

## Chapter 9

# Rhees, Wittgenstein, and the Swansea School

MARIO VON DER RUHR

### I

In his book *Philosophical Analysis*, which chronicles the development of analytic philosophy between the two World Wars, J. O. Urmson rightly notes that ‘the division of philosophers into schools is always a somewhat artificial matter, since every philosopher worthy of the name will say what he thinks, whether it agrees with the thoughts of his colleagues or no’.<sup>1</sup> In regard to logical positivism, he admits, the term ‘movement’ may not have been entirely misguided, since its advocates did share a set of basic tenets about the nature of philosophy, the conditions of meaningful speech, the futility of metaphysics, etc. The analytic philosophers of his own time, on the other hand, ‘fight shy of the sort of general philosophical pronouncements which could count as basic tenets’, their views and methods revealing at best a certain kind of ‘family resemblance’.<sup>2</sup> Urmson’s observations also hold for the group of philosophers known as the ‘Swansea School’. Unlike, for example, the Vienna Circle, the Marburg School, or the Frankfurt School, whose inquiries were largely focused on scientific method and critical Marxism, the philosophical activities of the Swansea School neither revolved around a particular branch of philosophy, nor were they intended to yield a shared doctrine or commonly accepted ‘solutions’ to particular philosophical issues or puzzles. On the contrary, – and as Cockburn, Hertzberg and Edelman have emphasized in their discussions of Rhees, Winch, and Phillips – the idea of philosophy as a wholly disinterested analysis of impersonal intellectual problems was just as inimical to the Swansea School’s philosophical enterprise as the desire to produce a catalogue of fundamental truths about the relation between language, thought, and world, or to promote a particular *Weltanschauung* or socio-political programme. If talk of a ‘School’ seems nevertheless appropriate, it is because its members invariably wrote and taught in the *spirit* of Wittgenstein’s work, eschewing jargon and obfuscation, distrusting philosophical *theories* and systems modelled on the template of scientific inquiry, expos-

ing idle linguistic wheels and (metaphysical) pseudo-explanations, and investing their clarificatory endeavors with a significance that was both intellectual *and* existential. ‘Work on philosophy,’ as Wittgenstein always insisted, ‘is really more work on oneself. On one’s own conception. On how one sees things. (And what one expects of them.)’,<sup>3</sup> where this *seeing* is, in turn, influenced by one’s culture’s dominant paradigms of inquiry. These paradigms, as Wittgenstein notes in the *Blue Book*, can be seriously distorting, not least in the context of *philosophical* inquiry:

Our craving for generality has another main source: our preoccupation with the method of science. I mean the method of reducing the explanation of natural phenomena to the smallest possible number of primitive natural laws. . . . Philosophers constantly see the method of science before their eyes, and are irresistibly tempted to ask and answer questions in the way science does. This tendency is the real source of metaphysics, and leads the philosopher into complete darkness. I want to say here that it can never be our job to reduce anything to anything, or to explain anything. Philosophy really is ‘purely descriptive’. . . . Instead of ‘craving for generality’ I could also have said ‘the contemptuous attitude towards the particular case’.<sup>4</sup>

I think it would be fair to say that Wittgenstein’s observation on the precarious prestige of scientific methodology and the subtle ways in which it may reinforce a natural ‘craving for generality’, and his requirement that one attend to particulars – whether in an analysis of the relation between language and the world, reflections on epistemological issues, elucidations of moral or aesthetic phenomena, or grammatical expositions of key religious concepts – was shared by all members of the Swansea School.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, the need for attention to ‘the particular case’, so important to Wittgenstein’s own elucidatory task, also explains the School’s concern with *literature* as a distinctive mode of understanding and potential corrective to philosophical confusion, especially in the area of moral phenomenology. One thinks here, for example, of Peter Winch’s fine discussion of Hermann Melville’s *Billy Budd* (in *Ethics & Action*, 1972), Roy Holland’s reflections on Joseph Conrad (in *Against Empiricism*, 1980), İlham Dilman’s interest in Dostoyevsky, (*Raskolnikov’s Rebirth*, 2000), H. O. Mounce’s work on Tolstoy (*Tolstoy on Aesthetics*, 2001), R. W. Beardsmore’s *Art and Morality* (1971), or D. Z. Phillips’s philosophical exploration of contemporary fiction (*From Fantasy to Faith*, 2006). The thought that in so far as literature is able to capture and preserve the irreducible uniqueness of the particular it can also make a useful companion to philosophical analysis, not merely as an illustrative device, but as a separate source of illumi-

nation, is, of course, congruent with Wittgenstein's own reflections on the arts. In *Culture and Value*, for example, he noted: 'People nowadays think scientists are there to instruct them, poets, musicians, etc. to entertain them. That the latter have something to teach them, that never occurs to them.'<sup>6</sup> Recalling Wittgenstein's concern – most notably in the *Tractatus* – with the nature of ethical, aesthetic and religious phenomena, and his rejection of idle chatter about value judgments more generally, it is easy to see why the Swansea School was keen to explore these issues further, and in ways that echoed Wittgenstein's observation about the edifying qualities of art. In spite of their diverse backgrounds and special research interests, and a conception of philosophical inquiry that was irreducible to a simple formula or doctrine, the Swansea School clearly agreed with Wittgenstein about what kinds of issues mattered in philosophy, and how one had to go about tackling them, and it is, above all else, this philosophical kinship that ultimately licenses the description 'Swansea School'. Whether its members would have been happy with the label themselves is, of course, debatable. Reminiscing on his own philosophical training in the early days of Swansea's philosophy department, D. Z. Phillips recalls:

The labels *Swansea School of Philosophy*, or *Swansea Wittgensteinians*, were not given to themselves by Swansea's philosophers. They are labels given by others, sometimes in agreement, sometimes in disagreement, but sometimes in anger and hostility, not least by philosophers who are themselves influenced by Wittgenstein.<sup>7</sup>

Phillips goes on to say that, in the early 1950s, after Winch and Holland had come to Swansea from Oxford, one certainly could not have spoken of a 'school' of any kind, but that this had changed by the mid 1960s: 'By the time my teachers departed, the description 'Swansea School' had arrived, and was even applied to them thereafter, and to İlham Dilman, H. O. Mounce, R. W. Beardsmore and myself, who taught at Swansea for many years, the last until 2001'.<sup>8</sup> Phillips also points out that, contrary to what might have been expected, he did not encounter Wittgenstein through an explicit discussion of his work, but rather 'through *the way* I heard a whole range of topics being discussed.'<sup>9</sup> İlham Dilman, who received much of his formative philosophical training at Cambridge and came to be strongly influenced by John Wisdom there, underwent a similar development. As Chryssi Sidiropoulou notes, when he was asked in 2001 what role Wittgenstein had played in his own life's work, he explained:

I am not a disciple; I have not been his contemporary. But having found my philosophical feet in an environment which he has made possible, and thanks to those who have made his writings public, I have had first-hand contact with his thoughts in these publications. I am greatly indebted to them; I would not be where I am today without them.<sup>10</sup>

Phillips's and Dilman's encounters with Wittgenstein were fairly typical of the way in which the latter's legacy was transmitted to subsequent generations of students – at least outside Swansea, where traditional lectures on Wittgenstein's writings continued to form an integral part of the honours curriculum well into the late 1990s. This indirect approach was particularly true for Winch, who always felt a strong reluctance to teach Wittgenstein formally, and who, even when he was conducting a full raft of undergraduate and graduate seminars at the University of Illinois (Urbana-Champaign), much preferred to invite a small group of interested graduate students, colleagues and friends to his home on Saturday afternoons, to go through *Philosophical Investigations* or *On Certainty* paragraph by paragraph. Not that he wanted to dictate this procedure to others, but *for him* it remained the best way to come to grips with the difficulties of Wittgenstein's work. These extra-curricular discussions were always open-ended and would continue throughout the academic session. Those who, like this author, were privileged to participate, found the meetings invaluable, not least because of the penetrating insights Winch – who, unlike most members of the Swansea School, also had a superb command of German – invariably brought to the readings. Being something of a *connoisseur* of fine coffee, Winch served that, too, though the general atmosphere at his home hardly resembled that of a Viennese coffee house, where people might come and go as they pleased. On the contrary, regular attendance and a serious commitment to the discussion were considered *de rigueur*, partly because of what was required by a sustained and joint effort at understanding, and partly because of Winch's wariness of the philosophical sightseer or *voyeur*, who merely wanted to 'check out the Wittgenstein group' because it sounded intriguing or esoteric. In this regard, Winch's attitude to teaching, and the tone he set for his lectures and seminars, was a lot like Wittgenstein's, who lamented to G. H. von Wright on 9 March 1939:

I'm sorry I caused you the trouble of writing to me. I shall try to explain why the presence of two new people in my class, the other day, greatly disturbed me. – I am, in my classes, doing my utmost to explain a *very* difficult matter to the students who have been attending my classes this term. I know that it is quite

impossible for any one coming in in the middle, or at *the end*, of the term to get an idea of what we really are driving at. In fact he must necessarily get wrong ideas. I hope you will understand this, & if you do you will also understand why being aware of this fact disturbs me a lot when I should be concentrating entirely on my subject. If I could, as many other people can, prepare my lectures in writing & then read them off in front of the class the presence of new people would not disturb me. But as I'm unable to do this & have to think things out afresh while I'm talking I am very easily disturbed.<sup>11</sup>

## II

In his Introduction to *Rush Rhees on Religion and Philosophy*, Dewi Phillips has provided an excellent sketch of Rhees's life and work, and there is no need to reproduce it here in detail.<sup>12</sup> However, a few points are worth emphasizing. One, to which Lars Hertzberg has already drawn attention on a previous occasion,<sup>13</sup> is that it would be a serious mistake to demote Rhees to a philosophical Eckermann, as it were, a mere editor and occasional exegete of his mentor's *oeuvre*, who published little himself and whose impact on the intellectual culture of his time remained largely negligible. While it is true that Rhees – like Wittgenstein – published little during his lifetime, Cockburn's paper confirms yet again just how forceful and independent a thinker he was, in spite of what must have been a (natural) temptation in all of Wittgenstein's students, viz. to passively submit to the genius of their *spiritus rector* and to treat his pronouncements as virtually unassailable. As Phillips reminds us in a special issue of *Philosophical Investigation*, published on the 50th anniversary of Wittgenstein's death:

Rhees came to be critical of certain aspects of Wittgenstein's thought as early as four years after the publication of the *Investigations*, and probably earlier. He thought he had let the analogy between language and games run away with him, but wanted to develop further the important notion of 'a form of life'.<sup>14</sup>

The material published from Rhees's *Nachlass*, especially *Wittgenstein and the Possibility of Discourse*, not only contains sustained discussions of these issues, but reveals that the critical originality of his thought extended well beyond his engagement with Wittgenstein, to cover a broad and impressive range of philosophical topics including Greek philosophy, moral and political philosophy, philosophy of religion,<sup>15</sup> aesthetics, and, equally importantly, the work of the French thinker Simone Weil (1909-1943).<sup>16</sup> Another point to remember about Rhees's intellectual development is that,

when he began to attend Wittgenstein's lectures in Cambridge (1936), he was already a mature, 30-year old graduate student who, having begun his university education at the University of Rochester (USA), completed – with distinction – an M.A. programme in *Mental Philosophy* at Edinburgh, served as Assistant Lecturer at Manchester for four years, spent a year in Innsbruck studying with the Brentano scholar Alfred Kastil, embarked on a Ph.D. programme with G. E. Moore at Cambridge, and worked at *Messrs Deighton, Bell & Co.*'s bookshop<sup>17</sup> – hardly the biography of an uneventful and intellectually impoverished life, or that of the average Cambridge undergraduate. Nor was Rhees the sort of person who would rush to Wittgenstein's seminars right away. According to Ray Monk, 'he had, at first, been put off attending Wittgenstein's lectures by the mannerisms of his students', and only overcame his misgivings in February 1936, though he continued to attend all lectures of the academic session thereafter.<sup>18</sup> While this encounter with Wittgenstein marked the beginning, not just of a deep friendship, but of an intense philosophical conversation that would last until Wittgenstein's death in 1951, it was also rather short: in 1937, Rhees first returned to Manchester as Assistant Lecturer, then worked as a welder in a factory. Wittgenstein was delighted. On 5 April 1940, not long before Rhees took up a temporary post at Swansea, he wrote: 'I like the idea of your doing work in a factory. You'll get better & better I have no doubt, if you can stick.'<sup>19</sup> However, far from getting better at the job, Rhees soon found that welding was not his forte at all, and decided that he'd better leave the factory and do something else. After much internal agonizing, he finally explained the decision to Wittgenstein, on 30 December 1940:

My welding kept on being bad, and I thought (not so stupidly either) that it probably would never develop into anything decent. . . . [S]uch training as I had had was in the academic and pedagogical line. (I was constantly aware that I was a duffer in a machine shop, and that this was partly because I hadn't had an apprenticeship there as a youngster.) It seemed then that I might be more useful if I were in some job in which the training I had got (?) might help. . . . And when Heath wrote offering me this deputy post here, I finally took it; though not right off the bat.<sup>20</sup>

Unfortunately, the appointment did not make Rhees's life more settled. He was now almost forty years old and still only a 'temporary assistant lecturer', the contract terminating in June 1941. In addition, he soon realized that '[the] business about my training making me fitted for this kind of job is plain rubbish', and even began to wonder whether he might not have

given up the welding job too soon.<sup>21</sup> Fortunately for Swansea, Rhees did not return to welding, but his attitude towards academic work remained ambivalent even after A. E. Heath, the Foundation Professor of Philosophy at Swansea, had managed to secure him a permanent position in the Philosophy Department. As Phillips recalls, ‘There were many occasions during his time at Swansea when Rhees worried over whether he should resign his post’, and if he nevertheless stayed on, it was largely thanks to Wittgenstein’s encouragement and support. These were badly needed. In October 1944, for instance, Rhees wrote: ‘I don’t seem to make much headway with my students; and here again it is my own confusion and uncertainty that cause much of the trouble’, though it was also true that ‘these students just don’t read anything; certainly not the sort of things their parents read. They aren’t interested in anything.’<sup>22</sup> Wittgenstein asked him not to despair, to pull himself together: ‘Please go the bloody, rough way! Complain, swear, but go on. The students are stupid but they get something out of it.’<sup>23</sup> Besides, so he assured him later, his own students at Cambridge were not all that different: ‘My class too is very primitive and often when I talk of “tribes” I think the most primitive tribe is right in front of me.’<sup>24</sup> Even so, Rhees’s doubts persisted and became particularly acute in the summer of 1946, when he found himself on the brink of leaving Swansea. He would probably have done so, had Wittgenstein not urged him to think again:

I was glad to hear that they had the sense to offer you an appointment again at Swansea. I wish to God you’d take it!! I don’t know, of course, what your special reasons are for wanting to leave Swansea, but please weigh them damn carefully. I should, for personal reasons, hate you to leave Swansea. Our talks & discussions have done me good. Don’t stupidly throw away an opportunity of doing some good. Your derogatory remarks about your philosophical abilities & success are so much rubbish. You are all right. And I mean just that: nothing more & nothing less. – Philosophical influences much worse than yours & mine are spreading rapidly, & it’s important that you should stay at your job. That your success won’t be brilliant is certain; in fact it will be meagre, it’s bound to be. Please, if you possibly can, resign yourself to it & stay on. – Don’t misunderstand me. I’m not trying to appear wise. I’m just as silly as you are. But that doesn’t make you any less silly.<sup>25</sup>

Wittgenstein's assurances that Rhees was 'all right', that he could 'do some good' if he remained in Swansea, and that there were 'philosophical influences much worse than yours & mine', did not miss their mark. Rhees stayed on and not only taught in Swansea until his retirement in 1966, but remained actively associated with the Philosophy Department until his death in 1989. Wittgenstein, who had first gone up to Swansea in 1942, would continue to visit Rhees there until 1947, no doubt also because he found the intellectual atmosphere at Swansea more congenial than the philosophical *milieu* at Cambridge. In his 1946 letter to Rhees, Wittgenstein does not elaborate on the philosophical influences he thought 'much worse than yours & mine', but we know from Karl Britton, one of his former students and then a philosophy lecturer at Swansea, that he repeatedly singled out *The Mind Association* and *The Aristotelian Society* for special criticism and that, when he learnt of Britton's invitation to the 1947 joint meeting in Cambridge, he felt nothing but contempt. 'Very well, to me it is just as if you had told me that there will be bubonic plague in Cambridge next summer. I am very glad to know and I shall make sure to be in London.'<sup>26</sup> Wittgenstein's annoyance had much to do with B. A. Farrell's recent, two-part discussion in *Mind* (1946) – 'An Appraisal of Therapeutic Positivism'<sup>27</sup> – in which the author refers to 'a certain method of dealing with and of resolving philosophical problems' that originated with Wittgenstein at Cambridge, but whose ramifications remained strangely elusive, because 'for the outsider there exists no official and adequate statement of the Wittgensteinian technique'.<sup>28</sup> It is not hard to see why Wittgenstein was infuriated. The suggestion that he had developed a 'technique', let alone one that could be described as 'therapeutic positivism', was just as absurd as the request for an 'official' statement of this 'technique'. While it was true that he would have rejected all talk of monads, immaterial thinking substances or metaphysical causation, for example, as confused and/or unilluminating, and applauded thinkers like Auguste Comte or Otto Neurath for exposing such pseudo-explanatory constructions, his conception of philosophical inquiry still remained much closer to the spirit of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* or Strawson's project of a 'descriptive metaphysics', than it was to the postulates of 19th or 20th century positivism. Moreover, Wittgenstein was adamant that '[the] philosopher is not a citizen of any community of ideas',<sup>29</sup> and therefore neither a 'realist' nor an 'idealist' as traditionally understood, but a sensitive chronicler and skillful expounder of the subtle and complex ways in which language is tied up with a speaker's *Lebenswelt*. The care and stamina required for this task resem-



bled the vigilance of a tightrope walker engaged in a delicate balancing act: what could one intelligibly *say* about reality, and how could one deepen the readers' understanding of it, too, without falling into a kind of grammatical void? Not surprisingly, the most common misinterpretations of Wittgenstein's – and indeed the Swansea School's – writings rest on the assumption that the philosopher's thoughts must, in the final analysis, be rooted in a general 'position' and thus exemplify *some* philosophical 'ism' or other. Hence the feeling of exasperation among critics of the Wittgensteinian approach to philosophy, not only in the 1940s, but in our own time. The occasions on which D. Z. Phillips, for example, has been asked whether he is a 'realist' or a 'non-realist' about belief in God, are legion, and yet the question continues to be asked with the same obstinacy with which critics persist in branding him a 'Wittgensteinian fideist'. As Phillips himself has observed:

Talk of 'realism' and 'nonrealism', at least has to do with familiar misunderstandings of his [Wittgenstein's] work, whereas the label 'Wittgensteinian Fideism', making a recent comeback despite my textual refutations in *Belief, Change and Forms of Life* (you can't keep a good label down), is simply a scandal in scholarship.<sup>30</sup>

It was in light of such responses, too, that Wittgenstein wondered whether the manuscript of *Philosophical Investigations* should even be published:

Up to a short time ago I had really given up the idea of publishing my work in my lifetime. It used, indeed, to be revived from time to time: mainly because I was obliged to learn that my results (which I had communicated in lectures, typescripts and discussions), variously misunderstood, more or less mangled or watered down, were in circulation.<sup>31</sup>

Reflecting on the reasons for the widespread misunderstanding of Wittgenstein's writings, Rhees once commented: 'I think it is clear that he was asking for more than most readers would be able to give or to do',<sup>32</sup> an observation echoed in Winch's conviction that '[a] fairly small proportion would have read his work at all extensively or carefully'.<sup>33</sup> Even to such a formidable intellect as Rhees, the confrontation with Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, for example, posed a serious challenge. It did not seem to be the kind of work that could be understood without guidance from the author himself. Recalling the peculiar difficulty of the thoughts expressed in it, Rhees writes:

Wittgenstein did go through the *Investigations* with me – some parts of it several times – before it was published. And although such understanding of it as I have has come more since his death, I should have understood less if I had not heard him read it and had him discuss it with me.<sup>34</sup>

While the idiom in which Wittgenstein's thoughts were presented was non-technical and free of jargon, it did not conform to standard philosophical writing, either. But then, so Rhees observes, "[We] cannot say, "It is a pity that Wittgenstein could not have presented his ideas in something more nearly the accepted philosophical style,"" since "[that] would not have been a presentation of his philosophical views."<sup>35</sup> For Wittgenstein, *form* and *content* were just as inseparably connected as they were for a thinker like Nietzsche, who would similarly have scoffed at any attempt to reformulate his pregnant aphorisms as *propositions*, *scholia* or *lemmas* in the style of Spinoza's *Ethics*, or to present them in the form of a neat and tidy architectonic structure *à la* Kant or Hegel. Wittgenstein, too, experienced 'the accepted philosophical style' as a structural corset that could only distort the phenomena under investigation, and hence as something to be overcome – not artificially, with the aid of an abstract symbolism or a specially invented vocabulary, but by remaining firmly rooted in the language of everyday discourse. As Peter Winch has put it:

I think it is clear that in the case of both (early) Plato and Wittgenstein, the relation between the literary presentation and the philosophical content is an 'internal' one. This is more marked in the case of Plato's elenctic dialogues, because of the *dramatic* aspect; different philosophical views as expressions of different forms of life.<sup>36</sup>

Closely connected with this observation is the recognition that the issues in question could not be properly appreciated without a serious *personal* struggle against the (natural) predilections of the intellect. And in this endeavor, so Wittgenstein assured Rhees, it certainly helped to have a serious discussion partner: 'It is true that the blind can't lead the blind; but two blind men have 4 feet between them & can therefore stabilize each other a bit.'<sup>37</sup>

#### IV

Realizing that the fruits of philosophical discourse depended more on the *personalities* of the interlocutors than on the extent of their *talent*, Rhees subsequently managed to assemble in Swansea a group of thinkers who satisfied both *desiderata* to an exemplary degree. In 1951, the year of Wittgenstein's death, Roy Holland was the first new appointee, closely followed by J. R. Jones and Peter Winch in 1952. At that time, İlham Dilman was still an undergraduate at Cambridge – he joined the Swansea philosophers ten years later, in 1961 – but not exactly ecstatic about his experience there:

In Cambridge in my first two years as an undergraduate in the early 50s I was disappointed in philosophy as I found it. It was the time when philosophy in Britain was recovering from 'logical positivism' and was dominated by Oxford philosophers representing the 'linguistic' movement in philosophy.<sup>38</sup>

Dilman does not tell us why he thought the 'linguistic movement' philosophically disappointing, but he would certainly have disliked the sort of conceptual analysis that went on in one of J. L. Austin's (1911-1960) circles, and of which Geoffrey Warnock has given an almost rapturous account:

We compared and contrasted such substantives as 'tool', 'instrument', 'implement', 'utensil', 'appliance', 'equipment', 'apparatus', 'gear', 'kit' – even 'device', and 'gimmick'. Here I remember Austin inviting us to classify *scissors*; kitchen scissors, I think we thought, were utensils, and garden shears were probably tools (or implements?), but the sort of scissors used in, for instance, dress-making were something of a problem. (Sewing 'materials' would probably *include* scissors, but that is not quite an answer to the question.) And I remember that he asked why, awaiting an operation, one would be disconcerted if the surgeon said, 'Right, I'll just go get my tools.' . . . I must confess . . . that I always found this sort of thing enormously enjoyable, exactly to my taste. I did not believe that it was likely to contribute to the solution of the problems of the post-war world; I did not believe that it would contribute, certainly or necessarily, to the solution of any problems in philosophy. But it was enormously enjoyable.<sup>39</sup>

Neither Dilman nor anyone else in the *Swansea School* would, I believe, have found the question whether garden shears should be subsumed under 'tools' or 'implements' at all important, let alone found the classificatory enterprise of which it formed a part, 'enormously enjoyable'. To thinkers like Rhees or Winch, the suggestion that philosophical issues might not be

*serious*, would have sounded just as incongruous as the idea of a serious philosopher who was also a *frivolous* person. As Rhees says,

. . . we should be surprised to find anyone who was a serious philosopher and was at the same time a playboy or man about town. . . . We may feel that there is something more like an internal connexion between what you are engaged on in philosophy, and the sort of life you lead.<sup>40</sup>

Rhees is, of course, not denying that there are publicly appointed academic philosophers who *do* lead the lives of ‘playboys’ or ‘men about town’, any more than he would deny the existence of highly paid philosophers who, though clever, are yet unable to speak with any depth about life, death, or human relationships. His point is a conceptual one, regarding the very *idea* of a philosopher and the kind of seriousness that is required in one who seeks to live up to it, though it would be a mistake to suppose that the seriousness in question could be captured in a simple formula. One illustration of it might be Wittgenstein’s need to know where he stood with G. E. Moore, because it expressed an attitude towards life in which clarity about ‘the way things really are’ was of the utmost importance. In his diary entry of 7 October 1930, Wittgenstein describes the crucial moment:

I asked Moore today whether he is glad when I come to see him regularly (as in the previous year) & said that I will not be offended whatever the answer turns out to be. He said that it wasn’t clear to himself, & I said he should think it over & inform me; which he promised to do. I said I could not promise that his answer will not sadden me, yet, however, that it will not offend me. — And I believe it is God’s will with me, that I shall hear & bear it.<sup>41</sup>

As Moore had promised, the answer to Wittgenstein’s question was not long in coming. On 16 October 1930, the latter noted in his diary:

Moore later answered my question to the effect that while he does not actually like me, my company nevertheless does him so much good that he thinks he should continue to keep it. That is a peculiar case.<sup>42</sup>

Wittgenstein’s need to know what his presence meant to others was not motivated by a personal craving for applause, or the desire to raise his self-esteem, but sprang from a demand for honesty that claimed himself as well as others. This is why, for Wittgenstein, the truth about *Moore’s* relation to *him* was merely part of the truth about the way things stood with him and other human beings. The correlate of his question to Moore was a question

he had to ask himself, viz., what was his perception of his fellow men, and what did it reveal about *himself*? Wittgenstein was honest enough to raise it, and not only in his diary entry of 27 January 1937:

I can observe on this journey a phenomenon that is uncommonly characteristic of me: Unless their appearance or demeanor makes a special impression on me, I judge people inferior to me: that is I would be inclined to use the word ‘ordinary’ about them, ‘a man from the street’ & the like. Perhaps I wouldn’t say this but my first glance at them says it. There is already a judgement in this glance. A completely unfounded & unjustified judgement. And it would also be unjustified, of course, if upon closer acquaintance that person really proved to be very ordinary, that is superficial. I am of course in many ways extraordinary & therefore many people are ordinary compared to me; but in what does my extraordinariness consist?<sup>43</sup>

Apart from shedding further light on Winch’s and Rhees’s remarks about the relation between a thinker and the character of his thoughts, these quotations also reveal something about the character of the philosophical community whose work has been portrayed in this volume. The Swansea School was not merely a group of philosophers interested in Wittgenstein, but a unique and (fortuitous) constellation of personalities who, in spite of their (sometimes irreconcilable) disagreements over particular philosophical issues, nevertheless exhibited a surprising uniformity, not only in their views on the nature of moral judgements or the significance and intelligibility of religious belief, but in their appreciation of the personal demands required by a truly philosophical *Lebenseinstellung*. Their general ethical orientation, for instance, strongly gravitated towards the views of Plato and Kant, rather than to those of Aristotle or Mill, though it would still be misleading to speak of them as ‘deontologists’, say, partly because they would have rejected the dichotomy between a duty-based ethics and a consequentialist construal of the virtues as false, and partly because of the conviction that ‘the appeals to false unities in ethics – the common good, human flourishing, universalizability, reflective equilibrium, acknowledgement of the other – are rooted in confused conceptions of language in moral judgements.’<sup>44</sup>

The Swansea School’s attitude towards religion is rather more diffuse, and hence more difficult to describe. On the one hand, they certainly agreed that, as a fundamental human concern, religious belief and practice had to be taken seriously and could not simply be dismissed as irrational, superstitious, or nonsensical. On the other hand, their *personal* beliefs spanned the

whole spectrum from atheism (Beardsmore) to orthodox Christianity (Mounce), with Rhees, Phillips and Winch probably coming closest to Wittgenstein's own views, i.e. deeply sympathetic to a religious outlook on life, sceptical of institutionalized religion, orthodox with respect to *some* aspects of the Western religious tradition (e.g., the concepts of sin, atonement and redemption, the nature of God), but also highly unorthodox in regard to others (e.g., the miraculous, the incarnation, the resurrection, immortality). In this connection, it is interesting to note that the work of Simone Weil (1909-1943), whom Rhees regarded as one of the most penetrating religious thinkers of the modern age, has exerted almost as strong an influence on the Swansea School's occupation with religion as Wittgenstein's own writings, even where their spiritual sensibilities were pulling them in quite different directions, as in the case of Howard Mounce, whose impressive knowledge – both *en gros* and *en détail* – of the history of philosophy deserves special mention. Indeed, reading through his latest work, *Metaphysics and the End of Philosophy* (Continuum, 2007), which charts the development – or rather: decline – of philosophy from Aristotle through the modern age, one is struck by the fact that the orthodoxy of Mounce's religious convictions goes hand in hand with an equally orthodox conception of philosophy as a *metaphysical* inquiry into the relation between the world and that which transcends it, albeit one whose primary inspiration would be Platonic rather than Kantian. From Mounce's sobering but, in my view, quite accurate, assessment of modern philosophy, Wittgenstein does not emerge as an unqualified *traditionalist* of the kind he would applaud, but he does exemplify for Mounce the reversal of an extended period of intellectual decline, and hence the hope that the end of philosophy may not be near just yet. That Mounce also mentions Simone Weil's philosophical endeavors in this connection again confirms the contention shared by all members of the Swansea School, viz., that, *qua* philosophers, their mission was not to propagate a particular world view or party-political programme, but to ensure that philosophical thinking does not fall into decline. As the eminent Wittgenstein scholar Peter Hacker has put it:

The understanding that philosophy yields *can* be lost from one generation to another. Empirical knowledge can be bequeathed, but philosophical understanding has to be achieved anew by each generation. Those who believe that Wittgenstein contributed more to that form of understanding than any other person in the last century must surely strive to preserve his legacy, not only by endeavouring to elucidate his thought, but above all by *using it* to shed light on the

great problems of philosophy that bewilder our age and to eradicate the scientism that bedevils it.<sup>45</sup>

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> J.O. Urmson, *Philosophical Analysis* (Oxford, 1956), p. 164.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, ed. G. H. von Wright, trans. Peter Winch (Oxford, 1998), p. 24.

<sup>4</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Blue & Brown Books* (Oxford, 1969), 2nd ed., p. 18.

<sup>5</sup> *Attention to Particulars* is also the title of a Festschrift for Rush Rhees, ed. by D. Z. Phillips and Peter Winch (London, 1989).

<sup>6</sup> *Culture and Value*, p. 42.

<sup>7</sup> 'On Wittgenstein', *Philosophical Investigations*, 24:2 (April 2001), p. 147.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 148.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., pp. 120-121.

<sup>11</sup> *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Briefwechsel. Innsbrucker elektronische Ausgabe*, eds. Monika Seekircher, Brian McGuinness and Anton Unterkircher, (Charlottesville, 2004), 17984-17986.

<sup>12</sup> D. Z. Phillips, ed., *Rush Rhees on Religion and Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1997), pp. xi-xx.

<sup>13</sup> Lars Hertzberg, 'Rush Rhees on Philosophy and Religious Discourse', *Faith and Philosophy*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (October 2001), p. 431.

<sup>14</sup> 'On Wittgenstein', *Philosophical Investigations*, 24:2 (April 2001), p. 152.

<sup>15</sup> D. Z. Phillips rightly describes *On Religion and Philosophy* as 'one of the most important collections of essays in twentieth century philosophy of religion. I do not think that there has been anything comparable of its kind since Kierkegaard.' (Unpublished typescript of the revised Introduction to the volume.)

<sup>16</sup> Rush Rhees, *Discussions of Simone Weil*, ed. D. Z. Phillips (New York, 1999).

<sup>17</sup> Cf. D. Z. Phillips's introduction to *Rush Rhees On Religion and Philosophy*, pp. xii-xvi.

<sup>18</sup> Ray Monk, *Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius*, (London, 1990), p. 357.

<sup>19</sup> *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Briefwechsel. Innsbrucker elektronische Ausgabe*, 18460-18462.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 18894-18904.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Letter from Rhees, 29.10.44, *ibid.*, 19776-19780.

<sup>23</sup> Letter from Wittgenstein, 28.11.44, *ibid.*, 19801-19809.

<sup>24</sup> Letter from Wittgenstein, 07.02.1946, in *Wittgenstein in Cambridge: Letters and Documents 1911-1951*, ed. Brian McGuinness (Oxford, 2008), p. 395.

<sup>25</sup> Letter from Wittgenstein, 21.5.46, in *Briefwechsel. Innsbrucker elektronische Ausgabe*, 20467-20470.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Karl Britton's report, reprinted in *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Briefwechsel. Innsbrucker elektronische Ausgabe*, 39847-8.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. The articles appeared in *Mind* LV, No. 217 (January 1946), pp. 25-48 and No. 218 (April 1946), pp. 133-150.

<sup>28</sup> *Mind*, No. 217, p. 125, reprinted in *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Briefwechsel. Innsbrucker elektronische Ausgabe*, 39847-8.

<sup>29</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Zettel*, ed. G. H. von Wright and G. E. M. Anscombe, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford, 1981), 2nd ed., #455.

<sup>30</sup> *Philosophical Investigations* 24:2 (April 2001), p. 159. Readers who would like to familiarize themselves with the current state of the debate, including Phillips's responses to his critics, will find it profitable to read *Wittgensteinian Fideism*, eds. Kai Nielsen and D. Z. Phillips (London, 2005).

<sup>31</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford, 1958), 2nd ed., Preface, pp. 8-9.

<sup>32</sup> *Philosophical Investigations* 24:2 (April 2001), p. 153.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 180.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 153.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 155.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 184.

<sup>37</sup> Letter to Rhees, 17.10.1944, in *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Briefwechsel. Innsbrucker elektronische Ausgabe*, 19752.

<sup>38</sup> *Philosophical Investigations* 24:2 (April 2001), p. 116.

<sup>39</sup> G. J. Warnock, 'Sunday Mornings', in *Essays on J. L. Austin*, pp. 38-9. Quoted in Bryan Magee, *Confessions of a Philosopher* (London, 1997), p. 67.

<sup>40</sup> Rush Rhees, 'The Fundamental Problems of Philosophy', *Philosophical Investigations* 17:4 (Oct 1994), p. 577.

<sup>41</sup> Wittgenstein's entry of 07.10.1930, in *Ludwig Wittgenstein. Public and Private Occasions*, eds. James C. Klagge and Alfred Nordmann, trans. Alfred Nordmann (Lanham, 2003), p. 53.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 59.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 161.

<sup>44</sup> D. Z. Phillips, 'On Wittgenstein', in *Philosophical Investigations* 24:2 (April 2001), Section VIII, p. 151.

<sup>45</sup> *Philosophical Investigations* 24:2 (April 2001), p. 130.

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