Self: Illusion or our One Certainty?

Social Psychology and Positivity

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20th-Century Version

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The 17th-century intellectual struggle between those who, like Descartes, make the self the basis of their philosophizing and those who, like Locke and Hume, regard the self as either a construction (Locke) or an illusion (Hume) gets recapitulated in the 20th century. In its modern incarnation, the protagonists are the logical positivists and analytic philosophers who have maintained either that the questions " Does the self exist?" and "What is the nature of the self?" are meaningless or that the self is an illusion, and the phenomenologists and existentialists who, in one way or another, place self at the center of their philosophizing, treating it as that which is indubitably known and the one certainty. The players in this drama are Bertrand Russell, Alfred Ayer, and Gilbert Ryle on the positivist side and Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, and Jean-Paul Sartre on the other. Ludwig Wittgenstein, a Viennese who largely worked in England both is and is not a logical positivist; or, to be more precise, he is a positivist with mystical inclinations. He too has some interesting things to say about the self. So does Ronald Laing, an existential psychoanalyst who was much influenced by Sartre and who wrote a book called *The Divided Self*. Alfred North Whitehead doesn't easily fit into either camp, but he too has made contributions to a theory of self.

The positivists are the heirs of the English empirical tradition, particularly of Hume, and are themselves mostly English, while the phenomenologists are the heirs to the European rationalistic tradition, particularly of Descartes, and are themselves mostly continental Europeans. The term *analyst* does not refer to psychoanalyst in this context, but rather to the school of analytic philosophy prominent in England and the United States that conceives of the task of philosophy as the minute and highly precise analysis of language and its relationship to the world. The disagreement about the self reflects a more basic disagreement about the nature of philosophy and of the right way to philosophize. At bottom, it is a disagreement about epistemology and ontology, about how we know and what there is to know. However, I will concentrate on the way in which these almost temperamental differences get played out in theorizing about self. Descartes's *ego* cogito, thinking self, is the starting point for diverse 20th-century reevaluations of the ontological status of the self. Ryle calls Descartes's cogito " the ghost in the machine," while Husserl believes that an entire structure of consciousness, of self-experience, is implicit in Descartes's *cogito* awaiting its explication by phenomenology. In addition to philosophic analysts,

America has made a unique contribution to self-theory from a social psychological or sociological perspective. Charles Cooley and George Herbert Mead are the main actors in this tradition. The self has also been " operationalized" (i.e., defined by the way in which it is delineated in self-descriptions of various sorts). Here self becomes self-concept.

I am going to discuss each of these theorists, and each of their points of view, in rather less detail than I have the major theorists of the previous chapters. I will start with the empirical psychologists; go on to the social psychologists Cooley and Mead; the analysts Ayer, Russell, Ryle, and Wittgenstein; the phenomenologist Husserl; and the existentialists Heidegger, Sartre, and Laing; and finish with Whitehead.

THE EMPIRICAL PSYCHOLOGICAL SELF

American academic psychology tends to be tough-minded. It has little tolerance for the abstract, the speculative, or the psychoanalytic. This is a tendency that goes back at least to the 1920s and James Watson's behaviorism. Behavior ism was a reaction to both introspectionism and psychoanalytic theorizing. Introspectionism was a school of psychology associated with the Cornell professor Edward Titchener that thought that the proper way to do psychology was to introspect, to examine the contents of consciousness and report upon them, rather than to study outward manifestations of behavior. Behaviorism, on the contrary, defines psychology as the science of behavior, of what is public, observable, measurable, and quantifiable. Although cognitive psychology, which deals with thought processes—mental contents—has come to the fore in the past 20 years, academic psychology continues to be hard-nosed. It looks at a concept like self and asks. What is the cash value of such a concept? What does it tell us that we wouldn't know without it? If it is an explanatory hypothesis, what does it explain? If it is a concept, how can it be operationalized? To operationalize a concept is to state how one would measure it. Thus, the self, from an empirical psychological standpoint, would be the operation used to measure it. To talk about measuring the self doesn't make too much sense, so academic researchers rarely talk about the self. Instead they talk about the *self-concept*. A person's self-concept is his or her view of what he or she is. It is the characteristics that a person believes that he or she has. These characteristics may be moral (honest-dishonest); functional (skilled-unskilled or bright-dull); affective (happy-sad); relational (friendly-unfriendly); and any other dimension the researcher comes up with. The self as self-concept

introduces a new meaning of self. Now the self is the sum total of my beliefs about myself or that subset of them that I can articulate. The self as self-concept is mediated by language: the self is those words, or that which they denote, that describe me. So the self becomes self-description. I am what I describe myself to be.

The self as self-concept can be operationalized in a variety of ways. Most common is an adjective checklist in which the subject is asked to check those adjectives that describe him or her. There are also a variety of "objective" descriptive psychological tests, such as Cattell's Sixteen Personality Factors test. The person's self-description may be scaled in various ways according to norms on a set of dimensions that have been standardized on a research population. One of the more interesting self-measurements was done by Carl Rogers, the "client-centered" therapist. Rogers (1959) adopted a research technique called Q, developed by Stephenson, to the study of personality. A Q sort is a pack of cards with descriptions on them that the subject is asked to sort into a series of piles on a dimension of *least like me* to *most like me.* The piles at the ends get the fewest number of cards, and the one in the middle the most, creating a statistically "normal" distribution. The normal distribution is the way in which a trait such as height is distributed in a large population. It has been extensively studied by statisticians, and its shape and characteristics are well known.

The subject is then asked to sort the cards to describe his or her "ideal" self, and the disparity between "real" and ideal selves is noted. Rogers thought that the greater the disparity, the more psychopathology, and went on to do outcome studies of psychotherapy in terms of a move toward less disparity. In other words, Rogers postulated that a discordance between ideal and real self would be manifested in symptoms, such as anxiety and depression, and that successful treatment would lessen that disparity. His data supported his hypothesis. The self as self-concept operationalized as one or another method of self-description has the strength of rendering the selfless abstract, less reified, and more contentful, but the self as self-concept fails to grapple with the issues of how the self is experienced or of continuity and discontinuity in the self-experience. It converts a problem in ontology into a problem in methodology. The self as constitutive or as organizational, as developmental or as conflictual, has no place here. There is not even any language in which they can be discussed. The empirical psychologists would disagree and say the self is what is self-described on instrument X on date Y. If it changes at date Z, then it is that which is self-described on date Z on the same instrument. The two can be compared, and

that is all that can be meaningfully stated about self.

There are several obvious objections to this. First, subjects can, as research methodologists put it, " fake good" or " fake bad," that is, describe themselves as better or worse than they really feel they are for whatever reasons—for example, to impress or to continue to qualify for a disability benefit—so that their self-description is not really an accurate account of who they really believe they are. But, says the empirical psychologist, I can build in a lie scale by asking the same question in different ways, or use other techniques to detect such deceptions. I would reply, Perhaps you can, and practically that would be of value, but philosophically that doesn't help. If there is a self-concept that is different from the operationalization of it, then that self-concept is mentalistic—something that someone believes but not something that I can necessarily measure. The empirical psychological self and its operationalization is a powerful research tool, but it contributes little or nothing to the solution to the problems about self that I have raised. Further, it operates only on the conscious level. The subject, even if attempting to be totally honest, doesn't know everything about him- or herself and so cannot possibly completely articulate self on an adjective checklist, objective test, or Q sort. This is far from a mystification, as the hard-nosed psychologists might maintain; it is not even speculative. One of the most common experiences in psychotherapy is for a defensive grandiosity to collapse into openly expressed contempt for and hatred of self. It could be maintained that this fact could be perfectly well accounted for by saying that the self-concept changed, without evoking an unconscious self-concept to explain this change. It could, indeed, but only at the cost of doing violence to the data of defensiveness and the acting out of that which is denied, repressed, or otherwise walled off. This is a case where an attempt to be parsimonious is not really parsimonious. The more complex theory that encompasses preconscious and unconscious self-concepts better explains the facts, but in doing so can no longer deem self as the operations performed to measure self-concept.

What about the social psychological view of the self? The social psychologist sees self as the product of social interaction and as always reactive to the social surround. Cooley (1902) believed that we primarily see ourselves through the eyes of others, and form our concept of ourselves from the reaction of others. He called this the *reflected* or *looking glass self.* It has three components: how we imagine others see us, how we imagine others judge us, and our emotional reaction to those imagined judgments. The looking glass is not quite the right metaphor, because Cooley's self is active and constitutive, particularly

in constituting an imagined judgment by others. The self is not merely what is reflected back to us; it is our interpretation of it. Cooley recognized this, but even with this caveat Cooley's social psychological self is highly determined by the reaction of the social self to the surround. Of course, the self is in turn reflecting back self-images to other selves, from which they construct their selves. Human life becomes, importantly, the process by which we mutually mirror and are mirrored by other selves, and in this interactive reflective process build selves.

George Herbert Mead (1934) had much the same notion. Self for him is the *generalized other*, rather than the looking glass self, but his description of the development of self is similarly social and interactive. For Mead, language process is essential for the development of self, and since language is a social acquisition, self is necessarily social. The self is not there from birth; rather, it develops in the social matrix in which language is acquired. Eventually, we organize all, or almost all, of our experiences as experiences of self, especially *affective experience,* but this need not be so. Mead's notion that feelings are especially the stuff of self is insightful. As we will see in the next chapter, Daniel Stern, the infant development researcher, thinks that he has demonstrated that affects are the least changing of experiences over the course of a lifetime, so that they are the securest foundations for the experience of ongoingness and continuity. Returning to Mead, he pointed out that we organize our memories on the " string of self." Self is not necessarily involved in the life of the (human) organism. Indeed, we can and do distinguish between body and self. " Self has the characteristic that it is object to itself" (Mead. 1934, p. 136), which is the case for no other object including the body. The self is reflexive; it is both subject and object. How can this be? Further, the individual organism must take account of him- or herself in order to act ration ally. (Organism is Mead's term for the total person, including mind and body.) How can this be achieved? It can only happen through a social process of interaction in which the individuals take the attitudes of others toward them and make them their own. This is strikingly similar to Cooley's looking glass self. Since self develops by internalizing the attitudes of many others toward the self, many selves are possible. This is normal; we are all multiple personalities to some extent. However, in health there is a degree of unity that arises out of an identification with and internalization of the " generalized standpoint of the social group as a whole." Thus, the self, insofar as it is unified, is the generalized other —or better, the generalized others' attitudes toward the self. (The terms identification and internalization are mine, not Mead's.)

All of this happens through communication. At first, the self is a dialogue with others; only later is it an internal dialogue—a dialogue of the self with the self. That is how the self becomes object to itself—becomes simultaneously subject and object. The self as object to itself is essentially a social structure; it is communicative, interactive, indeed dialectical, and always mediated by language. The process starts with gestures rather than speech, but self is inconceivable without words. Self is a dialogue I have with myself in which I take the role of a generalized other, or of particular others, and speak to myself as subject as if I were an object of the others' subjectivity. As with Cooley, the process is not passive, for I form the others no less than they form me, and I am as such a part of their internal dialogues, which I influence just as they influence me.

Mead's self that is both subject and object is *self-consciousness.* Self is self-consciousness, mediated by and expressed in language. Developmentally, my relations to particular others and their internalization are prior to relationships with the community or with subsets of it and their internalization as the generalized other that becomes constitutive of self. Without communication with the larger community, a developmental arrest occurs and the self is crippled by particularization. Mead believed that the capacity for abstract thought came from our " conversation" with a generalized other (team, organization, or polity) becoming part of that conversation with ourselves that is the self. Children's play, games, and rituals in which roles are assumed and enacted supplement linguistic communication in the process of developing the self.

Mead distinguishes between the *I* and the *me.* The I is the response of the organism to the attitudes of the others, and the me is the organized set of attitudes of others that become internalized. The derivatives of the attitudes of the others constitute the organized me, and my reaction toward those others is the I. The me makes community possible; the I makes individuality possible. Mead is much more convincing in his account of the me than in his account of the I. If the self is constituted by assuming the reaction of particular others and the generalized others to me in talking to myself as they talk to or about me, then I can see little place for the I. Where does the individual reaction come from if the self that does that reacting is formed by that which it is reacting to?

Sociologist Erving Goffman gave the dialectic of the mirror self an additional twist in his discussion of *impression management*, through which the self creates, or tries to create, consciously or unconsciously,

the response of the social surround that in turn is constitutive of that self. Goffman is concerned with *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959). Goffman's self is an amalgamation of Jung's persona and Cooley's looking glass self.

Social psychological theories of the self clearly have something true to say. The existence of social bonds and interactions that can be accounted for by biologically determined mechanisms and cooperation for survival clearly is logically and temporally prior to self, and self certainly arises out of a social matrix. Something may be no less true because it is paradoxical, and self can indeed only emerge from a social matrix. Further, the interactive, communicative nature of self and the necessity of such interaction and communication for the development of self has been firmly established by clinical research. Mead is also right in pointing to the importance of gesture as a precursor of linguistic communication and of its continuing role in the communicative shaping of self throughout life. We have seen self as self-consciousness in Hegel and in Kierkegaard, but the self as self-conscious internal dialogue is unique to Mead and new in our history of concepts of the self.

Less successful are both Cooley's and Mead's attempts to account for the autonomy of the self, the degree to which it is neither a looking glass self nor the assumption of particular others' reactions to or view of it, or the assumption of the generalized others' reaction to it. I do, indeed, react in an autonomous way to others' perception of me, but how I can do that is incomprehensible on purely social psychological terms.

THE LOGICAL POSITIVISTS

Whether self is self-concept as operationalized in a self-description for the empirical psychologists or the internalization of reflections from or refractions through others mediated by signs and symbols for the social psychologists, it is a meaningful concept. It can be talked about meaningfully, and its referents are clear. Neither of these types of theorists about the self seriously question that inquiry into the nature of the self is a meaningful activity. Not so for the logical positivists. The focus of their philosophical activity has been clarification, a clarification that has demonstrated, to their satisfaction, that certain philosophical problems, which they call metaphysical problems, are pseudo-problems because the questions they raise have no meaning. From a positivistic standpoint, the question is, is the question " Is

there a self?" meaningful? The question about meaningful ness is meaningful, and must be asked antecedently to any attempt to answer the question " Is there a self?"

Historically, positivism has had two sources, one being the English empirical tradition whose 20th-century representatives have been Ox-Bridge academics who were often active in social and political affairs, usually from a liberal or radical standpoint. (Ox-Bridge, of course, refers to Oxford and Cambridge universities.) Russell, G. E. Moore, Gilbert Ryle, and A. J. Ayer are all linear descendants of Hume. The English positivists are sometimes called analysts and their way of doing philosophy is called analytic philosophy. Though not strictly accurate, I use the terms (logical) *positivists* and (philosophical) *analysts* interchangeably. The second source of positivism was the " Vienna Circle," a group of logicians and

philosophers of science led by Moritz Schlick who were heirs of Helmholtz and Ernest Mach, a physicist with philosophical leanings. They too were influenced by Hume. Not all the Vienna Circle were Viennese: Polish and other European logicians were strongly identified with the group. Most of its members wound up in the United States after the rise of Hitler. The Vienna Circle articulated the principle of verifiability. A proposition is meaningful if, and only if, there is a course of action that can be taken to verify its truth or falsity.

Let us start with Gilbert Ryle (1900-1976). Ryle was an Oxford philosopher who has been widely influential. His best known book is *The Concept of Mind* (1949), in which he ridiculed Descartes's dualistic metaphysics as a doctrine of the ghost in the machine. In effect, he says that Descartes creates two parallel worlds, an outer, physical one and an inner, mental one, when there is no need to do so. The Cartesian *cogito* is not an indubitable datum as Descartes thought; on the contrary, it is a postulate that Descartes needed to create in order to preserve a realm of moral autonomy exempt from the rigorously deterministic laws of the physical world. In impugning Descartes's motives or, if you prefer, uncovering their unconscious determinants, Ryle does nothing to refute Descartes's argument. Ryle does that by pointing out, as Russell had done before him, that thoughts do not necessitate a thinker. That is what Ryle would call a *category mistake.* Ryle's example of a category mistake is the visitor to Oxford who sees all the Colleges and then asks to see the University, as if it were an additional member of the class of colleges rather than the organization of the Colleges. Of course, the University *is* something different from the Colleges. Ryle recognizes this, but doesn't seem to realize that the organization of the Colleges into the

University is an entity just as real, albeit of a different kind, as the Colleges themselves. By analogy, Ryle asks, once we have enumerated our thoughts, feelings, wishes, and so on, why do we ask to be shown the thinker, feeler, and wisher as if something additional was needed? But Ryle goes further. He is not merely attacking the notion of self as substance. He is radically questioning the existence of a private, inner world that is the domain of thinking substance: soul, mind, or self as something that exists over and above my public observable behavior. Ryle believes that such errors arise partly for psychological reasons, but mostly because we misunderstand how language works and look for substantives corresponding to nouns. The import of all this is to reduce the mental to the physical. The ghost disappears, but the machine remains. Ryle essentially reduces the inner to the outer, collapses the Cartesian dichotomy into a monist realm of the observable. If I want to know about allegedly "mental acts" like willing, desiring, or pondering, what I do is observe those who are alleged to be "having" those "mental" experiences. Ryle is not quite a radical behaviorist; he does not maintain that all private mental events are really publically observable bodily states and events—behaviors, but the realm of the private is radically reduced and of little interest to him.

> To talk o f a person's mind is not to talk o f a repository which is permitted to have objects that something called the "physical world" is forbidden to have; it is to talk of the person's abilities, liabilities and inclinations to do and undergo certain sorts of things, and of doing and undergoing of these things in the ordinary world." (Ryle, 1949, p. 199)

That is a behaviorist theory of mind, or of what was formerly thought to be mind. I know another person's mental attributes by observing his or her actions.

Ryle's notion of self follows directly from his notion of mind. It is contained in his discussion of self-experience. Essentially, he says that we discover ourselves by observing ourselves exactly as we observe others. There is no such thing as self-corresponding to the noun *I*; rather, *I* is an index word that locates a certain event of experience. In many instances, *I* can be replaced by *my body,* but not in all. In most other cases, / can be replaced by my attending to my unuttered utterances. Although there is no intrinsic reason why nonbodily self-experiences have to be unspoken speech, all Ryle's examples are of such unspoken utterances. Essentially, I know myself in the way I know other people, with the important additional knowledge of the thoughts I speak to myself. There is nothing else to say about self; it is self-experience as here described, and to ask for more is to ask to see the University after having seen the Colleges. The word / refers not to substance but to particular actions at particular times, as in " I am

walking down the street." The only function of *I* is to locate me in a time and place, performing a publicly observable action. The whole thrust of Ryle's argument is linguistic, consisting of a detailed, painstaking analysis of how *I* and *me* are used by speakers of the English language. His method is as significant as his conclusion. It is the examination of ordinary usage in an attempt to demystify philosophical inquiry. It is a method highly characteristic of analytic philosophy. Ryle's disciples are known as ordinary language philosophers.

Ryle is convincing in his demonstration that regarding the self as a mental substance that is a ghost in the machine does nothing to clarify the problems inherent in the unraveling of the nature of the self; our doubling the self into a bodily self and a mental self, that operate in different realms by different rules, is indeed a dubious procedure. Furthermore, Ryle is probably right in attributing this to a category mistake. His notion that we must examine how we use language very carefully to make sure that our philosophical problems, including questions about self, are not pseudo-problems is heuristic, and it is certainly true that we obtain a great deal of our self-knowledge by observing our own behavior and/or its publicly observable impact on others, and that another large chunk of our self-knowledge comes from attending to words we say to ourselves but do not speak; however, there is something reified and incomplete about Ryle's account of the self. I think that the central problem is that the University is *not* the Colleges and that the self is not self-experience, or not merely that. Rather, it is the organization of those self-experiences that is itself experienced with just as much reality as the individual self-experiences. Ryle does not seriously contend with either the University or the self, although he does have much that is illuminating to say about the Colleges and about self-experience.

Bertrand Russell (1872-1970) was a protean thinker whose restless energy took him everywhere. He was a mainstay of the anti-Vietnam War movement in his 90s; an early supporter of women's suffrage; a pacifist in World War I, for which he was jailed; an advocate of a freer sexual morality, for which he was fired from City College; and in general a supporter of liberty and freedom always. For this, he is rightly admired. However, our interest is not in his moral and political writings, nor in his educational theory, but in his technical philosophy. Here his influence has been enormous. In a sense, the entire movement of philosophical analysis is his creation. At the very least, he pioneered its methods and techniques. A wonderful stylist, his work is characterized by precision, lucidity, clarity, and simplicity. Russell may be wrong, but you always know what he is saying.

Russell's first interest in philosophy was in the foundations of mathematics. He was troubled by the fact that Euclid's axioms were unproven and that the whole structure of arithmetic and geometry might be arbitrary. His first solution to this problem was a kind of Neo-Platonism in which numbers and their relations were seen as universals already existent—where or how is not clear. But he soon abandoned Platonic realism and instead tried to give mathematics a certain foundation by reducing mathematics to logic; that is, he developed a logical system from which he deduced a real number system and its relations. He did this in collaboration with Alfred North Whitehead, his former math tutor, and the results were published in their three-volume classic, *Principia Mathematica* (1910-1913). The proofs he and Whitehead deduced are said by mathematicians to be beautiful and elegant.

In the course of his work on the foundations of mathematics, Russell developed an interest in more general philosophical problems, particularly in the nature of sense perception and the ways in which we construe both physical and mental reality. In the course of that work, he made a distinction between *knowledge by acquaintance* and *knowledge by description.* Those things we know by acquaintance we know directly while those we know by description, we know only inferentially. In his original formulation (Russell, 1912), objects of acquaintance included one's self, one's current mental states and acts, sense data, and acts of memory. In different language, the self is a direct intuition, and Russell's view of self is not substantially different from Kant's notion of the phenomenal self as revealed by the inner sense. However, Russell changed his thinking about self, and when he published *The Analysis of Mind* (1921), he thought of the self as a series of experiences. We have knowledge by acquaintance of those experiences, but not of the self, which is a logical construction from them and known only by description. Russell does not mean to say that our subjective experience of self is that of building a logical structure, but that that is its logical status. He is making a logical, or perhaps epistemological, statement, not offering a psychological description.

A Russellerian notion of some interest to self-theory is his *theory' of types.* The theory of types grew out of technical problems in the philosophy of mathematics. What it says essentially is that a class is not a member of that class. To assume it is, is to get involved in a paradox. Hence the class of self-experiences is not itself a self-experience, at least not of the same type.

Russell's theory of types leads to a hierarchy, so that a metalanguage is necessary to speak of a

primary language. The relevance of Russell's theory of types to Ryle's discussion of category errors is obvious. Russell's solution to the paradoxes of his logic has been criticized as really solving nothing, but as simply bringing in an extraneous postulate from outside the system. In a sense, he is back where he started when he questioned Euclid. There is, in effect, an axiom that cannot be proved from within the system. Kurt Godel, who was a member of the Vienna Circle, later proved that it is impossible to prove the consistency and completeness of a logical system from within that system—that can only be done by bringing in an assumption (postulate) that is not part of the system. Godel was not writing about Russell's theory of types, but in a sense his theorem vindicates it. Russell's theory may be aesthetically and logically unsatisfactory, and indeed emotionally unsatisfying, yet it may be the case that classes of events can only be meaningfully spoken about on a level of discourse above the level that applies to the members of the class.

In our case, it may not be possible to speak of the class of self-experiences as itself an experience of self. That raises the question of how, then, we can speak of it, and what is it? Russell's contention that the self is a logical construction seems to violate the subjective experience of selfhood. To say, as he does, that he is making a logical, not a psychological, statement somehow doesn't solve the problem. I certainly do have knowledge by acquaintance of the logical construction that is the self in his later theory, and I am not at all sure that I have knowledge by description of it. At least, Russell does not provide one. The strength of Russell's theory, as was the case for Ryle, lies in the method rather than its result—in the careful analysis of what is meant by self and of what kinds of experiences are self-experiences, as well as the suggestion that they are not all on the same logical or epistemological level.

A. J. (Alfred Julius) Ayer was the *enfant terrible* of logical positivism. In *Language, Truth, and Logic* (1936/1952), Ayer claimed to have solved the problems of philosophy—largely by demonstrating that they are pseudo-problems, and much like his hero, David Hume, turned to more broadly cultural interests. Although Ayer became less fiery as he aged, and somewhat trimmed his sails, he never really repudiated the radical stance that he took in his 20s. What is that stance?

According to Ayer, there are only two types of statements that are not nonsense (i.e., meaningless). These are analytic statements in which the predicate is contained in the subject. Analytic statements are tautologies that tell us about how we use a symbol system, be that symbol system logic or mathematics or

an analytic truth, such as " cats are animals." The truth or falsity of analytic statements can be tested by the means of *truth tables*, a device of formal logic developed by Wittgenstein. The truth of analytic statements can be established with certainty because they do nothing but spin out the meanings implicit in their premises. They may be psychologically novel (i.e., show us a relationship we didn't know to exist), but logically they reveal nothing new. We can know analytic truths with certainty, but they tell us nothing about the world; indeed, they are not about the world.

Empirical hypotheses *are* about the world. They are meaningful if, and only if, I can state what actions I would take to verify them. Verification means verification in principle: I cannot now verify the existence of certain states of affairs in distant galaxies, but since they are verifiable in principle, statements about them are not meaningless. Furthermore, *to verify* means to increase the probability that a statement is true (or false), not to establish it beyond a doubt. The principle of verification is a theory of meaning—or, better, of meaninglessness—espoused by the Vienna Circle and by Ayer. There are no synthetic a priori statements that are meaningful. Any statement that is not an analytic or empiric hypothesis subject to verification in principle is meaningless (literally, without sense). Statements that are neither analytic nor empirically verifiable may arouse emotions or induce aesthetic experience, but they have no truth value. They are neither true nor false. By this criterion, all of metaphysics is eliminated as senseless nonsense. Ayer, like Hume, would consign all volumes not concerned with relations of ideas or matters of fact to the flames.

There are difficulties with the verification theory of meaning. Is the verification principle itself verifiable? It certainly isn't analytic, since it is not logically absurd to maintain that a statement without truth value is nevertheless meaningful, nor does it seem to be an empirical hypothesis, since there doesn't appear to be any observation we can make, even in principle, that would be evidence of the probability, let alone certainty, of its truth. Ayer would probably answer that the verification principle is a definition, and that the business of philosophy is to provide definitions by analyzing language and how we use it. Such definitions are held to be neither descriptive nor prescriptive, but to be outcomes of philosophical analysis. But this either begs the question or introduces a third type of knowledge that the verification principle would not allow. Be this at it may, Ayer and the logical positivists' verification criterion of meaning has application to our theories about self.

From the positivist point of view, the question " Is the self substantive?" is neither true nor false; it is literally meaningless. " The self is substantive" is not analytic, since " the self is not substantive" is not self-contradictory. Nor is it an empirical hypothesis. What operations, even in principle, could add to or detract from the probability of its being true? The same would apply to " the self is an illusion," " the self survives the body," " the self is our one certainty," and " the self is the foundation of knowledge." Although I don't altogether subscribe to the principle of verifiability and have noted that it itself is not verifiable so that there must be meaningful statements that are neither analytic nor verifiable empirical hypotheses, the theory is salutary in that it forces us to be attentive to the possibility that we are asking meaningless questions or raising pseudo-problems (*meaning less* and *pseudo-problems* here meaning problems without solution, beyond our capacity to know). Ayer states that he is doing something different than Kant did when he " eliminated" metaphysics by showing its conclusions to be contradictory (see Kant's transcendental dialectic); that he, on the contrary, is analyzing language and how we use it. However, the result is the same. Some kinds of speculative questions are seen to be without sense, and this is all to the good. It demystifies and directs our attention to questions that can be fruitfully approached. The trouble with the principle of verification is that it has no place for organizing principles or explanatory hypotheses that are not directly empirically verifiable. The self may be fruitfully and meaningfully conceived of as an organizing principle, an explanatory hypothesis, or both.

Although the principle of verifiability renders some kinds of statements (or questions) about self meaningless and consigns them to the flames, Ayer does have a theory of self.

> We know that a self, if it is not to be treated as a metaphysical entity, must be held to be a logical construction out of sense-experience. It is, in fact, a logical construction out of sense experiences which constitutes the actual or possible sense-history o f a self And, accordingly, if we ask what is the nature of self, we are asking what is the relationship that must obtain between sense-experiences for them to belong to the sense-history of the same self. And the answer to this question is that for any two sense-experiences to belong to the sense-history of the same self, it is necessary and sufficient that they should contain organic sense-contents which are elements of the same body. (Ayer, 1952, p. 125)

Ayer has already said that sense contents are neither mental nor physical, although the objects that are logically constructed out of them are. All of this is far from clear. What exactly is a logical construction of our sense contents? Ayer says, " We are not saying that it is actually constructed out of those sense-contents, or that the sense-contents are in any way part of it, but are merely expressing . . . the syntactical fact that all sentences referring to it are translatable into sentences referring to them" (1952, p. 126). If I

follow this, what it seems to mean is that self is a logical construction out of sense contents that is not really a construction but merely a statement that any proposition I can assert about the members of a class of sense experiences will be true for the class itself. This is an odd kind of self. Is the statement that the self is a logical construction, in this special sense, analytic? A verifiable empirical hypothesis? It seems to be neither. By Ayer's criterion, it is meaningless, but I am willing to accord it meaning; I simply don't understand it.

So far, Ayer seems to be in accord with Hume that the self is nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, but he doesn't want to say that. Hume fell back on memory as a unifying principle, but then rejected it because what I can't remember is just as constitutive of self as what I can. So Hume, in the final analysis, can't see any connection between perceptions that would make them oneself. Ayer thinks he has solved this difficulty. He does this by defining personal identity as bodily identity and by defining self as the sense experiences of that body; or, to be more precise, that the self is reducible to the sense experiences of that body. " To say anything about self is always to say something about sense experiences." Now what a logical construction is makes more sense. What Ayer seems to be saying is that I have a self that I know because any statement I can make about it is a statement about the sense experiences of the body. So the self as a logical construction of sense contents doesn't mean that I construct the self, but only that I can analyze any statement I might make about self into a statement about a sense experience of my body. That makes it uniquely mine, because the statement that sense experience belongs to more than one body is self-contradictory. As much as Ayer struggles from construction to linguistic analysis, his notion of self is still that of a collection of self-experiences that belong to one body. The belonging to one body is the glue that makes them one self.

Ayer's position seems to be that when I say something about myself, I am saying something about a sense experience with a given sense content that occurs to my body. That does not make it a bodily experience (or a mental one), merely an experience somehow attached to my body. But how do I know that my body is the same body I had at birth? Or yesterday? Isn't the statement that I have the same body itself a construction? But Ayer would say that it is an empirically verifiable hypothesis. I could, for example, compare fingerprints or chromosomes in infancy and adulthood. The sameness of the body is verifiable in principle. That leaves the question of how sense experiences with their sense contents are related to (attached to, or occur to) that same body. Bodily identity is there and empirically verifiable, but

is the belonging of sense contents to that body analytic or synthetic, logically necessary or empirically verifiable? Again, this is not clear.

So the self is a logical construction that is not a logical construction of sense experiences belonging to the same body. The vector is from self to sense experience, not from sense experience to self. Ayer is talking about logical analysis, not about empirical synthesis. In that case, it is not clear why we need a notion of self at all. I suppose that Ayer would answer that we have one firmly embedded in language and that it is the business and only business of philosophy to give a " definition in use," to analyze how a term is used. Having done so, the philosopher has done his job. Ayer is content to say that he is not doing psychology and is not making a statement about the relationship of sense experience to sense content, so that he is not committed to Hume's atomistic psychology or to any other psychology. So the degree to which the subject organizes sense experiences, is active and constituent rather than passive and receptive, is a question for cognitive psychology, not for philosophy.

For Ayer, the self is subjective and private. Yet anything we say about it must be in principle verifiable. For me, the most salient feature of the Ayerian self is its connection with the body. Clearly the body does have continuity, and reducing the continuity of self to the continuity of sense experiences of that body has the virtue of simplicity and face validity. Nevertheless, it is schematic and leaves much unanswered. It is interesting that even so " antimetaphysical" theorists as Ryle and Ayer feel a need to give an account of the self. In effect, they apply Ockham's razor to knowables rather than to entities, that is, their application of Ockham's injunction to not multiply entities beyond what is absolutely needed to account for the world is to what we know rather than to what there is. They are parsimonious epistemologists rather than parsimonious ontologists; nevertheless, in spite of their denials, they do wind up doing a kind of ontology, and among the objects held to exist is the self. But that does not prevent them, especially Ayer, from at least implicitly declaring many questions about self and its nature meaningless. What is left in the positivist's account of self is an analysis of how we use the word *self.* From this point of view, the question " Does the self exist?" is meaningless, but the question "What do we mean when we use the word *se lf!"* is meaningful and, indeed, the focus of a rigorous philosophical analysis. In more current language, Ayer deconstructs the self. What Ayer comes up with is that whenever we say *self,* its only meaningful referent is to some sort of self-experience, contained in some sort of self-content, a self-experience being a sense experience of some sense content that is experienced as part of the sense

history of one self. This is obviously circular, and Ayer tries to get out of the circularity by saying that self is the sense history of my body—and therein lies personal identity. Reducing self to the sense experience of the body is in itself circular: don't I need an experience of self in order to experience body as *my* body? *Self* is now defined as a logical construction out of the sense (experience) history of my body, with logical construction merely meaning that I can analyze statements about self into statements about sense experiences that are part of the sense history of my body. Clearly Ayer is talking about how we use the word *self,* not about an entity (experience, organization, or organizer) denoted by that word. Ayer would deny that; he thinks that he is not merely talking about language and its use, but about sense experience and how it is organized. That brings us to a philosopher who was obsessed with language, its limitations, and the ways in which we are confined by it: Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951).

Wittgenstein is one of the most intriguing figures in the history of philosophy. Tormented genius; arch-romantic; rigorous positivist, at least in one highly salient aspect of his philosophizing; language analyst; logician; mystic; and creator of a method of philosophizing intended to put to rest the agony of the need to philosophize, he is a figure of paradox, conflict, and antithetical *Weltanschauung.* His work is often oracular and obscure, and most of it concerns matters remote from our concerns. However, Wittgenstein does have something explicit to say about self in his early book, the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1922), and his later work has implications for a theory of self. Wittgenstein was born into a wealthy, highly cultured Jewish family who had converted to Catholicism. There were multiple suicides in the family; two of his brothers had killed themselves before he was grown and a third did so when his regiment failed to obey him in World War I. The Wittgensteins were musical. Brahms had been a family friend; brother Paul, who tragically lost an arm in World War I (he continued his career as a performer of piano works for the left hand) was a concert pianist, and father stipended composers. Musicales were part of the ambiance. The Wittgenstein fortune was derived from manufacturing, and Ludwig was denied the classical Gymnasium education customary for his class, instead attending a technical high school in Linz—Hitler's home town. Wittgenstein went on to study engineering. Music and engineering continued to supply models for Wittgenstein throughout his life—models of reality and its relationship to symbol systems. He was fascinated by gadgets and mechanisms of all kinds, and the relationship of musical thought to score to performance resonated for him, suggesting analogous relationships between language and world. The phonograph, with its grooves isomorphic to the

electrical oscillations it produces, which are in turn isomorphic to the sound waves they produce, synthesized the mechanical with the musical to provide Wittgenstein with yet another model for the relationship between symbol system and reality. When he wrote that language is a picture of the world (or a portion of it), he must have had the musical score and the phonograph record in mind. The mechanical and the musical constituted the parallel sources of this thought in yet another sense; the mechanical was the source and prototype of his vigorous analytic side, while the musical was the source and prototype of his mystical side.

A brilliant, sensitive adolescent in a home dominated by a tyrannical father and marred by tragedy, the young Ludwig was enthralled by the pessimistic, other worldly philosophy of Schopenhauer. The 1906 appearance of Weininger's *Sex and Character* could hardly have been better timed for Ludwig. We have met the neurotic, brilliant, exhibitionistic, self-destructive Weininger before. Freud and Fliess's final break was over Fliess's accusation (partly true) that Freud had given Weininger Fliess's concept of bisexuality. Weininger, who was Jewish and homosexual, hated Jews and homosexuals. Much of his book is a " demonstration" that Jews and homosexuals are " feminine," a degraded state of being. Weininger apotheosizes the romantic hero in his concept of the " duty of genius." The duty of genius is to follow its unique and lonely way, regardless of the cost to self or others. The duty of genius is to be utterly ruthless. The impact of *Sex and Character* was amplified by Weininger's histrionic suicide at Beethoven's house. There was much for Ludwig to identify with here; he was Jewish (by descent), intellectual, homosexual, self-loathing, and a genius who felt compelled to realize his genius. He became obsessed with suicide, having both Weininger and his brothers for models. His survivor guilt must have been very strong. The part of Weininger that influenced Wittgenstein most was the former's injunction " genius or nothing," and all of Wittgenstein's life was a search for the superlative. He felt despair when he couldn't reach that superlative.

Wittgenstein went off to study aeronautical engineering at the University of Manchester. He is said to have designed a jet engine there. The seven years he spent in Manchester were spent struggling against suicidal depression. During that period, he became fascinated with the " foundation of mathematics" and with mathematical logic. He visited Frege, the great German logician who anticipated Russell and Whitehead's *Principia Mathematica* by 30 years, but who remained relatively unknown. Frege sent him to Russell.

Wittgenstein showed up on Russell's doorstep one day and the two spent 10 hours talking about logic and the foundations of mathematics. Although formally Russell's student (having transferred to Cambridge to study philosophy), Wittgenstein was quickly recognized by Russell as his peer and heir apparent. Wittgenstein's intensity eventually wearied Russell, and the two men were temperamentally incompatible, the one liberal, rational, and skeptical and the other conservative, strongly attracted to the irrational, and in search of belief and salvation. Nevertheless, their close if often strained relationship bore fruit. After several years of total concentration on the problems of logic as a Cambridge under graduate, Wittgenstein suddenly left England and built himself a hut in a remote part of Norway where he went to live. He had fallen in love with David Pinsent, who was probably much less in love with him. Pinsent's premature death nearly shattered Wittgenstein. The *Tractatus* is dedicated to Pinsent. Wittgenstein, under the influence of Tolstoy, signed his fortune over to his sisters and joined the Austrian Army as a private at the outbreak of World War I. Eventually, he was captured by the Italians, and he finished the *Tractatus* while in a prisoner of war camp. After the war, Russell arranged for it to be published. Believing that he had solved all of the problems of philosophy, Wittgenstein became an elementary school teacher in an Austrian village. Overintense as usual, he was accused of physical abuse of the children and, although acquitted, resigned and returned to Vienna, where he designed a strange, austere, cubistic home for his sister.

At Russell's urging, Wittgenstein returned to Cambridge, where he earned a PhD, submitting the *Tractatus* as his dissertation. Both *Principia Mathematica* and the *Tractatus* are, at one level, attempts to formulate a " logically perfect" (i.e., unambiguous and complete) language based on a system of logical symbols. The later Wittgenstein repudiated this ideal and turned to the examination of " ordinary language" with all of its complexity and ambiguity as a vehicle for the discovery of philosophical truth. What does the *Tractatus* say? That is not an easy question to answer. It is written in an oracular style as a series of numbered propositions that are often epigrammatic. Basically, Wittgenstein's position is that the world is a world of facts. It is composed of *atomic facts* or *states of affairs.* Wittgenstein gives no examples of atomic facts, and his commentators have outdone themselves in attempts to elucidate and concretize the concept of atomic facts. Their efforts notwithstanding, it is still far from clear what would constitute an atomic fact. The best that Wittgenstein can do is to say that an atomic fact is what is represented by an atomic proposition. That seems to make language prior to reality, somewhat as Ayer unwittingly does.

Atomic facts are independent; there is no causal nexus between them. Thus, all that we can legitimately do with language is to " picture" atomic facts or demonstrate the tautological relations between molecular (composite) facts. Thus, " grass is green or grass is not green" is a molecular proposition that is true because it is the case regardless of the truth value of " the grass is green." In logical notation, the generalization of the above proposition would be P V ~ P. Where P is any statement whatsoever, the V is a symbol for weak dis junction (i.e., at least one of the propositions connected by the wedge is true), and the ~ is a sign of negation. Now if P is true, P V ~ P. is true, and if P is not true, P or not P is still true; so P V ~ P is a tautology. The example may be banal, but all analytic truths are tautologies of this type. They are true regardless of the truth value of their components. They tell us about the meaning of our logical symbols, but nothing about the world, since they are the case no matter what the state of affairs pertaining in reality (in the world).

The purpose of language is to reflect the logical structure of molecular facts, complexes of atomic facts. " We make to ourselves pictures of facts" [2.1] (Wittgenstein, 1922, p. 14). A linguistic proposition is such a picture of reality. In the picture and the pictured there must be something identical in order that one can be the picture of the other at all. What the picture must have in common with reality in order to be able to represent it after its manner—rightly or falsely—is its form of representation. [2.16 and 2.17] (1922, pp. 15-26). In other words, the representation must be isomorphic, as a mathematician would put it, with what it represents. In a slightly different mathematical simile, it must be possible to *map* a representation through a *transformation* (formula) into what is represented and vice versa. " The gramophone record, a musical thought, a score, the waves of sound, all stand to one another in that pictorial internal relation which holds between language and the world. To all of them the logical structure is common" (4.014). The purpose of philosophy is not to build a system of propositions about the world, but rather to make propositions clear. Most propositions and questions that have been written about philosophical matters are not false but senseless. We cannot, therefore, answer questions of this kind at all, that only state their senselessness. Most questions and propositions of philosophers result from the fact that we do not understand the logic of our language [4.003] (1922, p. 37). Wittgenstein goes on to describe tautologies. " A tautology is a proposition in which the truth value of the conclusion can be deduced from the truth values of the premises" [4.004], It is Wittgenstein's elucidation of analytic propositions. A conclusion of a tautology is true no matter what the truth value of its premises, while in a

contradiction, the conclusion is false no matter what the truth value of the premises is. Tautologies are true regardless of the state of affairs of the world; propositions are true when there is a state of affairs in the world corresponding to that proposition; while contradictions are never true no matter what the state of affairs pertaining in the world. The first is certain, the second possible, and the third impossible. Wittgenstein elucidates the nature of tautology through the construction of truth tables, which show that the truth value of their components is irrelevant to their tautological certainty.

According to Wittgenstein, most of the statements in the *Tractatus* are "meaningless nonsense," at least insofar as they are statements about the nature of things (e.g., " the world is a world of [atomic] facts"). Wittgenstein says that when he is making such statements he is speaking nonsense, and only when he is analyzing (i.e., clarifying) that nonsense is he not speaking nonsense. Wittgenstein says that the nonsense of the *Tractatus* is " important nonsense" and compares it to a ladder that we must climb to get to the top of a floor to get the view, after which we should discard the ladder. The purpose of getting to the top floor is to get a synoptic view, a view of the whole, but Wittgenstein says that anything we can say about the whole is nonsense, and that the only meaningful propositions picture states of affairs, or are tautologies. Philosophical discourse clarifies the logical structure of language. Those parts of the *Tractatus* that are ontological are nonsense. His notion of important nonsense is paradoxical and unsatisfactory, yet he may be right. Wittgenstein goes on to say that we can " show" what we cannot (meaningfully) say. So perhaps Wittgenstein is here able to show us what he cannot meaningfully say.

Wittgenstein has some important nonsense to show (say) about the self. But before we can look at his " theory" of self, let Wittgenstein tell us what he is doing. He is here defining philosophy, and his comments on self are presumably philosophy.

Philosophy aims at the logical clarification of thought.

Philosophy is not a body of doctrine but an activity.

A philosophical work consists essentially of elucidations.

Philosophy does not result in "philosophical propositions," but rather in the clarification of propositions.

Without philosophy thoughts are, as it were, cloudy and indistinct: its task is to make them clear and to give them sharp boundaries [4.112] . . . .

Theory of knowledge is the philosophy of psychology [4.1121]. (1922, p. 49)

Wittgenstein rarely argues for his position in the *Tractatus*; rather he simply states it. Since he believed (at that time) that he had solved the problems of philosophy, he is presenting his solutions and but little of the way in which he arrived at those solutions. His presentation is somewhat reminiscent of Spinoza's in the *Ethics,* which has the form of geometric proofs, but the content of which is but tenuously related to those proofs. Much of Wittgenstein's concerns are technical ones that I am not competent to judge, but one can't help but notice how often Russell is criticized, often in a highly polemical way. At some level, the *Tractatus* is a transferential playing out of Wittgenstein's ambivalence toward his father, reenacted in his homage to and savaging of Russell. This, of course, is a commentary on the psychodynamic meaning of the *Tractatus,* not on its truth value.

Wittgenstein's discussion of self is intertwined with his discussion of language.

The limits of my language means the limits of my world [5.6], . . . The world is my world: this is manifest in the fact that the limits of language (of that language which alone I understand) means the limits of my world [5.62], I am my world . . . [5.63] . . . There is no such thing as the subject that thinks or entertains ideas.

If I wrote a book called *The World as I Found It*, I should have to include a report on my body, should have to say which parts are subordinate to my will, and which are not, etc., this being a method of isolating the subject, or rather of thinking that in an important sense there is no subject; for it alone could not be mentioned in that book [5.631],

The subject does not belong to the world; rather, it is a limit of the world [5.632], (1922, p. 117)

What Wittgenstein has done here is extraordinary. At first he seems to be doing what Ryle does, deconstructing the self into the body, but precisely at that point he turns his argument on its head and puts the self as subject as the limit of the world. Because this self is not in the world (as experienced) but the limit of that world, it cannot be meaningfully discussed propositionally (by discursive language) so it cannot be " said" ; however, it can be " shown," and Wittgenstein does show it by the use of a visual analogy. He draws an eye and its visual field to demonstrate that the eye is not part but rather the limit of that field [5.6331]. Thus he shows us what cannot be meaningfully said. What can be shown and not said is that the self is that which has a world but is not in the world.

Thus there really is a sense in which philosophy can talk about the self in a nonpsychological way. (The psychological way would be a set of contingent propositions which are logical pictures of states of affairs and belong to science.) What brings the self into philosophy is the fact that "the world is my world. " The

philosophical self is not the human being, not the human body, or the human soul, with which psychology deals, but rather the metaphysical subject, the limit of the world—not part of it [5.641], (1922, p. 117)

The logical analyst ends in a position strikingly similar to Kant's, with language replacing the transcendental aesthetic and categories of the understanding and the metaphysical subject coming preciously close to Kant's noumenal self. It too is a thing in itself, beyond the only world that I know, the world of my language. Again like Kant, Wittgenstein winds up a sort of empirical realist and transcendental idealist. For someone who sets out to demonstrate that metaphysics is nonsense, Wittgenstein turns out to be quite a metaphysician. To say that he is talking important nonsense won't quite do. As his friend, the incredibly brilliant logician Frank Ramsey (who tragically died in his 20s) said, If Wittgenstein's analysis of language and its limitations is correct, we should take it seriously and make no distinction between important and unimportant nonsense and act on the famous conclusion of the *Tractatus*; "What we cannot speak about we must consign to silence" (Ramsey, 1923, p. 478). One suspects that what one cannot speak about includes hatred of fathers, homosexuality, and the suicide of brothers. Wittgenstein's theory of the self reflects his isolation—his existential position of being not in the world—just as his disconnected atomic facts reflect the lack of integration of his experiential world.

Wittgenstein eventually rejected the *Tractatus,* at least the part of it that set out to construct a logically perfect language more or less a priori by examining the foundations of logic, and instead turned toward a painstakingly minute examination of ordinary language. In the course of doing so, Wittgenstein devised the concept of *language games*, and invented many such games in his exploration of how language actually works. In the course of his analysis of language games, Wittgenstein came to relinquish his view of propositions as logical pictures of atomic facts that are independent of one another. The existence of " simples" is a function of the *rules* of our language games, which we are free to modify. How connected or unconnected states of affairs may be is indeterminate.

For our purposes, the salient thing about language games is that we always play them; there is no standpoint outside of, above, beyond, or beneath the language games we play from which we can examine reality. The favorite philosopher of the later Wittgenstein was St. Augustine. Like Augustine, Wittgenstein experienced himself as radically incomplete but, unlike Augustine, never found a sense of completion through belief. Of course, Wittgenstein's critique in the limits of knowledge leaves open the possibility of religious belief; God would be outside the world and not knowable, but perhaps capable of

being shown.

Wittgenstein was also influenced by his fellow Viennese, Freud; he was fascinated by dreams and their interpretation, and his language games are importantly concerned with how we use the term *unconscious.* In fact, Wittgenstein's philosophizing is a kind of psychoanalysis aimed at freeing the sufferer from the torments of philosophizing (i.e., of asking meaningless questions), by demonstrating to the sufferer that he is playing a language game. The aim of philosophy is " to show the fly the way out of the fly-bottle." " Philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by the means of language" (Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations,* 1953, p. 109). If he were here, Wittgenstein would doubtlessly try to get out of the fly-bottle of our quest for the self. Wittgenstein would certainly have understood Freud's comment that " when one asks the meaning of life one is already sick."

In his *Philosophical Investigations* (1953), Wittgenstein comments on William James's analysis of the self of selves as bodily sensations in the neck and head, and concludes that James failed to analyze the meaning of the word self, but, rather, noted the state of his attention while trying to so analyze it. Wittgenstein thinks that this is intrinsically valuable, but that James is not doing what he thinks he is doing.

Wittgenstein suffered deeply from guilt, and at one point, arranged a sort of public confession to his friends. Among the things he confessed was virulent anti-Semitism, an aspect of self-hatred that he successfully overcame, and his mistreatment of schoolchildren when he was a schoolmaster in rural Austria following World War I. Wittgenstein was appointed Professor of Philosophy at Cambridge, where he became a cult figure. He directed his disciples away from academic life into " practical" careers, and himself served as a menial worker in a hospital in World War II. Eventually, he resigned his professorship and spent his last years as a wanderer. He died of cancer relatively young, without having gotten out of the fly-bottle.