order.

At times, Russell looks upon his work in mathematical logic as possibly the most exalted form of human occupation:

Pure mathematics is one of the highest forms of art; it has a sublimity quite special to itself, an immense dignity derived from the fact that its world is exempt from change and time. . . . [M]athematics is the only thing we know of that is capable of perfection; in thinking about it we become God. This alone is enough to put it on a pinnacle above all other studies.⁴⁷

Russell’s conception, however, of what it is that confers supreme value on this activity fluctuates between two poles – a quaintly contemplative, vaguely neoplatonist one and a highly modern, defiantly disenchanting one. These might be termed the *warm conception* and the *cold conception*, respectively, of the significance of mathematics. On the warm conception (which finds eloquent expression in the above quotation), the ennobling aspect of mathematics lies in the eternal character of its objects (a “world exempt from change and time”). Contemplation of such objects liberates the soul, allowing

it to ascend to the heights. Other forms of knowledge accordingly pale in comparison with the sort of knowledge afforded by mathematics and those branches of philosophy properly associated with it:

I hold all knowledge that is concerned with things that actually exist – all that is commonly called Science – to be of very slight value compared to that knowledge which, like philosophy and mathematics, is concerned with ideal and eternal objects, and is freed from this miserable world which God has made.⁴⁸

On the warm conception, (what Russell calls) “technical philosophy” represents the purest and noblest strain of philosophy because it, above all other disciplines, seeks to cut mathematical reality at its joints, revealing its true structure and nature. This contemplative conception of the importance of mathematics is, in turn, tied to a further yearning – a yearning for a world which will not disappoint:

The contemplation of what is non-human, the discovery that our minds are capable of dealing with material not created by them; above all, the realisation that beauty belongs to the outer world as to the inner, are the chief means of overcoming the terrible sense of impotence, of weakness, of exile amid hostile powers, which is too apt to result from acknowledging the all-but omnipotence of alien forces. . . . [M]athematics takes us still further from what is human, into the realm of absolute necessity, to which not only the actual world, but every possible world, must conform; and even here it builds a habitation eternally standing, where our ideals are fully satisfied and our best hopes are not thwarted.⁴⁹

But, at other times, nothing strikes Russell as more deluded than such thoughts (thoughts such as that we could be “freed from this miserable world” or that our ideals could be “fully satisfied” and our best hopes remain “unthwarted”); and this triggers the recoil to the cold conception of the value of philosophy. In this mood, the thoughts expressed in the above passage are apt to strike Russell as of a piece with the illusions of the traditional religions – indeed, such thoughts are themselves species of religious illusion – and the goal of philosophy should be to free us from all such illusion: to enable us to look things hard in the face and see them as they really are.

On the cold conception, technical philosophy is, again, taken to represent the purest strain of philosophy; only now it is because, in the quest to see things as they really are, mathematics is the helpmeet of philosophy precisely because it is so “cold and passionless.”⁵⁰ Russell’s eulogies to coldness are no less fervent or picturesque than his odes to warmth (to “the immense dignity” of a world “exempt from time and change”); with the paradoxical result that in these eulogies the spirit of dispassionateness often appears in the guise of a passion: “Philosophy is a cold mistress – one can only reach her heart with cold steel in the hand of passion.”⁵¹ Thus the aim remains one of seeking to avoid disappointment, but the strategy changes (from seeking a safe haven

for one's hopes) to seeking to free oneself of illusion through the practice of dispassionate analysis.⁵²

At still other times, Russell declares himself able, in turn, to see through the pretensions of the cold conception of the value of mathematics, unmasking it, too, as only a more subtle and rarified species of romanticism, one still in search of that "shiver of feeling," which a more thoroughgoing gospel of coldness would renounce but, at the cost of losing all its appeal. For the cold conception, too, seeks to ennoble the study of mathematics by subliming the object of its study, thereby elevating the Self who studies. As Russell astutely observes: "[T]he reflection that such beauty is cold and inhuman is already romanticism – it gives a shiver of feeling in which Self has its share."⁵³ This observation also contains a clue to understanding the possibility of the sorts of syntheses of features of the cold and the warm conceptions one also finds in Russell's writings – such as the following: although the world of time and change in which all human endeavour must transpire is squalid and bleak and to be acknowledged as such, Man is at least vouchsafed the small consolation of being able to contemplate the beauty of a better and higher realm, in which Man cannot live, but upon which he may at least gaze. On this hybrid conception, technical philosophy acquires its value by providing a (very temporary) *refuge* from the world in which we live.

These fluctuations within Russell's view of what confers value on technical philosophy are reenacted in an even sharper register in the fluctuations in his view of whether technical philosophy as such really has value at all and, if not, what does. One source of the occasional ambivalence in Russell's attitudes toward technical philosophy is a fear of the dehumanizing effect of such philosophy on the philosopher:

Abstract work, if one wishes to do it well, must be allowed to destroy one's humanity; one raises a monument which is at the same time a tomb, in which, voluntarily, one slowly inter oneself.⁵⁴

This passage still leaves room for the view that such self-destruction is itself a form of heroism: one sacrifices oneself but in the service of a greater good – the Truth. Yet the tone sometimes turns bitter, and the fear of disillusionment takes on additional bite in the form of a fear of retrospective disappointment: "I feel as if one would only discover on one's death-bed what one ought to have lived for, and realise too late that one's life has been wasted."⁵⁵ This occasional horror of the dehumanizing barrenness of technical work has its opposite pole in an intermittent attraction to alluringly momentous moral and political causes and, most strikingly, to religious modes of thought. Russell is famous for his fierce attacks on Christianity, but what is less well known is that he is also the author of passages such as the following:

Religion is the passionate determination that human life is to be capable of importance. . . . To assert religion is to believe that virtue is momentous, that human greatness is truly great, and that it is possible for man to achieve an existence which shall have significance.⁵⁶

Here the very possibility of believing that one is able to achieve an existence that has even a modicum of significance is tied to a sort of hope that it is the special office of religion to confer. Rather than mathematics, here it is religion that holds out the means of conferring value on this sordid and miserable world, of satisfying our deepest desires and not leaving our best hopes thwarted: "The things that make religion are the great things; they are what make life infinite and not petty."⁵⁷ What religion, in numerous remarks such as these, is represented as able to confer is strikingly reminiscent of the solace that mathematics (on the warm conception) is represented as able to afford; only now a new wrinkle is added – the solace comes not by fleeing the world of "human sordidness"⁵⁸ (as mathematics enables us to) for a timeless inhuman world, but by escaping the sordidness and petty selfishness of everyday existence via a route *toward* humanity, with the aim not only of coming closer to others but of bringing humanity as a whole together:

What we *know* is that things come into our lives sometimes which are so immeasurably better than the things of every day, that it *seems* as though they were sent from another world, and could not come out of ourselves. . . . Religion, it seems to me, ought to make us know and remember these immeasurably better things, and live habitually in the thought of them. . . . I have hitherto only seen the greatest things at rare times of stress or exultation. . . . When [that vision] . . . is strong, the kind of philosophical work I do seems not worth doing, and so when I have to do this work that vision fades. . . . What the vision seems to show me is that we can live in a deeper region than the region of little every-day cares and desires – where beauty is a revelation of something beyond, where it becomes possible to love all men.⁵⁹

This is not a mood Russell is ever able to sustain for long – at least not in this otherworldly key. Yet there is an underlying attitude – we might call it one of *utopianism* – to which Russell recurs throughout his life, which fuels his enthusiasm for various (sometimes astonishingly harebrained) political schemes, and which cyclically both eclipses and is alternately eclipsed by his enthusiasm for technical philosophy. Yet, whether it be in connection with his relatively enduring stretches of enthusiasm for technical philosophy or his comparatively ephemeral fits of enthusiasm for (some watered-down form of) religion, or some other project of utopian renewal, Russell never fails at some point to succumb to the feeling "that some element of delusion is involved in giving so much passion to any humanly attainable object."⁶⁰ The effect of such recurrent disillusionment is that "irony creeps into the very springs of one's being."⁶¹

Consequently, "the revelation of something beyond, where it becomes possible to love all men" finds its counterpoint in another vision:

In this vision, sorrow is the ultimate truth of life, everything else is oblivion or delusion. Then even love seems to me merely an opiate – it makes us forget that we draw our breath in pain and that thought is the gateway to despair.⁶²

The defense against the pain such disillusionment brings is a ruthlessly disenchanted view of the cosmos and one's place in it. Thus the pair of complementary conceptions that form the poles of Russell's thought about the significance of technical philosophy are paralleled by similar poles in Russell's conceptions of the value of philosophy as such. We might term these Russell's *utopian conception* and *disenchanted conception* of philosophy (and of the character of the reality it discloses), respectively. Here, too, we come upon striking hybrids at certain phases in Russell's thought. Even in his ultradisenchanted mode, Russell's tone is able to take on, if not a utopian, at least an edifying aspect. He accomplishes this by first assuming the mantle of a staunch defender of the scientific outlook and then characterizing the requirements of a strictly scientific attitude in ways that appear to have straightforward ethical implications. Paradoxically, on a first look, however, the nature of reality as disclosed by science appears to be merely ethically neutral:

The kernel of the scientific outlook is the refusal to regard our own desires and tastes and interests as affording a key to the understanding of the world. . . . The scientific mind involves a sweeping away of all other desires in the interests of the desire to know. . . . Until we have learnt to think of . . . [the universe] in ethically neutral terms, we have not arrived at a scientific attitude in philosophy.⁶³

This (apparently) ethically colourless view of the nature of things is sometimes able to take on an astonishingly vibrant aspect. In certain writings, Russell manages to convert a description of the universe as consisting of nothing more than mere clouds of particles in motion into a prelude for an edifying discourse – one that climaxes in the rousing tones of a gospel of salvation. This tendency is already manifest in as early an essay as "A Free Man's Worship" (written in 1902).⁶⁴ The essay starts with observations such as that "the world which Science presents for our belief" is "purposeless" and "void of meaning" – observations that Science has allegedly established to such a degree that today "no philosophy which rejects them can hope to stand."⁶⁵ We must acknowledge the truth of these observations not only for reasons of intellectual honesty, but in order to protect ourselves from false hope and crushing disappointment: "Only within the scaffolding of these truths, only on the firm foundation of unyielding despair, can the soul's habitation be safely built."⁶⁶ The essay rapidly moves from thus insinuating that what Science reveals is (not just ethically neutral, but) ethically dismal

to apparently asserting it: the world as revealed by Science is positively "inhospitable" to human hopes and values; Science reveals an "opposition of fact and ideal."⁶⁷ This sets up the question "How, in such an alien and inhuman world, can so powerless a creature as Man preserve his aspirations untarnished?"⁶⁸ In its answer to this question, the voice of sober-minded scientifically-informed common sense rapidly gives way to that of someone who has looked deep into the abyss, lived to tell about it, and now returns to show the rest of us how to become skeptical heroes undaunted by the task of living in a meaningless cosmos.⁶⁹ Though when he enters this postscientific sermonizing vein his cadences are sometimes dishearteningly hard to distinguish from those of as comparatively inconsequential a philosopher as, say, Albert Camus, of all Russell's many personae, this is probably the one that remains best known outside professional philosophical circles.

The preceding brief summary of Russell's intellectual pendulum-swings should suffice to make the following question urgent: How do all these attitudes (expressed in the quotations from Russell that figure in the preceding summary) fit into a single philosophical trajectory? One way of answering this question is by trying to understand another: how do these attitudes all fit into a single life? One can imagine different directions of answer to the former question (how do they fit into a single philosophical trajectory?) that might emerge through a consideration of the latter (how do they all fit into a single life?). To these different directions of answer correspond different sorts of intelligibility that philosophical biography can confer. At one extreme, one might come to see more clearly how a single overarching philosophical conception does indeed run through apparently discordant attitudes, harmonizing them into a single coherent unity: when one sees how the attitudes all fit together within the life, one sees better how they fit together philosophically. At the other extreme, one might come to see more clearly how there is no underlying unity in philosophical conception to bring this variety of attitudes into concord, yet one may still be brought to appreciate how this particular constellation of tensions and oscillations in philosophical conception fits into a single *humanly* (as opposed to *logically*) intelligible pattern: when one sees how the attitudes all fit into a life, one sees better how (although they do not form a coherent philosophical whole) they nonetheless represent an intelligible set of human responses to a certain set of intellectual needs and pressures. Monk's biography of Wittgenstein aims to confer the first of these two sorts of intelligibility on the material it lays before its reader; and his biography of Russell aims to confer the second of these two sorts of intelligibility on the material it lays before its reader.

With the aid of the narrative Monk painstakingly pieces together, we not only follow Russell through his convulsive changes of heart, but we witness how these changes are coordinated with – how they both trigger and are

triggered by – such things as the fluctuations in his relationship with figures such as G. E. Moore, Joseph Conrad, and Wittgenstein; his falling into and out of the grip of the conviction that he has found the love of his life; his contributions as a pamphleteer for diverse social and moral causes; his sojourns in the Soviet Union, the United States, and China; his gruelling soap-box tours on behalf of a variety of political movements; his work as a founder of a school and an agitator for educational reform; his efforts to coauthor treatises with collaborators as different from one another in sensibility and outlook as A. N. Whitehead, D. H. Lawrence, and Dora Black; and so forth. Once Russell's contributions to philosophy are woven together by Monk into a single continuous biographical narrative – a narrative in which each of the elements of this whirl of seemingly disjointed pursuits finds its place – it becomes possible to see the whirl not merely as a frenzy of activity, most of which is extracurricular to Russell's work as a philosopher. Many elements of the whirl become legible as expressions of Russell's fluctuating philosophical aspirations, and of the restless oscillation between the poles of yearning and disenchantment that characterize both his philosophy and his life as a whole.

What emerges vividly in Monk's pair of attempts to write philosophical biography is that the sort of illumination (of the work of an individual philosopher) that the genre of philosophical biography most naturally finds itself struggling to confer pertains, for the most part, not to particular details of philosophical doctrine or method, but rather to the character – what Wittgenstein calls the *spirit* – of a philosopher's work as a whole. Thus the most significant change of aspect (in our view of a philosopher's work) effected by a successful philosophical biography is unlikely to be *local* in character. That is, it is unlikely to be such that we will be able to exhibit our understanding – of that which we have been helped by means of philosophical biography better to understand (about a given philosopher's work) – by adducing detachable bits of (the philosopher's) philosophy that we are (now better) able to expound. If there is an important relationship between what philosophical biography shows and how it shows it, then we should not be surprised to learn that the sorts of change of aspect that philosophical biography permits to dawn in our perception of a philosopher's work are not ones easily brought into view by an alternative genre of writing. In particular, the sort of change of aspect in question will not admit expression via a mode of exposition of a philosopher's thought proper to the exposition of features of his thought graspable independently of their relation to the character of his thought as a whole.

The proper expression of such changes of aspect in our perception of a philosopher's work will possess the same paradoxical combination of features that Wittgenstein observes are characteristic of the sorts of change of aspect

investigated in *Philosophical Investigations*, Part II, section xi: the expression of the change of aspect in question must be "the expression of a *new* perception and at the same time of the perception's being *unchanged*." Further, as Wittgenstein seeks to show, this is connected to its being the sort of change in view that requires either that "light dawns gradually over the whole" or not at all.⁶⁰ Thus our estimate of a particular philosopher who forms the subject of a given biography may be augmented or diminished by reading the biography in question; but, if the biography in question is a (successful instance of the genre) philosophical biography, it is likely that the resulting change of aspect will be such that the philosopher's work will appear, as it were, to wax or wane as a whole.

Contrary to what the compartmentalist urges, what strikes one as one reads first Monk's biography of Wittgenstein and then his biography of Russell, is not how Wittgenstein's life is relevant to an understanding of his work, whereas Russell's life is not relevant to an understanding of his work, but rather how differently relevant the life is to an understanding of the work in each case. In Wittgenstein's case, seeing the philosophy in the light cast by Monk's biography helps us to see the rigor and depth and purity that characterizes Wittgenstein's work as a whole and, more importantly, perhaps to see more clearly what *sort* of rigor and depth and purity it is that Wittgenstein strove for in his thinking and living. In Russell's case, seeing the philosophy in the light cast by Monk's biography helps us to see ways in which Russell's work as a whole is, in some respects, a tragic failure – the ways in which, and the reasons why, Russell was unable to think his projects through to a satisfactory conclusion, so that his entire intellectual life was marked by his restlessly moving from one project of great promise to the next, often failing to carry through on them.

Thus, in Wittgenstein's case, we can be led to see better the resolute singlemindedness of purpose that runs throughout his work – what it means to say, and why it is right to say, that "nothing is hidden" is, for Wittgenstein, an ethical as well as a logical remark, and how it comes to pass that Wittgenstein finds himself addressing remarks such as the following to his friends: "I am not a religious person, but I cannot help seeing every problem from a religious point of view."⁶¹ In Russell's case, we are led to see the awkward furtiveness in the ways in which Russell struggles to integrate – or at least to rationalize the connection between – his theoretical and practical (his logical and ethical) motivations to philosophy, and how the shape of these struggles correlates with the cyclical pattern in the fluctuations in Russell's second-order views about the value of philosophy, and how it comes to pass that Russell finds himself addressing remarks such as the following to his friends: "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.⁷² One is helped by Monk to see the extraordinary resoluteness of Wittgenstein's philosophical thinking by seeing how various aspects of Wittgenstein's life are themselves expressions of that same insistence to achieve a sort of honesty with himself that he took to be a necessary condition of his being able to think things through philosophically. And one is helped by Monk to see the irresoluteness that characterizes Russell's broader philosophical trajectory – the way he shirks the problems that most haunt his central intellectual projects – by seeing the ways in which Russell's entire life, both in and out of philosophy, his tremendous individual accomplishments notwithstanding, is marked by ambivalence and irresoluteness.

Though there is much to admire in the Russell who comes to light in the pages of Monk's biography of him and much not to admire in the Wittgenstein who comes to light in the pages of Monk's biography of him, the following generalization is surely sound: most readers will find the resulting changes of aspect induced in their respective perceptions of Wittgenstein's and Russell's philosophical work to be such that the former will appear as a consequence to wax as a whole, while the latter will appear to wane. This difference in character in what Monk's biographies appear to disclose of Wittgenstein and Russell respectively has the inevitable consequence that Wittgenstein's admirers will, on the whole, tend to admire Monk's biography of Wittgenstein more than most of Wittgenstein's detractors will, and that roughly the opposite will tend to be the case with regard to the reception of Monk's biography of Russell amongst admirers and detractors of Russell. This inevitably leaves Monk open to the charge of a certain bias of sympathy in the one case and antipathy in the other.⁷³

If Monk succeeds in his quest to write the sort of biography he claims to aspire to write, then neither of these charges should be upheld. He aspires to confine himself to *showing* us the lives through a well-documented narrative of the thoughts and actions of the individuals themselves. If he is faithful to this aspiration, then all this pair of biographies could be said to be doing is simply confronting members of these respective circles of admirers and detractors with what there is to notice about the reciprocal interaction of the life and work of each of these two philosophers. The reader would thus find himself or herself confronted with each of these two individuals themselves – the ways in which each of their respective philosophical sensibilities emerges and finds expression in the course of shaping, and being shaped by, these interactions. Whether Monk does remain faithful to this aspiration (in each of his two very different efforts to write philosophical biography) is at best a delicate question, and no doubt one that different readers will decide differently (and perhaps differently with regard to each of his two efforts).⁷⁴

Even if one judges Monk to have remained faithful to this aspiration (in

either of his two efforts), this still leaves it undecided whether one should judge the result to be of *philosophical* interest. Whether one thinks being thus confronted with the entwining of a philosopher's life in his thought, and vice versa, is of philosophical interest will depend in part upon whether one thinks (the genre I have been calling) philosophical biography has any useful role to play in deepening our understanding of the work of particular philosophers. This is a question each of us must answer for him- or herself, on a case-by-case basis. How we answer this question will, of course, depend on our view, in each case, of the biography in question (on how successful we take it to be *qua* philosophical biography) and the philosopher in question (that is, on what *sort* of philosopher we take him or her to be); but, more significantly, it will depend on our conception of philosophy – on what we think philosophy now is and what we think it ought to be – and on the ways in which that conception may be either confirmed or challenged by a philosophical biography. These are not matters that someone else can decide for us.

Whatever one thinks of Monk's work – whether one thinks that it succeeds as philosophical biography or not – one ought to concede that it shows that one can at least *aspire* to write a philosophically illuminating biography of a philosopher without lapsing into reductivism. The reductivist biographer tries to show us the secret of a philosopher's work by locating the key to understanding his work outside of his work – in his life rather than his work. This is not what Monk does. Monk's mode of biography, in helping us to see the rigor and depth and purity that characterizes Wittgenstein's struggles generally, aims to help us to see Wittgenstein's work afresh: to see the rigor and depth and purity that are there *in* the work. What we are supposed to be thus helped to see is accordingly there to be seen in the work without the help of Monk's biography. But it can be hard to see.⁷⁵

Similarly, the ways in which, and the reasons why, Russell's work are tragically flawed in the respects that Monk's biography aims to reveal are ways and reasons that are internal to Russell's work itself. What Monk aims to do is to allow us to see that work as a whole more clearly and perspicuously than we were previously able to. Philosophical biography, if it succeeds, can play a role in enabling us to see in the work of a philosopher what we might otherwise miss. Though philosophical biography attempts a depiction of philosophy *in vivo* (rather than, as it were, *in vitro*), it is still the *philosophy* (and not just the philosopher) that it seeks to bring into view. Monk, unlike the reductivist biographer, does not take "the real meaning" of Wittgenstein's or Russell's texts to be of a sort that must remain hidden to us as long as we fail to situate those texts in the wider contexts of their respective biographies. He does not seek to explain or evaluate the work of either of these philosophers by privileging what is legible in their lives over what is legible in their

work – offering a reading of the texts of their lives that, in effect, pretends that it can serve as a substitute for the hard work of reading the texts that they wrote. He seeks rather to show how an attention to Wittgenstein's life or Russell's life can furnish a background against which one can more clearly discern what is already written, and there to be read, in the texts that Wittgenstein and Russell each wrote.

In the previous paragraph, when I speak of what Monk "aims" and "seeks" to do, I am crediting Monk with aiming to write philosophical biography (in the sense defined at the outset of this paper); but it is one thing to claim that Monk's work aspires to belong to this particular genre of writing and another thing to claim that it is a successful instance of the genre to which it thereby aspires to belong. By any discriminating person's lights, most attempts at philosophical biography must be judged failures. Many people who set out to do something like what Monk aspires to do – to write a biography that illuminates the work of a philosopher – wind up, I think, more or less inadvertently sliding into writing some more reductivist form of biography; because in order to construct a narrative that offers the appearance of illuminating the work through attention to the life, they slide into trafficking in the forms of pseudo-illumination that reductivist narratives confer. If one judges Monk to have succeeded in his aim then one will have judged him to have succeeded in doing something difficult. There is an art to writing such biographies; and, like any art worth practicing, it is hard to excel at. As with all such arts, people will differ widely in their assessments of whether the efforts of a given practitioner of the art are to be judged a success and, if so, how much of a success. My aim here is not to *settle* an argument concerning the relative success of Monk's particular pair of attempts to practice the art of philosophical biography, but only to show that this argument itself is a sensible one and its outcome not be decided on a priori grounds. My aim in this paper has been to exhibit the coherence of taking sides in such arguments by showing that the attempt itself – the genre of philosophical biography, as such – is in no way incoherent.

Other Honorable Trades: Shoemaking, for Example

Monk has himself written illuminatingly about his own conception of philosophical biography and, in particular, about the role played within that conception of the sort of understanding that consists in being able to see (and allow others to see) connections. In the course of explicating what it means to have the eye to notice such connections, he finds occasion to quote an anecdote from Stanley Cavell. The anecdote is from Cavell's days as a student at Berkeley when he attended Ernest Bloch's music theory class. Cavell's original reason for adducing the anecdote, in his book *A Pitch of Philosophy*,

is as a parable of philosophical instruction. The parable occurs as part of an extended exploration of the twin themes of having an ear for music and cultivating one's voice qua singer – an exploration within which these twin themes function as figures, respectively, for what it is to have an ear for philosophy and what it is to find one's voice qua philosopher. Here's the anecdote:

He [Bloch] would play something simple, at the piano, for instance a Bach four-part chorale, with one note altered by a half step from Bach's rendering; then he would play the Bach unaltered. Perhaps he would turn to us, fix us with a stare, then turn back to the piano and repeat, as it for himself, the two versions. The drama mounted, then broke open with a monologue which I reconstruct along these lines: "You hear that? You hear the difference?" ... He went on: "My version is perfectly correct; but the Bach, the Bach is perfect; late sunlight burning the edges of a cloud. Of course I do not say you must hear this. Not at all. No. But." The head lowered a little, the eyes looked up at us, the tempo slowed ominously: "If you do not hear it, do not say to yourself that you are a musician. There are many honourable trades. Shoemaking, for example."⁶

Monk himself adduces this anecdote in the service of exploring the analogy between understanding a person and understanding a piece of music. He is not so immodest as to indicate the respect in which the anecdote might have served equally aptly as a parable for the entire enterprise of philosophical biography itself. For in order to write a biography of the sort to which Monk aspires, you need a finely tuned sense of when and how a philosopher's personality expresses itself in his work and when and how his philosophy achieves expression in his life. Not everyone has the ear to catch each of these manifestations of a philosopher's vision as it expresses itself in the other. When the practitioners of philosophical biography are tone-deaf to what they need to hear, the sounds they produce are no less hard on the ears than those produced by tone-deaf musicians. What the widespread availability of bad biographies of philosophers shows is that in order to write philosophical biography, you need to have (not only considerable knowledge of both a philosopher's work and his life, but also) the ability to notice connections and hear resonances that not everyone will have the eye or the ear to pick up. Not everyone presently writing biographies of philosophers should obviously be doing what they are doing. To quote Ray Monk quoting Stanley Cavell quoting Ernest Bloch: there are many other honorable trades – shoemaking, for example.

Taking my lead from my epigraph from Virginia Woolf, I have indicated that the question "Should one allow a (philosophical) biography to assist one in understanding a philosopher?" is a question each person must answer on his or her own when faced with a concrete pair of examples – that is, when faced with both a philosopher and a (philosophical?) biography of that phi-

philosopher. An additional, relatively straightforward reason why this must be so is to be found in the fact that the sort of understanding that philosophical biography aspires to confer is not a sort that everyone necessarily seeks of a philosopher's work, and especially not necessarily when reaching for a biography. The quest for this sort of understanding may seem to defeat the pleasure of reading biography. What many people want most out of a biography is not to have light shed on elusive aspects of the work of a difficult philosopher; most readers, when they pick up a biography, just want to read an entertaining and edifying story about the life of a great person. Moreover, even if one takes oneself to have a use for the sort of understanding that philosophical biography (as I have here sought to define it) aims to confer, regardless of how successful an instance of the genre one takes up – as with all forms of understanding properly termed "philosophical" – such understanding can only come if earned.

Thus, even if one deems a philosophical biography successful, not everyone who reads such a book will come away with the variety of understanding it aspires to confer merely as a consequence of having attentively turned its pages – the more so if the reader turns the pages eager to see how it will all turn out, consuming it like an adventure story, without looking for connections that are left to the reader to draw himself. For it is a hallmark of good philosophical biography that a great deal of work be left to the reader. (Wittgenstein's remark about how philosophy ought to be written applies equally here: "Anything your reader can do for himself leave to him.")⁷⁴ Hence a reader may come away without any sense of gratitude; he may well feel, with justification, after reading even an exemplary philosophical biography of, say, Wittgenstein, that he is in no better position than before to see *who* Wittgenstein was and *why* he wrote what he did, let alone *why* he wrote *as* he did. That is only to say that philosophical biography is not for everyone: the sorts of connection that this genre of prose-writing seeks to bring to the fore, even when brought to light, will not seem salient to certain readers. In such cases, the changes of aspect in our perception of a philosopher's work that philosophical biography seeks to bring about will fail to dawn. There are however, many worthwhile ways to spend your time other than reading philosophical biography.⁷⁵

NOTES

1. "How Should One Read a Book?," in *The Collected Essays of Virginia Woolf, Volume II* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1967), pp. 3, 5.
2. Aristotle, *Protrepticus*, fragment 5, in *Aristotelis Fragmenta Selecta*, ed. W. D. Ross (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955), p. 33.

3. Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, ed. Arnold Davidson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 265.
4. The question of exactly what role such anecdotes are meant to play in ancient philosophical writings is a complex and delicate one. This much seems clear: if one thinks that a consideration of the manner in which a philosopher lives can contribute in some way to an assessment of the cogency of his philosophical doctrines, then this will have implications for what one takes to be the role and standing of (what we would tend to consider merely) *ad hominem* forms of argument. Nonetheless, it is difficult for a modern reader not to be struck by the abundance of (what is apt to strike one as) apparently irrelevant biographical detail in ancient philosophers' discussions of each others' views. As an amusing yet representative sample, consider the manner in which Aristotle introduces his discussion of the political doctrines of Hippodamus:

Hippodamus the son of Euryphon, a citizen of Miletus, was the first man without practical experience of politics who attempted to handle the theme of the best form of constitution. He was a man who invented the planning of towns in separate quarters, and laid out the Peiraeus with regular roads. In his general life, too, [apart from these innovations] he was led into some eccentricity by a desire to attract attention; and this made a number of people feel that he lived in too studied and artificial a manner. He wore his hair long and expensively adorned; he had flowing robes, expensively decorated, made from a cheap but warm material, which he wore in summer time as well as in winter. (*Politics*, 2.1267b22; tr. E. Barker [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1946], p. 68)

Can the observation that a philosopher lives "in too studied and artificial a manner" shed light on the character of his philosophy?

5. Arnaldo Momigliano, *The Development of Greek Biography* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 71.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 84.
7. Arnold Davidson, "Editor's Introduction," *ibid.*, p. 30. The embedded quotation is from Giuseppe Cambiano.
8. Momigliano argues that, precisely because the model of how to live furnished by such representations embodies an ideal, the practice of philosophical biography among the ancients must be distinguished from that of history:

The Socratics were infuriating in their own time. They are still infuriating in our time. They are never so infuriating as when approached from the point of view of biography. We like biography to be true or false, honest or dishonest. Who can use such terminology for Plato's *Phaedo* or *Apology*, or even for Xenophon's *Memorabilia*? ... [T]he fact we have to face is that biography acquired a new meaning when the Socratics moved to the zone between truth and fiction which is so bewildering to the professional historian. We shall not understand what biography was in the fourth century if we do not recognize that it came to occupy an ambiguous position between fact and imagination. Let us be in no doubt. With a man like Plato, and even with a smaller but by no means simpler man like Xenophon, this is a consciously chosen ambiguity. The Socratics experimented in biography, and the experiments were directed towards capturing the potentialities rather than the realities of individual lives. Socrates, the main subject of their considerations ... was not so much the real Socrates as the potential Socrates. He was not a dead man whose life could be recounted. He was the guide to territories as yet unexplored. ... The Greeks and the Romans realized that writing about the life of a fellow man is not quite the same as writing

history. . . . By keeping biography separate from history the Greeks and the Romans were able to appreciate what constitutes a poet, a philosopher, a martyr, a saint. (Montigliano, *op. cit.*, pp. 46–7, 104)

9. I do not mean to be claiming here (or anywhere, for that matter) that one cannot understand ancient philosophy (or any other kind of philosophy) without recourse to philosophical biography, but only that one has not understood what philosophy is for the ancients if one fails to understand that there is a distinctively philosophical role for the practice of biography to play in the practice of ancient philosophy. Hence the point here is not that one must be familiar (through biographical accounts or other forms of documentary evidence) with the concrete details of some particular individual ancient skeptic's, stoic's, or epicurean's life in order to understand what ancient Skepticism, Stoicism, or Epicureanism is. The point is simply that one must have some general understanding of the way of life of the skeptic, stoic, or epicurean in order to understand what ancient Skepticism, Stoicism, or Epicureanism is. Hence I say: one must have some understanding of the lives that the authors of skeptical, stoic or epicurean texts *aspired* to lead in order to understand these texts. One way of acquiring such an understanding is, while reading such texts, through imaginatively entering into the conception of how one ought to live that the texts themselves presuppose.
10. The case of Saul Kripke can serve as a useful contrast here. There are many anecdotes about Kripke circulating in contemporary philosophical circles, but no one is tempted to adduce any of them in the context of explicating Kripke's philosophical writings.
11. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, ed. G. H. von Wright; tr. P. Winch (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980; rev. 2d ed. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1998)), p. 33/38.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 34/39.
13. Rush Rhees, ed., *Recollections of Wittgenstein*, rev. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 193.
14. Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, p. 16/24.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 45/51.
16. "These passages," someone might complain, "are mostly taken from a single work: *Culture and Value* – the work that 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*. (See the Revised Edition (1998) of *Culture and Value*, *op. cit.*, with annotations by Alois Pichler indicating the manuscript sources of the remarks.) The passages from *Culture and Value* that are quoted here (like many such passages) occur, in their original place in Wittgenstein's manuscripts, in the midst of investigations of questions such as, what is it to follow a rule?, to name an object?, or to understand the meaning of a word?, etc.
17. In the opening sentence of his editor's preface to the volume, G. H. von Wright appears to be prepared to claim 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/x). A subsidiary aim of the present essay is to cast doubt on (the italicized portion of) this description of these remarks.
18. Some of the paragraphs that follow are drawn from my "On Going the Bloody

- Hard Way in Philosophy" (in *The Possibilities of Sense*, ed. John Whittaker (New York: Macmillan, forthcoming)), where the topic is treated at greater length.
19. "On Putting Two and Two Together," in *The Grammar of Religious Belief*, ed. D. Z. Phillips (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), pp. 248–331.
20. D. Z. Phillips, *Philosophy's Cool Place* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), p. 46.
21. 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.)
22. Having read thus far, the reader may have formed the impression that the topic of this section of the paper is one that could be summarized under the heading "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" (*This New Yet Unapproachable America* [Albuquerque: Living Batch Press, 1989], p. 40). I take the five remarks from Wittgenstein quoted above to be attempts to articulate (aspects of) that demand.
23. 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.
24. Phillips, *Philosophy's Cool Place*, p. 46.
25. 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.*).
26. Many of these misinterpretations have been occasioned by picking up from the wrong end Wittgenstein's oft-repeated analogy between philosophy and therapy.
27. Rush Rhees, ed. *Recollections of Wittgenstein*, *op. cit.*, p. 174. In this connection, see also the remark about the relation between cheating others and cheating oneself in "Notes for the 'Philosophical Lecture'," in Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Occasions, 1912–1951*; ed. J. Klagge and A. Nordmann (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1993), p. 450.
28. Ludwig Wittgenstein to Norman Malcolm, 16.11.44 in Norman Malcolm, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Memoir* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).
29. Such discernment is essential to the capacity for distinguishing (genuine) *philosophy* from what Wittgenstein was fond of calling (mere) *cleverness* – a distinction that underlies a great many of Wittgenstein's judgments of the work of other "philosophers."
30. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Denkbewegungen: Tagebücher 1930–1932, 1936–1937*, ed. Ilse Somavilla (Innsbruck, Austria: Haymon Verlag, 1997), 27.4.{19130, p. 7.

31. M. Drury, "Some Notes on Conversations with Wittgenstein," in R. Rhees, ed. *Recollections of Wittgenstein*, p. 1.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 159.
33. 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.
34. "Remarks on Frazer's *Golden Bough*," in Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Occasions, 1912–1951*, p. 131.
35. 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. 26/30). 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, trans. R. Hargreaves and R. White; [Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1975], Preface)
36. 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 "nonphilosopher" – who is in full possession of his intellectual faculties and yet utterly free from philosophical perplexity, and hence from the need for philosophy and the forms of perspicuity and clarity which it aims to confer.
37. Ray Monk, "Philosophical Biography: The Very Idea," in the present volume, p. 10.
38. The remark occurs in a letter to his sister: Ludwig Wittgenstein to Helene Salzer (née Wittgenstein), in M. Nedo and M. Ranchetti, eds., *Ludwig Wittgenstein, Sein Leben in Bildern und Texten* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1983), p. 292.
39. 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 his or her philosophical sensibility, a person is thereby (for better or worse) profoundly shaping him- or herself as a person.
40. I take it that the term "ethics" in Wittgenstein's vocabulary no more names an independent subject matter or separable area of philosophy than does the term "logic" (or "grammar"). For Wittgenstein, logic and ethics are each, and each differently, concerned with a pervasive dimension of human thought and action.
41. In his review of W. W. Bartley's biography of Wittgenstein, Rush Rhees puts it well: "Unless you know what his [Wittgenstein's] work means to him and what he tries hardest to bring into his work – and unless you know what other features

- of his living and his relations to other people he counts important – you cannot say whether some . . . desire or 'practice' is significant or rather insignificant in his character and his life" (*The Human World* 14 [February, 1974], p. 73).
42. Those who imagine, for example, that Wittgenstein's homoeroticism ("the love that dare not speak its name") is the key to understanding everything else in his life, including his philosophical preoccupations ("no wonder he's interested in what cannot be said but only shown!"), invariably end up offering a shallow and skewed representation of his philosophical thought. I discuss how this happens in the biographical representations of the relation between Wittgenstein's philosophy and his sexuality offered by W. W. Bartley and Bruce Duffy in my "Throwing Away The Top of the Ladder," *The Yale Review* 79 (3): 328–64.
43. Ray Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1990); Ray Monk.
44. *Bertrand Russell: The Spirit of Solitude* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1996). Thus far only the first volume of the Russell biography has appeared.
45. Wittgenstein, both early and late, employs the words "philosopher," "philosophy," and "philosophical" in (among others) the following two distinct senses: to denote that which he seeks to combat through his practice (e.g., "the philosopher is someone who is prone to . . ."; "the crucial trick in the philosophical conjuring game is the one which . . ."; and so forth) and to denote that practice itself (e.g., "philosophy is the battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence . . ."; "there is not a philosophical method, though there are indeed methods, like different therapies"; "my aim in philosophy is to . . ."; and so forth). For Wittgenstein, each of these two opposed senses of the word "philosophy" has equal claim to inherit the ancient sense of the word. I mean here to refer only to his use of "philosophy" in the second of these two senses.
46. This is not to say that the extreme opposite end of the spectrum is entirely unoccupied. Quine is perhaps the clearest example of an important contemporary analytic philosopher who resolutely eschews any (what I am here calling) "Socratic" motivation to philosophy; see, for example, his essay "Has Philosophy Lost Contact with People?" in *Theories and Things*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981, *passim* but especially p. 193. It is a not uninteresting fact, though, that when such a philosopher undertakes to write an autobiography, the result is likely to be not only a singularly boring book, but one that is, in any conventional sense, a remarkably unilluminating autobiography. Or more precisely: if it is illuminating, it will be so mainly in ways utterly independent of the author's design and mainly through the character of the void it discloses, that is, through the enormity of that which is absent from its pages and the pervasiveness of its absence. Both Quine's and A. J. Ayer's autobiographies are examples of books that possess this sort of unintended sublimity: even at those moments where one expects to catch a glimmer of involuntarily disclosed human depth, one glimpses only surfaces all the way down.

Does that mean that, with regard to philosophers who occupy this opposite end of the spectrum, there is nothing about their work for (the genre I am here calling) philosophical biography to illuminate? Can one only write (as it were, mere) *biographies* (as opposed to *philosophical biographies*) of such philosophers? That depends upon whether there is an interesting relation between that which is necessarily absent from the representation of the lives of such philosophers and that which is present (if only elusively so) in their philosophical thought, and, if so, whether the following two conditions are additionally satisfied by this relation:

first, that it illuminates something important about the character of the philosophical thought as such; and second, that what is thus illuminated can be brought to light with particular clarity or poignancy by means of the genre of philosophical biography. To put the point less delicately: it depends upon whether there is a philosophically interesting reciprocal relation between the poverty of the life (the magnitude of its accomplishments notwithstanding) and the poverty of the thought (its significance as a contribution to philosophy notwithstanding). I am inclined to think that there is indeed something here for philosophical biography to disclose, but that it takes tremendous talent and tact (not to mention courage) to do it well. Lest this be taken as an invitation, I ought also to add that I take this particular species of philosophical biography to belong to that category of activities (like shooting an apple off your son's head) that, however spectacular if successful, are far better left unattempted by those of us who possess a merely average prospect of success.

The topic of an internal relation between the poverty of the life of a philosopher and the poverty of his philosophy is arguably the central topic of J. S. Mill's *Autobiography* (as well as other of his writings, such as his essay on Bentham). It is a matter of some interest, in the light of the topic of this paper, that Mill should at some point have felt the need to resort to the genre of autobiography in order to do justice to the grounds of his most profound dissatisfactions with Benthamism. The point of the conclusion of the preceding paragraph might be put as follows: it takes a different order of delicacy and tact to do by means of biography what Mill there attempts (by means of autobiography).

47. Monk, *Bertrand Russell: The Spirit of Solitude*, p. 142.
48. Monk, *ibid.*, p. 147.
49. From "The Study of Mathematics," in *The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell*, Vol. 6, ed. John G. Slater (London: Routledge, 1983), p. 88.
50. Monk, *Bertrand Russell: The Spirit of Solitude*, p. 142.
51. Bertrand Russell to Ottoline Morrell, 24.5.12, in *ibid.*, p. 262.
52. There come to be, later on, of course, additional reasons for the demise of the warm conception of mathematics – ones that are strictly internal to the development of Russell's first-order views in technical philosophy – most of which are connected, in one way or another, with Russell's eventual conversion to Wittgenstein's conception of logical truth (as mere tautology). That conversion spells the demise in Russell's thinking of the idea that philosophy of logic constitutes an inquiry into fundamental features of reality. From this point on, Russell becomes able to look for warmth only outside technical philosophy.
53. Bertrand Russell to Helen Thomas, 10.6.02, in *The Selected Letters of Bertrand Russell*, Vol. 1, ed. N. Griffin (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1992).
54. Bertrand Russell to Lucy Donnelly, 23.5.02, in Monk, *Bertrand Russell: The Spirit of Solitude*, p. 150.
55. Bertrand Russell to Goldsworthy Lowes Dickenson, 13.2.13, in *ibid.*, p. 292.
56. From "Pilgrimage of Life," in *The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell*, Vol. 12 (London: Routledge, 1985), pp. 53–4.
57. Bertrand Russell to Ottoline Morrell, 1.1.12, in Monk, *Bertrand Russell: The Spirit of Solitude*, p. 244.
58. Monk, *ibid.*, p. 142.
59. Bertrand Russell to Ottoline Morrell, 3.1.12, in *ibid.*, pp. 244–5.
60. Bertrand Russell to Goldsworthy Lowes Dickenson, 13.2.13, in *ibid.*, p. 292.
61. *Ibid.*

62. Bertrand Russell to Ottoline Morrell, 3.1.12, *ibid.*, p. 245.
63. "Science as an Element in Culture," in *The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell*, Vol. 12 (London: Routledge, 1985), pp. 395–6.
64. Originally published in the *Independent Review*, 1903; reprinted in *Mysticism and Logic* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1919), pp. 46–57 (all references to this essay will be to this edition).
65. *Ibid.*, pp. 47–8.
66. *Ibid.*, p. 48.
67. *Ibid.*, p. 51.
68. *Ibid.*, p. 48.
69. Here is a taste of what the answer sounds like:

Brief and powerless is Man's life: on him and all his race the slow, sure doom falls pitiless and dark. Blind to good and evil, reckless of destruction, omnipotent matter rolls on its relentless way; for Man, condemned today to lose his dearest, tomorrow himself to pass through the gate of darkness, it remains only to cherish, ere yet the blow falls, the lofty thoughts that ennoble his little day; disdaining the onward terrors of the slave of Fate, to worship at the shrine that his own hands have built; undismayed by the empire of chance, to preserve his mind free from the wanton tyranny that rules his outward life; proudly defiant of the irresistible forces that tolerate, for a moment, his knowledge and his condemnation, to sustain alone, a weary but unyielding Atlas, the world that his own ideals have fashioned despite the trampling march of unconscious power. (*Ibid.*, pp. 56–7)

In "A Free Man's Worship," in the task of facing up to the coldness of the physical universe (the omnipotence of matter, the imperiousness of chance, and the like), Man's capacity "to burn for eternal things" is adduced as a crucial support: "this is emancipation, and this is the free man's worship" (*ibid.*, p. 55). As Russell's attachment to a warm conception of mathematical reality cools and his ontology accordingly dwindles – so that the reality that Science discloses increasingly coincides with the whole of reality – the contemplation of beauty that was to be a free man's worship gradually yields to a gospel of a resolutely disenchanted prometheism. The only posture that remains open to an intellectually honest free man is "to defy with Promethean constancy a hostile universe" (*ibid.*, p. 51).

70. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, ed. G. E. M. Anscombe and R. Rhees, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1953), p. 196.
71. Rhees, ed., *Recollections of Wittgenstein*, p. 94.
72. Bertrand Russell to Lucy Donnelly, 21.1.12, in Monk, *Bertrand Russell: The Spirit of Solitude*, p. 296.
73. I would argue that it is constitutive of the enterprise of philosophical biography that a successful philosophical biography must remain open to (at least) one of these two charges. If, in the light of the biography, the philosopher's work appears neither to wax nor wane as a whole, then the biography will have failed as philosophical biography.
74. If one suspects a bias (whether it be one of sympathy or antipathy), one may imagine one detects its influence not only in the manner of the *presentation* of facts, but in the manner of their *selection* as well. Since no biographer worth his salt fails to exercise considerable restraint in the selection of detail as well as considerable discrimination in the arrangement of same, the charge of having misjudged the salience of particular details (through their manner of either inclu-

- sion or omission) will inevitably remain a live one among unsympathetic readers.
75. One, of course, might not need such help; and, as I will suggest in a moment, even if one does need it, one might not be able to receive it.
76. Stanley Cavell, *A Pitch of Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), pp. 49–50. The anecdote is quoted by Monk in his contribution to this volume, pp. 5–6.
77. Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, p. 77/88.
78. This paper is indebted to conversations that took place in and around the symposium in Athens with Aristides Baltas, Vasso Kindi, Ray Monk, and Lisa Van Aalstynne; to comments by Jim Klagge; and to conversations over the years with Stanley Cavell and Arnold Davidson.

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