Wittgenstein, Plato, and the Historical Socrates

M.W. ROWE

This essay examines the profound affinities between Wittgenstein and the historical Socrates.[1] In sections I-V, I argue that similarities between their personalities and circumstances can explain a comparable pattern of philosophical development. In sections VI-XIV, I show that many apparently chance similarities between the two men's lives and receptions can be explained by their shared conception of philosophical method. Inevitably, for information about Socrates, I largely draw on Xenophon and early Plato.

In sections XV-XVII, I turn to the difficulty of writing about philosophy as practised by someone who uses the Socratic method. This was clearly a problem Plato faced with Socrates, and Wittgenstein faced with himself. At this point, I briefly examine two late Platonic texts—the *Phaedrus* and *Seventh Letter*—where Plato discusses this question explicitly. Plato's writings were, of course, the medium through which Wittgenstein encountered Socrates and his method, and I argue that Wittgenstein was directly influenced by the literary solution Plato adopted.[2]

[1] The topic of Wittgenstein and Socrates seems to be seriously underexplored in the literature. I know of only a few helpful texts: Richard A.Gilmore, *Philosophical Health: Wittgenstein's Method in 'Philosophical Investigations'* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 1999), pp123–161; Judith Genova, *Wittgenstein: A Way of Seeing* (London: Routledge, 1995), 6–8; Jane Heal, 'Wittgenstein and Dialogue' in Timothy Smiley (ed) *Philosophical Dialogues: Plato, Hume Wittgenstein* (Oxford: OUP, 1995), 63–83; Peter Winch, XIII, in *Philosophical Investigations* **24**, No.2, April 2001, 180–184.

[2] The chronology of Plato's dialogues I am using can be found in EPS, 5. Generally, I am treating all of Plato's dialogues up to the *Gorgias* as rational reconstructions of what Socrates actually said; those after the *Gorgias* I regard as essentially Platonic. (The *Theaetetus* is a rather special case for reasons given in, SIMP, 266). However, following normal practice, I rely on biographical material about Socrates contained in later dialogues.

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I

In his youth, Socrates was taught by the scientist Archelaus.[3] The latter was a pupil of the cosmologist Anaxagoras, and succeeded him when the older philosopher was forced to flee from Athens. Socrates duly became fascinated by scientific matters, and he recalls his interest in a lengthy autobiographical episode of the *Phaedo*. It begins:

> When I was young, Cebes, I had an extraordinary passion for ... natural science ...I was constantly veering to and fro, puzzling primarily over this sort of question. Is it when heat and cold produce fermentation, ... that living creatures are bred? Is it with the blood that we think, or with the air or the fire that is in us? ... Then again, I would ... study celestial and terrestrial phenomena ...[96-c]

However, Socrates later rejected the study of science and transferred his attention to the study of ethics and human action. Historically, this new subject matter and its new manner of treatment represented a radical departure from the way philosophy had previously been practised. In the famous words of Cicero: 'Socrates was the first to call philosophy down from the sky and

[3] To keep this essay to a reasonable length (it was once over 80 pages long) I have removed—except for the necessary minimum—discussions of five topics. 1) Scholarly debate about Socrates and the Socratic problem. Whenever possible, I have simply tried to follow philosophical orthodoxy. I found that if I even began to consider problems or alternative views the essay's basic topic became swamped in scholarly detail. However, for an interesting recent discussion of the Socratic problem, which considers solutions very remote from my own, see Catherine Osborne, 'Socrates in the Platonic Dialogues,' *Philosophical Investigations*, **29**, No.2, January 2006. 2) Interesting dissimilarities between Socrates and Wittgenstein. Their attitudes to irony and equanimity, for example, are clearly very different. 3) Discussions about whether one can reasonably use words like 'science' and 'homosexual' when discussing the ancient Greeks. I have simply gone ahead and used them, hoping that my meaning will be clear. 4) Discussion of Wittgenstein's *response* to Socrates and Plato. Wittgenstein wrote a good deal about both (approximately 4,000 words) and his views clearly changed and developed. Again, anything more than a bare minimum began to bury the essay's fundamental subject matter. 5) Discussion of Wittgenstein's relations to Platonic myths and theories.

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establish her in the towns and introduce her into homes and force her to investigate life, ethics, good and evil.' [SASB:193][4]

[4] I use the following abbreviations:

Works by Wittgenstein

BB: *The Blue and Brown Books*, (ed.) R.Rhees (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978); CV: *Culture and Value*, revised edition, (ed) G.H. von Wright (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998) LWPP: *Last Writings on the Philosophy of Psychology*, Vol.2, (ed.) G.H. von Wright and Heikki Nyman (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992); NB: *Notebooks 1914–1916*, 2nd edition, (ed) G.H. von Wright and G.E.M. Anscombe (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984); OC: *On Certainty* (ed) G.E.M. Anscombe and G.H. von Wright (Oxford: Blackwell, 1977); PI: *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1976); RGB: *Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough*, (ed) R. Rhees (Doncaster: Brynmill Press, 1991); RPP: *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*, Vol.1 (ed.) G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980); TLP*: Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1977); Z: *Zettel* (ed) G.E.M. Anscombe and G.H. von Wright (Oxford: Blackwell, 1967)

Works about Wittgenstein

ATW: Brian McGuinness, *Approaches to Wittgenstein: Collected Papers* (London: Routledge, 2002); BH: G.P. Baker and P.M.S. Hacker, *An Analytical Commentary on Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations,* Vol.1 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983); M: Ray Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius* (Cape: London, 1990); MM: Norman Malcolm, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Memoir* (Oxford: OUP, 1984); PH: Richard A. Gilmore, *Philosophical Health: Wittgenstein's Method in 'Philosophical Investigations'* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 1999); RW: Rush Rhees (ed) *Recollections of Wittgenstein* (Oxford: OUP, 1984); WAC: J.N. Finlay, *Wittgenstein: A Critique* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984); WC: O.K. Bouwsma, *Wittgenstein: Conversations 1949–1951* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1986); WMP: (ed) K.T. Fann, *Wittgenstein: The Man and His Philosophy* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1978); WSP: (ed) C.G. Luckhardt, *Wittgenstein: Sources and Perspectives* (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1996). WV: Allan Janik and Stephen Toulmin, *Wittgenstein's Vienna* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973)

Works by Plato

All quotations (but see note 10) are taken from *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, (eds) Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1973). I use the following abbreviations: *Ap*: *Apology*; *Charm*: *Charmides*; *Crit*: *Crito*; *Gorg*: *Gorgias*; *Lach*: *Laches*; *Mene*: *Menexenus*; *Men*: *Meno*; *Phaed*: *Phaedo*; *Phaedr*: *Phaedrus*; *L7*: *Seventh Letter*; *Symp*: *Symposium*; *Theae*: *Theaetetus*.

Works about Plato and Socrates

POS: Thomas C. Brickhouse and Nicholas D. Smith, *The Philosophy of Socrates* (Colorado: West View Press, 2000); PS: (ed.) Gregory Vlastos,

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It is difficult to say when this change came about (and of course it might have occurred very gradually) but it was probably some time before the beginning of the Peloponnesian War. This is because, at beginning of the *Protagoras*—the earliest scene in which he appears—the adult Socrates is shown debating the non-cosmological question of whether virtue can be taught. As several of those gathered in debate were on opposite sides during the war, the discussion must have taken place before hostilities started in 431 BC. [S:73] In addition, Alcibiades, who would later serve in the cavalry at the battle of Potidaea, is described as 'still handsome' even though he has reached the age of manhood and is now growing a beard. [*Prot*:309]. As Alcibiades was born in 450 BC, it would seem reasonable to date the scene somewhere between 434–431 BC, just before the war broke out. Socrates, who was born in about 469 BC, would have been between 35 and 38 years old.

The new method is linguistic. In the early Socratic dialogues, we find Socrates and his interlocutors attempting to arrive at definitions of important ethical concepts: 'friendship' in the *Lysis*, 'temperance' in the *Charmides*, 'courage' in the *Laches*, 'piety' in the *Euthyphro*, and so on. The interlocutors produce putative definitions of these terms, and fictional counter-examples are produced to test their adequacy. The method is important because discovering a true definition of, for example, 'courage' could equally well be described as discovering what *courage* is. And the method is informative because one can know *how* to use a word in

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The Philosophy of Socrates: A Collection of Critical Essays (New York, Doubleday, 1971: S: A.E. Taylor, *Socrates* (Edinburgh: Perter Davies, 1935); SASB: John Ferguson (ed), *Socrates: A Sourcebook* (London: Macmillan, 1970); EPS: H.H. Benson (ed.) *Essays on the Philosophy of Socrates* (New York: OUP, 1992). SIMP: Gregory Vlastos, *Socrates: Ironist and Moral Philosopher* (Cambridge: CUP, 1991).

General

A: Matthew Arnold, *The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold*, (ed) R.H. Super, 11 vols (Ann Arbour: University of Michigan Press, 1960–77); GM: Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* and *The Genealogy of Morals*, trans. F. Golffing (New York: Doubleday, 1956); HPW: Thucydides, *The History of the Peloponnesian War*, (ed) M. Finley (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972); MPN: C.D. Broad, *The Mind and its Place in Nature* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1925); PP: J.L. Austin, *Philosophical Papers* (Oxford: OUP, 1961); TOS: Stanley Cavell, *Themes out of School: Effects and Causes* (San Fransisco: North Poit Press, 1984).

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everyday contexts correctly, without being able to *say that* it is used in such and such a manner. Although Socrates believes definition is possible, none of these dialogues produces a definition agreed upon by all parties, and the interlocutors often separate agreeing that they are bewildered by the complexities they have tried to codify.

As a boy and young man, Wittgenstein's interests were also technical and scientific. Accordingly, he was sent to technical school in Linz, and as a teenager was profoundly influenced by the writings of Hertz and Boltzmann. Having studied engineering in Berlin, he progressed to Manchester University to specialize in aeronautics. The mathematical problems he encountered led to associations with mathematicians and this led to an interest in mathematical logic. Frege urged him to pursue his new enthusiasm in early 1911, and he then worked on logic with Russell until he joined up in 1914. [M:15–34]

Unsurprisingly, the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, published in 1921, shows traces of this scientific influence. The account of analyzing complex propositions into elementary propositions, each containing simple names in immediate combination [TLP:4.221], is explicitly modelled on Herz's account of scientific models in his *Mechanics*. [TLP:4.04][5] In addition, natural science is still held to have the monopoly of true propositions [TLP:4.11] (although the propositions of ethics and aesthetics are held, if anything, to be even more important [M:178]). Above all, the austere minimalism of the book's format, its dense symbolism, and the micrometer measurements of its numbering system, stand as a rebuke to windy literary afflatus. It is still recognisably the work of an engineer.

The most significant change in Wittgenstein's philosophical outlook occurred in his late thirties. After some years of doubt, he decided he could no longer endorse his earlier views, and returned to Cambridge in 1929 to pursue new lines of research. He was 39 years old. In this later period, far from being influenced by scientific and technological paradigms, he became increasingly critical of them: '... It is not e.g., absurd to believe that the scientific and technological age is the beginning of the end for humanity ... That there is nothing good or desirable about scientific

[5] I here rely on Brian McGuinness's articles, 'Philosophy of Science', and 'The Value of Science', both in ATW, 116–30. For a debate about the extent of the scientific influence on the *Tractatus* see John Preston 'Harré on Hertz and the *Tractatus*' and Rom Harré, 'Hertz and the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*: A Reply to John Preston', *Philosophy* **81**, No.316, April 2006, 357–66.

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progress and that humanity, in seeking it, is falling into a trap. It is by no means clear this is not how things are.' [CV:64. Also 69]

Wittgenstein's mature conception of philosophical method, like Socrates', is linguistic, and requires us to imagine how we use ordinary words and expressions in particular—frequently fictional—contexts. [PI:90, 122] His ultimate aim is to achieve peace by destroying the misleading pictures and analogies which tempt us to philosophise in the first place. Consequently, like Socrates, his method can look negative because these 'houses of cards' [PI:118] must first be destroyed before truth can supplant them. But again like Socrates there is a positive aim: to achieve a clear overview of our linguistic practice, thereby attaining the peace we crave. [PI:122] He has, however, no time for the Socratic pursuit of definitions [PG:76], feeling that an enumeration of cases, and a web of overlapping and intertwining similarities, is the best we can achieve for complex concepts. [PI:67–75]

Thus, by their late 30s, both philosophers had moved away from scientific beginnings, and developed a method designed to achieve self-knowledge of our linguistic practices.

II

As Socrates' interest in science declined, his attitude to religion appears to have become more sympathetic. At his trial, Meletus accuses him of atheism and believing that the sun is a rock and the moon a clod of earth. Socrates rejects the charge, saying that he is being confused with Anaxagoras. [*Ap*:26d] But this charge of atheism may not have been quite so stupid or groundless as Socrates implies. He had been taught by a pupil of Anaxagoras, and had once conducted similar inquiries. It does not therefore seem unreasonable to assume that he had, in his youth, held similar religious views. Indeed, in the Aristophanes' *The Clouds*, performed in 423 BC, he is shown teaching that Zeus has been dethroned by 'Vortex-motion' and swearing by a set of new deities including Chaos, Respiration and Aether. [*Clouds*: 247, 252: Quoted S:110][6] However, by the time of his trial he affirms that his belief

[6] The representation of Socrates as a cosmologist in the *Clouds* in 423 BC clearly presents a problem for those of us who believe that Socrates became interested in problems of ethics and human action before 431 BC. However, it is not difficult to reconcile the two. Socrates may have remained interested in cosmological questions after he had also become

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in the standard Greek deities is even firmer than that of the men on the jury. [*Ap*:35d] While in the *Phaedrus,* he says that he is prepared to accept myths as he finds them: applying scientific standards of evidence to myths, he continues, is a fashionable waste of time, and only distracts us from the more important task of seeking self-knowledge. [*Phaedr*:229c-230]

Similarly, Wittgenstein became more accepting in religious matters as he grew older. Before the war, he had been a vehement atheist, someone whom Russell thought 'more terrible with Christians' than Russell himself. [M:116] But the rigours and loneliness of the war, together with a chance encounter with Tolstoy's *Gospel in Brief*, entirely changed his outlook. He said the book 'kept him alive', he came to know long passages by heart, and he became known amongst his comrades as 'the man with the Gospels.' [M:116] After the war he never had any time for the Russell/Ayer variety of atheism. He adhered to the view that science was a form of life which required hypotheses and evidence in order to perform its explanatory task, while religion was a matter of faith, trust, feelings of security, and a certain way of behaving. To apply scientific or historical criteria to religion only showed confusion about the status of religious language. As he wrote in *Culture and Value*:

> Queer as it sounds: the historical accounts of the Gospels might, in the historical sense, be demonstrably false, & yet belief would lose nothing through this: but *not* because it had to do with 'universal truths of reason'! rather, because historical proof (the historical proof-game) is irrelevant to belief. This message (the Gospels) is seized only by a human being believingly (i.e., lovingly): *That* is the certainty of this "taking for true", nothing *else*. [CV:37–8]

Wittgenstein said that although he was not a religious man he saw everything from a religious point of view [MM:83], at one stage in

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interested in ethics and action. Alternatively, the play may simply be an inaccurate folk-memory of something he used to be interested in. It is not uncommon, after all, to encounter non-philosophers who think that Oxford linguistic philosophy is still the dominant trend in universities, thirty or forty years after its waning. The representation of Socrates in the *Clouds*, is discussed with great scholarly expertise in Kenneth J. Dover, 'Socrates in the *Clouds*,' PS, 50–77. Dover does not endorse my conclusion.

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his life seriously considered becoming a monk, and he showed an intense interest in Christian writers—Tolstoy, Kierkegaard, Augustine. Accordingly, his friends felt it appropriate to give him a Christian burial. [M:580]

Neither the mature Wittgenstein nor Socrates could be described as unequivocally religious, but they both, in later life, accepted and respected the religious life. If you think of knowledge in terms of scientific proof, and what kind of objects there are in the world, then you are quite likely to be hostile to religion. If you think of knowledge in terms of human action and practice, then religious practices—being part of the natural history of human beings [PI:415]—will tend to be viewed more sympathetically.

III

Knowledge of humanity and the *Lebenswelt* has traditionally been the province of the arts, and one reason why scientific investigation may have lost its appeal for Socrates [*Phaed*:96c] was because he had a strong artistic streak in his personality. In the *Phaedo*, Cebes says that he has heard that Socrates has composed some lyric poems while in prison. Socrates says this is true, and that during the course of his life he has had a dream which exhorted him to practise and cultivate the arts. Hitherto, Socrates says, he had thought he was doing just this, because he always thought philosophy the greatest of the arts. Since his trial, however, he had come to feel that perhaps the dream was referring to the popular conception of art, and he had therefore decided to put this new interpretation into practice by writing some poetry. [*Phaed*:60e-61]

According to Socrates' own report in the *Menexenus,* he also studied music: 'I had Connus, the son of Metrobius, as a master, and he was my master in music.' [*Mene*:236] The ancient tradition goes into a little more detail. Diogenes Laertius, for example, tells us that Socrates 'used to learn to play on the lyre when he had time, saying, that it was not absurd to learn anything that one did not know ...' [SASB:25] Socrates' artistic leanings also played a role in his professional life. He was the son of Sophroniscus, a sculptor or stone mason, and the ancient tradition asserts several times that he followed his father's trade. [SASB:315] He was evidently talented and successful. At least eight sources report that he was responsible for sculpting the statue of the Graces on the Acropolis—an important and prominent commission—and some commentators even describe their style in some detail. [SASB:241] These facts

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add resonance to his proud claim, in the *Euthyphro*, that Daedelus the artificer was founder of his line. [11c]

For the later Wittgenstein, artistic and philosophical matters are also intimately related. He frequently draws parallels between philosophy and music and painting, [CV:45 and 95] and often brackets 'aesthetic and conceptual' problems together: 'Scientific questions may interest me, but they never really grip me. Only *conceptual & aesthetic* questions have that effect on me. At bottom it leaves me cold whether scientific problems are solved; but not those other questions.' [CV:91]. In a remark written in 1933, he couples the idea of philosophy with more specifically literary ideals: 'I believe I summed up where I stand in relation to philosophy when I said: really one should write philosophy only as one *writes a poem*. That, it seems to me, must reveal how far my thinking belongs to the present, the future, or the past. For I was acknowledging myself, with these words, to be someone who cannot quite do what he would like to be able to do.' [CV:28]

Socrates wondered if he ought to have been writing poetry rather than philosophy; Wittgenstein thought philosophy should be written like a poem. The strength of their artistic impulses made them feel dissatisfied or equivocal about their philosophical vocations.

Strikingly, many observers felt that Wittgenstein's personality was more akin to an artist or prophet than a scientist. Carnap, for example, wrote:

> His point of view and his attitude towards people and problems ..., were much more similar to those of a creative artist than those of a scientist; one might almost say, similar to those of a religious prophet or seer. When he started to formulate his view on some specific philosophical problem, we often felt the internal struggle that occurred in him ... When, finally, sometimes after prolonged arduous effort, his answer came forth, his statement stood before us like a newly created piece of art or a divine revelation. [WMP:34]

Like Socrates, he occasionally broke off from his philosophical work, to pursue artistic interests. He spent two years designing and supervising the construction of his sister's house on the Kundmanngasse. He did not play an instrument form an early age—perhaps intimidated by the expertise of other family members—but did take up the clarinet later in life when he was training to be a teacher. He evidently became quite proficient, and could play the Brahms clarinet sonatas and arrangements of the

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quintets by Brahms and Mozart. [M:213] A poem by Wittgenstein is preserved in *Culture and Value* [CV:100], and, more importantly, he spent some time in the studio of the sculptor Michael Drobil carving a bust of a young girl. It is not memorable, but von Wright finds 'the same finished and restful beauty one finds in Greek sculptures of the classical period ... which seems to have been Wittgenstein's ideal.' [WMP:21]

VI

What finally led Socrates and Wittgenstein to follow their artistic dispositions, abandon their scientific and technical preoccupations, and become interested in self-knowledge? The most obvious cause is the onset of a major period of conflict. This absorbed more than thirty years of each philosopher's life, was the background to most of their important work, and destroyed the societies of their youth.

In the early part of their lives, both philosophers lived in cities which were the capitals of peaceful, secure and powerful empires. The hubris of these empires then provoked extended periods of warfare: the Peloponnesian War between Athens and Sparta from 431–404 BC, and the First and Second World Wars from 1914–1945.[7] During the early years of hostilities, both philosophers fought as frontline troops in defence of their empires, but witnessed their destructions and saw a vast reduction in their cities' political power. Both saw democracy under threat and finally disappear altogether for a number of years; both had to deal first-hand with tyrants and their agents, and finally lived to see the re-emergence of democracy.

The moral atmosphere driving Athenian policy in the build-up to war, finds expression in the speeches the Athenian envoys made to the Spartans just before hostilities broke out:

[7] I am inclined to accept the modern view that the two World Wars in the middle of the last century were one war with a 21 year truce. The Austro-Hungarian Empire, particularly the atmosphere of pre-First World War Vienna, can in any case be held responsible for both phases. The First started because of the Empire's considerable overestimation of its military prowess, and as for the Second, A.J.P. Taylor has argued convincingly that 'Hitler had learnt everything he knew in Austria ... and brought into German politics a demagogy peculiarly Viennese.' *The Hapsburg Monarchy 1809–1918* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1948), 258.

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> It has always been the rule that the weak should be subject to the strong; and besides, we consider that we are worthy of our power. Up till the present moment you, too, used to think that we were; but now, after calculating your own interest, you are beginning to talk in terms of right and wrong. Considerations of this kind have never yet turned people aside from the opportunities of aggrandizement offered by superior strength. [HPW:80]

A similar view is asserted in even more brutal terms in the dialogue with the Melians just before the Athenian attack on Syracuse. It thus seems wholly understandable why Socrates felt true ethical values stood in urgent need of investigation and defence.

Once the war began, the moral crisis deepened further. Commenting on events in 427 BC, Thucydides deplores the 'general deterioration of character throughout the Greek world' that had become all too obvious since the beginning of the conflict. [HPW:244] Rivalry between democrats and oligarchs, he says, became increasingly violent, while love of power and love of pleasure become the dominant motives in all affairs. This corruption in politics and morals led to a new corruption of moral language: 'To fit with the change of events, words, too, had to change their usual meanings.' [HPW:242] Thus, aggression became 'courage', while moderation became 'unmanliness'. Plotting and treachery grew synonymous with intelligence, while attempting to understand came to mean being unfitted for action. [HPW:242–4] Considerations of justice and principle disappeared, and more interest was shown in 'those who could produce attractive arguments to justify some disgraceful action.' [HPW:244] If the corruption of Athenian morals in the lead up to war was sufficient to turn Socrates into the first moral philosopher, then the corruption of argument and language Thucydides diagnosed during the war must have confirmed the importance of his methods. For the rest of his life, using valid argument to arrive at a correct understanding of words like 'courage' and 'piety' would be his vocation.

The effect of the First World War on Wittgenstein and his philosophy was more direct and personal. Socrates was clearly not appalled by his experiences of battle [*Charm*:153b-c], but Wittgenstein suffered terribly. His *Notebooks*, which he began to keep in August 1914, are exclusively about logic, science, and language until June 1916. Up to this point, he had served behind the lines or at the front when it was relatively quiet. Had he continued to avoid serious fighting the *Tractatus* would in all

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probability have remained a book only about logic and language.[M:137] But in June, Brusilov's offensive began, and the sector saw some of the war's heaviest fighting. Wittgenstein's regiment was in the thick of the battle and suffered enormous casualties [M:140]. In response to the suffering and terror he experienced and witnessed, the character of his entries undergoes a radical change. Here is the first:

> I know that this world exists. ... I am placed in it like my eye in the visual field ... My will penetrates the world ... My will is good or evil. Therefore ... good and evil are somehow connected with the meaning of the world. The meaning of life, i.e. the meaning of the world, we can call God. [NB:11/6/16]

It is as if his horror at the conflict suddenly precipitates him into the human world; suddenly his philosophy comes down from the sky and 'investigates life, ethics, good and evil.' From this point on, there is a decisive shift away from mathematical logic towards human action and experience, and the *Notebooks* become increasingly preoccupied with ethical, aesthetic and religious questions. These new ideas would not only alter the final pages of the book he planned (which would eventually emerge as the *Tractatus*); they would be the seeds from which his later philosophy—founded in forms of life and the natural history of human beings—would grow.[8]

Wittgenstein's ten-year retirement from philosophy, during which his new ideas began to mature, is partially explained by the mental crisis the war caused. When his sister reacted with incredulity to his decision to become a teacher he replied: 'You remind me of somebody who is looking through a closed window and cannot explain the strange movements of a passer-by. He cannot tell what sort of a storm is raging out there or that this person might only be managing with difficulty to stay on his feet.' [M:170] Emblematically, for many years after the war, he continued to wear the uniform of the now non-existent Austro-Hungarian army; and when Leavis—who had also served in the trenches—first met him in the early thirties, he recognised him as someone who was still deeply affected by his experience of war and combat. [RW:61]

[8] For the idea of the *Tractatus* as a war book, and the significance of the quoted passage from the *Notebooks*, see Marjorie Perloff, 'The Making of the *Tractatus*: Russell, Wittgenstein and the "Logic" of War', in her *Wittgenstein's Ladder: Poetic Language and the Strangeness of the Ordinary* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 25–50.

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Just as Socrates' new philosophy was influenced by the atmosphere of prewar Athenian society, so Wittgenstein's new philosophy was influenced by the intellectual atmosphere of the old Habsburg Empire. Like many intellectuals of *Jung Wien*, Wittgenstein saw his mission primarily as *seeing through* the kinds of deceptive appearances which had characterized prewar Vienna: the grandiose buildings which concealed their prosaic functions, the spurious traditions, unnecessary ornaments, redundant formalities, performances of efficiency, and bourgeois rectitude which screened corruption. No one could have a more serious sense of the intellectual consequences of apparently trivial pictures and analogies than the later Wittgenstein, and he is the philosopher with the most highly developed instinct for rooting out misleading analogies, false pictures, disguised nonsense, areas where we do not command a clear view, houses of cards, illusions, superstitions, and things which lack perspicacity. [WV:33–66]

V

If war made Socrates and Wittgenstein philosophically aware of the human world, then it also had an introverting effect on their personalities.

The first similarity is that both philosophers became preoccupied with the ethical life, but both decided to take no part in politics. In the 1930s, Wittgenstein showed some interest in Soviet Russia, but this was prompted more by a Tolstoyan enthusiasm for manual labour than any faith in scientific Marxism. His later political scepticism is best captured in a remark he repeated to many friends: 'Just improve yourself, that is all you can do to improve the world.' [M:17–8] Socrates had the same attitude: 'The best man is he who tries to perfect himself, and the happiest man is he who feels that he *is* perfecting himself.' [Xenophon. Quoted A:V:167–8] He too believed that the noise and effectiveness required from a politician only hindered self-knowledge and self-improvement, and although he was obliged by law to serve on the executive council of Athens, his inner voice prevented him taking any further part in politics, and he did not speak in the assembly.

The second effect on their personalities was that both became increasingly ascetic in outlook. Asceticism is clearly an intensely ethical form of life, and it is also a form of withdrawal. The ascetic renounces many normal human desires and ambitions; he ceases to

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take part in the administration of his society; he no longer cares for its material goods; he lives in a certain place but he can live anywhere. It is a natural response to a society whose values and priorities have grown strange and alien. Consequently, Socrates gives the impression of a man who is subtly detached from the society around him; he has questioned its traditions, assumptions and values, and politely abstained from its most ardently pursued goals. The overwhelming impression Wittgenstein left on one pupil was one of 'unbelongingness'. [WAC:21]

Socrates is sometimes thought of as a man of the people but there is good evidence for supposing that his background was moderately wealthy. His father was an important stonemason at a period of extensive public building, and his son probably followed his father's trade. It was widely believed in the ancient world that Socrates was married twice: first to Myrto, daughter or granddaughter of Aristides the Just, and secondly to Xanthippe. The 'ipp' is in the aristocratic style, and many other names in his family imply aristocratic origins. This suggests that Socrates, like his father, was a successful member of the bourgeoisie, and that his wealth was sufficient to attract the attention of aristocratic fathers who wished their daughters to marry well. [POS:24–5]

Socrates always had ascetic tendencies. He went barefoot and wore the same old cloak in summer and winter, and his physical hardihood was the cause of comment during the Potidaea (430/29 BC) and Delium (424 BC) campaigns. [*Symp*:220b] However, the very fact he served as an infantry soldier showed he must have had some money available. There were property qualifications for infantry men, and each soldier had to supply his own armour and weapons. This suggests that Socrates had a regular income, and work as a stonemason seems its most likely source. [SASB:11]

The philosopher who perfected his asceticism by relinquishing his trade, and came to rely on either his savings or the financial support of his friends, can only therefore have emerged after his last battle, Amphipolis (422 BC). This later Socrates abjured '... making money, having a comfortable home, high military or civil rank, and all the other activities, political appointments, secret societies, party organizations, which go on in our city.' [*Ap*:36b] Even though he lived in poverty he refused to accept payment from his pupils. 'He prided himself on the simplicity of his way of life' wrote Diogenes Laertius, 'and used to say that ... those who want fewest things are closest to the Gods.' [SASB:23–24]

Wittgenstein's character underwent a similar but more dramatic change. His father, Karl, was not a member of the nobility but he

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made a fortune in the steel industry, and before the war, Ludwig was recognizably the son of Viennese *haute bourgeois* parents. He dressed well, he was 'a favourite with the ladies', he took friends on lavishly funded foreign holidays, he found it natural to think of hiring special trains. After the war, he became the more withdrawn and ascetic philosopher of legend. He was quite conscious of the change. In the early twenties, he wrote to Eccles, a pre-war friend from his engineering days in Manchester: 'England may not have changed since 1913 but *I* have. However it is no use writing to you about this as I couldn't explain to you the exact nature of the change (though I perfectly understand it.) You will see for yourself when I get there ...' [M:230] Eccles was indeed surprised by the shabby, slightly eccentric creature that emerged from the train, who appeared to be wearing a Boy Scout uniform.

However, like Socrates, his asceticism was not just caused by the trauma of war. In 1912–3 he had withdrawn to a remote hut in Norway to work on logic, and in 1913 he directed Ficker, an important man of letters, to distribute 100,000 crowns (equivalent to about £50,000 today) amongst needy Austrian artists. His taste was always towards the plain and austere: the furniture he designed in Cambridge before the war prefigures the starkness of the house he built in the twenties. But after the war this trait becomes altogether more marked. In 1919, thanks to his father's foresight in investing the family money in American bonds, he found himself one of the wealthiest men in Europe. He determined to give it away. His decision was to give it to three of his brothers and sisters because they were so wealthy already that more money could do them no further harm. (Bizarrely, the fourth sibling, Gretl, was excluded because her wealth was already spectacular.) [M:171]

When he got rid of his uniform he adopted the style of dress by which he was afterwards always recognised: jacket, open-necked shirt, grey-flannel trousers, heavy shoes. The rooms he favoured tended to be plain and without ornament. His rooms in Trinity College Cambridge (he never owned a house) are described in many memoirs: plain walls, one armchair, a metal stove, a trestle table covered with notebooks and papers, a few books, a fan (to drown the noise of a piano below), deck chairs for students to sit on, a stove. At the end of his life he took up even bleaker accommodation when he moved, for several months, to a remote hut in Connemara.

Socrates' asceticism was reflected in his intellectual tastes, especially the hatred he shared with Plato for rhetoric and rhetoricians. The war and politics had shown all too clearly the damage that inflammatory language could do. Probably the most

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thoroughgoing attack is in the *Gorgias*. Here, rhetoric is said to bear the same relationship to philosophy that cookery does to medicine. It is denigrated as a mere empirical knack that causes profound harm by flattering the taste of the ignorant majority. [*Gorg*:464b-466a]

Wittgenstein's austere regard for the truth also led him to distrust rhetoric, ornament and political persiflage. He described the rhetorical style of Russell's *The Conquest of Happiness* as a 'vomative', and, like Kraus, he was vastly amused by the absurdity and inflated claims of modern advertising. Indeed, this is a staple source of amusement in his long correspondence with Gilbert Pattison. [M:294–5]

VI

In the works of Plato's middle period, the Socratic idea of definition is developed into the doctrine of the Forms. As might be expected, Wittgenstein is even less sympathetic to this notion than he is to the idea of general definitions. [See LWPP:48e and CW:56]

However, in two of the earlier works of Plato's middle period—the *Meno* and *Phaedo*—the Forms are said to be discovered and clarified by reminiscence, and it is here that we find an important similarity between the methods of Socrates and Wittgenstein. In the *Phaedo*, the idea of recollecting the Forms is introduced as part of a proof of the soul's pre-existence. [*Phaed*:72e-73] The *Meno* takes up the idea that all knowledge is recollection, and attempts to show its truth by means of a detailed demonstration. Socrates takes an uneducated slave boy, and attempts to teach him, solely by asking questions, to construct geometrically a square which is exactly half the area of another. When the boy has done this, Socrates cross-examines Meno, asking him whether the boy's opinions were his own, or whether they had been given to him by Socrates. Meno agrees they were the boy's. Socrates then asks Meno whether the boy's unclear opinions had been transmuted into knowledge. Meno agrees they have. Finally, he is asked whether this knowledge was produced by making the boy recollect what he knew. Meno assents to this too. [*Men*:85b-86b]

On at least one occasion, Wittgenstein drew attention to the similarity between this theory of recollection and his own philosophical method. Norman Malcolm reports: 'Wittgenstein once observed in a lecture that there was a similarity between his

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conception of philosophy ... and the Socratic doctrine that knowledge is reminiscence: although he believed that there were also other things involved in the latter.' [MM:44] Wittgenstein is probably thinking of the *Phaedo* and *Meno*. As these dialogues set out to prove the existence of the Forms, the idea that *all* knowledge is reminiscence, and the immortality of the soul, we can assume these are the 'other things' found in Plato which Wittgenstein did not endorse.

The idea that philosophical method uses the process of reminding is invoked in an early section of the *Investigations*. Wittgenstein is considering Augustine's remark 'Don't ask me what time is and I know, ask me what time is and I don't.' He continues: 'Something that we know when no one asks us, but no longer know when we are supposed to give an account of it, is something that we need to *remind* ourselves of'. (And it is obviously something of which for some reason it is difficult to remind oneself.) [PI:89]. The notion of a reminder is taken up a several later points in the book: 'The work of the philosopher consists in assembling reminders for a particular purpose' [PI:127]; 'The problems are solved, not by giving new information, but by arranging what we have always known.' [PI:109]

The kind of reminder Wittgenstein has in mind is, to use Austin's formulation, a reminder of *what we should say when* [PP:129]; the 'when' indicating a description of a real or fictional context. In the heat of philosophical discussion, native speakers do sometimes give instances of language-use they later see are incorrect or inaccurate. I remember hearing someone affirm that names have translations because the French translate London as 'Londres' and the British translate Wien as 'Vienna'. When someone else suggested that it seemed more accurate to say that there were French and English *versions* of these names, he readily accepted the new description. More commonly, people frequently make false generalizations about their use of language. For example, if you ask someone to define 'chair' they frequently say 'a portable seat' or 'a seat with four legs'. If you then point out that their first definition covers stools and sofas, and that inflatable chairs have no legs at all, they immediately see that their proffered definitions are incompatible with their own language use, and correct what they said. In both kinds of case (application of the wrong word or false generalization) the speaker was *reminded* that what he said was not a correct account of what he would really say; and they *recognize* the truth as soon as it is presented.

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The historical Socrates does not appear to have articulated a doctrine of reminiscence, but the discussion in the previous paragraph allows us to see that the notions of memory and reminder are already necessary components of the Socratic method. Plato's later account of knowledge as recollection of the Forms builds on—and makes falsely metaphysical and elaborate—something simple and true in his teacher's method.

VII

Plato's image of the philosopher as midwife [*Theae*:149b-150e] is the best known of the medical analogies for philosophy that thread their way through his works, but they can also be discovered in the Socratic dialogues. [e.g., *Crito* 47b, *Gorgias* 464b-465e] The idea of Socrates as mind doctor is a classical commonplace. Plutach, for example, remarks: 'Socrates used his negative critique as a kind of purgative medicine ... Socrates' medical skill was not applied to the body; it was an antiseptic for a diseased and festering soul.' [SASB:226][9]

The medical profession was also close to Wittgenstein's heart. He served as a medical orderly and researcher throughout the Second World War, [M:334–5&447–57] and was especially interested in psychoanalysis. To Rush Rhees, he once described himself as 'a disciple of Freud's', and in 1935 he wrote to Drury, who was taking the first part of his MB exams in Dublin, to ask if he could enter the medical school. Afterwards, he suggested, they could perhaps set up together as psychiatrists together. [M:356–7]

This interest too had an effect on his philosophical imagery: '... what a mathematician is inclined to say about objectivity and reality of mathematical facts, is not a philosophy of mathematics, but something for philosophical *treatment*' [PI:254]; 'The philosopher's treatment of a question is like the treatment of an illness.' [PI:255. See also PI:593 and CV:50] And at several points he draws attention to the similarities between philosophy and psychoanalysis, most famously in section 133 of the *Investigations*: 'There is not *a* philosophical method, though there are indeed methods, like different therapies.'

The reason for Socrates and Wittgenstein's shared medical imagery is that both philosophers aim at a healthy, integrated

[9] It is highly likely that Plutach has Socrates' campaign for moral virtue in mind as well as his interest in the health of the psyche.

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psyche, not a body of theory. It is also the psyche of a real person, not an ideal reasoner who lacks the normal human portion of pride, prejudice, blindness, and faulty memory. This is why their techniques bear such a close relationship to psychoanalysis. At the beginning of philosophical inquiry the interlocutor's mind is in a state of cognitive dissonance: he does not know what he thinks he knows; he cannot make his implicit knowledge explicit; he has false beliefs about his beliefs. In exactly the same way, the psychoanalytic patient suffers from disharmony between his conscious and unconscious beliefs and desires. It is for the philosopher or analyst to resolve these intellectual tensions.

Because their aims are the same, their methods are similar: a talking cure is required. The sophists placed great emphasis on rote learning and listening to lectures. Socrates, on the other hand, placed his faith in questioning, and in the power of questions to stimulate thought in the listener. What is original in Socrates' form of argument is not that he drew consequences from an interlocutor's position which eventually made the interlocutor want to revise or renounce his position. Socrates' originality lies in expecting the interlocutor, with suitable prompting, to realize the implications of his own starting point, and therefore its untenability, *himself*. As in psychoanalysis and literary criticism, the interlocutor has to *recognize* the truth; merely being told what is true, or even the reasons why it is true, is not good enough.

There are at least two reasons why a conclusion established by this method should become deeply embedded in the interlocutor's psyche. First, we feel it is the outcome of mental action rather than mere receptiveness, and action is always more memorable (perhaps because we have invested more in it) than what is simply registered. Second, we are inclined to cling to our own opinions through stubbornness and pride. The Socratic method outwits pride by making us overcome our own defences. The normal adversarial model dissolves, and our own self-overcoming becomes itself a source of pride.

These features are shared by both psychoanalysis and Wittgenstein's method. In analysis, the patient, under prompting, has to change himself. For Wittgenstein too, a philosophical education is designed not to inform the listener (or reader) but to make him *think*: 'I should not like my writing to spare other people the trouble of thinking. But, if possible, to stimulate someone to thoughts of his own.' [PI:viii] In analysis, the analyst needs to approach his patient with *tact*. The patient has to say how it is with him, and then, under prompting, slowly work through his neuroses.

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Eventually, very gradually, these are acknowledged and cleared away, and then the patient is in a position to recognise the truth. Wittgenstein applies the same procedure to philosophy: 'We must begin with the mistake and transform it into what is true. That is, we must uncover the source of error; otherwise hearing what is true won't help us. It cannot penetrate when something is taking its place. To convince someone of what is true, it is not enough to state it; we must find the *road* from error to truth.' [RGB:1] Analysis is necessarily slow, involving much repetition and indirection. The same applies to Wittgenstein: 'In philosophizing, we may not terminate a disease of thought. It must run its natural course, and *slow* cure is all important ...' [Z:382] The end result of all three methods is not information, but a transformed, integrated personality where no set of beliefs is in conflict with any other set, and no faculty of mind in conflict with another. The goal is the development of a psyche which is at one and at peace: vigilant, healthy and harmonious.

VIII

The common factor which links Freud, Socrates, and Wittgenstein, is that they all feel that matters go awry when something is repressed, occluded, or not in clear view. Similarly, all feel that some kind of reminder, often a verbal reminder, is the beginning of a cure. The most effective form of reminder is the question, and in the section about mathematical proof in the *Meno*, Plato's Socrates conducts his philosophical instruction by using questions alone. Wittgenstein is probably thinking of this passage, and shows a measure of agreement with it, when he writes: '... Philosophy could be taught (cf Plato) just by asking the right questions so as to remind you—to remind you of what? In this case, that a man does not say "I'm depressed" on the basis of observed bodily feelings.' [LPP:45. See also MM:28]

Another form of reminder is repetition, and several of those who attended Wittgenstein's lectures were much struck by how much he repeated himself. [WMP:51] This was not just a feature of his lecturing style but of his thought as a whole. At first, Wittgenstein was inclined to ascribe it to the newness of his approach: 'I myself still find my way of philosophizing new, & it keeps striking me so afresh, & that is why I have to repeat myself so often. It will have become part of the flesh and blood of a new generation & it will find the repetitions boring. For me they are necessary ...' [CV:3]

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Later, he came to realize that they were connected with the very nature of his investigation: 'Each sentence that I write is trying to say the whole thing, that is, the same thing over and over again & it is as though they were views of one object seen from different angles.' [CV:9] In addition, the psyche is not transparent. Judicious repetition clearly helps keep an established truth vivid, available, and before the mind.

Socrates repeated himself so often that his interlocutors felt or feigned exasperation: 'He talks about pack assess and blacksmiths', says Alcibiades, 'and shoe makers and tanners, and he always seems to be saying the same old thing in just the same old way, so that anyone who wasn't used to his style and wasn't very quick on the uptake would naturally take it for the most utter nonsense.' [*Symp*:221e] Even Socrates himself was struck now and again by his perpetual criss-crossings and circlings: 'Anyway, this discussion of ours is a strange business. We're spending the whole conversation going round in circles and constantly returning to the same point ...' [*Gorg*:517c].

The most obvious kind of reminder is one person reminding another. This suggests that philosophy, in its most natural form, is a social activity involving at least two people (although this should not suggest that 'work on oneself' [CV:24] is impossible, anymore than self-analysis is impossible). Wittgenstein's friend, Fania Pascal was much struck by the social, collaborative nature of his philosophizing: 'Even to an outsider it appeared as if Wittgenstein tested and perfected his thoughts in his endless talks with Francis [Skinner] and a few other young men. They were somehow essential to the formulation of his thought, and perhaps the clue to why he chose to stay in England.' [WSP:37] A question anticipates an answer and this will determine the next question. It would be possible to conduct this kind of philosophizing in writing, but for obvious reasons it has an inherent tendency towards conversation.

Wittgenstein was prepared to live the consequences of this implication. As is well known, his lectures were not lectures in the formal sense of the word. He began his course, entitled simply 'Philosophy' in 1930. He gave an hour's lecture once a week in the Arts School lecture room, and this was followed later in the week by a two hour discussion in the Clare College rooms of Raymond Priestly. Later in the year, he abandoned the formal lecture hall and did all his teaching in Priestly's rooms. When he acquired his own set of rooms in Trinity he conducted all his teaching there for the rest of his career. Although he prepared thoroughly, and frequently began by summarizing the previous week's discussion, he would

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speak without notes. This made the audience, sitting in deck chairs, have the impression of following someone in the act of thinking rather than someone presenting an ordered series of concluded thoughts. Frequently, he would get stuck and exclaim, 'What a damned fool I am', or 'This is difficult as hell!' [M:289] At this point there would often be an embarrassing silence, and he would appeal to members of the audience to help him out with an example or a question. [WMP:81] If anyone were brave enough to volunteer he would often become Wittgenstein's interlocutor for the rest of the session. [WMP:56] When this did not happen, Wittgenstein seemed to address most of his comments to G.E. Moore who sat in the only armchair in the room taking notes. [WMP:56]

Audiences had to be small and they had to be able to enter into dialogue with him. In 1950 he was asked to give the John Locke Lectures in Oxford. However, when he was told the audience would be about 200 and there would be no discussion afterwards, he refused, remarking to Malcolm: 'I don't think I can give formal lectures to a large audience that would be any good.' [M:564] The membership of his small audience had to be stable, and he disliked the idea of what he called 'tourists'—people who just dropped in for a couple of sessions. If you were going to attend his lectures at all you had to attend the whole course. As Jackson and Gasking put it: 'Plainly he was sensitive to the sort of audience he had. He wanted a small group of people who, knowing what was in store for them, were prepared to put in a strenuous full year with him learning philosophy.' [WMP:51–2]

The atmosphere created was peculiarly personal, tense and intense. Very occasionally a passage from another philosopher would be read out as a starting point for discussion (a section of William James' *The Principles of Psychology*, and Plato's *Sophist* were both used in this way). Sometimes he would refer to the writings of those present [WMP:58], sometimes he would refer to the oral opinions of other (usually Cambridge) philosophers outside the room; on some occasions he would report things from books he had been told of but not read. [WMP:83]

The Socratic analogy struck many contemporaries. Sir Desmond Lee uses the word to describe the impact Wittgenstein had on those around him, which was frequently hypnotic and sometimes numbing. [M:263] Wolf Mays writes: 'It has been said that Wittgenstein was a living example of the Socratic method, since often his lectures simply consisted of an interchange of question and answer between himself and the class.' [WMP:81] Certainly, there are strong similarities between the ways the two philosophers'

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practices. Besides the similarities noted above, the following could be mentioned. They both like to teach small groups, and these groups are primarily male and upper-class. The group has a fairly stable membership; there is a shared understanding that the meeting is not to be thought of as a single session designed to impart information, but part of a long-term project to acquire the correct philosophical outlook. Many members of the group could be described as disciples; one or two of these are made the main interlocutors. The meeting is not preplanned—its direction must be determined by people's replies. We know the contents of some of these sessions from accounts written—often much later—by those present. The lecturer avoids exposition, and it is striking that when Socrates feels it necessary to expound, he, like Wittgenstein, often draws on an external source. Frequently, Socrates describes the theory as coming from a dream, or from a woman (Diotima or Aspasia), or as what a famous philosopher would say.

Both philosophers used the Socratic method, but they were dealing with slightly different problems and used it with a slightly different emphasis. As Cavell once pointed out, Socrates' interlocutors tend to have thought too little, whereas Wittgenstein's tend to have thought too much. [TOS:230] And while Socrates usually prompts his interlocutors and allows them to do most of the talking, Wittgenstein wants his interlocutors to prompt *him* and is more inclined to monologue. This is reflected in their differing use of the same image. Socrates thought of himself as a midwife to the thoughts of others, but Wittgenstein needed others to act as a midwife to him. As he once said of a friend: 'If I can't bring forth a proposition, along comes Engelmann with his forceps and pulls it out of me.' [M:148]

Because they both believe in a therapeutic method, and believe the end of philosophy is a not a metaphysical theory but a mind which understands itself, Wittgenstein and Socrates do not make clear distinctions between teaching, learning and research. Although the emphasis may differ, to do one is basically to do them all.

IX

For Socrates and Wittgenstein, philosophy is designed to relieve a certain kind of cognitive dissonance, and as well as guiding us from falsity to truth, it should lead us from pain and oppression to pleasure and enlightenment.

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They and their interlocutors agree that philosophical perplexity and the process of cure can be deeply unpleasant. At the beginning of the *Blue Book*, Wittgenstein remarks that being asked a Socratic question like 'What is length?' or 'What is meaning?' induces a kind of mental cramp. [BB:1] In the *Apology*, Socrates says he is like the stinging gadfly [30e]; in the *Meno*, the eponymous questioner likens him to the numbing (cramp-inducing?) stingray. [80] In the *Laches*, Niceas says that to enter into conversation with Socrates is to become a 'sufferer.' [188] Bouwsma confesses that his conversations with Wittgenstein were some of the greatest and most stimulating events of his life, but he frequently would have done anything to avoid them. [WC:XV]

Just as perplexity and the process of cure are deeply unpleasant so enlightenment brings *jouissance* and delight. The repetitious, open-ended, interrogative method—prompting people to self-knowledge—can generate a peculiar kind of intellectual excitement. The whole soul of man seems to be brought into activity. We do not merely register an answer or acquiesce to a piece of information. We are puzzled, we seek, we are disappointed, upset, we retrace our steps and try again. In other words the emotions are engaged, and we feel as if we are *acting* rather than passively collecting true beliefs. Enlightenment, when it comes, feels like a gift or revelation, and we feel grateful to and frequently amazed by the person who prompted us. Gasking and Jackson give a fine account of what it felt like to be on the receiving end of Wittgenstein's method when it succeeded:

> At first one didn't see where all the talk was leading to. One didn't see, or saw only very vaguely, the point of the numerous examples. And then, sometimes, one did, suddenly. All at once, sometimes, the solution to one's problem became clear and everything fell into place. In these exciting moments one realized something of what mathematicians mean when they speak of the beauty of an elegant proof. The solution, once seen, seemed so simple and obvious, such an inevitable and simple key to unlock so many doors battered against in vain. One wondered how one could possibly fail to see it. But if one tried to explain it to someone else who had not seen it one couldn't get it across without going through the whole long, long story. [WMP:52]

Sometimes the excitement and adulation generated by this method was more palpable. Characteristically, Wittgenstein used the same

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open-ended, questioning, puzzle-setting technique on schoolchildren, and on a number of occasions he was watched by his sister Hermione:

> [He] devoted some afternoons to the boys in my occupational school. It was a marvellous treat for all of us. He did not simply lecture, but he tried to lead the boys to the correct solution by means of questions ... [even] the ungifted and usually inattentive among the boys came up with astonishingly good answers, and they were positively climbing over each other in their eagerness to be given a chance to answer or to demonstrate a point. [M:194]

After prolonged exposure, his interlocutors felt that they had not simply learned something, but that their whole approach to intellectual questions had been transformed and adjusted. J.N. Finlay is typical: '... [One] ... had to rebuild the whole structure of one's thinking to accommodate what one had learned from him.' [WAC:20]

As we have seen, Alcibiades comments on the apparently trivial, repetitious, directionless, quality of Socrates' conversation, and yet he is startled by the effect it has on those listening. '[When] we listen to anyone else talking, however eloquent he is, we don't really care a damn about what he says. But when we listen to you ... we're absolutely staggered and bewitched ...Yes I've heard Pericles and all the other great orators, and very eloquent I thought they were, but they never affected me like that; they never turned my whole soul upside down ...' [*Symp*:215d-e]

The discrepancy between the apparently paltry intellectual means and the astoundingly emotional end naturally inspires suspicion. People tend to think the method is irrational, magical, illegitimate, and that the philosopher who practises it is some kind of magus or seducer. The parallel imagery witnesses use to describe the Socratic effect is very telling. The intoxicated Alcibiades opines: 'Aren't you a piper ...? I should think you were—and a far more wonderful piper than [the satyr] Marsyas, who only had to put his flute to his lips to bewitch mankind ... [You] can get just the same effect without any instrument at all—with nothing but a few simple words—not even poetry.' [*Symp*: 215c] While a sceptical C.D. Broad, perhaps thinking more of Browning than satyrs, signs off his preface to the *Mind and its Place in Nature* with the words: 'I shall watch with a fatherly eye, the philosophic gambols of my younger friends as they dance to the highly syncopated tones of Herr Wittgenstein's flute.' [MPN:vii] The method is inherently

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social, and it tends towards the creation of disciples and in-groups. This naturally leads to quiet hostility from outsiders, and not the least compelling analogy between Wittgenstein and Socrates is the amount of irritation and hostility they could—and still can—provoke.

X

Many philosophers have been members of educational institutions, but neither Socrates nor Wittgenstein felt at home in existing academic structures. Socrates rejected the model of the paid instructor the sophists had developed, and he felt no inclination—as both Plato and Aristotle later did—to set up a formal school of his own. Wittgenstein ultimately recognized his unsuitability as a primary school teacher and, in the later part of his life, felt deeply uncomfortable in his role as a university professor. He sometimes wondered whether founding a school of any kind was inimical to the nature of his philosophy: 'Is it just *I* who cannot found a school, or can a philosopher never do so? I cannot found a school, because I actually want not to be imitated ...' [CV:69].

For the Socratic teacher, a formal pedagogic role is cramping or limiting. The success of the Socratic method does not only depend on the conscientiousness and cleverness of the teacher, but also on how sensitive he is to his pupils' personalities, and how responsive they are to him. It depends on tact, charm, insight, mutual liking and trust: it is thus impossible to draw a distinction between him and his role; between the professional and the personal. It is often a sign of Socratic success that the normal rules of engagement between teacher and pupil break down: they start to socialize together, meet outside of their institution, or outside of normal institutional times. They become more considerate or more fierce with one another than decorum usually allows. Education is not just part of the working day, it becomes woven into a whole manner of living. Accordingly, being a philosopher was not something Wittgenstein and Socrates did some of the time, it was something they were all of the time; they both lived exemplary philosophical lives.

The extremely personal relationship the Socratic method requires means that there are other reasons it does not institutionalize easily. If its successes are few but spectacular, its failures must be correspondingly large and severe—less able or less responsive students will get nothing out of it. This divides students and

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colleagues into insiders and outsiders, disciples and sceptics, and provokes emotions which chafe against institutional notions of propriety. Equally awkward is the way the Socratic method sets out to question the beliefs, rules and authority on which all academic structures rely, and, for obvious reasons, it does not lend itself to syllabuses, timetables, lectures, lecture notes and the standard institutional requirements.

It is interesting that both philosophers avoided lecture halls, classrooms and other designated teaching spaces: Socrates liked friends' rooms or public spaces where friends could meet; Wittgenstein liked to use friends' rooms or his own rooms. This, one feels, makes physically manifest the idea that philosophy was not simply a role or job, but a natural extension of their personalities.

XI

In Socrates and Wittgenstein, character, manner, and method form an indissoluble unity. This makes it impossible to read their works without thinking of the personal myths that endorse them, and this gives them the ability to tell on the popular consciousness in a way that far exceeds, for example, Leibniz and Rawls. These men inspire respect and admiration but they do not fascinate. They are great philosophers but they lack the interpenetration of life and work, a sustaining personal legend, which would allow them direct influence beyond academia. The lives and personalities of Wittgenstein and Socrates add weight and penetration to their words, and guarantee a kind of solidity or authenticity that far exceeds anything a mere academic philosopher—limited by professional role and persona—can achieve.

There is no more potent personal myth than that of asceticism (Byronic glamour comes a poor second.) It always gives us confidence in a man's work if we know it *cost* him something, and we feel Socrates and Wittgenstein must have had profound confidence in the worth of their work if they were prepared to sacrifice so much for it. The normal motivation for philosophical asceticism, as Nietzsche argued, is that it simply represents a life free of the normal distractions—partners, children, jobs, money, property—so that dedication to seeking the truth can be total. [GM:243] (Socrates, he maintained, had married in a spirit of irony. [GM:242]) Certainly, Wittgenstein had naturally simple tastes, sought out the conditions in which he could work best, and

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said he deserved no particular moral credit for either of them. But the myths of Socrates and Wittgenstein soon began to acquire the iconic force that goes with the variety of asceticism Nietzsche identified as *priestly*: the spiritual strength that is felt to accrue when the will to power turns against itself and shows its potency through the power of self-denial. [GM:253–4]

It is striking how easily both philosophers can be Christianized, and this of course aids their assimilation into the general culture of the West. Even as early as the second century AD, Christian writers began to recruit Socrates—oral teacher, seeker after virtue, leader of disciples, sceptic about human knowledge, abstainer from violence, martyr—to their side [SASB:305]; and in the nineteenth century, when belief in Christianity was under considerable pressure, Arnold and J.S. Mill clearly begin to perceive Socrates as a kind of secular Christ. Similarly, many of Wittgenstein's attributes—his devotion to the gospels, his spiritual struggles and confessions, his love of analogy, the simplicity of his life, his disciples, and the stories about his ability to tame wild birds—sometimes made him seem as if he were a holy man or prophet. [M:133–6, 527]

Like Christian saints, they were both deeply committed to the ethical life, and that meant *living* the ethical life. This is one reason for their ascetic tastes and contempt for luxury. It is also the reason why they disliked the insulation from life's harder edges which a more institutionalized life would have provided. If you seek emotional as well as intellectual self-knowledge, then hardships, tests, and other vicissitudes are the only way to distinguish what you think you are like from what you are actually like.

XII

This aspect of their characters is particularly clear in their response to military dangers. As I mentioned briefly in section IV, both philosophers fought in defence of their empires, and they are the only great philosophers (so far as I know) to serve with real distinction as frontline troops. Socrates fought in at least three battles: Potidaea, Delium, and Amphipolis. At Potidaea, he saved Alcibiades' life single-handed. The younger man recommended him for a medal, although this, unfortunately, was turned down by the authorities. In the retreat from Delium, he was described as altogether cooler than (the general) Laches, and his obvious effectiveness in combat allowed both men to escape. [*Symp*:221b]

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At the beginning of the First World War, Wittgenstein volunteered for the Austrian army, even though a rupture would have exempted him from military service. He requested to serve in the most exposed and dangerous positions, and, accordingly, he was asked to man an observation post where he would almost certainly be exposed to direct enemy fire. At the beginning of Brusilov's offensive, he was recommended for a decoration because his 'distinctive behaviour ... exercised a very calming effect on his comrades.' [M:146] Nearly a year later he took part in resistance to the Kerensky Offensive and won the Silver Medal for Valour. In June 1918, his courage was even more conspicuous, and he was again cited for bravery. The official report praises him for 'his exceptionally courageous behaviour, calmness, sang-froid and heroism,' which won 'the total admiration of the troops.' [M:154] He was recommended for the Gold Medal for Valour, the Austrian equivalent of the Victoria Cross, but was eventually awarded the slightly lesser honour of the Band of the Military Service Medal with Swords.

Both Socrates and Wittgenstein showed the same *kind* of courage. It is not of the dashing, vain, mad-cap, slightly hare-brained variety. It concerns being utterly steady when threatened, giving an example to others, taking on greater danger than is ordinarily required, not losing your head. It is significant that their bravery was often most manifest in otherwise disastrous retreats, and they were both turned down for medals competent eyewitnesses felt they deserved. Their courage was undemonstrative, solitary, self-controlled; it did not involve forgetting dangers in moments of exhilaration or courting public glory.

XIII

Both implicitly disavowed the role of the unworldly, abstracted academic contemplating cosmology or metaphysics. As Socrates' main interests were in action and virtue, and Wittgenstein's were in the philosophy of psychology and language, it was natural they should spend their time interacting with men in the real world. More importantly, neither thinks of theory or the gaze as the paradigm of knowledge or its acquisition. Wittgenstein was fond of quoting Goethe's remark, 'In the beginning was the deed', [OC:402] and he regards human knowledge as founded in certain kinds of practical skills—moving, acting, speaking a language. Even philosophy itself is an activity rather than a body of theory. For

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Socrates, virtue is a form of *technē* or skill, and when he thinks of knowledge he naturally thinks of crafts. [*Meno*:90c] Additionally, his technique of conceptual analysis, as Wittgenstein correctly saw, only works if it is founded on the practical ability of speaking a language [BH:141], and he too pursued philosophy by practising a technique rather than passing on a set of results.

It is for these reasons that both display a deep interest in manual skill and craftsmanship. Wittgenstein, like Socrates, was good with his hands, and his philosophy is full of craftsmen, their skills and their tools. One of the earliest surviving photographs of Wittgenstein shows him, serious and intent, working on his own lathe, and at the age of ten he constructed a working model of a sewing machine from bits of wood and wire. [M:13] While a teacher in Austria, he caused local consternation by repairing an engine whose fault had baffled qualified engineers, and he supervised all aspects of the design and construction of his sister's house. Malcolm comments: 'He always had a keen appreciation of sound workmanship and a genuinely moral disapproval of the flimsy or the slipshod. He liked to think there might be craftsmen who would insist on doing their jobs to *perfection*, and for no reason other than that was the way it *ought* to be done.' [MM:69–70]

As a Cambridge professor, he advised many of his pupils to give up philosophy and take up medicine or some kind of manual work. Much to the outrage of their families, he sometimes succeeded. As a philosopher, he clearly aimed to be like a craftsman who tries to achieve perfection simply because that is what ought to be done. In fact, he thought of using the following verse by Longfellow as an epigraph for the *Investigations*: 'In the elder days of art / Builders wrought with greatest care / Each minute and unseen part, / For the gods are everywhere.' [CV:39] The book is full of references to skilled manual workers, craftsmen and their equipment. There are the builders and their primitive language game at the beginning [PI:2, 8–10]; the comparison of language to a toolbox [PI:11]; the comparison of words with the handles in a locomotive's cabin [PI:12]; the phrases used when describing the operation of a machine [PI:194]; the carrying out of imaginary loading tests on a bridge. [PI:267]

Of course, this interest in crafts and skills, fits in naturally with the external details of Wittgenstein's life. There is a long ascetic tradition that values carpentry, lens-grinding, stone-masonry and similar trades. They make one a useful member of the community while ruling out potentially corrupting wealth, and they allow

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plenty of time for reflection along with a measure of self-sufficiency. They are a kind of expertise, but they are not the kind that encourages intellectual pride, nor could be used to hoodwink or baffle someone—the criteria for success and failure are too obvious for that.

In his mature philosophy, Socrates, artist and craftsman, makes much analogical use of fellow craftsmen and their expertise. In fact, he referred to them so frequently, that his usage became the subject of a complaint. Xenophon reports Critias as saying: 'And I, Socrates, I can inform you of something more you have to refrain from: keep henceforth at a proper distance from carpenters, smiths and shoemakers; and let us have no more of your examples from among them. And besides, I fancy they are sufficiently tired with your bringing them in so often in your long discourses.' [SASB:149] His workmen are not confined to carpenters, smiths and shoemakers, but also include brassworkers, pilots [*Charm*: 173b–e], builders [SASB:153], people who work in wool [*Charm*:173b–e], trainers [*Crito*:47b]; tanners [*Symp*:221e] sellers of dried fish, chimney sweeps [SASB:153], shipwrights, painters [*Gorgias*:503e] and tailors [*Meno*:91d].

This identification with craftsmen—together with their endurance, courage, lack of wealth, and suspicion of academia—allies both philosophers with ordinary men. Like ordinary men they are not just observers: they have dealt with the hard intractable matter of the world. They understand what it is to do a job well, for something to work or to stand firm, and consequently they have no patience with the flimsy constructions of metaphysics and speculative cosmology.

XIV

Is it a merely contingent fact that the two most famous practitioners of the Socratic method were homosexual? Men who sometimes fell in love with their male students and were sometimes loved in return?

Socrates clearly thinks that homosexuality and philosophical dialectic are internally related. At the beginning of the *Charmides*, he returns to Athens and inquires about the 'present state of philosophy, and about the youth.' When the attractive Charmides is introduced, Socrates requests that he strip and show his soul (by responding to questions) before he reveals his naked body. [154d-e] In later dialogues, philosophy and youths remain intimately

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conjoined. In the *Gorgias*, Socrates describes himself as 'in love with two beloveds ... of Alcibiades the son of Cleinias, and of Philosophy.' [481d]; in the *Phaedrus*, the ban on returning to heaven within ten thousand years is waived for the 'man who has lived the philosophical life without guile or who has united his love for a boy with philosophy.' [249]

The only place where he seems to suggest a reason for this conjunction is where he has Diotima argue that: 'Those whose procreancy is of the body turn to women as the object of their love and raise a family ...But those whose procreancy is of the spirit rather than of the flesh ... conceive and bear the things of the spirit.'[10] [*Symp*: 208e-209] The clear implication being, in the context of the dialogue, that the latter turn to boys. The argument is hardly compelling. It is not at all clear why a woman could not be fertile both in the spirit and the body, or why one could not equally well beget spiritual offspring with an infertile woman.

It may be possible to find better reasons for thinking that erotic attraction arises naturally from philosophical dialectic. Unlike writing a treatise or delivering a lecture, Socratic questioning has to be directed to an identifiable individual or individuals. The conversation that develops takes place over a protracted period of time, and the pupils are a great deal more involved in their task than the conventional reader or lecture audience. The pupils are part of the inquiry, they are not simply hearing a report of an inquiry, and this leads them to identify with their teacher and fellow pupils. As personnel managers know, any joint task encourages unity and team-spirit amongst the group undertaking it. However, the relationship can become closer than mere identification and team-spirit suggests. Socratic questioning gets *inside* the interlocutor by bringing his own mind into operation, and thus the normal separation between the teacher's thought and the pupil's thought begins to disappear. The pupil finds his ideas subtly adjusted by his teacher's voice; the very act of thinking becomes a collaboration; and thoughts begun in one mind are finished in the other.

The intensity of emotion generated by the Socratic method enhances these feelings of oneness. Initially, the pupil's soul is

[10] In this and the previous paragraph, I take my translations from, A.W. Price, *Love and Friendship in Plato and Aristotle* (Oxford: OUP, 1989), 90. The chapter from which these are taken also contains a most enjoyable account of the relationship between philosophy and homosexuality which is broadly consonant with the one taken here. Cognoscenti should also not miss his index.

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cramped and dreads philosophical conversation. During the conversation, because it involves mental action rather than simple receptivity, he will experience frustration, boredom and bafflement, and then, with luck, growing satisfaction and delight. At the end, ideally, he should feel staggered bewitched, turned upside down. On seeing this, the teacher, who has been so closely involved in his pupil's mind, feels moved, pleased and excited by the pupil's responsiveness and wonder. This intensity of shared and novel emotion can only give rise to feelings of identification and gratitude; and this is fertile ground for erotic attraction.

Socratic conversation also demands a certain sincerity of utterance. Socrates insists you cannot just entertain a proposition in philosophical discussion, you have genuinely to assert it. Wittgenstein insists that you must confess how matters seem to you, however silly or outlandish these views may be. [CV:64. See also 86, 92] This, of course, requires courage on the part of the speaker, and sympathy and understanding on the part of his hearers. Under the right conditions, however, it leads to an unusual degree of openness and trust. It would be strange to deny that love can begin in intense, protracted, personal and sincere conversation about the other person's mind, and perhaps it should be foreseeable that love can begin in philosophical conversations of this type.

As the mind of every pupil differs, the teacher must know each of his pupils' personalities well. Only then will he be able identify his pupil's temptations and work out the best route around his resistances. This of course means that there must be a personal as well as professional bond between master and pupil. In such circumstances it is not altogether surprising that friendship and respect should become eroticised. After all, Freud—who was engaged in a similar enterprise—thought it utterly natural that the patient should, at a certain point in his treatment, fall in love with the therapist.

When Wittgenstein was asked whether his being a philosopher, and the particular type of philosophical work he did, was connected with his homosexuality, he replied 'Certainly not.' [M:567–8][11] But

[11] Wittgenstein's remark requires careful handling. In 1950, Barry Pink and Wittgenstein had a conversation about the tendency to hide one's true nature. During the course of it, Pink asked Wittgenstein whether his being a philosopher, and the kind of philosophy he did, was connected with his homosexuality. 'What was implied,' writes Ray Monk, 'was that Wittgenstein's work as a philosopher may in some way have been a device to hide from his homosexuality. Wittgenstein dismissed the question with

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his practice suggests that he needed a certain kind of intimacy in philosophical discussion. He told Schlick he could only really talk with someone who '[held] his hand', [M:243] and Malcolm observed how important it was to him that there should be friends and friendly faces in his classes, even when they said nothing. [MM:27] It is also striking that his most fruitful philosophical conversations, apart from those with his teachers, were with young men. Two of these—Pinsent and Skinner—he certainly fell in love with. There is also a hint of oral sensuality in his memory of the 'delightful discussions' he had with Ramsey in 1929. There was 'something playful about them', he recalled, '[and] nothing [is] more pleasant to me than when someone takes my thoughts out of my mouth, and then, so to speak, spreads them out in the open.' [M:259]

None of the foregoing suggests that philosophy is necessarily homosexual, but it may suggest that it is best conducted between people who are mutually attracted. The homosexual inflection of Socratic philosophy in 4th century Athens and 1930s and 40s Cambridge may be due to social circumstances. Women in ancient Athens, unless they were courtesans or priestesses, were largely confined to the house, and Cambridge in the thirties and forties was a thoroughly male-dominated society. Presumably the men both philosophers talked to were young because they were students or not yet involved with careers. And they were (for the most part) upper-class, because those from other classes needed to work or could not afford higher education. These restrictions may well explain why the most effective practitioners of the Socratic method were homosexual.

Wittgenstein seems to have derived from Weininger the idea that sexual activity was inimical to greatness [M:90], and he struck most friends and acquaintances as sexually completely sublimated. Fania Pascal writes:

> [He] had to do his work unremittingly, and for this he depended on a small, select band of pupils and disciples: this was the only tie that bound him and this he accepted. If it should be asked,

---

anger in his voice: "Certainly not!" ' [M:567–8] The trouble here is that the implication Monk draws from Pink's question seems rather cruder than the question itself. If Wittgenstein was responding to the implication rather than the question (and this is probable since Monk interviewed Pink about the discussion and its context) then this leaves Pink's more nuanced question unanswered.

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> was that tie in any form or manner a homosexual one … I can only say that to my husband and myself, and as far as I know all others who knew him, Wittgenstein appeared a person of unforced chastity. There was in fact something of *noli me tangere* about him, so that one cannot imagine anyone who would ever dare as much as to pat him on the back, nor can one imagine him in need of the normal physical expressions of affection. In him everything was sublimated to an extraordinary degree. [WSP:59]

We now know that Wittgenstein did have sexual relationships, but there is still something correct in Pascal's intuition. He certainly considered love more important than sex; and his sexual relations were infrequent and the source of much agonizing. This, of course, is another analogy with Socrates, since the latter's frequent refusal to give way to homosexual desire is even more striking than the desire itself. The most famous example occurs in Alcibiades' speech in the *Symposium*. Here, he reports how, in attempt to seduce Socrates, he crept under the older man's cloak. Socrates, Alcibiades said, laughed at his beauty and, in the morning, he had no more slept with Socrates than if he had lain with 'my father or elder brother.' [*Symp*:219b-e] Both philosophers, it would seem, sublimated their desire into philosophy.

XV

It is because Wittgenstein thought of philosophy primarily as a public, oral activity with a group of initiates that he found writing so problematic. To begin with there is the difficulty of ensuring a sympathetic readership. 'If I say that my book is meant for only a small circle of people (if that can be called a circle) I do not mean to say that this circle is in my view the élite of mankind but it is the circle to which I turn (not because they are better or worse than the others but) because they form my cultural circle, as it were my fellow countrymen in contrast to the others who are *foreign* to me.' [CV:12–13]

Secondly, there is the difficulty of ensuring that even sympathetically disposed readers do not behave as 'tourists'—dipping in here and there as the whim takes them. To prevent this, Wittgenstein developed the use of extended sequences of remarks. This ensures that a whole movement of thought has to be followed; excepts taken by themselves frequently turn out to be incomprehensible. In places his writing seems almost wilfully difficult. The

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scope of his remarks, and their relationship one to another, is often hard to determine, and the precise interpretation of his metaphors is often perplexing. Added to this, we have his use of the interlocutor and his dense and idiosyncratic punctuation. No wonder he writes in *Culture and Value*, 'My sentences are all to be read *slowly*.' [65]

The third and most difficult problem, however, is that the reader must not be told the solution to the problem but must come to see it himself. Only in this way can the profound insight and sense of excitement reported in the passage from Gasking and Jackson be generated. To achieve this, the reader must be given only the minimum number of prompts. As Wittgenstein remarks in *Culture and Value*: 'Anything the reader can do for himself, leave it to the reader.' [CV:88] 'I must be nothing more than the mirror in which my reader sees his own thinking with all its deformities & with this assistance can set it in order.' [CV:25] In conversation the trick is difficult to achieve, but at least in this case one can see where someone understands and where they don't, what needs emphasizing and what doesn't, where an example or repetition would be helpful, and so on. No conversation on the same subject will be identical and each sequence of prompts will be bespoke.

The difficulty with the written word is that you have to guess the reader's opinion, what he has grasped at a certain point, when an overview would be useful. Now, because we all speak the same language, and live in the same age, we are all subject to the same temptations, and therefore, to a certain extent people's responses will be predictable. When you learn the violin there are certain temptations to which all are subject: people will grasp the bow like a claw, they will not push their left elbow far enough under the instrument, they will support the weight of the violin with their left hand not their chin, and so forth. This is why there can be such things as printed violin tutors and why they can be useful. But their existence doesn't obviate the need for individual lessons, or replace an individual teacher, because the strength of one temptation, or the kind of practice necessary to remedy a fault, as well as the speed of progress generally, is going to vary from one person to another.

In 1934–5 Wittgenstein tried to give a formal presentation of his ideas in the *Brown Book*. He decided to write it as a textbook. It consists largely of exercises for the reader: he is asked to perform certain experiments on himself, to imagine the behaviour of a certain tribe, or asked to consider what he would say if a certain situation obtained, and so forth. It contains questions and puzzles with only the merest hint of a solution now and again. The main

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difficulty however is to follow the sequence of thought: why are we being asked to imagine this after being asked to imagine that? And if the reader loses the thread early on, then there is little chance of picking it up again later. Wittgenstein clearly realized the book was failing and abandoned it. The *Brown Book* expects too much of the reader: it contains the kind of examples and puzzles he would use in his lectures, but without the necessary replies intelligibility is lost.

In the middle thirties, with the failure of the *Brown Book*, he entered into a period of despair about ever being able to write anything. He said rather feebly that his lectures were a form of publication [MM:48]; and at other times he could only hope that his scattered remarks would be published after his death:

> I am now writing my book, or trying to write it, and write bit by bit and without any progress; from hand to mouth. It is impossible that like this something good will come out of it. I am above all much too uneasy, much too constrained in my writing. If I were to write like this, then it is better to write no book, but rather to restrict myself here after a fashion to writing remarks which are still perhaps to be published at my death? [Nachlass 1937. Quoted PH:193–4]

He was clear, however, that it was not his intellectual vices that prevented him from finishing books, but his intellectual virtues, particularly his virtues as a teacher. As he wrote in 1937: 'The remarks which I write enable me to teach philosophy well, but not to write a book.' [Nachlass 1937; PH:193–4]

Wittgenstein became particularly angry when he discovered that other people were attempting to put his philosophy into print. For a number of years he tried to collaborate with Freidrich Waismann on a book, but eventually abandoned his attempt in disgust; and he sent furious letters to Ambrose and Braithwaite when he heard that they were putting some of his ideas into circulation. [M:335, 413] The recipients of these letters often protested that the source of these ideas was fully acknowledged, and they frequently asked Wittgenstein to correct their work if he felt that his ideas were misrepresented, but still his apparently irrational opposition persisted. The most plausible explanation for this irascibility is that he felt they did not appreciate the radicalism of his method, and consequently how difficult it was to write about it *at all*. Seeing that such a book was almost impossible to write was the necessary qualification for writing it.

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XVI

Socrates too saw difficulties with turning his philosophy into writing, and solved them by not doing any. Plato himself, despite being a copious writer, also felt equivocal about the written word, and gave a number of objections to the idea of written philosophy. Some of these are similar to Wittgenstein's. In the *Phaedrus,* he remarks that the living, breathing philosopher can choose whom he speaks to; whereas a book can be read by anyone:

> [Once] a thing is put in writing, the composition, whatever it may be, drifts all over the place, getting into the hands not only of those who understand it, but equally of those who have no business with it; it doesn't know how to address the right people, and not address the wrong. [*Phaedr*:275e]
>
> [But the] dialectician *selects a soul of the right type* [my italics] and in it he plants and sows his words founded on knowledge ... [*Phaedr*:276e]

In the *Seventh Letter*, Plato reports having heard that his former pupil, the tyrant Dionysis, is writing a book about Plato's philosophy. He then objects to the very idea of such a book in the following way:

> Acquaintance [with my philosophy] must come rather after a long period of attendance on instruction in the subject itself and of close companionship, when suddenly, like a blaze kindled by a leaping spark, it is generated in the soul and at once becomes self-sustaining. [*L* 7:341c-d]

Here we find three Wittgensteinian features: the necessity of lengthy study; the necessity of intellectual companionship; and the idea that truth is not the passing on of true sentences, but a blaze of excitement and recognition. This effect cannot be achieved by simply *telling* somebody something. Rather, the receptive pupil must, with the bare minimum of prompts, come to see it for himself:

> I do not, however, think the attempt to tell mankind of these matters a good thing, except in the case of some few who are capable of discovering the truth for themselves with a little guidance. [*L*7: 341e]

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As a last Wittgensteinian feature, I note the fact that Plato thinks it is impossible to write such a book, but that he will be able to do it much better than anyone else:

> I certainly have composed no [philosophical handbook] ... nor shall I ever do so in future, for there is no way of putting it in words like other studies ... Besides, this at any rate I know, that if there were to be a treatise or a lecture on the subject, I could do it best. [*L7*: 431d]

XVII

Plato's solution to these problems was to write in dialogue. Compared with living interlocutors and living speech, any form of philosophical writing must be frozen, calcified and inadequate, but it is evident that the dialogue—as a literary form—is slightly less inadequate than most other kinds of writing. It is by its nature social, and it is the form of writing that comes closest to spoken word. A dialogue can show how different interlocutors are to be treated and responded to; the interlocutor can demonstrate what intellectual sympathy is, and anticipate what readers would like to see explained or defended. Dialogue does not state its method but shows it; and the reader can learn by example. Also it does not merely present its conclusions and then run through the justifications; it develops the reader's acuity by allowing him to witness a process of thought. It presents many poor arguments, wrong turnings, digressions, and the reader has to select amongst these what he will take away. Consequently truth will be something arrived at by the reader rather than something of which he is informed.

Wittgenstein began reading Plato carefully in 1931, soon after he re-entered professional philosophy, and at the time when he was rethinking his entire philosophical approach. He owned several volumes of Plato, and there are quotations and references in his work to the *Philebus, Statesman, Sophist, Laches, Charmides*, *Parmenides*, *Phaedrus*, and—in particular—the *Theaetetus*. So far as one can judge from the remaining evidence, he read no philosophical dialogues by other authors. At some point after the failure of the *Brown Book*, it must have struck him that Plato represents Socrates' conversations in dialogue form, and that representing his philosophical conversations in a similar manner might help solve his difficulty. He can still put puzzles to the

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reader, and ask the reader questions, but the interlocutor might help the reader formulate his objections, and even when he doesn't, the interlocutor's response will make Wittgenstein's next reply intelligible. There is still the danger of saying too much, or too little, but the dialogue is certainly a more reader-friendly approach than the *Brown Book*'s list of puzzles.

Consequently, a few omissions and a little reformatting can easily turn long sections of the *Philosophical Investigations* into a straightforward dialogue:

> **B:** There is something common to all these constructions—namely the disjunction of all their common properties.
>
> **A:** Now you are playing with words. One might as well say: 'Something runs through the whole thread—namely the continuous overlapping of those fibres.'
>
> **B:** All right: the concept of number is defined for you as the logical sum of these individual interrelated concepts ...
>
> **A:** It need not be so. For I can give the concept 'number' rigid limits in this way ... but I can also use it so that the extension of the concept is *not* closed by a frontier. And this is how we do use the word 'game'. ...
>
> **B:** But then the use of the word is unregulated, the 'game' we play with it is unregulated.
>
> **A:** It is not everywhere circumscribed by rules; but no more are there any rules for how high one throws the ball in tennis, or how hard; yet tennis is a game for all that and has rules too. [Based on PI:67–68]

Wittgenstein was much interested in Plato's idea that thought is internalized speech, and he refers to the relevant passage from the *Theaetetus* in one of his late manuscripts. [RPP:180] Such a view was not only congenial to his ideas about meaning, but his later philosophical style seems to embody Plato's insight. As he says in *Culture and Value*: 'Nearly all my writings are private conversations with myself. Things I say to myself tête-à-tête.' [CV:88]

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For the reasons given above, Plato decided that the written dialogue was the best way to convey Socrates' philosophical spirit. And Wittgenstein, under Plato's influence, decided it was the best way to convey his own.[12]

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