

KRAUS ON WEININGER, KRAUS ON WOMEN, KRAUS ON SERBIA

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Most men profess to respect woman theoretically, in order that much more thoroughly to despise her practically; here this relationship has been reversed. Woman could not be highly valued: but women are not for all that to be excluded, from the start and once and for all, from all respect.¹

I. Preamble

Otto Weininger was born in Vienna on April 3, 1880. The above passage is taken from the only work he published in his lifetime, a big book entitled *Geschlecht und Charakter: Eine prinzipielle Untersuchung* (roughly: *Sex and Character: An Investigation of the Principles*). This work contains arguments to the effect that:

man alone is rational;

there has never been and could never be a woman genius;

women, like children, imbeciles, and criminals, should have no voice in human affairs;

woman is infinitely porous, infinitely malleable, and infinitely open to external influences;

woman has no soul;

love and understanding are mutually incompatible;

woman is exclusively and continuously a sexual being, man only secondarily and intermittently so;

it is the duty of all women to strive to become men;

every man, even Goethe, even Napoleon, even Kant, is part woman;

women do not exist.

Writing the Austrian Traditions: Relations between Philosophy and Literature.
Ed. Wolfgang Huemer and Marc-Oliver Schuster. Edmonton, Alberta:
Wirth-Institute for Austrian and Central European Studies, 2003. pp. 81-100.

At the age of twenty-two, Weininger received from the University of Vienna the degree of Doctor of Philosophy *summa cum laude* for a dissertation on the biology, psychology, and sociology of the sexes entitled “Eros and Psyche.” On the same day he converted to Protestantism – something highly unusual for a Jew in Catholic Austria. His dissertation grew within the year into the 600 pages of *Geschlecht und Charakter*. Part I, on “The Sexual Manifold,” is largely scientific in temper and has some scientific basis in the biology of Weininger’s day.² Part II, on “The Sexual Types,” includes new chapters on the metaphysics of sex, on talent and genius, on the erotic and the aesthetic, and on Jewishness: “The problem of the Jew = the problem of woman = the problem of the slave.”

It is an implication of Weininger’s work that all human relations, and not only human sexual relations, are immoral, that it is in a certain sense impossible to lead a moral life on this earth. Four months after the publication of the work – not “some years later,” as is asserted by Germaine Greer on page 79 of *The Female Eunuch* – Weininger committed suicide. On the 3rd of October 1903 he rented a room in the house on the Schwarzschanerstrasse in which Beethoven had died. The next morning he shot himself in the left side of the chest. His book, which had initially received little attention, immediately became the object of a cult. Weininger’s friends and disciples published articles and pamphlets in defense of his ideas. Fragments from his notebooks and diaries were collected and published in a volume bearing the title *Über die letzten Dinge* (*On the Last Things*). And *Sex and Character* itself, which eventually went through more than twenty-five editions in German, was almost immediately translated into six other languages, including Hebrew and English. Thinkers of the calibre of Strindberg, Wittgenstein, Joyce – and Kraus – not only took Weininger seriously, but suffered a profound and lasting influence.³ Strindberg credited Weininger with having solved “the most difficult of all problems” – the problem of woman. “I spelled out the words,” Strindberg wrote, “but it was he who put them together.” Shortly after Weininger’s suicide, Strindberg wrote to Weininger’s friend Artur Gerber, as follows:

Stockholm, 22 October 1903

I understood our dead friend, and I thank you. Some years ago as I stood there, like Weininger, with the hope of going further, I wrote in my diary: Why do I go on? Cato gave himself up to death when he found that he could not hold himself upright above the swamp of sin. It is for this reason also that Dante absolved him from his suicide (Inferno). Now it is I who am sinking, and I will not sink, therefore ... torment! –

I was on my way upwards, but a woman has dragged me back down to the ground ... But still I went on living, because I believed that I had discovered that our association with the earthly spirit woman was a sacrifice, a duty, a test. We are not permitted to live as Gods here on earth; we have to amble about in all this filth, and yet still stay pure, etc.

[...]

Your unknown friend in the distance,
August Strindberg.⁴

In a letter of July 1903 Strindberg describes *Sex and Character* as a “frightening” book that had “probably solved the hardest of all problems.” Strindberg also wrote an obituary of Weininger in which he affirms that all the spiritual and material riches of humanity had been created by males. Woman’s love for man he describes as “50% animal heat and 50% hate.”⁵

Weininger on the other hand was subject also to attacks. These emanated, above all, from members of the churches, and from the Vienna psychoanalytic movement. In 1904 there appeared in a German medical series a book entitled *Der Fall Otto Weininger (The Case of Otto Weininger)* by one Ferdinand Probst. Probst’s book is an exercise in posthumous psychopathology. As Kraus wrote: “The psychiatric troublemakers are no longer content to destroy the living. They have started to render expert opinions also on the dead . . .”⁶

Sigmund Freud himself described *Geschlecht und Charakter* as a “rotten book, which cannot be taken seriously”.⁷ Freud also accused Weininger of having stolen some of his own ideas in the writing of *Geschlecht und Charakter* – for another principal thesis of Weininger’s work is that all human beings, and indeed all sexually reproducing organisms, are physiologically and psychologically bisexual.

II. *Feeling vs. Truth*

Weininger is an ethical realist. He believes that there exist ultimate values which in and of themselves demand realization and whose demand for realization outweighs all other considerations. A human being, if he is to lead a moral life, must respect these values in his thoughts and actions, regardless of the consequences to his personal well-being or to the well-being of the society in which he lives. He who fails in this observation is a moral criminal. To the extent that he is conscious of his failure he suffers guilt, and there is, for Weininger, a logical tie between ethical guilt (ethical punishment) and the actions in which it resides. The reality of guilt is a logical mark of the reality of the values Weininger calls ultimate.

Nowadays people rarely talk of “ultimate” values. Rather, the measure of ethical value is taken to be the advantage of society as a whole. The extent to which the isolated individual succeeds in leading a moral life is thus shorn almost completely of its ethical significance.

Weininger’s ethical realism will appear as an even more formidable stumbling block to the contemporary reception of his views when we examine the precise nature of the “ultimate values” to which he is committed.⁸ The following would be an approximation of a complete list:

[M1] truth, knowledge, honesty, intellectual rigor, consistency, clarity and distinctness of thought;

[M2] the ability to reason, to differentiate, to impose an order upon and to distance oneself from the subject-matter of one’s thoughts; to isolate principles and to recognize essences or types; to see the general in

the particular; to grasp what is constant in a world of change, to forget nothing;

[M3] the ability to act in such a way that the principle of one's actions is clearly understood, and therefore also in such a way that one can accept responsibility for those actions; reason and will should coincide; logic and ethics should become identical; the ability to act where action is due, to act in accordance with a will to value; thus one should respect the qualities of resolution, decisiveness, and courage; and one should abjure complacency and pompousness.

To the extent that an action satisfies the above, its value will exhibit permanence; our willingness to accept responsibility for it will be capable of enduring forever. The action will, correspondingly, impose a permanent order upon some segment of the world we experience, of a type which appears most notably in the worlds of philosophy and of artistic creation (and especially in music). The world itself, on the other hand, acquires from the ethical point of view a wholly passive, submissive character, the character of something that is to be shaped according to the moral or aesthetic will of the experiencing subject. The list of values might accordingly be extended:

[M4] a high value is placed on those actions that impose a permanent form on that which is formless; the will to value is manifested as a will to form.

Finally, the above, purely subjective criteria of the ethical life will be seen to imply a specific constraint upon one's relations with one's fellow human beings (that is to say, upon those of our thoughts and actions which impinge upon our fellows):

[M5] a human being is to be treated with absolute respect as an equal (potential) source of ethical legitimacy (of truth and of right); he should not be treated in an instrumental way, as a means to one's own ends, however highly valued those ends may be.

I have called the above M-values: we may think of them, for the moment, as the values of the mind. Note that even where M-values have a bearing upon our relations with others, they are wholly individualistic. No ultimate value is placed upon, say, the health of the society in which one lives, not even upon the survival of the human species. Ultimate values can in Weininger's eyes be brought to realization only through the reason and will of a single individual – not, for example, through changes in society brought about by political means. Value is indeed divorced from the nexus of causes and effects. The individual should seek not to concern himself with the affairs and amenities of the world in which he lives. Rather, he should seek to travel light.

It is possible to set forth a complementary list of what might be called W-values by picking out those qualities isolated by Weininger as directly antagonistic to the above. These would include, in no particular order:

[W1] instinct, feeling (as a substitute for or as a beclouding accompaniment of thought); partiality; the inability to distance oneself from the subject-matter of one's thoughts;

[W2] passion, sentiment, sensuality, love (conceived as a bond between individuals somehow leading to an erosion of their respective individualities); togetherness, sociability, solidarity, compassion; comfort, domesticity, well-being, survival;

[W3] spontaneity, impulsiveness, pragmatism, the tendency to be swayed by temporal events instead of dominating them;

[W4] acting in such a way that one works with rather than against nature; being concerned to accept and live within the flow of events rather than to impose an enduring form or order upon the world; living for the moment;

[W5] self-abasement, self-sacrifice, the offering of oneself as a means to the ends of another, or the treatment of another as a means to one's own ends.

W-values are the values of the world. They are values pertaining to what goes on inside the realm of what happens and is the case, values relating to the stream of causes and effects. Where M-values relate to the individual intellect and to its ability to understand and thus also to stand apart from or transcend the objects of its thinking acts, W-values relate primarily to the body and to the nexus of instinctual relations between the body and its surroundings.

III. Man and Value

It is not merely that W-values have no legitimacy as values in Weininger's eyes (so that man has no moral duty to observe them). Weininger believes that any attempt at their promotion, whether on an individual or on a social level, is positively detrimental to the realization of M-values in the universe as a whole. Hence his belief that the W-values are ethically evil, and that they correspond, from the ethical point of view, to the dark, sensualistic side (the weaker side) of human nature. If W-values are conceived as values, then this is because man has been oppressed by woman. To uphold them now may be conceived as a form of atavism. And it is undoubtedly a form of atavism to wish to renounce modern scientific enlightenment in favor of, say, the form of life of the coven or of the tribe.

For Weininger what I have called M- and W-values are, respectively, the values of the absolute man and of the absolute woman. To the extent that someone has it within him to recognize that it is his duty before God (before his conscience, before the universe as a whole) to bring about the realization of value, to that extent he is a man. The absolute woman, as Weininger conceives her, is incapable of experiencing this duty. At best she may suffer the inclination to realize (M-) values not for their own sake, but in order to impress a man.

It should be stressed again that no actually existing human being exhibits in a pure form either the ideal type man or the ideal type woman. We are all to a greater or lesser extent bisexual; we all have within ourselves finite amounts of male and female “plasma,” as Weininger conceives it. Moments of masculinity and femininity, of reason and sensuality, and of light and darkness form interdependent, mutually inseparable parts of every human being. Weininger goes so far as to claim that it is possible to determine numerically the distribution of male and female “plasma” in any given individual. A predominance of femininity is marked, for example, by large breasts and hips, by a preoccupation with sexuality and with appearance to the detriment of the life of the mind. High masculinity is characterized by the presence of facial hair and a prominent jaw, and by the capacity to divert one’s attention away from purely sexual and personal concerns to other spheres, such as war, politics, athletics, or philosophy. Weininger argues in fact that it is possible to assign degrees of masculinity or femininity even to whole groups of human beings. The Jews, for example, he regarded as the archetypically feminine race, closely followed – in reflection of their lack of interest in the intellectual life – by the English. A perfect marriage, against this background, would be one in which the M- and W-quotients of the marriage partners each add up to 100% when summed together.

IV. *On Self-Transcendence*

In Part II of *Geschlecht und Charakter*, Weininger moves on to consider human sexuality not in relation to physiological and psychological fact, but rather in relation to pure or metaphysical possibility, to the possibility that human beings should recognize their moral duty, or their guilt, or that they should exercise their freedom as thinking, willing subjects. Pure possibilities of this kind, Weininger insists, are not constrained by facts of psychology or physiology. The latter relate exclusively to regularities actually exhibited in the world of what happens and is the case. Pure possibilities, in contrast, may obtain even in a world in which they are, as a matter of empirical fact, never realized. Weininger now goes on to argue that it is possible, in this metaphysical sense, that the human subject wills that he/she be released from the canker of bisexuality, that he/she be cleansed of what is, in Weininger’s eyes, the evil in his/her soul ... and become Man. While this act of will, as pure possibility, is not constrained by empirical reality, its success or failure will depend on the particular mental and physical powers, upon the character of the individual in question. The attempt to realize the ideal type *man* can at best, Weininger believes, succeed only partially and momentarily, and then only in human beings of genius. At worst – for example, in the case of human beings who are, by Weininger’s lights, predominantly female – it must tragically fail. Yet not to make the attempt is to abandon oneself to the forces of immorality.

V. *Horizontal and Vertical Ethics*

I shall suppose in what follows that whatever may be said of Weininger's respective evaluations of the M- and W-values, the distinction, at least, is well-founded. It gives rise to a division between what might loosely be termed vertical and horizontal conceptions of ethics. Vertical conceptions rest on a view of ethical value as residing in a linear, one-directional relation between the individual and some higher authority (God, as something like a father or a fearful judge, in the simplest possible account, though the higher authority may be, for example, the conscience of the subject in question, or some higher self or "moral law within"). Such a vertical relation may be seen also in Freud's account of ego and superego, and it is present also in Kafka, for example in *The Judgment*.⁹ Horizontal theories, in contrast, view ethical value as arising out of the existence of reciprocal relations between human beings, interrelations conceived as involving some sacrifice of our respective individualities (the kind of denial of the self which occurs, most evidently, in the relation between the mother and her child, and which is seen by most proponents of a horizontalist ethic as arising from the very fact that individuals live together as members of a common society/tribe/race/class). Horizontalist conceptions of God see Him not as judge or father, but as something like a social worker, a friend, or a cloud of benevolence. The propensity to recognize and to respect vertical values is manifest in the world's major religious traditions in the idea of a last judgment and of God as source of absolute justice. It is manifest in the systems of government and of law that have grown up in civilized societies, in the idea of a divine right of kings, with its conception of the monarch as a direct representative of God on earth.

That societies based exclusively on horizontal values (such as the hippy commune or the Fourierist phalanx) have been notoriously short-lived, is in Weininger's eyes entirely predictable. For it is a precondition of the continuity and survival of larger social groupings that the respect for vertical values should be deeply rooted in its constituent religious and secular institutions, even if this is accompanied by liberal helpings of the rhetoric of love and mutual sacrifice.

VI. *The Categorical Imperative*

For Weininger, of course, the health or continuity or stability of a society is of as little ethical significance as is the survival of the individual. What is of ethical significance is exclusively the realization of vertical values. This standpoint may seem strange, yet Weininger was able to draw support for his conception from almost the entire tradition of Western philosophy. For the principal philosophers of the West have given overwhelming priority to vertical rather than to horizontal intuitions in their accounts of value – and we should not be tempted to suppose that this uniformity of views is simply the result of the fact that the history of humankind has as yet seen no woman philosopher of the rank of Plato or Aristotle. The uniformity is to be traced, rather, to a purely philosophical idea, which received its

earliest formulation some three thousand years ago when the sentence “God created man in His own image” was first conceived: the idea of individual separateness, of loneliness, of freedom from the herd, as an *achievement* of mankind.¹⁰ This idea has colored the thought of the West since Judaic times. It has undergone successive modifications: in the writings of Plato with his conception of the philosopher as a man blessed with god-like spirit; in the medieval conception of man as microcosm;¹¹ in the monadology of Leibniz; and in the Cartesian *cogito*. It reverts to its primeval form in the writings of Nietzsche.

With Kant, however, as seen through Weininger’s eyes, the idea of individual separateness undergoes an almost complete detachment from its Judaeo-Christian origins. Kant, for whom the words “I stand alone! am free! am my own master!” represent the very root of ethics, instituted a new stage in the development of humankind. His work made possible the reversal of the Judaic premise, the propounding of a thesis of total autonomy, to the effect that it is the isolated, individual subject who creates God in his own image. This thesis, present only in seedling form in Kant’s own writings, first exploded with full force in the works of the later German idealists, which consist in large part of attempts to draw out its implications. It may appear grotesque to see in Weininger the culmination of a development which began with Kant and Fichte and was carried to successively greater heights by Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. Yet we shall see that, of all the inheritors of the idealist tradition, Weininger was alone in recognizing and embracing certain tendencies intrinsic to the higher morality of the Kantian world view, tendencies which reveal, once they are made explicit, that the entire edifice is fundamentally defective.

Kant’s ethical views may be summarized as follows. He insists, first of all, upon the necessity to realize, in one’s actions, an intrinsic unity of reason and will. The moral worth of an action lies not in the purpose to be attained by it, but in the principle in accordance with which it is decided upon.¹² Secondly, he insists that our relations with our fellows can be ethical only to the extent that we act so as to treat humanity, as well in our own person as in the person of another, ever as end, and never merely as means.¹³ Weininger conceived himself as having merely made precise the implications of this imperative of the Kantian ethic. But there is a further strand in Kant’s thought, expressed in his categorical imperative:

“Act only on that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law.” [...] the universal imperative of duty may also run as follows: *“Act as if the maxim of your action were to become through your will a universal law of nature.”*¹⁴

To fulfil this imperative is to bring about a unity of reason and will.

VII. Overturning Kant

It is not easy to see how a universalizing principle of this kind can be brought into harmony with the radically egoistic conclusions that Weininger wishes to draw from

the Kantian ethic. According to the more usual interpretations of Kant, this last clause of the categorical imperative is to be understood as imposing a constraint, indeed a considerable constraint, upon those types of action which can be counted as “ethical” within the terms of the earlier clauses. It is seen, in effect, as a fifth column of horizontalism within the Kantian framework.

Weininger, however, turns the usual, comfortable, liberal interpretation of Kant on its head. For him the proposition of universalizability is no more than an afterthought that is, strictly speaking, redundant. For he holds that all of those actions which, of themselves, exemplify the unity of reason and will, and which do not involve the use of another merely as means, are such that the principles in accordance with which they are executed are, of necessity and without further ado, universalizable. If an action is ethical in accordance with the earlier clauses, then this is of itself sufficient to vouchsafe that it is the duty of all human beings to respect the principles that underlie it. This is the case even if, for particular types of human being, the attempt to exercise this duty must tragically fail. Universalizability is thereby conceived not as a prior constraint upon what may count as ethical. Rather, whatever is ethical is to be treated, if necessary via *force majeure*, as universalizable. Because it is ethical to be a man and unethical to be a woman (to abandon oneself to the merely female characteristics in one’s biological make-up), it follows that it is the duty of every human being to will that the dark forces of sensuality within his or her breast should be surmounted. Woman must – in the spirit of at least some contemporary feminists – become man. Because the universalizability condition has been conceded so insubstantial a cutting edge, the thesis of total autonomy reaches its simplest possible expression within the Weiningerian ethic: *act on those maxims through which you can will that they serve as laws even in a world emptied of fellow human beings*.

In a world denuded of all consciousnesses outside myself, the W-values of community and compassion crumble into so much dust. The same cannot be said, however, of the M-values of truth, integrity, and resolution. Even in such a world I would still, according to Weininger, be burdened with the duty to exercise a will to value, to think honestly and rigorously, to forget nothing, to accept logic as the judge of all my thinking acts. One is reminded of the moral of Grillparzer’s *Weh dem, der lügt* – that every lie, however small, assaults the foundations of the entire human condition.

VIII. Sex and Morality

The next stage in Weininger’s development of the Kantian ethic consists in an argument to the effect that – superficial appearances notwithstanding – all of us are already living in a world in which we are in any case cut off from our fellow humans, that ultimate loneliness is not something we are ever able to escape. Here Weininger, with the courage of the monomaniac, is merely pointing out that there is a sense in which the Kantian imperative rules out any contact between human beings which would have positive ethical value. Kant’s injunction to treat humanity

ever as end, never solely as means, implies first of all, and familiarly, that the innocent contemplation of a pretty face be repudiated as immoral, since this involves the use of the owner of the face merely as the means to one's own personal gratification.

But then all sexual relations, whether they are entered into voluntarily or involuntarily, also necessarily involve the use of another merely as means. This is clear in the case of relations between client and prostitute. However, when reflecting upon sexual relations that are not purely mercenary, there remains the lingering feeling that – even though the desire for sexual gratification may give rise to the treatment of one's partner as mere means – the existence of other bonds between persons in love might somehow cancel out the immorality which would otherwise result. Kant, for example, in a letter to C.G. Schütz of July 10, 1779, states – without a shred of argument – that the immorality which should arise from “the reciprocal use of each other's sexual organs by two people” is cancelled out “if the cohabitation is assumed to be marital, that is lawful, even if only according to the right of nature; the authorization is already contained in the concept [of marriage].” Once we examine the nature of such bonds, however, we see that they rest entirely on the moment of reciprocity: M's willingness to allow W to do his cleaning and cooking is seen as being balanced by the willingness of W to allow M to house, clothe and feed her. But reciprocity cannot cancel out immorality. That two persons are using each other, as reciprocal means, is a double immorality; it is an immorality compounded by collusion. Relations between parent and child, too, involve the use of one person for the gratification of another. The child is brought into the world without his permission having been sought, and molded according to specifications that he is not given the opportunity to approve. Indeed, virtually all relations between human beings, including the simplest forms of trade, and even an act so trivial as riding on a bus, become impossible for the thorough-going Kantian who would lead a strictly moral life. Each involves the use of another solely as means to the agent's own personal ends. It thus appears that the current pejorative use of the word “exploitation” to characterize the relations between, say, an employer and his employees, or between a husband and a wife, has – with its implication that these perfectly commonplace ties are somehow immoral – fundamentally Kantian roots. What those who talk of exploitation have not seen, is that the alternatives canvassed (workers' control of the means of production and the like) serve, from this same Kantian point of view, merely to distribute the immorality among a somewhat larger group of people.

IX. Woman Has No Ego

It will by now be clear that the Kantian ethic, in its Weiningerian form, conflicts radically with more familiar conceptions of ethical value. Doing good for one's neighbor, for example, is seen to involve the morally repugnant assumption that the neighbor her/himself would be so unethical as to be willing to collude in our being

used as means to her ends. Where the right-minded person is perfectly happy to accept that there is an element of exploitation in the great majority of everyday transactions, and where he of a leftward bent is ready to use the fact of exploitation as an excuse to subvert the whole common life of humankind in order to substitute relations which are, in his eyes, somehow non-exploitative, Weininger draws the conclusion that truly ethical relations between human beings are unattainable, that human relations as such constitute at best a distraction from the ethical life. The problem of loneliness, then, is unresolvable. Our various frantic attempts to solve this problem – travel, sexual conquest, the gathering of worldly possessions – are to be dismissed as so much moral abuse. The only truly moral course is to submit to the duty to accept one's isolation before the world as a whole, to recognize (to will) that there is no problem of loneliness at all. That this is one's duty is not, in the end, susceptible to any proof. The horrifying, tragic fact for man, alone in the universe, is that it has no further sense to submit to this duty.¹⁵ Here we meet bedrock. Only something like the grace of God can help us.

It is the vertical order of the mind which makes possible – even in a wholly solipsistic world – the phenomena of conscience and guilt. These and other related ethical phenomena, as well as what Weininger calls the phenomena of logic (reflection, analysis, introspection), have their foundation in a relation between higher and lower strata of the mind, between what Weininger calls the soul, or intelligible ego, and the merely sensual self. The phenomena of logic and ethics arise where the soul is set in judgment over the empirical ego. And where – as in the case of Weininger's absolute woman – the logical and ethical phenomena are absent, where the mind is just a flow of sensuous data, there the ground for the assumption of a soul or intelligible ego falls away. The perfectly feminine being recognizes neither the logical nor the ethical imperative, and the words "law," "duty," and "duty before oneself" are words and concepts that are alien to her. Thus the conclusion is perfectly justified that she lacks also a supersensual personality. The absolute female has no ego.¹⁶

X. On Wittgenstein

It is no accident that so much in the above calls to mind the thinking of the early Wittgenstein. Recall, in particular, Wittgenstein's question as to what constitutes the difference between a happy, harmonious life and an unhappy one. This difference cannot be anything physical. Even if everything that we want were to happen, this would only be, so to speak, a grace of fate; for there is no logical connection between will and world which would guarantee it, and we could not in turn will the supposed physical connection. But how, if a man cannot ward off the misery of the world, can he be happy at all? Wittgenstein's answer is: through the life of knowledge, for which we might read: life spent in pursuit of the M-values of truth, honesty, intellectual rigor, and so forth.

Good conscience is that happiness which is vouchsafed by the life of knowledge. The life of knowledge is the life that is happy in spite of the misery of

the world. The only life that is happy is the life that can renounce the amenities of the world. Here we return, through Weininger, to Plato's (and the Stoic) conception of the philosopher (of the one who leads a life of knowledge) as being blessed with a godlike spirit. He alone is able to come into contact with the divine order of the world and thereby reproduce that order in his soul. He alone is able to view the world as a whole, *sub specie aeterni*, to liberate himself from the sphere of what happens and is the case.

In the *Notebooks of 1916*, we find only random remarks on matters such as these, interpolated with reflections on logic and formal ontology and with expressions of Wittgenstein's distress at the fact that what he says is not yet clear. Only in the *Tractatus*, completed two years later, do they begin to be consolidated into the framework of a consistent theory. And only there – where we find no more talk of the “life of knowledge” as the highest good – do the no longer simply Weiningerian implications of Wittgenstein's philosophy of the ethical become clear.

XI. Kraus on Woman

Die Fackel served as the platform for Kraus's constant stream of abuse against the moral, social, sexual, political, aesthetic, legal, medical, and above all grammatical failings of his contemporaries. His principal aim was to impede as far as possible – and paradoxically through the medium of journalism – the erosion of thought and culture that he saw as an inevitable consequence of the spread of journalistic cliché. He spent several thousands of pages, in issue after issue of his journal, bemoaning the extent to which the press, by continuously feeding its readers with ready-processed feelings and opinions, had denatured their intellectual and emotional lives and destroyed their capacity for moral (and aesthetic) judgment. Journalism and its allies – the information and war-propaganda organs of the state, a medical profession (and some of Kraus's most vituperative attacks were directed against the new pseudo-profession of psychoanalysis) ready to prostitute itself and its jargon to the services of the state – were conceived by Kraus as enemies of language itself. And in the case of *Viennese Society vs. the German Language*, Kraus himself served as both judge and defending council. The synchronisation of word and deed he saw as yielding a universal criterion of the ethical. Every misuse of language, however small, assaults the foundations of the entire human condition. And thus if, as Kraus saw it, his contemporaries once fully grasped the meaning of their utterances, if they once truly experienced the reality contained within their words, then their lives and their world would change; the otherwise all-pervading hypocrisy would become impossible. If writers and speakers fully realized what they write and say, if they saw and felt the full impact of the verbal reality that inheres in their words and has only to be uncovered for its effect to be revealed, then they would write and speak differently, and indeed live differently. It is as if we were to say that nobody who had ever fully imagined an execution could fail to plead for the abolition of capital punishment.¹⁷

As Kraus became more and more convinced of the hopelessness of his task, his critique of the misuse of language gradually became transformed into a form of linguistic theology, skirting the limits of intelligible discourse. Kraus saw the “fall” of German life, as marked by the rise of National Socialism, as a linguistic event, an apocalypse brought about by the black magic of printers ink. The issue of *Die Fackel* of July 1934 consists of a 170-page letter to “the stupid reader, whoever he may be,” in which Kraus explains “why *Die Fackel* does not appear.”

XII. Kraus and Language

The decay had set in, Kraus believed, because language had been robbed of its rightful and natural position of authority in the abode of thought; for the true writer, in Kraus’s eyes, is one who does not seek to interpose his own ego between language and the world. He is not one who has a perfect command of language, but one who is commanded by language, one who recognizes that language must be treated with respect if she is to give of her best – Kraus was fond of pointing out that “language” (*die Sprache*) is of feminine gender. As he himself expressed it:

Language is the sovereign mistress of thought, and whosoever succeeds in reversing this relation will find that she makes herself useful about the house but will bar him from her womb.

My language is the common prostitute that I turn into a virgin.¹⁸

Modern writers, and particularly journalists, had increasingly sought to use language as the instrument of their ideas, and their efforts resulted in thoughtless, heartless (artless) pap (compare Heidegger’s remarks on the inauthenticity of *Gerede* or chatter.) But not only has language been thus unnaturally forced into a passive, unresponsive role, robbed of its powers of directing the course of thought and of setting a limit to the thinkable; the debauchery of language has also brought a warping and a misdirection of the masculine principles of deliberation, dominance, and control. The modern world is accordingly a world in which (masculine) boorishness has triumphed over (feminine) sensitivity, a world in which the private life of humankind has been muzzled by brute force. It has thereby cut itself off from that concentration of thought and feeling, that harmonious coupling of language and experience, which is the precondition of culture.

XIII. The Personal and the Political

Kraus published in *Die Fackel* some of the writings that appeared in defense of Weininger after the latter’s death, including writings of Strindberg. We can now see that he turned Weininger’s work on its head. Out of Weininger’s vilification of the feminine principle he carved a eulogy of the absolute female which served in turn as the basis for his own attacks on the hypocritical attitudes toward woman and sexuality which pervaded the Viennese society of his day.

Weininger disparaged woman for her sensuality, her monomaniacal obsession with sex and the trappings of sex (beauty, sensuality, clothes, hair), her feeble-mindedness, her impressionability, her illogicality, her fickleness, her superficiality, her ability to be easily pleased – and just as easily upset. Kraus glorified woman for these same qualities.¹⁹ Weininger affirmed that the only hope for woman lay in her striving, however vainly, to become man. Kraus found nothing more repugnant, more unnatural, more lacking in charm, than the educated woman. What for Weininger is the soul-destroying capacity of woman to divert the attentions of man away from the truly moral life, Kraus saw as her glorious capacity to nurture and inspire.

Weiningerian individualism, with its vilification of the feminine principle, is transformed, through the filter of Kraus's vision of language, into an individualism that accepts the (restraining) power for good of precisely those qualities that Weininger had so vehemently disparaged. The dualism of masculine light and feminine darkness, a dualism in which the forces of culture (M) and nature (W) are diametrically opposed, is supplanted by an opposition between boorishness and sensitivity, between the mindless public world of incompetent journalists and bureaucrats and the interlocking private worlds of individual men and women. Individual morality and public law, for Kraus as – in a different way – for Weininger, must thereby relate to entirely separate domains. Hence Kraus's glorification of the prostitute, a victim of the confusion of these two domains. Hence his recommendation of the rural life and of the provinces, where character has not yet been laid waste by journalism, where printers ink has not yet discolored the natural life and signifies nothing further than a means which is ready to hand for the communication of "the serious, upright feelings of the private individual."²⁰ Hence his continuous stream of attacks against the activities of the Austrian public hygiene authorities, who would bring before the courts matters "which properly belong only before the Highest Judge – and probably would not interest even Him."²¹ The disgust people felt at the practices uncovered by the hygiene authorities Kraus saw as being rooted in the fact that even the most harmonious affairs in our private lives, when dragged out into the open, seem disgusting to eyes and ears for which they are not intended.²²

XIV. Protestant and Catholic Anti-Liberalism

Kraus, Weininger, and also Wittgenstein were part of a wider counter-liberal undercurrent in turn-of-the-century Austria to which Loos, Engelmann, Hänsel, Hofmannsthal, Ficker, and Ebner also belonged. These are thinkers who in different ways shared a distaste for the modern world and for modern ways of thought, and who therefore did not conceive their work as an attempt to persuade the public of the rightness of certain views. They were well aware that the thoughts expressed would not find general acceptance, but would at best evoke a spark of agreement in those few scattered individuals who had already had those thoughts themselves.

Thus also they were often content to express their thoughts in the form of aphorisms that were only asymptotically intelligible.

It is possible to distinguish within this counter-liberal movement two more or less coherent tendencies of what, with some hesitation, we can call Protestant and Catholic anti-liberalism. The division is not one that can be made to rest simply on the overt religious confessions of their respective adherents. It is more appropriately characterized by appeal to certain family resemblances between the philosophical backgrounds, interests, and beliefs of the individuals involved. Thus the Protestant strain is marked by the prominence of Nordic writers (Kant, Kierkegaard, Ibsen, Strindberg, Hamsun) in the intellectual biographies of its principal adherents. Representatives of the Catholic wing, on the other hand, tended to look to the South of Europe, to the traditions of classical Greece and Italy, to the Baroque, and to the native Austrian heritage of Grillparzer and Stifter.

We have already seen the workings of Protestant anti-liberalism in its most extreme form in the writings of Weininger. Recall that on the day on which he received his doctorate Weininger converted to Protestantism. Catholic anti-liberalism might best be represented by Kraus and by the members of the Brenner Circle. Kraus abandoned the Jewish faith in 1899 and was baptized (in secret) into the Catholic Church in 1911 (he left the Church in 1923), having come to regard atheism as an unnatural state, comparable to an artificially constructed language.

The Protestant and Catholic anti-liberals have this in common: they turned their backs on the existing political order of society. Both stressed the importance of a radical separation of the public and the private, and believed that what was of intrinsic value was rooted in the latter. Where they differed was in their understanding of the locus of the private sphere. Catholic anti-liberals retained a belief in certain pre-liberal values of communal life. They adhered – in theory if not in practice – to the values of the family and of local and neighborly traditions, and they turned against the facelessness of the metropolis. This generated a belief in the importance of a pluralism of authority in society and in the necessity to preserve hierarchical forms. The Protestant anti-liberal, on the other hand, conceived value as residing in the isolated individual (in the vertical relation between the individual ego and his God, or conscience). Protestant anti-liberalism thereby stripped ethical value of its connection with the sphere of what happens and is the case.

Where Protestant anti-liberalism is not recognizably a political doctrine of any form, its Catholic counterpart can be clearly understood as a form of (wistful) conservatism. Catholic anti-liberals sought, in effect, to return to a time when the values of preliberal (or “*altliberal*”) Austria as they conceived it were still taken for granted. But they did not, however, act in a simply political fashion: the individuals involved were not, as one now says, agents of reactionary forces in society. Catholic anti-liberals could see perfectly well that the attempt to bring about a restoration of the lost order in society by means of political agitation could only further consolidate the deterioration of those natural ties between individuals that they wished to nurture and sustain. They sought, rather, to exploit those havens of undistorted human life within society where political and ideological interference, the interference of modernity, had not yet made its mark. They sought to preserve

those bastions of humanity in the (almost certainly hopeless) fight against the decline of intellectual and moral standards brought about by the growth of the city and by the spread of democracy and journalism.

Thus Protestant and Catholic anti-liberals counterposed to the rationalistic conceptions of humankind derived from the Enlightenment two distinct but equally sceptical images of man. The Protestant anti-liberals, in emphasizing the absolute identity of man (and woman) before the moral law, are capable of generating absurd consequences to the effect that, for example, woman must strive to discover the moral law within her (must strive to become like man), even though, because of the intensity of the forces of darkness which beset her, this attempt will inevitably and tragically fail. The Catholic anti-liberal, in contrast, draw attention to and indeed glorify the differences between human beings, recognizing that a naturally existing complementarity obtains between individuals of different types and that this, so long as it is allowed to express itself naturally, can only have positive ethical value. Catholic anti-liberalism is therefore on the one hand more realistic than its Protestant counterpart: it can allow, for example, that a woman can lead a truly moral life *as a woman*, by practising those womanly virtues which, from a more rigorous point of view, have to be dismissed as of merely superficial importance. On the other hand, it is less optimistic in recognizing intrinsic ethically relevant differences between human beings, in implying that there are human beings who, because of their intrinsic nature, are cut off from the highest forms of moral or intellectual excellence.

XV. Kraus on Serbia

Kraus, notoriously, was an enemy not only of journalists and psychoanalysts but also of military authorities and war-mongering politicians. His antimilitarism expressed itself most poignantly in his massive onslaught on Alice Schalek, a female war correspondent who was the incarnation of everything that Kraus opposed. Kraus longed for a golden age when everything could be relied upon to remain in its natural place. He sought harmony and he hated the boorishness of the male, whether as *bureaucrétin*, as bumbling general, or as journalist. Schalek, a female pioneer, a “male-female perversion” (“*mannweibliche Pervertierung*”) who had secured for herself a posting as war correspondent in the front lines of the First World War through energetic persuasion of her employers at the *Neue Freie Presse*. In Kraus’s *Last Days of Mankind*, a female journalist modelled on Schalek is one of the few characters who figures repeatedly at different places in the plot; her activities at the front are represented as one of the most extreme horrors of the war.

Schalek is an early incarnation of what, in the era of CNN, has become a commonplace: a journalist who is herself a star and places herself at the very center of events. Kraus presents his version as driving through battlefields as if she is passing through museums, taking her own photographs of the corpses along the way and becoming enthralled at the bodies of the “simple man” in the trenches. She

hounds a troop of wounded men marching by with the question “Was für *Empfindungen* haben Sie?” (“How do you *feel*?”).

Schalek, like her CNN successors, brings the war into your living room. She brings the human side of war as it actually happens. But this means that no longer is anything in its proper place. Schalek not only has the insidious effect of making war acceptable, but her enthusiastic hopping around in the trenches in the thick of battle means that there is now no haven from the war, and this means that there is now nothing – no noble ideals – worth fighting for.

XVI. Promotional Trips to Hell

From *Die Fackel*:

I am holding in my hand a document which transcends and seals all the shame of this age and would in itself suffice to assign the currency stew that calls itself mankind a place of honor in a cosmic carrion pit. Even though any clipping from a newspaper has signified a clipping of Creation, in this instance one faces the dead certainty that a generation deemed capable of this sort of thing no longer has any nobler possessions to damage.²³

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- ¹ Weininger, *Geschlecht und Charakter*, 462.
- ² See Janik 1985b.
- ³ Ford Maddox Ford and William Carlos Williams were among the early admirers of *Geschlecht und Charakter* in the United States (Sengoopta 2000).
- ⁴ Appendix to Weininger 1920.
- ⁵ Sengoopta, *op. cit.*
- ⁶ *Die Fackel* 169, Nov. 23, 1904, 6-14; cf. Szasz, 144.
- ⁷ Abrahamsen 1946, 55; see Sengoopta 2000. Weininger approached Sigmund Freud with an outline of *Sex and Character* in the autumn of 1901. Freud refused to recommend publication, and advised Weininger to spend “ten years” gathering empirical evidence for his assertions. “The world,” Freud said, “wants evidence, not thoughts.” Weininger retorted that he would prefer to write ten other books in the next ten years.
- ⁸ See *GuC*, II, chs. 6 and 7, and the essay “Wissenschaft und Kultur” in *UdID*, 142-182.
- ⁹ Compare the discussion of the self as “inner tribunal” in Smith 1981.
- ¹⁰ Cf. Durzak, 16f.
- ¹¹ *GuC*, e.g., 222.
- ¹² Kant, 65.
- ¹³ Kant, 91.
- ¹⁴ Kant, 84 (original italics); compare Sengoopta, *op. cit.*, 55ff, where the relation between Man and Woman is compared to the Aristotelian relation between form and matter.
- ¹⁵ *GuC*, 209ff; Bíró, 73.
- ¹⁶ *GuC*, 239f.
- ¹⁷ Stern, 78.
- ¹⁸ Kraus, 1986, 135 and 293.
- ¹⁹ See Iggers, Ch. 7; cf. Greer in *The Female Eunuch*, whose view of the characteristic female traits of illogicality and emotionality comes close to that of Kraus. Greer holds that these traits are in fact advantages: “If women had no ego, if they had no separation from the rest of the world, no repression and no regression, how nice that would be!”
- ²⁰ Kraus, *Die Fackel*, Nov. 7, 1913, 29.
- ²¹ 1908, 287f.
- ²² Cf. Iggers, 164.
- ²³ Translated in Zohn, 89.

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