Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* as a War Book

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THE PREFACE TO LUDWIG WITTGENSTEIN'S SECOND great master-piece, the *Philosophical Investigations*, includes a powerful allusion to "the darkness of this time" (*PI* vi) in which the book was writ-ten.[1] But it is a fact rarely made anything *of* that the book was begun in about 1936 (as the Nuremberg Laws came into force and Germany remilitarized the Rhineland) and that it (in particular, that preface) was completed at a perhaps-just-as-dark moment in history: (January) 1945.

There is a remarkable "coincidence" here, a perhaps-telling symmetry: Wittgenstein's first masterpiece, the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, was completed in 1918 . . .

Marjorie Perloff has laid out how the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein's first masterpiece, can be seen as a "war book,"[2] influenced by the dark time in which *it* was written, while the young Wittgenstein was a soldier fight-ing for the Austro-Hungarian Empire in World War I.

Perloff doesn't make the same case for the *Investigations*. That is my self-appointed task. I will argue that the *Investigations* is exactly the kind of work one would expect of an intensely abstract analytical mind that is nevertheless concerned with the deepest and *most concrete* problems there are: in fact, with the underlying central ethical and political problem of its time (*PI* sec. 107–8). Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Inves-tigations*, I claim, aims to midwife its readers' acknowledging—really acknowledging—the humanity of all human beings, and not merely of a favored subset thereof.[3]

In the 1930s, Wittgenstein became increasingly preoccupied with the rise of fascism. It is interesting to note that during this time the vaguely anti-Semitic nature of a few of his personal jottings during previous years drops away to nothing.[4] My hypothesis (following David Stern) is that Wittgenstein came to feel his occasional tendency toward anti-Semitism (as he reflected on his own partly Jewish heritage) to be an unacceptable *indulgence*, an immaturity, in the time of a would-be one-thousand-year "Reich." I suggest that Wittgenstein's *Philosophical*

Investigations is Wittgenstein's attempt to perfect himself, away from the failure that was present in such immature self-indulgence. It involves, I submit, an attempt to take seriously our common humanity; it's a deep reflection upon our human tendency to deny the humanity of others (and ourselves). And a therapy for that tendency. A therapeutic reflection upon tendencies such as Nazism, and moreover a reasoned and impassioned reckoning with the dangerous and immature belief that such ultimately "inhuman" ideologies were a humanly-isolated phenomenon, (say) a product only of Germany. On this, see for example a letter of Wittgenstein's directed against Norman Malcolm's naïve belief that the "British national character" would be incapable of uncivilized or "underhand" behavior towards Germany:

You made a remark about "national character" that shocked me by its primitiveness. I then thought: what is the use of studying philosophy if all that it does for you is to enable you to talk with some plausibility about some abstruse questions of logic, etc., & if it does not improve your thinking about the important questions of everyday life, if it does not make you more conscientious than any . . . journalist in the use of the DANGEROUS phrases such people use for their own ends. You see, I know that it's difficult to think *well* about "certainty," "probability," "perception," etc. But it is, if possible, still more difficult to think . . . really honestly about your life and other people's lives. [5]

Wittgenstein's later work became a profound meditation upon what is actually necessary to overcome the easy attractions of such widespread tendencies of mind as Malcolm had exhibited, and, instead, to really look at one's own and other people's lives. Wittgenstein's investigations persistently aim, as he always insisted it was essential to go,[6] at the *root*—of the lived delusion that could issue in the kind of profound inhumanity that, from the mid-to-late 1930s through to 1945, as before in 1914–1918, he was living through.

Cards on the table: it can't be proven, as a matter of historical / biographical fact, whether Wittgenstein's later philosophy was actually constituted by a concern with Nazism / anti-Semitism / the roots of world war. *But* what I *will* show is that the *PI* contains a powerful philosophy concerning the pain of others, an ethic of acknowledgement that can found a strong antiracist stance, a determination to truly *see* the other. A philosophy that could even cure the very ideology or "philosophy" that was tearing the world apart, as Wittgenstein wrote his book.

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Let us turn to the text. Reading the *Philosophical Investigations* involves a "therapeutic'' progress in which we gradually come to appreciate that to understand adequately what a *person* is, we have to comprehend all of what a person is (not just a fragment thereof, as is traditional in philosophy, such as their rational mind); similarly, we need to think through what we are willing to call a *language* (not just fragments thereof, such as: declarative sentences, or "atoms" of meaning from which sentences are "composed"); and so on. We come to understand how very deeply a person *requires* the other people that coform a society, in order to *be* a person, *at all.* We come to understand this by a process of working through for ourselves unsatisfactory formulation after unsatisfactory formulation, each a little more complex than the last. These formulations are often more or less robotic or machinelike "models" which inevitably fail adequately to characterize human/social being.[7]

Thus, very roughly, the book consists sequentially of a therapeutic examination of what the reader *wants* out of concepts such as "language" (*PI* sec. 1–88); a reflection on the conception of philosophy implicit in such examinations (*PI* sec. 89–133); a therapeutic examination of (what the reader wants out of concepts such as) "rules" (*PI* sec. 134–242); and then, what is widely considered the greatest prize of all: a therapeutic examination of the reader's (and the author's) inclination to fantasize that a "private" language will satisfy his desires, giving him knowledge that is certain, the kind of foundation that he philosophised in order to obtain (*PI* sec. 243–c.428). I shall therefore focus on certain of these, Wittgenstein's, anti-private-language considerations. (These remarks attempt to persuade the reader that the desires in question—for certainty, etc.— are otiose and self-defeating, and that our language and life can proceed *perfectly* well without them.) They are the most crucial fruits on the tree; *and* they are what, if anything, above all makes this a war book.

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At *Philosophical Investigations* sec. 255, Wittgenstein writes, famously, "The philosopher treats a question: like an illness." I believe, following Gordon Baker and others, that this oft-repeated object of comparison for philosophy that Wittgenstein uses ought to be taken very seriously.

According to Nazism, the Jews were a disease, an illness of the body politic, a parasite on the *Volk.* The reality was the reverse: *Nazism* and the like was the illness. Or at least: Nazism and its ilk being like an illness is

an analogy that we should take very seriously. Wittgenstein treated just
such illness. With a philosophical depth psychology. Going to the root
of it. In particular, in the passages that follow sec. 255.[8]

Take sec. 286: "What sort of issue is: Is it the *body* that feels pain?—
How is it to be decided? What makes it plausible to say that it is *not* the
body?—Well, something like this: if someone has a pain in his hand, then
the hand does not say so (unless it writes it) and *one does not comfort the
hand, but the sufferer: one looks into his face*" (my emphasis). One comforts
somebody; not *a* body. This is a powerful "reminder" (cf. *PI* 127). But I
use the scare quotes advisedly: for it isn't exactly a reminder *of* anything
intellectual or factual (still less, theoretical) in any ordinary sense at all.
Rather, one is reminded, one might say, of what it is to be a decent hu-
man being. The particular purpose of this "reminder" is to assist one in
being mindful of what one has, hopefully, never forgotten, but probably
has: how to feel for others.

Commonly, we are taught to think of Wittgensteinian reminders as
reminding us of philosophical "points" or "truths." But such a way of
taking Wittgenstein's work fails to appreciate the radicality of Wittgen-
stein's philosophical method. It is *the other way around*: Wittgenstein
uses philosophical dialogue to remind us of *ourselves*—to re-mind (and
re-heart, re-body) us. To help us re-humanize ourselves.

When I read, "[O]ne does not comfort the hand, but the sufferer:
one looks into his face," I feel moved. And perhaps a little ashamed, of
times when I've failed to do this. The appeal here is not ungainsayable;
it can fail. But that is *part of its very power*: one *knows* that it is possible to
fail to respond to the suffering of another; one *knows* that one has done
so oneself (sometimes). Fascism grows out of such failures.

One *knows* that, on a vast scale, such failure is being trumpeted as a
necessary hardness, a noble or at least necessary overcoming of a com-
mon human reaction, as one writes/reads. Or at least, that is certainly
something *Wittgenstein* knew, at the time that he wrote this remark.

Thus what it is to see mind and body clearly is intrinsically—
"internally"—related to ethical and existential questions. To the question
of our relatedness with one another; of what we give and owe one another,
in mutual acknowledgement. Philosophers have often interpreted Wit-
tgenstein's anti-private-language considerations as if they were a novel
intervention in "the mind-body problem," considered as a technical,
metaphysical, or conceptual question. But they are not: because they
reconceive it as a (real) human, ethical problem. A problem that has
very real, concrete political/historical embodiments. (The failure to see
the ethics present in the internal relation of minds and souls to bodies
is a failure precisely found in Nazism and its ilk.)

Most philosophy has tended to think that metaphysics and/or epistemology are First Philosophy, fundamental philosophy. Wittgenstein puts this into question. For him, *clarification* is the highest call of the philosopher, and clarification is itself an ethical activity, a working on oneself. And part of *what* one is clarifying is necessarily an internal relation between matters conceptual and matters ethical. He submits, then, that you can't do "First Philosophy" without doing ethics. Ethics is inextricably an aspect of "First Philosophy." One might call this a proto-Levinasian moment in Wittgenstein. "[O]ne looks into his face" . . . [9]

Or take the following powerful passages:

[289] "When I say 'I am in pain' I am at any rate justified *before myself.*"—What does that mean? Does it mean: "If someone else could know what I am calling 'pain,' he would admit that I was using the word correctly"? // To use a word without justification does not mean to use it without right.

[374] The great difficulty here is not to represent the matter as if there were something one couldn't do. As if there really were an object, from which I derive its description, but I were unable to shew it to anyone.

We fantasize that, if only we were able to do this "impossible" (non)thing, then we'd be home and dry: if we could only *show* others the "object" that "is" our pain, then it would be impossible any longer for them to withhold sympathy from us. If we could only "show" others our souls, and vice versa, then racism and war would be inconceivable, we think. We are concerned that we "lack" what we think of as the standard kind of *justification* for being entitled to have others acknowledge the truth of what we say (when we, just like them, feel pain). We have not seen that we do indeed have the right to demand acknowledgement, *simply if we are in pain*—but that such acknowledgement is all the greater for its fragility, for being deniable, for not being automatic. As it might be, were it (say) to be programmed into an automaton that they should be "sympathetic" to us.[10] (Compare here how unimpressed we are by *automated* apologies for lateness, at a train station. . . .) We do *not* deny that pain exists if and when we refuse, with Wittgenstein, to give in to the deep attraction of thinking of pain as an "inner object" (cf. *PI* 293); rather, we then start to allow that pain is real and to get clear on what it is, *and* on how easy it can be to deny its reality, for one willing to un-acknowledge the full reality of another being or of their suffering.

What is needed, if we can give up the desire for the fantasy that in fact keeps us apart from one another (because it seems to prove that we *are* apart from one another, unbridgeably), is to acknowledge—which means, to *practice*—the ineradicability of our community.[11] To set aside the

so-called "inner object" *is* to allow space for a realistically apprehended and expressed inner life—and it is that life that is alive in our pain talk. There is a sense in which language itself binds us together, closer than close. (Cf. *PI* sec. 384: "You learned the *concept* 'pain' when you learned language." Our practice with the word "pain" already expresses our concern for [or at least, our interest in] others' suffering. Even if and when we laugh at others' pain, this is generally still so; for such laughter typically involves an attempt at denial that involves a tacit or denied *acknowledgement*, or else it is the "hysterical laughter" that inadvertently *expresses* a felt inability *to cope with* the suffering being witnessed.) Our internal relatedness is not something that language *ensures* that we always *realize*; far from it. The realization of this utter closeness is a *project*, an achievement, albeit an achievement that we mostly carry out reasonably effortlessly, so long as bad philosophy / ideology / propaganda / weakness of the will do not get in the way (as they usually *do*). Language, we might say, gives us the possibility of acknowledgement, of true community; it is up to us to realize that possibility. Language gets us to the starting line: *we* have to run the race for ourselves.

But we do not *need* the absurd acquaintance with others' fantasized "private objects" that the linguistic stereotype of 'object and designation [name]' seems to force upon us as an ideal (cf. the close of *PI* 293). No; whenever we are clear about our language, ourselves, each other, then nothing need stand in the way of effortless mutual acknowledgement.

Compare *Philosophical Investigations* sec. 303: "'I can only *believe* that someone else is in pain, but I *know* it if I am.'—Yes: one can make the decision to say 'I believe he is in pain' instead of 'He is in pain.' But that is all.—— What looks like an explanation here, or like a statement about a mental process, is in truth an exchange of one expression for another which, while we are doing philosophy, seems the more appropriate one. // Just try—in a real case—to doubt someone else's fear or pain."

That last is a genuine instruction or admonition. It is again a measuredly emotional reminder, carrying with it a pathos, a reality check. *Denial* of others' pain is only easy when they are far away, spatially or temporally. It can still be possible when they are close by, if they are an enemy soldier, or a demonized "race."[12] (Though even this may be doubted: don't soldiers in practice take utterly for granted that they are causing one another pain; isn't that an essential part of the calculus of pain that determines who wins an individual fight or a larger battle? Don't torturers know to their bones that they are causing pain to those they torture; isn't that exactly why and how they hope to have power over them? It seems then that there may be a polarity: in the end, torturers are not and soldiers are seldom *consistent* would-be solipsists; for

it would undermine their stock in trade, which is precisely the infliction of pain until it becomes intolerable; whereas mass murderers and propagandists are much more likely to be captured by the solipsistic impulse; for denial of the human reality and suffering of others can be precisely what they hope to achieve.)

Compare the following case, important to us *now*, when we are collectively in denial about the long holocaust-in-waiting that we are complicit in creating for our descendants: "One can only *believe* that future people will suffer, whereas one *knows* that present people are suffering." Or: "One can only *believe* in the existence of man-made climate change, whereas one *knows* that poverty is here and now." These are deeply attractive (and deeply *problematic*) statements.

Now compare this helpful passage, which may loose their hold, from *Philosophical Investigations* sec. xi of Part II—which ties together our tendency to think that there is a tight parallelism between the alleged profound "distance" from us of others' pains and of the future—and then suggests a highly *concrete* way out:

> "What is internal is hidden from us."—The future is hidden from us. But does the astronomer think like this when he calculates an eclipse of the sun?
>   If I see someone writhing in pain with evident cause I do not think: all the same, his feelings are hidden from me.
>   . . . "I cannot know what is going on in him" is above all a *picture . . .*"
> (*PI* 223)

Wittgenstein offers *liberation* from such pictures as "I cannot know what is going on in him" (and likewise from "The future is hidden from us," etc.). Similarly, "I just can't *get* them at all; they're just *not like* us. . . ." When the reasons for such a conviction go deep enough, such liberation will be hard indeed. The task of a great movement, or of a genuine civilization.[13] And of great philosophy.

Wittgenstein goes on: "I can be as *certain* of someone else's sensations as of any fact. . . . //'But if you are *certain*, isn't it that you are shutting your eyes in face of doubt?' They are shut" (*PI* p. 224). Passages such as these profoundly undermine the misreading of Wittgenstein as some kind of behaviorist. Consider sec. 304: "'[Y]ou will surely admit that there is a difference between pain-behaviour accompanied by pain and pain-behaviour without any pain?' –Admit it? What greater difference could there be?"

What greater difference could there be. . . . The possibility of simulation only brings out all the more clearly the need to acknowledge and care for the genuine article. What greater difference could there be, between

cases in which someone is in pain or is not. True aliveness to this differ-
ence: this is the prize. Once more, we must hear an emotional pull, a
deep call for acknowledgement—and some pain—in these words. The
difference is so great that it hurts to be accused of neglecting it—*and*
to recall that one has probably at times treated pain-behavior as not
expressive of genuine pain, even when it was.

The fantasy of the "inner object," necessarily hidden from others, blunts
the possibility—the necessity—the beauty—of genuine empathy.

This in turn suggests a reading of Wittgenstein on the crucial question
of the "relationship" of the so-called "individual" to the community (See
for example *PI* sec. 240–42, which launch the anti-"private-language"
considerations).[14] What is an "individual"? It is that that cannot be sub-
divided. The fundamental unit. In that sense, for Wittgenstein, the true
"individual" *is the community*. It is the community that is in-dividual.

But: everything depends on how community is conceived. For Wit-
tgenstein, clearly, given the discussion above, there is a sense in which
humanity (and in fact, the entire "field" of sensory being) itself is to
be regarded as a community. The community is whatever we mutually
commune with, whatever we are in common with. This is open ended
(open to those initially seeming other) and expansive (the onus is on
those who wish to exclude some from this community, not *vice versa*).
As I discuss below, the desperate efforts of racists and others to reduce
that field (and the insufficient efforts often of all of us to "look into one
another's faces") are self-deceptive; and yet they have a partial success.
Whenever we wilfully exclude others or fail to acknowledge another's
pain, our mutual community dies a little. When we *do* truly acknowledge
the other, then we become in-divisible (in-dividual).

By contrast, the Nazi conception of community, the conception more
or less present in most fascist and racist worldviews, is just a sort of "en-
larged" solipsism. It is thus precisely vulnerable to Wittgenstein's critique.
In solipsism, I start from myself, and perhaps try to expand "outwards"
to include others who I conceive to be relevantly like me; but the fun-
damental (self-created) gulf between myself and others is such that it
is fiendishly difficult, even impossible, to make any progress "outward"
at all, from the self; and this is what Wittgenstein shows. In what we
might dub "communalism," we start from ourselves, and perhaps try to
expand "outwards" to include others who we concede to be relevantly
like ourselves (think of the Nazis' being keen on the Nordic [not just
the Germanic] peoples as near brothers in blood); but the fundamental
gulf between ourselves and others is deliberate, and deliberately insuper-
able (it is as if "communalism" were self-consciously taking on the great
defect of methodological solipsism, *and seeking to turn it into a "virtue"*

of the "race"). Communalism is based upon the idea of a gulf between "ourselves" and others. The racist does not *want* the possibility of the gulf being overcome; he feels in danger of *invasion* (a salient word, in the context of a war book) or *infection.*[15] I claim that there is a straight *analogy* between solipsism and communalism; the attractions (and defects) of one *are* the attractions (and defects) of the other. This enables us to connect Wittgenstein's considerations against the very idea of a private language directly to the historical situation that he wrote in.

Thus any appearance of an analogy between Wittgenstein on the one hand and Nazism on the other, vis-à-vis the ineradicability of community, is delusive. For the racist community is communalist. It paradigmatically *excludes*: it is akin to the very object of Wittgenstein's critique (namely, the utter untenability of and the deep attractions of solipsism). The Nazi-style community defines itself over and against another, and at most works out towards it (and, more strikingly, usually, against it). The Wittgenstein-style community is not defined over and against anything, not even nonhuman animals. It is a truly open field, not a barbed wire-ringed fence.

The Nazi says: *us*, and possibly people genuinely alike to us, *versus* people who we set ourselves against, "people" who merely appear to be alike to us, but who aren't really *people* at all. The solipsist says: *me*, and possibly people genuinely alike to me, *versus* the mere appearances of "people" alike to me, who aren't really people at all. Wittgenstein's text suggests that these parallel modes of relating to others fail decisively: one will be left regarding other humans then as not really human at all. As no more than (say) automata that merely ape humanity.[16] But the failure is doubled; for the revisionist conception of the solipsist or the communalist (the racist) cannot be sustained.[17] It keeps receding in the face of (actual contact with) the other, and in the face of common sense, and it keeps threatening to become a mere change in notation, mere wordplay. To secure oneself against these threats, one is enormously assisted (I go into this further below, in relation to the case of the Nazis) by deliberate *numbing* against others, by a recession away from both rationality and emotionality, by mind-altering substances or propaganda, or by some combination thereof.

The Wittgensteinian alternative to the would-be revisionism is: simply us. The community/society/field; ultimately, the community if, you will, of all sentient beings. A community waiting to be fully achieved, by our actions, by our willingness to acknowledge, by our rightly taking our relations with one another as what Wittgenstein called *internal* rather than external. (Consider the analogous case of slaves, and their not being acknowledged by their "masters." Does a slave-owner miss

something about human beings in seeing them as slaves? Or something about slaves, in seeing them as not human beings? Neither, exactly, says Stanley Cavell in *The Claim of Reason:* "He is rather missing something about himself, or rather something about his connection with these people, his internal relation with them."[18])

The remarks above should *not* be heard as a "Wittgensteinian theory of community." Indeed, there would be no need for them at all, were it not for the way in which ideologies of the subjective "individual" human organism and/or of "communalism" hold such sway in our world. The Wittgensteinian "conception" of community as outlined here is a *reminder,* a corrective. It is a picture intended to return us to ourselves, together. If you ask me the question, "So are we humans really *one*?" I will reply: "Yes and no." But stressing a "yes" in answer to the question is very helpful, when the world around you resounds with "nos." Whenever powerful "communalism(s)" divides and aims to rule, then the reminders given here are especially well worth issuing.

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I am not going to essay a complete reading of all Wittgenstein's discussions of pain in the anti-private-language considerations. I do not need to: I don't need to rehearse all that the fine works of Cavell, Stephen Mulhall, Richard Eldridge, James Conant, Gordon Baker, among others, have already suggested or established. We already have extant in outline a strong "resolute" reading, which is also necessarily at one and the same time an "ethical" or "existential" reading,[19] of Wittgenstein on private language. So, in the remainder of this paper, I wish to focus on one passage that makes the version of such a reading that I am offering here particularly and starkly salient.

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The passage in question is sec. 420:

> But can't I imagine that the people around me are automata,
> lack consciousness, even though they behave in the same way as
> usual?—If I imagine it now—alone in my room—I see people with
> fixed looks (as in a trance) going about their business—the idea
> is perhaps a little uncanny. But just try to keep hold of this idea in
> the midst of your ordinary intercourse with others, in the street,
> say! Say to yourself, for example, "The children over there are mere

automata; all their liveliness is mere automatism." And you will either find these words becoming quite meaningless; or you will produce in yourself some kind of uncanny feeling, or something of the sort.
Seeing a living human being as an automaton is analogous to seeing one figure as a limiting case or variant of another; *the cross-pieces of a window as a swastika*, for example.[20] (Emphasis added)

I hope that you find that concluding sentence, in the present context, very striking. The reason why it is so can hardly not have struck Wittgenstein himself in the writing of it. For what were the Nazis failing to do, if not seeing a class of living human beings as no more requiring or deserving acknowledgement from us than automata do.[21]

It is important that this case of aspect-seeing is strikingly different from the more well-known cases that Wittgenstein considers (the Necker cube, the duck-rabbit, etc.) elsewhere. For in *this* case, in order to see the cross-pieces of a window as a swastika, it is not just that you have to see in a particular way; you have also to *deny* something that you are seeing, too. To avoid simply seeing the surround of the window as a complete square, you have to avoid seeing some of the window-surround; you have to shut your eyes to it. Likewise, with the deliberate unseeingness of the be-swastika'd to some of the human beings around them, the denial of something, that enables something else to appear. What, exactly? The human being becomes merely a human body. A new kind of imaginary cyborg has been born, from the depersonalization that turns a person into an (as-if) machine.

But part of the beauty of Wittgenstein's remark is in its even-handedness, its refusal crudely to refuse to understand. Seeing a living human being as an automaton is not simply an error, not simply an upshot of stupidity or cant; nor is it quite a complete and utter existential impossibility, an idle fantasy. It is something that one can lead oneself toward doing.[22] For instance, by bracketing *oneself*, placing oneself in a position of complete spectatoriality to the reality of others (as philosophers do when they are attempting to consider skepticism about other minds as a live possibility). One might say: the Nazi placed himself as a spectator to the cries of his victims. He didn't truly hear them *as cries.* He didn't hear them as containing a *call* to respond to, as manifesting a shared humanity. He saw them, we might say, as mere behavior. And from mere behavior, one can never "construct" actual feeling, interiority, a true other being. (The only one[s] who the Nazi allows real empathy for is himself and those racially linked to him. The Nazis, like most other agents of genocide, constructed *themselves* as the "real victims": of "Jewish international finance," "Jewish Bolshevism," of a "stab in

the back" during the First World War, etc. This mordantly *self*-pitying, self-deceptive attitude makes real empathy for others near impossible. As Arthur Koestler held: it is not just power that corrupts. Worse still is deliberate victimhood that then attains power, rulers who attain power in a precorrupted state.)

Seeing a living human being as an automaton is, then, an (un)ethical possibility just barely—but constitutively—open to us by virtue of the *fragility* of the criteria and the acknowledgement on which we mutually depend. This fragility of the mutual compact of humankind, outlined earlier in relation specifically to the anti-private-language considerations, is a central theme of all Wittgenstein's work, properly understood.[23]

How else might one be able to achieve the breaking of that compact? Well, for instance, by *practice.* (The homely phrase "Practice makes perfect" comes uncomfortably to mind here. It is a fact that ought, I think, to strike us more than it generally does as crying out for some kind of deeper explanatory understanding that most concentration camp guards and SS troopers found their bloody task *easier*, not harder, as time went by.)

Seeing a living human being as an automaton is (in a certain sense) *possible*; it is a kind of *limiting case* of normal vision. For example: it is like seeing something entirely harmless and everyday *as* a swastika. And that's something that any of us could potentially do, especially given the right (for example, historical) context. It is wrong, a foolish self-deception, to pretend that, given enough context, we too could not potentially see something essentially harmless and everyday (for example, someone from another "race") as dangerous, as a bacillus in the body politic, as not requiring of us acknowledgement of the kind that we unthinkingly lend our own kind.

We make roughly the same *kind* of wrong, if and when we fail to recognize how humanly available—even conceivably (dare to acknowledge it) to us, to you—the Nazi-style mode of seeing is. The human includes all that Wittgenstein ranges over in the anti-private-language considerations, including *all* those-less-than-fully-human modes of thinking and (not-) feeling that center on being willing to exclude others, at *least* notionally, from measuring up to the full humanity that one normally unthinkingly attributes at the very least to oneself and one's kin.

We see the swastika, at the limit of what *is* humanly *possible* for us. We may well see a window as (containing) a swastika, in the unusual circumstances when it becomes natural to do so. When, for instance, there are (or rather, were) swastikas all over the continent. If there are swastikas everywhere, and if people wearing swastikas are accomplishing this extraordinary self-deceptive feat of seeing human beings as if they

were no more valuable or truly human than automata, *then* one might find oneself seeing the cross-pieces of a window pane as a swastika; that extraordinary achievement will be a little less extraordinary, under such circumstances.

Most of the behavior of the be-swastika'd, in World War II, was demonic *in and through* its ordinariness, its banality, its lack of extreme sadism and yet its calm, casual—genocidal—callousness. Compare, for instance, the entirely practical discussions of the burning of human corpses that took up such a large part of the "cultural life" of Auschwitz. Robert Jay Lifton quotes a senior Nazi doctor as saying of this: "It was a purely technical matter. 'Ethical' [*sic*] plays absolutely no [part]—the word does not exist." (This was the consistent message of all his informants on this matter, with the exception only of newly arrived prisoners.) Lifton comments that the problem was perceived entirely as one of "getting rid of the waste material of a routinized communal enterprise."[24]

Similarly, Christopher Browning's definitive study of mass murder behind the Eastern front is controversially entitled, intriguingly for our present purposes, *Ordinary Men*.[25] Some would object to my reading of *Philosophical Investigations* that Wittgenstein's concern was only the genuinely ordinary, not the extraordinary, the political, etc. To this, I reply that the opposing term to "ordinary" for Wittgenstein was not "extraordinary" but "metaphysical," or "nonsensical." In other words, the ordinary includes *everything*; everything except that which we utterly fantasize, that (nothing) which we (merely) imagine that we imagine. In particular, then, it includes war, when war is the norm, when it is quotidianly ordinary, when it affects every aspect of your life (think, in Wittgenstein's case, of rationing, blackouts, your family under siege and under threat of death, ever growing knowledge of unprecedented atrocities under cover of the war,[26] and so on). The challenge is not to let the hard times that you are alive in turn what is empirically ordinary into a subtle justification for committing appalling crimes. Those that Browning (and Lifton) studied rose in sadly few cases to that challenge.

In this crucial remark of Wittgenstein's (*PI* 420), we see Wittgenstein impress upon us the *uncanniness* resulting from the effort to see a group of children as automata. Something extremely striking in Browning's account is that before (as well as after) their *Aktionen*, the men of Reserve Police Battalion 101 would almost invariably get drunk. Is it too much of a stretch to suggest that being drunk is in turn a means to blocking out that uncanniness? Surely that is what it is: inebriation and a consequent feeling of detachment from reality enabled ordinary men to overcome their internal division and to master or mask the unreality-feelings consequent upon seeing (and acting) in a way that is

profoundly unnatural. This is what led Lifton to talk extensively about
"psychic numbing" and "numbed violence"[27]—the state in which most
Einsatzgruppenaktionen were carried out. A drug-induced (that is, alcohol-
induced) sense of detachment or unreality, a recession away from their
full ordinary humanity, prevented the seeing-as-inhuman uncanniness
from settling in on them and too drastically disturbing them. You can't
do violence to an automaton; how handy then, to be able to see one's
victims (roughly) as or as-if automata. But how difficult, so how neces-
sary (for all but a small psychopathic minority) to deaden one's intuitive
sense of uncanniness at the distortion. In other words, to be able to see
one's victims as automata, it helps to see *as an automaton sees.*

It is striking that Josef Mengele, "Dr. Auschwitz," for some the ultimate
incarnation of Nazi evil, was not infrequently described by survivors in
terms like these: "Like an automaton" or "Hitler's robot."[28] The tendency
to allow other humans to become unpeople, as-if automata, mere bodies
that could be extinguished and dissected at will, carries within itself a
tendency to help turn the perpetrators *themselves* into something very
like what they take themselves to be dealing with: automata. The Nazi
doctor ever increasingly turned his patients (his victims) into machines,
pawns inside a vast machinery of death. The Nazi doctor, iconically, had
to "treat" the victims as if automata, as part of a functioning machinery
that *ultimately required him, the doctor, to become as if a machine himself.*

There is *an* important, ordinary sense in which seeing a living hu-
man being as an automaton is not just difficult, but *impossible.* A sense
in which it cannot be done. I mean my reading of Wittgenstein here to
be entirely alert to that, too. For this signals the crucial sense in which
the Nazis did not believe their own propaganda. This is the flip side of
the concern presented earlier in relation to sec. 286 and elswhere: Do
we truly believe our own words, when we (say that we) acknowledge oth-
ers' pain? The answer is shown largely in our actions, in how easily or
otherwise we fall tacitly into some version of denial. Did the Nazis truly
believe their own words when they denied humanity to their victims,
calling them subhuman and the like; or, again, the Hutu *genocidaires*
when they relentlessly called Tutsis "cockroaches"? Seeing humans as
cockroaches or as vermin of whatever kind is not just difficult; it is a
limiting case of something that is possible. That is, it is in a certain sense
conceptually impossible to attain stably, and yet remain sane, honest,
un-"doubled." This is another aspect of what is lastingly important, I
suggest, about Wittgenstein's formulation, "Seeing a living human be-
ing as an automaton."

This utterly, endlessly peculiar hybrid, a living human being *as* an
automaton—this is the most important of the *Philosophical Investigations'*

several "cyborgs," tenuously present (when human reality and beauty is absent) in the eye of the beholder.

* * *

It is arguably at least in *relative* terms easy to sympathize and empathize with the oppressed. With those whose very humanity has been attacked. The even tougher task, which sooner or later must be undertaken, is to understand the oppressors, and to acknowledge them too (while not abandoning in the least one's clarity that *they*, and not their victims, were the ones in the wrong). For the ultimate attraction is to think that one has nothing in common with the perpetrators.[29] But this is untrue. All great Holocaust writing/literature aims to establish in us this point, that we resist and resist; Wittgenstein's book is no exception.

The *full* flourishing of other humans depends *upon* our acknowledgement of them. So does *our* full flourishing. The oppressor makes it harder for the oppressed to achieve a complete liberation, a complete flourishing, because the very humanity of the oppressed is battered. They wonder whether they can really be deserving of full acknowledgement, if *that* (so "basely") is how they have been treated. But moreover, the oppressor decisively prevents *themselves* from being fully human. In this one particular sense, the harm the oppressors do to themselves is even worse than the harm they do to those they oppress. By the same token it is harder, emotionally and psychologically, for us to risk relating to them.

What does this mean? That Wittgenstein philosophically investigates the truth in what we are saying when any of us says or thinks or is inclined to think things like "To act in that way [for example, as racists do] is inhuman" *or* "They [for example, Jews, blacks, and so on] are subhuman." We need to *humanize* the oppressor by recognizing how easy it is—how human, all-too-human—to fall into the traps sprung by language and culture that result in their being (acting) less than human, by means of them seeing others as less than human.[30] (Philosophy, we might then say, is a battle against the bewitchment of our humanity by means of language.[31])

Thus Wittgenstein offers counterpropaganda.[32] To undermine the hold upon us that dangerous propaganda can easily attain.

Wittgenstein's analyses of the delusions that tend to overcome philosophers, all of us, are *directly* parallel to the analyses that are needed if one really wants to understand the attractions of racism, and how to overcome *it*. Understanding the philosophers, where they have been

tempted by the traps that our language and culture and humanity spring upon us, is, perhaps surprisingly, remarkably like understanding fascists. It is an understanding that we must be truly ready to apply to (and to find for) *ourselves.*

* * *

I don't wish to exaggerate my case. Wittgenstein's intellectual development was no doubt fairly self-contained. Consideration of pain as a paradigm case was already underway in his mind as early as 1929. The *Investigations* is still mostly not as political-philosophical a work as it might have been. Wittgenstein himself mostly shunned "real" politics. It is hardly proven that he fully practiced what he preached to Malcolm in his famous rant against him, quoted near the start of the present paper. And a *Philosophical Investigations* for *our* time ought I believe to be more explicitly political, much less "indirect," than was Wittgenstein's. For the time is not only dark, it is short.

But I don't want to understate my case either. The *Philosophical Investigations*, understood aright, is (much more than its predecessor texts in Wittgenstein's oeuvre) just the kind of book needed to dissolve the deepest seeds of war and genocide. It took that form exactly in that dark time, 1939–1945. Like most of the other great artistic works that concern the Second World War and its worst aspects and the ideology which spawned it, such as the writings of Georges Perec and works such as *Waiting for Godot*, the *Philosophical Investigations* does not wear on its sleeve that it is a war book. (Such sleeve wearing is arguably inimical to most great artistry.) I hope that this paper may at least have made available to you an aspect, a fertile possibility: I believe that *seeing* the *Philosophical Investigations as* a war book is fertile for understanding the real nature and huge significance of Wittgenstein's anti-private-language considerations. For (to return to *PI* sec. 255) it offers a multifaceted cure: a set of reminders of one's humanity, a diagnosis of the habits of mind and heart that can conceal others' humanity (and "by extension" therefore one's own), and, through the power of heteronomy become autonomy, a consequent enabling of the midwifing in oneself and others of a deeper and less vulnerable (to loss) humanity. Because of one's greater awareness and understanding of what that humanity requires (namely, above all, acknowledgement of vulnerability to pain, suffering, loss—and inhumanity).

This paper has been an exercise in pushing a boat out. It might be that I have pushed it slightly farther than it can in fact be pushed. That's

fine—so long as this has revealed relatively clearly just how far it *can* be justly pushed. If the *Tractatus* was a war book that was (is) a work of ethics, then, I suggest, the *Philosophical Investigations* too was a "war book" that was (is) a work of ethics, too, and even to some degree of politics. A therapy for our culture (and especially, for the challenge of the time in which it was written).

In closing, one might see my central thought in something like this way: seeing a living human being as worthy of being treated as nothing more than an automaton—a cyborg in the mind's eye—is analogous to the habits of thought most centrally subject to critique in the anti-private-language considerations. Whereas seeing in a swastika the cross-pieces of a rifle-sight is analogous to seeing the *Philosophical Investigations* as a meditation on Nazism and the like, on our attractions to it, and on how to expose them relentlessly to view so that they dissolve away.[33]

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NOTES

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1   See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (1953; London: MacMillan, 1958), sec. 107–8 (hereafter cited as *PI*).

2   I am thinking especially of her "Russell and Wittgenstein on War: The Avant-Garding of the *Tractatus*," *Common Knowledge* 2, no. 1 (1993): 15–34.

3   In the limiting case: just one. *Solipsism can be seen as a kind of extreme version of racism.* In this connection, it is worth noting Stanley Cavell's telling remark, in his discussion of the nature of slavery, in *The Claim of Reason* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1979), 376: "[The slave-owner] means, indefinitely [by any remarks to the effect that slaves are not human beings], that slaves are different, primarily different from him, secondarily perhaps different from you and me."

4   See Wittgenstein's *Culture and Value*, ed. G. H. Von Wright, rev. ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998) for the remarks in question.

5   Quotation from Wittgenstein's letter taken from Norman Malcolm, *Wittgenstein: A Memoir* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1954), 93.

6   See for example *PI* 103, 115, 111, 129; and 308.

7   To a degree, one can read off how to see the world aright precisely by what is wrong with these overly crude and mechanical pseudomodels. They provide, as it were, a pho-tographic negative for the perspicuous (re)presentation that one seeks. For instance, the "reading-machines" of *PI* 156–79 fairly clearly involve an (un)ethical abuse. People being treated as the "reading-machines" of those passages are treated would, I think, be fairly said to be having their humanity violated.

8   Especially as the considerations against the strong temptation to reach for "something" which one might want to call a "private language" start to come to a head, from about *PI* 280–315.

9   It has been pointed out to me by a referee that Cavell too spots this moment in "What is the Scandal of Scepticism?" in *Philosophy the Day after Tomorrow* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2005), 143. Cf. also *PI* 281–84, and 581–83; and also this marvellous

remark of Wittgenstein's to his disciple Drury who had become a doctor: "Look at your patients more closely as human beings in trouble and enjoy more the opportunity you have to say 'good night' to so many people. This alone is a gift from heaven. . . *I think in some sense you don't look at people's faces closely enough.*" (Emphasis added. Quote taken from Ray Monk's *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius* [New York: MacMillan, 1990], 389). Of course, there are very important differences between Wittgenstein and Levinas. For starters, the very idea of "First Philosophy" is rather inimical to Wittgenstein's thinking. Moreover, one crucial difference between him and Levinas that emerges from the passages I go on to discuss below is this: for Wittgenstein, it's not impossible to really/fully understand another. Real community is attainable and indeed *fundamental* for Wittgenstein (in a way that it is not, as I understand him, for Levinas); it needn't be 'deferred.' Levinas's vision of the "alterity" of "the Other" repeats the very gesture of the alleged unknowability of others critiqued so deeply by Wittgenstein.

10   Compare also Wittgenstein's wonderful discussion at 350f; and sec. 295.

11   Of (what Buddhists call) our "inter-being."

12   Here, compare *PI* 539.

13   This is the task that Thomas Berry identifies in his important book, *The Great Work: Our Way into the Future* (New York: Random House, 1999).

14   My use of scare quotes is advised: because the "relationship" is an "internal" one, as Peter Winch argued in detail. That is to say: "individuals" are *part of* the community. This is a part-whole relationship. This whole is *prior to its parts.*

15   As Robert Lifton (among others) has powerfully argued (in his *The Nazi Doctors* [New York: Basic, 1986]), the biological metaphor of the race or people was taken extremely seriously by the Nazis. They sometimes spoke of the *Volk* as if a single organism, and of other races as parasites, etc. But this does not make their conception any more akin to the in-dividual conception of the community being essayed here. For the logic of purity and of expurgating "parasites" and "infections," etc. endlessly inclines the communalist "people" to turn inwards and to cut off and at least thoroughly to *other* parts *of itself* (in a fashion closely paralleling the quasi-solipsistic logic of the paranoid psychotic mind, as analyzed by R. D. Laing in *The Divided Self* [London: Penguin, 1966]. The logic of the seriously paranoid mind is such that, in a deadly recess-ion away from life, it starts to devitalize and "machine-ize" everybody and everything, including ever more of itself / of oneself). The "oneness" of the racist community conceals a continual near-psychotic paranoia, an endless search for traitors and foreign bodies, a restless violent self-suspicion.

16   Think here of Daniel Paul Schreber, and his "fleeting-improvised men," etc.

17   Compare here Louis Sass's argument for why solipsism turns into depersonalization, into psychotic paranoia, and so on, in his *The Paradoxes of Delusion: Wittgenstein, Schreber and the Schizophrenic Mind* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1994).

18   Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, 376.

19   What is the "resolute" reading? It is the "program" (due to Cora Diamond and James Conant) of understanding Wittgenstein's philosophy, early and late, as consistently "therapeutic," as genuinely just returning ourselves to ourselves. A 'resolute' reading of the anti-private-language considerations does not attempt to state what a private language would be and argue that "*that*" is impossible; rather, it sees the text as engaging with the reader's desires for "something" that she would like to call a "private language" and suggesting that and how those desires don't come to anything that she actually at the end of the day desires. Why is the "resolute" reading one with being an "ethical" reading? I think the answer is present implicitly throughout the work of Cavell, recent Hilary Putnam, Conant, recent Stephen Mulhall, Eli Friedlander, etc. Among other things, as argued earlier, and as I hope this paper as a whole brings out: philosophical problems such as "the mind-body

problem" are intrinsically involved with ethics. You can't hope to solve nor to dissolve nor even really to understand that alleged problem without an ethical sensibility.

20   Wittgenstein had already developed the swastika case of seeing-as at some length in the *Brown Book* (*The Blue and Brown Books* [New York: Harper, 1965], 164), wherein he emphasizes how much cognitive work it takes to see a square with diagonals as a (limiting case of a) swastika. The automaton parallel, the "cyborg" of human-(seen)-as-automaton, is however absent here: it only enters into the scene several years later, in *Philosophical Investigations* itself.

21   Such that they could be discarded or "retired" at will, etc. Writing the point in this way brings to mind Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* / Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*, and the beautiful Wittgensteinian analysis of the latter made by Stephen Mulhall, for example in his "Picturing the Human (Body and Soul): A Reading of *Blade Runner*," *Film and Philosophy* 1 (1994): 87–104. An important moment for Mulhall's paper is sec. iv of the so-called "Part II" of *PI*, where Wittgenstein suggests the following: "I believe that he is not an automaton," just like that, so far makes no sense. // My attitude toward him is an attitude toward a soul. I am not of the *opinion* that he has a soul." This is drawing a kind of consequence from the discussion in *PI*'s 200s, as discussed above. A soul is not a thing within a body. Its existence can be read off how we act / behave toward one another: not (as a behaviorist might have it) how we behave toward bodies, but how we behave toward *people*. And a strong enough failure to behave toward another as toward a person evinces something very like the delusion that someone inclined to speak a nonsense such as the bare utterance of "I believe he is not an automaton" is prone to. Of course, a racist belief often has enough back-up that establishing that *it* is nonsense is much harder. Doing so will take a huge undoing of propaganda. The kind of undoing, in fact, that Wittgenstein essays. . . .

22   For example by the "phenomenonological" method described in outline in *PI* 412.

23   The failure to acknowledge this fragility, a failure present in the 'standard' readings of the so-called "private language argument" offered for instance by Norman Malcolm and by Baker and Hacker, is thus of real moment. In their pretense or hope that human beings can definitively establish one another's humanity, and definitively overcome the sense of any possible gap between them, these readers betray a lack of any sense of vertigo (and in this, they contrast strikingly with "New" Wittgensteinians such as McDowell and Cavell—see for example John McDowell's "Non-Cognitivism and Rule-Following," in *The New Wittgenstein*, ed. Rupert Read and Alice Crary [London: Routledge, 2000], 43), a lack of sensitivity to the endless human temptation to fall away from freely given mutuality, a temptation that is the very reason why the later Wittgenstein *writes* in the almost-painful circling semi-unending fashion that he does. Thus, in the hands of "standard" writers/ readers/interpreters, Wittgenstein's mode of literary self-presentation can never be successfully defended against those still-more-standard philosophers who find this mode simply obscure, an encumbrance, and who are concomitantly unimpressed with what then (understandably) appears to them to be the quasi-behaviorism or question-beggingness of the so-called "private language argument" presented by "standard" Wittgensteinians.

24   Lifton, *Nazi Doctors*, 178–79.

25   Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men : Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York : HarperCollins), 1992.

26   Lifton on Auschwitz as, paradoxically, generally a "calm" place; *Nazi Doctors*, 213.

27   See for example his majestic *Nazi Doctors*, 15. For fascinating analysis of the crucial role that alcohol played in this numbing, see *Nazi Doctors*, 193, 195, 231, 443.

28   Quotes taken from Lifton, *Nazi Doctors*, 344, 377.