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The Good, the Bad, and the Vacuous: Wittgenstein on Modern and Future Musics

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Ludwig Wittgenstein's impatience with the modern music of his time is well documented. He suggested that Gustav Mahler's symphonies might be worthless and pondered whether the composer should have burnt them or else "done himself violence" (Wittgenstein 1998, 76), he thought that Alban Berg's music was scandalous (McGuinness 1988, 33), and he is on record as refusing to enter a concert hall for a performance of selections from Richard Strauss' *Salome* (McGuinness 1988, 124). David Pinsent, Wittgenstein's friend and companion during his first sojourn in Cambridge in the years 1912-13, noted in his diary the vehement arguments between Wittgenstein and his fellow students in Cambridge concerning modern music (Monk 1990, 78). Finally, in a sketch for a forward to a planned book titled *Philosophical Remarks*, Wittgenstein admitted that he approaches "what is called modern music with the greatest mistrust (without understanding its language)" (1998, 8).

In an interesting passage, a curious diary entry from January 27, 1931, Wittgenstein suggested a distinction between three kinds of modern music: good, bad, and vacuous

(Wittgenstein 2003, 66-69; henceforth *GBV*). In this study I set out to answer a straightforward question: what did Wittgenstein mean by this threefold distinction? The answer, I will argue, reveals Wittgenstein's surprisingly nuanced, philosophically complex critical outlook on the modern music of his time.

In the first section of my study, I offer an exegesis of *GBV* and introduce Wittgenstein's distinction between good, bad and vacuous modern music.

Sections two and three set up the background for my interpretation of *GBV*. In section two, I situate Wittgenstein's outlook in the context of Oswald Spengler's ideas concerning the decline of Western culture. In section three, I argue that the music theory of Heinrich Schenker serves as an immediate link between Spengler's cultural pessimism and Wittgenstein's threefold distinction.

Sections four and five examine closely Wittgenstein's assimilation of the views of Spengler and Schenker and his critique thereof. In section four, I argue that Wittgenstein drew the distinction between bad and vacuous modern music in a manner reminiscent of Schenker's distinction between the progressive and reactionary composers of his time. In section five, I explain Wittgenstein's critique of the philosophical dogmatism of Spengler and Schenker, which results in a view of modern music, which I dub Wittgenstein's 'hybrid conception of musical decline'.

Sections six and seven examine closely Wittgenstein's problematic notion of good modern music. In section six, I discuss Wittgenstein's complex remarks concerning Gustav Mahler. In section seven, I explicate Wittgenstein's remark on the music of the future, which, I argue, should be understood ultimately as an ellipsis of his much later view of musical meaning and intelligibility.

I. Three kinds of modern music

On January 27, 1931, Wittgenstein wrote in his diary:

Guter – The Good, the Bad, and the Vacuous

The music of all periods [*insertion*: the music of the past] always appropriates certain maxims of the good and the right of its own time. In this way we recognize the principles of Keller in Brahms etc etc. And for that reason [*insertion*: good] music, which is being conceived today or that has been conceived recently, which is therefore modern, seems absurd; for if it corresponds to any of the maxims that are articulated today, then it must be rubbish. This sentence is not easy to understand but it is so: no one is astute enough to formulate today what is correct, and all formulations, maxims, which are articulated are nonsense [*Unsinn*]. The truth would sound entirely paradoxical to all people. And the composer who feels this within him must confront with this feeling everything that is [*insertion*: now] articulated and therefore [his music] must appear by the present standards absurd, timid [*blödsinnig*]. But not absurd in a dressed-up sense (for after all, this is basically what corresponds to the present attitude) but vacuous [*Nichtssagend*]. Labor is an example of this where he created something really significant as in some few pieces (Wittgenstein 2003, 66-69 – *GBV*).¹

Wittgenstein begins with a certain idea of cultural cohesion: music shows an affinity to other human practices and cultural artefacts of its period. It manifests mutual attunement, to use Stanley Cavell's locution (1982, 131-132). The example of recognizing the principles of the Swiss author Gottfried Keller (1819-1890) in the music of Johannes Brahms (1833-1897), is familiar from Wittgenstein's various lectures on aesthetics in the 1930s, and it clearly pertains to the cultural conditions of musical understanding and intelligibility. According to Wittgenstein, we draw such similarities between the style of composer and the style of a poet, or a painter, who lived at the same time, in order to make us hear the music with understanding (Wittgenstein, forthcoming).²

Guter – The Good, the Bad, and the Vacuous

The point of drawing such similarities for such purpose is precisely that the two artists belonged to, and shared the same culture (Wittgenstein 1966, 32, footnote).

For Wittgenstein, the hidden connection, which is suggested by the pairing of Brahms and Keller (*ibid.*), cannot be asserted independently of the actual hearing or playing of Brahms' music with understanding, which such pairing brings about (1967a, 166). Understanding the music of Brahms may consist in finding a form of verbal expression which we conceive as the verbal counterpoint of the music (e.g. 'Brahms is like Keller', or 'find Keller in Brahms!'). However, Wittgenstein's point is that "what happened when the understanding came was that I found the word which seemed to sum it up" (1967a, 167; cf. 1998, 59-60). This sort of cultural cohesion, exemplified by our intransitive understanding of Keller in Brahms (Wittgenstein 1974, 79),³ wherein music interacts with "the rhythm of our language, of our thinking and feeling" (Wittgenstein 1998, 59-60), is precisely that which seems to have been lost, in Wittgenstein's view, in the transition to the modern.⁴

Modern music, that is, music which is being conceived amidst "a dissolution of the resemblances which unite a [culture's] ways of life" (Wright 1982, 116-117), is bound to seem deficient, or absurd, Wittgenstein maintains in *GBV*. It is crucial to carefully delineate the absurdity, or rather absurdities, involved here. At the heart of *GBV* we find Wittgenstein's conviction that the transition to the modern shows itself in some sort of constraint—inability to conceptualize the transition away from the kind of cultural cohesion, which the 'Keller-in-Brahms' example epitomizes. There is something to be grasped, for sure, but, Wittgenstein maintains, we are not astute enough to conceptualize it. The kind of cleverness, which we seem to lack, according to Wittgenstein, is not a matter of mental capacity but rather a matter of education and tradition; acquired ability to comprehend cultural codes (cf. Wittgenstein 1966, 25-26). We have become

Guter – The Good, the Bad, and the Vacuous

constrained by incommensurability between us and the past, hence we get a paradox: even if we knew the ‘truth’, we probably would not have been able to comprehend it. Wittgenstein’s irony in *GVB* is glaring: “The truth would sound entirely paradoxical to all people.”

For Wittgenstein, this condition is the onset for a bifurcation and a conceptual tension in modern music: two sorts of music, which correspond to two sorts of cultural absurdity. There is music, which consists in a constraint on seeing *that* we do not comprehend (hence *unsinnig*, or nonsensical), and there is another sort of music, which consists in a constraint on seeing *what* we do not comprehend, on seeing through (hence *blödsinnig*, or timid, diffident).⁵ The first sort of modern music corresponds to the nonsensical maxims and formulations, which are actually articulated in contemporary (Western) life. Such music is absurd in a superficially attractive sense, and it is rubbish, says Wittgenstein. The other kind consists in denouncing such nonsensical maxims and formulation, but it ends up being vacuous, or vacant—absurd, for sure, but only because it cannot pass as absurd in the other, ‘dressed-up’ sense, which enjoys some sort of social acceptance. Such vacuous modern music bespeaks short-sightedness. It gropes for something which it cannot express. This is the genuine, albeit limited—in a sense, myopic—significance, which Wittgenstein attached in *GBV* to some of the works of the blind organist Josef Labor (1842-1924).⁶

Wittgenstein clearly distinguished in *GBV* between bad (nonsensical) modern music, and vacuous (timid) modern music. He was highly dismissive of the former, and critical of the latter, albeit being sympathetic to the music of Josef Labor. Yet Wittgenstein’s text does not give in to a false dichotomy between just the bad and the vacuous. *GBV* begins by asserting what ‘good music’ means in the present context: good music is good by virtue of its being emblematic of its time, as demonstrated in its affinity to other human practices and cultural artefacts of the period, and the

intransitive understanding, which ensues. It ends by pointing out the significance of at least some vacuous modern music: such music may embody an awareness of our built-in contemporary limitation to conceive modern music which is good in that particular sense.⁷

Thus there is yet another kind of absurdity hovering over *GBV*, and another notion of modern music to be entertained: good modern music. This is, paradoxically, the philosophical afterimage of that which has not yet been gained: a modern music, which is courageous (rather than being merely outrageous or timorous) in its striving to penetrate through what appears as dissolution of the resemblances which unite this culture's ways of life by rendering this condition as expressible and intransitively understandable. While this philosophically problematic possibility remains muted in *GBV*, Wittgenstein approached it on other occasions, as I shall argue in sections five through seven below.

II. Oswald Spengler: Shared concerns

We need to situate *GBV* in its proper intellectual context. In the spring of 1930, Wittgenstein read Oswald Spengler's two-volume magnum opus, *The Decline of the West* (Spengler 1939). On May 6, 1930, some eight months before penning *GBV*, Wittgenstein wrote in his diary: "Reading Spengler Decline etc. & in spite of many irresponsibilities in the particulars, find many real, significant thoughts. Much, perhaps most of it, is completely in touch with what I have often thought myself" (2003, 25; cf. 1998, 16).

Reading Spengler at that particular stage not only had a significant impact on the emergence and formulation of some of the most distinctive methodological aspects of Wittgenstein's later philosophy, but it also afforded historically informed cultural pessimism, which remained inseparable from these methodological aspects (Wright 1982; Cavell 1988;

Cavell 1989; DeAngelis 2007; Lurie 2012). Spengler's brand of cultural pessimism is particularly evident in Wittgenstein's remarks on art and on music from 1930 onwards. A striking example can be found early on, in Wittgenstein's outline for a forward to *Philosophical Remarks* (written on November 6, 1930), in which he expressed his alienation from the spirit of European and American civilization, lamented the disappearance of the arts, and mentioned his great mistrust of modern music (1998, 8). This line persisted in Wittgenstein's 1938 lectures on aesthetics, in which he not only commented on the deterioration of high culture, but also characterized artistic decline in terms of a breakdown of artistic necessity related to the reproduction of artefacts and a corresponding deterioration in sensitivity, which he claimed leads to indifference (1966, 22; cf. Spengler 1939, 293-295, vol. 1).

Spengler was highly critical of modern music, which for him was nothing more than "fake music, filled with artificial noisiness of massed instruments" (194, vol. 1). However, the case against modern music, for Spengler as well as for Wittgenstein, rested on two broad convictions concerning the decline of Western music, which they shared.

First, Wittgenstein shared with Spengler the conviction that in Western culture, music enjoys an exalted status among the arts, reflecting human concerns broader than any of its sisterarts. This was in fact a commonplace feature of Romantic thinking. Wittgenstein tacitly accepted this idea (1998, 11). Spengler pronounced this idea very clearly in his writings. For Spengler, music is a reflection of the Western soul, its prime symbol, the ideal medium for expressing the Faustian ideal of striving toward infinite space.

Another shared conviction concerned the key idea of 'genius'. Of course, this idea is also deeply entrenched in Romantic literature and has become a commonplace feature of nineteenth century thinking about music. Here Wittgenstein's remarks, many of them collected in *Culture and*

Value (Wittgenstein 1998), are quite explicit —albeit irredeemably entangled with his misgivings about the Jewish spirit (Lurie 2012, 43-52). Picking up and developing certain threads from Arthur Schopenhauer's and Otto Weininger's arguments, Wittgenstein contended that genius is talent embedded in a strong character, and that character (as opposed to mere intellect) manifests the basic natural core of human beings, as it allows all that is singular and authentic about the individual to shine through. According to Wittgenstein, genius takes courage (1998, 40). Mere talent, which hinges upon mere intellect, is reproductive and abstract. Courageously true to itself, artistic genius has the ability to contribute to the spiritual progression of a culture, by imbuing it with works of art that are both powerful and meaningful, by virtue of their authentic expression of human life.

Spengler similarly conceived genius in terms of a conscious —albeit gracefully selfoblivious— expression of the soul or spirit of humankind. In Spengler's terms, artistic genius consists in a consciousness that provides an unmediated expression of a culture's essence, thus manifesting as a prime symbol of that culture. The importance of these broad convictions for an account of musical decline is quite obvious: while the former (the profundity of music) imbues the signs of such decline with a cultural acuteness, the latter (the profundity of genius) lends them a general form, namely, the dilution or marginalization of genius, manifested in overintellectualized tinkering and Mannerist reproduction.

III. Heinrich Schenker: The missing link

Wittgenstein could not have gleaned from Spengler any theory of musical decline which encompasses a general theory of music. Spengler's comparative morphology of cultures had an entirely different focus: his proof of musical decline in the West was based on a comparison between the development of Western music and that of other cultures and at other times. The

Guter – The Good, the Bad, and the Vacuous

question arises whether there was anything which unequivocally linked Spengler's cultural pessimism with Wittgenstein's concrete view of music, which we find in *GBV*. Here, I suggest, we should turn to the Austrian music theorist and music critic Heinrich Schenker (1868-1935).

Wittgenstein showed interest in Schenker's theory and at some point even became familiar with it, albeit by proxy (Guter 2004, 192-213; Guter 2011, 117-128). This interest was kindled by the musicologist Felix Salzer (1904-1986), who was Ludwig Wittgenstein's nephew (son of Helene Salzer née Wittgenstein, Ludwig's sister). Salzer began his studies with Heinrich Schenker in 1931. He and two other students of Schenker formed a research seminar that met weekly to discuss Schenker's ideas. Upon the dissolution of the seminar in 1934, Salzer began private study with Schenker. Wittgenstein and Salzer spent some time together discussing Salzer's own work and the music theory of Schenker. These discussions began in 1926, four years before Wittgenstein's first encounter with Spengler's *Decline of the West*, and continued into the early 1930s during summers at the *Hochreit*, the Wittgenstein family country estate. Salzer reported that Wittgenstein's judgment of Schenker's view of music was not entirely negative. Apparently, in those conversations Wittgenstein was mostly interested in his own ideas on Schenker's theory.⁸

Schenker clearly maintained the broad convictions concerning the decline of Western music, which Wittgenstein shared with Spengler.⁹ He firmly believed in the exalted status of music among the arts. For Schenker, "in its linear progressions and comparable tonal events, music mirrors the human soul in all its metamorphoses and moods" (Cook 1989, 420). He also upheld the Romantic ideal of 'genius' as an essential feature of all great music. In Schenker's terms, musical genius consists in the artist's ability to transcend one's own individual will, so that the work of music, as it were, speaks through the artist, who unwittingly and quite spontaneously serves as a

medium. For Schenker, the self-realization of the genius in the masterworks of Western music is the realization of human spirit.

Yet Schenker provided also a formidable theory of musical decline. According to Nicholas Cook, Schenker had “an almost metaphysical conception of music being a temporal unfolding of the overtone series which exists as simultaneity in all natural sounds. More specifically, Schenker saw music as the temporal unfolding, or *prolongation*, of the major triad – the ‘chord of nature’, as he called it, since it exists as the first five partials of the overtone series, and which Schenker therefore saw as a specially privileged formation and indeed at the point of junction between what exists in nature as a simultaneity and what exists in art as a temporal process” (1994, 39). According to Schenker, all works of music (in particular all masterworks) are, in a sense, extended commentaries on the major triad. In effect, Schenker’s theory embodies an attempt to describe musical thinking itself: it describes how we keep this ‘privileged formation’ in mind over a period of time, and how we interpret configurations of notes as contributing to the continuity of that cognition.

However, since the major triad is in itself static, and since music is a temporal art, the most background formation from which any composition can be directly derived is the triad in motion, as represented in Schenker’s idea of *Ursatz* (fundamental structure). This fundamental structure is famously shown in the formations of Schenker’s bass arpeggiation of tonicdominant-tonic (I-V-I) (Schenker 1979, 4-5; fig. 1). According to Schenkerian analysis, the quality of a musical work depends on whether it has the type of expansion (‘middleground’ layers) that could connect its surface or ‘foreground’ to a constant ‘background’ and, ultimately, to the *Ursatz*. Any musical work that digresses from common practice harmony (hence failing to demonstrate the kind of hierarchy, which Schenkerian analysis seeks out) is patently rejected by Schenker as unsuccessful,

superficial, or altogether musically nonsensical, depending on the severity of the digression. Schenker seems to have envisioned that his theory amounts to a fullyfledged essentialist account of music, hence entailing in practice a clear demarcation between *bona fide* cases of music and what is to be regarded, in lieu of a better term, as non-music.¹⁰

Schenker’s criticism of modern music was scathing across the board. “Today’s generation even lacks the ability just to understand the existing technique of the masters, which would be required as the first step toward any kind of progress”, he wrote, “...the proudest products of Richard Strauss are inferior – in terms of true musical spirit and authentic inner complexity of texture, form, and articulation – to a string quartet by Haydn, in which external grace hides the inner complexity, just as color and fragrance of a flower render mysterious to humans the undiscovered, great miracles of creation” (1987, xxi).¹¹ Schenker’s theory gave him concrete means by which to diagnose the disintegration of musical culture on all fronts. Irreverence to the laws of tonal effect, among performers and composers alike, reflected, so he believed, a loss of musical instinct for the inner complexities of the masterworks of Western music, which in turn hindered the musician’s almost sacred mission to provide access to the world of human experience contained in such masterworks (Snarreneberg 1997, 145-150).

IV. Wittgenstein’s assimilation of Spengler and Schenker

Returning now to Wittgenstein’s threefold distinction between good, bad and vacuous modern music in *GBV*, we can see that the last two kinds map neatly onto the familiar terrain of the very similar worldviews of Spengler and Schenker, expressing Schenker’s technical interpretation of themes, which are best associated with Spengler’s *Decline of the West*.

Guter – The Good, the Bad, and the Vacuous

According to Wittgenstein, bad modern music is conceived in accordance with prevailing contemporary principles, which are equally ill-conceived. Most probably, Wittgenstein refers here to the predominant maxim of progress, for which he had the deepest mistrust, and not just because of its impact on the disappearance of the arts (Wittgenstein 1998, 8; 64). Such was indeed the case with those who during the first two decades of the twentieth century claimed to emancipate dissonance in the name of progress: Wittgenstein clearly had no patience for their senseless musical gesticulations, which Schenker's theory explains as symptomatic of the inability of these composers to bind their empty sonorities together as elaborations of a single chord. Thus, for example, Schenker accused Richard Strauss of trying to mask the primitive design of his music with heavy orchestration, with noise and polyphonic clatter, and of resorting to vulgar, extramusical narratives in order to solve problems of musical continuity. For both Schenker and Wittgenstein, such progressive music was plain 'rubbish', that is, something which insofar as it presents itself as non-musical clatter, is not interesting even from a merely technical perspective—indeed an 'attractive absurd' for all the wrong reasons.

The category of 'the vacuous' (*Nichtssagend*), 'the unattractive absurd', is exemplified in *GBV* by the music of Josef Labor. As I noted before, it denotes the problematic, somewhat tragic situation of a composer who shuns the illusion and peril of progress and yet is patently barred from artistic greatness. Schenker was similarly concerned with classicist epigones and clearly did not want composers to start imitating Brahms in any superficial sense. Interestingly, Wittgenstein maintained that "music came to a full stop with Brahms; and even in Brahms I can begin to hear the sound of machinery" (Rhees 1984, 112). Here Wittgenstein expresses a familiar train of thought held by others, ultimately traceable back to Schenker, who felt that the great tradition of Austro-German music had come to an end with Brahms.¹²

Wittgenstein's conception of vacuous modern music corresponds to Spengler's worry that when a culture enters its final phases (civilization), artists simply work with the hollow forms of the old culture, without understanding its essence. For Wittgenstein, ideas, including musical ideas, can get worn out and be no longer usable. In fact, he heard that from Labor himself (Wittgenstein 1998, 24). Wittgenstein wrote ambivalently elsewhere: "Labor's seriousness is a very late seriousness" (20). For Wittgenstein, vacuous modern music is the product of reproductive artists; it is first and foremost evidence for a lack of genius, hence a lack of character and a lack of courage (43-44). The adjective 'timid' (*blödsinnig*), which

Wittgenstein used in *GBV* in order to characterize such music-making, captures this precisely. "[I]n these times", Wittgenstein wrote, "strong characters simply turn away from the field of the arts & towards other things" (8). The opposition of such a composer to the predominant contemporary maxims is commendable, but it is ultimately flaccid; it lacks "connection with life and death" (44; cf. 43). And it exacts a heavy social price: as modern, it is bound to appear stupid.

In the final analysis, Wittgenstein rejected both the noble yet vacuous rehash of old forms of the conservative composer and the base contrapuntal tinkering with harmony of the progressive composer, considering them both symptomatic of musical decline.

V. A hybrid conception of musical decline

So far I focused on Wittgenstein's broad agreement with Spengler and Schenker, which clarifies his position concerning the distinction between bad and vacuous modern music. Yet in order to appreciate the originality and philosophic force of Wittgenstein's position, and also to explain the puzzling suggestion that one might entertain also the idea of good modern music, we need to consider the significance of Wittgenstein's departure from his intellectual forerunners.

As Garry Hagberg pointed out, Schenker was ultimately “the theorist most perfectly tailored to the tradition against which Wittgenstein’s methodological revolution is reacting” (2011, 393).¹³ Yet Wittgenstein’s actual critique of Schenker was nuanced, resulting not in wholesale rejection, but rather in an original hybrid, which retains some measure of cultural pessimism while jettisoning the philosophical dogmatism, which characterizes the intellectual projects of both Spengler and Schenker. In this section I explore and explain what I propose to call Wittgenstein’s ‘hybrid conception of musical decline’.

In a nutshell, Wittgenstein’s hybrid conception of music decline is this: Wittgenstein accepted Schenker’s idea that all good works of music are exfoliations of a primal musical phenomenon, not as a preconception to which everything must conform, but rather as a heuristic device for setting actual works of music in surveyable order within our way of looking at things. This non-dogmatic, anti-essentialist position is a double-edged sword: it undercuts both the purported practical implication of Schenker’s theory as a guide to composers and performers, which was meant to reverse musical decline, and the force of Spengler’s view as a prediction of the inevitability of such decline.

Let us turn to the two explicit references to Schenker in Wittgenstein’s *Nachlass* (Wittgenstein 2000).¹⁴ The first appears in the *Nachlass* in MS 153b, 60v-61r (1931), where Wittgenstein is arguing that the meaning of music is found in the criteria for the understanding of the meaning. He mentions “considering the piece in Schenker’s way” as one such possible criterion. The reference *en passant* to Schenker’s theory of music is telling, not only because Wittgenstein includes it naturally among the reactions which enable one to distinguish between someone who hears with understanding and someone who merely hears, but also because this very inclusion goes against Schenker’s theoretical conviction that structural hearing of the sort

promoted by his theory is the prime —if not the sole proper— manifestation of musical understanding. This is perhaps one sense in which Wittgenstein thought that Schenker's theory needed to be 'boiled down', as he told Felix Salzer.

The second explicit reference to Schenker appears in 1933 in the so-called *Big Typescript* (Wittgenstein 2005, 204; 2000, TS 213, 259v). It is a hand written comment, saying "Schenker's way of looking at music", which Wittgenstein jotted down next to an important passage, where he introduced the concept of 'family resemblance', by means of a critique of Spengler's principle of comparative morphology of cultural epochs. The brevity of this reference stands in inverse relation to its significance. Its relatively clear ideational background and its razor-sharp philosophical occasion render it lucid and complete enough to serve as our missing link. Here we can witness at firsthand, that not only did Wittgenstein perceive a structural analogy between Schenker's and Spengler's proof of musical decline, but he also utilized his critical angle on Spengler's methodology vis-à-vis Schenker.

In that passage from the *Big Typescript*, Wittgenstein reprimands Spengler's dogmatism in sorting cultural epochs into families, ascribing properties, which only the prototype or paradigm (*Urbild*) possesses, to the object that is viewed in its light. It is noteworthy that both Spengler's morphology of world history and Wittgenstein's criticism thereof found their original inspiration in Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's morphological method, as manifest in his conception of the 'primal plant', which was famously introduced in Goethe's *Italian Journey* (Goethe 1992). The purpose of Goethe's morphological method was to display the essential structure which is common to all natural species, to find unity in natural diversity. Goethe believed that the investigation of 'primal phenomena' is the general aim of any endeavour in natural science,

and the notion of ‘prototype’ (*Urbild*) was supposed to denote a clear representation of a single primal phenomenon, a step which was necessary in order to set the natural phenomena in order.

In the 1930s, Wittgenstein considered himself to be a follower of Goethe’s ideas about the metamorphosis of plants in the realm of the philosophy of language (Wittgenstein and Weismann 2003, 311). However his interpretation of Goethe’s ideas was decisively anti-realist: he denied the status of primal phenomena as common ancestors to all species (in any developmental, historical or genetic sense) and restricted the notion of *Urbild* to a mere regulative idea, the primacy of which is due to its heuristic use in providing the ‘logical space’ for all possible relevant instances (Baker and Hacker 2009, 307-334; Plaud 2010). This made Wittgenstein highly critical of dogmatic (namely, essentialist, metaphysical and illusory, in Wittgenstein’s eyes) uses of ‘prototypes’ (*Urbilder*), wherein “the primary phenomenon is a preconceived idea that takes possession of us” (Wittgenstein 1977, 47 par. 230). He diagnosed such improper uses of ‘prototypes’ not only in Spengler, but also in the ideas of James George Frazer (Wittgenstein 1979, 8), Sigmund Freud (Wittgenstein 1977, 47 par. 230), and also, I argue, Heinrich Schenker.

As William DeAngelis pointed out, in the *Big Typescript* Wittgenstein maintains that “Spengler fails to keep in mind that his prototype is a conceptual construct and so has a very different status than the concrete historical phenomena that it is framed to elucidate. ... His suggestion seems to be that the prototype itself be either dispensed with or employed very differently” (2007, 18). Wittgenstein's point is that the conceptual relations within the prototype, relations which can be expressed as grammatical or conceptual necessities, need to characterize the whole discussion and determine its form; however, they do not and cannot shape the phenomena that are being discussed. “The only way namely for us to avoid prejudice – or vacuity in our

claims”, Wittgenstein wrote in 1937, “is to posit the ideal as what it is, namely as an object of comparison – a measuring rod as it were – within our way of looking at things, & not as a preconception to which everything must conform” (1998, 30; cf. 31).

Wittgenstein’s critique impinges directly on the philosophical dogmatism of Schenker’s theory of music. The Schenkerian *Ursatz*, the representation of the primal musical phenomenon, which has been conceived to encapsulate the essence of tonality, is another example of an illconceived, dogmatic use of the idea of *Urbild*. Hence Schenker’s mistake is in the way that he extends the scope of statements true of tonality (in its pre-articulated form) to particular instances of tonal music.

The upshot of Wittgenstein’s critique of Schenker is this: Wittgenstein is committed to Schenker’s view concerning tonality, and he also maintains that various musical instances may bear a greater or lesser family resemblance to one another, to the extent of excluding of certain instances. Yet Wittgenstein is bound to deny that the general validity of the concept of tonality depends on the claim that everything which is true only of the abstract Schenkerian *Ursatz* must hold true also for any musical instance under consideration.¹⁵ For Wittgenstein, tonality—the way we experience and express certain relationships between musical tones—is affected by the way we recognize and describe things, and ultimately by the kind of beings we are, the purposes we have, our shared discriminatory capacities and certain general features of the world we inhabit. The preconditions of musical intelligibility are found in grammar.

When the prototype is clearly presented for what it really is, when we acknowledge its regulative use, thus rendering it a mere focal point of the observation, the general validity of the concept of tonality will depend on whether it characterizes the whole of the observation and determines its form. In this anti-essentialist vein, the Schenkerian *Ursatz* becomes a useful heuristic

Guter – The Good, the Bad, and the Vacuous

device that can be laid alongside the musical instances under consideration, as a measure, “not as a preconception to which everything must conform” (Wittgenstein 1998, 30). This is yet another sense, I suggest, in which Wittgenstein may have thought that Schenker’s theory needs to be ‘boiled down’.

Wittgenstein came very close to stating this critique of Schenker in a lecture, which he delivered in Cambridge on May 22, 1933:

Goethe in *Metamorphose der Pflanzen*, suggests that all plants are variations on a theme.

What is the theme?

Goethe says “They all point to a hidden law”. But you wouldn’t ask: What is the law?

That they point, is all there is to it.

Darwin made a hypothesis to account for this.

But you might treat it quite differently. You might say what is satisfactory in Darwin is not the hypothesis, but the putting the facts in a system – helping us to overlook them. You may ask: What is in common to all music from Palestrina to Brahms? And one might answer: They start from tonic, go to dominant, & return to tonic (Wittgenstein, forthcoming).¹⁶

Wittgenstein is actually tracing the route leading from his critique of Goethe’s primal phenomenon to his critical view of Schenker’s treatment of the primal phenomenon of Western music, albeit without naming the latter.¹⁷ Again, the upshot is clear: The great works of Western music point at Schenker’s prototype, but “that they point, is all there is to it” (ibid.). Like in the case of Darwin, what is satisfactory in Schenker (for Wittgenstein), is not the hypothesis that was made to account for musical coherence, but the putting of actual works of music in a system, rendering them surveyable.¹⁸

But this also means that Wittgenstein has in fact unleashed some genuine Spenglerian pessimism on whatever hope Schenker's theory may have retained in the face of musical decline. As Byron Almén pointed out, “because of [their] methodological differences, it is clear why Schenker would actively seek to reverse the decline by setting forth his theories as a guide to composers and performers, while Spengler would consider the decline as inevitable and irreversible” (1996, 24). According to Nicholas Cook, what Schenker wanted was for composers to return to the background as the only spiritual source for musical composition: “back to the fathers, back to the masters, but ultimately with the ear of depth!” (Cook 1989, 428). Ultimately, when Wittgenstein's critique of Spengler rebounds back to Schenker's theory of music, he seems to suggest that Schenker's hope for cultural rejuvenation by means of a concrete, hence dogmatic U-turn in compositional practice rests precisely on Schenker's confusion between ‘prototype’ and ‘object’.

Wittgenstein's decisively non-dogmatic, methodological hybrid conception of musical decline puts the notion of good modern music (insinuated in *GBV*) in a very interesting light, because it also challenges Spengler's commitment to historical inevitability. For Spengler, “pure civilization, as a historical process, consists in a taking-down of forms that have become inorganic or dead” (1939, 31, vol. 1). Wittgenstein's genuine worry in *GBV* that “no one is astute enough to formulate today what is correct” resounds strongly with Spengler's similar worry that the philosophers of his present day did not have a real standing in actual life, that they had not acquired the necessary reflective understanding of the time or its many built-in limitations, which philosophizing in time of civilization requires (Spengler 1939, 42, vol. 1).

In *GBV*, Wittgenstein voices an analogous worry about composers of his present day:

given that no principle can be coherently articulated amidst the dissolution of the resemblances that give unity to the ways of life of a culture, it should be equally impossible to conceive of music that could express the inarticulate. Thus, the precious little that Wittgenstein seems to have said in *GBV* about the prospect of good modern music is that, as things stand, such music is out of reach, and the very prospect of achieving such music seems quite paradoxical.

Yet Spengler maintained that civilization, as the most external and artificial state of which evolved humanity is capable, is the inevitable destiny of culture; death following life (Spengler 1939, 32, vol. 1). If *GBV* leaves open, as I suggested, the possibility of good modern music, that is, music which is truly adequate to our time, then it appears that in effect Wittgenstein was entertaining —albeit *sotto voce*— the strikingly absurd possibility of life after death: the possibility of an artistic afterimage of a wholesale rejection of the internal relations which hold together musical gesture and human life. This idea marks not only Wittgenstein’s rejection of Schenker’s sense of cultural rejuvenation by means of recoil from modern practices of composition, but also a resolute break from Spengler’s sense of historical inevitability. Thus, Wittgenstein’s forward looking hybrid conception of musical decline, forebearer of his notion of good modern music, secured its independence from its intellectual parents.

VI. The case of Gustav Mahler

It is instructive to examine Wittgenstein’s remarks on Gustav Mahler in the context of Wittgenstein’s notion of good modern music. Mahler was the only truly modern composer, who apparently was significant enough in Wittgenstein’s eyes to be worthy of attention. Wittgenstein’s somewhat abusive remarks on Mahler exemplify a distinct duality toward Mahler’s musical persona that was typical among Austrian literati at that time. Carl Schorske described this as a

duality in Mahler's functional relation to the classical tradition: an acute tension between Mahler's acceptance as a conductor —guardian of the abstract, autonomous music so cherished by the educated elite— and his rejection as a composer, in view of his subversive attempts to imbue abstract, high-culture music with concrete vernacular substance (Schorske 1999, 172-174).

Wittgenstein clearly had a tremendous respect for Mahler as a conductor. In 1940 he remarked on Mahler's conducting: "When Mahler was himself conducting, his private performances were excellent; the orchestra seemed to collapse at once if he was not conducting himself" (1998, 43).

Wittgenstein's harshly critical attitude toward Mahler as a composer was more philosophically complex than downright negative. He evidently did not like

Mahler's music, but he nonetheless attributed philosophical significance to it.

We have four self-standing passages on Mahler's music in Wittgenstein's writings. They can be neatly divided, chronologically and thematically, into two groups. The first group consists of two passages, both written in 1931 (Wittgenstein 2003, 93; 1998, 17), concerning Wittgenstein's puzzlement over Mahler's veering away from the cultural conditions of musical intelligibility.

Wittgenstein's emulation of Schenker's way of looking at the masterworks of Western music as extended commentaries on the major triad is evident in these passages, despite

Wittgenstein's non-technical and rather idiosyncratic terminology.¹⁹ From this theoretical perspective, Wittgenstein's claim that a Bruckner symphony is much closer to a Beethoven symphony than a Mahler symphony (1998, 17) is quite true.

Wittgenstein's critique of the moments of 'simple music' in Mahler (2003, 93) voices a train of thought, which is familiar in musicology, regarding Mahler's compositional strategies.

Mahler's mature works (for example, his fourth symphony) display significant ambivalence in the area of harmony and tonal relationships. While his music often appears deceptively conservative,

Guter – The Good, the Bad, and the Vacuous

employing undisguised dominant relationships that still play an essential structural role, his compositional procedures push tonality to the brink of dissolution (Morgan 1991, 22). In this sense, Mahler's 'simple music' is indeed contrived and disjointed, the product of an incredibly sophisticated, refined, and titillating —yet ultimately abstract— design.

Wittgenstein maps Schenker's music-theoretical perspective onto Spengler's scheme of cultural decline, by invoking a comparative image of an apple tree, a daisy, and a picture of the tree (1998, 17), which is meant to intimate not only the abstract nature of the digression embodied in Mahler's art, but also its cultural extent. Lurie captured this nicely by saying that "to affiliate Mahler's music with the musical tradition of the West is like putting pictures of apple trees in an orchid, believing they too can yield real apples" (2012, 137). Wittgenstein's idea in this passage (1998, 17), that a Mahler symphony might be a work of art of a *totally* different sort is Spenglerian in an important sense: Wittgenstein entertains here the possibility that Mahler's music, as Lurie put it, "belongs to an entirely different kind of spiritual enterprise that embodies civilization in the modern period" (2012, 137). Schenker similarly felt that "the quest for a new form of music is a quest for a homunculus" (1979, 6). Schenker's metaphor of an artificial living being, which "embodies the outward semblance of humanity but not the spirit" (Cook 1989, 428), captures not only the sense of the totality of this new enterprise, but also its uncanny nature.

The striking thought that Mahler's music might be genuinely adequate to the time of civilization, that it truly approximates good modern music, does not negate Wittgenstein's justification (from the idealized perspective of what he called "the high and great culture") for saying that Mahler's music is inauthentic and abstract. Nonetheless, it seriously qualifies the normative force of such a lament.

Guter – The Good, the Bad, and the Vacuous

With this caveat in mind, we now turn to the second group of passages on Mahler, which were written later, and more than a decade apart from one another. This group consists of a short passage written in code in 1937 (Wittgenstein 2000, MS 120, 72v) and a long passage from 1948 (Wittgenstein 1998, 76-77).

These passages continue the thought that Mahler's art is inauthentic, and relate it to the familiar distinction between talent and genius. However, Wittgenstein's main charge against Mahler was that he was not courageous enough (hence he merely shows talent, albeit great talent):

Whoever is unwilling to know himself is writing a kind of deceit. Whoever is unwilling to plunge into himself, because it is too painful, naturally remains with his writing on the surface. (Whoever wants only the next best thing, can achieve only the surrogate of a good thing.) (2000, MS 120, 72v. My translation.)

Bearing in mind, as we have seen, that Wittgenstein did not adhere to Schenker's call for an actual U-turn in composition practice, Wittgenstein's frustration at Mahler's weakness appears to stem from the understanding that this prodigious composer ultimately fell short of creating good modern music. In this sense, Mahler serves as a perfect example that justified Wittgenstein's apprehensions, expressed in *GBV*, concerning the prospect of good modern music: here was a prodigious artist who was still trying to create great art at a time when that might no longer be possible. In Wittgenstein's view, it would seem, the chances that others might succeed where Mahler failed were slim.

In the 1937 passage we get another idea about the kind of transgression, which Mahler's purportedly inauthentic music embodies: it presents itself as authentic, that is, as a genuine

Guter – The Good, the Bad, and the Vacuous

manifestation of its time. The immediate charge of self-deception leads to a pronouncement of an acute problem: the inability to distinguish what is genuine ('valuable') and what is false ('worthless'). This problem, which (Wittgenstein fears) afflicts his own thinking and writing as well, pertains to the cultural presuppositions for making such a distinction in the first place. As Wittgenstein clearly describes in the 1948 passage, this is a problem of incommensurability, which he already introduced in *GBV* in 1931:

If today's circumstances are really so different, from what they once were, that you cannot compare your work with earlier works in respect of its genre, then you equally cannot compare its value with that of the other work. (1998, 77)

Ultimately, the afterimage of good modern music arises due to our inability to tell, as Lurie puts it, "whether the spiritual progression of our culture is still continuing (and it is us who are being left behind), or whether the culture has disappeared (and we are the only ones left to notice it)" (2012, 150).

In sum, Mahler exemplified a genuine philosophical problem for Wittgenstein. From a musical perspective, with regards to Wittgenstein's distinction between the three kinds of modern music, Mahler's music clearly did not belong to the category of 'vacuous modern music'. It also did not simply belong to the category of 'bad modern music' together with Richard Strauss and his ilk.²⁰ For Wittgenstein, Mahler was a limiting case in the history of Western music. "You would need to know a good deal about music, its history and development, to understand him", he said (Rhees 1984, 71). From the perspective of philosophical autobiography, the Mahler conundrum was indicative of Wittgenstein's grappling with his own predicament as a philosopher. Interestingly, the problem of 'good modern music' and the problem of philosophizing in the time of civilization were one and the same in Wittgenstein's mind.

VII. The music of the future

An intriguing supplement to our discussion of Wittgenstein's problematic notion of good modern music is found in his remark on the music of the future in yet another curious diary entry from October 4, 1930, written only a few months before *GBV*:

I shouldn't be surprised if the music of the future were in unison [*einstimmig*]. Or is that only because I cannot clearly imagine several voices? Anyway, I can't imagine that the old large forms (string quartet, symphony, oratorio, etc.) will be able to play any role at all. If something comes it will have to be—I think—simple, transparent. In a certain sense, naked. Or will this apply only to a certain race, only to one kind of music (?) (2003, 49)

This terse passage invites careful consideration. It should be noted right at the outset that, for Wittgenstein, the music of the future is patently *not* modern music, *not* music of the present day, and the idea strongly envisions the beginning of a new cultural epoch (cf. Wittgenstein 1998, 73).²¹ The influence of Spengler's *Decline of the West* is unmistakable. For Spengler, the future always transcends the current epoch and it is always marked by a return to the simplest, most basic expression of life. Wittgenstein's suggestion that the music of the future might not continue from currently predominant, culturally entrenched musical formats, which embody a complexity of voices, can be related to various passages in Spengler, among them the following one: "Imitation stands nearest to life and direction and therefore begins with melody, while the symbolism of counterpoint belongs to extension and through polyphony signifies infinite space" (1939, 229, vol. 1). Wittgenstein's suggestion reflects also Spengler's conviction that any belated return to the simplest forms of expression is bound to reveal also their limitations.

As we have seen, Wittgenstein accepted that 'old large forms' have exhausted their resources, either by way of a hollow harking back to classicism (vacuous modern music) or by

means of a falsely understood freedom that sought to abstract compositional procedures from the human preconditions of musical intelligibility (bad modern music). Polyphony is inherent to Western culture and the fate of the former is emblematic of the fate of the latter.

However Wittgenstein's reference to monophony here, rather than to melody (as in Spengler), is not accidental. Wittgenstein envisioned that a return to musical meaningfulness would take the form of monophony, or music in unison. Monophony, as distinguished from either polyphony or heterophony, simply means music for a single voice or part.²² An obvious example of such unbounded musical movement is plainchant, or Gregorian chant, which is also the standard reference for monophony. The intellectual context of Wittgenstein's remark on the music of the future strongly suggests that such a pre-tonal monophony is precisely what he had in mind. In fact, Wittgenstein had a continuous interest in the problem of understanding church modes or Gregorian modes (*Kirchtonarten*) (Wittgenstein 1975, 281 par. 224; 1953, 144 par. 535; 1980, 118 par. 639). For Wittgenstein, the inflections from a reciting tone that correspond to the actual verbalization or vocalization of the text in a plainchant, epitomize the "significant irregularity", which is the hallmark of "phenomena akin to language in music" (1998, 40; cf. 1967b, 29 par. 161).

Moreover, by referring to something like pre-tonal monophony as the music of the future, Wittgenstein may have echoed a broad intellectual concern regarding the putative origins of music, which had become widespread in central Europe and also in England since the turn of the twentieth century (Rehding 2000). Schenker himself wrote and lectured in Vienna in the late 1890s about the origins of music, that is, from its spontaneous expressions by primitive peoples, its subsequent evolution through the cultivation of singing for its own sake, and the development of musical imagination (Cook 2007, 33-38). It is impossible to determine whether this issue ever came up

during Wittgenstein's conversations with Felix Salzer; a more likely assumption is that Wittgenstein had been exposed to these ideas during his stint as a researcher in Charles Myers's laboratory of experimental psychology in Cambridge, in 1912-1913, through his acquaintance with Myers's own work on primitive music and the origins of music (Myers 1905; 1913). Either way, later on Wittgenstein actually employed this conjecture regarding the origins of music: "Music has developed from singing, it is a kind of prolongation of language, and that is important because it shows how language trails off into what no longer would be called language" (Wittgenstein and Weismann 2003, 395).

There is a historical link between the discourse concerning the origins of music and the critique of modern music, which may be related to Wittgenstein's focus on monophony as the music of the future. As Alexander Rehding observed, the search for the origins of music in the early twentieth century was not merely of archaeological interest; it became instrumental in defining the tradition of tonal music as the subject matter of musicology, not coincidentally, at a time when this tradition was increasingly perceived to be under threat from contemporary composition (Rehding 2000, 371-380).

These considerations ultimately suggest that in Wittgenstein's 1930 remark on the music of the future we already find an ellipsis of his much later view of musical meaning as an internal relation that binds together musical gesture and the whole range of our language games (Wittgenstein 1998, 59-60). For the later Wittgenstein, as Garry Hagberg writes, "meaning something in music, like intending something musically or willing something musically, takes place within the experiential preconditions of their possibility" (Hagberg 2011, 401).

Considering the trajectory of Wittgenstein's thinking about music, from 1930 until his death in 1951, the peculiar use of the metaphors of transparency and nakedness in his remark on the

music of the future can be interpreted in terms of his increasing emphasis on the idea (found also in *GBV*) that music is physiognomic, intransitively transparent to human life, to “the preconditions, and the lived, embodied realities, of musical intelligibility” (Hagberg 2011, 402). A musical gesture is transparent in the sense that it is already given to us with a familiar physiognomy, already internally related to our world of thoughts and feelings. And so we find in

Wittgenstein’s much later writings the need to make sense of the conviction that “understanding music is a manifestation of human life” (1998, 80; cf. 1953, 143 par. 527); that it is a measuring rod by which a culture is to be gauged, enabled by our capacity to make increasingly nuanced comparisons between multiform human practices, as we chart the unexpected topography of the resemblances that give unity to the ways of life of a culture.

Yet perhaps the most striking feature of Wittgenstein’s remark on the music of the future is its last sentence, which brackets the entire train of thoughts by a second-thought, or an afterthought, concerning a yet unpronounced possibility of a music “of a *totally* different sort” (Wittgenstein 1998, 17). The ideational ellipsis, thus circumscribed, is called upon by

Wittgenstein’s final parenthetical question mark to answer its true calling. Hence I conclude that Wittgenstein’s later philosophy of music can be seen as a full-fledged grammatical investigation, carried out in light of the *Urbild* (in the regulative, non-dogmatic sense), which enabled him to consider not only the maladies of modern music, but also, however gingerly, their philosophically uncanny afterimage: the very thought of a genuine good modern music.

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Guter – The Good, the Bad, and the Vacuous

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¹ The standard print edition (Wittgenstein 2003) is a bilingual edition. I present here my own translation of

this diary entry, which, I believe, preserves some crucial semiotic ambiguities in Wittgenstein’s original German better than Klagge and Nordmann’s otherwise excellent translation. I am indebted to Nimrod Reitman for his assistance in translating this diary entry and for his thoughtful clarifications, which informed my discussion in this section.

² The source for this yet unpublished material is Cambridge University Library, Department of Manuscripts and University Archives, George Edward Moore: Correspondence and Papers, MS Add.8875, 10.7.9 p. 31. Lecture 6a, May 22, 1933. ³ For Wittgenstein, understanding is intransitive, if what I understand (in a picture or in a melody) cannot

be translated into a different expression. In that sense, it is autonomous. For Wittgenstein, understanding a melody is a prime example of intransitive understanding.

⁴ For a comprehensive description of Wittgenstein’s view concerning this loss, see Lurie 2012, 125-134.

⁵ This is where my translation differs most substantially from Klagge and Nordmann’s. Klagge and Nordmann translated the word *blödsinnig* as ‘stupid’. While *Blödigkeit* or *Blödheit* is indeed a kind of stupidity, it is more a matter of the intimidation of the mind; diffidence, which consists in

Guter – The Good, the Bad, and the Vacuous

shortsightedness. The word ‘timid’ captures this crucial aspect. Klagge and Nordmann also mistakenly interpreted the sentence as if the quality of timidity belongs to the composer, rather than to his vacuous music.

⁶ Labor was a rather minor turn-of-the-century conservative composer, who was a protégé of the

Wittgenstein family. For an extensive study of Josef Labor and the Wittgenstein family, see Alber 2000. ⁷

Wittgenstein’s insertion of the word ‘good’ in the third sentence in *GBV* is ambiguous. It

reflects back to

the characterization of ‘the music of the past’ in the previous sentences, but it may also anticipate Wittgenstein’s lenient attitude to the vacuous modern music of Josef Labor at the conclusion of this diary entry. Still it clearly does not render Labor’s music as good modern music in the sense of being adequate to its time. In any case, both the notion of good modern music, in the sense which I explore in this study, and Labor’s music, seemed absurd to

Wittgenstein, but in two very different senses.

⁸ This was later reported by Carl Schachter, who was Salzer’s student (Koslovsky 2009, 354, fn. 494). I

thank Bryan Parkhurst for this reference.

⁹ For a detailed comparison between the ideas of Spengler and Schenker, see Almén 1996.

¹⁰ Consider Schenker’s abrasive reaction to Arnold Schoenberg’s 12-tone music: “Schoenberg produces a

homunculus in music; it is a machine” (Snarrenberg 1997, 89).

¹¹ It is instructive to observe here the striking similarity between this passage and Wittgenstein’s 1930

remark on the greatness of music (Wittgenstein 1998, 11). Moreover, Wittgenstein inserted the word *Vordergrund* (foreground), a familiar technical term in Schenker’s theory, instead of the word *Oberfläche* (surface), which he wrote originally. This might be an immediate result of Wittgenstein’s exchanges with Felix Salzer.

¹² Schenker famously dedicated his monograph on Beethoven’s ninth symphony to Brahms, “The last

Guter – The Good, the Bad, and the Vacuous

master of German musical art” (Schenker 1969). Machine metaphors for modern music are familiar in Schenker’s writings; see for example endnote 10 above.

¹³ Hagberg argues that in the context of the debate between Schenker and Arnold Schoenberg concerning

non-chordal notes, Wittgenstein (of the *Philosophical Investigations*) should have aligned with Schoenberg. I see this differently (Guter 2011, 140-152).

¹⁴ References to the *Nachlass* are by MS or TS number according to Georg Henrik von

Wright’s catalogue followed

by page number.

¹⁵ According to Nicholas Cook, “the fundamental structure [*Ursatz*] is an abstraction far removed from the

listener’s experience of any given piece – especially since each form of the fundamental structure is shared between many thousands of different tonal pieces. In fact the fundamental structure is analytically meaningless in itself ...” (1994, 41).

¹⁶ The source for this yet unpublished material is Cambridge University Library, Department

of

Manuscripts and University Archives, George Edward Moore: Correspondence and Papers, MS Add.8875, 10.7.9 p. 33. Lecture 6a, May 22, 1933.

¹⁷ Wittgenstein reiterates Schenker’s *Bassbrechung* (bass arpeggiation)—the I-V-I that underpins the *Uralinie* as part of the *Ursatz* in Schenkerian analysis, including any elaborations of this pattern. It is also important to underscore Wittgenstein’s reference, quite unusual in this context, to Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina (1525– 1594), whose music is modal rather than tonal, preceding the ‘common practice’ era. This in itself lends Wittgenstein’s reference a Schenkerian bias, perhaps an immediate result of Wittgenstein’s exchanges with Felix Salzer around that time. I am indebted to Inbal Guter for this elucidation.

¹⁸

In this context Wittgenstein is using the verb “overlook” as a literal translation of the German verb “übersehen”, which is most often translated as “survey” or “overview”. Wittgenstein’s use of “overlook” here should therefore be understood to mean “gain a synoptic view”.

¹⁹ For instance, the diary entry on Mahler (Wittgenstein 2003, 93) is heavily edited. Wittgenstein seems to

Guter – The Good, the Bad, and the Vacuous

have fluctuated between such terms as “harmonic relations” and “harmonic progressions” (opting for the latter eventually). His own metaphoric term, “ancestral mother” (*Stammutter*), is a place holder for Schenker’s complex terminology for describing primary musical phenomena.

²⁰ Béla Szabados insists that in Wittgenstein’s judgment, Mahler’s music was invariably bad because Mahler was not ‘incorruptible’ (Szabados 2007). Szabados’ reading of the 1948 passage (Wittgenstein 2000, MS 136, 110a-111a) is slanted, I believe, partly because he did not notice that the actual appearance of the phrase “incorruptibility is everything!” on the manuscript facsimile clearly shows that it is a later addition, not part of the original flow of the paragraph. Also in referring to the 1937 passage (MS 120, 72r), Szabados omitted the last two crucial sentences, which are part of the coded paragraph in the original manuscript.

²¹ The phrase ‘the music of the future’ carried a great deal of cultural baggage in late-Romantic AustroGerman culture. The *locus classicus* for this phrase is Richard Wagner’s essay by the same name (Wagner 1894). We may assume that Wittgenstein’s choice of words here was not accidental, and in the context of the ideas presented in this study, even somewhat ironic.

²² The term monophony is not synonymous with an unaccompanied melody. A melody specifically exemplifies musical movement that is set within internal musical boundaries: we hear that it begins, that it ends, and that it moves from its beginning toward its end. In tonal music, this has largely —albeit not exclusively— to do with harmony. However, a monophony can be melodious without having a melody.