Homosexuality
and Religion and Philosophy
Wittgenstein And Homosexuality

BY W. W. BARTLEY, III

A man can bare himself before others only out of a particular kind of love. A love which acknowledges, as it were, that we are all wicked children . . .

Hate between men comes from our cutting ourselves off from each other. Because we don’t want anyone else to look inside us, since it’s not a pretty sight in there.

— Ludwig Wittgenstein

If you think I’m an old spinster — think again!

— Ludwig Wittgenstein

I. A Polemical Reply to My Critics.

Homosexuality is unlikely to be treated with any equanimity until sexuality itself is so treated. There seems little likelihood, despite the developments of the past century, that that shall soon occur. The original reception of my book *Wittgenstein*, on its publication in 1973 and 1974 in New York and London, illustrates this as well as anything.

1 This essay is a revised version of the “Afterword 1982” to the German and Spanish translations of my *Wittgenstein* (Munich: Matthes & Seitz; 1983, and Madrid: Ediciones Catedra; 1982).
In my book I had mentioned Wittgenstein’s homosexuality only very briefly — on about four or five pages. The information given there was, as I stated, based on confidential reports from some of his friends. Even before the book was published, however, as page proofs were circulating, these reports were vehemently challenged and denied by other of his friends. Since that time, Wittgenstein’s homosexuality has been corroborated by his own written statements in his coded diaries. And there is thus no longer any ground for controversy about the fact of his active homosexuality. Yet it continues to be denied, and the controversy continues.¹

Having treated the matter so briefly in the book itself, I am in two minds about entering into a more extended discussion of it. Wittgenstein was my first venture into biography. Since publishing it I have become a bit more thick-skinned: I have published another biography,⁶ and am now writing a third.⁷ Yet my skin still stings from being called a liar in the Times Literary Supplement and elsewhere, from being known as “the man who wrote the dirty book on Wittgenstein,” and from being denounced as “an able money-spinner” who “pees on the graves of men whom honest and upright people admire and respect.””¹⁰

There are two more serious reasons for my ambivalence. First, I really do not want to attach undue importance to Wittgenstein’s homosexuality. And I find — and here my own experience matches Wittgenstein’s — that many people do not “think well” or at all forthrightly when dealing with such issues. And yet, as Wittgenstein himself cautions, it is really difficult “to think, or try to think, really honestly about your life and other people’s lives. And the trouble is that thinking about these things is not thrilling, but often downright nasty. And when it’s nasty then it’s most important.””¹¹

Lest I make things appear altogether too grim, I should report that part of the reception given my book was refreshing. I had not blamed Wittgenstein for his sexual activities; and many readers seemed to absorb this information in the same understanding spirit in which they had taken similar revelations about Lytton Strachey, E. M. Forster, John Maynard Keynes, Virginia Woolf, Vita Sackville-West, D. H.

⁷ A biography of Sir Karl Popper.
⁸ The latter quotation is from Wittgenstein’s nephew, John J. Stonborough, in The Human World, February 1974, p. 78.
⁹ Quoted in Malcolm, op. cit., p. 39.
Lawrence, and other eminent British thinkers who are commonly associated, directly or indirectly, with Wittgenstein through Cambridge and the Bloomsbury Group, and who also happened to be homosexual. Reflecting this mood, the reviews of the book were tolerably good: The British Journal for the Philosophy of Science described it as "extraordinarily concise," "enthrallingly written," "profound," and "more interesting and provocative than anything else written about Wittgenstein." And C. P. Snow, writing in The Financial Times, described my treatment of Wittgenstein's homosexuality as "temperate and unusually detached . . . written with neutrality."

But this was only a small part of the story. Several of Wittgenstein's literary executors and relatives threatened legal action to suppress the publication of my book, and also called on my British publishers to attempt to persuade them to stop publication. Controversy raged in the columns of The Times Literary Supplement, and in several other publications. Professor G. E. M. Anscombe, of Cambridge University, one of Wittgenstein's literary executors, published two letters suggesting that I could not have known and ought not to have claimed the things I did. Wittgenstein's close friend M. O'C. Drury, after explaining that, since he is a psychiatrist, it is "in the nature of my work to be alert to problems of homosexuality whether latent or active," wrote that "Bartley is in error when he supposes that Wittgenstein was at any time 'tormented by homosexual behaviour' . . . sensuality in any form was

entirely foreign to his ascetic personality”.15 Another of Wittgenstein’s literary executors, Rush Rhees, of the University of London, used words and phrases like “novellette,” and “at the level of gossip columns” to describe my book.16 A letter campaign was set up: those whom I had mentioned in my acknowledgements were contacted, asked to disassociate themselves from me, and to withdraw permission to use their names. One of those contacted, an eminent British literary critic, wrote to me: “My respect for you and your work are such that I will write in complete frankness. I wonder whether you have a clear notion of the ugliness which followed on the publication of your book here . . . The general line here is that you are to be drummed out of the trade and that no academic invitation of any kind will be extended to you from the United Kingdom henceforth . . .”

The ugliness has continued over the years. Thus in the Wittgenstein Documentation Center in Kirchberg am Wechsel, Austria, the site of the annual international Wittgenstein congress, two display cases were for some years devoted to arguing that Wittgenstein was not a homosexual, and that my account was “verfälschend.”17

15 Times Literary Supplement, February 22, 1974. See also Drury’s essays: “Some Notes on Conversations with Wittgenstein,” and “Conversations with Wittgenstein,” in Rush Rhees, ed.: Ludwig Wittgenstein: Personal Recollections (Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman & Littlefield; 1981), p. 135, where Drury’s point goes uncorrected. For a very different view of Wittgenstein’s lack of “sensuality” and “ascetic personality”, see Professor Georg Kreisel’s report that Wittgenstein often broached the subject of sex in conversations, but Kreisel turned these aside because “it was certainly painful to me, as appropriate to the time, to hear an old man talk of things that were intended only for us young chaps.” See Georg Kreisel: “Zu Wittgensteins Gesprächen und Vorlesungen über die Grundlagen der Mathematik,” in Wittgenstein und Sein Einfluss auf die Gegenwärtige Philosophie: Akten des 2. Internationalen Wittgenstein Symposiums (Vienna: Hölinder-Pichler-Tempsky; 1978), pp. 79-81, esp. p. 81, note 7.
17 I am happy to report that Dr. Adolf Hübner, the director of this Center, has undergone an interesting transformation in this regard, and has now recanted (though privately). In his "Bartley Refuted" (Schriftenreihe der Oesterreichischen Ludwig-Wittgenstein Gesellschaft, 1978), Hübner denied that Wittgenstein was homosexual and called his friends and acquaintances in witness against me. By the time he published his book Wittgenstein (with Kurt Wuchterl; Hamburg: Rowohlt Taschenbuch; May 1979), Hübner had modified his opinions, and although still denouncing my book wrote of Wittgenstein’s “homoerotic tendencies” (p. 67). By September 9, 1979, Hübner wrote to me to say that he would not again write an article “in defense of” Wittgenstein’s personality “against reproaches such as yours.” Hübner added that he was rather sure that his literary executors know that Wittgenstein suffered from homosexual tendencies. Hübner goes on to say that his article was written in a period in which his admiration for Wittgenstein was “still boundless.” But there was no reproach in my own book; and my admiration for Wittgenstein was in no way affected by my discoveries about his sexuality.
This entire attack on my book, and on my own *bona fides*, has been based on bluff, on projection, and on plain naïveté.

First, as to bluff. The documents confirming Wittgenstein's homosexuality — his own coded diaries — have been in the possession of the Wittgenstein literary estate all along. During the height of their attack, the Wittgenstein literary executors had coded notebooks, in Wittgenstein's own hand — written in a very simple cipher and long since decoded and transcribed — corroborating my statements about his homosexuality. There is also an allusion to his homosexuality in a letter from Wittgenstein to his sister Minnie written as early as his days as an engineering student at the University of Manchester (1908-11).

Only two of the coded notebooks appear to have been preserved. It is known that several of his notebooks were destroyed, by Wittgenstein's own order, in 1950, and these appear to include the notebooks for the period 1918-28, the period with which my own book was chiefly concerned. At any rate, they are missing. Of the two books that are preserved, the first dates from the period of the First World War, ending prior to 1918. In it Wittgenstein explicitly discusses his homosexual wishes and longings, recurrences of "sensuality", and the way in which he is tormented by them. But there is as yet no unequivocal evidence of homosexual *activity*, and thus one cannot judge with certainty whether Wittgenstein's relationship with his friend David


19 B. F. McGuinness, who is writing the official biography of Wittgenstein (which has been announced several times since the early 1970s but has never been published), refers to this very indirectly in his "Wittgenstein's 'Intellectual Nursery-Training'," in *Wittgenstein, the Vienna Circle and Critical Rationalism, Proceedings of the 3rd International Wittgenstein Symposium* (Vienna: Hölder-Pichler-Tempsky; 1979), p. 39.
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Pincent — which is often supposed to have been a homosexual one — involved active sexual relations.

The second notebook dates from a later period, following 1928, and reveals both that Wittgenstein was involved in homosexual activities and that this brought him great distress of mind. In these pages Wittgenstein finds it abhorrent that he should have such desires, yet also comments that he cannot blame himself for having them, and that it is not bad to have them. This notebook also reveals that active homosexual practice was involved in Wittgenstein’s relationship with his friend Francis Skinner.20

So much for bluff. And so much for Drury’s “alertness” to homosexuality.

Then there is projection. I am using the word “projection” in the psychological sense, in which internal subjective states lead to radical misperceptions of the external world. To illustrate how unreliable people often become in the presence of information about homosexuality, I have selected two descriptions of my book by authors who are friendly to it. Any reader of its first chapter will be able to confirm that I do not claim or imply that Wittgenstein’s sexual partners were prostitutes or that he despised them. What I do say is:

By walking for ten minutes to the east ... he could quickly reach the parkland meadows of the Prater, where rough young men were ready to cater to him sexually. Once he had discovered this place, Wittgenstein found to his horror that he could scarcely keep away from it ... Wittgenstein found he much preferred the sort of rough blunt homosexual youth that he could find strolling in the paths and alleys of the Prater to those ostensibly more refined young men who frequented the Sirk Ecke in the Kärntnerstrasse and the neighboring bars at the edge of the inner city.21

20 This testimony by Wittgenstein himself is contrary to that of Fania Pascal, in her discussion of the relationship between Skinner and Wittgenstein in “Wittgenstein: A Personal Memoir,” Encounter, August 1973, pp. 23-29. Pascal’s version is however not corrected in the version reprinted in Rush Rhees, ed.: Ludwig Wittgenstein: Personal Recollections, op. cit. If Pascal does not correct her remarks, at least she mentions Skinner. Although Wittgenstein and Skinner were, in Pascal’s words, “inseparable,” Malcolm completely omits mentioning Skinner in his Memoir. This omission — as serious as Roy Harrod’s omission of the question of homosexuality from his biography of John Maynard Keynes — seriously flaws the portrait that Malcolm draws of Wittgenstein.
Out of this statement, W. D. Hudson conjures up — for his book *Wittgenstein and Religious Belief* — the following report:

Bartley’s book openly states that Wittgenstein’s perpetual bad conscience arose, in part at least, from the fact that he regularly consorted with the most repellant kind of male prostitute in London and Vienna.  

And Ben-Ami Scharfstein, in his book *The Philosophers*, writes of Wittgenstein, referring to my book:

His whole situation would be more intelligible, as would his frequent attacks on his own decency, if he suffered, as has been claimed, from his attachment to rough homosexual men whom he despised.

It is as if the matter is made less threatening by introducing, in the imagination, something which was, to the best of my knowledge, never there: the repellent, despised prostitute.

Finally, a word about the quite extraordinary naivety that attended the reception of my book. I will mention only two of the many preposterous arguments that have been published purporting to establish that I could not possibly have obtained the evidence I had for the details of Wittgenstein’s homosexuality. First, it is alleged that anyone who could have known about Wittgenstein’s sexual activities shortly after the First World War would be either dead or too old to remember. Yet when I obtained my information in the early and mid nineteen-sixties, my informants were of course in their early and mid sixties. Is it seriously suggested that men in their sixties cannot remember the sexual escapades of their youth — particularly when so distinctive a personality as Wittgenstein is involved?

Secondly, it is often argued that Wittgenstein could not have been homosexual since anyone so well known and so distinctive in voice and dress, and so rich, would — had he been homosexual and done the sorts of things I described — have been recognized and blackmailed. This is a very odd argument. Of course Wittgenstein was recognized:

24 Thus Rush Rhees and John Stonborough in *The Human World*, op. cit., pp. 67 and 80.
otherwise I could not have obtained my original information. Again, although homosexual practice was illegal in Austria prior to and following the first world war (indeed until 1970), and although there was sporadic enforcement of the law, there was little active, serious or sustained persecution or legal prosecution of homosexuals prior to the Hitler period. Thus Count Harry Kessler reports in his diaries the following story about Count Leopold Berchtold, the Imperial Austrian foreign minister:

On 31 July 1914, when the whole world was waiting for the Serb reply to the Austrian ultimatum, he (Kuh) saw Berchtold in the fun-fair part of the Vienna Prater standing by a merry-go-round notorious as a meeting-place for male prostitutes. An extremely pretty youth, in white trousers and white pullover, winked broadly every time the merry-go-round carried him past a very smartly dressed man whose eyes never left him. When the merry-go-round halted, the youth stepped down and went up to the gentleman, who greeted him and took him along. The gentleman was Berchtold. At the moment that the two were leaving, newspaper sellers rushed on the scene with shouts of ‘Serb Answer to the Ultimatum! War with Serbia! Austrian Invasion to Serbia!’ — The start of the World War which Berchtold had precipitated.25

Berchtold was obviously a far better candidate for blackmail than was Wittgenstein. Yet blackmail is far rarer than is homosexuality. And this is the same Prater where Wittgenstein’s nephew John Stonborough suggests that homosexual importuning is hardly to be found.26

25 Graf Harry Kessler: In the Twenties: The Diaries of Harry Kessler (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston; 1971), p. 457. Berchtold seems to have spent quite a bit of time on public view that summer. See Max Graf’s vignette in his Legend of a Music City (New York, 1945), pp. 69-70: “I can still see the distinguished Count Berchtold on a summer’s day in 1914, standing in the doorway of a Ringstrasse Hotel. He had just signed the declaration of war on Serbia. Now he stood here, slender, laughing ironically, a gold-tipped cigarette in his well-manicured fingers, watching the crowds and conversing with the passersby.” For comparable information about homosexual assignations, see the Victorian novel Teleny, or the Reverse of the Medal (London: Leonard Smithers; 1893), or Brian Reade: Sexual Heretics (New York: Coward-McCann, Inc.; 1970), pp. 228-245. Another example of a prominent homosexual during this period is that of Rantzau, Germany’s chief delegate to the Versailles conference.
II. The Question of the Relevance of His Homosexuality to Wittgenstein's Philosophy.

"It is sometimes said that a man's philosophy is a matter of temperament, and there is something in this".

— Ludwig Wittgenstein

Although Wittgenstein's homosexuality is, it seems obvious to me, of central importance in understanding the man and his influence, I made no attempt in my book to explain his thought in terms of it. This too has been criticized. Thus George Steiner, who gave my book a generous welcome, nonetheless suggested that I have evaded the "crux of the matter," and that Wittgenstein's sexual life and theory of language are closely related.28

This is a question that I wish to confront in this section.

*   *   *

I have a good friend named Ben-Ami Scharffstein, who is professor of philosophy in the University of Tel-Aviv, and the author of some splendid books on art and aesthetics, on Chinese and comparative studies, on mysticism, and on the lives of the philosophers. Most philosophers, Scharffstein contends, hide behind façades: their ideas are indeed constructions intended to make those façades the more difficult to penetrate.29 And sometimes their ideas are the façades themselves.

Such a claim is of course difficult to evaluate fairly. For we are, all of us, so adept at turning a profit out of whatever comes our way, that it is often hard to tell whether we have brought about something to our advantage or whether we have simply turned it to our advantage. Doubtless anyone clever enough to invent a philosophy would be clever enough to find a way to hide behind it — if he wanted to hide. Such is the very stuff and prerequisite of any ability to manipulate ideas to corrupt or to confuse understanding.

However this may be, Scharffstein's view would hardly have been advanced were there not at least some philosophers to whom it seemed,

27 Culture and Value, op. cit., p. 20.
29 See Scharffstein's The Philosophers, op. cit., for an account of his views. Steiner seems to argue in a similar vein in After Babel, op. cit., pp. 32-3, when he writes that "languages conceal and internalize more, perhaps, than they convey outwardly. Social classes, racial ghettos speak at rather than to each other."
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at least on the surface, to apply. Wittgenstein might appear to be a good example, and I can see how Steiner also could take him to be so. Certainly in his early theory of language Wittgenstein does insist that everything of real importance is unsayable; and he also says that the interior of a person is impenetrable by language. From Scharffstein's perspective, this would be a façade, a façade all too conveniently deflecting the gaze of the curious inquirer (and perhaps Wittgenstein's own attention as well) away from Wittgenstein. As if in confirmation of this, it has been recorded that Wittgenstein "would above all abhor anybody enquiring into his personal life."

Wittgenstein himself wrote: "Don't play with what lies deep in another person." And although he himself seriously entertained the idea of becoming a psychiatrist, he advised his disciple M. O'C. Drury — who did become a psychiatrist — that "he [Wittgenstein] would not want to undergo what was known as a training analysis. He did not think it right to reveal all one's thoughts to a stranger." (One cannot know whether Drury is reporting Wittgenstein accurately here either. But if he is, a psychiatrist would likely accuse Wittgenstein of irresponsibility. He would say that anyone who presumes to treat others without having undergone something like a training analysis himself does indeed play with his patients' depths.)

In any case, Wittgenstein's friends and literary executors have taken care to carry out his apparent wishes where possible. One of them has written: "If by pressing a button it could have been secured that people would not concern themselves with his personal life, I should have pressed that button." Another executor, when publishing a selection

31 Culture and Value, op. cit., p. 23.
32 See Drury's "Wittgenstein" in op. cit., p. 151.
33 G. E. M. Anscombe, quoted by Paul Engelmann in Letters from Ludwig Wittgenstein, with a Memoir (Oxford: Basil Blackwell; 1967), p. xiv. In 1953 the Wittgenstein literary estate refused to permit F. A. von Hayek, Wittgenstein's second cousin once removed, the distinguished Nobel-prize winning economist and biographer of John Stuart Mill, to publish some letters of Wittgenstein until they themselves had first published them. As a result, and to our common loss, Hayek abandoned his own biography of Wittgenstein. Later, Anscombe denied that this occurred. See her letter to the Times Literary Supplement, January 18, 1974, and F. A. von Hayek's letter in the same journal, February 8, 1974. See also Hayek's "Remembering My Cousin, Ludwig Wittgenstein," Encounter, August 1977, pp. 20-22. The hostility of Wittgenstein's executors to biographical and historical investigation has been effective; they have been able to deflect numerous researchers — with the result that every portrait drawn of Wittgenstein is false; not to mention that it is thereby almost impossible to tell the story of — or to direct critical attention to — the formation of his school and the creation of its influence.
from Wittgenstein's notes, "excluded from the collection notes of a purely 'personal' sort — i.e., notes in which Wittgenstein is commenting on the external circumstances of his life, his state of mind and relations with other people . . .". The "love that dare not speak its name," that which is "among Christians not to be named," needed to be shielded from view.

Scharfstein's thesis — that a man's philosophical product is a disguised expression of his inner state — is a sophisticated variant of epistemological expressionism, the popular idea that a man's work, whether of art or of philosophy, is an expression of his inner state, of his emotions, of his personality. Thus the philosopher and psychologist John Oulton Wisdom has argued that Bishop Berkeley's philosophical idealism is an expression of his internal state as discoverable by psycho-analysis. Berkeley's idealism, his denial of the existence of matter, is, Wisdom argues, linked to and an expression of the same unconscious anality which caused him, physically, to suffer from colitis! Elsewhere, Wisdom has argued that Hegel's philosophy is an expression of his isolation, loneliness and depression.

But can Wittgenstein's thought be understood in this way? And if so, what does it express? And what precisely is its connection, if any, with his homosexuality?

Before raising such questions, we need to ask whether anyone's thought is appropriately so interpreted. This is a question worth raising, for expressionism is widespread, shifting attention from the quality of the product to the character of the producer, and thereby also encouraging the romantic preoccupation with personality that is so

34 See G. H. von Wright, in his Preface to Ludwig Wittgenstein: Culture and Value, op. cit.
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prevalent in, if not an expression of, our culture. It is also an approach — often in the past called physiognomy — sanctioned by age. In the eighteenth century it is found in J. J. Winckelmann, who found the impassive marble fronts of classical statues an expression of the "noble simplicity and quiet grandeur" of the Greek soul; and also in Johann Casper Lavater's Physiognomische Fragmente (1775-78), which sought to decipher characters from portrait silhouettes. The approach was later ridiculed by Georg Christoph Lichtenberg who, in his delicious parody of Lavater, showed that those who followed Lavater lost the capacity to discriminate between Goethe's pigtail and Goethe's Faust. An even earlier example is G. B. Della Porta, in De humana Physiognomia (1586), who sought to develop a science of physiognomics by comparisons between human types and particular animals. Thus a man with an aquiline nose would be noble of spirit, and one with a sheepish face would be sheepish.

Such expressionism might seem palatable to Wittgenstein himself, in that he once wrote, in a physiognomical mood, that "The human body is the best picture of the human soul." 39 More important, such expressionism is often found intertwined with contemporary studies of language; and language is the focus of all Wittgenstein's work. Thus George Steiner asks: "In what measure are sexual perversions analogues of incorrect speech?", whether there are affinities between pathological erotic compulsions and the obsessive search for a private language, and "Might there be elements of homosexuality in the modern theory of language (particularly in the early Wittgenstein), in the concept of communication as an arbitrary mirroring?" 40 Steiner writes that:

Eros and language mesh at every point. Intercourse and discourse, copula and copulation . . . Sex is a profoundly semantic act . . . To speak and to make love is to enact a distinctive twofold universality: both forms of communication are universals of the human sexuality and speech developed in close-knit reciprocity. Together they generate the history of self-consciousness . . . The seminal and the semantic functions . . . together they construe the grammar of being. . . . If coition can be schematized as dialogue, masturbation seems to be correlative with the pulse of monologue . . . The multiple, intricate relations between speech defects and infirmities in the nervous and glandular mechanisms

which control sexual and excretory functions have long been
known . . . Ejaculation is at once a physiological and linguistic
concept. Impotence and speech-blocks, premature emission and
stuttering, involuntary ejaculation and the word-river of dreams
are phenomena whose interrelations seem to lead back to the
central knot of our humanity. Semen, excreta, and words are
communicative products. They are transmissions from the self
inside the skin to reality outside . . . The grounds of
differentiation (between the speech of men and women) are, of
course, largely economic and social. . . . But certain linguistic
differences do point towards a physiological basis or, to be exact,
towards the intermediary zone between the biological and the
social . . . Are there biologically determined apprehensions of
sense data which precede and generate linguistically programmed
conceptualizations?""41

This is a delight to read. But is what it says true? For that matter,
what exactly does it say?

It is easy to mock such approaches: to produce, say, examples of
realists who suffer from colitis and happily extraverted Hegelians. Or
to recall Winston Churchill’s description of a political opponent as “a
sheep in sheep’s clothing.” It is also easy to remark that Steiner’s
brilliant discourse insinuates an expressionism which he is too
sophisticated to state outright — insinuates by the use of provocative
questions which are posed and then abandoned; as if the answers to
them were obvious. It might even be important to remark that, although
Steiner’s discussion suggests the contrary, Wittgenstein’s early work
does not contain any “concept of communication as an arbitrary
mirroring,” and that Wittgenstein, far from obsessively searching for
a private language, firmly maintained that such a language was
impossible.

In the following, however, I do not wish to make fun of physiognomy
or expressionism, and certainly not of Steiner’s provocative and
brilliantly suggestive studies of language and translation. Rather, I wish
to begin to identify some of the basic scientific objections to
expressionism and to all attempts to reduce human speech and its
content to the circumstances, physiological, psycho-sexual, and
otherwise, of the individuals who use and create that speech.

41 Steiner, op. cit., pp. 38-39 and 43.
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We may begin by placing human expression in a somewhat wider context.

For this purpose I draw on Karl Bühler’s famous work, Sprachtheorie, concerning the theory of human language.42 Bühler, who was from 1922 to 1938 Professor of Philosophy and Psychology in the University of Vienna, and whose possible influence on Wittgenstein’s later philosophy is discussed in my book, analyzed the communicative function of a language into three components: 1) the expressive function, where the communication serves to express the internal states of the speaker; 2) the signalling or stimulative or release function, where the communication serves to stimulate or to release certain reactions in the hearer; 3) the descriptive function, which is present to the extent that the communication aims to describe some state of affairs. At this third level, the regulative idea of truth emerges, assessing descriptions according to whether they fit the facts. These first three functions are separable in so far as each is accompanied by its preceding one but need not be accompanied by its succeeding one. That is, one may express without signalling; one may express and signal without describing. But one cannot signal without expressing, or describe without both expressing and signalling. Another function has been added to Bühler’s set by my teacher Sir Karl Popper (who was Bühler’s student in Vienna), and on whose work I shall also draw in the several paragraphs that follow: namely, 4) the argumentative function. In terms of this, descriptive statements are appraised with regard to the regulative standards of truth, content, and truthlikeness; and arguments are appraised with regard to their validity. The same hierarchical ordering applies here: one cannot argue without describing, signaling, expressing.43 The first two functions apply, of course, to animal languages. But the second two functions may be characteristically human — although some of those who research into the life and languages of animals hope for discoveries which will modify some accepted views about the limits of animal communication.44

44 Frisch’s bees are a possible example.
As an aid in the understanding of his ideas, Bühler developed this diagram:

The triangle in the middle denotes the linguistic sign, whatever its character. This sign may be used by the sender or speaker to express himself; it may be received by the receiver or listener as a signal or appeal which may or may not have been intended by the speaker. And the same sign again may be used — by sender, receiver, or both — to symbolize some objective state of affairs independent of the receiver and sender.

The analysis may obviously be applied to contemporary art, music, and poetry — and to a variety of theories about them. Extend the sign beyond language to a work of art. Such a work may express certain subjective states of mind (conscious or unconscious) or intentions on the part of the artist; those who receive or respond to the work of art may or may not decode it (consciously or unconsciously) as it was intended by its sender. And the work of art may or may not be representational.
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Let us not pursue this but, instead, with Bühler's account in mind, return to our question: can a philosopher's theories be reduced to the expressive level? Philosopher's ideas are of course self-expressive; in a trivial sense, anything that one does is self-expressive. (And this observation should make us, right from the start, somewhat sceptical of the explanatory power of expressionism: if expression characterizes everything that one does, it can have little hope of explaining the particular features of some specific things that one does — such as art or philosophy.) But the question is whether such ideas can (as is maintained in expressionist accounts of philosophy — and of art) be reduced to the expressive level, whether they are, ultimately, only expression.

The answer to this question is emphatically negative — for a variety of reasons, logical, physical, biological. I shall cite three such reasons or arguments — two very short ones, and another rather longer one.

The first argument is that expressionism is quite contrary to everything we know from biology and from evolutionary theory. It removes the biological function from our descriptive statements, and thus leaves the important role that description plays in human life go quite unexplained; unchecked self-expression (i.e., self-expression unchecked by description) in the dangerous environments in which human beings have evolved and continue to live would be biologically lethal.

The second argument is that it is in any case impossible to reduce the descriptive and argumentative levels of language to the expressive and signal levels: no causal physical theory of the descriptive and argumentative functions of language is possible. Popper shows that the name relationship — which is the simplest case of a descriptive use of words — cannot be causally realized.45 That is, any purely causal model of naming is intrinsically defective, in that no causal chain alone can represent or realize the relation between a thing and its name. Rather, interpretation (which itself cannot be causally realized) must be added,

in order to pick out or select — and to name — some part of the total physical situation. It follows from this that, to the extent to which a philosopher's theories contain representational descriptive statements, intended to be true or false, and arguments intended to be valid or invalid, those theories cannot be reduced to the expressive level. This argument was originally constructed to refute physicalism and behaviorism, not expressionistic theories of art and philosophy; yet it applies to the latter just as much as to the former.

The argument is strong and general; and it suffices to refute the related family of philosophies (materialism, mechanism, determinism, expressionism, etc.) that attempt to reduce the human self, language, and theory to the conditions under which they arise, whether economic, psycho-sexual, physiological, genetic, or otherwise.

But I promised another argument. One which is not only easier to understand but which is also, I believe, particularly revealing, relates to the logical and informative content of theories. When we affirm a theory, we also propose its logical implications (otherwise we should not have to retract it when these come to grief), all those statements that follow from it — as well as those further implications which result from combining this theory with other theories which we also propose or assume. But this means that the informative content of any theory includes an infinity of unforeseeable nontrivial statements; it also makes clear that the content of an idea is far from identical with some particular person's thoughts about it. For there are infinitely many situations, themselves infinitely varied, to which the theory may be applicable. Yet many of these situations have not only not even been imagined at the time the theory is proposed; they are also, literally, unimaginable at that time, in terms of the information then available. For example, part of the informative content of Newton's theory is that Einstein's theory is incompatible with it; yet this could not possibly have been imagined at the time Newton proposed his theory; nor could the test situations or applications that eventually decided against Newton's theory have been imagined then — since such possibilities of observation and testing of Newton's theory become conceivable only after the invention of Einstein's theory.46

This startling result means that, literally, "we never know what we are talking about."47 Even the inventor of a theory cannot possibly

46 There is the related problem that the growth of knowledge is unpredictable in principle. See Popper: Poverty of Historicism (Boston: Beacon Press; 1957), Preface; and Popper: The Open Universe, op. cit., Chapter 3.
47 See Popper: Unended Quest, op. cit., section 7.
fully have understood it — as many historical examples attest. Thus Erwin Schrödinger did not understand the "Schrödinger equations" before Born gave his interpretation of them; and the content and application of these equations is, indeed, still a matter of controversy. Since it is logically impossible, consciously or unconsciously, to anticipate such matters on the basis of what we know about the inventor or discoverer of a theory, it is absurd to think of them in terms of "self expression."

Developing this result, we can see that expressionist accounts must fail in three fundamental ways. First, they suppose that there is a fixed core to the individual, of which his work and thought is an expression. Second, they neglect the objectively unfathomable depths of the product. And third, as a consequence, they are unable to capture the nature of the relationship between a man and his work (any more than they capture the "name relationship"). In sum, expressionism misunderstands the nature of the individual self; the nature of intellectual work and creativity; and the nature of the relationship between the two. The result is altogether too passive and one-directional.

We have already discussed the second point — the objectively unfathomable content of intellectual products or ideas — on which the entire argument hangs. To take the first and third points in turn: the human self, while no doubt in part resulting from inborn dispositions, is also at least in part held together by theories: these help to provide its unity, its individuality, and its continuity; and it is rich, unfathomable, and growing to the extent to which these theories enjoy these characteristics. Once one has acquired descriptive language, one becomes not only a subject but also an object for oneself: an object about which one can reflect, which one may criticize and change. Self-transcendence is a familiar and all-important characteristic of human life, and is attained in large part through the reflective criticism and examination of the theories that hold the self together; the destruction of some of those theories; and the creation of new theories in their place. Hence, for the reasons already mentioned, we can never fully know ourselves any more than we can know what we are talking about in other areas. For both poles are anchored in descriptive language.

The relationship between this unfathomable self and the unfathomable theories which it has somehow produced can then hardly be one of expression of the one by the other! Such an account fails

48 See Popper: The Self and Its Brain, op. cit., Chapter P4, esp. section 42; and Objective Knowledge, op. cit., pp. 146-50.
to take account either of the nature of language and of theory, or of the constantly changing flamethe like quality of the individual, as expressed in his active cybernetic relationship with his cultural world, including his own cultural products, and the creative, unpredictable character that is intrinsic to that relationship. This relationship is one of give and take between the individual and his work; it depends upon "feedback" amplified by conscious self-criticism. Such feedback is, as is evident from evolutionary theory, part of any growth process; so it is hardly surprising to find it here.49

When one produces an idea — whether about oneself, about the nature of the world, about human society, or language, or whatever — this idea, being formed in descriptive language, takes on an objective life of its own — and particularly so when it is written down and published, and thus made available to others. It has unexplored and sometimes also unwanted potential transcending what could possibly have been intended, or expressed, in the moment of its utterance. As one's understanding of such an idea unfolds, it may literally alter the econiche in which one dwells by introducing into it new potentialities and problems. The cultural world, which contains one's self-conceptions and one's theories about the external world, is thus an objective natural exosomatic product, comparable in certain respects to a spider's web. This web of ideas is autonomous in the sense that it generates its own problems and that its content is largely independent of our wishes, existing independently of being realized in the subjective consciousness of any individual.50 As Nietzsche found: "I discovered and ventured diverse answers; I distinguished between ages, peoples, degrees of rank among individuals; I departmentalized my problem; out of my answers there grew new questions, inquiries, conjectures, probabilities — until at length I had a country of my own, a soil of my own, an entire discrete, thriving, flourishing world, like a secret garden the existence of which no one suspected."

In this context, the unexpected ramifications of one's own ideas about the world, about society, about the individual, about one's own aims and preferences, may — as one pursues them, as one works with them, as one adopts them as problems — have a radical impact on one's self-conception, and also on one's instinctive life. Far from expressing one's

50 For a different sort of example, take the table of logarithms or the problem whether there are highest twin prime numbers.
51 Friedrich Nietzsche: On the Genealogy of Morals, Preface, section 3.
old self and self-conceptions, they may be radically at odds with them. They may work against one's self expression.\textsuperscript{52}

Some persons of course exploit this potential rather little. Yet in his interaction with and contribution to this cultural world — and with the descriptive and argumentative levels of language — a person has at least the opportunity to form himself, to transcend his origins, the conditions of his birth, his genes, his instincts, his self expression. In this interaction, one's self is constantly being transcended, together with its expressions of itself.

In the case of an individual such as a scientist or philosopher who is distinguished by his interactions with the world of intellect, one might even be tempted to say that he expresses his ideas, rather than that his ideas express him. Some persons have taken this sort of thinking to an extreme: I am thinking, for instance, of physical therapists in the United States, in the school of Ida Rolf for example, who contend that one's whole body, even the curvature of the spine and the fascia of one's muscles, express one's thoughts. But this too will not do: although the impact of the world of ideas on any person — even on the most original — exceeds the impact which any individual can make on it, the whole model of expression is too passive.

Many other arguments against such attempts at reduction could be added here, serious scientific arguments which are generally ignored in the loose popular talk — literary, historical, and philosophical — about "influences" from the psyche and such like. Such influences of course exist, but it would, for the reasons indicated, be quite impossible for them to work in the direct ways in which they are commonly alleged to work.

Once reminded of these facts about language, thought, and culture, it is hard to take seriously the project of reducing a philosophy to its inventor's personal circumstances, to his personal psychopathology, or to think of it simply in terms of expression. One must set aside such biography, which "explains everything and therefore explains nothing," as empty and unscientific. Such is not biography motivated by the search for deeper understanding; it is biography by recipe.

To understand a philosophy one must study its content and the constellation of objective problems that stand behind its creation; and one must not be distracted unduly by the personal circumstances of the philosopher. To do otherwise, to follow an expressionistic program,

\textsuperscript{52} For a good example, see J. D. Unwin's amusing introduction to his Sex and Culture (London: Oxford University Press, 1934).
is for the intellectual historian or biographer to risk turning himself into a kind of graphologist: grasping for insight in deviations from copybook drill; dubiously expressing (or disguising!) his own individuality in his projection-laden interpretations of the scribblings of others. The personal circumstances of the philosopher may sometimes play an important role in the network of problems and theories within which he is working and sometimes they may play no role at all.

Sometimes they don’t; and sometimes they do. In arguing against facile forms of expressionism, I do not want to suggest that sexuality never decisively shapes the content of the work of a philosopher or scientist. For there are no doubt some cases where this apparently has happened. Walter Kaufmann has contended that this is true of C. G. Jung: that some of the positive content of Jung’s psychology, and particularly the argument of his Answer to Job, can be understood best in terms of his failure to resolve his own Oedipal conflicts.\\footnote{52a}

**III. Some Attempts To Link The Homosexuality And The Thought**

After this review — which ought to form a prolegomenon to any psychologically oriented intellectual history or biography — it is high time to return to the specific case of Wittgenstein.

I know of one interesting detailed attempt to explain the content of Wittgenstein’s thought in terms of his homosexuality. It is due to Professor A. W. Levi, of Washington University.\\footnote{53}

Inspired by Nietzsche’s remark that “systems of morals are only a sign language of the emotions”, Levi recalls the deep consciousness of personal guilt that runs through Wittgenstein’s letters to Engelmann “like a trail of blood.” The words Wittgenstein uses to refer to himself, over and over again, are Unanständigkeit, Schlechtigkeit, Schweinerei, Niedrigkeit, Gemeinheit — indecency, badness, filthiness, baseness, viliness. The state in which he finds himself, Wittgenstein writes, “is the state of not being able to get over a particular fact,” the only remedy

for which, so Wittgenstein suggests, is suicide. Wittgenstein had the conviction, as he sometimes said, that he was "doomed." 54

Levi's argument is straightforward: Wittgenstein's account of ethics is a kind of reaction formation, aimed at assuaging this heavy burden of guilt. 55 Just as in his daily life he sought out milieux in which he would be protected from his homosexual urges, so "his moral philosophy was unconsciously constructed to protect himself against the moral condemnation which those inclinations might be expected to call out". His theory of ethics is, Levi says, "the subtle strategy of a proud but guilty homosexual who has with great perspicuity and care placed himself beyond the condemnation of rational speech — that is to say — beyond the moral judgement of his fellow men." To do this, Wittgenstein simply created an account of language which rendered moral condemnation meaningless because it went beyond a statement of the factual.

Wittgenstein does this by sharply excluding from ethics anything of a factual character, or anything that may be reduced to factual statements. For example, judgements of value as a means to an end, or as meeting a standard, have nothing to do with ethics since, according to Wittgenstein, they can be translated into factual statements. For the same reason, statements of "tastes or inclinations," Wittgenstein stresses and repeats, are not matters of ethics. 56 Likewise, although "preferences" can be stated in meaningful language, "the fact of being preferred has equally little claim to be something valuable in itself." 57

In short, personal tastes, inclinations, and preferences — and hence, presumably, sexual tastes and preferences — are not matters of ethics. The "particular fact", the particular state of affairs, of being homosexual — or of being heterosexual, or of acting as preferred by the majority of society, or of acting otherwise — has no coercive moral

54 G. H. von Wright, in Malcolm, Memoir, op. cit., p. 20.
55 What very little Wittgenstein wrote about ethics includes the last three pages of the Tractatus, his "Lecture on Ethics," (1929-30), and brief remarks in his notebooks and correspondence, in his conversations with Waismann and Schlick, and in the collection of remarks published as Culture and Value. (See "Lecture on Ethics," The Philosophical Review, January 1965, pp. 3-12.) For Wittgenstein's conversations with Schlick and Waismann, see Ludwig Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle (Oxford: Blackwell; 1979), translated from Ludwig Wittgenstein und der Wiener Kreis (Oxford: Blackwell; 1967); these are conversations recorded by Friedrich Waismann. See also Culture and Value (Chicago: University of Chicago Press; 1980). Levi takes all except Culture and Value (which was not published when he first wrote) into account, and concentrates his attention on the "Lecture on Ethics."

57 Ludwig Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle, op. cit., p. 11.
power, and it is not necessary, Wittgenstein states quite explicitly, to feel guilty about matters of taste or inclination.

So far Levi’s interpretation might seem to hold. Such a view of ethics could indeed give at least intellectual relief to a guilty homosexual—or, for that matter, to a heterosexual who was deviant in some way and was inclined to feel guilty about that.

Yet I do not think that Levi’s interpretation works. For there is another dimension to Wittgenstein’s thought which, it seems to me, Levi’s explanation does not capture at all—although he is of course well aware of it, and tried hard to fit it in.

True ethical judgements — what Wittgenstein calls judgements of “absolute value” — transcend the factual, and are supernatural. “What is good,” he wrote in 1929, “is also divine. Queer as it sounds, that sums up my ethics. Only something supernatural can express the supernatural.” As he puts it, the absolute good, if it were a describable state of affairs (and it is not), would be one which “everybody, independent of his tastes and inclinations, would necessarily bring about or feel guilty for not bringing about.” However, no such state of affairs exists: “No state of affairs has, in itself, what I would like to call the coercive power of an absolute judge.”

Here we find Wittgenstein himself talking about the supernatural and absolute value. People are not at all deterred from talking about the supernatural, and about the absolute value which is its prerogative, by accounts such as Wittgenstein’s which contend that such talk is meaningless. And Wittgenstein knows this very well. Moreover, he himself is not deterred. Quite the contrary, as he writes: “My whole tendency, and I believe the tendency of all men who ever tried to write or talk about Ethics or Religion was to run against the boundaries of language.” Such an attempt is hopeless; no knowledge can ever come from it. “But it is a document of a tendency in the human mind which I personally cannot help respecting deeply and I would not for my life ridicule it.”

What sorts of things do such people thereby want to express? Wittgenstein offers three concrete personal examples: 1) wonder at the existence of the world; 2) the experience of feeling absolutely safe; and 3) the experience of guilt, particularly that God disapproves of one’s

58 Culture and Value, op. cit., p. 3e.
60 Ibid.
62 Ibid., p. 12.
conduct. To put these experiences into language, Wittgenstein says, *points to something*, yet leads to nonsense. Nonsensicality is at their very heart: for when we use such expressions *we intend to go beyond the factual* and beyond significant language, and to point to the absolute, the supernatural.

Now a number of serious problems arise here. If people are not deterred from talking about the supernatural by Wittgenstein’s theory of the limits of language, they are not likely to be deterred from making moral judgements in matters of taste or inclination either. And thus Wittgenstein’s theory of language and ethics — *if devised to protect himself from such judgements* — would be a failure.

Levi tries to circumvent this problem, and to draw Wittgenstein’s discussion of the supernatural and the absolute within his interpretation by arguing that Wittgenstein’s three experiences place one “in the very center of the moral nightmare of Wittgenstein’s moral universe.” Thus he says that Wittgenstein’s wonder at the existence of the world is really a moral horror at the brute givenness of his “moral deformity.” And his concern for absolute safety stems from his fear of the wild homosexual desires raging within him, as well as from the very real threat of physical danger to which he exposed himself in the pursuit of those desires. The third experience, that of guilt, is “obviously” a consequence of his life situation.

But Wittgenstein’s discussion simply does not bear Levi’s interpretation. Nor would Levi’s interpretation work even if it did.

First, there is no evidence that Wittgenstein means moral horror where he speaks of wonder: Wittgenstein chose his words, including his metaphors and his expressions of emotion, carefully. Moreover, the pregnant yet bewildering question why there is anything at all, although formulated in a variety of ways, is familiar in German-language philosophy and goes back at least to Schelling. Karl Jaspers concerned himself with such a question in the ‘twenties, and eventually published a book on Schelling (1955) whose central section is devoted to it. The question also arises in Heidegger, in Tillich, and in numerous other writers (including Sartre). I do not know whether Wittgenstein knew the work of Schelling, Jaspers, Sartre, or Tillich; but he did know something of Heidegger, and referred to him briefly in his discussions with Schlick and Waismann.⁶³ Nowhere in these discussions is there

⁶³ Ludwig Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle, p. 68. See, however, Henry LeRoy Finch’s argument in his *Wittgenstein — the Later Philosophy* (New York: Humanities Press; 1977), p. 263, where it is denied that Wittgenstein and Heidegger have the same experience or question in mind.
any discussion of or reference to moral horror; and although Wittgenstein adds something new to the discussion — namely, an argument concerning its nonsensicality — he nowhere suggests that he intended anything so radically different from these other writers.

Second, there is no reason to suppose that Wittgenstein had the dangers, either subjective or objective, of homosexuality in mind when he referred to the feeling of absolute safety. Such an idea of safety is of first importance in Christianity in connection with salvation and the immortality of the soul, with no specific reference to homosexuality; and it also appears, in a different context, in Buddhism, in the striving for liberation from the circumstances of the world. There is no reason to suppose that, when Wittgenstein mentioned this experience, he had in mind other than what he said he had in mind: religious experience.

Moreover, there is some further, rather specific, evidence that goes contrary to Levi’s interpretation, quite apart from the “Lecture on Ethics”. Around 1910 Wittgenstein attended, and was deeply affected by, a performance of the Austrian playwright Ludwig Anzengruber’s play, “Die Kreuzelschreiber”. At the beginning of the third act, one of the characters states: “Whether you are lying six feet deep in the earth beneath the grass or whether you have to face this many more thousand times again — nothing can happen to you — you belong to all of it and all of it belongs to you. Nothing can happen to you. And this was so wonderful that I hollered to all the others around me: Nothing can happen to you . . . Now be joyful, joyful — Nothing can happen to you.” Wittgenstein was struck by this thought, and later described it to Malcolm as a turning point in his attitude towards religion.

The most important objection is that Wittgenstein’s third experience simply refutes, rather than supports, Levi’s interpretation. For the third experience appeals explicitly to divine disapproval. And divine disapproval is precisely what Wittgenstein’s account of language would not remove — even though it made discussion of it meaningless, and even if it had succeeded (as we have seen is doubtful) in removing human disapproval.

For if Wittgenstein conjured up a theory of language and an account of ethics from his unconscious need to deflect human condemnation of his actions, surely his unconscious was ingenious enough to conjure up a philosophy or theology to deflect divine judgement as well!

64 Ludwig Anzengruber: Gesammelte Werke (Stuttgart, 1898), Vol 7, p. 279. See Norman Malcolm’s account in his Memoir, op. cit., p. 70.
Without this second step, his view is hardly the "protective device of incontestable power" that Levi claims it to be.

Levi acknowledges that his argument is problematic, but does not seem aware how problematic it is. We have 1) the fact of Wittgenstein's guilt; 2) his theory of language and account of ethics; 3) the "factually meaningless" yet nonetheless powerful images of God as a terrible judge; 4) the powerful human desire, which Wittgenstein shares and respects, to point to such transcendence. (Levi even suggests that Wittgenstein might have held something like a "cupalological argument" to argue from the fact of his moral corruption to the need for a Last Judgement and a divine judge.) We are apparently asked to believe that Wittgenstein's ethics functions to *assuage* his guilt, whereas his implicit theology and his account of a human tendency to "run up against the limits of language" — which would also, on such an account, have to be part of a reaction formation — work to *aggravate and increase* it. All this is — as a form of psychopathology — within the realm of possibility. But there is no reason to believe it, as it does not form an economical whole. A deeper account of Wittgenstein's psychopathology, uniting these two disparate strains, would be needed before such hypotheses would, individually, have anything to recommend them.

In any case, there is a straightforward alternative explanation that makes much more sense. Wittgenstein's account of ethics was more or less dictated by his theory of language; it was indeed an unintended consequence of it, in the sense explained in the previous section. And the theory of language, in turn, was dictated by the network of thinking that he shared with Russell and the logical positivists. Similar views of ethics were adopted (although without the residual theology) by other philosophers, such as Carnap, who were quite heterosexual. Wittgenstein may well have noticed the limited effect his account of ethics could have in freeing him from the condemnation of his fellow men; and this may account, say, for his explicit mentioning of tastes and preferences in this connection. If this occurred, it could have been of only very limited significance for him. For his guilt continued, and was associated, throughout his life, with images of divine punishment that were not effectively removed by his philosophy.

Levi's attempt to link Wittgenstein's homosexuality to his philosophy focuses on his early work, as represented by the *Tractatus*, and on the "Lecture on Ethics". I could imagine a similar argument being made on the basis of Wittgenstein's later philosophy wherein Wittgenstein
suggests that understanding is rooted in and does not occur without shared practice and a common or shared form of life. Thus members or participants in one practice have no basis for criticizing or for judging good and bad those who engage in other practices. If we consider homosexuality as a "form of life", then such a philosophy also effectively insulates it from the moral criticism of others, although now the protective umbrella is constructed rather differently.

Possibly this aspect of his later philosophy, had he noticed it, would have appealed to Wittgenstein. But once again it is hard to accept the suggestion that he was motivated to construct his position by such a consideration. There are two reasons why. First, he was forced into such a relativistic position by what I have elsewhere called the "Wittgensteinian problematic", by the objective intellectual problem situation in which he found himself. Many other persons who were neither homosexual nor in any serious moral difficulty also found themselves forced by this intellectual problem situation to accept similar relativistic stances.

More important — and this is a fact about Wittgenstein which Levi's entire discussion neglects — all the biographical evidence suggests that Wittgenstein was never much motivated by or afraid of the opinions of other persons. He repeatedly behaved in disregard of ordinary social convention, and appears to have been singularly self-willed and independent. As he expressed the matter in his notebooks: "Lass Dich nicht von dem Beispiel Anderer führen, sondern von der Natur!" That is, "Don't let yourself be led by the example of others, but by nature!"

IV. Wittgenstein As Psychopomp.

"Much of his life will remain forever unknown to his closest friends."

— Fania Pascal

I have rebutted or cast doubt on various attempts to link Wittgenstein's homosexuality and his thought. Now I must attempt to explain the important connection which I do see between the

homosexuality and the man and his influence — a connection which some might not expect.

The connection that I see relates to the fact that Wittgenstein, although not a thinker of great originality, exerted, and continues to exert, immense influence. If one wanted his ideas, one could go to any number of other, clearer, writers. Those who have been influenced by him, particularly those who were close to him (two of his executors and several of his closest students are converts to Roman Catholicism; several other of his closest students are Anglicans), have responded to him as if to a psychopomp, to an anima mundi, a spiritual guide of almost supernatural character, to a shaman, priest and medicine man, to a hermetic figure or spiritus mercurialis — a spirit concealed or imprisoned in matter. Wittgenstein fascinates.67

J. N. Findlay expresses this mood when he writes of Wittgenstein:68 “at the age of 40 he looked like a youth of 20, with a godlike beauty, always an important feature at Cambridge, . . . awesome in its unearthly purity . . . The God received him . . . in an ascetic room, beautiful in its almost total emptiness, where a wooden bowl of fruit on a table made the one note of colour . . . The God was all he had been described as being: he looked like Apollo who had bounded into life out of his own statue, or perhaps like the Norse God Baldur, blue-eyed and fairhaired, with a beauty that had nothing sensual about it, but simply breathed the four Greek cardinal virtues, to which was added a very exquisite kindness and graciousness that bathed one like remote, slightly wintry sunshine . . . what Wittgenstein himself was thinking was of little importance, only much superior to the confusions and half-lights in which most philosophers of his acquaintance lived, despite their very great excellence as men . . . There was . . . an extraordinary atmosphere that surrounded him, something philosophically saintly that was also very distant and impersonal: he was the philosophe Soleil. One had walked in his sunlight but one had not at all been singled out by the Sun . . . the tea one drank with him tasted like nectar.”

For our purposes, three things are important in connection with such responses to Wittgenstein. First, such a response seems to work on the

67 Thus note the ancient, metaphorical meaning of fascinem as membrum virile. Incidentally, it is not only close disciples of Wittgenstein who respond to him in this way: all sorts of persons claim to be followers of Wittgenstein and to do the “sort” of things that he was doing — though they rarely can state what he was doing.
instinctual level; it is archaic, and what C. G. Jung calls archetypal, independent of individual training. Second, in the Pythagorean tradition, and in the alchemical and hermetic writings which probe this response, such a shamanic figure is seen as a sufferer, "the sufferer who takes away suffering," "the wounded wounder who is the agent of healing." Third, in these same ancient traditions and writings — and elsewhere, as in Plato's myth of lost androgynous unity — such a figure is frequently hermaphroditic. Thus for the Neopythagoreans, hermaphroditism is an attribute of deity; so Hermes Trismegistus is said to incorporate the masculine-spiritual with the feminine corporeal, and Hermes Psychopompus is the filius hermaphroditus. One could also mention the divine bisexuality often attributed to Brahma and Siva, to Adam, to Baal and Mithras, to Dionysus and Apollo. Thus what are seen as the two great powers of nature, the masculine and the feminine, are combined in one being. 69

For a human figure, such as Wittgenstein, to have such traits and powers projected on him by his admirers, it is necessary that the homosexuality be there; that it be known or sensed subconsciously by his followers; but that it not be admitted consciously. Indefiniteness is essential: the taboo and the temptation must be there together; both must be exploited. Thus what Drury and Pascal both sensed and recorded — Wittgenstein's noli me tangere and foreignness to sensuality

(and his intense suffering from this) — must be there: so far they told the truth. As did Julian Bell, when he rhymed, in 1930: 70

I pity Ludwig while I disagree,
The cause of his opinions all can see
In that ascetic life, intent to shun
The common pleasures known to everyone.

But equally required, in order for the mystique to hold, is the subconscious awareness that that is not the whole story.

This indefiniteness must also be present in the message of such a figure, particularly in that aspect of it which relates most closely to issues of morality. So it is not surprising that Wittgenstein's doctrine of ethics is so hard to state: that there is so much weighty controversy about what he said — or meant — in saying that what is said in these matters is meaningless . . . and yet of immense importance. As Wittgenstein wrote to Ficker: "My work consists of two parts: the one presented here plus all that I have not written. And it is precisely this second part that is the important one." 71 This of course concerned ethics.

Where everything is obscure — the personality, the sexuality, the content of the thought — anything may be projected. 72 And thus, from his friends and disciples, Wittgenstein rejected all overtures: interpretations of his thinking were rejected emphatically and even

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72 I do not believe that the construction of Wittgenstein is at all restricted to his later disciples in Britain. A similar process seems to have been at work in Vienna with the members of the Vienna Circle. Thus Heinrich Neider writes of "Wittgenstein . . . the halfmythical 'patron saint' of the Vienna Circle . . . I remember that even two years later, during an animated discussion at the philosophers' congress in Prague, a German participant said: 'Herr Wittgenstein, should he be a real person or rather, as I believe, a synthetic figure invented by the Vienna Circle as a mouthpiece to their theses . . . ?'" See Marie Neurath and Robert S. Cohen: Otto Neurath: Empiricism and Sociology (Dordrecht: D. Reidel; 1973), p. 47. In his biography of G. E. Moore, op. cit., p. 9, Paul Levy suggests that Wittgenstein's followers may provide a comparatively rare instance of the "cult of personality" operating within philosophy. See also J. N. Findlay, who writes of Wittgenstein's "magic of personality" and "personal enchantment" in his "My Encounters with Wittgenstein," op. cit.
cruelly. And similarly, "noli me tangere" ruled out in advance most overture-interpretations of his sexuality.

Nothing more is needed to explain the response to the first edition of my book." Thus — as discussed in the first section above — the bluff and coverup, the projection, the naivety. And the pain, affront, and shock. For when this preserve of unnamable privacy was breached, when the details of Wittgenstein’s sexuality were reported — however "neutrally" — the mystery was gone. Then it was "just sex."

I wonder then whether eagerness to prevent such aspects of Wittgenstein’s life from being explored does not stem from some source such as this? With unconscious prudence and savvy, "the "unnamability" of this area is kept safe in order to preserve the power and appeal, the magic, of the man."

73 There is of course more to the explanation than this. Thus any great thinker or artist tends to be romanticized by his followers. Every several years, with remarkable regularity, some outraged doctor or other writes an article denying that Beethoven or Schubert suffered from venereal disease. (See Heuwell Tircuit: "Knocking the 'Great Immortals' Back to Earth," Review, August 9, 1981, p. 17. See also Maynard Solomon: Beethoven (New York: Schirmer Books; 1977), p. 262; and John Reed: Schubert's Final Years). It seems that a heroic effort is made to overcome one's basic distrust of intellectual and artistic effort by making it into a "higher" calling in which the artist must take an elevated role, not prone to the temptations of ordinary mortals. The reverse of the coin here is the tendency to see all artists as libertines.

74 I say "unconscious" prudence; and so it no doubt would have to be. It could not have worked better to the advantage of Wittgenstein's posthumous reputation had it been conscious and deliberate. For by preserving silence about these things, one could avoid affronting the extensive repressed homosexuality and homophobia of American professional academics, and at once titilate and influence them. Hence Wittgenstein's extraordinary influence throughout the arts subjects of American academia. This is not surprising: American children have for years been schooled on the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory Test, which assigns one a high "femininity quotient" if one prefers going to the museum or reading a book to playing football or selling brushes door to door. In the circumstances it is hardly surprising that many American professors in the arts live with the not quite irrevocable fear that they may be not simply homosexual but downright queer.

75 I am grateful to a number of persons who have kindly read drafts of this essay and made helpful comments and criticisms, and who are in no way responsible for the opinions and errors that remain. These include Professors Joseph Agassi, I. C. Jarvie, Peter Munz, Steven S. Schwarzchild, and George Steiner.