

THE BEST PICTURE [Das Beste Bild] by Kopchyonaya Sel'dy. (1972)

The authorized translation from the original Czech and German is by Ya. Ya. Nikotyn Gorodishko and G. E. H. Lahitāwicklāmprārināh.

THE CAST (in order of utterance) :

TELEVISION ANNOUNCER.....Palmyr Focus, III
MORITZ SCHLICK.....Adolf Axim-Beyin
NELLBÖCK.....Götz Schreck
LUDWIG WITGENSTEIN.....Urbaxter Elwicker
DOKTOR INTERLOCUTOR.....Morgan Diwelt
DELIVERY BOY.....Florian Rooney
RUDOLF CARNAP.....Arno Ehrenhefticq
KURT GÖDEL.....Fong Tu-San
the use of "OTTO NEURATH".....Janos Hunyadi
META.....Yerba Queck
the voice of MAX PLANCK.....Alexandre Morgulyov
SIGMUND FREUD.....Emil Boring
the mention of ERNST MACH.....Anton Regelmässig
FRAU DOKTOR DOKTORPRAU.....Zephyre de Zipfzac

Scene 1 takes place in the studios of WIEN-TV.

Scene 2 takes place in the office of Ludwig Wittgenstein.

Scene 3 takes place in the Klinik of Sigmund Freud.

THE BEST PICTURE.

Scene 1: The television studios of WIEN-TV, educational television. Professor Moritz Schlick is seated behind a table, preparing to do a commercial for "ERSATZ" aspirin. On the table is a drawing of a human head screaming, with arrows pointing to the mouth and the center of the brain. To the left of the table is a large aspirin-bottle labeled "ERSATZ ASPIRIN - 100,000,000 Tablet Inflation Size". An announcer steps out.

ANNOUNCER: ERSATZ-Headache Number 491. (The announcer exits.)

SCHLICK: Hi, there. My name is Moritz Schlick. I'm a professor of philosophy at the University of Vienna. You know, we philosophers do a lot of thinking...thinking about pain. And all that thinking can give you a walloping headache. When I have a headache...that is to say, when I believe that I have a headache...one might prefer to say, when it is the case that I can be said to be acting in a manner consistent with the conjecture that I actually have a headache....Well, you know what I mean, don't you? That's the time I reach for ERSATZ, the aspirin of positivists. Two ERSATZ tablets in a glass of whipped cream will have you feeling like a superman in no time. And that's because ERSATZ contains the secret ingredient CRITERION, the most powerful antiseptic known to epistemologists.

(Wellböck)
BOTTLE: Professor Schlick!

SCHLICK: ERSATZ goes beyond mere pain-behaviour...which is, as everyone knows, only an outward manifestation of an inward process...to the pain itself, where it really counts. You can see why here in this diagram.

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[As Schlick is speaking and pointing to the drawing, the lid of the bottle unscrews and rises, attached to a periscope.]

BOTTLE: Professor Schlick!

SCHLICK: What the...? Yes? It's a talking bottle.

BOTTLE: Professor Schlick, I do this out of jealousy and revenge!

[A small door in the label opens (leaving the fragment "ASP"), and a hand with a gun comes out and shoots Schlick twice. He falls on the table; then as he tries to raise himself, the bottle escapes. Schlick falls to the floor.]

SCHLICK: Ohhhhhh!...Fuck!

[Schlick dies. The announcer rushes out.]

ANNOUNCER: Quick, Bruno, the jingle! (The announcer exits.)

CHORUS: (offstage) Fear and Trembling, Angst and Dread.
ERSATZ, ERSATZ knocks 'em dead. ERSATZ.

[Blackout.]

Scene 2: Dramatic music.

The voice of Wittgenstein is heard.

WITTGENSTEIN: My name is Ludwig Wittgenstein, private investigator. I remember the case of the Posthumous Positivist very well; it was one of the strangest cases Doctor Interlocutor and I ever tackled. We were sitting in the office one morning, talking as we often did...

[The lights come up to reveal the offices of Wittgenstein. He is seated on a chair, with Doctor Interlocutor on his knee, in the manner of a ventriloquist's dummy.]

INTERLOCUTOR: There are certain things in the world that one would wish to say are beautiful, while there are others that are only pretty.

WITTGENSTEIN: And some that might be said to be both.

INTERLOCUTOR: What? How could something be both beautiful and pretty, at the same time?

WITTGENSTEIN: Well, a face might appear beautiful to one person and pretty to someone else.

INTERLOCUTOR: Then, one of them is wrong! How could a face be both beautiful and merely pretty?

WITTGENSTEIN: Merely pretty? I didn't say "merely pretty". "Merely" in what sense?

INTERLOCUTOR: You're not trying to tell me that being pretty isn't something less than being beautiful!

WITTGENSTEIN: Less? But are they even the same sort of thing? What would it mean to say that one is correct in calling a face beautiful?...What would it mean to call a face beautiful, and to be wrong?

INTERLOCUTOR: I give up, Socrates. You tell me.

WITTGENSTEIN: Isn't it curious that while we often say of a face that it is pretty, we rarely say it of a body? A pretty body? A beautiful body!

INTERLOCUTOR: I'll tell you what I really think...that in all the world ...there might not exist so much as one beautiful thing... one truly beautiful thing...only some pretty ones...toys....

[There is a knock at the door. As Gödel and Carnap enter, Doctor Interlocutor gets off Wittgenstein's knee and sits in another chair, and starts to read a book. Just as Gödel is about to speak, a delivery-boy rushes past him with two large packages.]

DELIVERY-BOY: You ordered the world model?

WITTGENSTEIN: I don't think so.

DELIVERY-BOY: Then you must be the guy who wanted the two pictures framed. That'll be three hundred thousand marks, please.

WITTGENSTEIN: Tell me, would ^{you} accept tokens in place of marks?

DELIVERY-BOY: Huh?

INTERLOCUTOR: Watch out, he can be very tricky.

DELIVERY-BOY: Strictly cash, mister.

WITTGENSTEIN: Very well.

[Wittgenstein ^{picks up} ~~receives~~ an enormous bill.]

WITTGENSTEIN: I'm sorry I don't have anything smaller. Oh, well, keep the change.

[When he has been paid, the delivery-boy hands over the larger package and leaves. Wittgenstein unwraps it, revealing a portrait of the duck-rabbit, which he tries in various spots on the wall.]

WITTGENSTEIN: Now then, excuse me, gentlemen, for the delay. You're here, I take it, about the unfortunate shooting of Moritz Schlick.

CARNAP: (startled) But how could you know?

GÖDEL: (to Carnap) Rudi, I don't like it. Let's go.

WITTGENSTEIN: I assume I have the honor of addressing two distinguished members of the Philosophy Faculty of the University of Vienna. Professors Carnap and Gödel, if I am not mistaken.

CARNAP: Positively amazing!

GÖDEL: Impossible! How could you know?

WITTGENSTEIN: Elementary, my dear Gödel. That tell-tale trace of chalk-dust on your sleeves -- Marillenknoedel No. 3 -- found in only two places in Continental Europe: at the bottom of lake Balaton, a hypothetical water body in Western Hungary, and...in the Historical Room of Schloss Laxenburg, where the Vienna Circle meets each week. And from Dr. Carnap's use of the word "positively", the ambiguity was resolved! And now, gentlemen, about the shooting...

CARNAP: Hey, pick a number between zero and one.

WITTGENSTEIN: .3

CARNAP: You're not supposed to tell me. (to Doctor Interlocutor)
You pick one.

INTERLOCUTOR: Okay.

CARNAP: Got it?

INTERLOCUTOR: Yep.

CARNAP: The square-root of three divided by two pi.

INTERLOCUTOR: That's right! How did you...?

CARNAP: It's a nice trick, isn't it. You want to learn how to
do it?

WITTGENSTEIN: Gentlemen...the shooting?

GÖDEL: The murder! The murder!

CARNAP: Kurt believes it to be part of a larger schema...

GÖDEL: Believe nothing! I know! Someone, somewhere, is out to
murder positivism itself...by killing off the whole Vienna
Circle.

WITTGENSTEIN: What leads you to this conclusion?

GÖDEL: There have been threats on my life....I received a
package in the mail....

WITTGENSTEIN: Yes? And....What was in it?

GÖDEL: I don't know. I didn't open it. But I have it here, at the end of my rope...here.

[Gödel goes out and returns with a rope, which he pulls until a package flies onto the stage from the wings.]

INTERLOCUTOR: It's all wet! (examining the package)

GÖDEL: I took the precaution of soaking it in a tub for six weeks first, in case it should contain a bomb....

WITTGENSTEIN: Six weeks! When did you receive the package?

GÖDEL: Oh, several years ago. I don't remember exactly.

CARNAP: I do. It was right around the time of the Heisenberg light bulb jokes.

WITTGENSTEIN: Well, then. It should be perfectly safe to open it...

GÖDEL: No, no....It might contain some kind of dangerous animal capable of living for prolonged periods of time under water -- (to the audience) such as that terrible Vampire-Stoat that terrorized Vienna right before the Franco-Prussian War.

WITTGENSTEIN: Still...let's have a look.

GÖDEL: No, no! It isn't safe, I tell you.

CARNAP: I just remembered I promised to help Otto Neurath fix his boat.

GÖDEL: The Sea-Star? It sank in the Danube last Tuesday.

CARNAP: Shhh.

[Gödel and Carnap exit stealthily.]

WITTGENSTEIN: Well, let's see what we have as.

INTERLOCUTOR: Oh, let me unpack it. Hey! It's a drawing, a representation!

WITTGENSTEIN: A clue?

[Doctor Interlocutor takes out a picture of a triangle.]

INTERLOCUTOR: No, a triangle!

WITTGENSTEIN: A triangle? Let me see. A triangle.

[The telephone rings.]

WITTGENSTEIN: Hello.

GÖDEL: (offstage) Wittgenstein?...Gödel here. I just remembered something important.

WITTGENSTEIN: Yes?

GÖDEL: (offstage) There was a woman, a young woman...but Schlick was married....Tsk-tsk-tsk-tsk-tsk.... (He hangs up)

WITTGENSTEIN: Gödel?...He hung up.

INTERLOCUTOR: Why don't you call him back. The Gödel number is on your desk.

WITTGENSTEIN: No, it takes too long to dial. Anyway, he'll call back. He loves to telephone....A woman, he said.

INTERLOCUTOR: A woman! Holy Heidegger, Ludwig! Look! Another picture, on the back of the triangle. I wonder who she could be?

WITTGENSTEIN: I don't know, but I intend to find out. Call the offices of the Neue Freie Presse.

INTERLOCUTOR: Yes.

WITTGENSTEIN: I want to place a personal ad in the classified section.

[Doctor Interlocutor places the call, and hands the telephone to Wittgenstein.]

WITTGENSTEIN: Hello. I'd like to place a notice. Here's the text:
"White Male Philosopher, 47, seeks swinging thinker, 18 - 22, for games, a case of life and death".

[Wittgenstein hangs up, and there is a knock at the door. Meta enters carrying a tape-recorder.]

META: I'm calling about your ad. I'm in fear.

WITTGENSTEIN: Won't you come in. What did you say your name was, again?

META: I didn't...it's Meta...I'm a...student.

WITTGENSTEIN: Ah! (suddenly turning on her) What do you know about the murder of Moritz Schlick?

META: (chewing gum) Well...he was one of my regular...professors, as it were.

WITTGENSTEIN: As it were?

META: Yes, he's dead. I used to go talk with him about Aristotle and stuff like that.

WITTGENSTEIN: So....

META: Well, I always carry a tape-recorder with me, so that I won't forget anything my professors might say....Schlick was a genius, you know. A genius!

WITTGENSTEIN: That's nothing here. Go on.

META: Well, one night...here listen.

[Meta starts the tape recorder. The following dialogue is on tape.]

SCHLICK: Now, where were we? Meta, you were asking me about physical causation...Meta, physical causation?

META: Yes, I just don't understand what the difference between a cause and an effect is.

SCHLICK: Well, let me try to help you....Hume gives three conditions for....Look, I'll be the cause and you be the effect. We can act it out, okay?

META: (shyly) Okay.

SCHLICK: Now, first there must be temporal precedence of cause over effect. Now, I'm older than you, and perhaps a little more experienced in the ways of the world...so that condition is satisfied...satisfied, yes. Secondly, there must be spatial contiguity....Why don't you move a little closer, my little noodle....There, now, just...

META: Professor, Schlick, what are you doing?

SCHLICK: Nothing, nothing, I assure you. Just relax and lie back.

META: Oh!

SCHLICK: And the third condition...there must be between the cause and the effect...a constant conjunction!!!

SCHLICK and META: Oh! Ah! etc.

[These sounds continue, followed by a loud crash. The tape-recorder falls silent.]

WITTGENSTEIN: What happened then?

META: You wouldn't believe it!

WITTGENSTEIN: Never mind, tell me anyway.

META: Well, this kook...dressed up like a...ready for this...like a hypodermic needle, comes in and tries to shoot the place up.

WITTGENSTEIN:

Hor-ri-ble! And then....

META:

Well, I ran out...and the last thing I saw was this guy making for the professor like he was trying to kill him or something. I don't know what happened after that.

WITTGENSTEIN: Can you describe him more definitely?

META:

Well, he had on a shirt with horizontal stripes. They were graduated — one liter, two liters, you know, like that — and there was this needle on his head.

WITTGENSTEIN: Are you absolutely sure you weren't hallucinating, and thought that the professor had become...

META:

No, no. I was perfectly conscious the whole time.

WITTGENSTEIN: An hypodermic needle, ha? Most interesting! Do you mind if I borrow this tape for a while?

META:

No, go ahead. Just do something...I'm so afraid of him. I took a real chance coming here, you know.

WITTGENSTEIN: Well, Miss, sometimes it pays to gamble with truth.

META:

You wanna bet? I wouldn't give you two cents for my chances if he ever found me.

WITTGENSTEIN: You should try not to be so subjective in your beliefs.

META: He's a real kook, I tell you. Crazy, you know what I mean?

WITTGENSTEIN: Crazy, yes...crazy. Well, thank you for coming.
Good afternoon.

[Meta exits.]

WITTGENSTEIN: Dr. Interlocutor, call the V.C. headquarters. Tell them to meet us in half an hour at 716 Sackgasse.

INTERLOCUTOR: 716 Sackgasse? What's that?

WITTGENSTEIN: The psycho-erotische, -neurotische, und -psychotische Klinik und Hochschule...of Doktor Sigmund Freud, the one man in Vienna who can help us solve this terrible crime. Let's go.

INTERLOCUTOR: I can't.

WITTGENSTEIN: Why not?

INTERLOCUTOR: (holding up the telephone) I waiting for Gödel.

ene 3: [The lights go out as music begins. As soon as the scene change is ready, the lights fade in on Freud's Klinik. Freud is listening to the radio and reading a magazine with a foldout.]

RADIO: (offstage) This is Radio Berlin. We interrupt our regular broadcast of the Max Planck hour to bring you a message of national importance: * Ladies and Gentlemen, the Minister for Physics, Doktor Max Planck.

* Meine Damen und Herren, Mesdames et Messieurs, ...

PLANCK: (offstage) What really matters is that we recognize a fixed goal...this goal is not the complete adaptation of our ideas to our impressions, but the complete liberation of the physical world-picture from the individuality of the creative mind! This...

[Freud turns the radio off.]

FREUD: This rational realism! Where will it lead? Hah, if Mach were still alive....

[There is a knocking at the door. Wittgenstein, Dr. Interlocutor, and the Vienna Circle enter.]

FREUD: Come in.

WITTGENSTEIN: Doktor Freud?

FREUD: Ja. Won't you have a seat? (seeing all of them) Oh, I'm afraid there simply isn't room in here for all of you to lie down at once...perhaps we can begin with you, my dear. (to Dr. Interlocutor) The others can wait outside.

WITTGENSTEIN: No, Dr. Freud. We're not here for therapy. I represent these gentlemen...the Vienna Circle. (They dance around.) I'm investigating the murder of their founder, Moritz Schlick.

CARNAP: Pick a number between zero and one.

FREUD: Zero!

WITTGENSTEIN: Not now. That's enough. As I was saying...

FREUD: Ja?

WITTGENSTEIN: Dr. Freud, I'm looking for a murderer; and it's possible that he is currently here in the Klinik as one of your patients.

FREUD: Ja?

WITTGENSTEIN: Do you have anyone here who ^{is obsessed with} ~~believes himself to be an~~ hypodermic needle?

FREUD: I do not permit the use of drugs on the premises.

WITTGENSTEIN: You misunderstand...I meant that this person is deluded and thinks himself to be an hypodermic needle...or even an aspirin.

FREUD: An aspirin! The man must be crazy!

WITTGENSTEIN: Exactly!

FREUD: No, there's no one here like that.

WITTGENSTEIN: Well, perhaps his pain behavior has manifested a new aspect, has taken on a new form...perhaps a laxative, or a nasal decongestant....

FREUD: Wait! There is a patient here who behaves as if he were a giant carbonating tablet...possessing a morbid fear of water, panic at the thought of indigestion, of his being consumed, of *dissolving* at any moment...

WITTGENSTEIN: It sounds as if he's our man. Would it be possible for me to see this patient, Doktor Freud?

FREUD: Well...highly irregular...and...

WITTGENSTEIN: But in the interest of science?

FREUD: In the interest of science? Yes...very well. But I warn you, let me handle the patient. (speaking into an intercom) Frau Doktor Doktorfrau? Would you be so kind as to fetch Patient Seltzer, and bring...her...to my office. (to Wittgenstein) Actually, it's a he, but he thinks he's a she...sometimes even an it!

WITTGENSTEIN: That's life.

[Nellböck, dressed up to look like a large Alka-Seltzer with arms and legs, is brought in by the alienist. He appears dazed.]

FREUD: Bring her over here. [to Nellböck] Sit down. [to the Vienna Circle] Permit me to introduce my assistant, Frau Professordoktor Doktorprofessorfrau. [Everyone nods.]

WITTGENSTEIN: (confronting Nellböck) Nellböck!..(quietly) was that a wince?

INTERLOCUTOR: It's hard to tell.

FREUD: (Nellböck winces, but says nothing) Please, please. He does not know that he is any Nellböck; he believes himself to be Elke Seltzer. If we are to get anywhere, we must work backwards from his present identity to the stage at which the murder occurred, and then even further back if we are to find the motivation.

FREUD: (to Nellböck) Now then, Elke. When we were speaking last time, you were telling me about your experiences in the bathtub. (to Wittgenstein and the others) Gentlemen, he is supremely hydrophobic, which I interpret as the consequence of a traumatic incident in the...

GÖDEL: Can't you proceed any faster? How long is it going to take to get back to the time of the murder?

FREUD: Why, several years, I imagine. It's a substantial trauma, to shoot a philosopher. We must be patient, and go slowly.

WITTGENSTEIN: Several years! Why that's absurd!

GÖDEL: I haven't got several years.

INTERLOCUTOR: Is there nothing you can do to speed things up?

ALIENIST: Professor Doktor Freud, if I may suggest...

FREUD: Ja, Frau-Professor Doktor Magister: Ludi Ludimagister-Doktorprofessorfrau?

ALIENIST: Hýpnosis.

FREUD: Hýpnosis? Out of the question. I haven't indulged in hýpnosis in years.

ALIENIST: Still, it's faster.

FREUD: Very well. If you would proceed, my dear...Doktor.

[The Alienist hypnotizes Nellböck with melodramatic gestures.]

FREUD: You know, when this patient came into my care, he was suffering from a mild neurosis, which as you know cannot really be treated. But we were able to induce in its place an acute psychosis, which of course we can treat -- over a long period of time, and at enormous expense to the patient.

ALIENIST: The patient is prepared, ~~for further analysis~~ Doktor.

FREUD: Thank you, Frau Doktor Professor Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, und so weiter. Eh? (to Nellböck) All right, Elke. Can you hear me?

NELLBÖCK: Yes, Doktor.

FREUD: Elke, I want you to think back to a time when you were not what you are today.

NELLBÖCK: Yes, Doktor.

FREUD: What is your name?

NELLBÖCK: E...Er...ERSATZ!

FREUD: Ja!

WITTGENSTEIN: It's working! Ask him about...

FREUD: Sha! Remember the terms. Now ~~think back~~ think back further, before you were an Ersatz.

NELLBÖCK: Yes, Doktor.

FREUD: Now, tell me your name once more. Your name.

NELLBÖCK: Nellböck.

FREUD: Ja.

WITTGENSTEIN: That's it!

FREUD: Shhh. Nellböck, tell me your first name.

NELLBÖCK: Professor!

FREUD: Transference. Describe to me where you are.

NELLBÖCK: I am sitting in a room filled with books and people. It is a large room, but rough -- it is full of smoke! There is a table and a picture of a man. I ought to know who he is, but I don't know. Now, someone begins to speak...but I cannot understand what he is saying.

FREUD: You are in the seminar room of the philosophy department.

NELLBÖCK: Yes! I am attending a colloquium, but I cannot concentrate...I keep thinking about...metaphysics...

FREUD: Metaphysics?

NELLBÖCK: Yes...No! About Meta, the girl in Schlick's lecture-course.

FREUD: And what are you thinking about her?

NELLBÖCK: I am thinking that I wish she would look at me...but all she ever thinks about is Professor Schlick...she never looks at me or talks to me...only to him...he is the Professor while I am only a lowly assistant...

FREUD: And how does this make you feel about Professor Schlick?

NELLBÖCK: I regard Professor Schlick with the greatest respect and warmth. He is my teacher. He taught me...philosophy.

FREUD: You do not feel anger at him about Meta?

NELLBÖCK: No! He is my teacher. He taught me how to make certain moves...

FREUD: (excitedly) Nellböck! You do not feel hatred and frustration at this situation? and at Schlick for causing it?

NELLBÖCK: No. No!...Yes! I feel full of jealousy and revenge!...

FREUD: Ja!

WITTGENSTEIN: Dr. Freud.... (coming forward) One catches cold, but not hot. One catches a meaning, but not a word of what was said. And if one is naughty, one catches IT! And, and...one catches the murderer.... (seizing Nellböck) Nellböck, "jealousy and revenge", Nellböck...you killed Moritz Schlick.

[Everyone gathers around as Nellböck wakes up.]

NELLBÖCK: What? No, no! (Nellböck runs out.)

GÖDEL: Stop him! Stop him! Murderer!

[The Alienist runs out.]

FREUD: He won't get far...that door leads only to the pool...

WITTGENSTEIN: The pool!

FREUD: Good God! In his present state...hurry, hurry...

[Everyone starts to rush out when a splash is heard, followed by a fizzling sound which finally dies out. Everyone except Nellböck returns to the stage; Wittgenstein and Freud step to the front.]

FREUD: Too late...I'm afraid I was not in time to help him.

WITTGENSTEIN: Well, Doktor. At least we have the satisfaction of knowing the murderer has not gone unpunished.

FREUD: I'm afraid I was not in time....

WITTGENSTEIN: At least we have the satisfaction of knowing the murderer....

FREUD: I'm afraid I was not....

WITTGENSTEIN: At least we have the satisfaction of knowing....

FREUD: I'm afraid I was....

WITTGENSTEIN: At least we have the satisfaction....

FREUD: I'm afraid....

WITTGENSTEIN: Satisfaction....

FREUD: Afráid....

WITTGENSTEIN: Satisfaction....

FREUD: Afráid....

[As the lights fade out and the curtain closes, an offstage voice sings the closing line.]

VOICE: The human body is the best picture of the human soul.

F I N I S

The Best Picture

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