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**Family Resemblances: Ludwig Wittgenstein as a Jewish Philosopher**

The admonition to silence with which Wittgenstein ended the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1922) also marks the starting point for the emergence of his Jewish philosophical voice. Karl Kraus provides an instructive contrast: as a writer well known to Wittgenstein, Kraus's outspoken and aggressive ridicule of "jüdeln" or "mauscheln" –the actual or alleged pronunciation of German with a Jewish or Yiddish accent – defined a "self-fashioning" of Jewish identity – from German and Hebrew in this case – that modeled false alternatives in philosophic terms.<sup>1</sup> Kraus presented Wittgenstein with an either-or choice between German and Jewish identity, while engaging in a witty but also unwitting illumination of the interplay between apparently exclusive alternatives that were linguistically influenced by the other's voice. As Kraus became a touchstone for German Jewish writers from Franz Kafka to Walter Benjamin and Gershom Scholem, he also shed light on the situation that allowed Wittgenstein to develop his own non-essentialist notion of identity, as the term "family resemblance" emerged from his reevaluation of the discourse around Judaism. This transition from *The False Prison*, as David Pears calls Wittgenstein's move from the *Tractatus* to the *Philosophical Investigations*, was also a transformation of the opposition between German and Jewish "identities," and a recovery of the multiple differences from which such apparently stable entities continually draw in their interconnected forms of life.<sup>2</sup>

"I'll teach you differences," the line from *King Lear* that Wittgenstein mentioned to M. O'C. Drury as "not bad" as a "motto" for the *Philosophical Investigations*, in this way represents Wittgenstein's assertion of a German Jewish philosophic position. In the late Wittgenstein, "intermediate members" [*Zwischenglieder*] became crucial to his new philosophical method of analyzing "language games." In this new practice, the discovery of linguistic usages that defied exclusive alternatives defined a non-essentialist notion of identity. Wittgenstein's innovation also bears comparison to Franz Rosenzweig, as his creation of a version

of philosophy in which openness to the infinite potential of linguistic difference gives the concept of revelation a practical human form.<sup>3</sup> And like Walter Benjamin, who concerned himself with the “medial itself” in his translation-centered theory of 1916, Wittgenstein discovered the philosophic potential revealed by “language games,” in which aspects of meaning disclosed related but non-identical meanings inhabiting the same entities.<sup>4</sup> To make these discoveries, Wittgenstein had to come to terms with inadequate notions of Jewish identity in his period. Enabled by the terms of his dilemma, Wittgenstein transformed them into the breakthrough notion of “family resemblance,” conceiving of identity in a non-essential and porous form that can be discovered in the practical history of German and Jewish language as it was used. In the process, Wittgenstein became a Jewish philosopher in a manner that Hilary Putnam suggests: a thinker who re-discovered the medial zone of contact between what had been considered diametrically opposed identities – teaching a Jewish openness to difference as a way of life.<sup>5</sup>

### *A Jewish Philosopher and his Origins*

Attitudes toward German Jewish language presented a “heads I win, tails you lose” set of alternatives in Wittgenstein’s period. This bind was well suggested in the restrictive word “tangle” or “*Knäuel*” he used retrospectively in his notebooks to describe the constraints that anti-Jewish prejudice imposed.<sup>6</sup> The philosopher who wished to talk about his Jewish origins – as Wittgenstein did in his “confessions” to his friends in the late 1930s – faced a poor set of linguistic choices, defining a dilemma whose constitutive elements would ultimately define an exit from their confinement, when seen in different terms.<sup>7</sup> Identification as a Jew for Wittgenstein meant making one of two equal and opposite moves in the act of self-definition, and each extreme was initially untenable for him in both human and philosophic terms. Secrecy in the form of silence was the first alternative: failing to mention that three of his four grandparents were of Jewish background, Wittgenstein knew, allowed him to benefit in practical terms in an English environment in which, as his “confessor” Fania Pascal told him, the English were “shrewd” at ferreting out Jews with suspicion and prejudice.<sup>8</sup> The problem with silence thus became an ethical one for Wittgenstein, especially with the declaration of the Nuremberg

Laws in 1935, placing Jews like himself in Germany under an increasing disadvantage that his silence seemed to escape. The conclusion of the *Tractatus*, moreover, was intended to be ethical in import when initially drafted during WW I. “What we cannot speak about, we must pass over in silence” in the sense of silence about his Jewish background by 1937 had produced a suspect outcome: exempting a philosopher who made no distinction between language and ethics from the lot others, since silence also amounted to a mode of unethical escape.<sup>9</sup>

Wittgenstein therefore became a philosopher who radically revised Jewish stereotypes. The supposed “*Verstecktheit*” or cunning secrecy of the Jews, even as a survival strategy during “their long persecution,” he wrote in 1931, was “certainly not true,” even if this “tendency” [*Neigung*] might be seen as effective.<sup>10</sup> More deeply, silence also meant the unethical shunning of a burden carried by others with whom he shared a “family resemblance,” to use what Hans Sluga has called an initially “defensive” term from the *Philosophical Investigations*.<sup>11</sup> The problem was one of overlapping alternatives without identity: the silence that avoided persecution validated the very stereotypes about Jewish expression that the Wittgenstein of 1931 declared to be “*unwahr*” or untrue. At the same time, the opposite alternative to silence construed as secrecy – speaking openly and publicly as a Jew – was an equally losing proposition for Wittgenstein, especially given attitudes toward homosexuality in his era, reinforced by Otto Weininger, whom Wittgenstein felt could be a source of insight, if read with a negative sign in front of the text.<sup>12</sup> The Jewish “*Tier*” or “animal” discussed by the philosopher in his notebook of 1931 – “as we may say this or that animal has escaped extinction only because of its capacity or ability to conceal itself” – was thus liable to be falsely named whatever terms were used: an example of what Walter Benjamin meant in 1916 by his observation that if nature could speak, its expression would be one of mourning.<sup>13</sup> The Jewish “animal” imagined by Wittgenstein was in this way susceptible to what Benjamin called “over-naming,” even through silence. Lamentable stereotypes could be applied to Jewish linguistic expression in either case, of the sort that Karl Kraus was so adept at fashioning into versions of the Jewish self: a “nonsense,” to use the terms of the *Tractatus*, that silence, as the 1930s showed Wittgenstein in no uncertain terms, would only reinforce.<sup>14</sup>

The path out of this dilemma was marked by a tendency to discover a new approach in the very terms in which Wittgenstein’s thought seem

confined. The “*Knäuel*” of “hiding” [*Verstecktheit*], on the one hand, and stereotypes on the other provide the elements that expanded the concept of identity for Wittgenstein.<sup>15</sup> The constricting tangle of silence and false naming began to model a more plural model of overlapping differences, in which identity is comprised of multiple strands. The transition from “*Knäuel*” to a model of personal and conceptual identity comprised of multiple filiations, whose different threads constitute the same entity, was a gradual one for Wittgenstein, well captured in Benjamin’s conception of an emergence from “*Verstummen*.” For Benjamin as for Wittgenstein, such “muteness” is not a dearth but a plentitude of meaning – a significance that awaits the implicit name that will allow a specific phenomenon’s differences to find accurate expression, and hence to be redeemed. In Benjamin’s terms, “the deepest linguistic reason for all melancholy [*Traurigkeit*], and (from the point of view of the thing) for all deliberate muteness [*Verstummens*]” is the falsity of the name in respect to the multiple meanings of what longs to be named.<sup>16</sup> Such “deliberate muteness” depicts Jewish identity, like anything else of great significance, as waiting for its fullness of meaning to find expression in a name in which the differing strands of experience would be woven anew. Rather than pulling the threads of a definition tight into the all or nothing game of essence or nonsense, where “nature” becomes brittle and closed, Wittgenstein sought to express Jewish and other identities in a way that allowed their differences to be understood as finding expression in inter-related forms.

Wittgenstein’s philosophical method thus meant viewing the constricting strands that attempted to define the Jewish “*Tier*” or animal in a more differentiated light. The word “*Knäuel*” that means “tangle” in German can also be used to mean “bundle” in English terms: a word that serves as a retrospective alternative to “family resemblance,” which Wittgenstein would introduce to reconsider the project of essential definition. In 1948, “*Knäuel*” shows us Wittgenstein looking back at how his concept of “family resemblance” emerged, as the concern with Jewish and other forms of non-essential identity that remained silent in the *Tractatus* found a form of philosophic speech. “When you can’t unravel a tangle [*Knäuel*],” as Wittgenstein writes, “the most sensible [*das Gescheiteste*] thing is for you to recognize this [*das einzusehen*]; and the most upstanding [*anständig*] thing, to admit it [*Anti-Semitism*].” While some readers assume that Wittgenstein here refers to his use of anti-Semitic motifs in

his Jewish reflections, the rest of his word choice suggests otherwise. His use of “*gescheit*” or “sensible,” a word that carries the sense of “clever” in English, suggests a far more positive reading of the Jewish “*Tier*” or animal. The Grimm *Wörterbuch* provides an entire section of German usages of “*gescheit*” as pertaining to “*Thieren*” or animals: here, the sense conveyed is of “clever” beasts such as “dogs” or “foxes” who use their wits to escape the plots of their human captors, who are sometimes portrayed in Christian terms.<sup>17</sup> The Jewish “animal” or “*Tier*” in Wittgenstein follows this pattern of an intelligence that performs a similar escape from essential definition, with “anti-Semitism” signifying the conditions of discourse in which this human animal finds itself described. To be “*gescheit*” or “clever,” in this animal sense, is therefore crucial only by admitting the “*Knäuel*” or tangle of confining definitions of the Jews to philosophic analysis. In the process, such “*Tiere*” or animals discover the very terms in which they are caught to constitute a “bundle:” not a stick or a knot, but a mutually constituting group of differing characteristics from which identities are formed.

Wittgenstein’s analysis of the “*Knäuel*” or “tangle” of discourse about Jewish identity thus displays the intellectual material from which his notion of “family resemblance” emerged. “What you must *not* do,” as Wittgenstein wrote in 1948 about transforming such limited perceptions into new insights, “is clear in particular cases.”<sup>18</sup> Silence in the later Wittgenstein therefore lacks any “mystical” sense it retained from the *Tractatus*, and is replaced in his thought with the notion of “intermediate members,” whose various strands are gradually revealed along a continuum of more and less common traits.<sup>19</sup> The “*Knäuel*” thus becomes the material from which a less restrictive version of the concept is born in his thought. Wittgenstein’s reflections on Jewish identity thus enabled “family resemblance” and its notion of shared similarities as constitutive of identity to emerge, as the opposed terms of his earlier dilemma marked out the space in which the anti-essentialist opening of his later philosophy occurs. “Family resemblance” as a term for identity – a “family” of similarities that “overlap and criss-cross in the same way” thus conceives of conceptual unity as an activity with specific rules that are learned: “And I shall say: ‘games’ form a family.” In the place of “*Knäuel*,” the *Investigations* discovers these connections between discrete *aspects* of a name or identity as a form of strength, defining “family resemblance” as similar to the way we “twist fibre on fibre” to form identities: “the strength

of the thread does not reside in the fact that some one fibre runs through its whole length, but in the overlapping of many fibres” instead.<sup>20</sup>

Wittgenstein’s philosophic encounter with inadequate terms to define the Jewish “*Tier*” or animal resemble Kafka’s procedure for liberating the multiple meanings of Jewish and other forms of human identity. The talking animal of Kafka’s “Report to an Academy” of 1917, “Red Peter” the talking ape, calls this ability to transform the opposed terms of a limiting dilemma into a new conceptual solution: a “way out.”<sup>21</sup> Like Wittgenstein’s, Kafka’s innovation in his “animal stories” resulted from his ability to transform terms specific to anti-Jewish prejudice – in Kafka’s case, related to “dogs” and “apes” – by giving such figures all the attributes of enlightened and skeptical humanity. At the same time, Kafka’s figures never lose their animal traits, challenging us to rethink the accepted difference between the animal and the human – and the Jewish and other “national” boundaries such differences are used to anchor. The reader or philosophical interlocutor is thereby encouraged to discover the “continuum,” as one philosopher puts it, or the intermediate zone across which “family resemblances between such apparently discrete concepts as “human” and “animal,” or “German” and “Jewish” can be reconceived.<sup>22</sup> The “craving for generality,” as Wittgenstein wrote in his preliminary study for the *Philosophical Investigations*, produced “philosophical confusions” by ignoring this zone of meaning, or consider its articulate expressions to be crude animal sounds – when it was in fact philosophical language that was unreflective and unrefined.<sup>23</sup> Philosophy’s “primitive” notions were in fact not *primitive* or original enough to capture such these differential and formative strands: constituting the multiple meanings that interrelated language games brought to speech.

In Wittgenstein’s terms, the Jewish philosopher must re-name the animals, by rediscovering earlier forms of our names for “things.” Where Jewish thinkers faced the false choice between the “aping” of pre-existing concepts and silence, Wittgenstein accorded a positive – and critical – value to the “reproductive” or imitative powers that had been seen as the limiting nature of Jewish thought.<sup>24</sup> “I don’t believe I have ever invented a line of thinking,” he therefore writes in this same series of reflections: “I have always taken one over from someone else.” Here, Wittgenstein re-defines the motif of “Jewish reproductiveness” [*Jüdischer Reproduktivität*] as what we would now call “positionality.” The Jewish philosopher, Wittgenstein suggests, must first engage in a

“*Gedankenbewegung*,” or “movement of thought,” that explores limiting terms that confine Jewish expression: “in western civilization the Jew is always measured on scales which do not fit him [...] By taking the words of our language as the only possible standard we constantly fail to do them justice.”<sup>25</sup> To call himself a “reproductive” thinker thus redefined return to origin as the gold standard of philosophy – “we aren’t pointing to a fault when we say this,” Wittgenstein wrote – redefining the task of philosophy to rediscover more original names for differences of meaning that were not immediately transparent: “if someone can believe in God with complete certainty, why not in Other Minds?” [*andere Seele*].<sup>26</sup> In declining to accept singular originality as his “talent” – “even the greatest of Jewish thinkers is no more than talented. (Myself, for instance)” – Wittgenstein claims his position as a philosopher who engages in what he calls “my work of clarification,” defining his analysis of linguistic usage as the attempt to recover the deep “music” of words so that their full meaning can be heard.<sup>27</sup>

Wittgenstein’s “way out” therefore first meant contesting the distortions or “*Unförmigkeiten*” that pre-occupy his reader’s “own thinking” [*eigenes Denken*], which, as it turns out, do not “belong” to the reader at all. As Jews like himself were subject to such disfiguring conceptions, Wittgenstein saw the task of the Jewish philosopher as recuperating the notion of the re-productive, by thinking about “primary” forms of language in an original and different way:

It might be said, rightly or wrongly [*ob es nun stimmt oder nicht*] that the Jewish mind [*der jüdische Geist*] does not have the power to produce even the tiniest blade of flower or grass; its way is rather to make a drawing of the flower or blade of grass that has grown in the soil of another’s mind and put it in a comprehensive picture. We aren’t pointing to a vice [*Laster*] when we say this and everything is all right as long as that remains fully clear [*so lange das nur völlig klar bleibt*].<sup>28</sup>

That Wittgenstein can appear in thrall to “reproductive” notions of a “Jewish mind” is a partial consequence of his method. In fact, Wittgenstein could more accurately be described as a rooting out the notion of any “original” German or Jewish essence, establishing his “talent” as the genial capacity to see and accept difference and what Walter Benjamin called translation – a form of imitation with respect for difference – as the theological origin of human speech. The Jewish philosopher, Wittgenstein suggests, bears a different “Last” as a human animal, a burden that becomes the gift of

becoming “reproduktiv” in a way that is no “*Laster*” or vice. The Jewish philosopher, in Wittgenstein’s terms, must first re-picture the notion of “original” ideas: re-capture, by redefining, the imprisoning “picture” which holds that “blades of grass,” or even the “tiniest flower,” could spring from the “soil” of any individual mind. Origin is therefore not the goal of Wittgenstein’s later philosophy, but a re-envisioning of the notion of any singular grasp of phenomena. Wittgenstein revised this notion that “*essence* is expressed by grammar,” in which it is the encounter with different voices that allows original meanings to emerge and to thrive.<sup>29</sup>

*Re-Naming the Animals:*

*Wittgenstein and the Jewish Philosophy of Language*

Like Kafka, Wittgenstein was therefore opposed to any Freudian “sublimation” or [*Sublimierung*] or “subliming,” as the standard translation of the *Philosophical Investigations* has it, of “the signs themselves,” in the philosophical case, by assuming a “pure intermediary space” [*reines Mittelwesen*] between “propositional signs and the *facts*,” clarity about the way words link up with the world, he argued, could be achieved only by attaining “*Übersichtlichkeit*” or “perspicuity” on this fundamental problem of the philosophy of language.<sup>30</sup> That synoptic perspective, in turn, would practically abandon the notion of an overarching logic that the grammar of linguistic expression could be shown to duplicate. “Perspicuity” instead meant the reproduction of the multitude of different forms that correlate the grammar of linguistic usage to a world of discrete situations and things. The space between words and things was therefore not to be conceived of as “rein” or “pure” and of a singular “Wesen” or essence, but as a less than sublime region of “intermediate cases” or “*Zwischenglieder*” that linked the world of words and things in a series of differing forms. Wittgenstein’s refusal to “sublime” or “sublimate” these “intermediate cases” explains the intimate relation of his philosophic concerns to those of the satirist Karl Kraus in what has come to be called *Wittgenstein’s Vienna*, as Kraus continued a tradition of *Sprachkritik* in the multilingual Hapsburg Empire.<sup>31</sup> In a letter to Max Brod, Franz Kafka noted that “the wit of Kraus principally consists of Yiddish-German – *mauscheln* – no one can *mauscheln* like Kraus, although in this German-Jewish world, hardly anyone can do anything else.”<sup>32</sup> This form of German Jewish

expression thus exemplified the kind of cases Wittgenstein saw as necessary for philosophical clarity, since they force us to “see connections” [*Zusammenhänge sehen*], and hence the family resemblances, between “German” and “Jewish” forms of expression, rather than see such forms of life as separate and enclosed.<sup>33</sup>

Kafka shared this rejection of sublimation in the German Jewish nexus with Wittgenstein, particularly in the way the borderland between animal and human forms of expression contributed to the philosophy of language in their different bodies of work. The humor of Kraus – his “wit” in Kafka’s distinctly non-Freudian terms – encouraged Kafka to name the linguistic position of his generation of German Jewish writers in a way that paralleled Wittgenstein’s later commitment to evoke the “*Zwischenglieder*” of language. Just as Wittgenstein would refer to the Jewish “*Tier*,” reflecting on the “tangle” from which the concept of “family resemblances” would emerge, so Kafka formulated his linguistic situation in animal terms, with the “*Zwischenglieder*” or “intermediate members” physically embodied by a new generation, stretched between Jewish fathers and a filial linguistic space. “With their hind legs,” Kafka observes of writers like Kraus, “they were still glued to their father’s Jewishness, and with their waving front legs they found no new ground. The ensuing despair became their inspiration.” Kafka here redeems Otto Weininger’s “dog” from his *On Last Things*; there, the canine is defined as a “microcosm” of “a certain puzzling relation to the *past*,” trapped between concepts that are copied from others, on the one hand, and a preoccupation with particulars he can never unify on his own.<sup>34</sup> Kafka’s Jewish animal finds his “inspiration” in the very terms of this dilemma: like Wittgenstein, by valuing the space between universal concepts and the world of particulars as full of “intermediate cases” where philosophic insight can be found. Weininger sees the “dog” as a failed philosopher, unable to connect the world of things with concepts. Kafka, by contrast, portrays the Jewish animal of his generation as well positioned to discover the zone of “canine” meaning in which language’s relation to the world can be grasped in multiple and overlapping forms.

Where Weininger denied the “Jew” the capacity for “humor” – committing suicide two years before Freud’s joke book was published – the “wit” of Kraus consisted in his awareness of the multiple differences that existed at the heart of the German tongue.<sup>35</sup> When Kraus was at his most hostile, as in his attack on Heine, his writing became an unintentional

de-sublimation – a “de-subliming” in Wittgenstein’s terms – that revealed the pleasurable openness of German to Jewish and other sources. Kraus’s own writing – perhaps through his influence by Weininger – thus produced a satire on the German language’s claim to transmit an original essence, a humor that Kraus himself could not always enjoy.<sup>36</sup> Kafka’s examples from Kraus discover this pleasure in his performance of “talent,” as comically performed by the generation of German Jewish fathers in his *Literature, Or, We’ll Have to See about That*. “How expressive is this,” Kafka writes to Brod in his own performance of the German-Jewish voice: “So he’s got talent? Who says? Or this, jerking the arm out of its socket and tossing up the chin: ‘You think so?’ Or this, scraping the knees together: ‘He writes? What about?’”<sup>37</sup> Where Kraus “imagined Jews as secondary performers of the German, Kafka saw him as laying bare the historical contact between German and Jewish forms of life. In the process, Kraus both presented his predecessors in a negative light and gave a trenchant analysis of their reception. Heine’s “talent,” Kraus wrote, “flutters in the world without a core theme [*schwerpunktlos*], providing sweet nourishment to the philistine’s hatred for genius.”<sup>38</sup> Refusing to remain serious and “*schwer*” to make his point, Heine thus exposed the play of language, or what Wittgenstein, in his definition of “family resemblance,” called “the continuous overlapping of [...] fibers” that connect different language games and lead to discovery of intermediate forms.<sup>39</sup> Kraus’ attack on Heine in this way also articulated the genius of the latter’s insight: that German’s Jewish “other” had been a nourishing presence that helped originate the nation’s speech. “The secret of the birth of the ancient word,” as Kraus says of Heine with uncanny self-perception, “was foreign to him.”<sup>40</sup>

Wittgenstein savored Kraus in this same spirit as Kafka, who saw in his satire the Jewish philosophical insight that the differences were the redemptive content of the whole. “What we have here,” Kafka pointed out in his appreciation of Yiddish-accented German in Kraus’s *Literatur*, “is the product of a sensitive feeling for language which has realized that in German, only the dialects are really alive.”<sup>41</sup> In the this literary register, Kafka’s point was that Kraus’s written and spoken performances of these intermediate stages of German and Jewish language brought the sources of German’s linguistic riches to life. “A picture,” as Wittgenstein diagnosed such situations, had nonetheless “held us captive. And we could not get outside it, for it lay in our language and language seemed to repeat it to us inexorably:” such a picture was the notion that German was a language

completely distinct from Hebrew sources, one whose linguistic terms the philosopher Franz Rosenzweig helped to redraw.<sup>42</sup> The origins of the term “*mauscheln*” revealed the same principle of language as emerging from an act of German Jewish exchange. The term – literally meant speaking German with a Jewish accent – was derived from “*Moishe*,” Yiddish for Moses, the giver of the law, while another etymology gives its source as the Hebrew word “*mashal*,” meaning parable or example. According to this positive, Hebrew-German definition of the term, to “*mauscheln*” meant to relate parables or similes: that is, “*Gleichnis sagen*,” in a word that exemplified the “*Zwischenglieder*,” in Wittgenstein’s terms, or intermediate member that connected the worlds of German and Jewish expression: such were the resemblances which, according to Kafka, Kraus could render better than anyone else.<sup>43</sup>

Wittgenstein’s therefore appreciated this “talent” that Kraus exemplified, even when the latter betrayed the philosophic truths he performed. In his notebook comments on Kraus, Wittgenstein valued the figurative wheat where it was still connected to such linguistic chaff. Thus while Kraus deplored the “*Mosaik*” he saw in Heine’s writing as falsely original, Wittgenstein saw the ability to grasp the formative elements of phenomenon as the crucial critical task.<sup>44</sup> “When you are philosophizing,” as Wittgenstein put it, “you have to descend into primeval chaos and feel comfortable there” [*sich dort wohlfühlen*].<sup>45</sup> Any grasp of the integral forms of language – a philosophical grammar – therefore eluded Kraus: “Genius is talent in which character makes itself heard. That is why I want to say that Kraus had talent, an exceptional talent, but not genius,” in a passage that paraphrases Heine.<sup>46</sup> The precision of Wittgenstein’s word choice is worth observing in this instance. To say that Kraus lacks “*Charakter*,” as in English, suggests that Kraus lacks integrity. In Wittgenstein’s terms, the suggestion is that Kraus’s refusal to accept the “*Mosaik*” of his own linguistic influences – clear in his diatribe against Heine – is precisely what holds him back from “genius:” the ability to grasp the different elements of an identity without stifling their uniqueness, as the concept of “family resemblance” had done. Kraus’ perception of linguistic differences – though brilliantly precise – therefore remained the production of “talent,” as Kafka emphasized, without organizing those perceptions in a new form. Kraus thus remained the satirist of either end of the German Jewish divide, while lacking the “character” to articulate and express – “*sich aussprechen*” – the intermediate position and its perspectives, plumbing the depths of

German Jewish contact in a way that allowed others – including Walter Benjamin and Gershom Scholem – to reap the philosophic fruit.<sup>47</sup> “For the ox and the ass can do things too,” Wittgenstein quoted an aphorism by Lichtenberg to this effect: “it is remarkable how much greater that is than anything Kraus wrote.”<sup>48</sup>

In this same spirit of surpassing the master, Wittgenstein extended Kraus’s own talent for animal imagery in developing his own theory of “aspects,” in the section of the *Philosophical Investigations* that analyzes stages of perception as central to the understanding of language games. The animal speech satirized by Kraus had sparked serious reflection in Kafka, and the traces of similar influence can be found in the Jewish “Tier” or animal of Wittgenstein’s notebooks, and extending through his later work. Kraus’ references to Yiddish-accented German, whether referred to as “*mauscheln*” or “*jüdeln*,” used Viennese dialect forms that could be considered “aspect” test-cases for the later Wittgenstein, with intermediate shades of meaning implied by the context not always immediately available for analysis. Thus in 1929, Kraus attacked his journalistic opponent, the Zionist Felix Salten, the author of *Bambi* (1928) and more recent success *Fünfzehn Hasen: Schicksale im Wald und Feld* (1929), claiming to discover a Jewish linguistic inflection in the speech of the rabbits, and thus what might be considered an early “aspect” of Wittgenstein’s later terms.<sup>49</sup> The “Hares that Speak with a Jewish Accent,” in Paul Reitter’s felicitous translation, thus recall the “*Bönhasen*,” the worker outside a guild who sells his wares without official rights.<sup>50</sup> The deeper meaning of “Hares that Speak With a Jewish Accent” pictured a similar boundary zone of meaning that Kraus attributed to animals, while pointing to the duck-rabbit status of German Jewish forms of expression for more than one tongue. The “rabbit” – or the Hebrew element in German words like “*Beisl*” – was already present in the “duck,” to borrow Wittgenstein’s figures, even when aspect blindness prevented this Hebrew animal from appearing as part of the German language, which unfortunately could only imagine itself to be one beast at a time.

“The tacit conventions [*die stillschweigenden Abmachungen*] on which the understanding of everyday language [*Umgangssprache*] depends are enormously complicated,” was the way the Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus* states the situation.<sup>51</sup> Wittgenstein later avowed his philosophic goal as gaining “perspicuity” or the ability to re-envision those “intermediary links” that “go without saying,” as such “*stillschweigende*” or tacit

conventions do. The conventionality of meaning in late Wittgenstein becomes a “German Question” in such cases, where linguistic expression is recoded from the audible to the visual register as a means of recovering its complexity. Wittgenstein’s animal picture in this way signifies the presence of linguistic meanings that remain fluid “aspects” in the grammar of experience – the new “rabbit” emerging from what was already experienced as a “duck” in more limited terms: “the expression of a change of aspect is the expression of a *new* perception and at the same time of that perception being unchanged.”<sup>52</sup> In his exploitation of this situation, Kraus baited his audience with duck-rabbit forms of German Jewish expression that were common to Viennese German: words such as “*meschugge*,” “*mies*” and “*Schmus*,” as Kohn notes could be “used by the Viennese population as a whole, without any inkling of their foreign origin.”<sup>53</sup> In these Viennese dialect forms, Kraus pounced on words that *could* be taken for one animal or another by German or Jewish speakers – depending on the conventions of their linguistic community being addressed – even though the *sound* of the word might be identical. What was *meschugge* or crazy – Kafka quoted his father using the same word in his “Letter to My Father” – would be to imagine that specific words in the Vienna of Kraus and Wittgenstein could have a strictly German or Jewish meaning, when their linguistic usage constantly crossed such lines.<sup>54</sup> The pleasure of such German, when speakers could allow themselves to enjoy the full aspects of their language, was that the same words that could feel so authentically singular and univocal were, to paraphrase Kraus, different animals after all.

In Viennese German, for instance, the word “*Beisl*” that appears in Kraus is more than one kind of linguistic animal.<sup>55</sup> As a term that suggests the English sense of “dive” or “greasy spoon” – that is, a less than elegant restaurant in which one nevertheless feels quite at home – “*Beisl*” conveys a deeply Austrian and German sense of belonging. At the same time, however, the identical orthography expresses an entirely different sense of affective identification, not to mention linguistic roots. The word “*Beisl*” is derived from the Hebrew word for “house” – “*bayit*” – presumably captured by German speakers from “thieves language” or the *Gaunersprache* Kafka mentions as formative for the Yiddish tongue. After being adorned with the Austrian diminutive ending “*l*” as a kind of linguistic tail, the “little house” represents a linguistic animal that can feel “at home,” as it were, as a German or a Jewish expression, while at the same

time straddling the line between these domains. In the dictionary he wrote for Austrian schoolchildren, Wittgenstein emphasized this open boundary between “*Mundart*” and High German that made such “animal” exchanges possible. These “dialectal expressions” [*Ausdrücke der Mundart*] he writes, “are to be included only in so far as they have found entrance [*Eingang gefunden haben*] into standard, educated [*gebildete*] language,” giving examples of nouns that are containers: “*Heferl*” [mug], “*Packel*” [little package] as well as “*Lacke*” [puddle], suggesting both the enclosure and fluidity of linguistic forms.<sup>56</sup> In this emphasis on grammar as the map of philosophic meaning, concepts – like national belonging – did not grasp the essence of any phenomenon, but organized its “dialectal” differences in forms which, given family resemblances, could therefore be fluid and overlapping in the back and forth of common speech. “What we do,” as he wrote in the *Philosophical Investigations*, is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use.”<sup>57</sup>

In keeping with this insight, students of Wittgenstein’s German have noticed a transformed conception of origin in his later philosophy. Wittgenstein’s goal of “*zurückführen auf*” or “leading language back” to the “everyday use” [*alltägliche Verwendung*] was grounded in his answer to the question of “*Wesen*” or “essence,” as he calls it: “is the word actually used in the language-game that was its original home? [*Heimat*].”<sup>58</sup> Joachim Schulte notes that “*zurückführen auf*” in German is “generally associated with historical, causal, or reductive explanation:” we expect “*Heimat*” to express a sense of “homeland” that is nationalistic, or at least well bounded in linguistic terms lacking a duck-rabbit ability to shift.<sup>59</sup> From normal German usage, Wittgenstein has chosen a term for “tracing back” that hints at a return to a more paradisaical relation between words and things, especially if we “translate,” as Stanley Cavell suggests, “the idea of bringing words back as *leading* them back, shepherding them.” In Cavell’s formulation, Wittgenstein treated words as if they were animals with something to say back to us about their names: “which suggests not only that we have to find them, but that they will return only if we command them, which will require listening to them.”<sup>60</sup> Such animal voices, in this deepest metaphor of recollection, echo missing aspects of our language – and hence the fullest sense of our humanity, in which the other’s voices can be heard in all their distinctness, without loss of our own. In his re-definition of *Heimat*, Wittgenstein’s approach called for a return to the potential of language as such, so often lost in the language of man.

This messianic commitment to recover these sounds and their meaning parallels Walter Benjamin's similar perspective, as reflected in Adam's distinctive ability to call the animals by their proper names. The family resemblance of language to creation defines the Jewish philosopher's distinctive task as the redemption of the different: recovering an identity that would reveal, rather than imprison, the infinite forms of the original name.

### Notes

- 1 See Paul REITTER: *The Anti-Journalist: Karl Kraus and Jewish Self-Fashioning in Fin-de-Siècle Europe*, Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, pp. 109–11.
- 2 For this account of Wittgenstein's transformation of the terms of his philosophic dilemma into the material of his new mode of practicing philosophy, see David PEARS: *The False Prison: A Study of the Development of Wittgenstein's Philosophy*, vol. II, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988, pp. 199–225.
- 3 M. O'C. DRURY: "Conversations with Wittgenstein," in Rush Rhees, ed., *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Personal Recollections*, Totowa N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1981, p. 171; Ludwig WITTGENSTEIN: *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1953, Section 122, p. 49e.
- 4 Walter BENJAMIN: "On Language as Such and on the Language of Man," 1916, in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings* Vol. 1 1913–1926, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1996, pp. 72–3, "Über Sprache überhaupt und über die Sprache des Menschen" (1916), in *Benjamin, Gesammelte Schriften*, 4 vols. in 12, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1980, 2: pp. 145–6. Benjamin's term is "eine Mittelbarkeit schlechthin."
- 5 See Hilary PUTNAM: "Rosenzweig and Wittgenstein," in PUTNAM: *Jewish Philosophy as a Guide to Life: Rosenzweig, Buber, Levinas, Wittgenstein*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: University of Indiana Press, 2008: "Wittgenstein and Rosenzweig each directs us away from the chimera of a philosophical account of the 'essence' of this or that to the ordinary use we make of our words," p. 18.
- 6 Ludwig WITTGENSTEIN: *Culture and Value*, ed. G.H. Von Wright, trans. Peter Winch, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980, p. 74.
- 7 See "Confessions," in Ray MONK: *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius*, New York: The Free Press, 1990, 361–384 and Fania PASCAL: "Wittgenstein: A Personal Memoir," in *Wittgenstein: Sources and Perspectives*, ed. C.G. Luckhardt, Hassocks, Sussex: Harvester Press, 1979, pp. 23–60.
- 8 PASCAL: "Wittgenstein: A Personal Memoir," p. 47.
- 9 See Ludwig WITTGENSTEIN: *Letter to Ludwig von Ficker*, October or November 1919, in *Wittgenstein: Sources and Perspectives* 94, Ludwig WITTGENSTEIN: *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. D.F. Pears and B.F. McGuinness, intro. Bertrand Russell, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961, p. 74, and Alfred NORDMANN:

- Wittgenstein's Tractatus: An Introduction*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 48. German text of the Tractatus quoted below is from the Routledge 1961 edition.
- 10 WITTGENSTEIN: *Culture and Value* 22e.
  - 11 Hans SLUGA: "Family Resemblance," *Grazer Philosophische Studien* 71 (2006), pp. 1–21, here p. 1.
  - 12 See MONK: *Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius*, pp. 312–313.
  - 13 Walter BENJAMIN: "On Language as Such and on the Language of Man," "Über Sprache Überhaupt und über die Sprache des Menschen" 2: 155: "Es ist eine metaphysische Wahrheit, daß alle Nature zu klagen begönne, wenn Sprache ihr verliehen würde."
  - 14 The mutual reinforcing "tangle" of silence or speaking openly about Jewish identity in this way parallels the "private language argument" of the Philosophical Investigations, as Stanley Cavell suggests this reading in his "Postscript" to Eve Kosovosky's "closeted" reading of Henry James. I understand Cavell's point not to be about Wittgenstein's "identity," but rather as pointing to the falsity of a choice between "private" or "public" languages as adequate to it. See Stanley CAVELL: "Postscript (1989): to Whom It May Concern", *Critical Inquiry* 16:2, Winter 1990, p. 253 ff.
  - 15 WITTGENSTEIN: *Culture and Value*, p. 74.
  - 16 BENJAMIN: "On Language as Such", p. 73.
  - 17 "Gescheid, gescheit," *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, by Jacob und Wilhelm GRIMM, Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1854–1961, vol 5, col. 3846–3852.
  - 18 WITTGENSTEIN: *Culture and Value*, p. 74.
  - 19 WITTGENSTEIN: *Philosophical Investigations*, Section 122, p. 49e.
  - 20 WITTGENSTEIN: *Philosophical Investigations*, Section 67, 32e.
  - 21 Franz KAFKA: "Report to an Academy," in *Franz Kafka: The Complete Stories*, ed. Nahum N. Glatzer, Foreword by John Updike, New York: Schocken Books, 1971, p. 251. *Franz Kafka: Drucke zu Lebzeiten*, ed. Wolf Kittler, Hans-Gerd KOCH and Gerhard NEUMANN: *Schriften Tagebücher Briefe Kritische Ausgabe*, ed. Jürgen Born, Gerhard Neumann, Malcolm Pasley und Jost Schillemeit, Frankfurt: S Fischer, 1994, 1:300–301.
  - 22 See Kevin MULLIGAN: "Philosophy, Animality and Justice: Kleist, Kafka and Wittgenstein," in Barry SMITH, ed.: *Structure and Gestalt: Philosophy and Literature in Austria-Hungary and her Successor States*, Amsterdam: John Benjamins B.V., 1981, pp. 302–303.
  - 23 "The idea of a general concept being a common property of its particular instances connects up with other primitive, too simple idea, ideas of the structure of language," as Wittgenstein observed. See *The Blue and Brown Books*, New York: Harper & Row, 1965, p. 17.
  - 24 WITTGENSTEIN: *Culture and Value*, p. 18e.
  - 25 *Ibid.*, p. 16e.
  - 26 *Ibid.*, p. 73e.
  - 27 *Ibid.*, p. 19. What Wittgenstein called "aspect blindness" as an element of traditional philosophy is connected to the full sound of language in *Philosophical Investigations*, p. 214e: "Aspect blindness will be akin [verwandt] to the lack of a 'musical ear.'" The

- importance of this concept lies in the connection between the concepts of ‘seeing an aspect’ and ‘experiencing the meaning of a word.’ Wittgenstein’s “reproductiveness” in this “Jewish” sense can thus be taken to mean a full performance, in the musical sense, of words and their tonalities and shadings. In the process, Wittgenstein makes “Jewish” a positive quality in exact opposition to Wagnerian notions that Jews lacked any musical sense.
- 28 WITTGENSTEIN: *Culture and Value*, p. 19.
- 29 WITTGENSTEIN: *Philosophical Investigations*, Section 371, p. 116e.
- 30 WITTGENSTEIN: *Philosophical Investigations*, Section 38, p. 183e, Section 94, p. 44e and Section 122, p. 49e.
- 31 WITTGENSTEIN: *Philosophical Investigations*, Sections 94 and 122. On Kraus and Wittgenstein, see “Language and Society. Karl Kraus and the Last Days of Vienna,” in Allan JANIK and Stephen TOULMIN: *Wittgenstein’s Vienna*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973, pp. 67–91.
- 32 Franz KAFKA: Letter to Max Brod, June 1921, in *Franz Kafka, Letters to Friends, Family and Editors*, trans. Richard Winston and Clara Winston, New York: Schocken Books, 1977, p. 289; and Franz KAFKA: *Briefe, 1902–1924*, ed. Max Brod, New York: Schocken Books, 1958, p. 288.
- 33 WITTGENSTEIN: *Philosophical Investigations*, Section 122, p. 49e.
- 34 Otto WEININGER: *Über die letzten Dinge/ On Last Things (1904/1907)*, trans. Steven Burns, Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2001, pp. 96, 101.
- 35 WEININGER: *Sex and Character: An Investigation of Fundamental Principles*, trans. Ladislau Löb, ed. Daniel Steuer with Laura Marcus, Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 2005: “the Jew, who has no sense of humor, is in fact the most productive target of any wit.”
- 36 On Kraus and Weininger, see REITTER: *The Anti-Journalist*, pp. 35–39; Karl Kraus, “Heine und die Folgen,” in KRAUS: *Untergang der Welt durch Schwarze Magie*, Munich: Kösel Verlag, 1960, pp. 188–219.
- 37 KAFKA: Letter to Max Brod, June 1921, p. 288.
- 38 KRAUS: “Heine oder die Folgen”, p.191.
- 39 WITTGENSTEIN: *Philosophical Investigations*, Section 67, p. 32e.
- 40 KRAUS: “Heine oder die Folgen”, p. 213.
- 41 KAFKA: Letter to Max Brod, June 1921, p. 289.
- 42 WITTGENSTEIN: *Philosophical Investigations*, Section 115, p. 48e, and Franz ROSENZWEIG: “Scripture and Luther” [1926], in *Scripture and Translation: Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig*, trans. Laurence Rosenwald and Everett Fox, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994, pp. 48–49.
- 43 See Heidi STERN: *Wörterbuch zum jiddischen Lehnwortschatz in den deutschen Dialekten*, Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 2000, p.133.
- 44 KRAUS: “Heine oder die Folgen”, p. 196.
- 45 WITTGENSTEIN: *Culture and Value*, p. 65e
- 46 WITTGENSTEIN: *Culture and Value*, p. 65e. Wittgenstein twists a phrase that Heine applied to Wolfgang MENCZEL’s *Die deutsche Literatur* in a review of that work, where Menzel is paraphrased by Heine as declaring “Goethe is no genius, but a talent.” See Jeffrey L. Sammons’ Introduction to Heinrich HEINE: *Ludwig Börne: A Memorial*,

- trans, with commentary and an introduction by Jeffrey L. Sammons, Rochester, New York: Camden House, 2006, p. xvii. Heine's Denkschrift is also the locus classicus in German literature on mauscheln and is cited in the GRIMM Wörterbuch to that effect.
- 47 On Benjamin, Scholem and Kraus, see REITTER: *The Anti-Journalist*, pp. 137–174.
- 48 WITTGENSTEIN: *Culture and Value*, p. 65e.
- 49 As Paul Reitter notes, “Kraus was not categorically contemptuous of Mauscheldeutsch,” or speaking German with a “Yiddish” or Jewish accent: these rabbits were “absurd” because Salten identified with the hunters of his animal story, and not with the “jüdelnde Hasen” that are the title of Kraus’s piece. See REITTER: *The Anti-Journalist*, pp. 224–5.
- 50 See Walter GRAB: *Gegenseitige Einflüsse deutscher und jüdischer Kultur. Von der Epoche der Aufklärung bis zur Weimarer Republik*, Tel-Aviv: Universität Tel-Aviv, Nateev, 1982, p. 96 and Barrington MOORE, Jr.: *Injustice: The Social Bases of Obedience and Revolt*, White Plains, New York: Pantheon Books, 1978, p. 129.
- 51 WITTGENSTEIN: *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* 4.003.
- 52 WITTGENSTEIN: *Philosophical Investigations*, p. 196e.
- 53 Caroline KOHN: “Der Wiener Jüdische Jargon im Werke Karl Kraus“ in *Modern Austrian Literature* 8:1–2, 1975, p. 244.
- 54 KAFKA: “Letter to His Father,” in KAFKA: *Dearest Father: Stories and Other Writings*, trans. Ernst Kaiser and Eithne Wilkins, New York: Schocken Books, 1954, p. 145, KAFKA: *Nachgelassene Schriften und Fragmente*, ed. Malcolm Pasley, Franz KAFKA: *Schriften Tagebücher Briefe*, Kritische Ausgabe, ed. Jürgen Born, Gerhard Neumann, Malcolm Pasley und Jost Schillemeit, Frankfurt: S. Fischer, 1992, 2:152.
- 55 See KOHN: “Der Wiener Jüdische Jargon”, p. 250.
- 56 WITTGENSTEIN: *Wörterbuch für Volksschulen*, ed. Adolf Hübner and Werner and Elisabeth Leinfellner, Vienna: Verlag Holder-Pichler-Tempsky, 1977, p. xxviii.
- 57 WITTGENSTEIN: *Philosophical Investigations*, Section 116, p. 48e.
- 58 WITTGENSTEIN: *Philosophical Investigations*, Section 116, p. 48: “Wir führen die Wörter von ihren metaphysischen, wieder of ihre alltägliche Verwendung zurück.”
- 59 Joachim SCHULTE: “Ways of Reading Wittgenstein: Observations on Certain Uses of the Word ‘Metaphysics,’” in Guy Kahane, Edward Kantarian and Oskari Kuusela, eds.: *Wittgenstein and his Interpreters: Essays in Honor of Gordon Baker*, Malden, Massachusetts/Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007, p. 148.
- 60 Stanley CAVELL: “Declining Decline,” in Stephen Mulhall, ed.: *The Cavell Reader*, Cambridge, Mass: Blackwell, 1996, p. 324.