

# Wittgenstein Reads Weininger

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PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE  
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK  
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA  
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia  
Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain  
Dock House, The Waterfront, Cape Town 8001, South Africa

<http://www.cambridge.org>

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First published 2004

Printed in the United States of America

*Typeface* ITC New Baskerville 10/13.5 pt.    *System* L<sup>A</sup>T<sub>E</sub>X 2<sub>ε</sub> [TB]

*A catalog record for this book is available from the British Library.*

*Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data*

Wittgenstein reads Weininger / edited by David G. Stern, Béla Szabados.  
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 0-521-82553-9 (hard) – ISBN 0-521-53260-4 (pbk.)

1. Weininger, Otto, 1880–1903 – Influence. 2. Wittgenstein, Ludwig, 1889–1951.

I. Stern, David G. II. Szabados, Bela, 1942–

B3363.W54W58 2004  
193–dc22 2003065391

ISBN 0 521 82553 9 hardback  
ISBN 0 521 53260 4 paperback

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# Reading Wittgenstein (on) Reading

## *An Introduction*

David G. Stern and Béla Szabados

### Wittgenstein's Influences

In 1931, Ludwig Wittgenstein included Otto Weininger on a list he made of ten writers who had influenced him. He wrote:

I think there is some truth in my idea that I am really only reproductive in my thinking. I think I have never *invented* a line of thinking but that it was always provided for me by someone else & I have done no more than passionately take it up for my work of clarification. That is how Boltzmann Hertz Schopenhauer Frege, Russell, Kraus, Loos Weininger Spengler, Sraffa have influenced me.<sup>1</sup>

The list appears to be arranged according to the chronological order in which they influenced Wittgenstein. One sign of this is the odd punctuation of the list, which is due to the fact that Wittgenstein first wrote just four names – “Frege, Russell, Spengler, Sraffa” – and added the other names, carefully arranged in order, above the line. The first three names are authors Wittgenstein read as a teenager; Frege and Russell first had an impact on him when he was in his early twenties. While Wittgenstein would certainly have known of Kraus and Weininger long before 1914, for both were famous and controversial in fin-de-siècle Vienna, their position on the list, and the fact that Kraus, Loos and Weininger all had an influence on the *Tractatus*, which was composed during the First World War, suggests that their influence should be dated to the war years, or immediately before. All three were important influences on Paul Engelmann and his friends in Olmütz with

whom Wittgenstein stayed during an extended leave in the summer of 1916. Spengler's influence would have been after the publication of *The Decline of the West*, in 1918, while Wittgenstein first met Sraffa after returning to Cambridge in 1929. In most cases, while the precise nature of the influence is certainly debatable, the overall character is not.

In the case of Otto Weininger, however, we have very little firm evidence as to how he influenced Wittgenstein, or why. We do know that Wittgenstein read Weininger during the First World War, that he still thought highly of his writing late in life, and that, in the early 1930s, he repeatedly recommended reading Weininger to his friends and students. Desmond Lee, in a piece on Wittgenstein in 1929–31, writes that

He had a great admiration for Weininger's *Sex and Character* and for the introduction to Hertz's *Mechanics*. Both of these he made me read, and I remember his annoyance at finding that the Weininger book was in a section of the University Library which required a special procedure for borrowing: he thought the implication was that it was in some way unfit for undergraduates and that that was nonsense.<sup>2</sup>

Around the same time, Wittgenstein recommended *Sex and Character* to G. E. Moore. In response to Moore's lack of sympathy for the book, Wittgenstein wrote:

Thanks for your letter. I can quite imagine that you don't admire Weininger very much what with that beastly translation and the fact that W. must feel very foreign to you. It is true that he is fantastic but he is *great* and fantastic. It isn't necessary or rather not possible to agree with him but the greatness lies in that with which we disagree. It is his enormous mistake which is great. I.e. roughly speaking if you just add a "~" to the whole book it says an important truth. However we better talk about it when I come back.<sup>3</sup>

However, Wittgenstein's letter does not further explain what he means by adding a negation sign to the whole book, or identify what he takes to be the "important truth" that emerges. Even if we include the passage quoted at the beginning, there are only a handful of additional references to Weininger in the Wittgenstein papers, and they do not, at first sight, cast much additional light on the nature of Weininger's significance for Wittgenstein.<sup>4</sup>

The first author to refer to the importance of Weininger for Wittgenstein was Georg Henrik von Wright,<sup>5</sup> who was also, as editor, responsible for the inclusion of our opening passage about Wittgenstein's influences in *Culture and Value*, first published in 1977. That book is, as he puts it, a selection from the numerous notes in Wittgenstein's manuscript material that "do not belong directly with his philosophical works although they are scattered amongst the philosophical texts. Some of these notes are autobiographical, some are about the nature of philosophical activity, and some concern subjects of a general sort, such as questions about art or about religion."<sup>6</sup> There are also repeated discussions of Wittgenstein's reading, and he refers to a much wider range of authors than he does in the *Philosophical Investigations* or *Tractatus*. For instance, the index of names includes Francis Bacon, Karl Barth, Ludwig Boltzmann, Josef Breuer, John Bunyan and Wilhelm Busch among the B's, Immanuel Kant, Gottfried Keller, Søren Kierkegaard, Heinrich von Kleist and Karl Kraus among the K's.

Von Wright's brief but helpful remarks on Wittgenstein's reading divide the writers he read into two groups. The first consists of philosophers in the narrow sense, the great figures in the history of philosophy. Here, Wittgenstein was not a "learned man":

Wittgenstein had done no systematic reading in the classics of philosophy. He could read only what he could wholeheartedly assimilate. We have seen that as a young man he read Schopenhauer. From Spinoza, Hume, and Kant he said that he could get only glimpses of understanding. . . . it is significant that he did read, and enjoy, Plato. He must have recognized congenial features, both in Plato's literary and philosophical method and in the temperament behind the thoughts.<sup>7</sup>

This summary of Wittgenstein's views about the canonical philosophers finds some corroboration and qualification in Drury's records of conversations with Wittgenstein, which also allow us to add some names to this list: Kant and Berkeley are described as "deep," Leibniz as a "great man" well worth studying, and there are also references to Hegel and Marx.<sup>8</sup> Another canonical figure on Wittgenstein's reading list was William James. He thought very highly of William James's *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, and devoted so much time to the *Principles of Psychology* during the second half of the 1940s that he seriously considered using it as a text in one of his classes.<sup>9</sup>

On a number of occasions, Wittgenstein seems to have almost made a point of bragging about his lack of reading in the history of philosophy, or his lack of respect for the work of other philosophers. Thus we come across reports of comments to Drury and Leavis that seem to uneasily combine self-deprecation, humor and arrogance, and perhaps betray a certain anxiety. Consider the following recollections of discussions with Wittgenstein:

Drury: Did you ever read anything of Aristotle's?

Wittgenstein: Here I am, a one-time professor of philosophy who has never read a word of Aristotle!<sup>10</sup>

[F. R. Leavis:] I was walking once with Wittgenstein when I was moved, by something he said, to remark, with a suggestion of innocent enquiry in my tone: "You don't think much of most other philosophers, Wittgenstein?" "No."<sup>11</sup>

The setting of these two exchanges might well have been partly responsible for the tone of Wittgenstein's responses. In the first, from Drury's notes on a conversation on an afternoon in Phoenix Park, Dublin, in the autumn of 1948, Drury had already quizzed him about the history of philosophy at some length, including Plato, Berkeley, Kant, Hegel, Kierkegaard, and Schopenhauer; in the second exchange, it is evident that there was considerable mutual mistrust between Wittgenstein and Leavis.<sup>12</sup>

On other occasions, Wittgenstein expressed a very different attitude:

Drury: "I sometimes regret the amount of time I spent in reading the great historical philosophers, at a time when I couldn't understand them."

Wittgenstein: "I don't regret that you did all that reading."<sup>13</sup>

Wittgenstein: "I have been wondering what title to give my book. I have thought of something like 'Philosophical Remarks.'"

Drury: "Why not just call it 'Philosophy'?"

Wittgenstein: (angrily) "Don't be such a complete ass – how could I use a word that has meant so much in the history of mankind. As if my work wasn't only a small fragment of philosophy."<sup>14</sup>

These remarks indicate, in a more congenial setting, a respectful attitude toward reading the great philosophers, and considerably more humility toward the philosophical tradition. At the same time, it is clear that Wittgenstein preferred to read relatively little but very closely, frequently returning to the books he knew best.



If philosophy were a cultural constant, then certain philosophical writings could be regarded as compulsory, regardless of the reader's time and place. But philosophy was not like that for Wittgenstein; as von Wright stresses, Wittgenstein was "much more 'history-conscious' than is commonly recognized and understood," and did not regard philosophy as a

"historical constant", any more than science is, or art... His way of seeing philosophy was not an attempt to tell us what philosophy, once and for all, *is*, but expressed what for him, in the setting of his times, it had to be.<sup>15</sup>

Wittgenstein recommended books to his friends and students from which he thought they could benefit, taking into account their circumstances and problems:

"It may be that you ought not to read Kierkegaard. I couldn't read him now. Kierkegaard is so long winded; he keeps on saying the same thing over and over again. I want to say, 'Oh, all right, all right – I agree, but please get on with it.'<sup>16</sup>

"A book you should read is William James's *Varieties of Religious Experience*, that was a book that helped me a lot at one time."<sup>17</sup>

What emerges from these and other conversations, and from the wide range of literary references in his papers, is that Wittgenstein's interest in literature, *pace* Leavis, was far from "rudimentary," and that he had an unusual range and depth of understanding.<sup>18</sup> He read Dostoyevsky in Russian, Kierkegaard in Danish, Ibsen in Norwegian, and Augustine in Latin.<sup>19</sup> He could detect a bad translation of a passage of Augustine's *Confessions*, and supply a better one that made the point clear.<sup>20</sup>

Von Wright also tells us that Wittgenstein received "deeper impressions" from writers "in the borderlands between philosophy, religion, and poetry," and that these included:

St. Augustine, Kierkegaard, Dostoyevsky, and Tolstoy. The philosophical sections of St. Augustine's *Confessions* show a striking resemblance to Wittgenstein's own way of doing philosophy. Between Wittgenstein and Pascal there is a trenchant parallelism which deserves closer study. It should also be mentioned that Wittgenstein held the writings of Otto Weininger in high regard.<sup>21</sup>

A crucial parallel between Pascal and Wittgenstein is the importance and priority of practice, of doing, rather than the traditional privileging of theory. There is a common emphasis in Pascal, Kierkegaard, and Tolstoy on the importance of trust and faith. Their personal and confessional style suggests a greater role for the personal in philosophy, an attitude that is in sharp contrast to the objective and scientific posture of the dominant tradition. We might even say that in all these writers there is an attempt to struggle with pretension and self-deception as they struggle with philosophical problems. This is also true of Dostoyevsky; we get a very lively sense of this when we read Wittgenstein's insightful conversation with Bouwsma about "Notes from Underground," where the topic discussed is how, if at all, is it possible to write objectively about oneself.<sup>22</sup>

Despite these important and noteworthy affinities between Wittgenstein and the writers von Wright identifies that Wittgenstein did read intensively, only two of them, Schopenhauer and Weininger, appear on the list of influences with which we began. This strongly suggests that the list is highly selective, and that the writers who were included each had some particular significance for Wittgenstein. We know that Wittgenstein had once hoped to study with Boltzmann, and there are striking parallels between Boltzmann's and Wittgenstein's conceptions of philosophy.<sup>23</sup> The "picture theory" of the *Tractatus* is a development of Hertzian themes.<sup>24</sup> Wittgenstein knew the opening words of Hertz's *Principles of Mechanics*, which recommend the formulation of alternative notations as a way of dissolving philosophical problems, so well that he could recite them by heart, and at one time intended to quote from them for the motto to the *Philosophical Investigations*.<sup>25</sup> Schopenhauer's influence is evident in the *Tractatus*, especially in the treatment of the will. Similarly, Russell's and Frege's work informed Wittgenstein's Tractarian approach to logic, language and mathematics. Kraus's deep respect for language, his incessant battle against journalistic abuse of language, and his perspective on this abuse as an index of cultural malaise all left a deep mark on Wittgenstein's philosophy. Loos's influence can be traced on the style of both the *Tractatus* and the *Philosophical Investigations* inasmuch as Loos's practice of, and writings on, architecture and aesthetics are notable for the erasure of any sort of ornament and decorative elements as inappropriate for our era. Wittgenstein's attitude to his time was affected

by Spengler's vision of the decline of the West, and his emphasis on seeing connections and the synoptic overview he aimed at have marked affinities with Spengler's methodology.<sup>26</sup> Sraffa's extended criticism of Wittgenstein is praised in the preface to the *Philosophical Investigations*; while the precise nature of their conversations must remain a matter for conjecture, we do know that he mocked the Tractarian idea that every proposition has a logical form,<sup>27</sup> and would have conceived of language as a practice, not a formal system.<sup>28</sup>

### Why Weininger?

The issue of Weininger's connection with Wittgenstein is particularly charged because of Weininger's notoriety as the most widely read anti-Semite and antifeminist of fin-de-siècle Vienna. *Sex and Character*, published a few months before his suicide at the age of twenty-three, became a huge bestseller. The book includes an up-to-date synthesis of recent work on sexuality, a good deal of popular psychology, and an eccentric philosophical system. However, the equally important posthumous collection of essays, *Über die letzten Dinge*, was first translated into English in 2001,<sup>29</sup> and the first English translation of *Sex and Character* was not only poorly translated but also badly abridged. As a result, most Anglo-American philosophers have not been well placed to make sense of Weininger's significance for Wittgenstein, even though he enthusiastically recommended *Sex and Character* to G. E. Moore and other friends as a work of genius. With the publication of Steven Burns's translation of *On Last Things* and Ladislaus Löb's new translation of the full text of *Sex and Character*, the translation obstacles have been removed.<sup>30</sup> However, the pressing question remains: What did Wittgenstein and Weininger have in common philosophically that would illuminate the former's describing the latter as the source of "a line of thinking" that he "seized on with enthusiasm . . . for [his] work of clarification"?<sup>31</sup>

Weininger is an important figure for the study of literary modernism and the relationship between science and culture in the first half of the twentieth century. Both of his books were extremely widely read and went through many printings and translations. They were influential for a whole host of leading authors between the turn of the century and

the Second World War, and remain a subject of continuing fascination. While there is little, in our judgment, that is genuinely original or admirable about his work, there is no doubt that it was a potent distillation of many of the most powerful prejudices of his time, presented not as opinion, but as a synthesis of scientific fact and philosophical insight. *Sex and Character* is a little like a highbrow version of *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus* for turn of the century Vienna, with a good deal of racism, homophobia, and sexism thrown in. However, among Weininger's avid readers can be counted not only Wittgenstein, but also most of the leading literary figures of the years from 1903 to 1939, including such luminaries as Ford Maddox Ford, James Joyce, Franz Kafka, Karl Kraus, Charlotte Perkins-Gilman, Gertrude Stein, and August Strindberg. More recently, *Sex and Character* has also attracted renewed attention among historians of science as a Baedeker to views about science, sexuality, and gender at the time.<sup>32</sup> Weininger's psychoanalytic connections are another important aspect in the continuing interest in his work. Wittgenstein praised Weininger as a "remarkable genius," in part because Weininger was one of the first people outside Freud's inner circle to see "the future importance of the ideas which Freud was putting forward."<sup>33</sup> Quite apart from the old debate as to whether Fliess's ideas about universal bisexuality were stolen by Weininger via Freud, among the most interesting aspects of *Sex and Character* are its proto-psychoanalytic moments, such as the notion that the whore/madonna conception of Woman is the result of Man's projection: "Women have no existence and no essence; they are not, they are nothing. . . . Woman is nothing but man's expression and projection of his own sexuality."<sup>34</sup>

For obvious reasons, much of the Weininger literature is devoted to the debate between those who condemn Weininger out of hand for his prejudices and those who aim to rehabilitate his reputation. The following passages, the first from a website devoted to Weininger and the second from a Wittgenstein expert's homepage, provide good examples of these opposed positions:

*Sex and Character* is one of the few masterpieces of modern times. In it, Weininger overflows with profound insight, deepest love, and awesome courage.<sup>35</sup>

Otto Weininger, the misogynist nutcase by whom Wittgenstein was notoriously influenced.<sup>36</sup>

Our approach is rather different. In addition to casting light, not only on why Weininger mattered to Wittgenstein, but also on the problems surrounding talk of “influence” in philosophy, the essays in this book contribute to the project of understanding Weininger’s reception, addressing both his cultural and intellectual significance and the fact that his work continues to provoke such extreme responses. Before turning to a review of the leading approaches to the relationship between Wittgenstein and Weininger, it will be helpful to first consider the parallels with Wittgenstein’s relationship to another controversial citizen of fin-de-siècle Vienna: Sigmund Freud. Wittgenstein told Rush Rhees that he first read Freud shortly after 1919, and from that point on “Freud was one of the few authors he thought worth reading.”<sup>37</sup> In the early 1940s Wittgenstein spoke of himself as a “disciple of Freud” and as “a follower” of Freud.<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless, he also thought of psychoanalysis as unscientific, and dangerous. Freud is full of pseudo-explanations, which are admittedly brilliant, clever, and charming – hence all the more dangerous.<sup>39</sup>

Freud wanted to replace the mythology in our “explanations” of human action. Similarly, Wittgenstein wanted to see through the mythology involved in philosophical attempts to understand language: do not be taken in by the surface grammar of language, but understand it through “use.”<sup>40</sup> At the same time, Wittgenstein realized that Freud introduced a new mythology, which charmed and captivated, despite its unflattering nature. As McGuinness puts it, Wittgenstein “accepted and rejected Freud in equal measure, perhaps healthily.”<sup>41</sup> His attitude to Weininger seems much the same: an attitude of ambivalence. He embraces and distances himself from Weininger in equal measure in the letter to Moore. Yet when it came to the list of influences, Wittgenstein included Weininger and left out Freud. What differences between Weininger and Freud account for this?

One response to this question starts from Freud’s strategy of arguing that things that look different are really the same. For instance, he denies that there is any real difference between normal and abnormal behavior, in that both are to be explained in terms of deep unconscious forces. Wittgenstein’s line of thinking is radically different. The following remark on Hegel is equally applicable to Freud:

Hegel seems to me to be always wanting to say that things which look different are really the same. Whereas my interest is in showing that things which look

the same are really different. I was thinking of using as a motto for my book a quotation from *King Lear*: "I'll teach you differences."<sup>42</sup>

This indicates a deep difference between Weininger and Freud. While Freud thought of himself as a scientist and a reductionist, Weininger resisted both scientism and reductionism in his writings, where he insisted on differences of many kinds: between and among men and women, different temperaments, and cultures. Weininger, like Wittgenstein, was trained as a scientist, but became an antiscientific thinker, opposed to those who extend scientific methods into areas where they are inappropriate. Hence Freud gives dangerous pseudo-explanations, while Weininger and Wittgenstein accent description, and depiction of facts and practices. Again, Freud is an essentialist, trying to bring all human behavior under one explanatory rubric, while Wittgenstein is an anti-essentialist. Weininger certainly looks like an essentialist, with his quasi-Platonic definitions of opposite Types, and his purported explanation of all character in terms of the Man-Woman dichotomy, but Wittgenstein may have found in Weininger's ever-inventive discovering of new distinctions an anti-essentialist movement of thought that he wished to clarify.

Wittgenstein may also have identified with the spirit in which Weininger wrote. Wittgenstein's struggle with hypocrisy, with self-deception in oneself and one's work, his emphasis on clarity and clarification as a value in itself, and his respect for the particular case are all relevant here. In the late 1940s, Wittgenstein contrasted Weininger with Kafka in the following terms: Kafka, he said, "gave himself a great deal of trouble *not* writing about his trouble," while Weininger, "whatever his faults, was a man who really did write about his."<sup>43</sup> Weininger wrote about problems in his own life, while Freud wrote about problems in other people's lives. Weininger worked on himself as he engaged in the activity of philosophizing and psychologizing, while Freud had the disengaged posture of the scientist. So Freud's scientism, essentialism, and his captivating new mythology are not only mistakes but also personal flaws:

The less somebody knows & understands himself the less great he is, however great may be his talent. For this reason our scientists are not great. For this reason Freud, Spengler, Kraus, Einstein are not great.<sup>44</sup>

Freud believed he had made a series of scientific discoveries, discoveries that provided for a scientific theory of the mind. Wittgenstein reads him as an inventor of an unscientific “way of thinking” that laid claim to the authority of a science; ultimately, psychoanalysis was not only a “powerful mythology”<sup>45</sup> but also a form of self-deception. Freud says: Think like this. Weininger and Wittgenstein say: Here is one way or line of thinking; now keep it in mind but think for yourself.

In sum, we have developed a parallel and a contrast between Wittgenstein’s readings of Freud and of Weininger. Wittgenstein spoke of Freud’s extraordinary scientific achievement and of himself as a disciple of Freud, terms of praise at least as strong as those he gave to Weininger. Yet he was an implacable critic of Freud’s claims to have provided a scientific theory of the mind, or to have made scientific discoveries. This ambivalence is reminiscent of Wittgenstein’s treatment of Weininger too, both in content and vocabulary. However, Weininger’s writing helped Wittgenstein to resist the kind of essentialism and scientism that Freud, in his role as scientist of the mind, takes for granted.<sup>46</sup>

### The Uses of Reading

Section 375 of the *Philosophical Investigations* consists of a series of Socratic questions about reading:

How does one teach anyone to read to himself? How does one know if he can do so? How does he himself know that he is doing what is required of him?<sup>47</sup>

In answering them, Wittgenstein urges us to resist the inclination to turn inward, and the related attractions of a picture of reading as an inner process or activity, psychological or neurological. Sections 156 to 171 contain an extended examination of the concept of reading, a topic Wittgenstein repeatedly discussed. Here, he directs our attention to the skill of producing the right sounds as one looks at the words on the page; understanding what is read need not be part of this activity. In this sense of the word, it is possible to imagine a person who serves as a “reading machine,” vocalizing correctly, but without any understanding of the text. One aim of this passage is to get the reader to distinguish between reading, in this reproductive sense, and reading with understanding; another is to combat the idea that “reading is just

a special inner experience which you may or may not accompany by utterance out loud of the words you read."<sup>48</sup>

Perhaps these reflections on reading can shed light on Wittgenstein's ways of reading others' works as well as the difficulties he encountered in doing so. For once we distinguish reproductive reading from reading with understanding, and recognize that both of them are practical abilities, rather than a self-authenticating inner process, this leaves open the possibility that being well-read is no guarantee that one has understood what one has read. Reading and influence are complex notions. As we read Wittgenstein on reading we are reminded that "we also use the word 'to read' for a family of cases. And in different circumstances we apply different criteria for a person's reading."<sup>49</sup> To say of a person that we can read him or her like a book is to say that we understand that person very well – that he or she is transparent to us. But when the book is itself complicated and opaque, when it does not wear its meaning on its face, as it were, then we have a problem. Are we to understand "reading" in these circumstances as a process, or as an achievement, or both? As our various authors stress, there are many ways in which one can read and be influenced by an author.

The first assessments of Weininger's influence on Wittgenstein were relatively brief, rather general, and gave little attention to textual details and analysis. They also tended toward the purely biographical, without addressing the philosophical. Yet the relations between life and philosophy, influence and originality, are themselves themes that link Weininger and Wittgenstein.<sup>50</sup> Indeed, it is striking that the passage on Wittgenstein's influences, cited at the beginning of this introduction, is surrounded by remarks on influence and originality that have a strongly Weiningerian character.

### Early Assessments

We now turn to a brief overview of the early literature on the relationship between Wittgenstein and Weininger. The principal authorities are Allan Janik, Rudolf Haller, Ray Monk, Brian McGuinness, and Jacques Le Rider. Haller and McGuinness primarily concern themselves with the *Tractatus*, while Janik, Le Rider and Monk also address the question of Weininger's subsequent significance for Wittgenstein.



In Allan Janik and Stephen Toulmin's *Wittgenstein's Vienna* (1973), one of the first discussions of the Wittgenstein-Weininger connection, Weininger makes only a brief appearance: they emphasize his negative view of femininity, and his influence on Karl Kraus.<sup>51</sup> However, by the end of the 1970s Janik had begun to argue that Weininger's significance for Wittgenstein was much more direct and far-reaching, for Janik reads Weininger as Wittgenstein's leading example of someone who tries to say what can only be shown:

By looking at certain aspects of Weininger's work, one can discover an ethical position that asserts the sorts of things about "absolute value" that Wittgenstein admires but insists are unsayable. . . . Wittgenstein presupposes the validity of Weininger's ethical views in practice while he denies that these views can be put into words in the *Tractatus*.<sup>52</sup>

In a pioneering essay, Rudolf Haller further articulated this approach to the Wittgenstein-Weininger connection, arguing that Weininger influenced Wittgenstein philosophically in the *Tractatus*, exploring such philosophical common ground as their approaches to solipsism, the thesis that the soul of man is the microcosm, and the unity of logic and ethics. The latter is seen by Haller as the deepest affinity between the two thinkers in that "both believe that neither logical nor ethical rules can be established, but yet that both logical and ethical rules have an essential connection to the world and are thus one and the same."<sup>53</sup> Jacques Le Rider, in his *Le Cas Otto Weininger* (1982, 1985), on the other hand, construes Weininger's influence on Wittgenstein as purely personal. He denies there was any positive philosophical influence and argues that Wittgenstein's work amounts to a negation of Weininger's main theses.

Wittgenstein's biographers, Ray Monk and Brian McGuinness, also give their attention to this issue. McGuinness highlights the affinities between Weininger and the young Wittgenstein. Both were of Jewish descent and the theme of the influence of a person's Jewishness on his or her life recurs in their works; both were attracted to the idea that a man's character is something he cannot escape from.<sup>54</sup> McGuinness also suggests that the role of a theory of elements in the *Tractatus* is a Weiningerian echo. But what is of utmost importance, McGuinness maintains, for understanding why Weininger mattered to Wittgenstein, is the personal dimension. It was because "Weininger's

thought about character, superficial and half-baked at times, came from a deep concern with ethical problems of his own life” that Wittgenstein later spoke of *Sex and Character* as an important book – for the questions it raised, not for its answers.<sup>55</sup> While McGuinness maintains in his biography, subtitled *Young Ludwig* (1988), that the influence was both existential and philosophical, he restricts the philosophical impact to the *Tractatus* and its source to Weininger’s first book, *Sex and Character*.

The subtitle of Ray Monk’s biography, *The Duty of Genius* (1990), refers to Monk’s construal of the Wittgenstein-Weininger connection: he sees Weininger’s ideas about the life of genius as shaping the kind of life that Wittgenstein led. Monk believes that of all the books Wittgenstein read in his adolescence, it was *Sex and Character* that “had the greatest and most lasting impact on his outlook.”<sup>56</sup> *Sex and Character* rigorously separates love and sexual desire, insists that sexuality is incompatible with the honesty that genius demands, and takes an uncompromising view of everything except the products of genius. Weininger’s peculiar twist on Kant’s moral law not only imposes an inviolable duty to be honest but requires that everyone discover in themselves whatever genius they possess. Observing that Wittgenstein gave voice to these Weiningerian themes throughout his life, Monk maintains that Weininger’s positive influence was primarily on Wittgenstein’s convictions as to how he should lead his life.<sup>57</sup> However the connections Monk cites do not really answer the question about Weininger’s impact on Wittgenstein’s *philosophical* outlook. While Monk provides us with much evidence for ascribing a common outlook to Wittgenstein and Weininger, the question of precisely how Weininger influenced Wittgenstein’s philosophy, and to what extent the influence goes beyond the particular ethical and cosmological themes that Wittgenstein took up in the *Tractatus* is not addressed.

Taken together, these early interpretations do give us a compelling picture of Weininger’s impact on the young Wittgenstein and the *Tractatus*. They also provide a point of departure for a more detailed consideration of Weininger’s influence in the *Tractatus*, and of the significance of the Weiningerian unity of logic and ethics. Weininger claims that

Logic and ethics are fundamentally the same, they are no more than a duty to oneself. . . . All ethics are possible only by the laws of logic, and logic is no

more than the ethical side of the law. Not only virtue, but also insight, not only sanctity, but also wisdom, are the duties of mankind. Through the union of these alone comes perfection.<sup>58</sup>

The importance of this passage lies in its determination of what it is to be a moral agent: Only someone who can understand logic can be a moral agent.

A creature that cannot grasp the mutual exclusiveness of A and not A has no difficulty in lying; more than that, such a creature has not even the consciousness of lying, being without a standard of truth.<sup>59</sup>

Both Wittgenstein and Weininger paid close attention to the phenomena of hypocrisy and lying, and in strikingly similar ways: as occasions where we are confronted by problems of both logic and morality.<sup>60</sup> Wittgenstein touches on this Weiningerian theme in the *Tractatus*, where he characterizes logic, ethics and aesthetics as “transcendental”:

Logic is not a body of doctrine, but a mirror-image of the world. Logic is transcendental.<sup>61</sup>

And further on:

Ethics is transcendental. (Ethics and aesthetics are one.)<sup>62</sup>

The standard reading of these gnomic identifications is that the use of the term “transcendental” provides the Kantian key to understanding them. Logic, ethics and aesthetics are all transcendental because they have to do with the conditions for the possibility of the world. Kant certainly gave pure reason a central place in his ethical system. But it is Weininger, not Kant, who draws the particular connections between logic and ethics that are of importance in the *Tractatus*. Taking seriously the deep connection between logic and ethics opens up an ethical perspective on Wittgenstein’s struggles with logic and language. If confusion in our thinking is a kind of moral failure, then a struggle for clarity, transparency, and perspicuity is a moral struggle. For this reason, Wittgenstein writes that “clarity, transparency, is an end in itself,”<sup>63</sup> not only a means to other ends. Similarly, Weininger writes, “All error must be felt to be a crime. And so a man must not err. He *must* find the truth, and so he can find it.”<sup>64</sup> Wittgenstein’s works belong to the genre of *confessional* philosophical writing, the sort of writing that breaks down the distinction between the personal and

the philosophical. Against this background, the strangest thing about the famous exchange between Wittgenstein and Russell – “What are you thinking about, logic or your sins?” “Both” – is that Russell was so puzzled by it that he made a joke of it.<sup>65</sup>

In this way, the Tractarian connection between logic and ethics is made clearer if we see the extent to which Wittgenstein’s work on the *Tractatus* in 1916 is Weiningerian. However, the overall impression left by these initial assessments of Weininger’s influence on Wittgenstein is that Weininger’s personal impact had a deep and lasting influence on Wittgenstein as a man, but Weininger’s philosophical impact was limited to sections 5.6 and 6.4 of the *Tractatus*.

### Reassessments

Most early attempts to assess the precise nature of Weininger’s influence on Wittgenstein looked for commonalities in content: views that could be attributed to Weininger, and identified as the source of Wittgenstein’s own convictions. The results were relatively modest, and focused on a limited number of quite specific doctrines in the *Tractatus*. This collection of essays reassesses that influence, arguing that its nature, scope, and duration have been underestimated. In particular, and more positively, most authors aim to show not only how Weininger influenced Wittgenstein in 1916, or the early 1930s, but also how Wittgenstein’s philosophy as a whole shows signs of that influence. One reason for this change in approach is that Weininger’s extreme essentialism sits uneasily with his insistence on the enormous variation and particularity of individual cases, an aspect of his work that philosophers have not previously acknowledged.

Unable to see how Weininger’s principal philosophical views might explain Wittgenstein’s attribution of influence to Weininger, Monk’s *Duty of Genius* and McGuinness’s *Young Ludwig* emphasized biographical and existential concerns. While our contributors continue this discussion of the relationship between the doctrinal and the biographical, they also open up different ways of construing influence. Closer attention to Wittgenstein’s reading of Weininger has led us to question common assumptions about the concept of influence, and its role in previous discussions of the Weininger-Wittgenstein connection. Each of the first three contributors to the volume, Szabados, Janik, and