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## Wittgenstein and His Literary Executors

Christian Erbacher

Rush Rhees, Georg Henrik von Wright and Elizabeth Anscombe are well known as the literary executors who made Ludwig Wittgenstein's later philosophy available to all interested readers. Their editions of Wittgenstein's writings have become an integral part of the modern philosophical canon. However, surprisingly little is known about the circumstances and reasons that made Wittgenstein choose them to edit and publish his papers. This essay sheds light on these questions by presenting the story of their personal relationships—relationships that, on the one hand, gave Rhees, von Wright and Anscombe distinct insights into Wittgenstein's philosophizing; and, on the other hand, let Wittgenstein assume that these three former students, and later colleagues and friends, were the most capable of preparing his work for publication. Using hitherto unpublished archival material as well as information from published recollections, the essay sketches the development of the personal and philosophical bonds from which the literary heirs' distinct ways of handling Wittgenstein's unpublished writings grew in later years.

# Wittgenstein and His Literary Executors

Rush Rhees, Georg Henrik von Wright and Elizabeth  
Anscombe as students, colleagues and friends of  
Ludwig Wittgenstein

Christian Erbacher

## Rhees 1

Born in Rochester, New York in 1905, Rhees was the oldest of the three literary executors and the one who knew Wittgenstein the longest. He arrived at Cambridge in 1933 and soon began attending Wittgenstein's lectures. However, by this time the 28 year old Rhees was no longer an undergraduate and had already begun his philosophical life-journey.

At the age of 17, Rhees had begun studying philosophy at the University of Rochester. Though he had an outstanding position as the son of the president of that University, Rhees would not allow that his freedom of speech was restricted—quite the contrary. For example, Dr. George Mather Forbes—a distinguished professor of philosophy, head of the department of education and creator of the department of psychology at the University of Rochester—expelled Rhees from his ethics course because he would not comply with his teacher's doctrines. This revolt against institutional authority aroused the attention of the press and was even reported by *The New York Times* in a front-page story:

Young Rhees said the professor's action was a "blessing". "I am a radical. Dr. Forbes is not. That is why I am barred from the course. ... An anarchist does not believe in law. Nor do I. Therefore I say

that law is directly opposed to any notion of ethics. Law is a system of compulsion and does away with any individual decision."<sup>1</sup>

Uncompromising advocacy for individual freedom had a tradition in the Rhees family. One of Rhees' ancestors, Morgan John Rhys, was a Welsh preacher who wrote pamphlets agitating for the ideas of the French Revolution.<sup>2</sup> In 1793, Rhys moved to Paris to experience the outcomes of the revolution firsthand, but he was prosecuted under the reign of terror. To save himself, he fled to America where he founded a colony for Welsh emigrants. In this mission, Morgan John Rhees (as he spelled his surname after emigration) was supported by Benjamin Rush, signatory of the Declaration of Independence. Expressing his gratitude to Rush, Morgan Rhees named his son after him. Ever since, the Christian name "Rush" has been passed down from generation to generation. The Rush Rhees of our story not only continued the fight for freedom in the first Rush's name, he had also inherited the passion for defending his views with radical statements; and as with his distinguished ancestors, Rhees was prepared to act. Only 19 years old, Rhees left the land of his forefathers and went off to study philosophy in Europe.

"Wearing his shirt collar loose & open at the neck" (von Hugel 1981, 275–76, quoted in Phillips 2006, 268), Rhees appeared like a young Percy Shelley to Professor Norman Kemp Smith when he arrived in Edinburgh in 1924. Kemp Smith, a Scotsman, had been professor of psychology and philosophy at the University of Princeton when he published an extensive Commentary to Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (Kemp Smith

<sup>1</sup>"Radicalism of Rochester President's Son Causes Professor to Bar Youth From Class", *Special to The New York Times*, 28 February 1924, p. 1. The preceding passage in the article reads: "'The most unsatisfactory notebook for the year's work I have ever had turned in to me.' Dr. Forbes told his class of seventy-five students, referring to young Rhees's work. 'It attempted refutation of everything I had taught during the year'."

<sup>2</sup>Most of the biographical information in the following three paragraphs can be found in Phillips (2006).

1918). In 1924, Kemp Smith was professor of logic and metaphysics at the University of Edinburgh and would soon prepare his epoch-making translation of Kant's first *Critique* (Kant 1929). At the beginning of Rhees' years of study, Kemp Smith understood that Rhees aspired to be a poet and mainly sought inspiration from philosophy (Phillips 2006, 268). However, he convinced the strong-headed youth that he could only achieve any of his high ambitions through disciplined work. Under the guidance of this thoughtful and strict teacher, Rhees, after four years, graduated from the University of Edinburgh with high honors. That same year, 1928, he was given a post as lecturer at the University of Manchester, where he distinguished himself through his "wholehearted commitment in teaching" (Phillips 2006, 268).<sup>3</sup>

When the post as lecturer at the University of Manchester expired after four years, Rhees took this as an opportunity to pursue philosophical research. In 1932 he moved to Innsbruck, Austria, in order to study the philosophy of Franz Brentano with Professor Alfred Kastil. Kastil, a former student of Brentano, had been appointed editor of Brentano's unpublished writings some 15 years earlier. While Rhees was in Innsbruck, Kastil edited the *Kategorienlehre* for Brentano's complete works (Brentano 1968). This book contained Brentano's theory of the continuum. Rhees developed a keen interest in Brentano's treatment of continuity as a perceptual phenomenon and of the relation between continuous phenomena and their parts (Körner and Chisholm 2010). Kastil was impressed by Rhees' philosophical vigour and he believed that Rhees could elaborate on Brentano's theory:

Brentano struggled with the difficulties of the continuum repeatedly throughout his life and developed a general theory of continuity, which sets forth the general laws for continua of various

<sup>3</sup>The qualification stems from a recommendation written by Rhees' superior, professor J. L. Stocks, at the University of Manchester.

numbers of dimensions. In this connection he did not neglect the peculiarities which distinguish topic continua from chronic continua. But Brentano devoted special study to double continua, of which motion is the most important example. Here he developed the conceptions of teleiosis and of plerosis, the former of which applies to differences of velocity, the latter to the quantitative differences in the connections of boundaries. But even in regard to these relations of continuity Brentano's theory remains incomplete; indeed he indicated to me a few days before his death that his theory was in a process of alteration, without giving any further indication of the kind of improvements which he had in mind. It now appears very probable that Mr Rhees's acumen and unsparing diligence have succeeded [sic] in finding the proper approach here.<sup>4</sup>

Since Brentano built on Aristotle's doctrine of relations, Kant-scholars accused him of scholasticism. In turn, it was Brentano's intention to target their jargon with his philosophy (Brentano 1968, XXVIII). Thus, key features of Brentano's work—namely, the thorough criticism of scholarly jargon and the firm conviction that psychology and philosophy ought to be conducted like the sciences—made him a congenial thinker to the movement of analytical philosophy in England. It is therefore no wonder that after working for one year on Brentano's theories of relations and continuity, Rhees was accepted as a doctoral student at Cambridge. In 1933, George Edward Moore became his supervisor.

Moore had been Wittgenstein's friend and one of his closest discussion partners since Wittgenstein's years of study at Cambridge before World War I; he had visited Wittgenstein in Norway in the Spring of 1913, taking dictations from the student he believed to be already a most significant philosopher. After Wittgenstein returned to Cambridge in 1929, the professor

<sup>4</sup>Letter of recommendation, Easter 1935, Richard Burton Archives (hereafter abbreviated RBA), UNI/SU/PC/1/1/2/3. See also Erbacher and Schirmer (2016).

became an attendee of Wittgenstein's lectures. When Rhees arrived at Cambridge in 1933, Moore therefore recommended that he also attend Wittgenstein's lectures. By this time Wittgenstein had already worked through at least one major phase of his new philosophy: he had departed from the conception of analysis presented in the *Tractatus*, he had identified misleading ideas in his youth work and developed a method to clarify them, and he had just given a summarizing compilation of his new writings to a typist.<sup>5</sup> Around the time of Rhees' arrival at Cambridge, Wittgenstein was trying out new formats for presenting his views in a book. He was collaborating with Friedrich Waismann, a member of the Vienna Circle who wanted to give a systematic account of Wittgenstein's new philosophy, and he was dictating another draft to selected students.<sup>6</sup>

Amongst the Cambridge freshmen, Wittgenstein had become an almost mystical figure, famous, in any case, as an unconventional and eccentric teacher. Many students imitated his gestures and phrases when following him through Whewell's Court on their way to the lectures.<sup>7</sup> Rhees was put off by those acolytes (Monk 1991, 357), but for his supervisor's sake he approached Wittgenstein and received a probing reply:

When I Rhees asked him [Wittgenstein] first if I could come to his lectures, he asked if I had any idea of what went on in them. And when I said (or said something like) obviously I had only such ideas as came from discussion with those attending them, Wittgenstein said: "Suppose you asked someone 'Can you play the violin?', and he said: 'I don't know, but I can try.'"<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup>Editions of a major step in this development have appeared as Wittgenstein (1969b) and Wittgenstein (2000a).

<sup>6</sup>Waismann's account was published in Waismann (1976); Wittgenstein's dictation was published in Wittgenstein (1958).

<sup>7</sup>From notes of a personal conversation with Sir John Bradfield.

<sup>8</sup>Letter from Rhees to von Wright, 22 January 1976, von Wright and Wittgenstein Archives at the University of Helsinki (hereafter abbreviated WWA).

On reflection, this puzzling response may be understood as a grammatical joke, showing the kind of philosophical investigation that took place in Wittgenstein's lectures.<sup>9</sup> However, Rhees was not taken with the philosophizing that he witnessed in Wittgenstein's class, as he told his Austrian mentor Kastil in a letter:

I went to Wittgenstein a few times. He very much gives me the impression of being a straightforward and honest person; however, I don't think that I will go to him more often. I did not make this decision instantly, as Moore seems to be very appreciative of Wittgenstein. I, in turn, value Moore's judgment very highly, and I know that he would not have his opinion without a reason. Nonetheless, I think I will not go anymore. I find his style of lecturing confusing. He never prepares—and when he does, his lectures suffer. (I am convinced that he is no posturer in this, although he is probably mistaken.) He continuously speaks in similes (which are only partly actual examples), and says about himself that he always thinks in similes. If something does not become clear, he does not try to give an explanation in simple words but instead looks for a new simile. This method, though, is in accordance with his philosophical position, according to which the answers to the most important philosophical questions cannot be given through propositions or theories, but can only be "shown" by means of similes or "symbolic forms". Therefore, he says that he may be the right man for philosophy. (This is again, I believe, only naivety, not a sign of vanity.) But this is why his lectures do not get show a clear thread. Currently he lectures on the philosophy of language, particularly on the idea of meaning. He constantly emphasizes that the matter is exceptionally difficult. Sometimes he grabs his head, giving the explanation, "All this is *tremendously* difficult, we are in the middle of *hell* right now." And I asked myself if some of the attendees have any clear impression about philosophy, barring that the whole (quite undefined) matter is "tremendously difficult". This I regard as pedagogically bad. I hear that only after having heard him for a fairly long time one starts to recognize how much one gets from him. That I am willing to believe. But life is

<sup>9</sup>I am thankful to James Conant for this suggestion.

short; and the question is whether I would not profit even more if I used the time for something else (e.g. for the study of Marty's works). And at the moment, it seems to me that this question has to be answered in the affirmative."<sup>10</sup>

Wittgenstein himself was not satisfied with these lectures that were unusually crowded with 30–40 people (Wittgenstein 2003a, 345). In fact, soon after Rhees had written the above letter, Wittgenstein announced that he couldn't continue to lecture and proposed that selected students should write down dictations that could then be distributed (Wittgenstein 2003a, 345).

Though Rhees continued to attend Wittgenstein's lectures during the subsequent terms (Wittgenstein 2003a, 346–47), he remained critical towards the philosophy he was confronted with at Cambridge. As a participant in lectures, he would not merely sit and listen, but pose challenging questions (Rhees 2006, XXV). Still in 1935, Rhees firmly held on to the views he had acquired in Austria, as the following letter to Kastil shows:

My work here doesn't go particularly well. You have no idea which entanglement of fictions people here believe in; which different "meanings" of "is" and "exists". These are not regarded as homonymia pro hen (if people know what that means?), but, apparently, as homonymia apo tuches. They indeed are supposed to be different forms of existence, but without having anything in common. And no matter to what extent one thinks to have uncovered such doctrines, new objections come from unexpected quarters—also based on different "meanings". In the course of one argument, I remarked that the apodictic "is impossible" includes an empiric "is not". Moore wanted to deny this and told me that Wittgenstein holds this opinion as well. He admits that if a round quadrangle is impossible, there is no round quadrangle. But, according to him, the latter must mean something different than the

<sup>10</sup>Letter from Rhees to Kastil, 5 November 1933, Franz Brentano Archiv at the University of Graz, inventory number 000616–000622; original in German, translation by Tina Schirmer and Christian Erbacher. Underlinings in the original letter are transcribed as italics. A new edition of Moore's lecture notes of these lectures has appeared as Wittgenstein (2016).

"there is no —" as in "there is no green human being". The discussion about this point went on for quite a long time. Yet I still can't see what he suggests. His argument seems to mainly rest on the idea that I cannot learn through experience that no round quadrangle exists; therefore, the "is" or the "exists" must have a different meaning. If it is readily clear that we cannot learn it by experience? And if so, how does this give a different meaning to the "is"? Yes, Moore says, as it shows that the truth or the fact that is believed in is of a different kind.

Oh well; so, one should debunk the doctrine of "facts". I've partly already tried this. But when does one finish with the introduction to a theory of relations?<sup>11</sup>

One can imagine that Wittgenstein liked Rhees' obstinate attachment to his philosophical convictions. In turn, Rhees came to appreciate Wittgenstein's philosophizing despite his initial misgivings. Rhees' intelligent unruliness, his acquaintance with the University of Manchester—where Wittgenstein had once studied engineering—and his experiences in Wittgenstein's homeland Austria may have further contributed to a mutual sympathy. In any case, three years after their first encounter, Rhees and Wittgenstein had become discussion partners also outside class:

At the end of the academic session, in June 1936, I had tea with him and he talked about the question of what he should do now. His fellowship was coming to an end, and the question was whether he should try to get a job of some sort or go somewhere by himself and spend his time working on his book. (Rhees 1984, 208–9)

As it turned out, Wittgenstein left Cambridge in order to return to Skjolden, Norway, where he had made decisive breakthroughs for what became his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. More than 20 years after this experience, he now envisaged going there again to work on his second philosophical book. He

<sup>11</sup>Letter from Rhees to Kastil, 5 January 1935, Franz Brentano Archiv Graz, inventory number 000643–000645; original in German, translation by Tina Schirmer and Christian Erbacher.

had written a huge number of remarks during his fellowship at Cambridge. His latest strategy for turning them into a book had been to dictate to two students and friends throughout the academic year—four days a week for several hours at a time.<sup>12</sup> Wittgenstein wanted to translate the results of this dictation into German whilst staying at his cabin in Skjolden. Having been built especially for him before the Great War, this small house was located in an isolated spot at bottom of the Sognefjord.

Wittgenstein arrived at his cabin in August 1936 and began revising the voluminous dictation with the working title *Philosophische Untersuchungen—Versuch einer Umarbeitung*. After working through 180 pages, he suddenly stopped, drew a line and put down a devastating judgment: “This whole attempt at a revision from page 118 up to this point is *worthless*”.<sup>13</sup> This uncompromising rejection turned out to be a decisive moment in Twentieth Century philosophy: in early November Wittgenstein began writing a new manuscript entitled *Philosophische Untersuchungen*.<sup>14</sup> On the first page he declared this new manuscript to be a bad Christmas present for his sister. Even so, what he produced was a beautiful, fair copy of 188 handwritten paragraphs. Today it is considered the very first version of what posthumously appeared as Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations*.

For Rush Rhees, 1936 also proved to be a turning point because he gave up his ambition to finish his dissertation. Moore,

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<sup>12</sup>The dictations were later published in Wittgenstein (1958); for information on the circumstances of dictating, see Bouwsma (1961).

<sup>13</sup>Wittgenstein (2000b, Ms 115); the revision begins at page 118 (= Ms 115, 118[1]) and ends on page 297 (= Ms 115, 297[5]). The original is in German; double underlining is transcribed as italics. An edition of the manuscript is published in Wittgenstein (1958); transcripts and facsimiles of the items in Wittgenstein’s Nachlass can be found in Wittgenstein (2000b) and online at [www.wittgensteinsource.com](http://www.wittgensteinsource.com).

<sup>14</sup>Wittgenstein (2000b, Ms 142); in German this very first version of the *Philosophical Investigations* is referred to as “Urfassung” (foundational version) in Wittgenstein (2001).

his supervisor, was very sorry to learn of this; like Rhees’ previous colleagues and superiors, Moore felt he had benefited immensely from discussions with Rhees and regarded him as “exceptionally well qualified to lecture” (Phillips 2006, 271). Abandoning the idea of submitting a dissertation, however, did not mean Rhees would give up philosophical writing altogether. Rhees travelled to Austria in order to resume studies with Kastil, who was by then professor emeritus and living in Vienna. Returning to England from this sojourn, Rhees substituted for his former professor at the University of Manchester in 1937, teaching a wide range of topics in philosophy. Wittgenstein travelled back and forth between Vienna, Cambridge and Norway during these years. In Spring 1938, when Nazi Germany annexed Austria, Wittgenstein decided to apply for British citizenship and stay in England. Soon afterwards, he resumed lecturing at Cambridge. Rhees, who lived in London since his temporary post at the University of Manchester had expired, was among the hand-picked invitees to Wittgenstein’s classes on aesthetics and religious belief.<sup>15</sup> This refreshed their relationship and led to a phase of intensive cooperation.

Wittgenstein and Rhees met every afternoon for about three consecutive weeks in the Autumn of 1938, mainly to discuss the problem of continuity (Rhees 1970, vii). Rhees was trying to write down his account of continuity in immediate experience. Like before, his treatment built on Brentano’s theories of relations and the continuum.<sup>16</sup> But this was not what he discussed with Wittgenstein; he later remembered:

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<sup>15</sup>Notes from the lectures were later published as Wittgenstein (1966); see also Monk (1991, 402) and Wittgenstein’s letter to Rhees from 15 July 1938 in Wittgenstein (2011).

<sup>16</sup>Rhees’ extensive, but fragmentary treatise of 77 typewritten pages has been discovered recently. An edited excerpt is published in Erbacher and Schirmer (2016). A comprehensive edition of the fragment will appear in Erbacher’s forthcoming book on the work of Wittgenstein’s literary executors.

I came to know Wittgenstein after I had known Kraus and studied Brentano, and I was interested to learn if I could whether Wittgenstein had read Brentano. I think it is certain that he had not. ... And I cannot really find anything in Wittgenstein which *reminds* me of Brentano.<sup>17</sup>

Wittgenstein's acquaintance with the problem of continuity had another background. Ten years earlier, in 1928, he had attended a lecture entitled "The structure of the Continuum" by the mathematician Luitzen Brouwer (see Brouwer 1996). It is said that the experience of Brouwer's lectures on the intuitionist solution to the foundational crisis of mathematics was a main reason for Wittgenstein to return to Cambridge and to take up his philosophical writing (Stadler 1997, 449–50). In the notebooks Wittgenstein wrote upon his return, the problem of continuity appears, as well.<sup>18</sup> Now, whereas Rhees deliberately excluded the mathematical concept of continuity in his study, Wittgenstein began discussing with Rhees precisely the use of continuity in mathematics and then went on to treat the use of continuity outside mathematics (Rhees 1970, 157). These discussions could take hours (Rhees 1970, vii). They found that dissecting continuity may have served certain purposes in mathematics, but that philosophical confusion was produced when one tried to transfer those mathematical terms to other contexts, for instance to the perception of continuous movement. Only then did the puzzle arise of how a continuity of movement could be built using individuated positions and points (Rhees 1970, 157). Thus, what was puzzling about the problem of continuity was not that continuity actually was discontinuous; rather, the puzzlement was created by transferring a mathematically useful conception to a non-mathematical context.

<sup>17</sup>Rhees to McGuinness, 6 May 1963, RBA, UNI/SU/PC/1/1/3/5. Underlinings in the original letter are transcribed as italics.

<sup>18</sup>Wittgenstein (2000b, Mss 105–107). These notebooks contain Wittgenstein's so-called phenomenological phase. The problem of continuity appears, for example, in Ms 106, 38.

Rhees took notes from his discussions with Wittgenstein and published them later as "On Continuity: Wittgenstein's Ideas, 1938" (Rhees 1970, 104–57). At the same time, he tried to formulate his own account of continuity, and Wittgenstein encouraged him in this ambition:

As you know, I wish you lots of luck with your writing. Just stick to it; and if possible, sacrifice coherence sometimes. I mean, if you feel you could just now say something, but it isn't exactly the thing which ought to come in this place—rather say it and jump about it a bit than stick to the 'single track' and not get on. That is, if you can do it. If you can't jump, just plod on.<sup>19</sup>

Despite Wittgenstein's encouragement to submit this work as an application for a fellowship, Rhees would not send it off. Wittgenstein expressed his disagreement with this decision:

I found your first chapter here and was disappointed that you had not sent it in. I think it was wrong not to do it and I think you ought *still* to do it if there is a chance that it might be overlooked that you're a bit late. I have only glanced at a few pages & can't do more at present, but I didn't at all have a bad impression! So why the hell you should wish to be your own examiner I can't see.<sup>20</sup>

Rhees measured his philosophical writing according to the highest possible standards. His reluctance to submit a doctoral dissertation and his draft on continuity (as well as his reluctance to publish in later life) testifies to his belief that he seldom achieved the originality in his writing that he demanded from himself. His merciless self-criticism coupled with humility and an unwillingness to compromise with the customs of academic life certainly hindered Rhees from pursuing a smooth academic career; but who may have understood him better than

<sup>19</sup>Letter from Wittgenstein to Rhees, 9 September 1938, in Wittgenstein (2012, 230). Numbers refer to the numbering of letters in this book (and not to the book's pagination).

<sup>20</sup>Letter from Wittgenstein to Rhees, 3 October 1938, in Wittgenstein (2012, 233).

Wittgenstein in this respect? Perhaps it was a shared attitude towards the requirements of decent writing in philosophy that made Rhees especially sensitive and attentive to Wittgenstein's concerns about publishing his work. In any case, Rhees became Wittgenstein's confidant in the question of publishing. This is understood, for instance, from a letter Wittgenstein wrote in the Summer of 1938:

... this morning I had an idea which I can't very easily explain to you in writing. The gist of it is that I am thinking of publishing something before long after all so as to end the constant misunderstandings and misinterpretations. I very much want to talk the business over with you.<sup>21</sup>

At this time, a couple of texts were circulating which Wittgenstein considered plagiarism and misrepresentations of his views. Some of his students had written about his new philosophy on several occasions. Richard Braithwaite had published his impression of Wittgenstein's philosophy, to which Wittgenstein responded with a disclaimer in *Mind*, stating that one part of Braithwaite's presentation was inaccurate and the other false (Wittgenstein 1933; Monk 1991, 335). When Alice Ambrose wanted to publish an article on Wittgenstein's view on finitism in mathematics, Wittgenstein disapproved of the idea and tried to hinder the article's appearance in *Mind* (Monk 1991, 346). In early 1936, well after Wittgenstein had abandoned working with Waismann on a book intended to present his ideas, Waismann published an article and Wittgenstein accused him of appropriating ideas without acknowledging that he was the author of the views and similes put forward.<sup>22</sup> As a consequence, Wittgenstein would not meet Waismann again, although the latter had also immigrated to England and settled in Cambridge

<sup>21</sup>Letter from Wittgenstein to Rhees, 13 July 1938, in Wittgenstein (2012, 227).

<sup>22</sup>Letter from Wittgenstein to Waismann, 19 May 1936, quoted in Pichler (2004, 135).

by 1938.<sup>23</sup> These events incited Wittgenstein to publish his works. In addition, since he had resolved to live permanently in England, a publication might have been helpful, if not mandatory, for continuing his work at the university.<sup>24</sup> Thus, Wittgenstein envisioned publishing the typed and reworked version of the manuscript he had created in Skjolden.<sup>25</sup> He wanted to know if Rhees would make an attempt to translate the book:

I think it was in June 1938 that Wittgenstein asked me if I would translate his book—certainly before the beginning of July. And he sent me a copy of his preface soon after this, asking me to translate it. Moore had already given me the typescript of the *Untersuchungen* which Wittgenstein had given him ...<sup>26</sup>

Why Rhees was asked to do the translation may partly have to do with his familiarity with Wittgenstein's philosophizing and the fact that he had a good command of Austrian German. However, Theodore Redpath, another regular attendee of Wittgenstein's lectures at that time, was also asked to translate the preface. Redpath agreed and reported what an exhausting task working with Wittgenstein could be:

We sat for several hours one day thinking out not only every sentence, but pretty well every word, and Wittgenstein got very worked up when he (or we) could not find words or phrases which entirely satisfied him. Time and again I found myself wishing to heaven that he would let me work on the German quite alone and present him with a version which he could then comment on and revise, but he pushed inexorably on, and though his interpositions were sometimes quite awry, as well as exasperating, one did

<sup>23</sup>See Monk (1991, 335, 346); Wittgenstein would also try to make Norman Malcolm and others publish a correction of John Wisdom's presentation of his philosophy: see Malcolm (1958, 57–59).

<sup>24</sup>I am especially indebted to Peter Keicher for this suggestion.

<sup>25</sup>Wittgenstein (2000b, Ts 220); this typescript is referred to as "Frühfassung" (early version) of the *Philosophical Investigations* in Wittgenstein (2001).

<sup>26</sup>Letter from Rhees to von Wright, 13 May 1977, RBA, UNI/SU/PC/1/2/1/3.



learn something from the procedure, and it gave one an insight into Wittgenstein's fanatical care both for accuracy and for style. (Redpath 1990, 73)

Rhees was probably one of the few people prepared for the struggle of crafting each and every formulation. In October 1938, Cambridge University Press agreed to publish the book in a bilingual edition under the title *Philosophische Bemerkungen* (*Philosophical Remarks*),<sup>27</sup> and Rhees worked on his translation throughout the Autumn and Winter. He regularly met with Wittgenstein for discussions. In January 1939, Rhees' father died and Rhees travelled to the United States. Before departing, he left the translation with Wittgenstein.<sup>28</sup> It was deemed unsatisfactory (Monk 1991, 414). But although Wittgenstein disapproved of the translation, he was always, in the same breath, keen to emphasize Rhees' qualities. To Moore he wrote: "please don't mention to anyone that I don't think highly of the translation. Rhees did his very best & the stuff is damn difficult to translate."<sup>29</sup> A few days later, Wittgenstein pointed out to John Maynard Keynes, to whom he had sent the German manuscript together with the translation: "Yes, the translation is pretty awful, & yet the man who did it is an excellent man."<sup>30</sup> Wittgenstein's high esteem for Rhees was not altered by the disappointment over his translation, as is also evident from a recommendation that Wittgenstein wrote soon after:

I have known Mr R Rhees for 4 years; he has attended my lectures on philosophy and we have had a great many of discussions both on philosophical and general subjects. I have been strongly impressed by the great seriousness and intelligence with which he

<sup>27</sup>Letter from Wittgenstein to Rhees, 6 October 1938, in Wittgenstein (2012, 234); see also Wittgenstein (2001, 20).

<sup>28</sup>The translation can be found in Wittgenstein (2000b, Ts 226).

<sup>29</sup>Letter from Wittgenstein to Moore, 1 February 1939, in Wittgenstein (2012, 240).

<sup>30</sup>Letter from Wittgenstein to Keynes, 8 February 1939, in Wittgenstein (2012, 242).

tackles the problem. Mr Rhees is an exceptionally kind and helpful man and will spare no trouble to assist his students. His German is very good indeed. (Quoted in Phillips 2006, 271–72)

## Von Wright 1

Rhees' translation never appeared in print.<sup>31</sup> Wittgenstein began to revise it but soon gave up the idea of publishing the book at all. His dissatisfaction with the translation was most likely not the only reason (see Wittgenstein 2001, 19–21). In early 1939, Keynes informed Wittgenstein that he had been elected to succeed Moore as professor of philosophy.<sup>32</sup> Wittgenstein may then have seen a possibility to improve the book. After receiving word of his election, Wittgenstein resumed lecturing on the foundations of mathematics—the theme that was supposed to make up his book's second part. Again, Rhees was among the attendees of these lectures, which were held twice a week in a friend's room at King's College.<sup>33</sup> One day, two new faces appeared in class, as Redpath recalled:

Knowing his aversion to such invasions, I wondered what would happen. If I remember rightly, Wittgenstein asked them what they were doing there and whether they intended to follow the course. They didn't really answer, at all events to his satisfaction. Indeed he hardly gave them time to, for he added, quite uncompromisingly: 'I don't want any tourists here, you know!' They were, however, allowed to stay for the rest of the lecture. (Redpath 1990, 86)

<sup>31</sup>Though Rhees' translation (Wittgenstein 2000b, Ts 226) never appeared in print, P. M. S. Hacker and J. Schulte have consulted it, together with Wittgenstein's comments on it, for their new translation of *Philosophical Investigations* (2009). I thank an anonymous reviewer for making me aware of this fact.

<sup>32</sup>Letter from Keynes to Wittgenstein, 11 February 1939, in Wittgenstein (2012, 243); Monk (1991, 415).

<sup>33</sup>Wittgenstein (2003a, 350); notes from the lectures were later published as Wittgenstein (1976b). A new edition of Wittgenstein's lectures from this period is about to appear as Wittgenstein (forthcoming).

One of the intruders was Georg Henrik von Wright. He too described the encounter:

I went to his lecture in a room in King's College, introduced myself when he entered, and said that I had the chairman's permission to attend lectures in the faculty. Wittgenstein muttered something which I did not understand, and I seated myself among the audience. He started to lecture and I became at once fascinated. "The strongest impression any man ever made on me", I wrote in my diary that same day—and the statement remains true. At the end of the lecture, however, Wittgenstein expressed his great annoyance at the presence of 'visitors' in his class. He seemed furious. Then he left the room without waiting for an apology or explanation. I was hurt and shocked. My first impulse was to give up efforts to approach this strange man. (von Wright 1989, 10–11)

Von Wright, a 22 year-old doctoral student from Helsinki, was not accustomed to such a brusque rejection. Indeed, his life up to this point seems to have been completely governed by polite conduct and gentle deportment. Nothing similar to the ruptures and rebelliousness that characterize Rhees' early biography can be discovered in descriptions of von Wright's youth. However, like Rhees, von Wright was wholeheartedly determined to make his way in philosophy.

Born in 1916, von Wright had grown up in a wealthy and well-educated family that was part of Finland's Swedish speaking elite.<sup>34</sup> His father had graduated from the Swedish commercial college and had gone on to study economics and philosophy at the University of Helsinki. Though he could have pursued an academic career, he chose to become a businessman. Despite his success in business, the son admired him not for being a smart manager but for being a generous gentleman, a fine

<sup>34</sup>Most of the biographical information in this section can be found in von Wright (1989) and von Wright (2001). For the sake of readability, additional citations are only given in cases of direct quotations or when a source different from these was used or when it seemed to be of special interest to the reader to refer to specific pages.

intellectual who met with the academics, writers and publishers who attended Helsinki's cultural salons. Von Wright's education and physical care were left to his mother. She too had graduated from the Swedish commercial college and thereafter had continued her education in Germany. When von Wright was twelve years old, he and his mother went to a health-resort in Merano, Italy, which at the time was under the jurisdiction of Austria. Here, von Wright not only received private lessons in German but was also introduced to geometry by his mother—an experience von Wright regarded as his "intellectual awakening":

It happened through my acquaintance with the elements of geometry in the spring 1929. This gave me a tremendous thrill—and sleepless nights of thinking about triangles and circles, cones and spheres, and the mysterious number  $\pi$ , whose value it was impossible to tell 'exactly'. (von Wright 1989, 4)

Only a few months later, around Christmas in 1929, the now thirteen year-old von Wright asked his father what "philosophy" was. In response, his father gave him a small selection of books. While reading them, he decided that philosophy would become his subject—and Georg Henrik von Wright would never question this decision again. His early mastery of German provided him with what would become his "spiritual home": the literature of Schiller and Goethe, Nietzsche and Schopenhauer (von Wright 1989, 8).

Having made his vocational choice at this early stage in his life, von Wright began studying philosophy at the University of Helsinki immediately after finishing secondary school in 1934. A few years before, Eino Kaila (whose wife was a cousin of von Wright's mother) had been appointed professor of theoretical philosophy at the University of Helsinki. Von Wright admired him as a strong, charismatic person who was able to captivate large audiences. Kaila had earned his doctorate with a dissertation in experimental psychology and, as a professor, raised

a whole generation of Finnish philosophers and psychologists in a new scientific spirit.<sup>35</sup> During the years that immediately preceded von Wright's matriculation, Kaila had been in contact with Rudolf Carnap and Moritz Schlick in Vienna. Since the Vienna Circle had gone public with its program in the late 1920s, Kaila paid research visits to Vienna and conducted psychological research in the city orphanage. Back in Helsinki, he was developing his own branch of logical empiricism. When von Wright began studying at university, Kaila was about to reach the peak of his academic creativity.

At the beginning of his studies, von Wright expressed to Kaila, perhaps naively, a preference for logic more than psychology (von Wright 2001, 54). As a consequence, Kaila introduced him to the writings of Carnap, and this was decisive for von Wright's career (von Wright 2001, 55–56). It only took one semester for von Wright to be convinced that logic would be his "gateway to serious philosophizing" (von Wright 1989, 5). At only twenty years old, he committed himself to the idea of becoming a professional in "Logistic Philosophy". This was also the title of an article the young von Wright published in the Swedish intellectual journal *Nya Argus* (1938). This article displays his gift of expressing philosophical ideas in an accurate, clear, and easily accessible language which is neither too technical nor too simplistic. Von Wright honed this skill of writing lucidly for a broad audience by regularly contributing short essays to the student journal. Meanwhile, the article "Logistic Philosophy" shows that von Wright cleaved to the views of the positivistic movement. Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, which Kaila had chosen as the topic for von Wright's final exam in philosophy, is also mentioned in this early piece and interpreted in a positivistic vein: von Wright celebrates the *Tractatus* as the first

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<sup>35</sup>For this and the subsequent information on Kaila, see von Wright's Introduction to Kaila (1979).

great work of logistic philosophy, the consequences of which were explicated by the Vienna Circle.

After graduating with a Master of Arts in Philosophy in 1937, von Wright wanted to proceed immediately to doctoral studies (von Wright 2001, 69–70). His suggestion to Kaila was to write a dissertation on "The Justification of Induction". Von Wright was aware of the problem's tradition in philosophy, especially of Aristotle's and Hume's expositions of the inconclusiveness of inductive inferences. The most important reason for making this suggestion, however, was that the problem of inductive reasoning was currently of prime interest for the type of logistic philosophy that aimed at clarifying the logic of the empirical sciences. Von Wright developed an understanding of the great role of inductive reasoning in the practice of research as well as in everyday life. Though Kaila had originally planned another topic for von Wright's dissertation—namely, a comparison of a Platonic and an Aristotelian philosophy of science—he approved of von Wright's suggestion.

Reading Hume and Bacon on the problem of induction shifted von Wright's focus towards philosophical works originally written in English. The works he had studied up to that point had been written almost exclusively in German. In fact, von Wright had not learned English before he began studying the classic works on the problem of induction (von Wright 2001, 71). Von Wright used the literature on his doctoral topic for learning English that became the new *lingua franca* of science since Nazi Germany intellectually desiccated the German-speaking academia. First and foremost von Wright studied treatises by Keynes, Braithwaite and Charlie D. Broad. Since all these authors taught at Cambridge at that time, and since the Vienna Circle was practically dissolved, it was only natural for von Wright to choose Cambridge as his destination for a period of study abroad which was a traditional element in Finnish doctoral studies.

Von Wright arrived at Cambridge in early March 1939 (von Wright 2001, 72–77). Without having made any official pre-arrangements, he moved into a hotel and simply approached the scholars he knew from his readings. Upon paying his first visit to Braithwaite, he was surprised to hear that Wittgenstein currently taught at Cambridge. Without a second of doubt, von Wright wanted to attend his classes. When visiting Broad, who was the faculty chairman, he asked for permission to participate in courses in philosophy. Having Broad's permission in his pocket, von Wright went to Wittgenstein's class at King's College: here, as we saw, he was expelled, perhaps for the first and only time in his life. But contrary to his initial impulse of giving up trying to approach Wittgenstein, von Wright had the courage to write a letter to the man who had made such a strong impression on him through only one encounter. To his great surprise, he immediately received a friendly response with an invitation for tea for 4:45 pm on March 10<sup>th</sup>. This was still during von Wright's first days in Cambridge.

The conversation von Wright and Wittgenstein enjoyed that afternoon was the first step in their long friendship. What Wittgenstein found most interesting about his young visitor was probably not his belief in logistic philosophy. Wittgenstein knew this agenda from his discussions with Waismann, Schlick and Carnap. He had never considered philosophy a science and was against deriving theories or principles from the *Tractatus* or his new philosophy. In fact, just a few days before Wittgenstein and von Wright met, Wittgenstein had made this clear at the Moral Sciences Club (see Wittgenstein 2003a, 334–35, 377–80). By contrast, what Wittgenstein found of interest may have been that he met in von Wright a young man who shared an upbringing rooted in the non-aristocratic and non-religious cultural nobility of the central European world of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In any case, according to von Wright, he and Wittgenstein did not talk about philosophy during their first meeting. They

talked instead about architecture and Scandinavia, the landscape Wittgenstein had come to adore since sojourning in Norway.<sup>36</sup>

It seems that a common ground for their conversation was not their philosophical views but a cultural resemblance. Indeed, there was a side to the young von Wright that could not be described from his professional interest in logistic philosophy. His intellectual passions were aroused by the 19<sup>th</sup> century art historian and humanist Jakob Burckhardt, and he was greatly inspired by the philosopher of history Oswald Spengler, whose books he first came across in his father's library.<sup>37</sup> Spengler's morphology of world history put von Wright in a mood he described as his 'early Spenglerism' that was in his own words:

... to view history as a sort of *tableau vivant*, to be looked at in awe and contemplated like a work of art. In the details of history one should try to discern the typical, the 'morphological similarities', the recurrent patterns. The great changes, the crises and revolutions of history, are like earthquakes and other catastrophes in nature. They cannot be judged under the moral categories of justice and rightness. But they may, like life as whole, be seen in the light of 'tragedy'. (von Wright 1989, 8)

Although "rightness" was no category for contemplating history, "greatness" certainly was. "Greatness" was the element von Wright integrated into his Spenglerism from reading Jakob Burckhardt, in whose writing he found:

... greatness of achievement but also of personality (Goethe, Leonardo). Greatness is an unpredictable chance element in his-

<sup>36</sup>Wittgenstein wrote to von Wright six months after their discussion: "I wish I were in that landscape of yours. It must be similar to the landscape in Norway, which I love." Letter from Wittgenstein to von Wright, 13 September 1939, in Wittgenstein (2012, 263).

<sup>37</sup>Von Wright read the German original of Spengler's *The Decline of the West* in the editions Spengler (1922) and Spengler (1923). The original copies from the library of von Wright's father can be consulted at WWA.

tory; it is largely through greatness that the typical and recurrent gets its individuality. (von Wright 1989, 8)

Thus, in contrast to a pure cultural pessimism often associated with Spengler's subsequently proverbial book-title of *The Decline of the West*, von Wright's early Spenglerism involved a glowing appreciation of past cultures and great personalities. This sense of greatness and a romantic belief in humanity's cultural refinement through education were surely present in his first conversation with Wittgenstein, even though they did not explicitly talk about Spengler who Wittgenstein regarded as one of the authors that influenced him.<sup>38</sup>

Wittgenstein visited von Wright for discussing philosophy in the Easter vacation and invited him to attend his classes in Easter term (von Wright 2001, 77; 1989, 11). He continued lecturing on the foundations of mathematics. During the lectures von Wright did not try to take notes, but wanted to concentrate on Wittgenstein's train of thought. Retrospectively, he confessed that he had understood next to nothing (von Wright 1989, 11). But already then, he was aware of witnessing a historical moment when Wittgenstein and the young Alan Turing fought what appeared to him dramatic intellectual duels (von Wright 2001, 77). Rhees and Norman Malcolm also attended these lectures, and both became good friends and colleagues of von Wright in later life. In 1939, however, von Wright did not associate with either of them (von Wright 1989, 11). After all, his main purpose for being at Cambridge was to work on his dissertation, and he pursued this goal with great determination.

The greater part of his stay at Cambridge von Wright spent either in the library or in discussions with Broad, who grew very fond of his student from Helsinki (von Wright 1989, 12). Broad would become von Wright's influential mentor and promoter.

<sup>38</sup>See von Wright (2001, 127); Wittgenstein's note on Spengler's influence is to be found in Wittgenstein (2000b, Ms 154, 15v). The remark stems from 1931 and is published in Wittgenstein (1980a).

He invited von Wright to dine at the High Table of Trinity College where the bright young gentleman impressed all fellows he met.<sup>39</sup> This detail is remarkable for it gives an idea of von Wright's outstanding diplomatic talents: within a few weeks, he won favor with both the academic establishment at Cambridge and Wittgenstein, whose position can be regarded as diametrically opposed to that academic establishment. Indeed, Wittgenstein and Broad had for a long time been intellectual antipodes at Cambridge.<sup>40</sup> Wittgenstein was appalled by the artificiality of the conversation at the High Table, where he was once reprimanded for not wearing a tie (Malcolm 1958, 30). Broad, on the other hand, could not stand Wittgenstein's appearances at meetings of the Moral Sciences Club and had asked him to stop attending.<sup>41</sup> This coincided with complaints from others that Wittgenstein tended to disturb and dominate the meetings. Accordingly, Wittgenstein had not been at the Moral Sciences Club between 1931 and 1938.<sup>42</sup> Though he resumed participating a few weeks before von Wright's arrival, there is no documentation that Wittgenstein was present when von Wright gave a talk on "The Justification of Induction" on 25 May 1939.<sup>43</sup>

Von Wright's talk at the Moral Sciences Club testifies to the

<sup>39</sup>Letter from Broad to von Wright, 17 July 1939, National Library of Finland (hereafter abbreviated NLF), Coll. 714.28–32.

<sup>40</sup>See Broad (1959b). Already in 1925 Broad wrote in the preface to his book (Broad 1925): "In the meanwhile I retire to my well-earned bath-chair, from which I shall watch with a fatherly eye the philosophic gambols of my younger friends as they dance to the highly syncopated pipings of Herr Wittgenstein's flute." Wittgenstein, in turn, mentioned Broad in his lectures of the academic year 1931–32: see Wittgenstein (1982b, 72–81).

<sup>41</sup>See Broad (1959a, 61), Monk (2001, 201), and Letter from Wittgenstein to Russell, 28 November 1935, in Wittgenstein (2012, 199).

<sup>42</sup>According to James Klagge in a note to the author, Wittgenstein was paying dues to the Moral Sciences Club again in Fall 1938.

<sup>43</sup>The minutes of the meeting with von Wright's talk are brief and do not indicate whether or not Wittgenstein was present. The minutes from the previous week's talk by Ayer show that Wittgenstein participated in that discussion. I am very thankful to James Klagge for this information.

influence that Wittgenstein had on him after only a few intense encounters. One can almost sense a departure from logical positivism when von Wright introduced the problem of induction as a “pseudo-problem” and then specified it as “a confusion of pictures which we associate with different terms”.<sup>44</sup> While his notion of “pseudo-problem” belongs to the logistic diction, “confusion of pictures” sounds much more like the Wittgenstein of the 1930s. In his talk, von Wright presented the inductive problem as the “demand for a proof that inductive inference if not with certainty so at least with considerable degree of probability will be true”. Von Wright argued that the solution of this problem lay not in finding or constructing such a proof, but rather in avoiding the philosophical error that leads to the demand for proof in the first place. This too reminds us of Wittgenstein. So also does the very end of von Wright’s talk, which is written in his hand at the end of his typescript:

... the problem of finding a justification of induction is no problem at all in the proper sense of the word, that what matters is not that the justification of induction is lacking, but rather: that there is nothing to justify.

The inductive problem—like so many other problems in philosophy—is like a mist and to solve the problem is to make the mist disappear. What I have said is not meant to be a proof for this, I have merely tried to point out a way, which if followed ought to contribute to a clarification of the ideas which we are apt to connect with this particular problem.

This is one of the rare cases in which von Wright can be said to have adopted a Wittgensteinian style. He later consciously resisted the temptation to imitate Wittgenstein’s way of philosophizing, but this early talk shows that Wittgenstein immediately left a stamp on von Wright’s thinking, and that von Wright was capable of immediately recognizing and assimilating new

<sup>44</sup>This and the following quotations are from the typescript for the talk kept at WWA.

thoughts of great significance. Of this intellectual impact, he later said:

What Wittgenstein did was to completely ‘shake me up’. The position in philosophy which I had come to hold during my studies with Kaila was being called into question, the basic problems of philosophy, which I had considered settled, revived. I felt that I had to start again from scratch in philosophy. (von Wright 1989, 11)

Von Wright’s talk at the Moral Sciences Club in May 1939 was warmly applauded and probably was yet another high point of his five months at Cambridge (Redpath 1990, 87). As Summer approached, Wittgenstein offered to finance an extension of von Wright’s stay, which he would be able to afford in his future position as professor from Autumn 1939 onwards (von Wright 2001, 77). Von Wright declined. As military airplanes began to appear over Cambridge, he feared the outbreak of war (von Wright 2001, 77–78). Von Wright discussed this issue with Wittgenstein. Although he was aware that Wittgenstein regarded Western civilization as a deteriorated culture, he was shocked when Wittgenstein indeed wished for its destruction. When von Wright asked him: “Do you really think that Europe needs another war?”, Wittgenstein replied: “Not one, but two or three” (von Wright 1995, 5). This statement was outrageous, all the more since, as a young soldier, Wittgenstein had experienced the cruelties of World War I.<sup>45</sup>

Von Wright left England before the Summer. From his family residence at the Finnish coast, he wrote to Wittgenstein about the significance of their acquaintance:

I must add very sincerely that already what I got from your lectures and my discussions with you during my time in Cambridge has given me a certain ‘tune’ to follow into a realm of thoughts, on the border of which I am standing, trying to listen carefully in

<sup>45</sup>I am thankful to Harald Johannessen for directing my attention to this aspect.

order to take the right course to the place, from where the tune is emanating. We do not know as yet wheather [sic] I shall arrive there or whether I only shall take the wrong course over and over again, but the fact that I hear the tune is enough to fill me with life-long happiness and thankfulness for that I have met you and been thought [sic] by you, even if for a very short time.<sup>46</sup>

Wittgenstein, in his reply, expressed that the appreciation of both philosophical understanding and personal respect was mutual, and almost like a premonition, he wrote about the book manuscript that he had not sent to the printers at the beginning of that year:

I should very much like to send you the M.S. of what would be the first volume of my book. I have an idea that it shall never be published in my lifetime & might perhaps be entirely lost. I should like to know that you had read it & had a copy of it. Write me if you like to have it; & if it can be sent I'll send it to you.

I think it goes without saying that I shall always be exceedingly glad to hear from you.<sup>47</sup>

## Rhees 2

A few days after von Wright had written to Wittgenstein, World War II broke out. Wittgenstein was greatly affected by this. In his reply to von Wright he revealed his state of mind and occupational doubts:

I can't imagine how I shall be able to lecture. I feel as though, under the present shameful & depressing circumstances, I ought to do anything but discuss philosophical problems, with people who aren't really deeply interested in them anyway.

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<sup>46</sup>Letter from von Wright to Wittgenstein, 27 August 1939, in Wittgenstein (2012, 259); see also: Letter from von Wright to Wittgenstein, 22 February 1940, in Wittgenstein (2012, 269).

<sup>47</sup>Letter from Wittgenstein to von Wright, 13 September 1939, in Wittgenstein (2012, 263).

... everything that I do seems to me futile & I don't know what sort of life I ought to lead.<sup>48</sup>

Wittgenstein's contempt for modern and Western ways of living extended to the academic life that surrounded him. He had always been in doubt about his role as a university teacher, and he advised several students to leave academic philosophy for a more practical occupation. The war aggravated these concerns. Although Wittgenstein had just been appointed professor of philosophy at Cambridge, he wrote to Rhees the very same day he replied to von Wright's letter, stating that he considered leaving university again if the war should continue:

... I am as unclear about what I ought to do as ever, except that I think, just now the right thing is to wait and see whether this war really develops into a war or not for this still seems to me very doubtful. In case it does I suppose one will get a job with the Red Cross pretty easily and not so many occupations will be 'reserved'.<sup>49</sup>

The 35 year-old Rhees shared Wittgenstein's rejection of academic customs. He had, perhaps under Wittgenstein's influence, taken a job as a welder at a factory in Swansea.<sup>50</sup> Rhees soon contemplated quitting, but Wittgenstein advised him to stick to it:

No job will ever absolutely & entirely fit you (just as ready made clothes don't ever fit certain people). What I mean is: please beware of drifting between jobs but thank the Lord that you've found one which however moderately, fits you somewhat. Forgive me for writing to you in this way.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup>Letter from Wittgenstein to von Wright, 13 September 1939, in Wittgenstein (2012, 263).

<sup>49</sup>Letter from Wittgenstein to Rhees, 13 September 1939, in Wittgenstein (2012, 261).

<sup>50</sup>I am indebted to Brian McGuinness, who pointed out that Wittgenstein's influence may have led Rhees to take the welding job.

<sup>51</sup>Letter from Wittgenstein to Rhees, 14 August 1940, in Wittgenstein (2012, 281).

These words weighed heavily in Rhees' conscience. In a long letter written on New Year's Eve 1940, Rhees struggled to justify his decision to give up welding in order to take a teaching post at the University of Swansea. He finally explained this decision by appealing to yet another opinion of Wittgenstein:

I would like to say that I didn't just disregard your advice. I was worried by your suggestions at the time when I finally did decide to come here; and I have seen a number of things which favour your view since then. My welding kept on being bad, and I thought (not so stupidly either) that it probably would never develop into anything decent. There was a lot more that was connected with this, but I'd better leave that out. I mention two considerations which played a considerable part. One was that such training as I had had was in the academic and pedagogical line. ... Another consideration, I confess, was a saying of yours which kept recurring to me. Your first opinion, when I suggested that I might go in for welding, was that it was foolish for me to try it. And one of your remarks about that sort of job generally was, 'It's too impersonal'. This kept going around in my head as I kept making a mess of things.<sup>52</sup>

It is probably fair to say that Rhees' decision to give up welding was prudent. As in his earlier university posts, Rhees proved his outstanding capacity as a teacher in philosophy. Being highly respected by students and colleagues, he would, in later years, inspire the atmosphere at the department of philosophy in Swansea with his honest and deep thinking. Moreover, the post at the University of Swansea also introduced an element of stability in a life full of discontinuities.

Visiting Rhees in 1942 and 1943, Wittgenstein discovered Swansea to be a place of retreat and inspiration. Lecturing had become unbearable to him. In the Autumn of 1941, he took a job as a porter at Guy's Hospital in London and scheduled his lectures for the weekends. After a year and a half, in Spring

<sup>52</sup>Letter from Rhees to Wittgenstein, 31 December 1940, in Wittgenstein (2012, 288).

of 1943, he moved to Newcastle where he assisted in a medical laboratory. During these years of war-work, Wittgenstein paid visits to Rhees in Swansea. They attended meetings of the Philosophical Society which Rhees had initiated and had many philosophical discussions, for example about Freud and psychoanalysis.<sup>53</sup> Just as Wittgenstein had come to like the Norwegian landscape and people, he now came to like Wales and the Welsh.

In his writing, Wittgenstein was still mainly occupied with his remarks on the foundations of mathematics. He heavily reworked them for the second part of his book and once again considered publishing it.<sup>54</sup> After discussions with Nikolai Bachtin (the older brother of Michail Bachtin), Wittgenstein thought that the *Tractatus* and his new book ought to be printed together in the same volume. Though Cambridge University Press had already received permission from Kegan Paul to reprint the *Tractatus*, the plan of publishing the book was once again abandoned, since Wittgenstein shifted the focus of his work during his next stay in Swansea. In 1944, Trinity College called Wittgenstein back to Cambridge, but he negotiated a sabbatical from teaching and decided to spend it with Rhees in Swansea. It was now that Wittgenstein entirely stopped working on the foundations of mathematics and turned towards investigating psychological concepts (Wittgenstein 2001, 23–24).

That Wittgenstein stopped elaborating his remarks on the foundations of mathematics seems to be a far more significant turn in his work than is usually recognized. For it was Wittgenstein's interest in the philosophy of mathematics that brought him to philosophy in the first place: the idea of studying the philosophy of mathematics incited him to visit Gott-

<sup>53</sup>Notes from their conversations are published in Wittgenstein (1966), a memoir of a meeting at the Philosophical Society in Rhees (1984, 201). A new edition of Rhees' philosophical discussions with Wittgenstein has appeared as Wittgenstein and Rhees (2015).

<sup>54</sup>Selections of these writings were later published in Wittgenstein (1976a).



lob Frege in 1911, and Frege recommended him to study with Bertrand Russell in Cambridge (McGuinness 1988, chap. 4). In 1928, Brouwer's lectures on the foundational crisis of mathematics contributed to Wittgenstein's return to philosophy and, in 1929, his first fellowship at Trinity College allowed him to carry out work on the foundations of mathematics. Teaching at Cambridge, Wittgenstein devoted many of his lectures to the foundations of mathematics, and for several years his plan was that remarks on this topic would constitute the second part of his book. Now, after so many years of creating, selecting and composing these remarks, he stopped working on them entirely, without achieving a version he declared ready to be published. It seems that just as the *Tractatus* took a new course after Wittgenstein's experiences in World War I, his work during World War II was followed by a change in the course of the *Philosophical Investigations*. While staying in Swansea between April and September 1944, Wittgenstein wrote 114 new remarks (Wittgenstein 2000b, Ms 129). He read this new material to Rhees and discussed it with him (Rhees 2006, 257):

He had read the last part of Part I aloud to me from Zettel clamped together, in September 1944. I cannot remember now just how much of the text now printed he read to me—partly because he discussed other parts—or rather: expounded to me the points he makes in them—when we walked or met indoors during earlier months.<sup>55</sup>

I remember in particular the finish of it, when he read the paragraph concluding “([sic]Man könnte auch von einer Tätigkeit der Butter reden, wenn sie im Preise steigt; und wenn dadurch keine Probleme erzeugt werden, so ist es harmlos.” This was at the end of September, 1944. And I remember what a kick I got out of it. I thought his stuff was wonderful.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>55</sup>Letter from Rhees to von Wright, 10 August 1972, WWA.

<sup>56</sup>Letter from Rhees to von Wright, 27 February 1969, WWA. The sentence quoted by Rhees became the last sentence of the last paragraph (§693) in the *Philosophical Investigations*. In Anscombe's translation it reads: “(It would also

These remarks formulated during Wittgenstein's stay in Swansea in 1944 were later typed and incorporated into the already-reworked typescript of the *Philosophical Investigations*.<sup>57</sup> This may have been after Wittgenstein's return to Cambridge in Autumn 1944. There, he wrote what became the preface to the posthumous edition of the *Philosophical Investigations*. Having experienced Swansea as a stimulating place for philosophizing, it is no wonder that Wittgenstein later advised Rhees to stay there when now it was Rhees who wanted to leave. Being strongly attracted to anarchistic thought, Rhees considered joining a Trotskyist party. Wittgenstein objected: if one became a party member one could not question the party line, whereas in philosophy one had to be constantly prepared to change directions (Rhees 1984, 207–8). Wittgenstein obviously regarded Rhees as better suited for the latter and at the same time he urged him not to change his occupational direction again, but to accept the offer of a permanent post at the University of Swansea:

I was glad to hear that they had the sense to offer you an appointment in 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

be possible to speak of an activity of butter when it rises in price, and if no problems are produced by this it is harmless.)”

<sup>57</sup>The typescript containing the remarks that were written in Swansea are published in Wittgenstein (2000b, Ts 241). A reconstructed typescript of the subsequent version of the *Philosophical Investigations*, is referred to as “Zwischenfassung” (intermediate version) in Wittgenstein (2001).

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.

So long!

Ludwig Wittgenstein

P.S. Read this letter again from the beginning.<sup>58</sup>

Though this letter still echoes many of Wittgenstein's previous recommendations to Rhees to stick with what he began, its tone indicates that the relationship between the two men had changed after the months they spent together in Swansea. Wittgenstein no longer spoke as a tutor advising an undecided student; Rhees was a discussion partner on equal footing, and the two could speak frankly. Hence, after Wittgenstein resumed lecturing in Cambridge, their correspondence became a relaxed exchange between colleagues, two friends really, sharing their experiences in the same occupation of teaching philosophy. This comes across in a letter Wittgenstein wrote shortly after returning to Cambridge:

I wish you one moderately intelligent & awake pupil to sweeten your labour! Please look after your health. You can't expect good work when your health isn't really good, & colds are nasty things. I've so far been in good health, & consequently my classes haven't gone too bad. (Or should I say "badly"?) Thouless is coming to them, & a woman, Mrs so & so who calls herself Miss Anscombe, who certainly is intelligent, though not of Kreisel's caliber.<sup>59</sup>

## Anscombe 1

Unlike Rhees and von Wright, Elizabeth Anscombe did not enter philosophy through the discipline's modern focus on the

<sup>58</sup>Letter from Wittgenstein to Rhees, 21 May 1946, in Wittgenstein (2012, 352).

<sup>59</sup>Letter from Wittgenstein to Rhees, 28 November 1944, in Wittgenstein (2012, 321).

empirical sciences and their logic. Her thinking was embedded in and directed towards human action and its relations to reason and God. Anscombe, the daughter of a schoolmaster and a headmistress, fell for philosophy after reading a work called *Natural Theology* written by a 19<sup>th</sup> century Jesuit:

The book contained an argument for the existence of a First Cause, and as a preliminary to this it offered a proof of some 'principle of causality' according to which anything that comes about must have a cause. The proof had the fault of proceeding from a barely concealed assumption of its own conclusion. I thought that this was some sort of carelessness on the part of the author, and that it just needed tidying up. So I started writing improved versions of it; each one satisfied me for a time, but then reflection would show me that I had committed the same fault. I don't think I ever showed my efforts to anyone; I tore them up when I thought they were no good, and I went round asking people why, if something happened, they would be sure it had a cause. No one had an answer to this. In two or three years of effort I produced five versions of a would-be proof, each one of which I then found guilty of the same error, though each time it was more cunningly concealed. In all this time I had no philosophical teaching about the matter; even my last attempt was made before I started reading Greats at Oxford. (Anscombe 1981a, vii)

In contrast to von Wright who, as a thirteen year-old, had asked what philosophy was and then decided it should become his subject, Anscombe unintentionally slipped into philosophizing by stumbling upon a fallacy. Once her fascination for reasoning was awakened, it became her life's occupation.

In 1937, at the age of 18, Anscombe began studying classics and philosophy (*Literae Humaniores*) at St. Hugh's in Oxford, a college that enabled women from all backgrounds to gain a university education.<sup>60</sup> Shortly after matriculation, she converted to Roman Catholicism. This decision, she claimed, was based

<sup>60</sup>Much of the biographical information in this section can be found in Teichmann (2008, 1–9).

on her reading and reflection from twelve to fifteen years of age (Anscombe 1981a, vi). At the Corpus Christi procession the year after her conversion, she met another convert, Peter Geach, whom she married three years later. Given that both Anscombe and Geach were academic philosophers, it has been suggested that—besides for aesthetic reasons—Anscombe kept her maiden name in order to avoid ambiguity in their later publications (Teichmann 2001, 1).

Philosophy, faith and life—by some regarded as incompatible—informed and enlightened each other and merged into a unity in Anscombe’s conduct. She was able to employ reason to answer a question that sprang from daily life while gaining orientation for her reasoning from Catholic doctrines and tenets. Hence, it could happen that she let teachings of the Catholic Church lead her in philosophy. This is beautifully illustrated by an event that probably took place in Blackwell’s bookshop when Anscombe was an undergraduate student at Oxford. Her daughter Mary Geach describes this event:

She had come across a passage in Russell to the effect that an argument from the facts about the world to the existence of God could not be valid, as one could not deduce a necessary conclusion from a contingent premiss. She had not at the time been able to see what was wrong with the notion that necessities can only be deduced from necessities, but she had known that to deny the possibility of moving by reason from the facts about the world to a knowledge of the existence of God was to deny a doctrine defined as of faith by an ecumenical council.

She went then to church and made an act of faith; I suppose it was the standard one ‘My God I believe in thee and all thy Church doth teach, because thou hast said it and thy word is true’. She realized later that of course one can derive necessary conclusion from contingent premises. (Geach 2008, xvi)

It seems as though Russell’s reaching a conclusion that contradicted her theological beliefs merely prompted her to try to see more clearly where the fault of the argument was. And there

was no tension in this. In Anscombe’s case, faith and rationality complemented each other. In particular, rather than providing a foundation for religion, Anscombe may have found that logical analysis helped to remove misunderstandings that hinder belief.

The ability of bringing together rationality and faith was evident already in Anscombe’s first publication from 1939. In this pamphlet entitled *The Justice of the Present War Examined* (reprinted in Anscombe 1981b, 72–81), Anscombe derived from Catholic principles seven necessary and, in combination, sufficient conditions for a just war. She then carried out a sharp analysis of the conditions’ fulfillment in the actual case of British policy in 1939 and came to the conclusion that the war of the then-present government was not a just war. This early piece of Anscombe’s writing weaves a dense texture of religious belief, logical analysis and political criticism. These are seminal elements that would later differentiate into different lines of her writing. However, Anscombe always remained interested in arguments relevant for action, and in this she was not afraid of defending unpopular views. In the particular case of her undergraduate piece on the justice of war, criticism came not only from the public and academic philosophers but also from the Catholic Church. Anscombe and her co-author Norman Daniel gave their pamphlet an extra description as expressing a “Catholic view” (Anscombe 1981b, vii). The Archbishop of Birmingham objected that they had no right to do so without an official *imprimatur*. Dutifully, Anscombe and Daniel withdrew the essay from bookshop-shops in Oxford and London (Anscombe 1981b, vii).

Obedying the teachings of the Catholic Church did not mean that Anscombe demanded such obedience from her partners in philosophical discussion. She loved working on arguments as such, and not only with regard to their potential implications for religious thought. She could focus entirely on an argument’s

structure and its significance for a discussion at hand. In doing so, she was at first not particularly interested in the contexts from which the arguments had historically originated. In this sense she may properly be called an analytical philosopher from the start. Her interest in the philosophical gist of an argument became especially clear in her final exam at Oxford, when she counterbalanced a rather incomplete knowledge of history and literature with an outstanding performance in philosophy. Indeed, it was due to her philosophical brilliance alone that she earned exceptional honors in her exam.

After graduating from St. Hugh's College, Anscombe received a research studentship from Newnham, a women's College at Cambridge. From that time onwards, she participated in almost all of Wittgenstein's lectures, which mainly dealt with the philosophy of psychology (Wittgenstein 2003a, 355–59). She brought to them her original philosophical curiosity that could not be contented by clever sophisms. Anscombe wanted to work until her original puzzlement was truly dissolved, and that is what the 25 year-old experienced in Wittgenstein's lectures:

For years I would spend time in cafés, for example, staring at objects saying to myself: 'I see a packet. But what do I really see? How can I say that I see here anything more than a yellow expanse?' ... I always hated phenomenalism and felt trapped by it. I couldn't see my way out of it but I didn't believe it. It was no good pointing to difficulties about it, things which Russell found wrong with it, for example. The strength, the central nerve of it remained alive and raged achingly. It was only in Wittgenstein's classes in 1944 that I saw the nerve being extracted, the central thought 'I have got this, and I define yellow (say) as this' being effectively attacked.—At one point in these classes Wittgenstein was discussing the interpretation of the sign-post, and it burst upon me the way you go by it is the final interpretation. (Anscombe 1981a, xiii-ix)

It was the effort to get to the bottom of her philosophical perplexities that made Wittgenstein's lectures so valuable for

Anscombe. One might expect that her rather ahistorical interest in philosophical arguments corresponded to Wittgenstein's attitude, but that would be misleading. Though Wittgenstein has sometimes been imagined as a philosopher who neglected the tradition of thought in the history of philosophy, Mary Geach makes clear that it was Wittgenstein who stimulated Anscombe's interest in the great thinkers of the past:

She recorded that before she knew him [Wittgenstein], the great philosophers of the past had appeared to her like beautiful statues: knowing him had brought them alive for her.

...

She said to me once that the contemporary philosophy teachers who called themselves philosophers were not philosophers: she would not call herself one. Who was, I asked, and she named Wittgenstein. She had learned, by walking and talking in the company of one of them, to move in the company of people who were, in this restricted sense, philosophers; not merely listening, but seriously entering into their concerns and criticizing their thoughts. This does not mean using a philosopher's work as a text about which to make erudite observations, nor did it mean taking him as a banner for her cause, nor employing his name as a label for a mindset which she might dislike: it meant interesting herself in the topics that the philosopher discusses, taking his thoughts apart, adopting some, finding deep problems through others, and rejecting what she found silly. For she was quite capable of finding a great philosopher silly. (Geach 2011, xiii)

As for Wittgenstein, philosophy for Anscombe primarily meant the activity of discussing and arguing about a subject at hand. This implied the decency to respect good arguments regardless of who had uttered them or when. Ancient philosophers were thus to be respected for their good thoughts, and faulty arguments were to be rejected even if they were put forward by great thinkers. Though this way of philosophizing was probably lived and fostered by Wittgenstein, it demanded a high degree of independence from authorities. Anscombe demonstrated such independence early on, for example in 1948, when

she presented a paper to the Socratic Club at Oxford, criticizing an argument in Clive Staples Lewis' (1947) book *Miracles*. Lewis, the founder of the Club and already a prominent academic, was present at that event. Anscombe won what people remembered as a tense argument and Lewis changed the respective passage in a revised edition of his book.<sup>61</sup>

One may think that this was a bold attack by a young woman in an academic surrounding that von Wright had experienced to be completely dominated by men (von Wright 2001, 74). But as Mary Geach once put it: someone who was bold enough to confront Wittgenstein, could probably confront anyone.<sup>62</sup> Anscombe's faith may have emboldened her in bravely facing superiors and authorities, if indeed fear of God destroys all earthly fears, as her husband once wrote.<sup>63</sup> However, it is likely that in order to stave off gender prejudices, her arguments had to be more coherent and her attacks more precise than those of her male colleagues. Anscombe's intellectual assertiveness, on the other hand, may have just as well provoked comments on gender. Wittgenstein was not totally immune from this, as Anscombe's husband Peter Geach remembered:

I heard him address Elizabeth several times as 'old man' on several occasions. It was not the only way in which he treated her as an honorary male. Each year at the beginning of his course of

<sup>61</sup>The revised edition appeared in 1960.

<sup>62</sup>Note from personal conversation.

<sup>63</sup>See Geach (1969, 127): "worship of a supreme power ... is wholly different from, and does not carry with it, a cringing attitude towards earthly powers. An earthly potentate does not compete with God, not even unsuccessfully: he may threaten all manner of afflictions, but only from God's hands can any affliction actually come upon us. If we fully realize this, we shall have such fear upon God as destroys all earthly fears". An anonymous reviewer for JHAP made the following comment that is worth quoting here: "Interestingly Wittgenstein expressed the very same thought in a diary entry from January 28, 1937: 'I understood what it means that belief is bliss for a human being, that is, it frees him from the fear of others by placing him immediately under God.'" (Wittgenstein 2003a, 163).

lectures Wittgenstein would have a great many listeners, largely female; this crowd would rapidly shrink to a hard core of regular attenders by the third or fourth lecture. This happened in particular during one year's attendance by Elizabeth; noticing this shrinkage, Wittgenstein looked round the room with gloomy satisfaction and remarked: 'Thank God we've got rid of the women!' (Geach 1988, xii)

This is probably best understood as a wry appreciation of Anscombe's abrasiveness and philosophical acumen. Wittgenstein regarded Anscombe as extraordinary talented, as is evident from a letter of recommendation that he wrote to Myra Curtis, principal of Newnham College, when Anscombe's studentship expired:

She is, undoubtedly, the most talented female student I have had since 1930, when I began lecturing; and among my male students only 8 or 10 either equaled or surpassed her. She has an excellent grasp of philosophical problems, great seriousness, and ability for hard work.<sup>64</sup>

Thus, already in 1945, Wittgenstein considered Anscombe among his best 10 students he ever had. The emphasis of gender in his letter may be accounted for by the fact that Newnham was a women's college. However, even with such a recommendation from a thinker like Wittgenstein, it was difficult to gain a foothold in the academia of that time. During the hard transition period after her studentship, "Wittgenstein showed himself a true friend" (Geach 1988, xi), as Peter Geach recollected:

We were very poor. He tried to persuade Newnham to do something for Elizabeth's career; indeed though he regularly did not wear a tie, he wore one for an interview with the Principal of the College—quite in vain. Later on he paid the fee for Elizabeth to go to a private maternity home for the birth of our second child, John Richard, in December 1946. He refused to regard this as anything

<sup>64</sup>Recommendation by Wittgenstein to Curtis, 18 May 1945, in Wittgenstein (2012, 324).

but a gift: a characteristic expression of a generosity to which other friends have borne witness. (Geach 1988, xi)

In 1946 Anscombe obtained a research fellowship from Somerville College, Oxford. While living in Oxford, she travelled regularly to Cambridge to visit Wittgenstein for discussions. In addition to attending his lectures, she participated in his tutorials on the philosophy of religion (Wittgenstein 2003a, 358; Monk 1991, 497–98). An expression by her husband seems to capture her determination: “Elizabeth did not let her pregnancy interfere with attendance at Moral Sciences Club meetings and at Wittgenstein’s lectures” (Geach 1988, xi).

## Von Wright 2

In Wittgenstein’s last lecture at Cambridge in Spring term 1947, Anscombe met a guest from Finland: Professor von Wright.<sup>65</sup> Von Wright had pursued his academic career under the hard circumstances of war. He had published the article “On Probability” in *Mind* in 1940, one year before defending his doctoral dissertation. Shortly afterwards he was given a lectureship at the University of Helsinki. As long as censorship during the war permitted, von Wright had regularly corresponded with Broad, who had praised von Wright’s dissertation in three long contributions to *Mind* as the best treatment known to him of the problem of induction (Broad 1944, 1). By 1947 von Wright was professor in Helsinki and at times even held a second professorship at the Academy of Åbo. When Broad invited von Wright to lecture in Cambridge after the war, von Wright also received invitations to lecture in London and Oxford. Before departing for England, he informed Wittgenstein about his return to Cambridge and invited him to his lectures. Wittgenstein replied:

I’m glad that you are going to lecture here, & I know that by attending your lectures I could learn a very great deal. In spite of

<sup>65</sup>Notes from the lectures were later published in Wittgenstein (1988).

this I will not come to them—for the sole reason that, in order to live & to work, I have to allow no import of foreign goods (i.e., philosophical ones) into my mind. For the same reason I haven’t read your book, though I am convinced of its excellence. If you think that I’m getting old—you’re right. So long! & good luck!<sup>66</sup>

As promised, Wittgenstein did not attend von Wright’s lectures; but von Wright did attend Wittgenstein’s class, which marked the endpoint of Wittgenstein’s lecture series on the philosophy of psychology and, indeed, of his career as a university professor. During the sessions von Wright met Anscombe, Geach, and Malcolm, all of whom became friends during and after the lectures.

The adult von Wright sitting in Wittgenstein’s class in 1947 was very different from the doctoral student who had sat there eight years earlier. Not only had he become a successful and sought-after professor; he had married and started a family.<sup>67</sup> Along with the changes in his professional and personal status, his philosophical standpoints had changed significantly. In the year of his dissertation, von Wright had written the book *Den logiska Empirismen* (von Wright 1943) which was to him a farewell to logical positivism. This sentiment was sustained in the talk that von Wright gave to the Moral Sciences Club upon his return to Cambridge. Contrasting his previous philosophical belief in logistic philosophy, he turned in his talk to the activity that he now called “analytical philosophy” and sketched the kinds of problems it may tackle. One sentence—though it is crossed out in the manuscript—is illustrative of his critical reflection on his previous faith in logical positivism:

As a matter of fact there has on a comparatively large scale been advocated in modern philosophy a conventionalist view that appears to have made philosophy almost to an art of sophistry. [I am

<sup>66</sup>Letter from Wittgenstein to von Wright, 21 February 1947, in Wittgenstein (2001, 361).

<sup>67</sup>For information in this paragraph, see von Wright (2001, 79–113).

thinking on the main trend of thought known as logical positivism or logical empiricism as advocated in particular by Professor Carnap]<sup>68</sup>

The programmatic talk von Wright gave in 1947 stands in stark contrast to what he had said as a doctoral student at the same place almost exactly eight years earlier. Reading his manuscript, one gets the impression that throughout the entire talk, his matured intellect commented on his own statements from 1939. Though von Wright's professional philosophizing was still scientific in spirit, his intellectual passions were nourished by his acquaintance with the distinguished Brazilian diplomat Mario De Millo, in whose cultural world Nietzsche was central and logical empiricism did not even exist. De Millo had directed von Wright's attention to the book *Paideia* (Jaeger 1934–1947), the third volume of which had just appeared. Von Wright was immediately fascinated by this humanistic historiography of higher education in Plato's time. *Paideia* inspired von Wright to write essays in a new vein, following more freely his attraction to the work and style of a public intellectual (von Wright 1947). This change was probably also noticed by Wittgenstein, with whom von Wright repeatedly discussed during his stay in Cambridge (von Wright 1989, 14). Wittgenstein lent him the typescript of the then-current version of the *Philosophical Investigations*, and von Wright read it on his way to lectures in Oxford. This gave him insights into Wittgenstein's unpublished work. Nevertheless, even more than the writings, the philosophical conversations with Wittgenstein impressed von Wright:

I saw a great deal of Wittgenstein and the impression he made on me was even deeper than that of eight years earlier. Each conversation with Wittgenstein was like living through the day of judgment. It was terrible. Everything had constantly to be dug up anew, questioned and subjected to the tests of truthfulness. This

<sup>68</sup>Quoted from the typescript for the talk kept at WWA, p. 10.

concerned not only philosophy but the whole of life. (von Wright 1989, 14)

The torment reverberating through this published passage is also apparent in the sincere letter von Wright wrote to Wittgenstein after his return to Finland. Von Wright began the letter by stressing the great philosophical benefit he had gained from their renewed discussions:

Never before, to my memory, going abroad [sic] meant so much to my education.

I learnt an enormous mass [of] philosophy. Why and how it came to be so, you know as well as I do. What will be the consequences of it, is not as yet to be foreseen,—I can only hope they will be of more good than harm, in the long run. I know that a hard struggle is needed before the imported goods will become my own. Certain things will be ejaculated, other things assimilated. If, at the end, no visible traces of your influence remain in my thought, which is extremely unlikely, so shall I at least always have to acknowledge that I learnt from you, how difficult philosophy must be, if it is to be more than a collection of materials for academic controversy and learned conversation.<sup>69</sup>

A second tone, as it were, grounds the significance of that encounter in a more existential dimension:

Still more, perhaps, did the stay in Cambridge mean to my human being, so to say. It was as though something, which had begun to grow in me in the last years, suddenly had ripened. Things which I hardly thought of before, became of vital importance, new values and ideals appeared and greatly revised my outlook on life.

A third tone, however, turns the chord into a minor key, as the greatness von Wright experienced in Wittgenstein also gave rise to doubt and fear:

<sup>69</sup>This and the next two quotations come from the letter from von Wright to Wittgenstein, 31 July 1947, in Wittgenstein (2012, 370).

The question may again be raised, whether for good or bad. I have an awful feeling, I might as well have said conviction, that nothing I consciously undertake for the sake of my soul can make me substantially different from what I am, a pharisee in minutest details, because I shall always lack courage to let myself down in the abyss of despair which I know I had to pass in order to be saved.

These words, which were written immediately after his second stay at Cambridge, show that von Wright felt that any serious engagement with the great philosopher may come at high personal cost. He must have regarded it a privilege to go for walks and have philosophical talks with Wittgenstein, yet being under the spell of such a powerful mind may have threatened von Wright's philosophical identity. This does not need to be a matter of rivalry with his much admired companion; it could rather be that von Wright was concerned about whether he would be able to free his mind again after having tuned into Wittgenstein's way of thinking. Von Wright wrote about this concern to his friend Göran Schildt:

When I came to Cambridge before the war, and to my surprise found out that Wittgenstein was there it was self-evident that I would approach him and come to receive his teaching. In two respects this was of the greatest significance for me: partly because Wittgenstein pulled me out of a dangerous philosophical jargon which I had acquired under the impression of the general development of logical empiricism in the 30s; partly, which I understood only much later, I acquired a new philosophical jargon, which for many years totally chained my thinking. (Fortunately almost all my publications have been in a very narrow field in which I more or less have been able to be myself.) Only during the two last years I experienced that I have reached a certain independence, found the beginning of a style of my own.

Then came the renewed and much deeper contact with Wittgenstein which among other things has given me a sense of significant parts of his unpublished works. This time it could not be a question of uncritical reception; it was rather a struggle of life and

death. I don't say death lightly here, for god only knows, whether after this I will ever be able to think a thought of my own.<sup>70</sup>

Despite the intensity of this inner conflict, von Wright once again made an extraordinarily good impression on everyone during his time in Cambridge. If a personal struggle was noticeable at all in the conduct of the consummately composed gentleman, it may have even added to the decency of his demeanor. Wittgenstein, in any case, obviously did not believe von Wright's philosophical sovereignty was in danger: during one of their walks through Trinity's Fellows Gardens, he revealed his plans to resign from his chair and that he would like von Wright to become his successor. Von Wright remembered that moment as equally flattering and intimidating (von Wright 2001, 129; 1989, 14). It was not unimportant that as von Wright contemplated this proposition, he received encouragement from several friends. Broad supported the idea that his admired colleague and beloved friend would apply for the professorship. Anscombe concurred, as she made clear in a letter to von Wright after his return to Finland:

You will I expect by now have heard of Wittgenstein's resignation from the professorship at Cambridge. As I expect you know, he has not done it for the reasons which he used to have for wondering whether he should not—the general beastliness of the situation at Cambridge and his feeling of incongruity about his being in that job—but because he can't get on with his book. In a few weeks he is going to live near Dublin, so I suppose none of us will see him for some time. He is in a rather depressed state at present, but is not, he tells me, having any twinges of doubt about his resignation, and I think that if when he gets away he is able to work he is going to find it a great relief.

Meanwhile one feels very gloomy about things at Cambridge. I suppose that sooner or later they will be advertising the professorship. Is there any remote chance of your applying for it? It isn't

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<sup>70</sup>Letter from von Wright to Schildt, 15 June 1947, in von Wright (2008). Translation of the letter by Bernt Österman.



of any significance that you are the only person I can think of in that job without acute depression—but I’ve no doubt that others whose opinion does count will have the same idea. But I have a fear from certain things that you said about your job at Helsingfors that loyalty may keep you there apart from anything else.<sup>71</sup>

By the time von Wright read this, he was undecided whether he really ought to apply for the professorship. He was unsure whether at the age of 31, he was suited for this most outstanding position of professor of philosophy at Cambridge. In addition, he hesitated to force his family to resettle in England. Wittgenstein expressed his sympathy for these doubts and would have been neither surprised nor disappointed if von Wright had decided to stay in Finland.<sup>72</sup> The decisive consideration in favor of applying was seemingly a political one: von Wright feared that Finland might be incorporated into the Soviet Union. If this happened, he would be isolated from his cherished colleagues to the west and prevented from philosophical exchanges with them.<sup>73</sup> Thus, after intense deliberation, von Wright applied for the professorship in January 1948. While Broad informed him of the formal requirements for applying for the post, von Wright asked Wittgenstein for a letter of recommendation. Wittgenstein agreed, but not without a word of warning:

Dear von Wright,

Miss Anscombe wrote to me a few weeks ago that you had put in for the professorship. I shall write the recommendation in a few days & send it to the Registry as you suggest. May your decision be the right one! I have no doubt that you will be a better professor than any of the other candidates for the chair. But Cambridge is a dangerous place. Will you become superficial?

<sup>71</sup>Letter from Anscombe to von Wright, 12 October 1947, NLF, Coll. 714.11–12.

<sup>72</sup>Letter from Wittgenstein to von Wright, 22 December 1947, in Wittgenstein (2012, 378).

<sup>73</sup>von Wright (2001, 132); Letter from Wittgenstein to Malcolm, 30 April 1948, in Wittgenstein (2012, 385).

smooth? If you don’t, you will have to suffer terribly.—The passage in your letter which makes me feel particularly uneasy is the one about your feeling enthusiasm at the thought of teaching in Cambridge. It seems to me: if you go to Cambridge you must go as a sober man.—May my fears have no foundation, & may you not be tempted beyond your powers! <sup>74</sup>

In contrast to Wittgenstein, Anscombe had no doubts about von Wright’s prospects as professor. In a long letter, she expressed her delight about von Wright’s application and addressed many themes besides the new position, such as the *Tractatus*, Parmenides, Leibniz and the current situation of English academia. Anscombe may have wished for a friend in such an influential position.<sup>75</sup> First and foremost, however, her letter shows that friendship and mutual professional respect had begun to grow between herself and von Wright. Of course, their relationship was rooted in their acquaintance with Wittgenstein and his philosophy, but other strands grew out from this. Despite many shared philosophical interests, however, their mutual literary recommendations remind one of how different they must have been. In a letter to von Wright, she commented on the already-mentioned three volumes of Werner Jaeger’s *Paideia*, which von Wright had obviously recommended to her:

Werner Jaeger, I have got to confess, does not appeal to me; it may be because I have not read a great deal of his book; I think it probable that one should read a great continuous chunk of it in order to get anything out of it; but I am afraid that I have got impatient with the atmosphere of general adulation.<sup>76</sup>

Anscombe added her literary recommendation of her own in a post-script:

<sup>74</sup>Letter from Wittgenstein to von Wright, 23 February 1948, in Wittgenstein (2012, 381).

<sup>75</sup>I am especially thankful to Harald Johannessen for this suggestion.

<sup>76</sup>Letter from Anscombe to von Wright, May 1948, NLF, Coll. 714.11–12.

Have you ever read a short (unfinished) story of Franz Kafka's called "The Burrow"? I did not understand it for a long time, but now I do and I think it incomparably the most significant thing of his, &<sup>77</sup> one of the most significant things I have ever read. I'd like to know what you think of it.

Compare these works by Jaeger and Kafka and the contrast could hardly be more striking! Adding Wittgenstein's reading suggestions completes a peculiar literary triangle: after Anscombe once lent Wittgenstein a work by Kafka, Wittgenstein is reported to have said that Kafka "gives himself a great deal of trouble not writing about his trouble" (Monk 1991, 498). According to biographer Ray Monk, Wittgenstein recommended that Anscombe instead read Otto Weininger's *The Four Last Things* and *Sex and Character* (Monk 1991, 498). Despite the contrast between Wittgenstein's and Anscombe's reading lists, it is doubtful whether Wittgenstein shared von Wright's enthusiasm about Jaeger's philological edifice. Wittgenstein encouraged him to read Wilhelm Busch.<sup>78</sup> These differences in literary taste may provide some hint of the characteristic dissimilarities that persisted amongst these three thinkers in spite of all their respectful friendship and philosophical resemblance.

There is a second post-script in Anscombe's letter to von Wright:

I delay a day or two even in posting *this*—and now I hear from Cambridge that you are elected (from my husband, who asks me to send you his good wishes & congratulation.)—I am extremely glad.<sup>79</sup>

On 15 May 1948, von Wright received the official telegram offering him the professorship. Two days later von Wright wrote to Broad:

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<sup>77</sup>Anscombe often uses an abbreviation for "and" which is here transcribed as "&".

<sup>78</sup>For an account of Wittgenstein and von Wright's exchange on Wilhelm Busch, see Erbacher and Österman (2014).

<sup>79</sup>Letter from Anscombe to von Wright, May 1948, NLF, Coll. 714.11–12. Underlinings in the original letter are transcribed as italics.

I have to-day cabled to the Vice-Chancellor that I accept the invitation to the professorship. I feel very much surprised, overwhelmed and honoured. I shall do my best to become a good professor, and I hope I shall not fail in my efforts.<sup>80</sup>

Gilbert Ryle, professor at Oxford and one of the electors, telegraphed to von Wright: "You will be respected for your work and welcomed for yourself" (von Wright 2001, 133)—a message that certainly encouraged von Wright to meet his new and daunting task. After all, von Wright was only 32 years old when he filled Wittgenstein's shoes as professor of philosophy at Cambridge.

## Anscombe 2

By the time von Wright arrived at Cambridge to assume his professorial duties, Wittgenstein had already moved to Ireland in order to finish his book. After his last lecture, he visited Rhee in Swansea and he had his latest remarks on the philosophy of psychology typed. Wittgenstein took the resulting typescript to Dublin in December 1947.<sup>81</sup> He stayed at a farm in the south of Dublin owned by a colleague of his friend Maurice Drury who had recently been appointed psychiatrist at St. Patrick's Hospital. At first Wittgenstein's work went well. Around Easter 1948, however, illness and depression stopped the auspicious flow. Once more Wittgenstein began doubting whether he would ever finish his book. Towards the end of April, he secluded himself further by moving into a small cabin on the west coast of Ireland. There his work improved, slowly at first, but with increasing productivity as Summer approached. Except for a visit from his friend Ben Richards and daily meetings with his "assistant" Tommy, who had to burn pages of rejected remarks, Wittgenstein spent the Summer living and working in

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<sup>80</sup>Letter from von Wright to Broad, 17 May 1948, NLF, Coll. 714.28–32.

<sup>81</sup>Wittgenstein (2000b, Ts 229); later published in Wittgenstein (1980b).

isolation (Monk 1991, 525–26). In the Autumn of 1948, Wittgenstein went to Vienna to visit his sister Hermine who was seriously ill. On his way back to Ireland he stopped in Cambridge where he had his recently revised remarks typed.<sup>82</sup> While staying in Cambridge, he discussed the *Philosophical Investigations* with Anscombe and lent her a typescript of the work.<sup>83</sup>

Wittgenstein had initially planned to spend the Winter of 1948–49 in his cabin at the Irish coast, but instead decided to remain in Dublin and moved into the Ross Hotel. It was there that he experienced a rush of creativity, as he wrote to Malcolm:

When I came here I found to my surprise that I could work again; and as I am anxious to make hay during the very short period when the sun shines in my brain I've decided not to go to Rosro this winter but to stay here where I've got a warm and quiet room.<sup>84</sup>

In a period of intense work lasting from October to December 1948, Wittgenstein completed a series of manuscripts on the philosophy of psychology.<sup>85</sup> During the first half of December, Anscombe came to visit. They discussed the new work and Wittgenstein indicated to her that it should be incorporated into his book.<sup>86</sup> Around the same time, he wrote to Moore with a view to make sure that his manuscripts should be given to his executors.<sup>87</sup> Shortly after Anscombe's departure, in the second

<sup>82</sup>Wittgenstein (2000b, Ts 232); later published in Wittgenstein (1980c).

<sup>83</sup>Wittgenstein (2000b, Ts 227a); referred to as "Spätfassung" (late version) in Wittgenstein (2001); Letter from Wittgenstein to Malcolm, 6 November 1948, in Wittgenstein (2012, 393).

<sup>84</sup>Letter from Wittgenstein to Malcolm, 6 November 1948, in Wittgenstein (2012, 393).

<sup>85</sup>Wittgenstein (2000b, Ms 137), later published in Wittgenstein (1982a).

<sup>86</sup>This information was the reason to include "Part II" in Anscombe and Rhees' edition of the *Philosophical Investigations* (1953). The relevant quotes can be found in Erbacher (2015).

<sup>87</sup>Letter from Wittgenstein to Moore, 16 December 1948, in Wittgenstein (2012, 394).

half of December, Rhees visited Wittgenstein at the Ross Hotel. The two discussed Wittgenstein's new remarks and Rhees, like Anscombe, was told that they should be incorporated into his book.<sup>88</sup> On New Years Eve, one day before Rhees left Dublin, Wittgenstein informed Moore:

My executors are Rhees and Burnaby of Trinity.<sup>89</sup>

Wittgenstein stayed in the Ross Hotel for the first half of 1949, with the exception of a visit to Vienna in April (Wittgenstein 2012, 396–407). He was ill for many weeks during Spring, but eventually able to travel to Cambridge in late June. Here he had typed his new remarks. The resulting typescript would later be used for printing Part II of Rhees and Anscombe's posthumous edition of the *Philosophical Investigations*.<sup>90</sup> During the typing process, Wittgenstein and Anscombe had lunch together several times, as she later told von Wright, "I remember his reading it a bit and exclaiming at some point 'Gescheit!'"<sup>91</sup>

While staying in Cambridge, Wittgenstein was the guest of von Wright who rented a large house on Lady Margaret Road. Here they sometimes enjoyed tea in the garden. Half jokingly, Wittgenstein even offered to design a house that von Wright was planning to build—a proposal that, to von Wright's relief,

<sup>88</sup>See note 86.

<sup>89</sup>Letter from Wittgenstein to Moore, 31 December 1948, in Wittgenstein (2012, 395). Rev. John Burnaby was an ordained priest, fellow of Trinity College, Junior Bursar and, in 1948, Dean of Chapel and University lecturer in Divinity. Later he became Regius Professor of Divinity; see <http://trinitycollegechapel.com/about/memorials/brasses/burnaby/>. According to a note in a personal conversation with Michael Nedo, Burnaby declined the proposal to become Wittgenstein's executor.

<sup>90</sup>Typescript now lost; last existing pre-version (Wittgenstein 2000b, Ms 144) published in Wittgenstein (2001).

<sup>91</sup>Letter from Anscombe to von Wright, 15 April 1991, NLF, Coll. 714.11–12. "Gescheit!" is an idiomatic expression in Austrian dialect; it is difficult to translate, but helpful approximations may be "bright!", "smart!", "shrewd!", but also "well done!".

went unfulfilled. About their discussions during that period, von Wright later gave a report:

When Wittgenstein was with us, he and I had daily talks, sometimes on things he was working on then, sometimes on the logical topics which were mine at the time, but most often on literature and music, on religion, and on what could perhaps best be termed the philosophy of history and civilization. Wittgenstein sometimes read to me from his favourite authors, for example, from Grimm's *Maerchen* or Gottfried Keller's *Zuericher Novellen*. The recollection of his voice and facial expression when, seated in a chair in his sickroom, he read aloud Goethe's *Hermann und Dorothea* is for me unforgettable. (von Wright 1989, 15)

His reading was full of expression and precision, without any theatricality. (von Wright 2001, 129; my translation)

Von Wright felt that his mutual sympathy with Wittgenstein was rooted in these shared non-philosophical interests, in their shared taste in art and their common background of central European culture (von Wright 2001, 74). Discussions between Anscombe and Wittgenstein, by contrast, seem to have been more directly focused on philosophy. Once she noted to von Wright that she considered it "a very striking fact about Wittgenstein's thought that he reverts to problems of Greek philosophy".<sup>92</sup> She continued:

... one of the things for which I am grateful to him is that he has caused me to read Plato and Parmenides with more understanding.<sup>93</sup>

In fact, Anscombe was working on an essay in which she used the means she had learned from Wittgenstein to treat a philosophical problem the first expression of which she had found in Parmenides: the question of whether we must regard the concept of the past as a delusion, since there is no state of affairs

to which statements about the past can point. In this formulation, the problem of our knowledge of past time is the question how statements about the past can have meaning. In her essay entitled "The Reality of the Past" (1950), Anscombe presented the inclination to construct a theory of knowledge about past events as a foundation for how statements about the past can be true. This led her to take into consideration possible theories of memory and consciousness. By introducing intriguing scenarios of how we actually do and possibly can meaningfully speak about the past, she delicately and carefully sorted out misleading analogies in our striving for such general theoretical accounts. Working through the problem piecemeal, Anscombe identified the source of her philosophical perplexity:

The idea of the past as something *there*, to which true statements about the past correspond as a description corresponds to the object that we can compare with it, is what produces the puzzlement of which this paper is a discussion; for now when I wish, as it were, to locate this object I cannot do so. (Anscombe 1950, 113)

Anscombe would not come up with a coherent theory that would justify our way of speaking about the past, yet her scenarios from everyday life showed that we do understand the examples of talking about the past. How then can statements about the past have meaning? Echoing von Wright's conclusion in his early talk to the Moral Sciences Club in Spring 1939, Anscombe tunes into a philosophical dissolution by refusing to provide a theory and, instead, treating the demand for a theory: "The purpose of answering the question 'How does the past tense have meaning?' by giving a description of use is to make one think that this search for a justification is a mistake" (Anscombe 1950, 118).

Anscombe was very clear about the fact that she owed to Wittgenstein the course of her discussion in "The Reality of the Past." She ends her essay thus:

<sup>92</sup>Letter from Anscombe to von Wright, May 1948, NLF, Coll. 714.11–12.

<sup>93</sup>Letter from Anscombe to von Wright, May 1948, NLF, Coll. 714.11–12.

And so far I can judge, only the account of meaning given by Wittgenstein enables one without begging the question to introduce mention of actual past events into one's account of knowing the past that one *has* witnessed. This is made possible precisely by that feature of his method which is most difficult to accept: namely, that he attacks the effort at justification. (Anscombe 1950, 118)

Anscombe had been working on "The Reality of the Past" since 1948,<sup>94</sup> and it was published in a volume of essays by several of Wittgenstein's students in 1950. Thus, it is likely that Anscombe has shown it to Wittgenstein before publication. If so, it is telling since "The Reality of the Past" can really be read as an application of Wittgenstein's thought and method. Anscombe was aware of this and made it patently clear in a footnote:

Everywhere in this paper I have imitated his ideas and methods of discussion. The best I have written is a weak copy of some features of the original, and its value depends only on my capacity to understand and use Dr Wittgenstein's work. (Anscombe 1950, 50)

This footnote is interesting in light of how furious Wittgenstein was with earlier attempts to paraphrase his ideas: against this background, it is informative that he did not intervene in Anscombe's article.<sup>95</sup> Indeed, Anscombe's essay seems to differ in one crucial aspect from other authors' publications that Wittgenstein had condemned: whereas earlier writers may have claimed to present original thinking while imitating Wittgenstein, Anscombe admitted imitation while presenting

<sup>94</sup>Anscombe mentioned this in her letter to von Wright, May 1948, NLF, Coll. 714.11–12.

<sup>95</sup>I am especially indebted to James Conant for making me see the relevance of Anscombe's essay "Reality of the Past" in the context of the question how it came that Anscombe was asked to translate the *Philosophical Investigations*.

original thinking.<sup>96</sup> "The Reality of the Past" does not mimic Wittgenstein's style nor does it lightheartedly repeat his slogans. Anscombe makes effective use of Wittgenstein's method in order to clarify her genuine philosophical puzzlement. Unlike Wittgenstein, she follows a clear argumentative structure that proceeds from one step to the next in order to untie the intellectual knot. Like Wittgenstein, however, she uses a language that is simple, strong and so dense that it requires slow reading. If Wittgenstein saw the article, he certainly noticed these stylistic qualities and this might have further contributed to the idea that Anscombe could be the right person for translating the *Philosophical Investigations*. He knew her capability to render his words into English from earlier experiments, as this recollection by Anscombe shows:

<sup>96</sup>I owe an anonymous reviewer for JHAP the following suggestion that is worth quoting here:

Another case backs up this general line of thinking. For John Wisdom published a paper entitled 'Philosophical Perplexity' in the 1936/7 *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, and Wittgenstein did not complain. In it Wisdom wrote an acknowledgement very similar to Anscombe's (in his first footnote): "Wittgenstein has not read this over-compressed paper and I warn people against supposing it a closer imitation of Wittgenstein than it is. On the other hand I can hardly exaggerate the debt I owe to him and how much of the good in this work is his—not only in the treatment of this philosophical difficulty and that but in the matter of how to do philosophy. As far as possible I have put a W against examples I owe to him. It must not be assumed that they are used in a way he would approve." It seems to me that both Wisdom's and Anscombe's acknowledgements make two points that were jointly necessary for Wittgenstein not to get angry: (i) they make a full-throated acknowledgement that many of the ideas in the work are taken directly from or derived from Wittgenstein; and (ii) they equally acknowledge that in the transfer process they may have distorted them from Wittgenstein's original intention. Wittgenstein's annoyance with Waismann seems to have derived from the lack of (i) in his paper; and his annoyance with Braithwaite seems to have derived from lack of (ii).

See Wisdom (1937).

In 1946 I decided to learn German, and started with Hugo. I told Wittgenstein, and he said 'Oh, I am very glad, for if you learn German, then I can give you my book to read'. This had been my hope, and it spurred me on. We read the introduction to Frege's *Grundlagen* together. He professed amazed admiration at my laying hold of the construction of the sentences. He said, what no doubt was true, that it must have been the fruit of a training in Latin. But I was struck by the incongruousness of his admiring the exercise of so elementary a skill, which I thought a very slight display of intelligence, when one could get into fearful trouble in his lectures for not grasping something which I was sure it needed great powers and hard thought to grasp. We eventually read the early part of the *Investigations*; I remember he reacted with real pleasure when I told him that I had read to §35 and had found it intoxicating; which was the case. As we read it we discussed translating it—he would explain the import of words, and I would suggest an English rendering, about which he would be very enthusiastic. (I don't know if I remembered any of these when I came to translate the book for its publication in 1953.)<sup>97</sup>

At the latest in early 1950, Anscombe had "committed herself to translating the *Investigations* and wanted to equip herself for the task with a good knowledge of Viennese German" (Geach 1988, xiii). For this purpose, Wittgenstein arranged for her to spend several months in Vienna in Spring 1950.<sup>98</sup> At least during a part of this visit she stayed in the house of Wittgenstein's friend Ludwig Hänsel.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>97</sup>Transcript from Anscombe's notebook. I thank Prof. Luke Gormally for sending this transcript to me and Dr. Mary Geach for permitting to quote it. Prof. Gormally added the following note: "Hugo refers to a series of elementary language learning texts, including German."

<sup>98</sup>Notes from personal conversation with Ingrid Hänsel and with Dr. Mary Geach. According to both, Anscombe was sent to Vienna by Wittgenstein. Later, Prof. Luke Gormally specified in a note to the author that Wittgenstein "arranged for her to spend nine months in Vienna in 1950 so that she could perfect her knowledge of Austrian German."

<sup>99</sup>Notes from personal conversation with Ingrid Hänsel. According to I. Hänsel, Anscombe lived at the house of Wittgenstein's friend Ludwig Hänsel.

Wittgenstein too was in Vienna in early 1950, principally to visit his sister Hermine for the last time. He had then returned from visiting Malcolm in Ithaca, New York. Already during this journey, he had appeared weakened himself, and after returning to England in November 1949, he had been diagnosed with cancer. In Vienna in early 1950, Anscombe and Wittgenstein met for discussions two to three times a week.<sup>100</sup> Once they attended a meeting of the philosophical circle around Viktor Kraft, a member of the former Vienna Circle who was just finishing a summarizing book on this philosophical movement (Kraft 1950). Being a student of Kraft, Paul Feyerabend was also present at that meeting. As a result of the discussion, Feyerabend wished to write a doctoral dissertation under Wittgenstein's supervision—a wish that the course of Wittgenstein's life left unfulfilled.

By April 1950, Wittgenstein and Anscombe had returned to England and Wittgenstein moved into Anscombe's house in Oxford. They most likely discussed the translation of his book. Given his keen interest in earlier translations of his work, it is hard to imagine that he would have lived in the same house with his translator and not paid due attention to the process underway. In fact, Jenny Teichman, a friend of Anscombe's family, wrote that the translation "was carried out under his guidance" (Teichmann 2001, 2). According to Peter Geach, the translation of all remarks in the then-current version of the *Philosophical Investigations* was finished while Wittgenstein was still alive (Geach 1988, xiii).

During the Summer of 1950, Wittgenstein waited for his friend Ben Richards to finish an exam so that they could travel together to Skjolden. Wittgenstein used the time to write about questions of knowledge and certainty, themes he had discussed

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See Somavilla et al. (1994).

<sup>100</sup>Letter from Wittgenstein to von Wright, 12 February 1950, in Wittgenstein (2012, 419).

with Malcolm in the United States. These new remarks, however, were not meant to go into his book.<sup>101</sup> His work on the *Philosophical Investigations* had, it seems, come to an end. In the Autumn of 1950, Wittgenstein and Richards finally took their journey to Skjolden, to the spot at the end of the Sognefjord where the philosopher had experienced an intellectual rush as a youth and achieved another breakthrough in his later work as a man in his prime. Now he was inspired once again. Despite illness, Wittgenstein even planned to return to Skjolden to resume his philosophical work. This he wrote in a letter to von Wright:

If all goes well I shall sail on Dec. 30<sup>th</sup> and go to Skjolden again. . . . I don't think I'll be able to stay in my hut because the physical work I've got to do there is too heavy for me, but an old friend told me that she'd let me stay at her farmhouse. Of course I don't know whether I'm able any more to do decent work, but at least I'm giving myself a real chance. If I can't work there I can't work anywhere.<sup>102</sup>

Despite this flare of hope, Wittgenstein's health now deteriorated rapidly and he was unfit for the ship's departure. Anscombe informed von Wright on New Year's Day 1951:

He is still in England, as he wasn't able to make arrangements in Norway. Also he has been rather ill, but apparently it is—or ought to be—a temporary thing and to pass off in another week or two. He already seems much better after having been pretty wretched and having a good deal of pain ever since his return in November. Of course he has not been able to do any work and he told me that he had not even felt any frustration at this, but was vegetating. He spent Christmas here at the Bevans' house and has returned to Oxford today—or so I believe; this was his plan last night.<sup>103</sup>

<sup>101</sup> Wittgenstein (2000b, Mss 169–176); later partly published in Wittgenstein (1969a), Wittgenstein (1977), Wittgenstein (1982a), and Wittgenstein (1992).

<sup>102</sup> Letter from Wittgenstein to von Wright, 7 December 1950, in Wittgenstein (2012, 430).

<sup>103</sup> Letter from Anscombe to von Wright, 1 January 1951, NLF, Coll. 714.11–12.

Wittgenstein suffered severe attacks of pain in the subsequent weeks.<sup>104</sup> Returning to Oxford from yet another treatment session in Cambridge on 29 January 1951, he gathered witnesses to sign his will by which he entrusted Rhees, Anscombe and von Wright with the task to decide what to publish from his writings:

I GIVE to MR. R. Rhees Miss Anscombe and Professor G. H. v. Wright of Trinity College Cambridge All the copyright in all my unpublished writings and also the manuscripts and typescripts thereof to dispose of as they think best but subject to any claim by anybody else to the custody of the manuscripts and typescripts

I intend and desire that Mr. Rhees Miss Anscombe and Professor von Wright shall publish as many of my unpublished writings as they think fit but I do not wish them to incur expenses in publication which they do not expect to recoup out of royalties or other profits<sup>105</sup>

In February 1951, treatments were stopped and Wittgenstein moved into the house of his medical doctor Edward V. Bevan in Cambridge. Von Wright visited him there several times, and Wittgenstein once came to see von Wright in his college office. They talked about Sergej Aksakov's "Family Chronicle" but not about questions related to editing his papers. In fact, Wittgenstein did not tell von Wright that he was to inherit this task (von Wright 2001, 152, 158). With Rhees, on the other hand, he directly addressed the issue. As late as ten days before his death, Wittgenstein spoke with Rhees about preparing the manuscripts for publication. According to Rhees, Wittgenstein "was particularly anxious that care should be taken in what was published and how it was presented".<sup>106</sup> However, when Anscombe asked Wittgenstein how they ought to deal

<sup>104</sup> Letter from Anscombe to Wittgenstein's sister, 8 June 1951, transcription by Kotte Autographs GmbH, Germany.

<sup>105</sup> Wittgenstein's will, 29 January 1951, copy at WWA.

<sup>106</sup> Letter from Rhees to von Wright, 7 July 1965, WWA.

with variant versions in his manuscripts, Wittgenstein is said to have answered that he could not help them any longer (Nedo 1993, 75). He left these decisions to the literary heirs he had chosen. In one of their last conversations about the matter and a few days before his death, Wittgenstein said to Rhees: "I trust you absolutely, and I trust Miss Anscombe absolutely."<sup>107</sup>

### Concluding Remarks<sup>108</sup>

Wittgenstein died in April 1951. The fact that he passed the copyright for his unpublished writings on to Rhees, Anscombe and von Wright may seem like the final acknowledgement that he would not live to see his book printed. This thought, however, was already familiar to him. Finishing the *Tractatus* during World War I, he had been compelled to consider what should happen to his work if he died. This is why the very first entry in the first of his preserved philosophical notebooks states that "After my death to be sent to Mrs. Poldy Wittgenstein XVII. Neuwaldeggerstr. 38—to be sent to Hon. B. Russell Trinity College Cambridge."<sup>109</sup> In June 1917, at the age of 28, Wittgenstein wrote what may be considered his first more extensive will.<sup>110</sup> This concern for the posthumous fate of his writings was not exclusively caused by the life-threatening conditions of war. Since

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<sup>107</sup>Letter from Rhees to Kenny, 22 March 1977, copy at WWA. Underlinings in the original letter are transcribed as italics. An edited version of this letter has been published in Rhees (1996).

<sup>108</sup>I thank an anonymous reviewer for JHAP for suggesting this concluding section.

<sup>109</sup>Wittgenstein (2000b, Ms 101, iii), entry from 9 August 1914. The German original reads: "Nach meinem Tod zu senden an Frau Poldy Wittgenstein XVII. Neuwaldeggerstr. 38 Zu senden an Hon. B. Russell Trinity College Cambridge"; my translation.

<sup>110</sup>The critical edition of the *Tractatus* informs about a letter (dated 7 June 1917) that contains instructions for what should be done with Wittgenstein's manuscripts after his death; this letter may be regarded as the first will Wittgenstein wrote. See Wittgenstein (1989, XIV).

resuming philosophical writing in 1929, shortly after his return to Cambridge, he told Frank R. Leavis that "When I am engaged on a piece of work I'm always afraid I shall die before I've finished it. So I make a fair copy of the day's work, and give it to Frank Ramsey for safe-keeping" (Rhees 1984, 61).

This practice was later repeated in different forms and found its final expression in the will Wittgenstein signed in 1951, naming Rhees, Anscombe and von Wright as his literary executors. Thus it may be safely assumed that Wittgenstein did not make this choice in haste. Indeed, the presentation in this essay has aimed at showing how personal and philosophical friendships grew over many years and eventually led Wittgenstein to choose his three literary executors. At this point it may be worthwhile explicating some further suggestions for why he chose them, though much of this must naturally remain speculation.

The entire foregoing story indicates that Wittgenstein was convinced of Rhees', Anscombe's and von Wright's philosophical acumen and integrity. He had advised some of his most trusted and loyal friends to leave philosophy and pursue other more suitable occupations. This was not the case with Rhees, Anscombe or von Wright. Wittgenstein actually helped to establish their academic positions by writing recommendations for each of them. Two of these recommendations still exist and have been quoted above; the third one concerning von Wright has not yet been found, but there is a letter by Wittgenstein which confirms that he indeed wrote such a letter (also quoted above); Wittgenstein concludes it by saying "If I wanted to play providence I'd write you a lukewarm recommendation; but I won't. I'll write you as good a one as you can possibly wish for. For what can I know about the future?"<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>111</sup>Letter from Wittgenstein to von Wright, 2 February 1948, in Wittgenstein (2012, 381).



Besides trusting their overall philosophical talent, Wittgenstein extensively discussed his work with Rhees, Anscombe and von Wright; hence he was aware of their understanding of his philosophy. This is also true for von Wright, even if he felt his friendship with Wittgenstein was based on similarities in taste and culture rather than on philosophical resemblance. This, however, points to another important aspect: none of the three were inclined or tempted to imitate Wittgenstein by using his methods or expressions in their own names. Judging from Wittgenstein's loathing of plagiarism, he certainly valued this intellectual independence.

A similar account may to some extent be given for other trusted friends whose philosophical talent Wittgenstein appreciated. But in contrast to them, Rhees, Anscombe and von Wright may have possessed further qualities especially relevant for the practical task of publishing his papers. Two aspects immediately come to mind: first, all three had a very good command of German—the language Wittgenstein almost exclusively wrote. Rhees spent long periods in Austria when studying with Kastil, Anscombe became acquainted with Austrian German when preparing herself to translate the *Philosophical Investigations* and von Wright was educated in a mainly German-speaking academic environment. Second, all three lived in Great Britain at the time of Wittgenstein's death: Rhees was a lecturer in Swansea, Anscombe was a research fellow at Oxford and von Wright had succeeded him as professor of philosophy at Cambridge. In addition to these qualities that apply to all three, other more specific qualities may have further distinguished them from other candidates. A consideration of these specific qualities may best be made in a way that follows the order in which the literary executors appear in Wittgenstein's will. This order may also reflect the temporal order of Wittgenstein's decisions to include each of them.

Rhees was the first to be chosen for the task: in a letter to

Moore he was named executor as early as 1948. Since Rhees was visiting Wittgenstein when this letter was written, it may be assumed that he had been asked and had agreed. At that time, Wittgenstein had known Rhees for 15 years. Rhees had started attending Wittgenstein's lectures albeit with some hesitation, but became a regular attendee in the subsequent years. Through discussions outside class and on repeated visits, he gained insight into the development of Wittgenstein's book, witnessed his way of working and was aware of his considerations as he composed his remarks with a view towards publication. Rhees was sympathetic to Wittgenstein's second thoughts about authorship and customs of academia. Thus, Rhees shared Wittgenstein's views in many crucial respects, and Wittgenstein could be certain that Rhees would be loyal to these views. This combination of philosophical understanding and unconditional loyalty may have contributed to Wittgenstein choosing him as an executor, not only in 1948, but also in the final will from 1951:

I appoint my friend MR. R. RHEES of 96 Bryn Road Swansea to be the EXECUTOR of this my will *and I hope that he will accept £50 for his personal Expenses in discharging this Trust*<sup>112</sup>

In 1948, Wittgenstein envisaged both Rhees and Rev. John Burnaby to be his executors. When Burnaby declined, it might have been possible to leave the task to Rhees alone. In a sense this is what happened, as Rhees became the sole executor of Wittgenstein's will in 1951. However, the fact that Wittgenstein thought about entrusting the task to two men may indicate that he considered it too much of a burden for only one person. Thus, the idea of appointing a consortium of literary executors may have occurred after Burnaby declined. Since Wittgenstein had early on planned a bilingual edition of his book, Anscombe was a natural candidate. Rhees' unsuccessful attempt to translate the early version of the *Philosophical Investigations* in 1938

<sup>112</sup>Wittgenstein's will §2, copy at WWA. The sentence in italics represents an addition in Wittgenstein's hand; my transcription.

ruled him out as a translator. Anscombe, on the other hand, had been chosen and instructed by Wittgenstein to translate the most finished version of his book at least one year before his death. However, if Wittgenstein had wanted her to deal exclusively with the translation and not with judgments about what to publish, he would have had many opportunities to express this wish. But there is nothing to indicate that he wanted to restrict Anscombe's role to translating his writings. He may have thought that she would have a special sensibility for a different aspect of his philosophy than would Rhee. The same may be true for von Wright.<sup>113</sup> At any rate, Anscombe's recollections of her visit to Dublin in 1948 show that Wittgenstein informed not only Rhee but also Anscombe about his plans for how to improve his book. As this was precisely the time when he decided that Rhee ought to become his executor, he may already then have thought of integrating Anscombe into the task of publishing his writings.

Wittgenstein informed Rhee and Anscombe about the task he wanted them to do. In this respect, there is a clear difference between their appointment as literary executors and that of von Wright, who may have been the last to be included in the consortium.<sup>114</sup> It is striking that Wittgenstein did not even tell von Wright about his will. Why not? Did he not consider it necessary? Did he fear that von Wright would not accept? Or did he want to keep the option open of removing him from the list? The answers to these questions will probably never be known. However, it is thought-provoking in this context that

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<sup>113</sup>Anthony Kenny has suggested that each of the literary executors covered one aspect of Wittgenstein's philosophy: von Wright the logical, Anscombe the philosophy of mind and Rhee the mystical. Quoted from notes of a personal conversation; see also Kenny (2014). In this connection, it is worth noting that von Wright was early on aware of the cultural context and literary quality of Wittgenstein's writings: see von Wright (1955).

<sup>114</sup>That von Wright was included last in the list of literary executors was also assumed by M. Nedo in a personal conversation.

Rhee remembered Wittgenstein saying he would absolutely trust Rhee and Anscombe, bearing in mind that this statement was made when Wittgenstein had already signed the version of his will that included von Wright as the third literary executor. The statement cannot possibly mean that Wittgenstein did not trust von Wright in general. This would not only be absurd given their relationship; had he not trusted von Wright, there would have been no reason to include him in the first place. It seems obvious that von Wright was just as loyal and trustworthy as the other two. Nevertheless, one may be inclined to understand the statement as a hint concerning the future decisions about which parts of his writings ought to be published. Indeed, Rhee seems to have understood the statement in this sense:

And he might have said of someone that he 'did not altogether trust him', or perhaps of someone that he did not trust him at all: meaning, of course, that he trusted, or did not trust the person's *judgment* in deciding what should be published. For it was plain that he expected or took it as obvious that there would have to be selection, and so there would have to be decisions.<sup>115</sup>

The fact that von Wright did not participate in preparing the typescript for Anscombe and Rhee's edition of the *Philosophical Investigations* may be regarded as support for such an interpretation (see Erbacher and Krebs 2015). On the other hand, again, Wittgenstein did not, in his will, distinguish between the future roles of his literary executors. All three are included in the "they" of "what they think fit". The only documentation hinting that Wittgenstein might have been making a distinction between the three literary heirs is Rhee's double position as executor of the will and literary executor, as well as the order in which the literary executors are named. This order can be explained neither by alphabet nor by age or gender. However, this seems

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<sup>115</sup>Letter from Rhee to Kenny, 22 March 1977, copy at WWA. See also Rhee (2006, 56).

too weak to justify the strong interpretation of Wittgenstein's statement according to which he would not have trusted von Wright's judgment in making selections for publication. Von Wright may have considered it inappropriate to intervene in the editing of the *Philosophical Investigations* since—contrary to Rhees and Anscombe—he had not been expressly asked to do so, and neither may Rhees and Anscombe have asked him to participate in it. However, his exclusion may also be explained by the fact that he retired from his professorship and moved to Finland while the editing took place (von Wright 2001, 152–57). Furthermore, there could be many reasons for not mentioning von Wright in Wittgenstein's statement about trustworthiness. It simply may have been inappropriate to mention to Rhees that von Wright was meant to become one of the literary executors before having informed von Wright himself. But then we are left again with the question that triggered this line of thought: why did Wittgenstein not inform von Wright?

A positive reason why Wittgenstein included von Wright as a literary executor may be seen when considering once more the letter from 1948 that names Rhees and Burnaby as his executors. Placing "Burnaby of Trinity" at Rhees' side indicates that Wittgenstein wanted to ensure a strong connection to Trinity College. Despite all his reservations about academic customs at Cambridge, Trinity College had provided an academic home for Wittgenstein for many years—for his discussions, lectures and writing. As his successor as professor of philosophy, von Wright certainly provided this connection to Trinity College. Further, as the first months of the posthumous editing show, it was advantageous that von Wright had an academically authoritative position: he played a central role in organizing the publication, in clarifying questions of copyright with publishers and college representatives and in acquiring funding that would facilitate working on the manuscripts (Erbacher and Krebs 2015). This function of von Wright may also give an

idea of the special abilities he brought to the team: von Wright was an efficient manager who achieved the academic goals he set for himself and he was able to take fastidious care of all the practical necessities a decent publication would require. In addition, von Wright was a natural gentleman and diplomat. It may have occurred to Wittgenstein that von Wright could act as a mediator in cases of conflict between the other two rather uncompromising characters—one a devout Catholic, the other a strong-headed anarchist. Thus, naming von Wright as one of his literary executors significantly reduced the risk of disagreement within the group while increasing the likelihood that the endeavor of publishing his book would soon be successfully concluded.

Rhees, Anscombe and von Wright appear as a carefully chosen and balanced triumvirate of literary executors. Considering their personal integrity, philosophical ability and pragmatic capacities, it is comprehensible that Wittgenstein chose precisely these three for publishing his writings. Furthermore, he obviously felt that he could entrust them with this burden, and he knew from Rhees and Anscombe that they would accept. When appointing them, he may have thought first and foremost of publishing the *Philosophical Investigations*. This was the book that he had prepared for publication to the greatest extent. The literary executors knew this and were sure that publishing the *Philosophical Investigations* was their first task (Erbacher and Krebs 2015). However, in his will Wittgenstein referred to the entirety of his writings, and for Rhees at least, it was obvious that they should continue publishing selected material after the *Philosophical Investigations*. Wittgenstein may have foreseen that they would spare no trouble in fulfilling this wish. Perhaps this is why he, in his will, reminded them not to "incur expenses in publication which they do not expect to recoup"<sup>116</sup>. However,

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<sup>116</sup>Wittgenstein's will; this statement reminds us also of Wittgenstein's unwillingness to pay for the paper and the printing of the *Tractatus* in 1919; see

at that point of time, no one envisaged that Wittgenstein's last will would give rise to an editorial story that, as of today, has been expanding for 65 years.<sup>117</sup>

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McGuinness (1988, 287).

<sup>117</sup>An overview of the phases in the history of editing Wittgenstein is presented in Erbacher (2015).

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