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STROMATA

● Readers (especially of cynical turn) must have been dumbfounded by what they encountered on two successive pages of the Rocky Mountain News, Saturday, April 24, 1984. On page 105 they were informed that Pinchas Lapide, an orthodox Jewish Professor of Scripture, has published a book, The Resurrection of Jesus: A Jewish Perspective (Augsburg Press) in which he, of all people, argues for the real, historical, firmly authenticated fact of Jesus' resurrection. He twits modern Christian theologians for sometimes seeming "ashamed of the material facticity of the resurrection," and claims that "without the resurrection of Jesus, after Golgotha there would not have been any Christianity." The reader then turns the page and there encounters the modern Christian theologian Hans Küng who also has recently published a book, Eternal Life? (Doubleday), in which, however, he turns the resurrection into a non-resurrection at best, or gobbledygook at worst: "To be exact, it (the resurrection) is not a historical (event) but nevertheless a real event. . . . It is a question of a transcendent happening emerging out of human death into the all-embracing dimension of God." Twitting aside, what serious reader can suppress an ironic smile and twinkle in the eye? On page 105 an orthodox Jewish theologian defends the real resurrection of Jesus, and on page 106 a Christian theologian denies it! Whoever said that theology is no fun?

● Briefly reported. "A Lutheran bishop, we are told, declared in 1577 that Halley's comet was formed by coagulation of 'the thick smoke of human sins.'" (The Orange County Register. Monday, Nov. 25, 1985).

● Briefly quoted. ". . . you are one of those who have an eye for faults and failures; . . . you take a pleasure to find and publish them; and . . . having found them, you make haste to forget the overvailing virtues and the real success which had alone introduced them to your knowledge. It is a dangerous frame of mind." (Robert Louis Stevenson, An Open Letter to the Reverend Doctor Hyde of Honolulu. (New York: Cobble Hill Press, reprint, 1968, p. 45.)

IN THIS ISSUE OF THE BRIEF

Editor: Prof. Ed. L. Miller
With Prof. John R. Carnes, Mr. Damian Baumgardner

WITTGENSTEIN'S APPEARANCE BEFORE THE CORNELL PHILOSOPHY CLUB

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In the Summer and Fall of 1949 Ludwig Wittgenstein was staying at Norman Malcolm's. At the time the Malcolms lived in the country, a mile or two outside Ithaca. It was therefore rather easy to keep Wittgenstein's presence from becoming common knowledge and that was the way that Wittgenstein wanted it. I think that, besides Malcolm and his family and Wittgenstein's physician, Dr. Mooney, only a couple of the Cornell philosophy faculty and one graduate student in philosophy, which was myself, knew -- until his appearance before the Cornell Philosophy Club — of his being in the vicinity of Cornell or, indeed, of his being even on this side of the Atlantic.

My own knowledge of the fact had a somewhat non-pedestrian explanation. At the time the Malcolms were without a car. I had an old Ford sedan. I was completing my graduate studies under Norman. On returning from Summer "vacation" I therefore ran out to Norman's to consult on my studies. Norman was in the backyard. As I had passed by the house, glancing inside, I had noticed Willis Doney (then an instructor at Cornell) and a somewhat elderly-appearing person in deep discussion. Doney's face had seemed so squinched up in concentration I was impelled to ask Norman who it was he was talking to. Holding me to secrecy Norman told me it was Ludwig Wittgenstein. Later, I chauffeured Wittgenstein on several occasions to his doctor's (although as yet undiagnosed, the cancer which was to terminate his life was already making severe inroads into his health). I may also have run some errands for him in my car. At any rate, I saw Wittgenstein off and on through most of the Fall.

Some mention should be made of the feelings that I experienced -- feelings that almost any graduate student in philosophy at Cornell in 1949 would have experienced — meeting and being in the company of Wittgenstein. Otherwise the full dimensions of his appearance before the Philosophy Club will be missed.

Today, when the philosophizing of Wittgenstein in both the Tractatus and his subsequent writings is available and familiar to everyone in philosophy and commentaries on both abound, the name "Wittgenstein" will ring no different in a student's ears from those of any other of the better known philosophers of that era: Russell, say, or Moore, or Dewey. But that was not so in 1949. The Tractatus was physically available, to be sure; but, though quoted for ornamentation's sake now and then (its epigrammatic propositions lending themselves to such misuses), it existed more as a legend and enigma than a studied text. Over its author's name and his post-Tractatus philosophizing an even more legendary and enigmatic aura prevailed.

Some of the people who had participated in Wittgenstein's lectures and discussions possessed the dictations, one in a blue cover and the other in a brown, which came to be known eventually as the Blue and Brown Books. Their existence was something barely rumored. A student who showed some apparent grasp of the sort of thing that was going on in Wittgenstein's new and revolutionary mode of philosophizing might be passed, after promising not to have them copied or to allow them to be perused by others and to return them promptly, one or another of these dictations (probably first the Blue Book and then the Brown Book). But unless so favored one had very little to go on by way of obtaining anything like a clear perception of either the philosopher or his philosophy.

In the last connection some illumination was supposed to be shed in the interminable and obscure pros and cons of Wisdom's "Other Minds"; but I, for one, could make nothing at all of them. More illuminating were references that Malcolm in his classes sometimes but not very often made to what Wittgenstein had said in some lecture or discussion. But even if one were fortunate enough to have been entrusted with the Blue and Brown Books, and had pored long and hard over them, both Wittgenstein and his new philosophizing were sure to remain shrouded in awesome mystery. One might put the experience of reading the Blue and Brown Books in 1949, when one had read nothing like them before or thought nothing like their thoughts, this way: It was like being dropped into the middle of a completely strange, booming, buzzing metropolis -- one was left more in a state of vertigo than of comprehension. At the same time one had the feeling that a New Age was on the point of dawning; a new way of philosophizing (only half guessed at) which would dispel at last the glacial problems and controversies of philosophy. And, full of excitement, one felt that one was on the verge of participating oneself in this great and momentous event. Or, anyhow, for a graduate student in philosophy at Cornell in 1949 it was easy to entertain such feelings.

Such was the back-drop before which Wittgenstein made his unannounced and unimaginable appearance before the assembled philosophy club of Cornell University in the middle Fall of 1949. That appearance (I believe Wittgenstein's only really public appearance in the U.S.) is the topic of the three descriptions that follow. That there are three and not a single one happened this way.

Back in 1968 Bill Gass included in a review of Engelmann's Letters from Ludwig Wittgenstein with a Memoir his own recollection of that appearance. A propos of a discussion about poetry that Norman Malcolm and I had been having this present Summer (1978) Norman sent me a copy of Bill's review. I had not read it before. When I did I found what I took to be some factual inaccuracies in it. These I relayed to Norman and in turn Norman relayed to me his own recollections of that meeting, along with some excerpts from notes that he had taken down during it. Gass's recollection, mine, and Norman's (it seems to me) form a triptych of the event having both historical and philosophical interest. I have already sketched a sort of back-drop for the better viewing of these three recollections. I think no more commentary is necessary. Except, therefore, for some excisions of irrelevent matter, I append the three accounts pretty much as they were originally set down.

Bill Gass's Account: "Wittgenstein — A Man and a Half"[1]

"Professor Gregory Vlastos had completed his paper on Reinhold Niebuhr. The paper was excellent but the discussion had swallowed itself as such things sometimes do (one was only inclined to cough), and even the effort to be brilliant at someone's expense seemed no longer worth the trouble, when the funny, shabby man began speaking. At least he seemed shabby, though I remember giving him small notice at first. Old, unsteady, queerly dressed, out of date, uncomfortable in space, he struck me as some atheistical, vegetarian nut who'd somehow found his way to this meeting of the Cornell Philosophy Club and would, at any moment, heatedly, endlessly, support and denounce with wild irreverance whatever simple, single thought was burning him up. But he'd been silent and I'd forgotten about him. Now he spoke, clearly yet haltingly, with intolerable slowness, with a kind of deep stammer involving not mere sounds or words but yards of discourse, long swatches of inference; and since those sentence lengths, though delivered forcefully, indeed with an intensity which was as extraordinary as it was quiet, were always cut short suddenly -- in midphrase, maddeningly incomplete -- and then begun again, what you heard was something like a great pianist at practice: not a piece of music, but the very acts which went into making that performance.

"Thus in this sudden, silly way began what was to be the most important intellectual experience of my life, yet it was an experience almost without content, for it was very plainly not just what the old man said that was so moving, it was almost entirely the way in which he said it, the total naked absorption of the mind in its problem, the tried-out words suspended for inspection, the unceasingly pitiless evaluation they were given, the temporarily triumphant going forward, the doubt, despair, the cruel recognition of failure, the glorious giving of solutions by something from somewhere, the insistent re-beginning, as though no one, not even the speaker, had

ever been there. Without cant, without jargon, and in terms of examples, this abstract mind went concretely forward; and is it any wonder that he felt impatient with twaddle and any emphasis on showy finish, with glibness, with quickness, with polish and shine, with all propositions whose hems were carefully the right length, with all those philosophies which lean on one another, like one in a stupor leans against a bar? No wonder he was so jealous of his thoughts, no wonder he so entirely hated those who seized on his results without the necessary labors, as one might who'd sacrificed himself for summits only to await there the handclasps of those who had alighted from helicopters he'd designed; for he felt philosophy to be an activity, this very activity he was entering on before us, exactly as Valéry had felt concerning the creation of poetry, where every word allowed to remain in a line represented a series of acts of the poet, of proposals and withdrawals which, in agony, at last, issued in this one, and how no one word was final, how the work was never over, never done, but only, in grief, abandoned as it sometimes had to be, and so, in the manner of the poet, each line of thought was a fresh line, each old problem no older than the sonnet, invented today, to be conquered again for the first time, never mind if you've written a thousand; and a murmur ran round the seminar table, heads turned toward Malcolm, his student, who'd brought him, but I don't know for how many this movement was, as it was for me, a murmur, a movement of recognition.

"Wittgenstein spoke very briefly, then. He produced an example to untie the discussion. A few weeks later he met with us, the graduate students there in philosophy, for two two-hour sessions. Monologues, they were really, on the problems of knowledge and certainty. I thought at the time I'd undergone a conversion, but what I'd received, I realize now, was a philosophy shown, not a philosophy argued. Wittgenstein had uttered what he felt could be uttered (and it was very important), but what he had displayed could only be felt and seen — a method, and the moral and aesthetic passion of a mind in love. How pale seems Sartre's engagement against the deep and fiery colors of that purely saintly involvement. It now seems inevitable that the Tractatus should have stressed, so much, the difference between what can be said (and anything that can be said can be said clearly), and what can only be shown, and it is completely proper that Engelmann should stress this himself in his memoir.

". . . Englemann is right to call attention to the moral and aesthetic side of the Tractatus, for these things have not received the attention they deserve. The following strange line appears in this beautiful poem: ethics and aesthetics are one. I think Engelmann glosses it correctly, for I feel I saw it shown in those three evenings with the genius, and he quotes Karl Kraus appropriately:

"I cannot get myself to accept that a whole sentence can
ever come from half a man."

Both poet and logician have an equal interest here. Showing has several dimensions. Wittgenstein's propositions are complete, and therefore baffling to the wrong minds because they record the struggles of one who as a day-to-day human was only a half, no more, but who, as a philosopher, was considerably greater — perhaps a man and a half."

Nelson's comments on same to Malcolm (7/6/78)

". . . I read Bill Gass's reminiscences with great interest. The writing is artful, even (as you suggest) poetic. But (it seems to me) staged for an effect. And the staging is not always accurate. I refer in particular to Wittgenstein's appearance at the Vlastos paper.

"I was sitting with Bill. We were facing the entrance to the room. When you came down the hallway, with Wittgenstein leaning on your arm, knowing the "secret" was out, I nudged Bill and told him that that was Wittgenstein. Thus, I hardly think that Bill's "At least he seemed shabby, though I remember giving him small notice at first" can be correct. Nor was Wittgenstein "shabby" -- that's not the right word. He was wearing army trousers and an army jacket — I suppose one could call that "queerly dressed" — but they were neat and clean and one might have noticed his oxfords, which were very quietly but surely of the finest English make.

"Have all these years been deluded? My constant memory is that Vlastos's paper was on Kant's "ought implies can" and not Reinhold Niehbuhr. And do you not also remember: when Vlastos finished presenting his paper, Max Black arose (as chaiman or whatever of the meeting) and turning to his right said (as a gasp went up from one end of the long table to the other -- quite as if he had said, "Professor Plato"), "Would you care to make any comments, Professor Wittgenstein?" And Wittgenstein got up, took the few steps needed to bring him in front of the movable blackboard on which Vlastos had drawn some diagrams and equations having to do with "ought implies can," stared incredulously for a long period, and then said, "What is this hooey?" And then proceeded, in a very crisp, knowledgeable way, to comment on Kant's "ought implies can." I do believe Bill has mixed up meetings.

"It was in the session on the verifiability principle, to which only students were invited, that Wittgenstein grappled with his thoughts and words in the way described (indeed aptly) by Bill: but grappled, not because he was attempting to show the unsayable but because a mistake had been made and the thread of argument was

forming knots of nonsense. In unmistakable anguish Wittgenstein said, "What has gone wrong? Can anyone help me?" Lalumia (the fellow who went on to teach at Kent State) volunteered an answer. He was told in no uncertain terms that he was a fool (or that his answer was stupid — I forget which). I volunteered an answer. Ditto. In painful silence the meeting broke up.

"Thinking over the break-down in discussion later that night I realized what the mistake had been. Wittgenstein had commenced by citing the case of a person getting off a plane at a distance from one and one's entertaining the hypothesis that he was carrying a valise. He was carrying something but one couldn't quite make out what. Obviously Wittgenstein was presenting the sort of case which would attract one to the verifiability principle which would seem to confirm it and which logical positivists wanted to universalize. But then something happened. Wittgenstein carried over the hypothesis-model to the case of a person getting off the plane right in front of one in plain sight, without — evidently — realizing that he had, nor did anyone else: I mean realizing that he had forcibly carried over the model. Soon the aforementioned conceptual knots began to form; and it was then that Wittgenstein struggled with word and thought.

"If memory serves me at all, Wittgenstein was often downright eloquent in his philosophical presentation. He was as eloquent as Socrates when Plato has him spinning out philosophical metaphors. But I remember too times when he grappled with his words and thoughts in the way described by Bill — in the first session for the graduate students, for instance. I do believe that through some funny mirrors of time (even though Gass's account was written in 1968 -- but that would still be over nineteen years after the event) Bill has "universalized" one portion and aspect of Wittgenstein's mode of philosophizing, and perhaps "sublimed" it.

"I should, naturally, be terribly interested in your own memory

(and Max Black's) of the Vlastos-paper appearance of Wittgenstein, and Gregory's too. Wasn't the paper on Kant's "ought implies can"? (a thought strikes me: maybe it was on Niebuhr's particular treatment of Kant's "ought implies can". Could that be?)."

Malcolm's Response to Nelson's Letter (7/16/78)

"Your account of the first meeting is certainly more accurate than is Bill Gass's. The topic of the Vlastos paper was the Kantian "ought implies can." Vlastos may have brought Niebuhr into his paper in some way or other. I do recall that Vlastos wrote some things on the board, and that Wittgenstein expressed some disgust for them. But the exact words, "What is this hooey!" I hadn't recalled. What a marvellous remark! I think he may have picked up the word "hooey" from me — because it is American and not English.

"I also recall being struck by how much Wittgenstein knew about Kant and this topic of "ought implies can." I also recall one scene where Wittgenstein was talking about "can," I believe, and stood above Max, dangling an imaginary rope above his (Max's) head. I remember that the scene struck me as incredibly funny — although I can't remember the exact point Wittgenstein was making. He was, I believe, trying to illustrate something about the use of the word "can."

"John: I have just looked back through an old notebook, and found a record of Wittgenstein talking about "Does ought imply can?" This undoubtably refers to that first meeting.

"Wittgenstein used two examples of cannot:

1.) this man can't withstand this temptation.

2.) this rope can't bear this weight.

"(Max was the weight that the imaginary rope couldn't bear). I quote from my notes:

> "In these sentences 'can't' may be replaced by 'won't.' These are predictions, based on observation, and perhaps statistics.
>
> But though we know he won't withstand the temptation, we may still say that he ought to. Which shows that the ought has nothing to do with statistics, or with his past history.
>
> The ought expresses an attitude — not a belief, prediction, or generalization.
>
> The won't is based on evidence; the ought is based on nothing."

I take Wittgenstein's point to be that here is a case where "ought" does not imply "can."

"You may be right that Gass's recollection is more accurate in respect of the second and third meetings -- which I did not attend. You agree that Bill did give an "apt" description of the way Wittgenstein "grappled with his thoughts and words." Since I had been a witness of such struggles innumerable times, I thought (and think) that Bill's description was not only apt but beautiful."

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1 William Gass, "Wittgenstein -- A Man and a Half," The New Republic, June 22, 1968, pp. 29f.

BOOK BRIEF

Kurt Aland, Four Reformers: Luther, Melanchthon, Calvin, Zwingli, tr. James L. Schaff (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1979), pp. 174. $4.95.

According to Aland (p. 11), "each year at least five hundred new publications on the subject of Martin Luther and the Reformation appear." If this is so, one might ask, why bring forth yet another? Aland implicitly answers this question when he states that his own book attempts to fill a need resulting from the fact that "for decades there has not been a comprehensive presentation of the reformers from a single pen" (p. 7). Some readers may dispute the author's restriction of the topic "reformers" to mainline Protestants, but few will quarrel with his decision to include an essay on Philip Melanchthon, a man not always given his due in general histories of the Reformation.

Aland, Professor of Church History and New Testament Research at the University of Münster in Germany, is at his best in the Luther essay which forms the major piece in the book (pp. 9-53). Aland has published extensively on this topic, his previous works including an edition of Luther writings and the indispensable research tool: Hilfsbuch zum Lutherstudium, 3rd ed. (Witten, 1970). He obviously is sympathetic to Luther and is in full command of both the primary and secondary sources. His interpretation offers few surprises but provides a reliable summary of recent Luther research. Enough background and political analysis is included to place the German reformer in his historical context. My one complaint arises from what seems to me an unnecessarily negative and one-sided evaluation of some of Luther's opponents, e.g., Karlstadt and Erasmus.

Aland portrays Melanchthon, Luther's brilliant but somewhat vacillating colleague at Wittenberg, as sharing a common trait with Erasmus and many other humanists of the sixteenth century -- an "intellectual greatness diminished by human weakness." This theme of personal weakness is pervasive throughout the Melanchthon essay and seems to me to be overly emphasized, although it must be acknowledged that Aland at the same time does attempt to give full recognition to the man's extraordinary talents and enduring achievements.

The chapters on Zwingli and Calvin are somewhat briefer but nonetheless provide well-informed and reasonably well-rounded sketches of the two Swiss reformers. The remainder of the text consists of a Postscript briefly discussing the following topics: The Reformation Outside Germany and Switzerland; The "Lesser" Reformers; The "Left Wing" of the Reformation (Anabaptists and Spiritualists); Reformation "From the Top Down" or "From the Bottom Up"?; Did the Reformation Destroy the Unity of Christianity?

For its size, Aland's book includes unusually extensive Notes (pp. 141-56) and Bibliography (pp. 157-74). The latter is an excellent guide to the various editions of the reformer's writings as well as secondary literature published in Europe. Unfortunately, a number of important English-language studies, particularly on Zwingli, have been omitted. The volume also lacks an index.

In sum, Four Reformers may be judged a welcome addition to the body of introductory literature available on the Reformation. It is scholarly yet generally well-written and, with its parallel biographies, offers a somewhat unique approach to an old topic.

— Carl Christensen,
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(UNDER) THE TABLE TALK

". . . Once when there was a procession with banners around a church, the verger put the holy water pot on the ground. A dog came along and pissed into the holy water pot. A priest noticed this because he was sprinkling the water, and he said, 'You impious dog! Have you become a Lutheran too?'"

— Martin Luther, Table Talk, no. 5418,
tr. Theodore G. Tappert