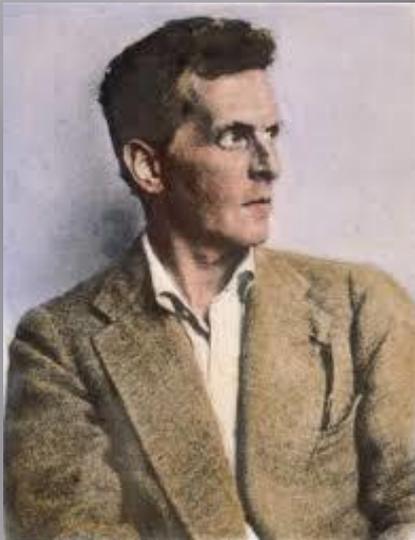


THE MYSTERY OF MUSIC



A lecture given at the Bath Royal Literary and
Scientific Institution October 1st 2019

by Ray Monk

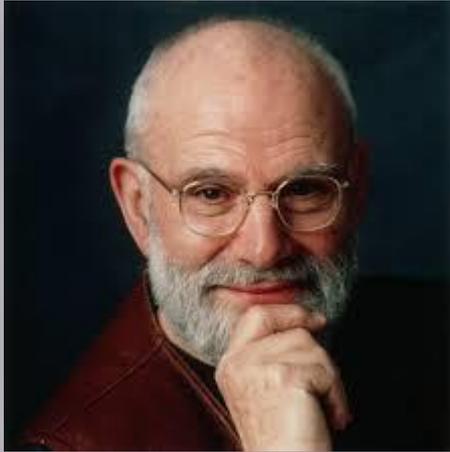
The Mystery



‘What an odd thing it is to see an entire species – billions of people – playing with, listening to, meaningless tonal patterns, occupied and preoccupied for much of their time by what they call “music”’

Karellaen the Overlord from *Childhood's End*
by Arthur C. Clarke (1953)

Oliver Sacks on the mystery



‘They [the Overlords] cannot think what goes on in human beings when they make or listen to music, because nothing goes on with *them*.

This thing called “music”, they would have to concede, is in some way efficacious to humans, central to human life. Yet it has no concepts, makes no propositions, it lacks images, symbols, the stuff of language. It has no power of representation. It has no necessary relation to the world.’

'It is impossible for me to say one word in my book about all that music has meant in my life. How then can I hope to be understood?' (Wittgenstein to Drury)

And yet:

‘I was practising the top part of Mozart’s Fugue in G Minor for Four Hands (K 401). Wittgenstein asked me what I imagined it to mean. I said I had no idea. ‘Well,’ he replied, ‘it’s the eternity of the damned!’’ (Theodore Redpath)

‘I once wrote that Mozart believed in both heaven and hell, whereas Beethoven believed in heaven and nothingness’
(Wittgenstein to Drury)

‘Schubert is irreligious & melancholy’ (*Culture and Value*)

‘The chord with which that slow movement [of Beethoven’s Seventh Symphony] opens is the colour of that sky [pointing out of the window at a grey sky]

‘To watch Wittgenstein listening to music was to realize that this was something very central and deep in his life. He told me that this he could not express in his writings, and yet it was so important to him that he felt without it he was sure to be misunderstood. I will never forget the emphasis with which he quoted Schopenhauer's dictum:

“music is a world itself.””

Maurice Drury



The Wittgenstein Family



Back: Helene, Hermine,
Gretl. Front: Paul, Ludwig



Karl and Poldy



From left: Helene, Rudi,
Hermine, Ludwig, Gretl,
Paul, Hans, Kurt

The Palais Wittgenstein



The Grand Staircase



The Red Salon

Viennese Musical Culture and the Wittgenstein Family



The music salon, Palais Wittgenstein



Johannes Brahms



Josef Labor

Tractatus Logico- Philosophicus

*International Library of Philosophy
and Scientific Method*

EDITED BY A. J. AYER

The German text of
LUDWIG WITTGENSTEIN'S
Logisch-Philosophische Abhandlung
with a new Translation by
D. F. Pears & B. F. McGuinness
and with the Introduction by
Bertrand Russell

Arthur Schopenhauer
Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung



‘[Music] stands quite apart from the other arts. In it we do not recognise the copy, the repetition, of any Idea of the inner nature of the world. Yet it is such a great and exceedingly fine art, its effect on man’s innermost nature is so powerful, and it is so completely and profoundly understood by him in his innermost being as an entirely universal language, whose distinctness surpasses even that of the world of perception itself.’

Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*

'As the essence of man consists in this, that his will strives, is satisfied and strives anew and so on ad infinitum; as, indeed his happiness and well-being merely consist in the rapid transition from desire to fulfilment and from fulfilment to new desire, because non-fulfilment means suffering, non-desire empty yearning, languor, tedium - so melody is essentially a constant deviation from the tonic to which it always ultimately returns. Thus in a thousand ways melody expresses the multifarious strivings of Will, but also their assuagement through the return to an interval within the harmony, or to the tonic itself.

Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*

'We must never forget that music never expresses the phenomenon, but only the inner nature, the in-itself, of every phenomenon, the will itself. Therefore music does not express this or that particular and definite pleasure, this or that affliction, pain, sorrow, horror, gaiety, merriment, or peace of mind, but joy, pain, sorrow, horror, gaiety, merriment, peace of mind *themselves*, to a certain extent in the abstract, their essential nature.'

Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*

‘No art affects man so immediately as music, as none other reveals to us the essence of the Universe so profoundly and so immediately. Listening to great, full-voiced and beautiful music is like bathing the mind: it drains off all that is impure, petty and bad, and lifts every one to the highest spiritual plane to which his Nature can attain, and as he listens to great music man perceives clearly what he is worth, or rather, what he might be worth.’

Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*

The Inexpressible

‘What *can* be shown *cannot* be said’

‘There is indeed the inexpressible. This *shows* itself; it is the mystical.’

Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus

‘And this is how it is: if only you do not try to utter what is unutterable then nothing gets lost. But the unutterable will be -- unutterably -- contained in what has been uttered!’

Wittgenstein to Paul Engelmann on ‘Count Eberhard’s Hawthorn’

Count Eberhard's Hawthorn by Ludwig Uhland

Count Eberhard Rustle-Beard,
From Württemberg's fair land,
On holy errand steer'd
To Palestina's strand.

The while he slowly rode
Along a woodland way;
He cut from the hawthorn bush
A little fresh green spray.

Then in his iron helm
The little sprig he plac'd;
And bore it in the wars,
And over the ocean waste.

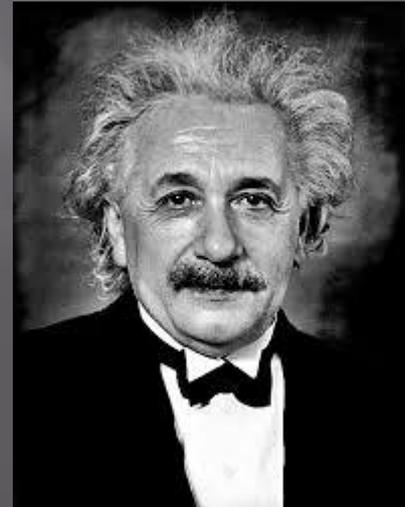
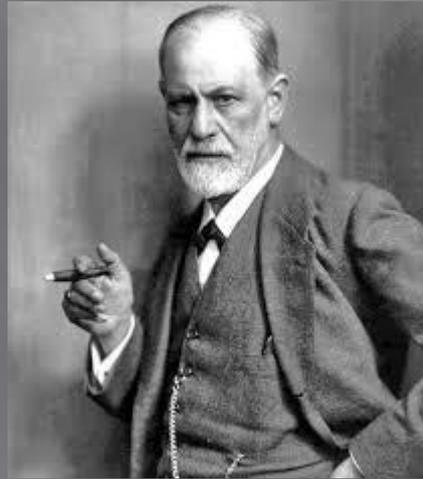
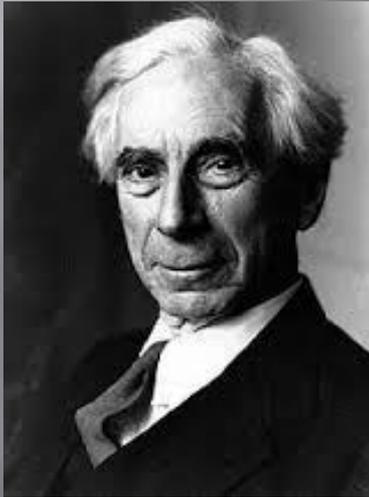
And when he reach'd his home;
He plac'd it in the earth;
Where little leaves and buds
The gentle Spring call'd forth.

He went each year to it,
The Count so brave and true;
And overjoy'd was he
To witness how it grew.

The Count was worn with age
The sprig became a tree;
'Neath which the old man oft
Would sit in reverie.

The branching arch so high,
Whose whisper is so bland,
Reminds him of the past
And Palestina's strand.

‘The terrible degeneration that has come over the human spirit in the course of only a hundred years.’



The later Wittgenstein

‘Understanding a sentence is much more akin to understanding a theme in music than one may think. What I mean is that understanding a sentence lies nearer than one thinks to what is ordinarily called understanding a musical theme. Why is just *this* the pattern of variation in loudness and tempo? One would like to say “Because I know what it’s all about.” But what is it all about? I should not be able to say.’

Philosophical Investigations 527

St Augustine on how he learned to speak

“When they (my elders) named some object, and accordingly moved towards something, I saw this and I grasped that the thing was called by the sound they uttered when they meant to point it out. Their intention was shown by their bodily movements, as it were the natural language of all peoples: the expression of the face, the play of the eyes, the movement of other parts of the body, and the tone of voice which expresses our state of mind in seeking, having, rejecting, or avoiding something. Thus, as I heard words repeatedly used in their proper places in various sentences, I gradually learnt to understand what objects they signified; and after I had trained my mouth to form these signs, I used them to express my own desires.”

(*Confessions*, quoted in *Philosophical Investigations*, paragraph 1.)



Wittgenstein on St Augustine

“These words, it seems to me, give us a particular *picture* of the essence of human language. It is this: the individual words in language name objects – sentences are combinations of such names. – In this *picture* of language we find the roots of the following *idea*: Every word has a meaning. The meaning is correlated with the word. It is the object for which the word stands.” [italics added]

(*Philosophical Investigations*, paragraph 1.)



The Variety of Language

“But how many kinds of sentence are there? Say assertion, question, and command? – There are *countless* kinds: countless different kinds of use of what we call ‘symbols’, ‘words’, ‘sentences’. And this multiplicity is not something fixed, given once for all; but new types of language, new language-games, as we may say, come into existence, and others become obsolete and get forgotten. (We can get a *rough picture* of this from the changes in mathematics.)

Here the term ‘language-*game*’ is meant to bring into prominence the fact that the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life.

Having introduced the builder's language game in paragraph 2, Wittgenstein extends it in paragraph 8 by adding colour samples, numbers and the words 'this' and 'there'. The point is to emphasise the different *kinds* of words and the very different ways in which they are used. Subsequent paragraphs up to 27 are devoted to emphasising the *variety* of language, ending with the list of exclamations: Water! Away! Ow! Help! Splendid! No!

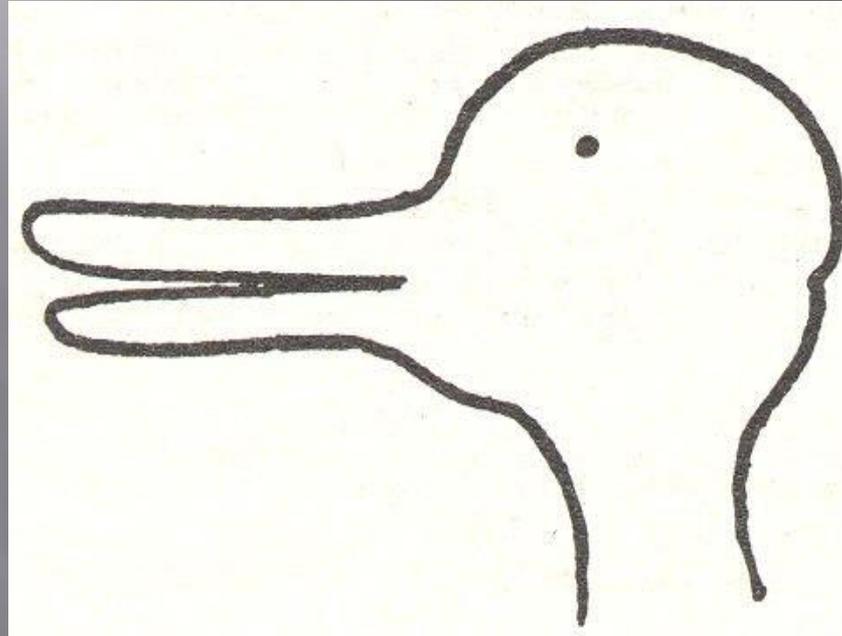
'Are you,' he asks, 'still inclined to call these words "names of objects"?'



Family Resemblance



Seeing Aspects



The Duck Rabbit

'We speak of understanding a sentence in the sense in which it can be replaced by another which says the same; but also in the sense in which it cannot be replaced by any other. (Any more than one musical theme can be replaced by another.)

Philosophical Investigations 531

The Windhover
To Christ Our Lord

I caught this morning morning's minion, kingdom of
daylight's dauphin, dapple-dawn-drawn Falcon, in his riding
Of the rolling level underneath him steady air, and striding
High there, how he rung upon the rein of a wimpling wing
In his ecstasy! then off, off forth on swing,
As a skate's heel sweeps smooth on a bow-bend: the hurl
and gliding
Rebuffed the big wind. My heart in hiding
Stirred for a bird, – the achieve of, the mastery of the thing.

Brute beauty and valour and act, oh, air, pride, plume, here
Buckle! AND the fire that breaks from thee then, a billion
Times told lovelier, more dangerous, O my chevalier!

No wonder of it: shéer plód makes plough down sillion
Shine, and blue-bleak embers, ah my dear,
Fall, gall themselves, and gash gold-vermilion.



Brothers in Arms

Visual, cinematic, thunder, rain, guitar through the mist, then the voice, accompanied by of all things a mouth organ, these men round the camp fire have fought together but are about to cease being brothers in arms. In the early verses, the guitar is an accompaniment to the vocal, but it becomes more & more insistent, until at the end it takes over completely. The melody never returns to the tonic (Schopenhauer). At that stage, the song urges us to think of the whole of humanity, not only our comrades, as brothers in arms. We're fools to make war on our brothers in arms. We have gone from the individual to the universal, from the particular visualisable scene to a general yearning. This is when words give way to music. As Schopenhauer says, the music is a. universal and b. expressive, not of this or that particular yearning, but of yearning itself. And somehow it seems so much *deeper* than the words.

Brothers in Arms

These mist covered mountains
Are a home now for me
But my home is the lowlands
And always will be
Someday you'll return to
Your valleys and your farms
And you'll no longer burn to be
Brothers in arms

Through these fields of destruction
Baptisms of fire
I've witnessed your suffering
As the battle raged higher
And though they did hurt me so bad
In the fear and alarm
You did not desert me
My brothers in arms

There's so many different worlds
So many different suns
And we have just one world
But we live in different ones

Now the sun's gone to hell and
The moon's riding high
Let me bid you farewell
Every man has to die
But it's written in the starlight
And every line in your palm
We are fools to make war
On our brothers in arms

