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Lars Hertzberg

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RUSH RHEES ON PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGIOUS DISCOURSE

Lars Hertzberg

Rush Rhees is primarily known as an expounder of Wittgenstein's philosophy. However, his depth and originality as a thinker is increasingly recognized, largely due to the posthumous publication of his *Nachlass*. In this essay, characteristic features of Rhees's philosophical style and method are conveyed through comparing and contrasting them with those of Wittgenstein. Rhees, it is found, is more of a dialogical thinker than Wittgenstein. His most distinctive contributions to philosophy were concerned with language and religion. Rhees's views on the unity of language are compared with those of Wittgenstein, and in conclusion Rhees's thinking about religion is presented through a close reading of one of his essays on that topic.

In the English-speaking philosophical establishment, Rush Rhees has come to be seen as little more than a student and expounder of Ludwig Wittgenstein's views. This characterization, however, is far from doing him justice: he was in fact a deeply original philosopher in his own right, as is obvious from a careful reading of what he published, and even more so from the large body of work that is posthumously being made available through the editorship of D. Z. Phillips¹. In fact, the relation between his thought and that of Wittgenstein would merit careful scrutiny.

There are, I believe, several reasons for the neglect of Rhees's own philosophy. While becoming known as Wittgenstein's literary executor, he himself published sparingly in his life-time, and most of the work of his own that he saw off to the publisher was either editorial comments or discussions of Wittgenstein's life and his philosophy. Readers may have overlooked the fact that one of his best-known articles, "Wittgenstein's Builders", is deeply critical of a central aspect of Wittgenstein's thinking. Another reason is what I would consider Rhees's lack of concern with his own fame. He felt no need to underscore his own originality, and he was anxious to acknowledge his indebtedness, such as it was, to Wittgenstein.² But, most important, there was a genuine affinity in philosophical outlook between Wittgenstein and Rhees, as shown both in their style of doing philosophy and in their view of the philosopher's task. Rhees seems not to have fit the conventional mould of academic philosopher any better than Wittgenstein did, as shown, for instance, by his unwillingness or inability to play the game of self-promotion.³ They both rejected the widely received idea of philosophy as the testing ground of various philosophical theories: realism vs. idealism, materialism vs. dualism, etc., sharing the view that



committing oneself to one or the other of these abstract labels had little to do with thinking seriously about the issues. And in the case of both, there was a huge lack of proportion between the vast quantities they wrote and the tiny amount they published. (In that respect, they would have been a nightmare for contemporary university administrators.) Both of them exerted their influence, above all, through personal interaction; this was connected with the fact that their influence, by all accounts, did not just take place on an intellectual level, but was to a large extent what might be called ethical or existential. In fact, as they themselves saw it, the ethical was here inseparably intertwined with the intellectual: one of the aspects of Wittgenstein's view of philosophy for which Rhee had particular affinity was the idea that philosophical difficulties are made intractable by the fact that what they require, rather than cleverness, is the strength to overcome one's own will, i.e. one's predilections concerning the way the problems *ought* to be solved.

Rhee, in fact, came to have a very large indirect influence on contemporary British philosophy, through the mediation of his colleagues and students at Swansea: among those who were more or less profoundly touched through their interchanges with Rhee were Peter Winch, Ilham Dilman, Cora Diamond, R. F. Holland, D. Z. Phillips, H. O. Mounce, and David Cockburn, many of whom, in turn, as teachers and writers, have had a large impact on further generations of philosophers. Thus, it might be asked whether a large part of what passes for the legacy of the later Wittgenstein, at least in Britain, could not more properly be referred to as the Wittgenstein-Rhee legacy. In any case it is clear that, without the role that Rhee came to have, the Wittgenstein legacy would have taken a radically different form.

This essay is an attempt to convey some of the characteristic features of Rhee's philosophical style and method, in part by comparing and contrasting them with those of Wittgenstein. This includes a brief account of their respective views on philosophy and the unity of language. Some of Rhee's most distinctive work being concerned with the philosophy of religion, I end by attempting to give a close reading of one of his richest essays on that topic.

Style and method

The personal nature of Rhee's engagement with philosophy is apparent from the character of his *Nachlass*: this consists mainly of notes to individuals, generally to friends and colleagues. Winch has spoken about the profound impact that a letter from Rhee had on his own philosophical development.⁴ Rhee was engaging in dialogue, not debate; a distinction he clarifies in one of his notes: "what we call debating ... is a matter of trying to make an impression on somebody else than the person *with* whom, or *against* whom, you are talking – it is not even clear *to* what person you are talking, so that a debate in this way is not a conversation in one sense at all".⁵ Whereas academic writing tends to have the character of debate, it is clear that what counted for Rhee was conversation in the full sense, an exchange in which there was no doubt about whom you were talking *to*.

One is reminded here that one of Rhees's guiding stars in philosophy was Socrates, as presented by Plato. As Socrates says, in the *Gorgias* (474 a): "... I know how to produce one witness to the truth, the man to whom I am talking. ... [W]ith the many I will not even enter into discussion." (It may be significant that Wittgenstein, for his part, did not have much time for Plato.)

In this respect, Rhees's papers are quite unlike Wittgenstein's. While Rhees is responding to someone else's remarks, Wittgenstein's starting point is his own intellectual temptations. Even when his notes are inspired by reading or talking about some thinker (St Augustine, Goethe, Frege, Freud, Moore, Russell), that thinker soon recedes to the background. Wittgenstein wrote notes almost every day, and he would then try out different ways of compiling them with a view to ultimate publication. But though his notes were not intended as contributions to current debate in philosophy, neither were they written for particular persons; rather, one might say, they were written for posterity. While Wittgenstein did not aspire to fame, it is obvious that he was not indifferent to the sort of impact his work would have on the course of philosophy. This is clear from some of the reflections that have been assembled in *Culture and Value*. Concerning a book he was planning to publish, Wittgenstein wrote, "This book is intended for only a small circle of people". What he had in mind was not a specific group of individuals, but people who were in tune with his way of thinking.⁶

It is hard to imagine Rhees having such worries, and though he did leave a mark on 20th century philosophy this was not by design. In a generally favourable review of the posthumous collection *Moral Questions*⁷, the reviewer ends by expressing his doubts about whether the book will have any impact on contemporary debate. I do not know whether he considers that a reflection on Rhees or a reflection on the state of debate. In any case, the question would not have bothered Rhees.

This is connected with another difference between their writings: Wittgenstein seems to have made a clear separation between two sorts of question: on the one hand, the (shall we say?) timeless and impersonal philosophical questions that are the subject matter not only of the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*⁸, but also (though in a different form) of the book that he was continually preparing during the 1930's and 1940's but never finished, and of which the posthumous *Philosophical Investigations*⁹ is the closest representation; and, on the other hand, what might be labelled questions of "culture and value": questions engaging his individual existence or provoked by his times, e.g. matters of art and aesthetics, religion, ethics, psychoanalysis or anthropology. It is striking that, while there are plenty of discussions of such topics both in his notebooks and in his lectures, no reference is made to any of them in the selection which forms the basis of *Philosophical Investigations*. There can be no doubt that this was a very conscious choice on Wittgenstein's part (one that Wittgenstein's commentators, for the most part, have overlooked). In Rhees's case, the work on religion is as close to the core of his thinking as that, say, on philosophy and language. If there is a division in Rhees, it is between commentaries on Wittgenstein (as it were his "official" work), which he was willing to pub-

lish, and his own independent thinking, which he seemed content to share with his friends and colleagues.

This brings us to some points of style and method. *Philosophical Investigations* is of course compiled as a sequence of remarks varying in character as well as length (between a line and a page). Wittgenstein's aim is to elicit the active cooperation of the reader. The few short remarks are often epigrammatic in character, involving the use of striking simile. Many of the longer remarks are like a tool kit: they often contain suggestions for thought-experiments, exercises to be carried out by the reader, or small bits of dialogue, in which the reader must learn to distinguish between the voice expressing the view of the writer's alter ego still in the grips of misleading pictures, or misunderstanding the other party's responses, and that of the writer himself trying to disentangle the confusions.

Rhees's rhetoric is very different from Wittgenstein's, though quite as distinctive. Perhaps it is best characterized as an *absence* of rhetoric: he does not use striking simile, formulates no epigrams. The flow in his texts is much more even than that of Wittgenstein: like that of an even breath. Rhees often proceeds by marking off the matter under discussion – this might be language, conversation, faith in God, etc. – by alternately pointing out why this is different from something with which we might be tempted to assimilate it, and why it is similar to something we are used to consider different. The differences between their philosophical temperaments is visible even on a typographical level: Wittgenstein's texts are made up of distinct remarks, corresponding to quick shifts of temper and rhythm, as against the continuous tread of Rhees's writing.

In Rhees's texts there is a stronger sense of the author's presence; this undoubtedly is connected with the way in which they came about. While Wittgenstein *portrays* a struggle with philosophical difficulties, he does not normally convey a sense that he himself is struggling at the moment of writing (there are exceptions to this in the manuscripts). He is making us see how bewildering something may seem, rather than expressing his own bewilderment. In most cases, the reason he asks the questions he asks is not that he does not know the answer to them, rather, he is drawing attention to them *as questions*, in order to show, for instance, that they are pointless. His attitude is aptly summarized in his remark: "My ideal is a certain coolness. A temple providing a setting for the passions without meddling with them."¹⁰ In Rhees's writing, on the other hand, the struggle is usually present in the text itself. Difficulties due to the subject matter and difficulties due to his own limitations are intertwined. One gets the feeling that they cannot be distentangled. With Rhees, much more than with Wittgenstein, one is witnessing philosophy growing out of his own everyday experiences and encounters. (I am not suggesting that one form of writing is more valuable than the other.)

Perhaps it could be said (though I am not sure how far this is right) that for Wittgenstein the difficulties of will that have to be overcome are mostly difficulties that we share, whereas for Rhees they cannot in many cases be separated from the person whose difficulties they are.

Wittgenstein and Rhees share the conviction that philosophical clarification is to be achieved through the use of examples. This is to forestall the

predicament that Wittgenstein, in *Philosophical Investigations*, describes in the following remark (§ 593): "A main cause of philosophical disease – a one-sided diet: one nourishes one's thinking with only one kind of example." The danger of doing philosophy without examples is that one permits one's thinking to be guided, unconsciously, by *one* type of case. Nevertheless, there is a marked difference in their attitudes to the examples. Wittgenstein's examples are Spartan; very often he only hints at a situation which he leaves the reader to imagine for herself. The situations he invokes are often unfamiliar or fantastic. This has sometimes been considered a weakness of his presentation. In fact, this is the basis of Rhees's criticism of the builders' game in *Philosophical Investigations*, when he argues that what the builders share cannot by itself be thought of as a language. Rhees seems to be suspicious of the Wittgensteinian idea of thought-experiments.¹¹ In Rhees, too, the examples are brief, often just hinted at (unlike the fleshed-out examples, say, of Winch or Phillips), but, coming from sources like literature, poetry or the Bible, or involving well-known phenomena in contemporary culture, they presuppose a familiarity with the situation on the part of the reader, which must make up for their brevity.

Belonging to the language

One of the shared convictions within the philosophical tradition from which Wittgenstein was trying to distance himself was that human thought and language have one given form. Our thoughts and our utterances have reference to reality through being representations of the way things are or might be. This account, it may be thought, suits the assertions of natural science fairly well, but a problem might be raised with respect to religious and ethical utterances (among others), since in their case it is not so clear what they are to be taken to represent. Common responses to this problem have been either to argue that these utterances too, despite appearances, are similar in character to scientific assertions, or to declare that they do not actually belong to the language. The most thorough-going expression of the latter position was Wittgenstein's own *Tractatus*. (On one reading of it, what he was trying to do in that work was to refute this view of thought and language by carrying it to absurd extremes.)

In contrast to this, in his later work Wittgenstein was drawing attention to the multiplicity of forms of discourse, which is bound up with the multiplicity of ways in which language enters into human activities. The relation between a thought or utterance and the reality to which it refers is not, as philosophers have been inclined to think, a simple relation that lies at the basis of our dealings with the world, but rather our dealings with the world show the different things it may mean for a thought or utterance to be related to reality (and thus, too, the different meanings of the word "reality"). What this amounts to has to be exhibited case by case. This is where the depiction of various language games comes in, such as the builders' game described at the beginning of *Philosophical Investigations*.

The emphasis on the multiplicity of forms of discourse seems paradoxical in view of the fact that the traditional division of labour between different branches of philosophical inquiry, such as logic, epistemology, ontol-

ogy, ethics, etc. is completely absent from Wittgenstein's work. But the paradox is only apparent: since the variety of forms of discourse is open-ended and unsurveyable, the traditional idea that there exist the separate tasks of laying down conditions for logical validity, knowledge, reality, value, etc. is misconceived. In the so-called *Big Typescript*, Wittgenstein wrote:

Unrest in philosophy comes from philosophers looking at, seeing, philosophy all wrong, i.e., cut up into (infinite) vertical strips, as it were, rather than (finite) horizontal strips. This reordering of understanding creates the *greatest* difficulty ... But then we'll never get finished with our work! Of course not, because it doesn't have an end.¹²

Rather than striving to take a stand on what can and cannot be said, philosophical inquiry will concern itself with how the idea that something can or cannot be said is bound up with the context in which words are spoken; in particular, it will have to combat the desire to lay down *a priori* conceptions of what forms of discourse are possible. This means that philosophical inquiry will acquire a kind of unity it has not traditionally had: the unity which comes from considering each particular case *as* a particular case. Philosophy gets what complexity it has from the temptations it is unravelling rather than from the complexity of its subject matter.

Rhees, however, was convinced that this kind of account left something out. If we think of speaking merely as analogous with playing a game, some important distinctions are going to get blurred. This was the core theme of Rhees's essay "Wittgenstein's Builders", and it is a theme that recurs throughout his writings.¹³ Also, as Rhees emphasises in the preface to *The Blue and Brown Books*, this fails to account for why philosophers should have felt such a strong temptation to provide a unified account of language and its relation to reality.

All forms of discourse, Rhees wants to say, *do* have something in common: the fact that they *belong to the language*: even though there is no one answer to the question what it means for an expression to make sense in all cases, still the question is the same, or similar. I am not sure whether I am able to appreciate the full depth of the matter the way he saw it, but in any case he is evidently drawing attention to an important dimension of our thinking about language. The following passage seems to sum up his position well:

If someone learns to speak, he does not just learn to make sentences and utter them; nor can he merely have learned to react to orders. If that were all he ever did, I should not imagine that he could speak, and I should never ask him anything. When he learns to speak, he learns to tell you something; and he tries to. In learning to speak, he learns what can be said; he learns – however fumblingly – what it makes sense to say. He gets some sense of what different remarks have to do with one another. That is why he begins to follow a conversation, or to carry on a conversation himself. Or rather: it is misleading to say "this is *why* he does that", as though we had to do with

a condition and what results from it. For in beginning to carry on a conversation – in trying to tell you something and trying to understand your answer – he *is* getting a sense of how different remarks have a bearing on one another. (*PD*, p. 185.)

Comparing speaking to a game might encourage us to consider simply the behaviour: the uttering of certain sounds, in conjunction with the immediate context. Rhees is telling us to look beyond this. But what is this larger context that is relevant? In fact Rhees's discussion might be thought to point in two different directions, which are hinted at in this passage: to what might be called the "having something to say" theme (or "the place in life" theme) on the one hand, and the "remarks hanging together" theme on the other hand.

Rhees sometimes speaks about sharing a language, speaking *the same* language, but I am not sure how much this idea should be emphasized. This would mean putting the focus on what distinguishes some cases of speaking (say, cases of speaking English) from others (say, those of speaking Swedish), whereas what Rhees was concerned with was what different cases of speaking have in common. Central notions here are those of a "common understanding", a shared view of "what makes sense, what can be understood, what it is possible to say, what one might try to say" (*PD*, p. 193). On the other hand he makes it clear that he is not speaking about a common (logical) system underlying all the different languages, the way pure mathematics underlies all the different applications of mathematics (*ibid.*). Evidently, the idea of unity or of belonging that is relevant here is not one which entails any idea of a whole, of a totality: it is not a question of delimiting an area. In fact, I believe that the two themes alluded to above should not be contrasted but are inseparable. For remarks to "have to do with one another" or "have a bearing on one another" is not a formal relation between sounds, but one that is *constituted* by their role in the lives of the people who utter them: they are connected through that which people are saying in making them. But at the same time, being able to say what one has to say with *these* words, even its *being something one may have to say* in the first place, is dependent on what has been said in these words before, in other cases. Perhaps Rhees's idea could be summed up as follows: what we say does not make sense *because it belongs to the language*, but it *belongs to the language because it makes sense*. In Wittgenstein, on the other hand, there is hardly any discussion of "belonging to the language".

Religion, life and meaning

Much of the work collected in *Rush Rhees on Religion and Philosophy* shows Rhees at his most impressive. In one of the essays, "Religion, life and meaning: A and B", the editor has combined two texts that were written at separate times but address similar questions. The first, brief, text is undated but was presumably written in the 1940's, the second text is a letter written to M. O'C. Drury in May of 1956. There are marked contrasts between the texts (but also interesting similarities of style) which help

bring into relief some of the characteristic features of Rhees's mature thinking about religion. Thus the essay constitutes an (unwitting) dialogue between the younger and the older Rhees, somewhat like the dialogue between A and B in Kierkegaard's *Either/Or*.

A is critical of religion. The central terms of the discussion are freedom and servitude. The way to escape from our bondage to worldly cares, Rhees says, is through activities that are free and creative, "where the work is undertaken ... because it is worth working at, so that it has an importance of its own account and independent of one's momentary personal needs." The examples Rhees gives are artistic and scientific investigation – and contributing to the development of industrial production. In these pursuits, the activity of the spirit is free; "it operates ... *as spirit*, – or as intelligence, if you like" (p. 167). His portrayal of the ideal, it must be said, seems somewhat elitistic. He pays little attention to the way, say, caring for the sick or needy may also involve overcoming one's own momentary concerns. Religion, he admits, does call attention to the futility of a life in which the spirit is dragged about by worldly cares, but he argues that the deliverance offered by religion is false, it "calls for ... a servility that is the more vile because it is more deeply rooted" (p. 166). He does not really make it clear what he means by religion being deeply rooted or how that makes it more vile. In any case, he contrasts two aspects of the life of the spirit: on the one hand, there is *the greatness of religious ideas* – e.g. the life of Christ, the story of the creation – that art is able to show us; on the other hand, there is *religious preaching*. Religion as something to be preached, he thinks, is servile because it is rooted in self-seeking, in preoccupation with one's personal salvation, and because it involves spiritual pride in wanting to reserve true goodness for those who believe in God.

Rhees's criticism of Christianity is hardly original. It takes it for granted that we have access to an independent measure by which to judge the Christian life, in such a way that any honest person, independently of his or her religious commitments, will be forced to acknowledge its deficiencies. There is no room for the idea of a *difference in understanding* between the believer and the non-believer. Part B of Rhees's essay stands this idea on its head. Here he is trying to get clear about the Christian idea that belief may give a person's life greater meaning or depth, as a way of understanding what religion is. Now clearly he is not suggesting that we should first look for whatever might be meant by a life having greater depth, and then use that as a key to understanding religion; that would have been similar to his approach in the earlier text. Rather, the two concepts are *internally* related: trying to discover the relevant sense of life having depth is just a way of trying to get clear about what is involved in religious belief; it is taking up a perspective on religion. Putting the matter crudely: A starts with a conception of life and tries to see how Christianity measures up, B asks what "a conception of life" might mean to a Christian. Given Rhees's understanding of the task, it poses a dilemma, since it involves conveying the sense of religious language without presupposing that that language is understood, and yet without reducing it to some extra-religious form of discourse.

Rhees's essay contains a wealth of ideas; here I shall only be able to give

a bare summary of them. His discussion appears to have the following implicit structure: he compares the expression of religious ideas by turns to various other forms of discourse, by way of bringing out the similarities as well as the dissimilarities. The first comparison is with expressions of will or interest. We may say a person is devoted to God, just as we say someone is devoted to art or science. However, Rhees says, the sense of "devotion" is different here. Art does not transform a life the way religion may: living religiously does not mean *subordinating* one's life to some particular interest or occupation, but rather letting everything one does be an expression of one's belief. An artist (or scientist) might say that some cause was more important than his life, but for the believer to make such a comparison would make no sense. (Maybe he would say that the belief in God *is* his life.) In sacrificing one's life for a cause one hopes that one's sacrifice will help bring certain things about. But it would be nonsense to speak about sacrificing one's life for God in *this* sense, as though God might be dependent on one's support. One might rather think about one's *life* as a sacrifice to God. Furthermore, Rhees reminds us that it does not make sense to talk about our devotion to God as selfless: the "selfish" – "selfless" distinction has no application here. (There is no place for the idea, for instance, that in giving one's life to God one might be settling for the second best.)

Rhees suggests that something may be learnt by comparing religious statements with judgments of value, but at the same time the comparison is misleading in many ways. In this connection, there is a penetrating discussion, which I am here only able to hint at, of the relation between Christianity and Plato's conception of aspiring towards an ideal. Rhees points out that the form of the good in Plato's conception is not related to the world in the same way that the creator is in the Christian faith. This goes with the fact that one does not *worship* the good. In Plato there is no analogue to seeking God or seeking one's life, nor is there a conception of sin in connection with the form of the good.

A religious conception, Rhees says, might take the form of perplexity about one's life. Such a perplexity is like wondering about the value of one's life. Yet it is unlike a value judgment, for instance, in not being dependent on what actually happens. I might think I have made a mess of my life: my career, my friendships, etc. But a religious perplexity about the worth of my life would not be decided by considerations like those. On the whole, it does not appear to be something one could try to resolve through argument.

The word "perplexity", Rhees points out, has a special use in religious contexts. Religious perplexity usually centers around one's relation to God; in its extreme form, it is perplexity concerning the reality of God. This will only be experienced by someone who understands religious language. It is not due to my ignorance of certain facts, nor will it be relieved through some new observation. It is a failure to understand: one would like to say, a difficulty with concepts. In this way it is like mathematical perplexity. However, Rhees warns against taking the parallel with mathematics too far. In mathematics there is no distinction between understanding and accepting. Mathematical perplexity does not involve doubting; it simply means that one cannot get things to work the way they are supposed to.

With respect to religious language, the relation between understanding and belief is much more indeterminate; thus (though Rhees does not put it this way), one might be skeptical of the idea that there is some *one* way that things are supposed to work in a religious context.

The situation is puzzling, because the separation between understanding and believing seems to belong in cases in which we may check how things really are. But checking how things really are has no place in religion. So how is this separation to be understood here? Well, Rhees asks: what is the difference between someone who simply repeats the words of the prayer and someone who *means* them? The skeptic, he says, is not like someone who believes there is no one at the other end of the phone line; rather, he cannot *imagine* what it would be like if there were. Part of his difficulty may be with understanding what it means to address God as opposed to addressing other people. This is a matter of understanding how the way I commit myself through what I say differs in the two cases. If I am talking in the presence of a large group of people, for my words to be addressed to a particular person among them is a matter of the role my words play in my relation to that person. But what makes what I say addressing *God* is the role my words play *in my own life*. In other words: it is the fact that the *meaning* of my words depends on their bearing on the rest of my life. But then the question becomes: why will some people use words in this way, while others will not?

The difficulty people will have with understanding how words are used here is partly conditioned by contemporary culture. The idea of getting things done, of establishing what can and cannot be achieved, Rhees points out, is a central theme of our lives. We tend to think of a difficulty as something that is to be "measured against resources and capacities and methods" (p. 202). And in trying to think about God and salvation, say, we may not be able to keep free of this technical and empirical way of approaching the issues, as though it were a question of God's capacities in relation to a specific task.

I have the impression that Rhees did not count himself a believer. Still I find his ability to make a reader see what is there to be found in religious language impressive and of a quality rarely matched by other philosophers of religion. However, in conclusion I want to draw attention to a couple of difficulties someone might have with his discussion. The first is not a serious one, I think. Rhees speaks about understanding "religious" language, and yet it is clear that what he has in mind is Christianity – perhaps it could even be said, one particular form of Christian faith. Is he then not himself guilty of feeding on a one-sided diet of examples, i.e. of assuming that there is such a thing as the essence of religious faith, embodied in this one particular form of worship? The reason I do not find this a serious objection is that it misses the problem he is after. Rhees is not here puzzled by the *word* "religion", or by the question what different forms of worship have in common, but is trying to make us see the sense of *one* form of worship, a form with which he and the person he was addressing were familiar. Other forms might give rise to other difficulties, but those were not his concern in the present context.

The other difficulty is more intractable, as Rhees seems to have been

aware. His long letter ends in a kind of paradox: he has been trying to explain

why it is that a man who does not believe may be able to discuss religious matters – so that he must understand the language in which believers speak of them; while on the other hand we may feel that he has not grasped how religious language is used, and that in that sense he cannot really understand it (*RP*, p. 205).

That sounds as if Rhees had set himself the task of squaring the circle. How could a person appreciate that something makes sense *in and of itself*, and yet deny that it makes sense to *him*? But Rhees wants to embrace the paradox. It is a characteristic of the language of religion, he is saying, that it poses this very conundrum: that there should be a question, beyond that of understanding, of whether one has *really* understood. Reflection on the reading of Rhees's essay makes this obvious: one may appreciate everything he says in it without becoming a believer. (And one may be a believer without appreciating what he is saying.) That is to say, let one try as one might, through clarification and paraphrase, to convey to someone, not just the outer workings of this "language game", but as it were the beauty and truth of it: sooner or later clarification and paraphrase will have to yield. At that point some will leap and some will not. Others again will not even see it as a matter of leaping. And that is all there is to say.¹⁴

Åbo Academy

NOTES

1. For a listing of Rhees's main life-time publications, see D. Z. Phillips and Peter Winch (eds.), *Wittgenstein: Attention to Particulars* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1989), pp. 201 f. The following posthumous collections have appeared under the editorship of D. Z. Phillips: *Rush Rhees on Religion and Philosophy* (Cambridge University Press, 1997; henceforth referred to as *RP*); *Wittgenstein and the Possibility of Discourse* (Cambridge University Press, 1998; henceforth referred to as *PD*); *Moral Questions* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1999); *Discussions of Simone Weil* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000). Three other works have been edited but not published as yet, *Wittgenstein's "On Certainty"*; *"What Really Is": In Dialogue with the Presocratics; Plato and Dialectic*.

2. In commenting on Rhees's motives I judge by his work and by what I have read and heard about him. I met him on a few occasions and was impressed by his modesty and sincerity, but I cannot claim to have known him.

3. See, e.g., Phillips's introduction to *RP*, pp. xv f, xviii.

4. This letter appears as "Religion and Language" in *RP*.

5. "Conversation and Institutions", in *PD*, p. 202. My italics.

6. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), ed. by G. H. von Wright in collaboration with Heikki Nyman, trans. P. Winch, p. 12e.

7. Richard Joyce, in *Philosophical Books* 41 (2000), pp. 271-273.

8. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961; first English edition, 1922).

9. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1953).

10. *Culture and Value*, p. 4e.

11. On this, see, e.g., "Wittgenstein's Builders – Recapitulation", *PD*, p. 181.

12. Wittgenstein, "Philosophy", in J. Klagge and A. Nordmann (eds.), *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Philosophical Occasions 1912-1951* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993), p. 195.

13. "Wittgenstein's Builders" originally appeared in *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 1959-60, and was reprinted in Rhees, *Discussions of Wittgenstein* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970). There is a fuller version in *PD*, which also contains a number of other texts pertinent to the theme. Also, see Rhees's Preface to *The Blue and Brown Books* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1958), which gives an account of the development of Wittgenstein's thinking about language and philosophical method.

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