

WITTGENSTEIN 1929–31:

CONSERVATISM AND JEWISHNESS

When, at the beginning of 1929, Wittgenstein resolved to live for a time once more in Cambridge and to concern himself again with philosophical problems, the outlines of the thoughts which he was to develop gradually over the next twenty years were by no means clear to him. Although the *Weltanschauung*, the general attitude which pervades his later reflections is clearly present in the manuscript notes that he made at this time, there is here almost no connection between the elements of this general disposition and theoretical argument, no interplay between attitudes and concept-formation. Wittgenstein grappled with problems in the first few months of 1929 in a manner which appears – in the light of what he was later able to achieve – as a directionless wandering about. He was indeed often conscious of this, and it filled him with despair. “Once more in Cambridge. How strange. It sometimes appears to me”, he wrote on the 2nd of February in his notebook, “as if time had been turned back. ... I don’t know what is awaiting me. But something will turn up! If the spirit does not leave me. ... The time here should have been – or should be – in fact a preparation for something. I have to become clear about something” (MS 105, p. 2). And a few days later: “Everything that I am now writing in philosophy is more or less insipid stuff. But I still believe it possible that it should get better” (*ibid.*). “I should like to know”, he wrote in another remark dating from the Spring of 1929, “whether this work is right for me. I’m interested in it, but not inspired. ... Somehow I see my present work as provisional. As a means to an end” (MS 106, p. 4). Or again: “I am continually moving in circles around the problem. Apparently without ever coming any nearer to it” (MS 106, p. 30). Several months pass; Wittgenstein feels himself still to be pursued by doubts, by feelings of directionlessness, uncertainty, which come to expression in a typical manner for example in the dream which he describes in a passage of the 6th of October, immediately followed by the remark: “I’m disgruntled because my work gets me no further. Emptyheadedness” (MS 107, p. 154).

Many of the questions with which Wittgenstein concerned himself at the beginning of 1929 reveal, of course, an obvious continuity both with

problems of the *Tractatus* as also with the fundamental themes of his later writings. These are, above all, certain questions in the foundations of mathematics, Wittgenstein's interest in which – as is well known – had been re-awakened by Brouwer's lecture in Vienna in March 1928. And it is to considerations in the foundations of mathematics which, for example, the following important remark is directed:

I believe that the mathematics of the last century had experienced a period quite peculiarly lacking in instinct, from which it will suffer for a good deal longer. This instinctlessness is connected, I believe, with the decline of the arts, it flows from the same cause (MS 106, p. 253).

It would be wrong, however, to conceive considerations in the philosophy of mathematics as the essential driving force of Wittgenstein's thinking in this period. On the contrary: he finds himself "thrown back on problems of arithmetic" as it were "against his will" (MS 105, p. 19). He sees in arithmetic an "unconquered fortress of the enemy": with this enemy in one's rear one cannot "march into the territory of psychology" (MS 107, p. 39) – and it is precisely this territory that seems to have held Wittgenstein's interest. Thus on the 9th of October he writes in his notebook: "I am conscious that the most magnificent problems are lying in my closest vicinity. But I can't see them, or I can't grasp them" (MS 107, p. 156). And a similar entry from the day following: "I feel today an unusual poverty of problems around me; a sure sign that there lie *before me* the most important and the hardest of problems" (MS 107, pp. 158 f.). His "Freudian resistance to finding the truth" (MS 107, p. 100) seems to have loosened itself only gradually.

The theoretical path followed by Wittgenstein in 1929 was a slow and uncertain one. The next two years however brought decisive insights. Already on the 3th of January 1930 he is confronting the "naive conception of the meaning of a word", which would have it that "in hearing or reading a word one 'presents', 'imagines' [*vorstellt*] its meaning to oneself" (MS 108, p. 61, cf. *Philosophical Remarks* [PR], § 12). His first comparison of the question "what is a word" with the question "what is a chess-piece" appears, it seems, on the 15th of January (MS 107, p. 240, cf. PR § 18), and already on the 19th of May he is talking of "*grammatische Spielregeln*". "Different kinds of chess-pieces: bishops, knights, etc., correspond", he argues, "to different kinds of words" (MS 108, p. 169). And on the next day:

I have hit here upon that method of explaining signs which Frege derided so much.

One could, that is to say, explain words like “knight”, “bishop”, and so on, by giving the rules which relate to these pieces (MS 108, p. 170).

This new conception of the meaning of a word must, of course, bring with it a new conception of believing, thinking, and so on. *Thinking* is, according to a passage from the 29th of June, “the use of symbols” (MS 108, p. 201), and “the thought – if one can talk of such a thing at all – must be something totally familiar” (MS 108, p. 216, entry of July 19). The thought is nothing “ethereal” (*ibid.*), nothing “amorphous”. And it is fundamentally something that can be “observed by everybody”. “One could express this as follows”. Wittgenstein writes, “that in the *thought* there is nothing private” (MS 108, p. 279, entry of July 31). The sense in which the thought must be conceived as something non-private is outlined particularly vividly in a passage from the 25th of August:

If I were to resolve (in my thoughts) to say “abracadabra” instead of “red”, how would it show itself that “abracadabra” stood in place of “red”? How is the position of a word determined? Supposing that I were to replace all the words of my language simultaneously by others, how could I know which word stood in place of which other word? Is it here the ideas [*Vorstellungen*] that remain and hold fixed the positions of the words? As if there were a sort of hook attached to each idea, upon which I hang a word, which would indicate the position? This I can’t believe. I cannot make myself think that ideas have a place in understanding different from that of words (MS 109, pp. 45 f.).

In a strikingly short time, practically in the last days of July 1930, there take shape also those stylistic peculiarities which are so characteristic of Wittgenstein’s later writings: the dialogue and unanswered question, the familiar “*Du*” as a form of address. Each of these had occasionally appeared already in his earlier notes (for example in a passage of January 3, MS 108, p. 56), but it is nevertheless not until the end of July that they become a regular stylistic device. Thus on the 29th of July:

“Yes, *that* is what I expected”. How could you have expected it, when it wasn’t yet there at all? (This misunderstanding contains the entire problem of our reflections and also its solution) (MS 108, pp. 265 f.).

The following passage derives from the 31st of July:

“I thought to myself, he will now come”. – “Yes, you said ‘he is about to come’, but how do I know that you meant that by what you said?” (MS 108, p. 274)

Now one can, after all, ask: “How, then, does it show itself, that he means the picture as a portrait of N.?” – “Well, in that he says that it is”. – “But then how does it show itself that he means that by what he says?” – “In no way at all” (MS 108, p. 275).

This style reflects completely Wittgenstein's theoretical intentions. It must be in the everyday circumstances in which language is used, for example in conversations, that it becomes manifest whether particular philosophical questions or concepts have sense at all. In such situations it will be revealed in a convincing manner that "everything is ... after all simple and familiar to us all" (MS 109, p. 15, entry of August 16), that particular words – for example the word "to mean" – will most readily and naturally allow themselves to be driven back "from their metaphysical to their correct application in the language" (MS 110, p. 34).

If philosophers use a word and inquire into its meaning one has always to ask oneself: is, then, this word as a matter of fact used in this way in the language which has created it // for which it has been created //?

One will then usually discover that it is not so and that the word is used against // in a manner contrary to // its normal grammar. ("Knowledge", "being", "thing") (MS 109, p. 246).

It is not as if the normal – inherited – grammar were somehow capable of being given foundation of its own through special insights; rather it is the foundation of every insight and of every judgement. "To understand calculation in the primary school, a child would have to be a great philosopher; failing that, they have to have exercise, training" (MS 109, p. 138, entry of September 13; cf. *Zettel*, § 703). To say, "this is just how we use language" (MS 109, p. 224) or "this is how I have learned language" (MS 109, p. 286) is to present *ultimate justifications*; the need for further justification has to be conceived as springing from a "misunderstanding of the logic of our language" (MS 109, p. 225). "Teach them to us" – arithmetic or language – "and you have provided them with a foundation" (MS 111, p. 63).

In a similar way the question whether someone "really sees the same colour ... as I" when he sees, for example, blue, also reveals itself as a misunderstanding of the logic of language (MS 109, pp. 298 f.). "Does he really see the same as I when he looks at the sample?" To raise doubts here, Wittgenstein argues, is as nonsensical as the assumption that thoughts are a "secret and blurred process, ... of which we see only indications in language" (MS 109, p. 99). It is only apparently the case

that we cannot know whether two human beings see the same colour when they look at an object. This is nonsense, for by seeing two different colours we mean // understand // something quite different, and in this sense there exist criteria as to whether the two see the same or different colours (MS 109, p. 171).

One is, Wittgenstein stresses, “led into error by a false analogy”, “when one says that ideas or images are private” (MS 153, p. 59, transferred into notebook 110 on 6 July 1931). The question: “how do you know that that which you call red is really the same as that which the other calls red?” is “just as nonsensical” as the question “how do you know that that *is* a red spot?” (MS 109, pp. 196 f.). In order to set forth clearly the senselessness of these and similar questions Wittgenstein, already in 1930, employs the method which later, for example in the *Blue Book*, was to play such a fundamental role: he shows that the actual or assumed function of mental pictures can in every case be fulfilled also by physical pictures. One can

substitute for the process of calling to mind images in thought, another process, say the writing down of signs (or some other process), which performs the same task (MS 109, p. 89).

Someone receives the instruction to look for, say, a yellow flower. One might here wish to suppose (and this is *the* inherited philosophical assumption) that in looking for the flower he carries around with him in his memory an image of the colour yellow, comparing it with each successive flower that he sees. This memory image can of course in principle be replaced by a yellow colour-sample, and the question raised by Wittgenstein is: how will this person know which flower is of the *same* colour as the sample?

It is perhaps most instructive to think that, when we look for the flower with a yellow sample in the hand, then at least the relation of colour-similarity is not present to us in a further image. But rather that with this we are quite contented (MS 110, pp. 277 f.).

But if one can do without the image of colour-similarity, then – leaving aside special cases – the sample of colour, and thus also the mental image, are not required either.

I go looking for the yellow flower. And even if whilst I am walking along an image should appear to me, do I really need it, when I see the yellow flower – or any other? (MS 110, p. 276)

And an example which shows clearly that the mental image can in some cases play *no* role as model:

The command is given: “Imagine to yourself a red circle”. And I do this. How would it be possible that I follow the words in that way? (MS 110, p. 173, written in March or April 1931)

There must come a point where ideas, models, signs or images, no longer serve as supports for action, where the action is its own support.

Already in 1931 Wittgenstein seems completely to be in possession of this decisive insight. And indeed it is clear that the elements that predominate in Wittgenstein's remarks of 1931 are exactly those which were to constitute the groundwork of his later synthesis. In 1931 there were composed the remarks on Frazer, in which Wittgenstein lays so great an emphasis on the programme of *mere description* (MS 110, p. 180), insisting thereby that philosophy

is not allowed to disturb in any way the actual // factual // use of language // what is actually said //, it can in the end only describe it.

For it cannot justify it either. It leaves everything just as it is (MS 110, pp. 188 f.)

– a conception which would not, of course, be capable of being adopted if word-meanings were *independent* of the use of words, if the latter were determined by the former. But such an independence does not exist: "To understand the meaning of a word means to know or understand how it is used" (MS 111, p. 12). It is in 1931 also that Wittgenstein outlines those examples and arguments which are familiar from the opening sections of the *Philosophische Untersuchungen*: the criticism of Augustine's conception of language (MS 111, pp. 15 ff.), the game with building blocks (MS 111, pp. 16 f.), the rejection of the idea that there is something common to all games (MS 111, p. 17, cf. also especially MS 111, pp. 79 ff., where the concept of *family resemblances*, and shortly thereafter the expression itself, are anticipated). The interconnections between these elements do not, of course, immediately meet the eye. Wittgenstein himself indeed notes on the 14th of October 1931 that what he is saying seems on the one hand to become "ever easier to understand, its significance, on the other hand, is ever more difficult to grasp". And the interpretation of these remarks is impeded still more by the fact that, in the time-span here considered, there is no fixed correlation of problems and concepts – that Wittgenstein is continually changing his terminology. (It is, he wrote on the 29th of August 1930, "as though the problem were moving house", MS 109, p. 67.) Thus for example the series of concepts depiction–verification–application–use retains, between 1929 and 1931, its connection with one and the same problem,¹ but this problem is further developed and modified. And thus also the role of *application* and *action* in relation to *understanding* becomes visibly clarified through the concept "plan" (see e.g. MS 109, pp. 81 ff.) – this concept itself however is soon abandoned. Yet these elements do combine

together into a unified whole – if not conceptually, then certainly from the point of view of the underlying general attitude. “Whatever I write”, Wittgenstein remarks in 1930, “is fragments, but he who understands will be able to extract from them a self-contained world-view” (MS 108, p. 152). A self-contained world-view indeed: the world-view of conservatism.

WITTGENSTEIN'S CONSERVATISM

A characterization of Wittgenstein's general attitude as “conservative” makes sense only if, and to the extent that, it points to well-defined theoretical and historical parallels or influences. Conservative thinking is, historically, an extremely heterogeneous formation, and in particular the German so-called neo-conservatism of the 1920s and 1930s with which Wittgenstein's later thought can be most readily compared, differs essentially from, say, the first significant wave of German conservatism which occurred at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries. There are, nevertheless, certain fundamental ideas which are common to both currents, and these ideas are indeed characteristic for most of those theoretical and political movements that have associated themselves, or have been associated, with the term “conservative”.² That these fundamental traits are all of them present in Wittgenstein's later writings – including the manuscripts of 1929–31 – is unmistakable. The *rejection of the rationalistic scheme of explanation* is a guiding idea not only of the later *On Certainty*,³ but also of the commentary to Frazer; the *respect for what exists*, for the *historically given*, is expressed not merely in those programmatic remarks which draw attention to the purely descriptive task of philosophy, but in Wittgenstein's analyses in general, which rest, as a matter of principle, upon the acceptance of the authority of everyday language.

Wittgenstein's later writings, beginning with the manuscripts of 1929–31, imply an image of man which stands in glaring contradiction to the enlightened, liberal view. The concept of the internally or mentally autonomous, rational individual, of the human subject acting in accordance with the light of his reason, sovereign within his own mental world, reveals itself as absurd in the face of the realization that the meaning of a word is not a mental image, but the use to which the word is put; thinking, believing, expecting, hoping, and so on, are not private mental processes; mathematical insight is grounded in exercise, in drill;⁴ every action is

executed, ultimately, without any kind of interpretation of models. Wittgenstein's conservative anthropology employs predominantly negative formulations: it must move, after all, like all conservative theories, within a system of concepts that is in fact alien, that has been borrowed of necessity from the false world-picture to which it is opposed. Thus it is not for any inexplicable, mystical reason that Wittgenstein stands "in struggle with language" (MS 110, p. 273, cf. *Culture and Value* [CV], p. 11), that he must set his hopes on the "inexpressible" (MS 153a, p. 130, cf. CV, p. 16). By 1930, however, that which is inexpressible seems to lie more deeply hidden, to be set further back, than was the case in the *Tractatus*. The historical surroundings of the young Wittgenstein had to some extent preserved elements – for example the still living idea of an established order – which could, as it were, simply be depicted, be pointed out, within a conservative theory. The world in which Wittgenstein lived after the War was altogether different: to someone with the dispositions of an Austrian conservative it could not but have appeared entirely alien.

That Wittgenstein was under the immediate influence of some leading neo-conservative figures – Spengler, Dostoevsky, and almost certainly also Moeller van den Bruck – can be easily shown. The ideas by which he was affected were of course put forward already before 1930, even though, for economic and political reasons, it was at just this time that they became most widely disseminated.⁵ The expression "conservative revolution" occurs already in 1921, in application to Nietzsche and Russian literature, in a work of Thomas Mann.⁶ Dostoevsky's pronouncement – "we are revolutionaries from out of conservatism" – was cited already by Moeller van den Bruck in his introduction to *The Devils* in his German collected edition of Dostoevsky's works.⁷ And it seems to be precisely Dostoevskian ideas, as these were given coinage by Moeller, which served as Wittgenstein's most basic introduction to the intellectual world of neo-conservatism.⁸ That Wittgenstein's later philosophy shows an utter lack of understanding for the conservative values inherent in Western, middle-class forms of life, that his epistemological traditionalism became entirely prejudiced against European ideals, is, then, hardly independent from the detrimental effect Dostoevsky had upon him. Dostoevsky's counterposition of Russia and the degenerate *civilization of the West* is, of course, a recurrent theme also in the work of Spengler, the most influential of the neo-conservative thinkers of the post-War years.

That Spengler had exerted at just this time (i.e. 1930/31) a quite particular influence upon Wittgenstein can be seen clearly from the passages printed in the *Vermischte Bemerkungen*. In the drafts which he made in 1930 of possible forewords to the text now known as *Philosophische Bemerkungen*, Wittgenstein affirms that where the course of "European and American civilization" tears everything along with it, the "value of the individual" is no longer capable of expressing itself in social institutions and in social actions "as it is in the age of a great culture". Culture, Wittgenstein writes,

is like a great organization, assigning to everyone who belongs to it a place where he can work in the spirit of the whole, and his strength can with much justification be measured in terms of this whole. In times of non-culture energies fritter away and the strength of the individual is worn down by opposing forces and frictional resistances... (MS 109, p. 205, cf. CV, p. 6).

There are a number of manifest parallels between certain neo-conservative tendencies of the 20s and 30s and many of Wittgenstein's thoughts in the same period. And it is indeed possible to point to passages where one can speak not merely of parallels but of actual influences upon Wittgenstein's thinking. But the question can be raised as to the extent to which Wittgenstein – as he gradually began to develop the themes and some of the central theses of his later philosophy, and as he found his own characteristic mode of expression – was conscious that, in his theoretical endeavours, he was taking part in a burning contemporary discussion. To what extent was the history of German neo-conservatism in the 1920s and 30s a part of Wittgenstein's own personal fate? The answer to this question can be anticipated in one sentence: Wittgenstein must have been intensely interested in the outcome of at least certain discussions within neo-conservatism – those relating to *the German-Jewish problem*, which at this time both deeply affected Wittgenstein himself, and had a powerful influence upon neo-conservative thinking; those relating to the problems of Jewish character, of Jewish society, and of the relation between Jew and Christian.

CONSERVATISM AND JEWISHNESS

S. M. Bolkosky, in his book *The Distorted Image*, estimates the number of anti-semitic books published in Germany between 1929 and 1932 at over seven hundred, and puts the number of German-Jewish counter-

publications at double this number.⁹ Certain publications within this flood of writings have, of course, an especial significance. One such was the special issue on “The Jewish Question” of the periodical *Süddeutsche Monatshefte* which appeared in September 1930 and which included contributions by both Jewish and anti-semitic authors. One contribution, by the “conservative revolutionary” Ernst Jünger, bearing the title “On Nationalism and the Jewish Question”, is particularly suited as a summary introduction to the themes that here concern us. Jünger pokes fun at “the strange blossomings of well-bred conservative prose which are these days ever more frequently flowing out from Jewish pens. Bitter declamation in defence of culture, witty and ironical attacks upon the bustle of civilization, an aristocratic snobbism, the Catholic farce...” The Jew, Jünger writes, “certainly cannot complain about the attention given to him by those powers who believe themselves to be the representatives of our present-day thinking”. But this attention is, Jünger believes, misplaced. The Jew is after all “not the father, but the son of liberalism – just as, in absolutely everything else having to do with German life, both the good and the bad, he can play no creative role”.¹⁰ These, then, were the issues of theoretical controversy:

- what role was played by the Jew in the victory of “liberalism”, of the bourgeois-capitalist social order?
- are Jews able to participate in a true “culture”, or rather only in a “civilization”?
- does there exist an unbridgeable chasm between Jewish and Christian – and especially Catholic – religion and world-view?
- is the Jew able to be truly creative, or is he always merely imitative?

Richard Wagner, already in the nineteenth century, was able to call Jewishness [Judentum] the “bad conscience of our modern civilization”¹¹ and to affirm:

The Jew in general speaks the modern European languages only as if acquired and not as if he were a native. This rules out for him any capacity to express himself properly and independently within them in accordance with his essence. A language, its expression and its development, is not the work of individuals but of a historical community: only he who has grown up unconsciously within this community can take part also in its creations. ... In [our] language, [our] art the Jew can only repeat what others say, affect the art of others, he cannot compose or create works of art in a manner that would speak authentically.¹²

Thus Otto Weininger, when he spoke of the “necessary lack of genius in the Jew”, of his “lack of any truly rooted and original conviction”,¹³

was only taking up again what had already been often repeated.

Another question which arose repeatedly in the discussions has been mentioned already above. It was the question of the essential, or merely accidental, connection between bourgeois-liberal progress – “civilization” – and Jewishness. This question was of course touched upon also by Spengler. “In the moment when the civilized methods of the European-American world-cities shall have arrived at their full maturity, the destiny of Jewry – at least of the Jewry in our midst (that of Russia is another problem) – will be accomplished”.¹⁴ Spengler characterizes the city-dweller as traditionless; it was, however, equally repeatedly affirmed that this lack of reverence for the traditional does not belong to the *essence* of Jewishness. Thus Rudolf Kaulla for example, in his *Der Liberalismus und die deutschen Juden: Das Judentum als konservatives Element* of 1928, wrote that

Form signifies tradition, the preservation of that which obtains. Form belongs to what one calls the “culture” of a people, formlessness something that does not take this culture seriously. Form has an integrating effect, formlessness dissolves. Formlessness nourishes a falling apart. – And it would almost certainly be impossible to find a more vivid illustration of the truth of these propositions, and thereby also – to put things most simply – of the dangers of “modernism” than the Jewish religion and its fate ... having been caught up by the enlightenment, which has in part mitigated and modernized its old forms, in part set them aside.¹⁵

That Wittgenstein deals strikingly often with the problem of the Jewish mind in the remarks published as the *Vermischte Bemerkungen*, is stressed by G. H. von Wright in his lecture “Wittgenstein in Relation to his Times” which was presented simultaneously with the publication of these *Bemerkungen*, and can indeed be interpreted as an introduction to the remarks which the latter contains. I wish here to enlarge upon von Wright’s discussion of this problem by means of an analysis of the material contained in the *Vermischte Bemerkungen* from the period 1929–31, in the light of its wider context in Wittgenstein’s manuscript.

The first such passage, which appears on p. 72 of notebook 107, reads:

The tragedy consists in this, that the tree does not bend, but breaks. The tragedy is something non-Jewish. Mendelssohn is probably the most untragic of composers (cf. CV, p. 1).

That Wittgenstein is here ascribing to himself the traits which he sees in Mendelssohn is clear, since he adds, immediately after the sentence concerning Mendelssohn, a further sentence in which he talks of his own

untragic nature, of his untragic “ideal” (MS 107, p. 72). And indeed only a few manuscript-pages later he writes:

Mendelssohn is like a man who is only jolly when the people he is with are all jolly anyway, or good, when all around him are good, and not really like a tree which stands fast, as it stands, whatever may take place around it. I too am like that and am inclined to be so (MS 107, p. 120, cf. CV, p. 2).

Mendelssohn is mentioned by Wittgenstein also in several other places: for example on p. 98 of notebook 107, where he speaks of an “Englishness about him” (cf. CV, p. 2), and two years later, in September 1931, on p. 195 of notebook 111, where he writes: “Mendelssohn’s music, where it is perfect, is musical arabesque. This is why we have a sense of embarrassment at his every lack of rigour” (cf. CV, p. 16). And even though this is not perhaps immediately clear from the quoted lines themselves, both of these remarks refer to the Jewishness in Mendelssohn. Does not Weininger, after all, who was so especially highly regarded by Wittgenstein, speak of the “similarity, to which attention has been drawn since Wagner, between the Englishman and the Jew”?¹⁶ And did not Wagner himself, in his essay “On Jewishness in Music”, write that he could feel himself caught up by Mendelssohn only

when there is offered to our phantasy, which seeks only to be more or less entertained, nothing other than the displaying, laying out, and interlacing, of the smoothest and most refined and artistically polished figures, as in the ever-changing stimuli of colour and shape of the kaleidoscope – never, however, where these figures are intended to take the form of deeper and more rigorous sensations of the human heart¹⁷

– an intention which leads, in Mendelssohn, merely to “dissolute and phantastical shadow-images”.¹⁸

Wittgenstein’s last-mentioned remark on Mendelssohn is, at it happens, followed immediately in the manuscript by the passage which follows it in the *Vermischte Bemerkungen*:

In western civilization the Jew is always measured on scales which do not fit him. Many people can see clearly enough that the Greek thinkers were neither philosophers in the western sense nor scientists in the western sense, that the participants in the Olympian Games were not sportsmen and do not fit in to any western occupation. But it is the same with the Jews. And by taking the words of our language as the only possible standards we constantly fail to do them justice. So at one time they are overestimated, at another underestimated. Spengler is right in this connection not to classify Weininger with the philosophers // thinkers // of the West (MS 111, pp. 195 f., cf. MS 153a, p. 122; CV, p. 16).

The idea that the Jew is to be measured not by Western but rather

precisely by oriental standards had in fact become established already in German intellectual history as a characteristic correction or supplementation to the demand for total emancipation and assimilation (as put forward for example by Lessing). It was defended by the dialect poet and folk-author J. P. Hebel, who was also one amongst Wittgenstein's most favoured writers. Thus in his study "Die Juden" Hebel wrote of the "characterizing mark" "which the climate of the land where the Bible was written has impressed upon its children"¹⁹ and which has, through the centuries, by no means disappeared. The Jews have remained entirely true to this "consecration of their homeland", and thus they have "more character and strength", Hebel believes, than the people of the West.²⁰ It seems therefore clear that it was not only as an exponent of the idea that "a great part of our lives ... is a - pleasant or unpleasant - stumbling about through words" and that "most of our wars are ... wars of words",²¹ but also on the strength of his views on Jewishness, that Hebel may have captured Wittgenstein's interest.

Now the reference to Spengler in the remark analyzed above clearly relates to that passage in the *Untergang des Abendlandes* where Spengler speaks of three Jewish saints of the last centuries - "which can be recognized as such only through the colour-wash of Western thought-forms".²² He refers, in particular, to Otto Weininger

whose moral dualism is a purely Magian conception and whose death in a spiritual struggle of essential Magian experience is one of the noblest spectacles ever presented by a Late religiosity. Something of the sort Russians may be able to experience, but neither the Classical nor the Faustian soul is capable of it.²³

The concept of a "Jewish saint" occurs in fact also in Weininger's own work (albeit in a negative sense: "In the Jew, almost as much as in the Woman, good and evil are not differentiated from each other; there is certainly no Jewish murderer, but not either is there such a thing as a Jewish saint",²⁴ and indeed again in Wittgenstein: "Amongst Jews 'genius' is found only in the holy man. Even the greatest of Jewish thinkers is no more than talented. (Myself for instance)" (MS 154, p. 16; CV, p. 18). These sentences occur at the beginning of that remarkably instructive paragraph in which Wittgenstein speaks of his "merely reproductive" thinking and of "Jewish reproductivity" in general, providing a list of thinkers who had exerted an influence upon him. This paragraph, as it appears in the notebook 154, is connected directly to those remarks by which it is followed also in the *Vermischte Bemerkun-*

gen (CV, pp. 18–20). Almost immediately after this series of entries there follows the remark concerning the Jewishness in Rousseau (MS 154, p. 21; CV, p. 20), with a further chain of reflections, relating to the history of the Jews in Europe – and including Wittgenstein’s reference to the inadequate “rigour” of Mendelssohn.

The cause of this interest on Wittgenstein’s part in the Jewish mind and in the peculiarities of the Jewish character seems to have been a deeply personal one. By this is meant not so much the fact of his own partially Jewish extraction, but much rather the circumstance that – to his distress – he believed himself to have detected in his own personality, as it seemed, those traits which had been held in the literature – for example in Weininger’s *Sex and Character*, a work whose subject matter was of the deepest personal significance to Wittgenstein – to be precisely characteristic of the Jews. The significance of this problem of his own Jewishness can be gauged, for example, by the dream which he describes in an entry in his notebook of the 1st of December 1929. The central character in this dream is an evil man, who had disowned his Jewish descent. His name is given by Wittgenstein alternatively as “*Vert sagt*” and “*Vert sag*”, but is written also as “*Verzagt*” and interpreted by Wittgenstein as “*verzagt*” (disheartened). There is, however, a more obvious interpretation, which is nevertheless avoided by Wittgenstein: that he (who is not of course *versagt*: betrothed) is worried by the fact that as a human being and as a philosopher he has *versagt* (failed), and that it is *versagt* (denied) to him, as a Jew, that he should create a decent and profound work. – After this dream, almost a year goes by before the theme of Jewishness is once again mentioned by Wittgenstein in his writings. In the meantime he has made decisive theoretical advances, and completed the manuscript of a book which, although (or indeed *because*) it has been written by a Jew, is not adapted to “the current of European civilization” (MS 109, p. 206; CV, p. 6).

Wittgenstein’s draft foreword to this book, from which these words have been extracted, derives from the 6th of November 1930. One day earlier Wittgenstein had entered into his notebooks the passages concerning Renan’s *Histoire du Peuple d’Israël* (MS 109, pp. 200–202) which have been published in the *Vermischte Bemerkungen* (CV, pp. 5 f.). In the first of these passages there is so much that recalls the commentary to Frazer, that it does not come immediately to light: although Wittgenstein speaks here of primitive man and primitive peoples he is in fact referring to the ancient *Jewish* people. Had he wanted to concern himself simply

with primitive peoples and customs he then would certainly not have chosen Renan as his scientific reading matter. His driving motive seems much rather to have been a personal and subjective interest in that which was Jewish – as does indeed become clear from the second passage, which follows immediately after the first in the manuscript also: “What Renan calls the ‘bon sens précoce’ of the semitic races (an idea which had occurred to me too a long time ago) is their *unpoetic* mentality, which heads straight for what is concrete. This is characteristic of my philosophy”.²⁵ Now, however much Wittgenstein may have found to disagree with in Renan’s elucidations, he must nevertheless have found the perspective in which Renan set the Jewish problem to be of profound interest. In the foreword to his book Renan had characterized “the founders of Christianity” as “direct descendants of the prophets”,²⁶ and had acknowledged the opposition between Christianity and the “liberal rationalism of the Greeks”: “Christianity will leave behind ineradicably a trace, and liberalism will no longer rule the world alone”.²⁷ “The history of the Jews and of Christianity”, he goes on,

have been the joy of a full eighteen centuries, and even though half conquered by Greek rationalism they still possess an astonishing power for ethical betterment. The Bible in its different forms remains, in spite of everything, the great book, the comforter of mankind. It is not impossible that the world, in becoming exhausted by the repeated declarations of the bankruptcy of liberalism will become once more Judeo-Christian...²⁸

As had been mentioned already, Wittgenstein’s remarks on Renan are then followed by sketches for a foreword – entered into his notebooks on the 6th and 7th of November (CV, pp. 6 f.) – in which Wittgenstein distances himself from Western “civilization”, and on the 8th of November he writes that most familiar version of the foreword which was published in the *Philosophische Bemerkungen*. Thus his thoughts on the Jewish spirit on the one hand, and his remarks on culture and civilization (i.e. his most directly conservative remarks) on the other hand, are connected inseparably together. And in his manuscripts the topic of Jewishness, around 1930, is bound up in turn with themes – for example with the ideas of the fundamental role of common sense and of concreteness – which will permeate his later writings.

Wittgenstein did not, however, have a comprehensive or coherent conception of Jewish history, or of the Jewish inheritance, the Jewish character and intellect. His references are, in general, impressionistic in form, having no special claims to validity (as when he says, for example,

that “the Jew is a wasteland, beneath the thin layer of rock there lie however the fiery-flowing masses of the spirit”, MS 153a, p. 161, cf. CV, p. 13). It would be mistaken to see in Wittgenstein’s later work the incorporation of any definite current of thought that would normally be conceived as traditionally Jewish. Nevertheless Wittgenstein’s interest in Jewishness is not merely a psychological or biographical fact. It can, first of all, help to explain the interconnections which obtain between his later work and German neo-conservatism. But more profoundly, considered from the perspective of religious typology, one recognizes that his thought does not simply exhibit strongly *Catholic* traits, as was the case with neo-conservatism in general, but rather precisely those traits which are *common* to Catholic and Jewish thought, but alien to Protestantism, in particular to Lutheranism. It would perhaps be not incorrect to turn back, at this point, to the already mentioned special issue of the *Süddeutsche Monatshefte*. Here the fundamental characteristics of the Jewish religion were presented by Leo Baeck. This religion is, Baeck wrote,

a religion of commandment and of the deed. ... The word, even the word of confession, and the expression of faith in general, has less weight within it than does action.

To speak of God

is only to attempt to make the inexpressible capable of expression. This ultimate futility is sensed with such an intensity that one covers over with silence the ancient word for the eternal God. For him who seeks to find his way on this earth, it is only the deed that fulfils God’s command, that becomes a manifestation of Him.

Jewish religiousness is a “religiousness of the deed”, and “wherever a Jewish community has preserved the old forms of life”, there exist

manifold customs and practices, extending into the most minute, of which he who perceives them from the outside must suppose that they conceal and strangle religion, and of which he who possesses and practises them can learn that they consecrate everyday life.²⁹

It is known, however, that the Catholic Church too declares faith to be insufficient, and accordingly makes that which is good dependent not upon faith alone, but upon its becoming proved through deeds – where the Protestant conception recognizes as good works only those deeds which, as is said, flow from out of the living faith. Wittgenstein thus shows, in fact, that the Protestant, in particular Lutheran, conception *must* be false. It is impossible, he shows, to speak meaningfully of intentions, of purposes, of willing and believing – outside, that is, a context of deeds, customs and practices.

- ¹⁵ This is the point that Wittgenstein constantly makes in his comments on Frazer.
- ¹⁶ *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Philosophy and Language*, pp. 15 f.
- ¹⁷ *Philosophical Grammar*, p. 96.
- ¹⁸ *The Blue and Brown Books*, New York: Harper & Row, 1960, p. 3.
- ¹⁹ Fania Pascal, *op. cit.*, pp. 33 ff.
- ²⁰ *Philosophical Investigations*, Part I, § 433. This passage occurs practically word-for-word in the *Philosophical Grammar*, on p. 133.
- ²¹ *Philosophical Investigations*, Part I, § 85.
- ²² *Ibid.*, § 186.
- ²³ *Ibid.*, § 198.
- ²⁴ It is in this connection that the term "inexorability" emerges in 1937. Cf. *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1964, Part I, §§ 4 and 118.
- ²⁵ *Philosophical Investigations*, Part I, § 242.
- ²⁶ *On Certainty*, § 156.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, § 493.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, §§ 47, 664.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, § 94.
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*, § 449.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, § 312.
- ³² *Ibid.*, § 344.
- ³³ *Ibid.*, § 559.
- ³⁴ Fann, *op. cit.*, p. 35. From the "Autobiography" of Rudolf Carnap.
- ³⁵ *Philosophical Investigations*, Part I, § 18.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, "Preface".
- ³⁷ *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, Part I, Appendix II, § 4.

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- ¹ Cf. Anthony Kenny, *Wittgenstein*, Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1973, pp. 139 f.
- ² Compare e.g. the description of the "enduring kernel" of conservatism by Klaus Epstein in his *The Genesis of German Conservatism*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1966, cf. esp. pp. 13–16, or Gerd-Klaus Kaltenbrunner's analysis of what one could call a *conservative anthropology* (Kaltenbrunner, "Der schwierige Konservatismus", in: Kaltenbrunner, ed., *Rekonstruktion des Konservatismus*, Freiburg i.B.: Rombach, 1972, cf. esp. pp. 45 f.), or indeed Karl Mannheim's "Das konservative Denken", *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik* 57 (1927).
- ³ Cf. Rudolf Haller, "Über das sogenannte Münchhausentrilemma", *Ratio* 16 (1974), pp. 115 and 126 f.
- ⁴ Thus a number of years later Wittgenstein wrote: "Counting (and that means: counting like *this*) is a technique that is employed daily in the most various operations of our lives. And that is why we learn to count as we do: with endless practice, with merciless exactitude; that is why it is inexorably insisted that we shall all say 'two' after 'one', 'three' after 'two', and so on" (*Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, Part I, § 4). This conception of mathematical insight and of the ways in which

arithmetic is learned, is rooted in the same psychological attitude as Wittgenstein's general conception of education. The latter may be illustrated, for example, by his remark: "When you say NO to a child, you should be like a wall and not like a door", cf. K. E. Tranøy, "Wittgenstein in Cambridge 1949–51. Some Personal Recollections", in: *Essays on Wittgenstein in Honour of G. H. von Wright – Acta Philosophica Fennica* 28/1–3, 1976, p. 15.

⁵ As Klemens von Klemperer writes: The year 1928 "was the last year of the prosperity which had marked German economy since 1924. ... It was quite clearly an economic and political crisis. ... These were the days when Moeller van den Bruck was read, reread, reedited in popular editions, and all but canonized, when Spengler was eagerly debated... The neo-conservatives were the intellectuals of the Right who pointed toward the long-range spiritual roots of the crisis". (Klemperer, *Germany's New Conservatism: Its History and Dilemma in the Twentieth Century*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1957, pp. 125 and 118 ff.)

⁶ Thomas Mann, "Russische Anthologie", in: Mann, *Rede und Antwort: Gesammelte Abhandlungen und kleine Aufsätze*, Berlin: S. Fischer, 1925, p. 236.

⁷ F. M. Dostojewsky, *Die Dämonen*, R. Piper, 1921, pp. XVIII f.

⁸ Cf. my essay "Wittgenstein's Later Work in Relation to Conservatism", in: Brian McGuinness, ed., *Wittgenstein and His Times*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982, pp. 49 ff.

⁹ Bolkosky, *The Distorted Image: German Jewish Perceptions of Germans and Germany, 1918–1935*, New York: Elsevier, 1975, p. 49.

¹⁰ Ernst Jünger, "Über Nationalismus und Judenfrage", *Süddeutsche Monatshefte* 27 (Sept. 1930), pp. 843 f.

¹¹ Wagner, "Das Judentum in der Musik" (1850), in: Wagner, *Gesammelte Schriften und Dichtungen in zehn Bänden* (ed. W. Golther), Berlin: Deutsches Verlagshaus, n.d., vol. V, p. 85.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 70 f.

¹³ Weininger, *Geschlecht und Charakter: Eine prinzipielle Untersuchung*, 25th ed., Wien: Braumüller, 1923, pp. 431 and 425.

¹⁴ Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, vol. II, p. 323.

¹⁵ Leipzig: Duncker und Humblot, p. 37.

¹⁶ Weininger, *op. cit.*, p. 422.

¹⁷ Wagner, *loc. cit.*, pp. 79 f.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

¹⁹ J. P. Hebel, *Werke*, Karlsruhe: 1847, vol. III, p. 207.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 214.

²¹ Quoted in Heidegger, *Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens*, Frankfurt/M.: Klostermann, 1983, p. 142.

²² Spengler, *loc. cit.*, vol. II, p. 321.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 322.

²⁴ Weininger, *op. cit.*, p. 411.

²⁵ The concern for what is concrete involves relying on examples instead of on a general argument. An entry Wittgenstein set down in his notebook in April 1932 is relevant here: "Ich weiß nicht ob ich es je aufgeschrieben habe, daß ich die Methode, einer grammatischen Betrachtung // einer Betrachtung // eine Anzahl Beispiele

vorzusetzen // voranzustellen // in der Mittelschule von einem Professor namens Heinrich Groag (einem Juden) gelernt habe // ... daß ich die Methode, eine sprachliche Betrachtung mit einer Gruppe von Beispielen zu begründen... //" (MS 113, p. 371).

²⁶ E. Renan, *Geschichte des Volkes Israel*, transl. E. Schaelsky, Berlin: Cronbach, 1894, vol. I, p. 3.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

²⁹ Leo Baeck, "Die jüdische Religion in der Gegenwart", *Süddeutsche Monatshefte* 27 (Sept. 1930), pp. 830 f.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 3

¹ "In establishing the system of science", Hempel wrote, "there is a conventional moment... even the singular statements which we adopt, which we regard as true, depend upon which of the formally possible systems we choose. — Our choice is logically arbitrary, but the large number of possibilities for choosing is practically restricted by psychological and sociological factors, as particularly Neurath emphasizes. ... How do we learn to produce 'true' protocol statements? Obviously", writes Hempel referring to Carnap but here in fact going further than Carnap did, "by being conditioned. ... we may say that young scientists are conditioned ... in their university courses... Perhaps the fact of the general and rather congruous conditioning of scientists may explain to a certain degree the fact of a unique system of science" (Carl G. Hempel, "On the Logical Positivists' Theory of Truth", *Analysis* 2, 1935, pp. 52, 56 ff.).

² Rudolf Haller, *Fragen zu Wittgenstein und Aufsätze zur Österreichischen Philosophie*, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1986, pp. 130 ff.

³ Thus e.g. in Mach's philosophy the role of *tradition*, as regards society in general and science in particular, is, characteristically, depicted in an overwhelmingly negative manner. Handed-down patterns, Mach suggests, "are excellent for soldiers, but they will not fit heads" (Ernst Mach, *Popular Scientific Lectures*, transl. by Thomas J. McCormack, La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1986, p. 369). Schools should not "select the persons best fitted for being drilled" (*ibid.*, p. 370) and thereby suppress the "powerful judgment" which "would probably have grown up [in children] if they had learned nothing" (*ibid.*, p. 367). The "aim of instruction" should be "simply to economize on experience" (*ibid.*, p. 191). Even though it is a fact that in science "the majority of the ideas we deal with were conceived by others, often centuries ago" (*ibid.*, p. 196), this does not, according to Mach, represent an essential feature of cognition. It amounts only to an "exquisite economy" (*ibid.*, p. 198): each individual could, in principle, think out everything for himself.

⁴ This is in fact confined to three pages in Rudolf Carnap, "Erwiderung auf die vorstehenden Aufsätze von E. Zilsel und K. Duncker", *Erkenntnis* 3 (1932/33). And even here Carnap does not seem to realize the inherent absurdity of the idea of a single individual bringing into existence a scientific theory (cf. *ibid.*, p. 180). Carnap even suggests that it would be an empirical question whether systems brought into existence in this way will dovetail with our own. Science, for Carnap, is not an