

THE “SILENCE” OF WITTGENSTEIN AND KRAUS

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I. Preliminaries

Wittgenstein’s remark at the end of the *Tractatus*, commending silence for everything other than scientific statements, is perhaps his best-known remark. No doubt it is so well known partly because it comes at the end of the work and partly because it is so resonant, especially in the German original:

Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muß man schweigen.

The remark is fascinating also because it seems to be both momentous and trivial, an effect which may well have resulted from the influence of Kraus. Of course, Wittgenstein’s remark at the end of the *Tractatus* is hyperbole, a rhetorical device that is perhaps one of the things he learned from Kraus. But there is also a paradox in its being said at all, for it is not the sort of thing that *can* be said, according to the doctrine of the *Tractatus*. This paradox raises questions about the *Tractatus* as a whole, one of which concerns what sort of work Wittgenstein supposed he had written. Another arises in connection with the famous letter to Ludwig von Ficker,¹ in which Wittgenstein said that the more important of the two parts of the work was everything he had *not* written. A third question arises in connection with Wittgenstein’s life-long silence² about political matters, even though he lived through very troubled times that had many a direct impact on him, and even though he was very close to a number of people – Russell, Keynes, and Kraus in particular – who commented regularly and prominently on political and social matters. Was Wittgenstein’s political silence a continuing application of the concluding line of the *Tractatus*, perhaps long after he had repudiated its main philosophical doctrines? Or was the Tractarian silence something that Wittgenstein refined rather than repudiated?

In this paper I will first discuss Tractarian silence and what becomes of it in Wittgenstein’s later work, then consider how Kraus’s work fits into this framework of thought and what line of thought Wittgenstein might have taken from him, and finally come to the matter of what each did and did not say about Hitler, concluding with an appreciation of the roots of Wittgenstein’s silence in his “work of clarification.”

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 Ed. Wolfgang Huemer and Marc-Oliver Schuster. Edmonton, Alberta:
 Wirth-Institute for Austrian and Central European Studies, 2003. pp. 67-79.

II. *The Silence of Wittgenstein*

The silence at the end of the *Tractatus* is not isolated or arbitrary. On the contrary, it is the logical culmination of one main line of argument in the book, the line of argument that has the distinction between *showing* and *saying* as its core. The key thing about this silence is not the absence of noise but the absence of *saying* anything. It may be that most of our noise and certainly most of our utterances are attempts to say something; but we can certainly make noise without saying anything. Some of what we do when we do not really *say* anything, and some of the noise we make when we do not really *say* anything, may be important, even of critical importance. Wittgenstein's point may be put by saying that being meaningful in the sense of having importance does not entail being meaningful in the sense of having sense.

Just as saying does not just consist of utterance, so also silence does not merely consist of the absence of noise. What can be *said* has sense, which means both that it can in principle be either true or false and that it can in principle be completely and uniquely clarified by logical analysis. Anything that cannot be true or cannot be false is senseless – and therefore cannot be *said*, even though it be not only uttered but even shouted. Contradictions cannot be true and therefore say nothing (or everything). Tautologies cannot be false and therefore say nothing. Contradictions and tautologies are both senseless. It does not matter if we shout them from the rooftops, as perhaps Kraus may have been inclined to do. Shouting does not constitute saying something. Therefore even shouting can be a form of silence, when we construe silence as not saying anything.

Just as Wittgenstein did not speak until he was four, we might also say that he again practiced silence in the decade from 1918 to 1928. During this decade he engaged in little philosophical discussion. The silence was never complete. In prison camp in Monte Cassino he read and discussed Kant and Frege with Ludwig Hänsel.³ When released, he met with Russell to discuss the *Tractatus*. While teaching elementary school in Lower Austria, he met a few times for philosophical discussions with Frank Ramsey. No doubt these discussions were serious. But they were brief interludes in the silence that lasted until he had finished working on the house for his sister, had heard L.E.J. Brouwer's lecture, and had begun meeting with Moritz Schlick. Silence was significant in Wittgenstein's *life* as well as in his early philosophical thought.

It is well known that Wittgenstein often quoted Goethe's line, "Im Anfang war die Tat" (e.g., *OC* § 402).⁴ It is less often acknowledged that this motto is a version of Tractarian silence. The point of the silence, after all, is not that there is nothing but speech. Quite the contrary, it is part of the view that the most important things cannot be said – neither the important logical things about the form of reality nor the important ethical things about life. Whatever can be said has one and only one complete analysis. But analysis itself cannot be analyzed, and the beginning and end of analysis must be shown rather than said. The beginning therefore must be a *showing* (a deed) rather than something said (a word). In this sense the beginning and

the end must be a kind of silence, and Goethe’s line from *Faust* fits not only with Wittgenstein’s later philosophical standpoint but also with the Tractarian silence.

“In the beginning was the deed” contrasts of course with the opening words of the Gospel of John, “In the beginning was the word.” The contrast is fascinating, with manifold applications. Goethe certainly did not mean to be anti-Christian, and there is little difficulty for a Christian to prefer the synoptic gospels with their emphasis on the *deeds* of Jesus to the Johanne gospel with its emphasis on doctrine. That is one application. A deconstructionist might take Goethe’s remark as a rejection of Christian logocentrism – another application. From a Tractarian point of view one could understand the remark as stressing the primacy of showing over saying. This application might also be made by one wishing to stress the continuity of Wittgenstein’s later work with the *Tractatus*. On the other hand a commentator like Norman Malcolm or Jaakko Hintikka might try to use this remark to contrast Wittgenstein’s early emphasis on propositions (on what can be said) with his later emphasis on doing things (language-games as forms of activity).

Let us look at *PI* § 78 (p. 36e):

Compare *knowing* and *saying*:
 how many feet high Mont Blanc is —
 how the word “game” is used —
 how a clarinet sounds.

If you are surprised that one can know something and not be able to say it, you are perhaps thinking of a case like the first. Certainly not of one like the third.

This paragraph makes a point perspicuously. Wittgenstein declines to *say* what the point is, but his examples show us the point. Something further is shown by this section coming at the end of passages that introduce the idea of family resemblances among uses of a word. The point clarifies for us something about the relation between two concepts, and in that sense it is a logical point. Or perhaps better: a “grammatical” one. In the passage where he mentions the ten influences on his thinking (*CV*, p. 19e), Wittgenstein speaks of his work of clarification. *PI* § 78 (quoted above) is without question an instance of such clarification. Unlike the clarification mentioned in the *Tractatus*, however, this passage contains no analysis. The method of clarification is rather that of perspicuous representation (*übersichtliche Darstellung*). Perspicuous representation is a continuation of the earlier emphasis on showing rather than saying (as characteristic of philosophy and logic), and it also exemplifies the connection between meaning and use. This method of clarification, which became dominant in his later work, can well be thought of as an elaboration of how to be effective without saying anything – how to use silence. Three points are worth stressing: clarity remains an intrinsic aim, analysis is subordinated to contextual considerations, and silence is something to *use*.

In the remark, in which Wittgenstein notes influences on his later as well as his earlier work (*CV*, pp. 18e-19e), he speaks without qualification of what he is doing as “work of clarification.” The clarification serves no further purpose but is an end in itself, as Matthias Kross has correctly argued.⁵ Wittgenstein did not change what he was doing but rather how he was going about it.

The most significant change in how he went about it is the replacement of analysis by context as the dominant crux of clarification, as elaborated in the opening sixty-five sections of the *Philosophical Investigations*.⁶ Analysis may still be a method of clarification where truth-claims are involved and where they are to be tested through their implications, for this is a context in which Frege's demand for analytical clarity makes sense. Wittgenstein begins the *Philosophical Investigations*, however, with an investigation of the use of expressions which make no truth claim at all, and in these cases understanding requires us to pay attention to the context, in particular to what the person is doing when or through speaking. Hence the basis of linguistic meaning, even when it is to be clarified analytically, is the *uses* of language (language-games) that are woven into the fabric of "this complicated form of life" of ours (*PI*, p. 174e).

That silence is not just an emptiness, but rather something to be used in the context of showing something that cannot be said, may account for Wittgenstein's reported admiration of George Fox, the seventeenth-century charismatic and mystical genius who gathered together the "peculiar" people called Quakers and founded the Religious Society of Friends.⁷ Wittgenstein gave Norman Malcolm a copy of the *Journal* of George Fox as a Christmas present in 1948, and Malcolm reports that Wittgenstein read it with admiration.⁸

The significance of the Quaker connection is fourfold. There is first and foremost the matter of silence, prominent in Quaker practice and at the end of the *Tractatus*. There is next the emphasis on the present, prominent in Fox's remark, "There is no time but this present" (adopted by the American Friends Service Committee as a theme for one of its annual meetings some years ago) and finding an echo both in *Tractatus* 6.4311 and in the conversation with Schlick and Waismann, where Wittgenstein insists that "we have already got everything, and we have got it actually *present*; we need not wait for anything" (*WVC*, p. 183). There is thirdly the matter of insisting on alternatives: for Fox and the Quakers it is alternatives to things that government finds necessary, such as bowing, swearing, doffing one's hat, imprisoning miscreants, and warring against enemies; one Quaker historian has called the Alternatives to Violence Project the cutting edge of contemporary Quakerism.⁹ Wittgenstein is equally critical of alleged necessities, both in *Tractatus* 6.37, where he says that the only necessity that exists is *logical* necessity, and in his later philosophical practice, where he often responds to claims of necessity by noting possible alternatives and commenting that the alleged necessity is one of a number of ways in which things may proceed. There is finally the matter of style of thinking, eschewing metaphysics on one side and theology on the other. It is a style in which dogmatic starting points are replaced with queries, a Quaker practice documented in Fox's *Journal* and a striking feature of Wittgenstein's later philosophical work that certainly does not find its origin in any of the ten sources of influences he listed in 1931 (*CV*, p. 19e); Wittgenstein's style, his thinking and teaching fit this Quaker pattern, in that on many pages queries outnumber assertions.

An important part of Quaker practice – some think it the most vital testimony to the world – is to seek the "sense of the meeting." This practice emerges from

worship, where the predominance of silence and the lack of a presiding officer mean that it is up to each person to feel when the group is of a common mind. Often there is an informal consensus to that effect afterward, and it is said that the meeting was "gathered." In meetings for business it is the job of the clerk not only to help the group become of one mind but also then to record the sense of the common mind. A social scientist might insist that this common mind or consensus is best to be understood as a complex function of the minds of the constituent individuals (following the widely accepted principle of "methodological individualism"), but such reductive individualism is contrary to both the thinking and the experience of Friends. The thinking is that one gives up one's attempt to control the outcome and seeks not what conforms most to one's personal beliefs and interests but rather what is inherent in that which binds the group together. The experience is that of being surprised by what happens. It is true that there could be no groups without individuals, and that individuals must contribute to the formation of the group's mind, but it does not follow that the group does not really have a mind of its own, nor that one must first understand the individual minds in order to understand the group mind.

Wittgenstein wrote extensively on mental matters, or philosophy of psychology, and what he had to say has received extensive comment. Much of the comment, however, is exegesis and defense of Wittgenstein's rejection of inner processes and of traditional behaviorism¹⁰ rather than a consideration of the commonality (or commonability, to use Philip Pettit's word) of mind. It is obvious, however, that many of the elements of thought that Wittgenstein pays close attention to, especially those connected with logic or grammar, are common rather than individual or idiosyncratic. A proposition determines just one point in logical space, but it presupposes the whole of logical space (*TLP* 3.42) – and any other proposition by any other person presupposes exactly the same logical space. Logic is a common element of thought – not something individual, and certainly not solipsistic. The same is true of grammar, in the sense in which Wittgenstein speaks of it in his later work: it provides a framework for "this complicated form of life" (*PI*, p. 174e) we humans share, no matter how wide the divergences in vocabulary, morphology, and syntax. Wittgenstein sought to characterize the features of these common elements of thought as earnestly as any Quaker has sought to articulate the common mind of a Friends meeting.

Two recent books have taken up this theme. Kimberly Cornish, in *The Jew of Linz*,¹¹ devotes the final part of the book (chapters 8-12) to arguments that attribute to Wittgenstein a "no-ownership" view of the mind, the upshot of which is that consciousness is social rather than individual, a view that he calls "mental socialism." Early evidence for this reading comes from Wittgenstein's remark that "there is no such thing as the soul – the subject, etc. – as it is conceived in contemporary superficial psychology" (*TLP* 5.5421). Cornish – not altogether convincingly – marshals further quotations from Wittgenstein's later work, as well as from medieval sources, Goethe, Schopenhauer, and Geach, to argue that Wittgenstein held the same view of mind through his latest writing.

The other book is *The Common Mind* by Philip Pettit.¹² Although Pettit distinguishes his view from Wittgenstein's, in that his publicity conditions on rule-following are different from those in the Wittgensteinian literature, he does see such publicity conditions as entailing that there is something mental that is common to some group – or at least is available to becoming common (is “commonable”). Pettit makes a powerful case for this view, though without attributing it to Wittgenstein, in the final pages of the book. Though Pettit distinguishes his view from that of Wittgenstein (or Kripke's Wittgenstein), it is nonetheless arguable that, if Cornish is in general right about Wittgenstein, Pettit, especially in the final section of the “Postscript,” gives a better account of what Cornish is attributing to Wittgenstein than Cornish does himself.

We might take Wittgenstein's admiration for Fox as further indirect evidence that he responded favorably to a view of mind or thinking that was common or commonable rather than solitary and solipsistic. The practice of silence is, for Quakers, an important part of the discipline of attending to what is common; so, too, for Wittgenstein, though in a different way. For Wittgenstein the important part of what is common is grammar, which is the basis of philosophy.¹³ Making grammatical remarks is no doubt as much a language-game as the others Wittgenstein discusses, but it depends on there already being other language-games and therefore could not be a *primitive* language-game. Furthermore its focus is not on the *substance* of what is said (its truth or validity or other cogency) but on the *possibility* (meaning) of what is said. Hence Wittgenstein's insistence that philosophy remain *silent* on matters that concern science and morals:

It was true to say that our considerations could not be scientific ones.
[...] And we may not advance any kind of theory. [...] We must do away
with all *explanation*, and description alone must take its place.
(*PI* § 109, p. 47e)

Philosophy puts everything before us, and neither explains nor deduces anything. Since everything lies open to view there is nothing to explain. For what is hidden, for example, is of no interest to us.

One might also give the name “philosophy” to what is possible *before* all
new discoveries and inventions. (*PI* § 126, p. 50e)

III. *The Silence of Kraus*

In 1931 Wittgenstein listed Kraus as one of ten people – and one of several Jews – who influenced him. The context is an interesting and somewhat enigmatic self-assessment, partly in regard to he himself being Jewish:

Amongst Jews “genius” is found only in the holy man. Even the greatest
of Jewish thinkers is no more than talented. (Myself for instance.)
(*CV*, p. 18e)

Wittgenstein went on to describe his particular talent and to mention some of those who influenced him most:

I think there is some truth in my idea that I really only think reproductively. I don't believe that I have ever *invented* a line of thinking. I have always taken one over from someone else. I have simply straightaway seized on it with enthusiasm for my work of clarification. That is how Boltzmann, Hertz, Schopenhauer, Frege, Russell, Kraus, Loos, Weininger, Spengler, Sraffa have influenced me. Can one take the case of Breuer and Freud as an example of Jewish reproductiveness? – What I invent are new *similes*.

[...]

What I do think essential is carrying out the work of clarification with COURAGE: otherwise it becomes just a clever game.

[...]

It is typical for a Jewish mind to understand someone else's work better than he understands it himself. (*CV*, pp. 18e-19e)

Throughout the list of influences there runs a sharp critique of dominant practices and accepted ways of doing or saying things. One might think of this list when reading Wittgenstein's comment about his own work, "I destroy, I destroy, I destroy!" Kraus was perhaps the most trenchant of the social critics, but Frege's polemics, though more concerned with scholarship and argumentation, are as devastating and unrelenting as anything in Kraus.

In the case of Kraus the criticism is partly political and partly directed against social pomposity in general, but the politics left little imprint on Wittgenstein. The core of Kraus's own work as well as his influence on Wittgenstein concern language. Kraus (1874-1936) was fifteen years senior to Wittgenstein, and he established his unique and influential journal *Die Fackel* before Wittgenstein was ten. It is difficult to characterize Kraus's career, since he worked in so many ways, but a unifying theme to his plays, his poetry, his criticism, and his journalism, was his love and care for an ideal of language and his contempt for the prevailing ways of his time. He was anything but silent. His antiwar play, *The Last Days of Mankind*, ran to 800 pages, and his journal appeared more or less regularly for thirty-seven years. He was loosely socialist, but his main enemy was corruption of the language. His diatribe against Heine concerned Heine's introduction of the *feuilleton* into German papers. The *feuilleton*, which features high-brow intellectual essays on topics of no political importance, is usually written in a florid style that never spares adjectives, adverbs, metaphors, or similes; the *feuilleton* has remained one of the popular features of many German newspapers. One of Kraus's principal targets was Austria's "best" paper, *Die Presse*, which once offered him the job of writing and editing its weekly *feuilleton*.

The triumph of Hitler was not the first or only time that Kraus, in spite of being a prolific writer, was silent in the ordinary sense, and Tractarian silence is a regular feature of his most pungent style of writing. The first public silence of Kraus, the first noticeable interruption in the publication of *Die Fackel*, occurred in 1914, at the outbreak of World War I. Harry Zohn writes:

The outbreak of World War I forced him [i.e., Kraus] to bear witness to what he regarded as the beginning of the end. [...] Kraus's initial reaction to the new "great times" was silence. The torch was temporarily extinguished, and for several months the torch-bearer was too stunned to participate in the flood of words all around him.¹⁴

He wrote two extraordinary anti-war works, his 800-page play, *The Last Days of Mankind*, and his biting satirical diatribe, *In These Great Times*. Here are some of the barbs from the latter work:

In the realm of poverty of imagination where people die of spiritual famine without feeling spiritual hunger, where pens are dipped in blood and swords in ink, that which is not thought must be done, but that which is only thought is unutterable. Expect no words of my own from me. [...] He who encourages deeds with words desecrates words and deeds and is doubly despicable. [...] Let him who has something to say come forward and be silent! (p. 71)

That last line is as fine an invocation to silence as the last line of the *Tractatus*. In both cases silence becomes the instrument of a powerful moral witness.

Since I am neither a politician nor his half-brother, an esthete, I would not dream of denying the necessity of anything that is happening or of complaining that mankind does not know how to die in beauty. I know full well that cathedrals are rightfully bombarded by people if they are rightfully used by people as military posts. (p. 72f)

In this passage Kraus speaks, but with heavy-handed irony. From Wittgenstein's point of view, such irony is not really *saying* anything. Anyone who understands Kraus realizes that he means just the opposite of what the words seem to say. To put it another way, Kraus *shows* us something by "saying" something he obviously does not mean. To the extent that Kraus restricts his writing and speaking to irony and satire, he is engaged in *showing* rather than *saying* and therefore remains silent in the Tractarian sense.

It is worth noting that the irony here is directed against explanations and justifications of what was happening in the war. When he speaks of the encouragement of deeds with words desecrating both deeds and words, he surely has war propaganda in mind, the ringing words of patriots. There is a strong consensus between Kraus and Wittgenstein about the abuse of language in such justifications: the speaker seems to be saying something that could be true or false, but there are no *facts* that could possibly make such sentences true or false (Kraus's ironic response is equally not an abuse, because it is obviously showing us an absurdity rather making a truth-claim). Kraus was from the beginning antagonistic toward the press, but its role in publishing and popularizing the rationales for violence made him intensify his attack:

If one reads a newspaper only for information, one does not learn the truth, not even about the paper. The truth is that the newspaper is not a statement of contents but the contents themselves; and more than that, it is an instigator. If it prints lies about horrors, these turn into horrors.

There is more injustice in the world because there is a press which fabricated it and deploras it! It is not nations that strike one another; rather, it is the international disgrace, the profession which rules the world not despite its irresponsibility but by virtue of it, that deals wounds, tortures prisoners, baits foreigners, and turns gentlemen into rowdies. Its only authority is its unprincipledness, which, in association with a rascally will, can change printer's ink directly into blood. O last unholy wonder of the times! At first everything was a lie, and they always lied so that lies might be told only elsewhere; but now, thrown into the neurasthenia of hatred, everything is true. There are various nations, but there is only one press. The newspaper dispatch is an instrument of war like a grenade, which has no consideration for circumstances either. (p. 77f)

Kraus was equally outraged by the rise to power of Hitler, against whom he had warned in 1922, and his initial reaction was again silence. Here is Zohn again:

"Mir fällt zu Hitler nichts ein." (I cannot think of anything to say about Hitler.) This is the striking first sentence of Kraus's *Die Dritte Walpurgisnacht* [...], a prose work written in the late spring and summer of 1933 but not published in its entirety during Kraus's lifetime. That sentence [...] may be indicative of resignation and impotence [...], but it is also a hyperbolic, heuristic device for depicting the witches' sabbath of the time. [...] There had been no *Fackel* for ten months when no. 888 appeared in October 1933. Its four pages contained only Kraus's funeral oration on his architect friend Adolf Loos and what was to be the satirist's last poem, with its poignant closing line, "The word expired when that world awoke." Kraus sadly realized the incommensurability of the human spirit with the brutal power structure across the German border, and on the second page of his work he asks this anguished question: "Is that which has been done to the spirit still a concern of the spirit?" The equally anguished answer he gives himself is this: "Force is no object of polemics, madness no object of satire."¹⁵

We see in this last remark not only anguish but also recognition that a distinctive linguistic activity requires its appropriate context. It is said that after the war Charlie Chaplin admitted that he might not have made *The Great Dictator* if he had known the immensity of the evil. The madness of German fascism destroyed the context in which satire and polemics made sense. Just as Wittgenstein spelled out limits of philosophy and of science, so also Kraus recognized limits of satire.

IV. Political Silence

Arnulf Zweig published an interesting, somewhat tentative, essay on "Wittgenstein's Silence" a few years ago.¹⁶ The silence in question is Wittgenstein's silence, both during and after the war, about the Holocaust. There are two sorts of response to the moral shadow cast by Zweig's essay. One suggests that Wittgenstein's actions may have compensated for his lack of deeds, and the other portrays his silence as stemming from very deep principles and insights.

Kimberly Cornish makes a dramatic inference from established historical data, relying on our imagining what might have been Wittgenstein's two separate lives during his second period in England. Wittgenstein and Hitler were both in the *Realschule* in Linz at the same time for a year; and they were of the same age, having been born within a fortnight of one another; and Hitler does write in *Mein Kampf* of being incensed by an arrogant Jew while at the school. Wittgenstein can therefore, so argues Cornish, be assigned an unknowing and unintentional role in the formation of the beliefs and sentiments that led Hitler to the "final solution." This took no extra time or energy on Wittgenstein's part, and for it he of course deserves neither credit nor blame. But Cornish goes on to assert, with evidence more voluminous albeit less consequential, that Wittgenstein was the Soviet recruiter in Cambridge who got Burgess and others from Cambridge to spy for the Soviet Union in the thirties and forties. What a feat this was! It would have required a great deal of time, travel, concentration, judgment, discretion, and secrecy. One can imagine that Wittgenstein might have realized his earlier relation with Hitler and determined to do something to make up for it – a warrior for a second time, though in a different kind of war with a vastly different role. The definitive characteristic about this role is its secrecy, not a hint of it emerging from any of Wittgenstein's friends.

There is much we do not know about Wittgenstein's life. Reading Kimberly Cornish's book one comes away with a sense that Wittgenstein, that extraordinary man, might well have had several other sides. He did, of course, a prodigious amount of philosophical work, filling notebooks with his thoughts. Anyone who has tried to do such will know that the work he did seems enough to fill a great deal of one's time. In addition there were also the relaxing moments, listening to music or going to "B" movies. But those who have looked closely into his life tell us that there was much more. McGuinness recounts Wittgenstein's front-line experiences in the Great War, and one realizes from Wittgenstein's notebooks of that period that he composed the *Tractatus* while actively engaged at the front.¹⁷ Since the philosophical writing and the military life each seem like full-time activities, the account McGuinness gives makes one realize that Wittgenstein was capable of much more than is an ordinary individual. So, though I remain unconvinced, perhaps Wittgenstein's acts spoke more loudly in the political context of the 1930s and 1940s than any of us realize.

Nonetheless he remained silent about politics in all his works and correspondence. The silence is so striking that it must be construed as deliberate, and therefore as an act of considerable discipline. No doubt this discipline had various sources, but one of its roots is a line of thought he seized on from Kraus: that the great underlying problem of the times, and a key factor in making him feel alienated from the civilization by which he was surrounded,¹⁸ was the abuse and corruption of language. Of course part of the act of seizing upon this line of thought was Wittgenstein's conviction that he understood Kraus's line of thought better than Kraus did!

One key to Wittgenstein's version of the abuse and corruption of language is contained in *Tractatus* 6.37 and 6.375:

There is only *logical* necessity.

Just as there is only *logical* necessity, so too there is only *logical* impossibility.

If one looks at political speeches, wartime slogans, and party platforms, one encounters a plethora of modal claims that are not matters of logic at all. This phenomenon occurs with both fascists and socialists and (in the American context) with both Republicans and Democrats: President Bush said that Saddam Hussein left him no choice, and President Clinton that Slobodan Milosevic left him no choice – and Presidents Hussain and Milosevic have of course made analogous (but incompatible) modal claims. Even after the fact, historians continue to invoke necessities and impossibilities that lie far outside the domain of logic, in order to explain the events. All these common, almost ritualistic political and historical ways of using language fly in the face of Wittgenstein's characterization of the scope of modality. From the line of thought Wittgenstein articulated, these historical and political statements could not *really* be modal at all, but rather some other sort of use of language masquerading as modal claims. It is the masquerade that constitutes an affront not only to logic but to Wittgenstein's sense of morality.

Wittgenstein, although he changed his views about many things and came to speak more of grammar than of logic in connection with necessity (see *PI* § 246-251, pp. 89e-90e, and § 371-373, p. 116e), continued to regard necessity and impossibility as rooted in the framework of language, rather than in the world.¹⁹ It is this persisting view that lies behind his well-known remark about metaphysics:

The essential thing about metaphysics: it obliterates the distinction between factual and conceptual investigations. (*Z* § 458, p. 81)

He might have made a similar remark about political and historical discourse. Such an attitude is clearly indicated by his having become "extremely angry" at Norman Malcolm for Malcolm's having said that a British plot to assassinate Hitler was incompatible with British national character:

He considered it to be a great stupidity and also an indication that I was not learning anything from the philosophical training he was trying to give me. He said these things very vehemently, and when I refused to admit that my remark was stupid he would not talk to me any more, and soon after we parted. He had been in the habit of coming to my lodging in Chesterton Road to take me on a short walk with him before his bi-weekly lectures. After this incident he stopped that practice.²⁰

I take it that Wittgenstein saw the point about metaphysics as central to his whole philosophy, and to the work of clarification about the distinctions necessary for understanding the highways and byways of language, and that it was really stupid of Malcolm not to see that "national character" plays the same sort of role in political and historical discourse that "form" and "essence" play in metaphysics. That is, it disguises a modal claim, where it is easy to see, once the disguise is removed, that the required logical foundation is entirely lacking. Malcolm must at that moment have seemed an integral part of the very civilization from which Wittgenstein felt alienated.

Wittgenstein's outburst may have been nothing but pedagogical despair, with no value judgment implied, as he says in the "Sketch for a Preface." Perhaps by "value judgment" he meant a condemnation, which he would understandably have been unwilling to endorse. But it is difficult to believe that he did not see Malcolm's remark as a moral as well as a logical failure, albeit not a culpable failure. From his earliest discussions with Russell, Wittgenstein saw logico-linguistic clarity as intimately connected with moral purity. Political pronouncements and historical explanations inevitably involve the same sort of blurring of the vital distinction between the conceptual (logical) and the factual that he explicitly attributed to metaphysics. So *of course* he remained silent about the momentous political events of his day. His political silence was a moral act. It was a persistent and conscientious implementation of final words of the *Tractatus*. And it was, ironically, a tribute to Kraus, from whom he had taken the seminal thought that what is rotten and despicable in our civilization stems from abuse of language.

¹ Letter 23 (undated), in: C.G. Luckhardt, ed., *Wittgenstein: Sources and Perspectives*, Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1979, p. 94f.

² Wittgenstein's silence began when he was very young; according to Ray Monk's biography, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1990), he did not begin to speak until he was four.

³ Brian McGuinness, *Wittgenstein, a Life: Young Ludwig (1889-1921)*. London: Duckworth, 1988, p. 270.

⁴ The following abbreviations are used when referring to Wittgenstein's works:

CV = *Culture and Value*. Ed. G.H. von Wright. Trans. Peter Winch. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990.

OC = *On Certainty*. Ed. G.E.M. Anscombe and G.H. von Wright. Trans. D. Paul and G.E.M. Anscombe. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1969.

PI = *Philosophical Investigations*. Trans. G.E.M. Anscombe. Oxford: Blackwell, 1968.

TLP = *Tractatus Logico-philosophicus*. Trans. D.F. Pears and B. McGuinness. London: Routledge, 2001.

WVC = *Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle: Conversations Recorded by Friedrich Waismann*. Ed. Brian McGuinness. Trans. Joachim Schulte and Brian McGuinness. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1979.

Z = *Zettel*. Ed. G.E.M. Anscombe and G.H. von Wright. Trans. G.E.M. Anscombe. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981.

⁵ Matthias Kross, *Klarheit als Selbstzweck: Wittgenstein über Philosophie, Religion, Ethik und Gewissheit*. Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1993.

⁶ For further details, see Newton Garver, "Context and Analysis," *Journal of Philosophical Research* XXIV (1999): pp. 1-19.

⁷ Aspects of Fox's genius are evident in the *Journal*, but appreciating his organizational genius, which allowed the Society of Friends to be among the few seventeenth-century charismatic sects to survive into the twentieth century, requires historical study; see Homer Larry Ingle, *First Among Friends: George Fox and the Creation of Quakerism*. New York: Oxford UP, 1994.

- ⁸ Norman Malcolm, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Memoir*. London: Oxford UP, 1958, p. 71f.
- ⁹ Personal communication from Alson Van Wagner.
- ¹⁰ See, for example, Norman Malcolm, *Memory and Mind*, Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1977; *Thought and Knowledge*, Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1977; and *Nothing is Hidden: Wittgenstein's Criticism of His Early Thought*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1986; Colin McGinn, *Wittgenstein on Meaning: An Interpretation and Evaluation*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1984; and Malcolm Budd, *Wittgenstein's Philosophy of Psychology*, London: Routledge, 1989.
- ¹¹ London: Century Books, 1998.
- ¹² New York: Oxford UP, 1996.
- ¹³ See my "Philosophy as Grammar," in Hans Sluga and David G. Stern, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Wittgenstein*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996, pp. 139-170.
- ¹⁴ Editor's "Introduction" to *In These Great Times: A Karl Kraus Reader*. Ed. Harry Zohn, Montreal: Engendra Press, 1976, p. 14.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 17f.
- ¹⁶ Arnulf Zweig, "Wittgenstein's Silence," in *Proceedings of the Nineteenth International Wittgenstein Symposium*, Vienna: Hölder-Pichler-Tempsky, 1997; German version as "Wittgensteins Schweigen," *Bruchlinien: Tendenzen der Holocaustforschung*. Ed. Gertrud Koch, Köln: Böhlau, 1999, 163-180.
- ¹⁷ Brian McGuinness, *Wittgenstein, A Life: Young Ludwig (1889-1921)*, London: Duckworth, 1988, chapter 7.
- ¹⁸ See the "Sketch for a Foreword" to *Philosophische Bemerkungen (CV, p. 6e-7e)* and following passages (*CV, 7e-8e*), for example: "The spirit of this civilization makes itself manifest in the industry, architecture, and music of our time, in its fascism and socialism, and it is alien and uncongenial to the author" (*CV 6e*).
- ¹⁹ See, for example, John V. Canfield, *Wittgenstein: Language and World*, Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1981, esp. chapters 9-11.
- ²⁰ Malcolm, *Ludwig Wittgenstein*, p. 32f [see endnote 8].