

RANDOM HOUSE  BOOKS



Ludwig Wittgenstein

Ray Monk

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About the Author

Ray Monk gained a first class degree in Philosophy at York University and went on to Oxford, where he wrote his M.Litt. thesis on Wittgenstein's philosophy of mathematics.

'This biography transforms Wittgenstein into a human being. It shows his capacity for love, bumps away the hagiolatry, and cuts through a strange layer of po-faced schlock which is perhaps unique to his memory. It ties the philosophy to the life and brings clearly into view the immoderate, brilliant, moving and regularly insupportable genius... For nearly 600 pages Monk moves between quotations, drawing on interviews and letters, diaries, and memoirs of Wittgenstein and his family and friends. He works them intelligently into continuity. His own speculative interventions about Wittgenstein's feelings and motivations are never pushy or insistent, but well-supported, plausible and at the same time self-effacing... His handling of the early philosophy is admirable. He has a gift for simple exposition, and knows what it is worth trying to get across to a largely non-philosophical audience.'

Independent On Sunday

'With a subject who demands passionate partisanship, whose words are so powerful, but whose actions speak louder, it must have been hard to write this definitive, perceptive and lucid biography. Out goes Norman Malcolm's saintly Wittgenstein, Bartley's tortured, impossibly promiscuous Wittgenstein, and Brian McGuinness's bloodless, almost bodiless Wittgenstein. This Wittgenstein is the real human being: wholly balanced and happily eccentric, with nothing much in common with his suicidal brother Rudolf, except his homosexuality. Allowed to speak for himself by a self-effacing author, this Wittgenstein knows his own military mind and nature, of which the suicidal gestures were deeply felt, but still gestures.'

The Times

'Ray Monk studied philosophy as an undergraduate and went on to write a dissertation on the philosophy of

mathematics. In writing this book he has shown himself a more than competent biographer and historian of ideas... It is both readable and easy to use, with a full index and bibliography. It is much to be recommended not least for its tolerant, non-judgmental, but sometimes sardonic tone.'

Observer

'Monk presents a portrait of real complexity: a sceptic (who in his early years was sceptical enough to disagree with Russell that it could be proved that "there was not a rhinoceros in the room") and yet a mystic for whom certainty of a kind existed - the certainty of unknowing. Monk's biography is deeply intelligent, generous to the ordinary reader, and restrained about Wittgenstein's homosexual relationships. It is a beautiful portrait of a beautiful life. After such rigour, such strictness and moral torment, there is a beauty and a release in Wittgenstein's famous last words, "Tell them I've had a wonderful life".'

Guardian

'Monk's energetic enterprise is remarkable for the interleaving of the philosophical and the emotional aspects of Wittgenstein's life. The biographical method here is comparative: Monk *shows* certain connections, but he does not *argue* them. He honours the master by his very method and renovates biography in the process.'

Sunday Times

ILLUSTRATIONS

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TO JENNY

Ray Monk

LUDWIG
WITTGENSTEIN

The Duty of Genius

V

V I N T A G E

Logic and ethics are fundamentally the same, they are no more than duty to oneself.

Otto Weininger, *Sex and Character*

INTRODUCTION

THE FIGURE OF Ludwig Wittgenstein exerts a very special fascination that is not wholly explained by the enormous influence he has had on the development of philosophy this century. Even those quite unconcerned with analytical philosophy find him compelling. Poems have been written about him, paintings inspired by him, his work has been set to music, and he has been made the central character in a successful novel that is little more than a fictionalized biography (*The World as I Found It*, by Bruce Duffy). In addition, there have been at least five television programmes made about him and countless memoirs of him written, often by people who knew him only very slightly. (F. R. Leavis, for example, who met him on perhaps four or five occasions, has made his 'Memories of Wittgenstein' the subject of a sixteen-page article.) Recollections of Wittgenstein have been published by the lady who taught him Russian, the man who delivered peat to his cottage in Ireland and the man who, though he did not know him very well, happened to take the last photographs of him.

All this is, in a way, quite separate from the ongoing industry of producing commentaries on Wittgenstein's philosophy. This industry too, however, continues apace. A recent bibliography of secondary sources lists no fewer than 5,868 articles and books about his work. Very few of these would be of interest (or even intelligible) to anyone outside academia, and equally few of them would concern themselves with the aspects of Wittgenstein's life and

personality that have inspired the work mentioned in the previous paragraph.

It seems, then, that interest in Wittgenstein, great though it is, suffers from an unfortunate polarity between those who study his work in isolation from his life and those who find his life fascinating but his work unintelligible. It is a common experience, I think, for someone to read, say, Norman Malcolm's *Memoir*, to find themselves captivated by the figure described therein, and then be inspired to read Wittgenstein's work for themselves, only to find that they cannot understand a word of it. There are, it has to be said, many excellent introductory books on Wittgenstein's work that would explain what his main philosophical themes are, and how he deals with them. What they do not explain is what his work has to do with *him* - what the connections are between the spiritual and ethical preoccupations that dominate his life, and the seemingly rather remote philosophical questions that dominate his work.

The aim of this book is to bridge that gap. By describing the life and the work in the one narrative, I hope to make it clear how this work came from this man, to show - what many who read Wittgenstein's work instinctively feel - the unity of his philosophical concerns with his emotional and spiritual life.

I
1889-1919

1

THE LABORATORY FOR SELF-DESTRUCTION

WHY SHOULD ONE tell the truth if it's to one's advantage to tell a lie?'¹

Such was the subject of Ludwig Wittgenstein's earliest recorded philosophical reflections. Aged about eight or nine, he paused in a doorway to consider the question. Finding no satisfactory answer, he concluded that there was, after all, nothing wrong with lying under such circumstances. In later life, he described the event as, 'an experience which if not decisive for my future way of life was at any rate characteristic of my nature at that time'.

In one respect the episode is characteristic of his entire life. Unlike, say, Bertrand Russell, who turned to philosophy with hope of finding certainty where previously he had felt only doubt, Wittgenstein was drawn to it by a compulsive tendency to be struck by such questions. Philosophy, one might say, came to him, not he to philosophy. Its dilemmas were experienced by him as unwelcome intrusions, enigmas, which forced themselves upon him and held him captive, unable to get on with everyday life until he could dispel them with a satisfactory solution.

Yet Wittgenstein's youthful answer to this particular problem is, in another sense, deeply uncharacteristic. Its easy acceptance of dishonesty is fundamentally incompatible with the relentless truthfulness for which Wittgenstein was both admired and feared as an adult. It is

incompatible also, perhaps, with his very sense of being a philosopher. 'Call me a truth-seeker', he once wrote to his sister (who had, in a letter to him, called him a great philosopher), 'and I will be satisfied.'²

This points not to a change of opinion, but to a change of character - the first of many in a life that is marked by a series of such transformations, undertaken at moments of crisis and pursued with a conviction that the source of the crisis was himself. It is as though his life was an ongoing battle with his own nature. In so far as he achieved anything, it was usually with the sense of its being in spite of his nature. The ultimate achievement, in this sense, would be the complete overcoming of himself - a transformation that would make philosophy itself unnecessary.

In later life, when someone once remarked to him that the childlike innocence of G. E. Moore was to his credit, Wittgenstein demurred. 'I can't understand that', he said, 'unless it's also to a *child's* credit.'³ For you aren't talking of the innocence a man has fought for, but of an innocence which comes from a natural absence of a temptation.'

The remark hints at a self-assessment. Wittgenstein's own character - the compelling, uncompromising, dominating personality recalled in the many memoirs of him written by his friends and students - *was* something he had had to fight for. As a child he had a sweet and compliant disposition - eager to please, willing to conform, and, as we have seen, prepared to compromise the truth. The story of the first eighteen years of his life is, above all, the story of this struggle, of the forces within him and outside him that impelled such transformation.

He was born - Ludwig Josef Johann Wittgenstein - on 26 April 1889, the eighth and youngest child of one of the wealthiest families in Habsburg Vienna. The family's name and their wealth have led some to suppose that he was

related to a German aristocratic family, the Seyn-Wittgensteins. This is not so. The family had been Wittgensteins for only three generations. The name was adopted by Ludwig's paternal great-grandfather, Moses Maier, who worked as a land-agent for the princely family, and who, after the Napoleonic decree of 1808 which demanded that Jews adopt a surname, took on the name of his employers.

Within the family a legend grew up that Moses Maier's son, Hermann Christian Wittgenstein, was the illegitimate offspring of a prince (whether of the house of Wittgenstein, Waldeck or Esterházy depends on the version of the story), but there are no solid grounds for believing this. The truth of the story seems all the more doubtful, since it appears to date from a time when the family was attempting (successfully, as we shall see later) to have itself reclassified under the Nuremberg Laws.

The story would no doubt have suited Hermann Wittgenstein himself, who adopted the middle name 'Christian' in a deliberate attempt to dissociate himself from his Jewish background. He cut himself off entirely from the Jewish community into which he was born and left his birthplace of Korbach to live in Leipzig, where he pursued a successful career as a wool-merchant, buying from Hungary and Poland and selling to England and Holland. He chose as his wife the daughter of an eminent Viennese Jewish family, Fanny Figdor, but before their wedding in 1838 she too had converted to Protestantism.

By the time they moved to Vienna in the 1850s the Wittgensteins probably no longer regarded themselves as Jewish. Hermann Christian, indeed, acquired something of a reputation as an anti-Semite, and firmly forbade his offspring to marry Jews. The family was large - eight daughters and three sons - and on the whole they heeded their father's advice and married into the ranks of the Viennese Protestant professional classes. Thus was

established a network of judges, lawyers, professors and clergymen which the Wittgensteins could rely on if they needed the services of any of the traditional professions. So complete was the family's assimilation that one of Hermann's daughters had to ask her brother Louis if the rumours she had heard about their Jewish origins were true. '*Pur sang, Milly*', he replied, '*pur sang.*'

The situation was not unlike that of many other notable Viennese families: no matter how integrated they were into the Viennese middle class, and no matter how divorced from their origins, they yet remained - in some mysterious way - Jewish 'through and through'.

The Wittgensteins (unlike, say, the Freuds) were in no way part of a Jewish community - except in the elusive but important sense in which the whole of Vienna could be so described; nor did Judaism play any part in their upbringing. Their culture was entirely Germanic. Fanny Wittgenstein came from a merchant family which had close connections with the cultural life of Austria. They were friends of the poet Franz Grillparzer and known to the artists of Austria as enthusiastic and discriminating collectors. One of her cousins was the famous violin virtuoso, Joseph Joachim, in whose development she and Hermann played a decisive role. He was adopted by them at the age of twelve and sent to study with Felix Mendelssohn. When the composer asked what he should teach the boy, Hermann Wittgenstein replied: 'Just let him breathe the air you breathe!'

Through Joachim, the family was introduced to Johannes Brahms, whose friendship they prized above any other. Brahms gave piano lessons to the daughters of Hermann and Fanny, and was later a regular attender at the musical evenings given by the Wittgensteins. At least one of his major works - the Clarinet Quintet - received its first performance at the Wittgenstein home.

Such was the air the Wittgensteins breathed - an atmosphere of cultural attainment and comfortable respectability, tainted only by the bad odour of anti-Semitism, the merest sniff of which was sufficient to keep them forever reminded of their 'non-Aryan' origins.

His grandfather's remark to Mendelssohn was to be echoed many years later by Ludwig Wittgenstein when he urged one of his students at Cambridge, Maurice Drury, to leave the university. 'There is', he told him, 'no oxygen in Cambridge for you.'⁴ Drury, he thought, would be better off getting a job among the working class, where the air was healthier. With regard to himself - to his own decision to stay at Cambridge - the metaphor received an interesting twist: 'It doesn't matter for me', he told Drury. 'I manufacture my own oxygen.'

His father, Karl Wittgenstein, had shown a similar independence from the atmosphere in which he was brought up, and the same determination to manufacture his own. Karl was the exception among the children of Hermann and Fanny - the only one whose life was not determined by their aspirations. He was a difficult child, who from an early age rebelled against the formality and authoritarianism of his parents and resisted their attempts to provide him with the kind of classical education appropriate to a member of the Viennese bourgeoisie.

At the age of eleven he tried to run away from home. At seventeen he got himself expelled from school by writing an essay denying the immortality of the soul. Hermann persevered. He tried to continue Karl's education at home by employing private tutors to see him through his exams. But Karl ran off again, and this time succeeded in getting away. After hiding out in the centre of Vienna for a couple of months, he fled to New York, arriving there penniless and carrying little more than his violin. He managed nevertheless to maintain himself for over two years by working as a waiter, a saloon musician, a bartender and a

teacher (of the violin, the horn, mathematics, German and anything else he could think of). The adventure served to establish that he was his own master, and when he returned to Vienna in 1867 he was allowed - indeed, encouraged - to pursue his practical and technical bent, and to study engineering rather than follow his father and his brothers into estate management.

After a year at the technical high school in Vienna and an apprenticeship consisting of a series of jobs with various engineering firms, Karl was offered the post of draughtsman on the construction of a rolling mill in Bohemia by Paul Kupelwieser, the brother of his brother-in-law. This was Karl's great opportunity. His subsequent rise within the company was so astonishingly swift that within five years he had succeeded Kupelwieser as managing director. In the ten years that followed he showed himself to be perhaps the most astute industrialist in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The fortunes of his company - and, of course, his own personal fortune - increased manifold, so that by the last decade of the nineteenth century he had become one of the wealthiest men in the empire, and the leading figure in its iron and steel industry. As such, he became, for critics of the excesses of capitalism, one of the archetypes of the aggressively acquisitive industrialist. Through him the Wittgensteins became the Austrian equivalent of the Krupps, the Carnegies, or the Rothschilds.

In 1898, having amassed a huge personal fortune which to this day provides comfortably for his descendants, Karl Wittgenstein suddenly retired from business, resigning from the boards of all the steel companies he had presided over and transferring his investments to foreign - principally US - equities. (This last act proved to be remarkably prescient, securing the family fortune against the inflation that crippled Austria after the First World War.) He was by this time the father of eight extraordinarily talented children.

The mother of Karl Wittgenstein's children was Leopoldine Kalmus, whom Karl had married in 1873, at the beginning of his dramatic rise through the Kupelwieser company. In choosing her, Karl was once again proving to be the exception in his family, for Leopoldine was the only partly Jewish spouse of any of the children of Hermann Christian. However, although her father, Jakob Kalmus, was descended from a prominent Jewish family, he himself had been brought up a Catholic; her mother, Marie Stallner, was entirely 'Aryan' - the daughter of an established (Catholic) Austrian land-owning family. In fact, then (until the Nuremberg Laws were applied in Austria, at least), Karl had not married a Jewess, but a Catholic, and had thus taken a further step in the assimilation of the Wittgenstein family into the Viennese establishment.

The eight children of Karl and Leopoldine Wittgenstein were baptized into the Catholic faith and raised as accepted and proud members of the Austrian high-bourgeoisie. Karl Wittgenstein was even given the chance of joining the ranks of the nobility, but declined the invitation to add the aristocratic 'Von' to his name, feeling that such a gesture would be seen as the mark of the parvenu.

His immense wealth nevertheless enabled the family to live in the style of the aristocracy. Their home in Vienna, in the 'Alleegasse' (now Argentinergasse), was known outside the family as the Palais Wittgenstein, and was indeed palatial, having been built for a count earlier in the century. In addition to this, the family owned another house, in the Neuwaldeggasse, on the outskirts of Vienna, and a large estate in the country, the Hochreit, to which they retired during the summer.

Leopoldine (or 'Poldy' as she was known to the family) was, even when judged by the very highest standards, exceptionally musical. For her, music came second only to the well-being of her husband, as the most important thing

in her life. It was owing to her that the Alleegasse house became a centre of musical excellence. Musical evenings there were attended by, among others, Brahms, Mahler and Bruno Walter, who has described 'the all-pervading atmosphere of humanity and culture' which prevailed. The blind organist and composer Josef Labor owed his career largely to the patronage of the Wittgenstein family, who held him in enormously high regard. In later life Ludwig Wittgenstein was fond of saying that there had been just six *great* composers: Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Brahms - and Labor.

After his retirement from industry Karl Wittgenstein became known also as a great patron of the visual arts. Aided by his eldest daughter, Hermine - herself a gifted painter - he assembled a noteworthy collection of valuable paintings and sculptures, including works by Klimt, Moser and Rodin. Klimt called him his 'Minister of Fine Art', in gratitude for his financing of both the Secession Building (at which the works of Klimt, Schiele and Kokoschka were exhibited), and Klimt's own mural, *Philosophie*, which had been rejected by the University of Vienna. When Ludwig's sister, Margarete Wittgenstein, married in 1905, Klimt was commissioned to paint her wedding portrait.

The Wittgensteins were thus at the centre of Viennese cultural life during what was, if not its most glorious era, at least its most dynamic. The period of cultural history in Vienna from the late nineteenth century to the outbreak of the First World War has, quite justifiably, been the centre of much interest in recent years. It has been described as a time of 'nervous splendour', a phrase which might also be used to characterize the environment in which the children of Karl and Poldy were raised. For just as in the city at large, so within the family, beneath the 'all-pervading atmosphere of culture and humanity', lay doubt, tension and conflict.

The fascination of *fin de siècle* Vienna for the present-day lies in the fact that its tensions prefigure those that have dominated the history of Europe during the twentieth century. From those tensions sprang many of the intellectual and cultural movements that have shaped that history. It was, in an oft-quoted phrase of Karl Kraus, the 'research laboratory for world destruction' - the birthplace of both Zionism and Nazism, the place where Freud developed psychoanalysis, where Klimt, Schiele and Kokoschka inaugurated the *Jugendstil* movement in art, where Schoenberg developed atonal music and Adolf Loos introduced the starkly functional, unadorned style of architecture that characterizes the buildings of the modern age. In almost every field of human thought and activity, the new was emerging from the old, the twentieth century from the nineteenth.

That this should happen in Vienna is especially remarkable, since it was the centre of an empire that had, in many ways, not yet emerged from the eighteenth century. The anachronistic nature of this empire was symbolized by its aged ruler. Franz Josef, Emperor of Austria since 1848 and King of Hungary since 1867, was to remain both *kaiserlich* and *königlich* until 1916, after which the ramshackle conglomeration of kingdoms and principalities that had formed the Habsburg Empire soon collapsed, its territory to be divided between the nation states of Austria, Hungary, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Italy. The nineteenth-century movements of nationalism and democracy had made its collapse inevitable a long time before that, and for the last fifty or so years of its existence the empire survived by teetering from one crisis to the next, its continuing survival believed in only by those who turned a blind eye to the oncoming tides. For those who wished it to survive, the political situation was always 'desperate, but not serious'.

The emergence of radical innovation in such a state is not, perhaps, such a paradox: where the old is in such transparent decay, the new *has* to emerge. The empire *was* a home for genius, after all, as Robert Musil once famously observed: 'and that, probably, was the ruin of it'.

What divided the intellectuals of *Jung Wien* from their forebears was their recognition of the decay around them, a refusal to pretend that things could go on as they always had. Schoenberg's atonal system was founded on the conviction that the old system of composition had run its course; Adolf Loos's rejection of ornament on the recognition that the baroque adornments to buildings had become an empty shell, signifying nothing; Freud's postulation of unconscious forces on the perception that beneath the conventions and mores of society something very real and important was being repressed and denied.

In the Wittgenstein family this generational difference was played out in a way that only partly mirrors the wider dissonance. Karl Wittgenstein, after all, was not a representative of the Habsburg old order. Indeed, he represented a force that had curiously little impact on the life of Austria-Hungary - that of the metaphysically materialistic, politically liberal and aggressively capitalistic entrepreneur. In England, Germany or - especially, perhaps - in America, he would have been seen as a man of his times. In Austria he remained outside the mainstream. After his retirement from business he published a series of articles in the *Neue Freie Presse* extolling the virtues of American free enterprise, but in doing so he was addressing an issue that had only a marginal place in Austrian politics.

The absence of an effective liberal tradition in Austria was one of the chief factors that set its political history apart from that of other European nations. Its politics were dominated - and continued to be so until the rise of Hitler - by the struggle between the Catholicism of the Christian

Socialists and the socialism of the Social Democrats. A side-show to this main conflict was provided by the opposition to both parties – who each in their different ways wished to maintain the supra-national character of the empire – of the pan-German movement led by Georg von Schoenerer, which espoused the kind of anti-Semitic, *Volkisch*, nationalism that the Nazis would later make their own.

Being neither members of the old guard, nor socialists – and certainly not pan-German nationalists – the Wittgensteins had little to contribute to the politics of their country. And yet the values that had made Karl Wittgenstein a successful industrialist were, in another way, the focus of a generational conflict that resonates with the wider tensions of the age. As a successful industrialist, Karl was content to *acquire* culture; his children, and especially his sons, were intent on contributing to it.

Fifteen years separated Karl's eldest child, Hermine, from his youngest, Ludwig, and his eight children might be divided into two distinct generations: Hermine, Hans, Kurt and Rudolf as the older; Margarete, Helene, Paul and Ludwig the younger. By the time the two youngest boys reached adolescence, the conflict between Karl and his first generation of children had dictated that Paul and Ludwig grew up under quite a different régime.

The régime within which Karl's eldest sons were raised was shaped by Karl's determination to see them continue his business. They were not to be sent to schools (where they would acquire the bad habits of mind of the Austrian establishment), but were to be educated privately in a way designed to train their minds for the intellectual rigours of commerce. They were then to be sent to some part of the Wittgenstein business empire, where they would acquire the technical and commercial expertise necessary for success in industry.

With only one of his sons did this have anything like the desired effect. Kurt, by common consent the least gifted of the children, acquiesced in his father's wishes and became in time a company director. His suicide, unlike that of his brothers, was not obviously related to the parental pressure exerted by his father. It came much later, at the end of the First World War, when he shot himself after the troops under his command had refused to obey orders.

On Hans and Rudolf, the effect of Karl's pressure was disastrous. Neither had the slightest inclination to become captains of industry. With encouragement and support, Hans might have become a great composer, or at the very least a successful concert musician. Even by the Wittgenstein family - most of whom had considerable musical ability - he was regarded as exceptionally gifted. He was a musical prodigy of Mozartian talents - a genius. While still in infancy he mastered the violin and piano, and at the age of four he began composing his own work. Music for him was not an interest but an all-consuming passion; it had to be at the centre, not the periphery, of his life. Faced with his father's insistence that he pursue a career in industry, he did what his father had done before him and ran away to America. His intention was to seek a life as a musician. What exactly happened to him nobody knows. In 1903 the family were informed that a year earlier he had disappeared from a boat in Chesapeake Bay, and had not been seen since. The obvious conclusion to draw was that he had committed suicide.

Would Hans have lived a happy life had he been free to devote himself to a musical career? Would he have been better prepared to face life outside the rarefied atmosphere of the Wittgenstein home if he had attended school? Obviously, nobody knows. But Karl was sufficiently shaken by the news to change his methods for his two youngest boys, Paul and Ludwig, who were sent to school and allowed to pursue their own bent.

For Rudolf, the change came too late. He was already in his twenties when Hans went missing, and had himself embarked upon a similar course. He, too, had rebelled against his father's wishes, and by 1903 was living in Berlin, where he had gone to seek a career in the theatre. His suicide in 1904 was reported in a local newspaper. One evening in May, according to the report, Rudolf had walked into a pub in Berlin and ordered two drinks. After sitting by himself for a while, he ordered a drink for the piano player and asked him to play his favourite song, 'I am lost'. As the music played, Rudi took cyanide and collapsed. In a farewell letter to his family he said that he had killed himself because a friend of his had died. In another farewell letter he said it was because he had 'doubts about his perverted disposition'. Some time before his death he had approached 'The Scientific-Humanitarian Committee' (which campaigned for the emancipation of homosexuals) for help, but, says the yearbook of the organization, 'our influence did not reach far enough to turn him away from the fate of self-destruction'.⁵

Until the suicides of his two brothers, Ludwig showed none of the self-destructiveness epidemic among the Wittgensteins of his generation. For much of his childhood, he was considered one of the dullest of this extraordinary brood. He exhibited no precocious musical, artistic or literary talent, and, indeed, did not even start speaking until he was four years old. Lacking the rebelliousness and wilfulness that marked the other male members of his family, he dedicated himself from an early age to the kind of practical skills and technical interests his father had tried unsuccessfully to inculcate into his elder brothers. One of the earliest photographs of him to survive shows a rather earnest young boy, working with apparent relish at his own lathe. If he revealed no particular genius, he at least showed application and some considerable manual dexterity. At the age of ten, for example, he constructed a

working model of a sewing machine out of bits of wood and wire.

Until he was fourteen, he was content to feel himself surrounded by genius, rather than possessed of it. A story he told in later life concerned an occasion when he was woken at three in the morning by the sound of a piano. He went downstairs to find Hans performing one of his own compositions.⁶ Hans's concentration was manic. He was sweating, totally absorbed, and completely oblivious of Ludwig's presence. The image remained for Ludwig a paradigm of what it was like to be possessed of genius.

The extent to which the Wittgensteins venerated music is perhaps hard for us to appreciate today. Certainly there is no modern equivalent of the form this veneration took, so intimately connected was it with the Viennese classical tradition. Ludwig's own musical tastes – which were, as far as we can judge, typical of his family – struck many of his later Cambridge contemporaries as deeply reactionary. He would tolerate nothing later than Brahms, and even in Brahms, he once said, 'I can begin to hear the sound of machinery.' The true 'sons of God' were Mozart and Beethoven.⁷

The standards of musicality that prevailed in the family were truly extraordinary. Paul, the brother closest in age to Ludwig, was to become a very successful and well-known concert pianist. In the First World War he lost his right arm, but, with remarkable determination, taught himself to play using only his left hand, and attained such proficiency that he was able to continue his concert career. It was for him that Ravel, in 1931, wrote his famous Concerto for the Left Hand. And yet, though admired throughout the world, Paul's playing was not admired within his own family. It lacked taste, they thought; it was too full of extravagant gestures. More to their taste was the refined, classically understated playing of Ludwig's sister Helene. Their mother, Poldy, was an especially stern critic. Gretl,

probably the least musical of the family, once gamely attempted a duet with her, but before they had got very far Poldy suddenly broke off. '*Du hast aber keinen Rhythmus!*' ('You have no sense of rhythm at all!') she shrieked.⁸

This intolerance of second-rate playing possibly deterred the nervous Ludwig from even attempting to master a musical instrument until he was in his thirties, when he learnt to play the clarinet as part of his training to be a teacher. As a child he made himself admired and loved in other ways - through his unerring politeness, his sensitivity to others, and his willingness to oblige. He was, in any case, secure in the knowledge that, so long as he showed an interest in engineering, he could always rely on the encouragement and approval of his father.

Though he later emphasized the unhappiness of his childhood, he gave the impression to the rest of his family of being a contented, cheerful boy. This discrepancy surely forms the crux of his boyhood reflections on honesty quoted earlier. The dishonesty he had in mind was not the petty kind that, say, allows one to steal something and then deny it, but the more subtle kind that consists in, for example, saying something because it is expected rather than because it is true. It was in part his willingness to succumb to this form of dishonesty that distinguished him from his siblings. So, at least, he thought in later life. An example that remained in his memory was of his brother Paul, ill in bed. On being asked whether he would like to get up or to stay longer in bed, Paul replied calmly that he would rather stay in bed. 'Whereas I in the same circumstances', Ludwig recalled, 'said what was untrue (that I wanted to get up) because I was afraid of the bad opinion of those around me.'⁹

Sensitivity to the bad opinion of others lies at the heart of another example that stayed in his memory. He and Paul had wanted to belong to a Viennese gymnastic club, but discovered that (like most such clubs at that time) it was