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## Ludwig Wittgenstein on Jewish Creativity: From Self-Doubt to Self-Hatred

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**Abstract:** *In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Vienna was the site of great flourishing in the literary and visual arts, philosophy and music, giving rise to avant-garde modernist movements, such as the Vienna Secession. The artists and intellectuals involved with these movements contributed significant aesthetic innovations to their respective fields. At the same time, Austrians were preoccupied with defining themselves as a German nation. Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951), best-known for his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* published in 1922, was one of the pre-eminent philosophers to emerge from Vienna during that period. Despite his brilliance, he contended with his own identity as a Jew and its effect on his creative potential, a concern that accompanied him throughout his life. In *Culture and Value*, compiled posthumously, Wittgenstein disparaged the adequacy of Jewish artists and intellectuals, in remarks which may be interpreted as antisemitic. This article offers an alternate reading of these comments through the lens of Sander Gilman’s theory of self-hatred, classifying them into the three categories proposed by Gilman in his book *Jewish Self-Hatred: Anti-Semitism and the Hidden Language of the Jews*; namely, internalisation of dominant paradigms about the Other; the belief in the Jews’ inability to fully integrate into Western society due to their “secret language”, which infiltrates all of their cultural pursuits; as well as hatred of another who embodies the qualities one dislikes in oneself. Thus, Wittgenstein’s views may be understood as a reflection of his own insecurities and internal conflict, rather than an absolute judgement on the value of his Jewish colleagues’ creative and intellectual work.*

**Keywords:** *Ludwig Wittgenstein, Sander Gilman, Jewish self-hatred, creativity, aesthetics, morality, Otto Weininger, Richard Wagner, German Romanticism, Modernism*

Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951), best-known for his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* published in 1922, was admired by his colleagues in the philosophy department at Cambridge University as “a philosopher of genius”.<sup>1</sup> Even though he was held in such high esteem by leading philosophers of the time, he went through extended periods of self-doubt, when he did not think that he deserved praise. Immediately after publishing that book, for instance, he believed that he had solved all the problems of philosophy, but later became dissatisfied with certain parts of the treatise. These insecurities are reflected in his insights, compiled posthumously in *Culture and Value*, such as “the saint is the only Jewish ‘genius’. Even the greatest Jewish thinker is no more than talented. (Myself for instance)”.<sup>2</sup> One is forced to wonder what led Wittgenstein to express such negative thoughts

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<sup>1</sup> Allan Janik and Stephen Toulmin, *Wittgenstein’s Vienna* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973), 207.

<sup>2</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value: A Selection from the Posthumous Remains*, ed. G. H. von Wright (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 16.

about fellow Jews and why he disliked their cultural productions so much? At first glance these comments may be understood as a hateful theory perpetuating the belief that Jewish artists and intellectuals lacked creativity and were, consequently, unable to significantly contribute to Western culture. Upon closer examination, however, these remarks appear as an attempt to define his own place as a Jewish intellectual within the context of Western philosophy, since most of the comments are directed at himself.

In his comprehensive book, *Wittgenstein on the Human Spirit* (2012),<sup>3</sup> Yuval Lurie examines these comments in the context of Wittgenstein's philosophical attempt to "clarify" the concepts of the Jew and of the "Jewish spirit". Lurie identifies the stereotypes prevalent in early-twentieth-century Viennese society, such as the Jews' "alien, secretive, diseased and parasitic spiritual nature",<sup>4</sup> which seeped into Wittgenstein's own thoughts on the subject, asserting that Wittgenstein:

had been making use of the ways in which his culture regarded Jews and their spiritual nature, by making use of its stereotypical symbolic discourse. He was thus partaking of a shared critical attitude towards Jews and expressing the anti-Semitic metaphysical outlook emerging out of his culture. In doing so, he was also associating himself with a social attitude and ideology hostile toward Jews.<sup>5</sup>

Once Lurie establishes Wittgenstein's reliance on, reiteration, and even justification of antisemitic sentiments, he alludes to the fact that they may have found their source in Wittgenstein's self-hatred:

With anti-Semitism as background, the fact that these remarks are also self-directed does not alter this perception. It only makes them expressions of what Theodor Lessing has described as 'Jewish self-hatred'. In this case, it also takes the form of spiritual self-hate, manifesting a yearning for a different spiritual nature than the one the writer possesses, a yearning for a non-Jewish spiritual nature.<sup>6</sup>

This article seeks to expand and elaborate on this last statement by Lurie, which appears to be of great significance to the understanding of Wittgenstein's attitude toward contemporary Jewish artists and intellectuals, as well as for his estimation of his own merits as an Austrian cultural figure. Wittgenstein's comments about the inadequacy of Jewish artists and intellectuals may be classified into the three categories of self-hatred proposed by Sander Gilman in his seminal book on the subject: namely, internalisation of dominant paradigms about the Other; the belief in the Jews' inability to fully integrate into Western society due to their "secret language", which infiltrates all of their cultural pursuits; and, finally, hatred of another who embodies the qualities one dislikes in oneself.<sup>7</sup> According to Paul Reitter's *On the Origins of Jewish Self-Hatred*, the term was coined after World War I by Viennese Jewish journalist Anton Kuh in his book *Jews and Germans* (1921). Kuh conceived of Jewish self-hatred as a way of life that Jews could and should embrace in order to integrate into German society.<sup>8</sup> It is, therefore, quite possible that Wittgenstein was influenced by

<sup>3</sup> Yuval Lurie, *Wittgenstein on the Human Spirit* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2012).

<sup>4</sup> Lurie, *Wittgenstein on the Human Spirit*, 26.

<sup>5</sup> Lurie, *Wittgenstein on the Human Spirit*, 69.

<sup>6</sup> Lurie, *Wittgenstein on the Human Spirit*, 62.

<sup>7</sup> Sander L. Gilman, *Jewish Self-Hatred: Anti-Semitism and the Hidden Language of the Jews* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).

<sup>8</sup> Paul Reitter, *On the Origins of Jewish Self-Hatred* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 29.

his compatriot and intentionally based his thinking about Jewish creativity on these controversial notions.

Wittgenstein was born to one of the wealthiest families in the Habsburg Empire; the family had taken its name from the aristocratic German family which had employed his great-grandfather. This patriarch was so eager to conceal his Jewish background that he added “Christian” to his name and converted to Protestantism along with his wife. The family was completely assimilated into Austrian society and broke all its ties with the local Jewish community, to such an extent that one of his daughters was shocked as an adult to hear rumours about their Jewish origins.<sup>9</sup> The family accomplished such complete assimilation by immersing itself in German culture and befriending the most important Austrian artists and musicians, many of whom, such as Johannes Brahms, performed at events hosted in their home. Thus, they came to be known as important patrons of the visual and musical arts in Vienna<sup>10</sup> and lived in an “all-pervading atmosphere of humanity and culture”, in which they absorbed Western values.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, from the start, Wittgenstein identified himself primarily as a bourgeois product of Viennese German culture of the nineteenth century, rather than as a Jew, particularly since he had been baptised at birth. As Brian McGuinness states, “Theirs was not a life with any Jewish dimension, or consciousness of their remote Jewish ancestry.”<sup>12</sup> However, the family was very sensitive to the rampant antisemitism in Vienna at that time and even considered itself as “Jewish in character”, despite the fact that it did not observe religious practice.<sup>13</sup>

From the moment of his birth, Wittgenstein received mixed messages concerning his Jewish heritage and was often confused about his true religious identity. When the Nuremberg Laws were instituted, the family attempted to avoid being designated as Jewish by disseminating the myth that one of their grandparents was the illegitimate son of a German prince of the original Wittgenstein family.<sup>14</sup> In contrast, Wittgenstein’s sister Margarete Stonborough insisted on remaining imprisoned with other Viennese Jews after the Anschluss, even though the Nazis granted the Wittgenstein family special privileges and agreed to overlook their Jewish background,<sup>15</sup> at the significant cost of returning to Austria a portion of their assets held abroad, in order to “purchase a racial status that permitted them to remain in Austria but in safety”.<sup>16</sup> Already as a child growing up in Vienna under the leadership of antisemitic mayor Karl Lueger, Wittgenstein concealed his Jewish background in order to join a Viennese gymnastics club reserved for Aryans, while his brother Paul refused to lie about their heritage to achieve the same goal.<sup>17</sup> As a professor at Cambridge, Wittgenstein never corrected those who erroneously thought that he belonged to the aristocratic German family, Sayn-Wittgenstein, and even asked his cousin in England not to reveal his Jewish origins.<sup>18</sup> This attitude reflects his internalisation of the prevalent notion that Judaism and aristocracy cannot be reconciled because they represent opposite ends of the German social hierarchy,

<sup>9</sup> Ray Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius* (New York: Penguin Books, 1990), 4–5.

<sup>10</sup> Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein*, 5–6.

<sup>11</sup> Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein*, 8.

<sup>12</sup> Brian McGuinness, “Wittgenstein and the Idea of Jewishness”, in *Wittgenstein: Biography & Philosophy*, edited by James C. Klagge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 221.

<sup>13</sup> Janik and Toulmin, *Wittgenstein’s Vienna*, 172–173.

<sup>14</sup> Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein*, 4.

<sup>15</sup> Janik and Toulmin, *Wittgenstein’s Vienna*, 173.

<sup>16</sup> McGuinness, “Wittgenstein and the Idea of Jewishness”, 231.

<sup>17</sup> Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein*, 14.

<sup>18</sup> Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein*, 278–279.

with Jews on the lowest rung and aristocrats on the highest. His desire to be part of Christian society was so strong that he once wrote in his diary: “I am much pained by the fact of my not being a Christian.”<sup>19</sup>

### Internalisation of Dominant Paradigms about the Other

According to Sander Gilman, self-hatred among Jews became a major phenomenon in Central Europe at the turn of the twentieth century, because Jews aspiring to acceptance into European society internalised the majority’s view of them and projected it back upon the minority group to which they originally belonged and from which they sought to disassociate themselves. In order to be regarded by the majority as one of their own, they had to embrace its antagonistic attitude toward the Jews and, consequently, also toward themselves. This process caused the “fragmentation of identity” that resulted in self-hatred. More precisely, “the image projected onto the world of the Other by outsiders is simply an extension of that projected onto them by the group that defined them as Other”.<sup>20</sup> These Jews’ desire to be accepted into general society was so strong that they disowned their own People and acknowledged that the Jews embodied the stereotypical traits attributed to them by the majority. In other words, “the essential Jew in conflict with the values of the West produces the self-hater, that individual who typifies the Jew in the West”.<sup>21</sup> Hence, many Jews, such as Wittgenstein, who strove to be recognised for their cultural achievements by Western standards, were compelled to express antagonistic thoughts against the Jews, in order to demonstrate their complete allegiance to German society.

At that time, Germany was attempting to define its national identity and perceived the Jews as strangers who did not belong to the nation, even though they lived and functioned among the Germans.<sup>22</sup> Against the background of the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and its consolidation into nation states, the Wittgenstein family struggled with its Jewish identity, preferring to integrate into Austrian society, which forced them to internalise many of the dominant stereotypes about the Jews. As Wittgenstein wrote in his diary, “What others think of me always occupies me to an extraordinary extent. I am often concerned to make a good impression. I very frequently think about the impression I make on others.”<sup>23</sup> This passage indicates Wittgenstein’s concern not to appear as a Jew in the eyes of the Austrians, a goal that may have seemed to him attainable only by expressing denigrating thoughts about other Jews. Wittgenstein’s internalisation of the Austrians’ negative stereotypes about the Jews is demonstrated by the decline of his close friendship with Paul Engelmann once Wittgenstein fell in love with Marguerite Respinger, due to her dislike of Jews (Wittgenstein himself was exempt from her disdain because of his family’s status in German culture).<sup>24</sup>

Those negative notions about the Jews were so deeply ingrained in him that they even haunted his dreams.<sup>25</sup> He reports that one night he saw a Jew murdering an innocent girl. The man was not

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<sup>19</sup> Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein*, 210.

<sup>20</sup> Gilman, *Jewish Self-Hatred*, 2–5.

<sup>21</sup> Gilman, *Jewish Self-Hatred*, 297.

<sup>22</sup> Yuval Lurie, “Jews as a Parable”, *Iyyun: A Hebrew Philosophical Quarterly* 37:2 (April 1988): 99.

<sup>23</sup> Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein*, 278.

<sup>24</sup> Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein*, 239.

<sup>25</sup> Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein*, 279–280.

recognisable as a Jew because he was brought up by a non-Jewish Scottish lord. Wittgenstein uses Nazi slogans such as “Must there be a Jew behind every indecency?” to express his disapproval of Vertsag’s (the hero of his dream) actions and even describes him through the eyes of the Nazis, who considered assimilated Jews to be more dangerous than visible ones, since they could infiltrate German society without anyone taking notice. He may, moreover, have been influenced in this matter by the work of another prominent Viennese Jew, Sigmund Freud. According to William Olmstead, “*The Interpretation of Dreams* is haunted by the spectre of antisemitism and shows Freud’s awareness of the often sensational antisemitic developments that were unfolding while he wrote.”<sup>26</sup> Wittgenstein’s report of the dream ends with the statement: “I am embarrassed and do not want to say that I myself am descended from Jews or that the case of Vertsag is my own case too.”<sup>27</sup> This sentence reveals that Wittgenstein’s self-perception as an assimilated Jew was shaped by the German conception of Jews as a foreign entity contaminating German society and culture by joining it while retaining their negative traits. It also demonstrates “the victim’s collusion with the enemy”, a phenomenon associated with Freud’s “central concept of dream censorship [which] develops in response to contemporary antisemitic incidents and policies”.<sup>28</sup> In this case, it reveals itself in the Jewish dreamer’s internalisation of the Nazi perspective as a manifestation of his own self-hatred.

The most startling manifestation of Wittgenstein’s internalisation of negative views about the Jews appears in his comments about Jewish artists, such as:

The Jewish mind is not in a position to produce even so much as a tiny blade of grass or flower but its way is to make a drawing of the blade of grass or the flower that has grown in the mind of another and then use it to sketch a comprehensive picture... Danger arises only when someone confuses the nature of a Jewish work with that of a non-Jewish work and especially when the author of the former does so himself, as he so easily may;<sup>29</sup>

Mendelssohn’s music, when it is flawless, consists of musical arabesques. That is why we feel embarrassed at every lack of rigour in his work;<sup>30</sup>

What is lacking in Mendelssohn’s music? A ‘courageous’ melody.<sup>31</sup>

These remarks echo Richard Wagner’s article, “Judaism in Music”, which sought to discredit his Jewish competitors Felix Mendelssohn and Giacomo Meyerbeer.<sup>32</sup> It is interesting that both Wagner and Wittgenstein selected Mendelssohn as the prime example of an artist without feeling, particularly since Wittgenstein’s grandparents sent their nephew to study piano under Mendelssohn’s

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<sup>26</sup> William Olmstead, “Turning the Tables: Freud’s Response to Antisemitism in *The Interpretation of Dreams*”, *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 54 (1) (2009): 191.

<sup>27</sup> Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein*, 280.

<sup>28</sup> Olmstead, “Turning the Tables”, 192–193.

<sup>29</sup> Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 16–17.

<sup>30</sup> Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 23.

<sup>31</sup> Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 40.

<sup>32</sup> Richard Wagner, *Judaism in Music and Other Essays*, trans. William Ashton Ellis (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 75–122.

direction,<sup>33</sup> demonstrating their respect for him as a great musician. In publishing this article, Wagner was also concerned with refuting rumours that he had been fathered by Ludwig Geyer, a Jewish man.<sup>34</sup> By attacking Jewish artists as rational and uncreative, Wagner asserted his pure German background, as he implicitly compared those Jewish artists to himself throughout the article, thus establishing himself as “the creative genius *par excellence*”, who could not have been so successful had he truly had Jewish blood.<sup>35</sup> Though David Stern writes that, in passages like the one quoted above, “Mendelssohn is introduced as an exemplar of Wittgenstein’s idea of Jewishness, and used as a way of thinking about Wittgenstein’s own ideals, which he thinks of as akin to Mendelssohn’s”,<sup>36</sup> Wittgenstein might, rather, have been positioning himself as a foil for the Jewish artists mentioned in his remarks in order to distinguish himself from them and gain recognition as an important contributor to Western culture. This may be deduced from his use of distinct pronouns, as in the clause “*we* feel embarrassed at every lack of rigour in *his* [Mendelssohn’s] work”.<sup>37</sup>

### Romanticism versus modernism, culture versus civilisation

Wagner’s comments about Jewish artists were inspired by the current German Romantic ideology that believed all art should originate from passionate emotions. Since the Jew is completely intellectual and “has no true passion, and least of all a passion that might thrust him on to art-creation”, he draws his inspiration from the “Folk” among whom he lives.<sup>38</sup> However, since he is not deeply grounded in its culture, he cannot grasp and express the profound feelings that stimulate that culture; consequently, he cannot create great works of art that are supposed to convey those feelings.<sup>39</sup> Wittgenstein would have been aware of Wagner’s article, as well as of other popular aesthetic theories by Hegel, Eugen Dühring and Friedrich Ratzel, who articulated similar concepts.<sup>40</sup> Wittgenstein formulated his own insights about Jewish artists and their creative talent based on the notions he absorbed from these thinkers and particularly from Oswald Spengler’s *The Decline of the West*,<sup>41</sup> a treatise instrumental in disseminating Romantic ideology. Wittgenstein acknowledged Spengler’s inspiration, as 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 and 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>42</sup>

Spengler distinguished between periods in world history which he labelled “culture” and “civilisation”. According to him, “culture” is the primal historical period, when original and authentic

<sup>33</sup> Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein*, 5–6.

<sup>34</sup> Richard Wagner, *Judaism in Music*, 104.

<sup>35</sup> Gilman, *Jewish Self-Hatred*, 211.

<sup>36</sup> David Stern, “Was Wittgenstein a Jew?”, in *Wittgenstein: Biography & Philosophy*, edited by James C. Klagge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 266.

<sup>37</sup> Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 23.

<sup>38</sup> Richard Wagner, *Judaism in Music*, 93.

<sup>39</sup> Richard Wagner, *Judaism in Music*, 89–90.

<sup>40</sup> Gilman, *Jewish Self-Hatred*, 212–217.

<sup>41</sup> Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, trans. and ed. Charles Francis Atkinson (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1928).

<sup>42</sup> Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 16.

cultural products are brought forth by artists who create with primitive instincts and genuine feeling (e.g., Classical Greece). In contrast, “civilisation” follows and modifies the preceding era’s cultural products by means of that society’s intellectual faculties (e.g., the Roman Empire).<sup>43</sup>

According to Lurie, Wittgenstein’s distinction between culture and civilisation “clearly aligns his philosophical thinking with that of the Romantic Movement – placing it within the very heart of this important philosophical tradition”.<sup>44</sup> Wittgenstein conflated the two historical periods suggested by Spengler to represent the situation in contemporary Central Europe and distinguished between non-Jewish artists, who produce culture by creating with their spiritual and emotional impulses, and Jewish artists, who produce civilisation by intellectually upgrading the artworks produced by non-Jews.<sup>45</sup> Alternatively, Wittgenstein perceived nineteenth-century art, music and literature produced by the German Romantic movement that valued passion and spirituality as the epitome of “culture”, while associating Modernism, which he disliked, with “civilisation” and holding Jewish artists and thinkers responsible for its inception. More precisely, Jews joined German Romantic culture and transformed it into a civilisation by refining it with their intellectual faculties. However, Wittgenstein did not appreciate their modification of those artworks, since “wisdom is passionless”<sup>46</sup> and “wisdom is something cold and to that extent foolish... We might also say: wisdom merely *conceals* life from you.”<sup>47</sup> Perhaps Wittgenstein felt that Modernism – with its universal ideals – was emotionally detached from the rich tradition of German culture he admired so much and he therefore associated it with intellectuality independent of the unique German experience. This type of cultural production could occur anywhere, since art produced by Jews is not an organic part of the culture in which it is created. Wittgenstein complained that:

my originality (if that is the right word) is, I believe, an originality that belongs to the soil, not the seed. (Perhaps I have no seed of my own.) Sow a seed in my soil, and it will grow differently than it would in any other soil. Freud’s originality too was like this, I think... (*Courage is always original.*)<sup>48</sup>

This statement indicates that, in his opinion, Jews would be able to pursue their cultural endeavours within whichever cultural context they desire, since their artworks do not convey the deep feelings of a specific cultural experience.<sup>49</sup> Therefore, in modern times, when Jews finally gained emancipation and were, as a result, enabled to significantly enrich their local cultures, Western civilisation blossomed and became more sophisticated, but less particular than ever before.<sup>50</sup> These notions held by Wittgenstein about Jewish artists reflect his desire to gain recognition as a serious thinker in the tradition of Western philosophy, by demonstrating his distinctness from other Jewish artists, as well as his internalisation of the Germans’ notions about the Jews.

Wittgenstein was well aware that between 1860 and 1938 Vienna underwent a period of prolific creativity. Jews dominated Vienna’s cultural scene, both as patrons of the arts and as artists, and exerted significant influence on Viennese culture, despite their small number as a minority. Jews

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<sup>43</sup> Lurie, “Jews as a Parable”, 100.

<sup>44</sup> Yuval Lurie, “Wittgenstein on Culture and Civilization”, *Inquiry* 32 (4) (1989): 379.

<sup>45</sup> Lurie, “Jews as a Parable”, 101.

<sup>46</sup> Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 61.

<sup>47</sup> Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 64.

<sup>48</sup> Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 42.

<sup>49</sup> Lurie, “Jews as a Parable”, 114.

<sup>50</sup> Lurie, “Jews as a Parable”, 102.

excelled at turning avant-garde artistic movements into mainstream and, as a result, gained popular acclaim and celebrity status for their innovative artistic styles.<sup>51</sup> In fact, their prominence was so strongly felt that the Modernist Secession style was known in Vienna as “the Jewish style”.<sup>52</sup> It is arguable that the creative achievements of Jewish artists in Vienna may be attributed in part to their ability to enrich their artworks by drawing inspiration from both German culture and from their unique Jewish heritage, as well as to their intensive preoccupation with determining their identity and striking a balance between their Jewish and German affinities.

Wittgenstein, on the other hand, was very conservative in his aesthetic taste and regarded Modernist art as the decay of culture.<sup>53</sup> He once said that the six greatest composers were Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Brahms and Liszt, and he particularly disliked Mahler and Schönberg, who revolutionised the principles of Western music by incorporating motifs from Jewish music into their compositions and inventing atonal music that is, by definition, dissonant to Western ears.<sup>54</sup> His perception of Jewish artists as unoriginal and uncreative may show that he recognised their significant contribution to Modernism, which he disliked. As he himself admitted, “in order to enjoy a poet, you have to *like* the culture to which he belongs as well. If you are indifferent or repelled by it, your admiration cools off.”<sup>55</sup> In other words, he may have arrived at these conclusions due to his disapproval of Modernism, rather than a dislike of the individual Jewish artists active in Vienna during that period. This assessment is reinforced by his assertion during his lectures on aesthetics at Cambridge that “The words we call expressions of aesthetic judgement play a very complicated role, but a very definite role, in what we call a culture of a period. To describe their use or to describe what you mean by a cultured taste, you have to describe a culture.”<sup>56</sup> Hence, aesthetic judgement and taste are dependent upon the cultural context.

Wittgenstein appears to have been a very conflicted individual unsure of his own preferences. Accordingly, a contradiction is apparent in Wittgenstein’s admiration of Adolf Loos’s plain and unornamented style of architecture, which he himself adopted when building his sister’s house.<sup>57</sup> This style is a product of the simplification of Modernism, with the retention of only the most basic and functional structural elements, unlike the elaborate classical music he enjoyed so much. Although he adored nineteenth-century German culture and regarded himself as its successor, Wittgenstein’s own philosophical treatises, such as the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, may be classified within the Modernist school of thought with “no precedent in the entire tradition of Western philosophy”.<sup>58</sup> As a matter of fact, the *Tractatus* revolutionised the study of philosophy by foregrounding the representational properties of language, in itself a Modernist concern. Yet, by criticising Jewish artists, he may have sought to align himself with the German Romantic philosophical tradition, which stood in opposition to Modernism. This attitude reveals his internal struggle and attempt to establish himself as a German philosopher despite his Jewish origins, by disassociating himself from the “Jewish” Modernist style. Indeed, toward the end of the *Tractatus* he classifies

<sup>51</sup> Allan Janik, *Wittgenstein’s Vienna Revisited* (London: Transaction Publishers, 2001), 11.

<sup>52</sup> Janik, *Wittgenstein’s Vienna Revisited*, 53.

<sup>53</sup> Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein*, 20.

<sup>54</sup> Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein*, 78.

<sup>55</sup> Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 96.

<sup>56</sup> Barrett, Cyril, editor. *Wittgenstein: Lectures & Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), item 25, 8.

<sup>57</sup> Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein*, 106.

<sup>58</sup> Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein*, 316.

metaphysical, ethical and aesthetic philosophical considerations as “inexpressible” and “transcendental”, stating that “The feeling of the world as a limited whole is the mystical feeling.”<sup>59</sup> This statement resonates with the German Romantic notion of the Sublime, and its view that philosophy should resemble poetry.

### The Hidden Language of the Jews

This contradictory impulse may be related to the second theory of Jewish self-hatred proposed by Sander Gilman, namely, the “hidden language of the Jews”. One of the main prerequisites for integration into general society and culture is mastering the majority’s language and the dominant discourse. Language is considered an essential component of civilisation, as it gives people access to the texts that have shaped society and allows them to interpret those texts on their own, as well as to contribute to that culture by publishing their own reactions and insights. Even though the Jews did master European languages, society always tried to pinpoint mistakes in pronunciation, accent, intonation or idiosyncratic idioms, in order to discredit their cultural endeavours as being inflected by Hebrew or Yiddish. In Wittgenstein’s own words, one might “really [be] speaking, maybe unconsciously, the old language, but speaking it in a manner that belongs to the newer world, though not on that account necessarily one that is to its taste.”<sup>60</sup> This statement, too, echoes Richard Wagner’s assertion that “The Jew speaks the language of the nation in whose midst he dwells from generation to generation, but he speaks it always as an alien.”<sup>61</sup>

Furthermore, German society designated certain forms of written expression favoured by Jews as “Jewish rhetoric”, such as revolutionary philosophical discourses, a category that may have included Wittgenstein’s treatises. Indeed, the Vienna Circle, which met from 1924 to 1936 and was profoundly inspired by Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*, was accused of propagating “degenerate” Jewish thought and of contaminating German philosophy with Jewish logic and formalism. Jewish artists, therefore, strove to express Jewish themes and concerns in a manner compatible with the German language, yielding avant-garde movements in which Jews occupied prominent positions.<sup>62</sup> This theory of the hidden language of the Jews may elucidate Wittgenstein’s view of Jewish artists as unable to attain artistic excellence due to their limited exposure to German language and culture, as well as their personalisation of it to suit their worldview, rather than faithfulness to its genuine essence. The issue of an authentic German language that cannot be fully mastered by Jews was important in a period, so soon after the unification of the German provinces, when Germany sought to establish its national identity based on literary texts and other cultural works produced by people of German origin. Therefore, Germans were desperate for a minority they could exclude in order to define themselves as a majority distinct from the Jews.<sup>63</sup> Consequently, a dispute arose among Jewish thinkers about whether they should write in German as Jews or as Germans, and whether it was necessary to express the Germans’ hateful views of the Jews in their texts in order

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<sup>59</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. C. K. Ogden (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1999), 6.45, 107.

<sup>60</sup> Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 69.

<sup>61</sup> Richard Wagner, *Judaism in Music*, 84.

<sup>62</sup> Gilman, *Jewish Self-Hatred*, 15–21.

<sup>63</sup> Gilman, *Jewish Self-Hatred*, 212.

to be accepted as German writers.<sup>64</sup> While Wittgenstein may have longed to be regarded as a great philosopher fully immersed in German Romantic culture, he embraced the Modernist style created by Jews and affected by their “secret language”. He was unsure how his texts could be relevant to Western culture and how he could significantly contribute to it while upholding ostensibly Jewish aesthetic ideals by adopting Modernism as his main form of expression. Indeed, the *Tractatus*’s form is compatible with the Modernist aesthetic of a discontinuous essay consisting of numbered fragments that follow a certain logic. Throughout his life, Wittgenstein contended with this inconsistency by contemplating the potential for creativity and eminence of Jewish artists and thinkers in a language and culture not their own. This preoccupation may have been at the root of Wittgenstein’s conviction that all of philosophy is in essence a critique of language.

Wittgenstein attempted to come to terms with his own identity as a German/Jewish thinker, as illustrated by the fact that most of his remarks about Jewish artists are primarily directed at himself, even when he uses other Jewish artists as comparisons, as in:

All great art has primitive human drives as its ground bass... they are what gives the melody *depth & power*. In *this* sense one may call Mendelssohn a ‘reproductive’ artist. In the same sense my house for Gretl is the product of a decidedly sensitive ear, *good manners*, the expression of great *understanding* (for a culture, etc.). But *primordial* life, *wild* life striving to erupt into the open is lacking. And so you might say, *health* is lacking.<sup>65</sup>

This passage indicates Wittgenstein’s acceptance of the theory of the “hidden language of the Jews”, as he asserts that no matter how well Jewish artists immerse themselves in the surrounding culture, master its language, conform to its standards, and follow all of its artistic rules, the best they can do is a mediocre job, since their “hidden language” inhibits them from expressing the genuine essence of the culture within which they are creating.

Interestingly, Wittgenstein’s admiration of Jewish artists and intellectuals, despite what he wrote in the margins of his notebooks, is revealed by the two people to whom he ascribed the greatest impact on him: Karl Kraus and Otto Weininger, both of whom were born Jewish. Wittgenstein was an enthusiastic reader of Karl Kraus’s satirical journal *Die Fackel* (*The Torch*). In it, Kraus frequently attacked Jewish writers and thinkers, as well as the Zionist movement, and claimed that Jews could only gain freedom through complete assimilation.<sup>66</sup> Furthermore, he considered artistic honesty and truth as values of utmost importance.<sup>67</sup> Wittgenstein seems to have taken these two objectives to heart and to have aspired to them throughout his life, by attempting to integrate into Austrian society and to function as an Austrian in both his personal and professional life, as well as by constantly perfecting his work. Like the Romantics, he, too, perceived beauty and truth as interrelated values.

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<sup>64</sup> Gilman, *Jewish Self-Hatred*, 18.

<sup>65</sup> Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 43.

<sup>66</sup> Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein*, 16–17.

<sup>67</sup> Janik and Toulmin, *Wittgenstein’s Vienna*, 69.

Moreover, Wittgenstein admired Otto Weininger's *Sex and Character* (1903)<sup>68</sup> and often recommended it to his students and friends as "the work of a remarkable genius",<sup>69</sup> even though its writer was Jewish. This book's impact on Wittgenstein is repeatedly felt in the texts he composed throughout his life, which resonate with terms and concepts first formulated by Weininger. David Stern ascribes Wittgenstein's admiration of Weininger to his self-hatred:

Wittgenstein saw in Weininger, and Weininger's anti-Semitism, a mirror of his own self-hatred, a way of figuring a relationship of identification and denial that he both had to and could not confront [...] there is good reason to think that Wittgenstein's fascination with Weininger at this time arose out of an uneasy identification with that famously Jewish, homosexual philosopher who was himself deeply troubled by his own identity.<sup>70</sup>

One of the sentences from *Sex and Character* that had the greatest impact on Wittgenstein is: "the *spirit of modernity* is Jewish, wherever one looks at it".<sup>71</sup> As mentioned earlier, Wittgenstein was unimpressed with the tenets of Modernism and blamed Jewish intellectuals for its inception. This dislike of Modernism led him to articulate other negative thoughts about Jewish artists, largely based on Weininger's book. Weininger described the early twentieth century as "the most Jewish [...] of all ages [...] an age that has declared genius to be a form of madness, but which no longer has one great artist or one great philosopher, an age that is most devoid of originality, but which chases most frantically after originality".<sup>72</sup> Wittgenstein reiterated this idea by writing that "the spectacle afforded by this age is not the coming into being of a great work of culture in which the best contribute to the same great end... I contemplate the current of European civilization without sympathy, without understanding its aims if any."<sup>73</sup> This view forms the basis of Wittgenstein's thought that Jewish artists, who dominated the Viennese cultural scene at the time were, in his opinion, unoriginal and incapable of producing great art. Weininger believed that all human cultural achievements should be attributed to the rational masculine principle found in Aryans, who are endowed with creative power.<sup>74</sup> It is interesting that, while Wittgenstein accepted this concept and preferred the creative works produced by non-Jewish artists and thinkers, he reversed Weininger's notion and criticised the Jews for being excessively intellectual and lacking the emotional properties possessed by non-Jews, while Weininger referred to the Jews' irrationality and emotionality as the source of their inadequacy. Nonetheless, both of them reached the same conclusion about the Jews' reproductive thinking and inability to produce true art because of their inorganic relationship with European culture.

### The Quest for Genius

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<sup>68</sup> Otto Weininger, *Sex and Character: An Investigation of Fundamental Principles*, trans. Ladislaus Löb (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005).

<sup>69</sup> David G. Stern and Béla Szabados, eds., *Wittgenstein Reads Weininger* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 118.

<sup>70</sup> Stern, "Was Wittgenstein a Jew?", 259.

<sup>71</sup> Weininger, *Sex and Character*, 299.

<sup>72</sup> Weininger, *Sex and Character*, 299.

<sup>73</sup> Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 9.

<sup>74</sup> Janik and Toulmin, *Wittgenstein's Vienna*, 73.

The terms “genius”, “talent” and “character” are keywords that recur in Weininger’s work and that occupy a central place in Wittgenstein’s life and philosophical thought.<sup>75</sup> Among many remarks on the subject, Wittgenstein wrote “genius is *courage in one’s talent*”<sup>76</sup> and “genius is what makes us forget talent [...] Where genius wears thin skill may show through [...] Genius is what makes us unable to see the master’s talent [...] Only where genius wears thin can you see talent.”<sup>77</sup> Lurie explains that Wittgenstein “takes genius to mean a creative force that contributes to the *lofty spiritual* progression achieved in a culture by being both original and *profound*”.<sup>78</sup> According to Weininger, the only way to live life respectably is as a genius, by becoming the best person you are capable of being in terms of morality and skill.<sup>79</sup> Accordingly, Wittgenstein structured his life around Weininger’s formula for leading the life of a genius and did his best to fulfil his potential by living honestly, discovering his strengths, and developing them to the fullest, as well as satisfying himself solely with achievements of the highest calibre.<sup>80</sup> In his notes, Wittgenstein appears preoccupied with defining the genius and assessing whether or not his achievements qualify him as a genius.

The concept of the genius – an original and intuitive artist – finds its roots in Romantic ideology, particularly in the writings of Immanuel Kant, and poses the expectation that every individual should model themselves after the genius. Wittgenstein’s desire to live life as a genius aligns him with this Romantic ideal. It may, however, also be linked to his engagement with the principles of self-hatred. As German Jewish philosopher Theodor Lessing suggested in his book *Jewish Self-Hatred* (1930), self-hatred may lead to the development of a “genius mentality”.<sup>81</sup> Indeed, as McGuinness asserts, Wittgenstein “subscribed both to the myth of genius, the absolutely original thinker, and to the idea that a national character was transmitted in the blood”.<sup>82</sup>

Based on Weininger’s treatise, Wittgenstein understood that:

the measure of genius is character, even if character on its own does *not* amount to genius. Genius is not ‘talent *and* character’, but character manifesting itself in the form of a special talent. Where one man will show courage by jumping into the water, another will show courage by writing a symphony.<sup>83</sup>

Lurie explains that in Wittgenstein’s view, courage “is demonstrated by not yielding to convention, by standing up to cultural influences which induce human beings to conform to and to observe standard, tasteful norms of expression. Courage, presumably, is what ‘strong characters’ demonstrate as they engage a culture.”<sup>84</sup> He also explains that Wittgenstein uses the term “character” to refer to:

a *particular* kind of nature, unique to an individual and prior to any thing acquired through culture. It is what a person *is*, rather than what that person has in terms of

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<sup>75</sup> Stern and Szabados, *Wittgenstein Reads Weininger*, 117. These terms also recur to a lesser extent in the works of Karl Kraus, whom Wittgenstein admired.

<sup>76</sup> Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 44.

<sup>77</sup> Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 49–50.

<sup>78</sup> Yuval Lurie, “Geniuses and Metaphors”, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 49 (3) (Summer 1991): 231.

<sup>79</sup> Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein*, 24–25.

<sup>80</sup> Stern and Szabados, *Wittgenstein Reads Weininger*, 14.

<sup>81</sup> Reitter, *On the Origins of Jewish Self-Hatred*, 28.

<sup>82</sup> McGuinness, “Wittgenstein and the Idea of Jewishness”, 229.

<sup>83</sup> Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 40.

<sup>84</sup> Lurie, “Geniuses and Metaphors”, 227.

skills and abilities. It is also what a person brings to a culture while being initiated into it, and what sustains him therein and determines the way in which he subsequently engages in it.<sup>85</sup>

In terms of artistic pursuits, genius is a spiritual quality that enables the artist to create a cultural product that is both original and unique to that specific culture, but that also has a profound human relevance that can move anyone, no matter their cultural background, because it expresses something authentic and essential to every human being. In contrast, talent enables the Jewish artist to abstractly elaborate upon a cultural product devised by someone else without profoundly touching upon the heart of human nature and experience, by working from the surface of the previous product and, as a result, failing to evoke true feelings in its audience.<sup>86</sup> Wittgenstein took Weininger's demand to be a genius so seriously that he suffered from suicidal depression for nine years until he convinced Bertrand Russell, one of the greatest philosophers of the time, that he was actually endowed with philosophical genius.<sup>87</sup>

### **Self-Hatred: Disliking in Others the Qualities One Dislikes in Oneself**

Wittgenstein often felt unconfident about the quality of his philosophical and artistic works and unsure how to determine whether he possessed genius or mere talent. He once wrote that “a writer far more talented than I would still have little talent”,<sup>88</sup> demonstrating his low self-esteem and inability to accurately judge the value of his work. Accordingly, he may have invented the formula that distinguishes between artworks produced by Jews and non-Jews as a means of evaluating his own accomplishments.<sup>89</sup> Again, he appropriated Weininger's theory that whatever there is to dislike in oneself is due to one's Jewish heritage<sup>90</sup> and blamed his flaws on his nature as a Jewish intellectual. In this sense, Weininger also contributed to the third facet of Wittgenstein's self-hatred. As Weininger asserted, “people can be divided into those who love themselves and those who hate themselves... One must first love or hate oneself in order to love or to hate other people.”<sup>91</sup> This definition of self-hatred best matches Wittgenstein's remarks that are simultaneously self-deprecating and insulting toward other Jewish artists. More precisely, hatred of another implies first of all disliking certain qualities in oneself and then seeing those disagreeable qualities in another, while Jewish self-hatred may be understood as hating all those who embody the Jewishness from which one wishes they were exempt. Once more a quotation by Weininger serves to clarify the situation:

whoever hates the Jewish character hates it first in himself. By persecuting it in the other, he is only trying to separate himself from it, and by trying to localize it en-

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<sup>85</sup> Lurie, “Geniuses and Metaphors”, 227.

<sup>86</sup> Lurie, “Jews as a Parable”, 104.

<sup>87</sup> Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein*, 20.

<sup>88</sup> Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 86.

<sup>89</sup> Lurie, “Jews as a Parable”, 114.

<sup>90</sup> Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein*, 313.

<sup>91</sup> Stern and Szabados, *Wittgenstein Reads Weininger*, 91.

tirely in his fellow-human, in order to dissociate himself from it, he can momentarily feel free of it. Hatred, like love, is the result of projection: we only hate those who remind us *unpleasantly* of ourselves.<sup>92</sup>

In other words, we usually hate those in whom we see the undesirable traits we would like to overlook in ourselves. Wittgenstein may have made all those disparaging remarks about Jewish artists due to his dissatisfaction with his own artistic production in the fields of music, architecture, sculpture and philosophy. His displeasure with himself may be discerned from statements such as “I am too soft, too weak, and so too lazy, to achieve anything important. The industry of the great is, amongst other things, a sign of their strength, quite apart from their inner wealth.”<sup>93</sup> When he searched for a feature in himself on which to blame his imperfections, he chose his Jewish background and, consequently, projected what he perceived as his lack of creativity onto all Jewish artists. Though Wittgenstein may have conceived of Jewishness as a metaphor “to think about issues of creativity and originality [...] about his particular way of approaching philosophical problems, which he connects with his temperament”,<sup>94</sup> he may, as a result, have stopped appreciating contemporary Jewish artists because he saw magnified in them the Jewishness and adherence to Modernist tenets that he disliked in himself.

In fact, Wittgenstein seems to have disliked the works of most Modern artists, whether or not they were of Jewish origin, since he was not in favour of the Modernist movement. However, he recognised the Modernists’ prominence in contemporary European culture and wished to establish contact with them in order to promote his professional interests. Hence, after his father’s death and his inheritance of a fortune in 1914, Wittgenstein donated the significant sum of 100,000 crowns to “Austrian artists who are without means” and he entrusted Ludwig von Ficker to distribute the money to “our best talents... most in need of support”.<sup>95</sup> Ficker selected Rainer Maria Rilke, Georg Trakl, Carl Dallago, Karl Hauer, Oskar Kokoschka, Else Lasker-Schüler and Adolf Loos, among others. According to Ray Monk, Wittgenstein was not familiar with the works of most recipients, and was unimpressed with those he did know, with very few exceptions, as may be discerned from his cold responses to the letters of gratitude he received from them.<sup>96</sup> This lack of appreciation reveals his disapproval of Modernist trends in general, rather than of Jewish artists in particular. Furthermore, Wittgenstein did not object to the selection of Else Lasker-Schüler as a beneficiary, even though she explicitly identified herself as a Jewish poet and painter, drawing much of her inspiration from the classical Jewish sources. Had Wittgenstein truly been convinced of the futility and inadequacy of the creative pursuits of Jewish artists, he would have refused to honour her as a talented artist fulfilling the criteria of artistic excellence and financial need. Moreover, Wittgenstein did not stop at that one donation to her. On another occasion, when she was in financial straits due to her divorce from her second husband, Wittgenstein anonymously donated a sum of money to Else Lasker-Schüler to help finance her son Paul’s artistic education, specifically the tuition fees for his training as a painter.<sup>97</sup> If Wittgenstein truly disrespected Jewish artists, he would not have sponsored Else Lasker-Schüler, even though she was considered by

<sup>92</sup> Weininger, *Sex and Character*, 275.

<sup>93</sup> Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 83.

<sup>94</sup> Stern, “Was Wittgenstein a Jew?”, 256.

<sup>95</sup> Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein*, 106

<sup>96</sup> Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein*, 108–109.

<sup>97</sup> Betty Falkenberg, *Else Lasker-Schüler: A Life* (London: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2003), 100.

many as one of Germany's greatest Expressionist poets. Furthermore, he would not have contributed that sum specifically to her son's artistic education had he truly thought that, as a Jew, Paul would never produce an original work of art. Therefore, Wittgenstein must have appreciated her artistic brilliance and acknowledged it by offering financial assistance. However, the second time he donated the money anonymously, possibly to avoid accusations of hypocrisy or to protect himself from classification as a Jewish intellectual.

### Aesthetics

Wittgenstein's unappreciative attitude toward Jewish artists was not necessarily universal. Besides the fact that his two greatest sources of inspiration were contemporary Jewish thinkers, the ranking of Jewish and non-Jewish artists on the basis of intellectuality or emotionality does not fit with the aesthetic principles that he himself taught to his students at Cambridge.<sup>98</sup> Wittgenstein was opposed to Aesthetics as a scientific field of study. In his opinion, there was no point in arguing about artistic taste, as each person is free to enjoy whichever creative product he or she desires. The only kind of appreciation that could be objectively measured is determining whether the rules of that particular art form have been followed correctly, such as the rules of harmony, perspective, grammar, etc. He states: "when aesthetic judgements are made, aesthetic adjectives such as 'beautiful', 'fine', etc., play hardly any role at all. [...] The words you use are more akin to 'right' and 'correct' [...] than to 'beautiful' and 'lovely'."<sup>99</sup> Furthermore, the rules of art vary by culture, geographical location and historical period.<sup>100</sup> This approach to aesthetics is incompatible with his criticism of Jewish artists as uncreative, intellectual and incapable of expressing emotion, since criticising them for these reasons is a matter of taste and not of true appreciation. By reproducing the works of local artists and intellectually enhancing them, Jewish artists are more likely to be following the rules of their respective art forms than an artist who creates intuitively and emotionally. Therefore, Wittgenstein should have appreciated works by Jewish artists, since their intellectual approach to art is more conducive to the meticulous application of the rules and, hence, to the creation of greater works of art. Nonetheless, as we have seen above, Wittgenstein criticises Mendelssohn's music even "when it is flawless", even when it follows the rules precisely.

The inconsistency between Wittgenstein's approach to aesthetics, as articulated in 1938, and his earlier remarks about Jewish artists – likely never intended for publication – may indicate that these comments do not necessarily comprise an absolute judgement of Jewish artists. Rather, they probably functioned primarily as a standard for self-assessment that Wittgenstein would use to remind himself of his imperfections. He was usually very proud of his achievements, as he once wrote to his friend Patisson, though in jest, that he is "the greatest philosopher that ever lived".<sup>101</sup> However, he was well aware of the dangers of excessive arrogance and overweening pride, particularly their tendency to prevent further development and improvement, which Weininger identified as constant requirements for a true genius. Wittgenstein asserted that "anyone who is half-way decent

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<sup>98</sup> Frank A. Tillman and Steven M. Cahn, *Philosophy of Art and Aesthetics from Plato to Wittgenstein* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1969), 515.

<sup>99</sup> Barrett, *Wittgenstein: Lectures & Conversations on Aesthetics*, item 8, 3.

<sup>100</sup> Barrett, *Wittgenstein: Lectures & Conversations on Aesthetics*, items 25–36, 8–11.

<sup>101</sup> Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein*, 317.

will think himself utterly imperfect”.<sup>102</sup> Therefore, he hoped to become more modest by proving to himself that he was imperfect.<sup>103</sup> He searched for a defect that would curb his arrogance, to fulfil his conviction that “the *edifice of your pride* has to be dismantled. And that means frightful work.”<sup>104</sup> Wittgenstein searched for something in himself for which he could blame the flaws he perceived in his cultural endeavours, and the most likely candidate he discovered was his Jewishness, an abstract concept that had no concrete ramification on his perceived perfection and extraordinary accomplishments, but that he could cite against himself whenever he felt overwhelmed by vanity. As he wrote, “my conceit of being an extraordinary human being is of course *much* older than my experience of my particular talent”.<sup>105</sup> Since Wittgenstein believed in achieving redemption through the elimination of one’s ego and pride, he always reminded himself of his limitations as a Jewish intellectual and his consequent inability to excel in his cultural endeavours.<sup>106</sup> Thus, he felt that he could always do better and was inspired to do his utmost to attain the outstanding results for which he aimed.

### Conclusion

Throughout his life, Ludwig Wittgenstein struggled to define his identity as a Viennese Jewish philosopher and to gain recognition as an important cultural figure in Austria, without denying his Jewish background. Due to this internal conflict, he was unconfident of his achievements and of the significance of his contribution to Western culture, and consequently expressed uncomplimentary views about Jewish artists and thinkers. These remarks reflect his desire to integrate into German society and his internalisation of the contemporary discourse about Jews, as well as of the theory of the Jews’ “hidden language”. As Wittgenstein strove for perfection in his philosophical endeavours in order to be recognised as a genius, he kept reminding himself of his Jewishness to force himself to work even harder.

Not only did Wittgenstein struggle against pride and doubt the quality of his philosophical achievements, but he was also concerned with his morality. He was motivated by Weininger’s statement that “typical Jewish arrogance emanates from the lack of true knowledge of oneself”.<sup>107</sup> As a result, over Christmas 1936, Wittgenstein made a formal confession to his friends and acquaintances and admitted that he was in reality three-quarters Jewish and only one quarter Aryan, though he may have led them to believe the opposite.<sup>108</sup> This confession may have stemmed from the Romantic ideal that “ethics and aesthetics are one”, as Wittgenstein stipulated in the *Tractatus*,<sup>109</sup> and that they work together to foster a better political and social reality. He may, therefore, have believed that he could only merit the title of genius by cleansing himself of self-deception. As Weininger wrote, “genius is the *higher morality* as such. The exceptional individual is [...] one who is most faithful to himself, who forgets nothing about himself, who detests nothing more and can tolerate nothing

<sup>102</sup> Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 51.

<sup>103</sup> Stern and Szabados, *Wittgenstein Reads Weininger*, 64–65.

<sup>104</sup> Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 30.

<sup>105</sup> Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 53–54.

<sup>106</sup> Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein*, 317, 410.

<sup>107</sup> Lurie, “Jews as a Parable”, 111.

<sup>108</sup> Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein*, 369.

<sup>109</sup> Wittgenstein, *Tractatus* 6.421, 105.

less than errors and lies”.<sup>110</sup> Wittgenstein’s confession about his Jewishness may reveal his wish to remain true to himself. Through this confession, Wittgenstein demonstrated that it is possible to be a genius while remaining openly Jewish, by being true to himself, constantly striving to improve himself, and always doing his best at whatever endeavour he undertakes. Thus, he attempted to attain the unachievable by Weininger’s definition, namely, to become a Jewish genius.

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<sup>110</sup> Weininger, *Sex and Character*, 158.

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