

The Philosopher and His Mask

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The Philosophical Tone

"*Larvatus prodeō*," "I go forth masked": with these words does the young René Descartes – the year is 1619 and he is twenty-three years old – mark his entrance into philosophy. In an early text found among his papers and published under the title *Praeambula*, he writes the following: "Before going on stage, an actor dons a mask (*persona*) so as not to reveal the redness of his face. Likewise, as I make my appearance in the theater of the world, where I have so far been only a spectator, I also go forth masked."¹

Here Descartes describes a practice that is far from his alone. When a philosopher appears upon the stage – whether in speech or in writing – he alters his tone and projects his voice. He no longer merely speaks; he declaims, and sometimes even takes an oracular stance. He uses the mask to hide his face and body and above all to transform his voice. What we hear is the voice of René Descartes, but it is transformed, amplified, deformed by the mask behind which he hides, by the *persona* of the philosopher he wants to be. These few lines of the *Praeambula* may be considered as a beginning, a very personal preface to his philosophical *oeuvre* as a whole, as the moment when he leaves behind his person to become a *persona*. Until now, Descartes has been a private person, answerable to no one, able to express himself just as he is, just as he thinks he is, without having to use a mask. Once he openly, officially chooses the life of the mind, a new "I" is expressed through his mouth; from now on what he says will no longer be private but public. His role now is to speak the truth, even if it turns out in the end to be his truth alone.

Before speaking through the mask, he must put it on. Writing a

1. René Descartes, "Praeambula," in *Oeuvres philosophiques*, v. 1, ed. F. Alquié (Paris: Garnier, 1963), 45.

preface is a way of performing this act in the public eye – somewhat like those theater troupes that invite the audience to watch them putting on their makeup, costumes, and personas, and above all showing the persons concealed behind the personas that will be seen on stage. In this way the wings become a part of what is shown to the audience, part of the stage. Philosophers' prefaces – and this is true of prefaces in general, particularly in works dealing with ideas, of prefaces in which the author explains himself and what he has done – are instances of this public act of putting on a mask; they are a way of showing what one really is, or rather how one really wants to be seen, before changing one's tone of voice, before speaking as a persona rather than a person.

Already at the dawn of philosophy, in one of the earliest known prefaces to a philosophical text, this type of public mask-donning can be found. Parmenides presents himself to us just as he is about to appear on stage, at the delicate moment when the personal "I" introduces himself to the reader while taking leave of him, the moment when he clears his throat and adjusts the projection of his voice, the moment at which he makes it known that another voice will speak to us through him – a more general voice, the voice of truth.

Here then is the prologue of Parmenides' philosophical poem: "The mares that carry me as far as my heart ever aspires sped me on, when they had brought and set me on the far-famed road of the goddess, which bears the man who knows over all cities. . . . And the goddess greeted me kindly, and took my right hand in hers, and addressed me with these words: 'Young man, you who come to my house in the company of immortal charioteers with the mares which bear you, greetings. No ill fate has sent you to travel this road – far indeed does it lie from the steps of men – but right and justice. It is proper that you should learn all things, both the unshaken heart of well-rounded truth, and the opinions of mortals, in which there is no true reliance. But nonetheless you shall learn these things too, how what is believed would have to be assuredly, pervading all things throughout.'"²

Parmenides explains himself: impelled by his desire for knowledge, he is called upon by the goddess Justice, who takes him by the hand to show him the way of truth. She addresses him, Parmenides, and subsequently she will speak through his mouth:

2. G.S. Kirk, J.E. Raven, and M. Schofield, *The Presocratic Philosophers: A Critical History with a Selection of Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 243.

after meeting the goddess, Parmenides becomes simply the mouth-piece of the truth; he is the persona or mask through which the goddess speaks, through which the truth is spoken. The poem continues thus: "Come now, and I will tell you (and you must carry my account away with you when you have heard it) the only ways of enquiry that are to be thought of. The one, that [it] is and that it is impossible for [it] not to be, is the path of Persuasion (for she attends upon Truth)" (245). This is how a philosopher often appears: as a man who pontificates in the name of a truth that has possessed him, in the name of a truth that he seeks to possess.

Compare this prologue, which seems so remote, so exotic, to a contemporary prologue, the note to the reader that Marcel Conche places at the beginning of the new edition of his book *L'orientation philosophique*: "[...] What is this book about? Not the phenomenology of 'Mind,' but the phenomenology of *my mind*, or the movement by which I have come to rest [...] Montaigne would say to me: 'What you are depicting is yourself.' Perhaps, but quite involuntarily in this case, for my only concern has always been the truth, never myself; and I do not think I am 'myself the subject of my book' – fortunately for this book! . . . However personal the philosopher's gaze may be, what he has seen with it is not himself (however much this self may be implicated in his gaze), but only the truth. What interests me is not the way I see the world, but seeing it as it must be seen, in truth. And by 'truth' I do not mean only my own truth, but rather the truth for each and every person, by right. I make it mine because, in my eyes, it is *the truth*, and not the other way around."³

Although Conche is less rigid in most of the texts that follow this notice, we are still left with the impression that the distance between Conche and Parmenides is not so great. For both of them, the philosopher belongs to the category of prophets: he speaks through his own mouth – because he cannot do otherwise – but he is possessed, or at any rate he wants to be possessed, by the spirit of truth. The temptation is clear: speech in the service of something beyond itself, speech for which, it might even be said, the responsibility does not belong to the one who utters it, since it comes from somewhere else, since in order to speak the truth, it is enough to wish in good faith to speak it. Such speech comes from elsewhere and the philosopher merely sets it forth with a variable degree of success, according to his talents.

3. Marcel Conche, *L'orientation philosophique* (Paris: PUF, 1990), 19–20.

The philosopher who seeks truth discovers it rather than invents it. In speaking his philosophy, he does not express himself through it; on the contrary, he does his utmost to avoid expressing himself through it, to make himself invisible in it, to be simply the mouth-piece of the truth he discovers (in himself, beyond himself?) The result is the abstract, impersonal tone that is so often found in philosophical writings: What do you expect? I myself, the philosopher, am not the one who is speaking, it is the truth wending its way through my mouth; and the truth, we all agree, has a right to pontificate.

I will even say this: the truth *must* speak in an impersonal tone – otherwise, who would take it seriously? Here, it is the tone that makes the music.

Wittgenstein begins his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* with a series of peremptory affirmations, which really give the impression of truth speaking through his mouth: “The world is all that is the case. The world is the totality of facts, not of things.”⁴ What would have happened if, instead of using such a peremptory tone, Wittgenstein had begun by saying: “I think, I believe, I have the impression, it seems to me, I propose, it would be interesting to suppose [or something of the sort] that the world is all that is the case; let us suppose that the world is made up of facts, and not of things, even though I do not know exactly what a thing is”? Would the Vienna circle have taken what he had to say so seriously? Isn’t there something in us that likes the imperious tone that is so sure of itself, the tone that reassures us even when we do not accept what is said to us in it? It commands an ideational obedience that is all the more comfortable because it allows us to criticize the details, once the essential has imposed itself.

This is the illusion: the belief that philosophers – great philosophers, those who have something new, important, or interesting to say to us – silence their own personal voices in order to loudly proclaim the voice of truth. Now, it is precisely in their personal voices (which are not to be confused with anecdotes about their emotions and fantasies) that we recognize those philosophers who blaze new trails of thought – even when they conceal or camouflage their “I” through linguistic subterfuge or sleight of pen, even when they give themselves over to the “philosophical” mode of speech. Philosophers – true philosophers, those who do have something to

4. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974), 5.

say – speak to us; they are mouthpieces for themselves, for their ideas, opinions, intuitions, beliefs, knowledge, feelings, desires, and phantasms. It is from their personal experience of ideas that they proffer the ideational objects they create – their written works. What they conceptualize, generalize, and transform into texts is their own “flesh and blood.” What they offer us is their own world of ideas, in the form of philosophical positions.

When I say that (great) philosophers speak to us from themselves (the lesser ones, the followers, do not possess any “I” from which to speak), I do not mean that they speak only about themselves. Above all I do not mean that a philosophical text can be exhaustively explained by the psychological profile of its author – even though it seems obvious that these elements are important to the nature and composition of the work. Plato’s work cannot be explained by his own feeling of self-worth, nor by the fact that he was orphaned as a very young boy and belonged to a declining aristocracy. Certainly these factors are important, but they do not explain his work and its influence on us.

When great philosophers – creators of ideational worlds, advance scouts in new frontiers of thought – speak to us from themselves, they speak to us of ourselves, and make us see a world that can be our own. They touch our thoughts and appeal less to our idiosyncracies or our psychological profiles than to our existential postures as these relate to our ideational positions,⁵ our attitudes toward what is, what should be, and what must be done. In their works, these philosophers reflexively express their own existential positions, which may also be our own; they present these positions for our consideration and open our eyes to what, thanks to them, we discover in ourselves.

The Role of Prefaces

Let us now return to the question of prefaces and to their relation to the texts they introduce. For readers who read a work in the order in which it is presented, and not in the order in which it was composed, the philosopher speaks in his preface about himself, what he set out to accomplish, what happened to him along the way, what he hopes to achieve. Between himself and his readers, the philosopher creates a space of personal intimacy, speaking from one “I” to another, in a rush of *captatio benevolentiae* that is

5. Cf. Jacques Schlanger, *Solitude du penseur de fond* (Paris: Critérian, 1990), 31–42.

surprising and even jarring, especially in the case of those philosophers who speak in the name of truth and whose texts ought to be sufficiently compelling in and of themselves, by virtue of their own necessity. As Spinoza so clearly puts it, "*veritas norma sui*"⁶: truth is the standard of itself – or in any case it ought to be; it has no need of "explaining itself." Someone who has written the *Meditations, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, the Critique of Pure Reason, The Gay Science, the Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, or the like, does not need to justify it, nor does he need to win the reader's goodwill; it is enough to let the work speak for itself.

And yet, many philosophers cannot resist attempting to justify or explain themselves. There are of course some philosophers, including some of the greatest, who have chosen and still choose to present themselves to us exclusively through their texts without any detours like a preface or foreword. Moreover we should not forget that the inclusion of a preface is a relatively recent practice, which caught on especially during the Renaissance, when the author began wishing to make an appearance behind his text. However, even though the practice is not universally followed, many philosophical texts have prefaces that are presented under various guises: prologues, forewords, epistles, preambles, notes to the reader, and so forth.

An author writes a preface to show himself to us as he wants to be seen; philosophers who write prefaces do so for the same reason. Consequently, these prefaces must be read *cum grano salis*; they should not always be taken literally. Still they are certain to be of interest, if we examine the way their authors – whether these are philosophers or other types of writers – bring the self to bear on what they write.

To win over the reader's goodwill, the author asks him to enter the inner recesses of his intentions; he speaks of his successes but also of his shortcomings, and invites the reader to share in the difficulties he has experienced; he expresses his desires and what he hopes to elicit from the reader. To this end, the author places himself outside his work, contemplating it from without and situating himself in relation to it. The text is more "professional," the preface is more "personal" – as if the writer were switching levels, moving from text to metatext. The effect of this fundamental process is to

6. B. Spinoza, *Ethics, preceded by On the Improvement of the Understanding*, trans. William Hale White, rev. Amelia Hutchinson Stirling; ed. James Gutmann (New York: Hafner, 1949), 114.

relativize the work, to question its absolute authenticity: a work that is viewed by its own author from outside, that has to be defended from without, shows a certain fragility. Whether the author criticizes it or boasts about it, the work thus presented manifests weakness rather than strength: it needs what is said *about* it in order to exist, to affirm itself, to be compelling. When the truth is expressed, however, it does not need to plead its own cause; it has no need of a preface, and a text whose author feels obligated to preface it, to make it acceptable by defending himself in relation to it, is by this very fact disqualified from being truthful. Sacred texts have no preface: they are their own preface.

The author speaks about himself and from himself in his preface. He makes use of various modes of self – existential, paradigmatic, transcendental. He explains himself, pleads his cause, exults, complains. Then, when the preface is left behind, there is often an abrupt change of tone. The philosopher who was speaking to us so confidentially just a brief moment ago disappears, giving way to someone who hits us over the head with the truth: “1. The world is all that is the case. 1.1. The world is the totality of facts, not of things,” and so forth (to recall the opening statements of the *Tractatus*). It is no longer the philosopher who speaks to us, but rather his thought that expresses itself through him: he has become the spokesman of his own thought.

Of course, this is merely an impression; what actually takes place is quite different. First of all the philosopher composes his work, in which – to set and maintain the proper tone – he makes every effort to hide his “I,” to play his cards close to the chest. Once his work is finished, when he hands it over to his readers, he remembers that he is the one who wrote this work, recalling the history of its fabrication, what impelled him to write it, what he hopes from it, in what he has succeeded, and in what he has failed; above all he remembers me, his reader, and what he hopes from me, what I can do for him. At this point he reveals a glimpse of this “I” that, until this moment, he had so carefully concealed. After preparing his discourse *ex cathedra*, but before delivering it up to me, he grabs me by the collar and speaks directly into my ear.

In Locke’s 1689 preface to his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, he addresses his reader as follows: “If thou judgest for thyself I know thou wilt judge candidly, and then I shall not be harmed or offended, whatever be thy censure. For though it be certain that there is nothing in this Treatise of the truth whereof I am

not fully persuaded, yet I consider myself as liable to mistakes as I can think thee, and know that this book must stand or fall with thee, not by any opinion I have of it, but by thy own."⁷

But after this preface (that is, before the preface in the sequence of composition, but after it in the book), Locke – one of the most congenial of philosophers, abruptly changes his tone and speaks in a much more peremptory fashion: "Since it is the *understanding* that sets man above the rest of sensible beings, and gives him all the advantage and dominion which he has over them; it is certainly a subject, even for its nobleness, worth our labour to inquire into" (1). Now we have come to the heart of the matter; no more emotional outpourings. The voice is raised and the tone changes: a philosophical work is too serious for us to continue in this familiar vein. Or perhaps the new distant tone, so cold and impersonal, is simply a way to reassure us, to confirm the importance of what we are doing, and to persuade us with a show of self-assurance, as when one knows oneself to be speaking the truth. The philosopher switches abruptly from a personal, almost intimate use of self in the preface, to an instrumental use in the work itself; if the "I" appears here, it is because it is required "*for the sake of argument.*"

Wittgenstein's Two Prefaces

The preface as a reflection of the text: the relation between a text and its preface is particularly interesting when it is not merely a *pro domo* plea, a means of self-justification, but when it is presented as an echo of the text, a reflection – not so much of the contents (in this case the preface is nothing but a summary or paraphrase) as of the tone. The tone of the preface picks up the tone of the text. The example of Wittgenstein is doubly striking. I am thinking here of his two "canonical" texts, the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (published in 1921, with a preface dating from 1918) and the *Philosophical Investigations* (published in 1953, with a preface dating from 1945). The radical ideational divide between the Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus* and the Wittgenstein of the *Investigations* is well known. The self-assured expression in the *Tractatus* and its peremptory affirmations are faithfully reflected in the tone of the preface, just as the hesitations, corrections, changes of position, and displacements found in the *Investigations* are echoed in the preface

7. John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, "Epistle to the Reader" (London: Everyman's Library, 1947), XX.

that Wittgenstein added once that text was made public – almost against his will.

In the preface to the *Tractatus*, the young Wittgenstein expresses himself with a high degree of assurance; he is an impetuous man who speaks and wants to be heard. The preface is very short, just over one printed page, and though it would be worth quoting in its entirety, I will present only its principal components: “Perhaps this book will be understood only by someone who has himself already had the thoughts that are expressed in it – or at least similar thoughts” (3). In other words, this book is addressed only to an elite readership. “The whole sense of the book might be summed up in the following words: what can be said at all can be said clearly, and what we cannot talk about we must pass over in silence.” I, the young Wittgenstein, know what can be said: “Thus the aim of the book is to draw a limit to thought, or rather – not to thought, but to the expression of thoughts” (3).

“I do not wish to judge how far my efforts coincide with those of other philosophers. Indeed, what I have written here makes no claim to novelty in detail, and the reason why I give no sources is that it is a matter of indifference to me whether the thoughts that I have had have been anticipated by someone else.” This extremely audacious statement affirms an enormous degree of power: I think by myself, I am nobody’s disciple or epigone – and if what I say is not new, in the sense that someone else has already said it before me, that does not interest me. For me, it is new, since I, and I alone, have thought it. Of course, Wittgenstein goes on to mention that he is “indebted to Frege’s great works and to the writings of my friend Mr. Bertrand Russell for much of the stimulation of my thoughts.” “Stimulation” and no more: Wittgenstein acknowledges no master, and barely acknowledges the predecessors who sparked his reflections.

At last, we come to the final evaluation, Wittgenstein’s appraisal of his own work: “If this work has any value, it consists in two things: the first is that thoughts are expressed in it, and on this score the better the thoughts are expressed – the more the nail has been hit on the head – the greater will be its value” (3–4). Here, Wittgenstein judges both his value as an “artist” who expresses his thoughts and his impact on the reader; he continues: “Here I am conscious of having fallen a long way short of what is possible. Simply because my powers are too slight for the accomplishment of the task. – May others come and do it better.” For all his assur-

ance, Wittgenstein considers himself a mediocre "artist" who has done the best he could given the limits of his means. And he accepts this judgment easily, for in his eyes it applies only to a "technical" aspect of creation, a secondary aspect that is only a matter of degree.

However, when it comes to true creativity, to innovation proper, genius makes itself heard, and Wittgenstein feels this concerns him directly: "On the other hand the *truth* of the thoughts that are here communicated seems to me unassailable and definitive. I therefore believe myself to have found, on all essential points, the final solution of the problems. And if I am not mistaken in this belief, then the second thing in which the value of this work consists is that it shows how little is achieved when these problems are solved" (4). This declaration shows his immense pride – in its claim to have attained an intangible and definitive truth – as well as his genuine modesty, since the domain of truth is itself very limited and is not the most important for human life.

For such a radical statement to make sense, or rather, for the author of such a bold statement not to be considered senseless, it must be based on a conception of philosophy that takes after mathematics. It assumes the possibility of affirming a philosophy that is "true," in the same way that the possibility of a "true" geometry is accepted. From such a perspective, Wittgenstein's claim and hope, however unrealizable they may appear to us, are not devoid of meaning. He declares that he is following in the footsteps of Frege and Russell, who sought to unify logic and mathematics; but he, Wittgenstein, ventures further, toward ontology, the nature of what is and what is said about what is. This leap toward ontology, and the hope for a logico-mathematical truth frightens men like Russell and holds an irresistible attraction for radical thinkers who dare to accompany him, for the members of the Vienna Circle, who espouse his positions and take them as the basis for their own reflections, for the realizations of their own ideational interests.

Let us now shift our attention from the preface to the *Tractatus* – so powerful and so sure of itself – to Wittgenstein's preface to the *Investigations*. Written in 1945, it is also quite short, and its tone is even more personal. "The thoughts which I publish in what follows are the precipitate of philosophical investigations which have occupied me for the last sixteen years. They concern many subjects: the concepts of meaning, of understanding, of a proposition, of logic, the foundations of mathematics, states of consciousness, and

other things. I have written down all these thoughts as *remarks*, short paragraphs, of which there is sometimes a fairly long chain about the same subject, while I sometimes make a sudden change, jumping from one topic to another"⁸ (v). This passage presents the book for what it is: a collection of remarks on various subjects, which have a sort of "family resemblance" resulting more from the way they are treated than from what they are.

And Wittgenstein continues: "It was my intention at first to bring all this together in a book whose form I pictured differently at different times. But the essential thing was that the thoughts should proceed from one subject to another in a natural order and without breaks." Up to this point, Wittgenstein speaks about what he has done and what he intended to do. Then he declares his powerlessness – for he has not managed to realize his intention: "After several unsuccessful attempts to weld my results together into such a whole, I realized that I should never succeed. The best that I could write would never be more than philosophical remarks; my thoughts were soon crippled if I tried to force them on in any single direction against their natural inclination" (v).

The tone here is very personal. Wittgenstein admits his inability to compose this book, to accomplish what so many authors accomplish. We should not, of course, conclude from this confession that Wittgenstein considers himself incompetent or lacking in genius. Quite the contrary, Wittgenstein remains profoundly convinced of his own worth and genius despite the doubts that constantly plague him. This genius, however, is of a different order: as he says himself, his thoughts quickly become "crippled" when he tries to force them in a particular direction. The approach that worked so well in the *Tractatus* – forcing his ideas in a given direction – is no longer possible for him. He has lost the optimism of the *Tractatus* and its preface: he neither believes that "what can be said at all can be said clearly" nor accepts the premise that "what we cannot talk about we must pass over in silence" (3). In short, the man, has changed, and so has his thought. He is no longer the same, and his thought, which had been "true" at the time of the earlier preface, is no longer true; another thought has developed, one that is "truer" now than the earlier thought.

Wittgenstein the thinker yields to his nature and to the transformations that have taken place in him – whatever the psychological,

8. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, 3d ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1968), v.

sociological, existential, or other reasons for these changes. He knows himself and accepts himself and now does only what he is capable of doing, without forcing himself to go in directions or adopt styles that are no longer his own. His work is the resultant of his intentions, as these are conveyed and constrained by the means available to him. In the preface to the *Tractatus*, "the truth of the thoughts that are here communicated seem to me unassailable and definitive" (4), but this is no longer the case in the *Investigations*: "And this was, of course, connected with the very nature of the investigation. For this compels us to travel over a wide field of thought criss-cross in every direction. – The philosophical remarks in this book are, as it were, a number of sketches of landscapes which were made in the course of these long and involved journeyings" (v).

It is difficult, even impossible, to create a well-constructed book, when trying not to lose any of the richness of what we have before us, from a variety of perspectives and approaches: "The same or almost the same points were always being approached afresh from different directions, and new sketches made. Very many of these were badly drawn or uncharacteristic, marked by all the defects of a weak draughtsman. And when they were rejected a number of tolerable ones were left, which now had to be arranged and sometimes cut down, so that if you looked at them you could get a picture of the landscape. Thus this book is really only an album" (v).

The way the philosophical landscape is seen dictates the way it is presented: how can someone compose a well-constructed book when he can only offer different perspectives on an object observed from every direction? If we take seriously what Wittgenstein tells us in this preface, we get the impression that he is not aware of the unity and the newness of what he says, and that this unity and this originality are perceived better by those he addresses, who are also his disciples. Whatever Wittgenstein's attitude toward the novelty of what he has produced, he feels himself capable of describing the world only in an album, a collection of images that do not always seem to be closely related to each other.

"Up to a short time ago I had really given up the idea of publishing my work in my lifetime" (v). This was 1945; Wittgenstein was 56 years old, and had given much thought to his death, often dreaming of it, starting when he was quite young. He had also thought a lot about his posthumous work, and had already designated certain disciples as literary executors – with a view to possi-

ble publication. "Up to a short time ago I had really given up the idea of publishing my work in my lifetime." This idea "used, indeed to be revived from time to time: mainly because I was obliged to learn that my results (which I had communicated in lectures, typescripts and discussions), variously misunderstood, more or less mangled or watered down, were in circulation" (v-vi). Here is a common theme: a work developed in secret and not published is divulged by those privileged to have access to it; above all, this work is mangled by those who divulge it, even though they mean no harm. The offence is twofold: the secret is not only disseminated, it is mangled in the process. Wittgenstein's highly personal, and very natural, reaction: "This stung my vanity and I had difficulty in quieting it" (vi).

Now we come to the most important element of this preface, the confession: "Four years ago I had occasion to re-read my first book (the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*) and to explain its ideas to someone. It suddenly seemed to me that I should publish those old thoughts and the new ones together: that the latter could be seen in the right light only by contrast with and against the background of my old way of thinking. For since beginning to occupy myself with philosophy again, sixteen years ago, I have been forced to recognize grave mistakes in what I wrote in that first book" (vi).

In short, Wittgenstein had gone astray in the *Tractatus*; he was on the wrong track, and he admits it. What was announced in that book as a definitive truth turned out to be only an illusion: "I was helped to realize these mistakes – to a degree which I myself am hardly able to estimate – by the criticism which my ideas encountered from Frank Ramsay [born 1903, died 1930], with whom I discussed them in innumerable conversations during the last two years of his life. Even more than to this – always certain and forcible – criticism I am indebted to that which a teacher of this university, Mr. P. Straffa, for many years unceasingly practiced on my thoughts. I am indebted to *this* stimulus for the most consequential ideas of this book" (vi). In the preface to the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein does not present himself as a disciple of Frege or Russell; he was only stimulated by them. Similarly, Straffa does not influence Wittgenstein, he "stimulates" him, pushing him to think his own ideas through thoroughly.

In this preface, each statement has a role to play. After such a weighty confession, emphasizing the help he received in ridding himself of his old ideas as well as in developing new ones,

Wittgenstein continues to diminish himself: "For more than one reason what I publish here will have points of contact with what other people are writing to-day. – If my remarks do not bear a stamp which marks them as mine, – I do not wish to lay any further claim to them as my property" (vi). This is a complex statement about the originality of his own ideas. As long as the truth spoke through his mouth, as in the *Tractatus*, such a declaration of modesty was entirely appropriate. True knowledge is not supposed to bear the mark of the mind that discovers and expresses it. It is in the preface to the *Tractatus* that Wittgenstein boldly proclaims his opinion of his own originality – precisely where originality is less pertinent than truth or adequation to the real.

In the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein no longer proffers true knowledge but rather a point of view, an album, a collection of images. Here the artist, the crafter of the work, plays an essential role. What Wittgenstein tells us is not that he knows he is not original, but that he cannot provide us with any guarantee that he is original. He says that others – Frege, Russell, Ramsay, and Straffa – have only stimulated him, and that the ideas he expresses are his own, but also that it is possible that what is in the air has seized him in spite of himself, and that the ideas he presents are his only because he is imbued with them, as we are all imbued with what is in the air. This is where Wittgenstein is confronted with the question of his own genius, a question that he does not feel able to settle for himself as he did in the happy days of the *Tractatus*, and a question whose answer, or verdict, can come only from someone else.

"I make them public with doubtful feelings. It is not impossible that it should fall to the lot of this work, in its poverty and in the darkness of this time, to bring light into one brain or another – but, of course, it is not likely.

"I should not like my writing to spare other people the trouble of thinking. But, if possible, to stimulate someone to thoughts of his own.

"I should have liked to produce a good book. This has not come about, but the time is past in which I could improve it" (vi).

The short preface ends on this despairing note, with a lofty declaration of self-denigration, which seems quite remote from the self-assurance of Wittgenstein's early philosophical career. Wittgenstein is no longer the person he used to be, and this is true in his most intimate aspect, his thought.

The philosopher's ideas, beliefs, and doctrine have changed:

Wittgenstein I has become Wittgenstein II. What conclusions can we then draw about his early theory, the theory of the *Tractatus*? Are we to conclude that what seemed true to him in 1917 has become false by 1926? Or that in 1945, when comparing his two theories, Wittgenstein II considers the *Tractatus* false and the *Investigations* "true," i.e., a better adequation to "reality"? Or even – to take the counterfactual proposition to its extreme – that if Wittgenstein I had been confronted with these two theories in 1917, he would have preferred the second, the *Investigations*, which means that one of these two theories is intrinsically "truer" than the other?

This question is important not only for the reception of Wittgenstein's work – already a very significant problem in itself – but it takes on a more general importance when an individual's work is not so repetitive that it is without interest. The Wittgenstein of the *Investigations* is different from the Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus*; and each of the two theories is linked to its author, as if there were two different authors. But which is the real Wittgenstein? The author of the *Tractatus*, drawing in his wake the members of the Vienna Circle, who later have nothing but scorn and condescension for what they consider to be the wild imaginings of the second Wittgenstein, the one who will end up the *Investigations*? Or this second Wittgenstein, the one who opens up new pathways for the analysis of language?

Perhaps we should see these two theories as two ideational propositions, produced by a single man at two different stages of his life; one interests one group of men, and the other is taken up and amplified by another group of disciples. We should not be preoccupied with the philosopher's change of mind, but rather with his attitude toward this change, toward the theory he abandoned and the one he now prefers, fully aware that he has forsaken the first for the second – both having been "invented/formulated" by him. If the first theory is no longer true, how can he hope the second one is? Instead of speaking about the truth of philosophical theories – verification of which poses so many problems – perhaps we should consider the interest the theories themselves hold for us: their fruitfulness, their capacity to explain, the paths they open up for us? To change theories does not mean to change truths, but, as Wittgenstein so aptly puts it, to change viewpoints, perspectives, even to change the theater or landscape of ideas and to describe these variants. A theory is exchanged when its viewpoint is no longer satisfying, whatever the reasons for this dissatisfaction may be.

I chose Wittgenstein as an example precisely because of the drastic change in his philosophical orientation, and because of the way each of his two prefaces reflects this difference in the text it introduces. Of course Wittgenstein is not the only man who has burned the idols he crafted for himself, for his own worship. The seemingly radical change that took place in his thought should not cause us undue surprise; rather it should underline the fact that these two theories were ways of thinking through which Wittgenstein's ideational "I" of the moment was given full expression in good faith – and thus that the Wittgenstein of the *Investigations* is no more in possession of the "definitive truth" than was the Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus*, who, as he says himself, is definitely no longer in a position of truth. What the philosopher expresses through his work are his ideas, his culture, his talents, and his dreams – not the truth, but his truth. Short of direct access to transcendence, this will always be the case.