

# Vikerkaar

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theoretical broussing. But what Wittgenstein said wasn't so important; it was how he fought Frege's mind, how he fought for the primacy of his own understanding — *this* was what seized Frege's attention. Manners fell by the wayside; there wasn't time. The young Viennese was stubborn and argumentative. Worse, he had a bad habit of interrupting. Not protested Wittgenstein, and then he stopped himself. It cannot be ... I just — *I don't know!* he snapped, and then he turned away, the blood blurring up into his face, blinded by the shame of *not seeing*, at once forty steps ahead and forty behind. But even more, Frege saw how the young man would not let go, saw his *tremendous, straggly impudence* to get at it — at what he could not quite see but vividly intuited.

The pungent cigar was faintly narcotic. Sitting slumped in his heavy, overstuffed chair, the cigar raised like an exclamation point, Frege inwardly *flipped* then. Now a man over sixty, he felt a vague melancholy sifting over him, saddened, in the face of this rampant youth, to realize his own diminished energies. He simply didn't have the *strength* not for this one. *This* one, he saw, needed a younger man to take him in tow. Frege puffed out his *cheeks* with *smoke*, then *exhaled*, saying in a low, rasping voice, *Ras-sell*.

Wittgenstein looked up quizzically. Watery eyed with the smoke, Frege said, Work with Russell at Cambridge. He's the one doing the new work now. Write to him. You may use my name.

Frege roused himself from the chair and cleared his throat. Wittgenstein was still staring when the old logician looked back in good-natured dismay and said, On second thought, I will send Russell a note *myself*. Not to recommend you, you understand, but to warn him. That's all. Just a friendly note of warning.

Wittgenstein took Frege's advice: he wrote to Russell. Russell replied *favorably* and by *early* September Wittgenstein was officially *enrolled* at Cambridge. Karl Wittgenstein, meanwhile, was *falminating* over his son's latest letter formally notifying him of his intentions. Wittgenstein was in England finishing up his aeronautical work when he received his father's reply — a warning shot across the bow:

5. September 1912

My Son,

Your latest letter, like our last interview, was *unmistakably*. As usual, there was your own natural — I want to say *willful* — *difficuly and reticence* and my own *inclination* to want to seize a certain pass and plow through various *recurrent* objections, which, as I see it, are just that — stubborn objections.

To philosophy you bring a certain irritating *skepticism* and the uncanny ability to make others feel self-conscious. But can these truly be called *gifts*?

You would say, "I cannot have my gifts *guaranteed in advance*." Quite true. No man could do anything if he first had to *justify* for his priority, Good, I told the *Royal Guild, grants go (charity)*, one takes that out for oneself! But to fish one requires at least a stout boat; it is not enough to express mere inclination to fish or eat fish. If this were the case, every young man of quality in Vienna who did not have to *strife* for a living would be an artist; the rest would be rich *ladies*. The world has already too many artists with their kits and claims, their astounding pretensions. I do not mistake the *rightful place* of philosophy. Philosophy is an art but has an even more tenuous claim to truth than does Art itself, which at least claims to be nothing more than it is. No philosophical system has ever proven anything. All a philosophy shows are the presumptions and proclivities of the philosopher, who simply cuts the coat to fit the cloth. *Do not speak to me of Absolute Truth!* At best the effect is only beautiful or evanescently satisfying in the way of myth. Goethe is more believable and a thousand times more honorable than any philosopher. Forget your beloved Schopenhauer, that latter-day Ecclesiastes. Schopenhauer can open his wares and call it literature because he did not have to toil for a living or offer the world anything but vain groanings. We need men who bring STEAM to the world; we need, if anything, another Goethe, and you — need I say it? — are no Goethe.

Would it surprise you if I said I, too, had wanted at one time to be a philosopher? True to say, in my published writings I have touched, shall we say, on a civil philosophy of an *industrious* variety that puts steel in the foundation and ensures a certain code of civil workmanship, with the finest of materials and work that goes according to some foreseeable SCHEDULE. But I realized much earlier than you — now, I might add, in your twenty-third year — that it was not in my veins to be a philosopher, not at least as Kant is a philosopher, or Goethe a poet-philosopher. What of your case? You are *abundantly talented*. But to think of you as a philosopher ... I am *skeptical* because I know what thinking went into the formation of your character. You did not just fall into the world; it was with long and exacting deliberation that I planned the education of you and your siblings, and why, indeed, I concluded that my children could be educated only under my roof with hand-picked *things*.

It DISTRESSES me, dear son, to see you, a man of *invaluable intellect* and talent, *bound* in this way. I wish I could be more sanguine in this, yet you see, I did not found a family not to know that family, and if I should raise an *obscure* or your later *family* please understand that it is in the interests of a resolute *efficiency*. I, too, have traveled this *path* and I do not believe the way of the Wittgensteins goes there.

I trust you will give my words *some* CONSIDERATION.

Your concerned Father



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