

D. Z. Phillips' Contemplative  
Philosophy of Religion  
Questions and Responses

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ASHGATE

## Chapter II

# Locating Philosophy's Cool Place – A Reply to Stephen Mulhall

D.Z. Phillips

What is of most importance ... is Phillips' strategic goal – that of articulating a Wittgensteinian conception of philosophy that is sensitive to its distinctive contribution to the human project of making sense of our existence, and yet capable of preserving the neutrality from which its peculiar authority grows. He thus attempts to place himself between those Wittgensteinians who can see only a negative task for philosophical investigations, and those who see the human significance of philosophy as rendering its autonomy deeply questionable.<sup>1</sup>

So wrote Stephen Mulhall in a review of *Philosophy's Cool Place* published in 2001. Those who emphasize philosophy's negative task see the philosopher as an underlabourer (to borrow Locke's phrase), who has no subject of his own, but who has a technique for clearing up conceptual confusions on other people's sites. Those who emphasize philosophy's human significance see it as providing a philosophy for living, a guide for human life. The first conception does too little, while the second attempts too much. By contrast, a contemplative conception of philosophy, in seeking to do conceptual justice by the world in all its variety, does so in the service of philosophy's central concern with the very possibility of such a world. In relation to this contemplative conception of philosophy, as Mulhall points out in his contribution to the present volume, I see the other conceptions as transgressive cousins, one defective, and the other excessive. In *Philosophy's Cool Place*, I criticized Stanley Cavell and James Conant for joining, *at times*, the family of transgressors. In his review, Mulhall thought my discussions of them 'develop criticisms that merit serious attention'.<sup>2</sup> By combining the transgressive conceptions of philosophy, Cavell and Conant have been extremely influential in promoting a *therapeutic* reading of Wittgenstein's philosophy.

In 'Wittgenstein's Temple', Mulhall's view has changed somewhat. In his review, he had been frustrated by what he took to be a sparse account of what exactly philosophical contemplation of reality comes to, and urged me to say more. Now, he doubts whether there is a 'more' to say, since he has difficulty in locating philosophy's cool place. Anything it wants to achieve, he argues, can be achieved by the underlabourer conception of philosophy, in a way which shows us, at the same

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1 Stephen Mulhall, Review of Phillips, *Philosophy's Cool Place*, *Philosophical Quarterly* 51:202 (2001), p.104.

2 Mulhall, Review *Philosophy's Cool Place*, p.104.

time, a philosophy for living. In short, Mulhall is deeply attracted by a therapeutic reading of Wittgenstein. So far from seeing the work of Cavell and Conant, in this context, as meriting serious critical attention, he is now 'less convinced by ... attempts to argue that [they] ... exhibit a culpable version of this failing'.<sup>3</sup> In my reply I'll try to show why Mulhall's change of heart is not a change for the better.

## 1. The Lure of a Philosophy for Living

Wittgenstein had grave doubts whether, if published, his work would be understood. This was not snobbishness or arrogance on his part, but a realistic assessment of the spirit of his and our age. It is an age concerned with progress, problem-solving, skills for personal relationships and making the world a better place. Such dominant interests are likely to be impatient with, and even uncomprehending of, a contemplative interest in the world. Béla Szabados is capturing the attitude of many philosophers in describing the reaction of Kai Nielsen to Wittgensteinian contemplation:

Wittgenstein's philosophical outlook is ethically and politically irresponsible, since his attitude of quietism leads us to a pernicious disengagement from the world and robs us of the critical tools to assess our culture and change it for the better. To put it bluntly, a philosophy that leaves everything where it is hinders the struggle for social justice, peace and human flourishing. It is an obstacle to human solidarity.<sup>4</sup>

In fact, Nielsen thinks I am simply deceiving myself in thinking that I am engaged in philosophical contemplation. This is how he begins his last chapter in our recent encounter:

D. Z. Phillips and I are, to put it mildly, at loggerheads. We both think of each other, at least on the issues before us, as a philosophical disaster ... I see Phillips as at least in effect as a preacher mounting the pulpit to preserve religion from any fundamental criticism, while thinking of himself as a neutral contemplator of the actual and the possible in a cool place, and he sees me as a fervent atheist riding the hearse proclaiming that God is dead and a good thing too.<sup>5</sup>

In her review of my book, Alison Denham thought I was advocating a cool philosophical way of rising above the cares and troubles of ordinary mortals. Given this misunderstanding, it is no surprise that she wondered whether I could keep that cool in the dance!<sup>6</sup> Even in his review, Mulhall is prone to speak of 'the human project of making sense of our existence', and in 'Wittgenstein's Temple' he sees my

3 All quotations from Mulhall are from 'Wittgenstein's Temple' in the present volume, unless otherwise indicated.

4 Béla Szabados, 'Introduction' Kai Nielsen and D.Z. Phillips, *Wittgensteinian Fideism?*, London: SCM Press, 2004.

5 Nielsen and D.Z. Phillips, *Wittgensteinian Fideism?*, Ch. 14, p.290. I had accused Nielsen of falling to the lure of a philosophy of life.

6 Alison Denham, 'How Long Can You Stay Cool at the Dance?', *Times Literary Supplement*, 23 June 2000, n.p.

refusal to indulge in Wittgensteinian therapy as 'a failure to recognize the pertinence of Kierkegaard's repeated and pointed reminder that philosophers are human beings too' (p.999). Kai Nielsen, Alison Denham and Stephen Mulhall differ, as philosophers, in all sorts of ways, but their remarks exemplify the therapeutic spirit which Wittgenstein thought was a barrier to an understanding of his contemplative task. Rush Rhees captures that spirit as follows:

The people who argued with Socrates and Plato may have thought that language was just a collection of techniques, and that that was what understanding is: 'knowing the technique ...' Is understanding just competence? Is language a skill? Whether speaking is a technique, whether thinking is a technique; whether living is. Again: whether life has the unity of a skill ... You might even think of methods of producing it to order then. This is the question whether virtue can be taught. It is all a matter of the method. That is what it comes to. And that would be the same as solving problems of life by calculation. Reaching an understanding of life by calculation.

Solving philosophical problems by calculation. 'Philosophy as just a matter of sorting out various grammars that have got mixed up.' Helping you to see where things go so that you do not get into a snag.

And so with understanding life: understanding the business of living. Knowing how to live effectively. Being a success. Doing it better than anyone else. The question of what it is to understand life. Or simply: of what it is to understand.<sup>7</sup>

I have not forgotten that Mulhall says of his three conceptions of philosophy (p.21),

It is not my concern to question Phillips's claim that at least some ways of failing to respect these distinctions would be philosophically damaging; there is certainly an important truth registered in Wittgenstein's claim that a philosopher should not be a citizen of any community of ideas – that that, indeed, is what makes him a philosopher.

The question is whether, in discussing Cavell and Conant, Mulhall retains this 'important truth', or recognizes, in their work, some of the 'philosophically damaging' ways of ignoring it. I shall begin to discuss this question with reference to Cavell. I regret that, in doing so, I shall have little to say about what I take to be his excellent contemplative discussion of scepticism in his early work,<sup>8</sup> or about the way in which Mulhall has helped us to understand it.<sup>9</sup> My brief, here, is to discuss the concerns voiced in 'Wittgenstein's Temple'.

In reaction to the accusation of quietism in Wittgenstein, Szabados replies: 'It may strike some as ironic that one of the deepest critics of our culture, concerned

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7 Rush Rhees, *Wittgenstein and the Possibility of Discourse*, ed. D.Z. Phillips, 2nd edn., Oxford: Blackwell, 2005, pp.3–4.

8 Stanley Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say?*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976, and *The Claim of Reason*, Parts 1 and 2, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979. For my appreciative discussion see *Philosophy's Cool Place*, pp.87–94.

9 See Stephen Mulhall, *Stanley Cavell: Philosophy's Recounting of the Ordinary*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994.

with its animation, is charged with complacency and quietism.<sup>10</sup> Commenting on Szabados' remark I said:

The irony Szabados refers to consists in the fact that one of the concepts in our culture which Wittgenstein reanimates is *the concept of criticism*. Criticism is rescued from what philosophy tries to make of it. By reflecting on contexts where *real* criticisms have their life, these criticisms, including the most radical, are allowed to be themselves. So far from advocating quietism, Wittgensteinian contemplation allows real battles to be themselves.<sup>11</sup>

Mulhall wants to remind me that one can only have philosophical contemplation if there is something other than philosophy to comprehend. True enough, but that, in itself, does not threaten the autonomy of the subject. Neither does the fact that a philosopher, like any other human being, lives at a certain time and place, with particular concerns, troubles and aversions. The point is that the philosopher is related to these surroundings in a contemplative way; his questions arising from the central concerns of his subject. The vital question is whether this relation has been transgressed in Cavell's ambition to be a reappraiser of his culture:

'To imagine a language is to imagine a form of life' ... In philosophizing, I have to bring my own language and life into imagination. What I require is a convening of my culture's criteria, in order to confront them with my words and life as I pursue them and as I imagine them; and at the same time to confront my words and my life as I pursue them with the life my culture's words may imagine for me. This seems to me a task that warrants the name of philosophy.<sup>12</sup>

This activity rightly turns its back on a transcendent metaphysics. But post-Wittgensteinian philosophy, in the course of doing so, has simply continued to search for a measure of 'all things'. As Michael Weston has pointed out, *it has simply turned to our historical situatedness to provide materials for a renewed search for such a measure*. On this view, to imagine a language is to imagine a form of life one approves of after due reflection. As Weston points out, Cavell's overriding commitment to a search for community leads him to use Wittgenstein's philosophy to show that 'adherence to absolute values in ethics and religion [are] products of inadequate understanding'.<sup>13</sup> For whom is Cavell speaking when he says that God is dead? Or for whom is he speaking, politically, when he says,

Society ... is what we have done with the success of Locke and the others in removing the divine right of kings and placing political authority in our consent to be governed together. The essential message of the idea of a social contract is that political institutions require

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10 Mulhall, *Stanley Cavell*.

11 Mulhall, *Stanley Cavell*, Ch. 17, p.350.

12 Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, p.100.

13 Michael Weston, Review of *Philosophy's Cool Place*, *Philosophical Investigations* 23:3 (2000), p.262.

justification ... there are laws or ends, of nature or justice, in terms of which they are to be tested. They are experiments.<sup>14</sup>

Mulhall admits that what Cavell is propounding is a form of contract liberalism,<sup>15</sup> but Cavell takes himself to be arriving at the political conditions for speech and agency *tout court*. Whatever of that, Cavell is certainly not exercising a contemplative enquiry in political philosophy. Had he been doing so, he would have wanted to show that recognition of the divine right of kings can itself be a form of political consent. When Locke criticized other parties, he did so in terms of political values to which he adhered. In *Philosophy's Cool Place*, I argued (p.106),

Political institutions are not experiments but are constitutive of certain ideas in terms of which discussion is carried on ... The contemplation of political agreement and disagreement needs to acknowledge that fact and not try to get behind the phenomena to some basic set of interests or ideas that they are supposed to serve.

In the light of the pronouncements we have seen Cavell make with respect to ethics, religion and politics, not to mention his views on Romanticism and Emersonian perfectionism, Mulhall makes two surprising claims in 'Wittgenstein's Temple', particularly since he does not attempt to meet the specific criticisms I made in *Philosophy's Cool Place*.

First, Mulhall claims 'how easily the basic articulations of [Cavell's] conception can be given expression in terms of [my] own, Rhee-inspired contemplative reading of Wittgenstein' (p.24). But how can Cavell's advocacy of specific values relating to ethics, religion and philosophy be rendered compatible with contemplation of the variety of values to be found in these contexts?<sup>16</sup> Mulhall asks how we can say 'in advance of dialogue with the relevant traditions, that the discoveries and claims of Freudian psychoanalysis, Romanticism and Christianity could have no bearing on our distinctively philosophical interests in such matters' (p.26). But there is no question of saying anything *in advance* of a contemplative dialogue with these traditions. One cannot legislate about the insights or confusions which may emerge.<sup>17</sup> By contrast, the influence of psychoanalysis on Cavell's thought leads him to speak of certain philosophical confusions as 'the denial of the human'. Further, the denial of a philosophical insight is seen as the repression of what we need to acknowledge.

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14 Stanley Cavell, *The Senses of Walden: An Expanded Edition*, San Francisco, CA: North Point Press, 1981, p.82.

15 Mulhall, *Stanley Cavell*, pp.69–74.

16 See Cavell's political pronouncements, for example with a superb example of contemplative philosophy in Peter Winch's paper, 'How is Political Authority Possible?', *Philosophical Investigations* 25:1 (2002), 20–32.

17 For my criticisms of psychoanalysis see Ch. 8 of my *Religion and the Hermeneutics of Contemplation*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001. For my criticisms of romanticism see 'Winch and Romanticism', *Philosophy* 77:300 (2002), 261–79. For my most recent criticism of accounts of Christianity see *Recovering Religious Concepts*, Basingstoke: Macmillan and St. Martin's Press, 2000; *Religion and Friendly Fire*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004; and *The Problem of Evil and the Problem of God*, London: SCM Press, 2004.

The danger is obvious: critics of Cavell may find themselves characterized as the repressed deniers of what they need to acknowledge.<sup>18</sup>

Second, Mulhall claims that in Cavell, we see an 'elaborated and sophisticated working out of the very model of discourse' for which, he claims, Rhee and I have only provided 'the barest sketch in [our] own writings' (p.25). This claim is indeed surprising, since surely one obvious contrast between Cavell and Swansea's contemplative philosophers is the selectivity of the former's texts, compared with the wide variety of examples discussed in the work of Rhee, Peter Winch, R.F. Holland and, dare I say, myself. How can such examples be called 'the barest sketch'? Furthermore, Mulhall recognizes the selectivity of Cavell's texts and offers a curious defence of it:

anyone who understands the acknowledgement structure underlying Cavell's model of reading would expect him to search for and to use texts which participate in his own attitude and approach to reading ... only texts motivated by the thoughts and feelings that are crystallized in Cavell's own conception and practice of reading could provide words capable of testing and drawing out the full potential of that practice.<sup>19</sup>

A contemplative conception of philosophy, by contrast, would wait on texts which would challenge any already crystallized conception. It would wait on criticisms and counter-criticisms to see the conceptual character of disagreement in contexts such as these. For example, I suggested that Cavell should put the texts of Flannery O'Connor alongside those of Emerson.<sup>20</sup> As I keep telling my students, contemplative acknowledgement is wider than what we appropriate personally.

In his later work, and in the work of those influenced by him, Cavell and others seem to be on journeys of self-discovery. According to Richard Eldridge, life is to be lived in a creative tension between a recognition of our finitude, and the desire to transcend it.<sup>21</sup> According to Richard Fleming, life must be lived in a realistic acceptance of our finitude.<sup>22</sup> According to Timothy Gould, we must go beyond our finitude in an endless search for a common humanity. He concludes his book thus: 'Each may find the other wanting and each might try to suppress what the other is seeking to say. But each is made for –and by the other.'<sup>23</sup>

I do not deny that one may find insights of all kinds, along with confusions too, in the accounts of journeys of self-discovery. All I am insisting on is that they are far removed from a contemplative philosophy. The latter is found in the way Rhee emphasizes the hubbub of voices in our culture, some in close proximity, others passing each other by. They are not engaged in one big conversation or enterprise.

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18 See *Philosophy's Cool Place*, p.109.

19 Mulhall, *Stanley Cavell*, p.194.

20 See *Philosophy's Cool Place*, p.112.

21 Richard Eldridge, *Leading a Human Life*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1997. See Edward Minar's review in *Philosophical Investigations* 23:1 (2000), 73–81.

22 Richard Fleming, *The State of Philosophy*, Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1993. For my review see *Philosophical Investigations* 19:4 (1994).

23 Timothy Gould, *Hearing Things*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1998. For my review see *Philosophical Investigations* 22:4 (1999), 349–53.

But they are thrown together in the language they speak. Rhees's contemplation of them is born of wonder at that fact.

Mulhall, on the other hand, wonders how easy it is to maintain a distinction between a contemplative interest in the dialogical relations between people's conversations, and one's own particular stance within them. I hope to have shown in my work, for example, in *From Fantasy to Faith*, differences and proximities between religious belief and atheism. The aim is not resolution, but an understanding of what is at issue.

Wittgenstein did not say that a philosopher *should not* be a citizen of any community of any ideas, as Mulhall has him saying, but that he *is not* such a citizen. He is not recommending, but arguing, critically, from a certain conception of philosophy and its relation to its subject matter, including the wider culture in which it finds itself. It is this latter relation that separates Cavell's therapeutic conception from Wittgenstein's philosophy. Having seen, rightly, that our forms of life are not founded on a metaphysical foundation external to themselves, Cavell jumps to the confused conclusion that, therefore, human beings are responsible for their maintenance, as though we were their managers, and they were our projects. A form of life is maintained, of course, by participation in it, but its maintenance is not the reason for our participation. Thinking otherwise leads Cavell to think of our philosophical confusions as a refusal to accept the responsibility of maintenance. This is not an advance on Wittgenstein's philosophy, but a violation of its contemplative character. A conception of language as a set of techniques or skills<sup>24</sup> facilitates this external and instrumental way of thinking.<sup>25</sup> My most recent criticism of these tendencies was expressed as follows:

We are not 'minders' of our lives; we are *in* our lives: we are our lives. Concern may be expressed about the deterioration of a movement. But that concern is itself an expression of the movement, not an external, technical problem in handling it. We are not the technicians of culture (the tool-box analogy again).<sup>26</sup>

This is one of the central insights of Wittgenstein's great work, *On Certainty*, and of his emphasis on world-pictures. Wittgenstein is not trying to *establish* these world pictures, or trying to prove that we can know them. Even less is he trying to determine which world-picture is the right one. These endeavours, given what he means by a world-picture, have no messages or guidance for us in seeking a philosophy for living. Mulhall notes, as we saw at the outset, that to seek such a 'human significance' for philosophy, renders 'its autonomy deeply questionable'.<sup>27</sup> It is no surprise, therefore, to find confirmation of this fact in a recent pronouncement where Cavell says,

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24 For a tendency to link speaking with mastery of a technique, see M. McGinn, *Sense and Certainty: A Dissolution of Scepticism*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1989.

25 For fuller criticisms see *Philosophy's Cool Place*, p.96.

26 D.Z. Phillips, 'The Case of the Missing Propositions', in *Readings of Wittgenstein's 'On Certainty'*, eds. Danièle Moyal-Sharrock and William H. Brenner, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2005, p.27.

27 Review of *Philosophy's Cool Place*, p.104.

when fragments of Wittgenstein's thought continue to appear in my texts, they are not meant to authorise my methods or conclusions but often to serve as periodic checks that I am continuing to grasp the thread of philosophy, leading to some form that my contemporaries might approve. That the claim to philosophy has become inherently questionable is part of my conviction about philosophy.<sup>28</sup>

Wittgenstein was not concerned with whether his contemporaries approved of his contemplative endeavours. As we have seen, he was all too aware that they would not. For my part, all one can do is to show what a contemplative conception of philosophy involves, and how it differs from others. To show, for example, that in Wittgenstein, world-pictures 'are constitutive of how people think, act and live'.<sup>29</sup> I am, therefore, glad to have *Philosophy's Cool Place*, in its criticisms of modes of contemporary thought, and in its attempt to elucidate a contemplative conception of philosophy, described as an attempt 'to keep alive a Wittgensteinian voice in a hostile environment'.<sup>30</sup>

## 2. The Philosophical and the Personal

Remaining with a discussion of the desire for a philosophy for living, I turn now to Mulhall's defence of James Conant against the criticisms I had made of him in *Philosophy's Cool Place* concerning the methodologies of Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein.

Conant had claimed that the confusions Wittgenstein wants us to avoid 'cannot be separated from a form of vigilance which is directed towards how we live'.<sup>31</sup> *In this context*, I thought it worth making certain distinctions between 'the philosophical' and 'the personal'. I emphasize *the context*, since if it is ignored, we soon become embroiled in an *abstract* argument about these terms which throws little light on anything. I find such an abstraction in some of Mulhall's replies to my criticisms. For example, he writes (p.23):

What Conant in fact asserts is not an equation but a connection or alignment; Conant's thought is that the philosophical difficulties are a species of personal difficulty, one kind of way which an individual might confront the difficulties of achieving self-knowledge in

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28 Stanley Cavell, 'On Wittgenstein', *Philosophical Investigations* 24:2 (2001), p.94.

29 *Philosophy's Cool Place*, p.55.

30 Weston, Review of *Philosophy's Cool Place*, p.263. Weston's own book, *Kierkegaard and Modern Continental Philosophy*, London: Routledge, 1994, shows, with reference to Nietzsche, Heidegger and Derrida, how difficult it is not to provide substantive alternatives to a metaphysical world well lost.

31 Conant, 'On Putting Two and Two Together', p.280. Since then Conant has also published 'Philosophy and Biography', in *Wittgenstein: Biography and Philosophy*, ed. James C. Klagge, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, and 'On Going the Bloody Hard Way in Philosophy', in *The Possibilities of Sense*, ed. John H. Whittaker, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002. I cannot reply to all Conant's points in this paper, but I shall endeavour to discuss those most pertinent to the points Mulhall raises, without assuming that Mulhall would or would not want to defend Conant on all the matters I raise.

her life. There are, of course, other ways in which we might encounter such difficulties, ways which are not distinctively philosophical in character; but that does not make the ones which *are* philosophical any less personal – and of course it does not make that species of personal difficulty any less philosophical ... Phillips does not succeed in giving us any reason to accept his suspiciously absolute, subliming dichotomy between the philosophical and the personal; he simply presupposes it.

I agree that I do not succeed in getting anyone to accept a sublimed distinction between the personal and the philosophical. That is because I was not trying to draw one. All I am saying is that the distinction is worth making, given what Conant, *at times*, wants to make of it. Ironically, it is Mulhall who sublimes the distinction. In saying that philosophical difficulties are no less personal than non-philosophical difficulties, he seems to be saying that one kind has as much of 'the personal' as the other. But what is this personal 'something' which appears no less in one context than the other? Perhaps I have financial difficulties. The bills show that they are pretty personal. But another may relieve me of my burden. My philosophical difficulties are personal, but even though I may benefit from the philosophical insights of others, they cannot, in the same sense, relieve me of my difficulties. I still have to work through them for myself. In face of these differences, no illumination is gained, and much is obscured, by saying that though not all difficulties are philosophical, this does not mean that those that are, are any less personal than financial difficulties. Again, I may have religious difficulties concerning the ways in which my self comes between me and God. I may have had philosophical difficulties in seeing that distance from God is not his consequential punishment for sin, but come to see that sin *is* the distance. I write an article about it, and feel very proud of it. As a result, the pride comes between me and God! Nothing is illuminated, and much is obscured, by saying that one set of difficulties is no less personal than the other, giving as one's justification, as Mulhall does, that a gain in philosophical clarity is, after all, 'an alteration in one's life' (p.22). To speak of all these difficulties as no less personal than each other, is to forget Mulhall's own insistence that all Conant does is not to equate, but to align or connect the philosophical and the personal. All I do is to criticize *some* aspects of those alignments and connections. It is these that Mulhall fails to address.

What of Conant? At times, he shows a commendable reticence and restraint about these matters. For example, in discussing the complex relations between philosophy and biography, the extent to which philosophical work is integral to an assessment of character, or the extent to which an assessment of character is integral to an assessment of philosophical work, he insists, at the outset, that these questions do not admit of a general answer: 'they are the sorts of questions we must each answer for ourselves and on a case-by-case basis'.<sup>32</sup> Conant promises not to trade in generalities concerning them. The issue is whether, in his various discussions, he sticks to this promise.

Conant identifies generalities to be avoided in two views of the relation between the philosophical and the personal. According to *reductivism*, the real explanation of a philosophical work is to be found in the personal details of the philosopher's life

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32 Conant, 'Philosophy and Biography', p.17.

which are the external causes of the philosophy and which it subserves. According to *compartmentalism*, on the other hand, the philosophical and the personal are entirely separate from each other. Compartmentalism preserves the truths that philosophical work cannot be reduced to the merely personal, or assessed purely in terms of it. Nevertheless, its central claim can be attacked while preserving these truths.<sup>33</sup> Conant takes me to be a compartmentalist. He thinks I am right in thinking that philosophical difficulties are not merely personal, but wrong in thinking that they are not personal in any sense.<sup>34</sup> Conant argues that I want to insist on this latter point, in order to avoid saying, as he does, 'that a shoddiness in how we speak is, at the same time, a shoddiness in how we live'.<sup>35</sup> On the other hand, Conant also says:

Phillips is certainly right that the wrong kind of insistence on the (idea that the sorts of *difficulty* with which Wittgenstein, in his philosophical work, is concerned are) 'personal' can lead to a disastrous misinterpretation of Wittgenstein's work.<sup>36</sup>

Clearly, further sorting out is required on my part to make clearer what I do and do not want to say about relations between the philosophical and the personal.

The first thing to be said is that I do not want to deny, for a moment, that practising a contemplative conception of philosophy is, in an important sense, personal. The reason why is obvious: the enquiry makes ethical demands of the enquirer. It calls for a certain purity of attention to the world which shows character. This is the natural context for the kind of remark by Wittgenstein that impresses Conant and Mulhall:

You cannot write anything about yourself that is more truthful than you yourself are.<sup>37</sup>

Nothing is so difficult as not deceiving oneself.<sup>38</sup>

If anyone is *unwilling* to descend into himself ... he will remain superficial in his writing.<sup>39</sup>

Working in philosophy ... is really more a working on oneself.<sup>40</sup>

That man will be revolutionary who can revolutionise himself.<sup>41</sup>

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33 Conant, 'Philosophy and Biography', pp.17–19.

34 Conant, 'On Going the Bloody *Hard* Way in Philosophy', p.88.

35 Conant, 'On Going the Bloody *Hard* Way in Philosophy', p.119, n.21, quoting from *Philosophy's Cool Place*, p.46.

36 Conant, 'On Going the Bloody *Hard* Way in Philosophy', p.88.

37 Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1990, p.33.

38 Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, p.34.

39 *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Personal Recollections*, ed. R. Rhees, Oxford: Blackwell, 1981, p.193.

40 Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, p.16.

41 Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, p.45. Those passages are quoted by Conant on p.86 of 'On Going the Bloody *Hard* Way in Philosophy'.

Conant agrees with what I say about the relation of such remarks to the demands of philosophical attention. He also quotes, with approval, the following comments by Rhees about what philosophy meant for Wittgenstein,

'Go the bloody *hard way*.' I have said that for him philosophy was this. And this was not just a personal matter: it was not just the spirit in which he happened to pursue philosophy ... If you see the kind of difficulty that is raised in philosophy, you will see why there cannot be a simplified way of meeting it ... And this means: take the *difficulties* seriously: 'unless you recognise that they *are* difficulties; unless you recognise that they are difficult – unless they make things difficult.'<sup>42</sup>

*In these philosophical contexts*, therefore, it would be misleading to make a distinction between the philosophical and the personal. They are internally related. In *these* contexts, I agree entirely with Conant when he emphasized that the ethical demands of enquiry are no less present, for example, in the *Tractatus*, when Wittgenstein is discussing logic, than when he is discussing ethics. The ethical is present on every page of the work. What is more, Wittgenstein's different assessment of Frege and Russell, in their discussion of issues in logic, cannot be understood without bringing in the difference in the way they treated philosophical difficulties. That difference will itself involve ethical difficulties in the sense in which we are not referring to 'the ethical'.<sup>43</sup>

The second thing I want to say is that I do not want to deny that there are internal relations between contemplative philosophy and a way of living, but am extremely wary and dubious of attempts at connecting philosophy and ways of living beyond these internal relations.

The insight and the confusion I want to preserve in this context can be brought out by comments made by Rush Rhees in this connection. On the one hand, Rhees is clear about the kind of demand philosophy made on Wittgenstein:

Not letting it become a way of asserting or regaining his prestige ... not racing for the credit of being 'the discoverer of so and so'. As though he might say: 'Keep your attention on philosophy; ...' For this kind of purity and discipline, you need purity and discipline in the rest of your life as well ... And in the midst of a long discussion of some philosophical question in some notebook, you will find an isolated single remark like: 'I am always in love with my talent. This is dangerous.' The patience needed to guard against this sort of danger must go on outside philosophy as well.<sup>44</sup>

Rhees also gives an example of what would be surprising to find outside philosophy in the life of a contemplative philosopher. He says 'we should be surprised to find

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42 Rush Rhees, 'The Study of Philosophy', in *Without Answers*, ed. D.Z. Phillips, London: Routledge, 1969, reprinted 2005, p.169.

43 Conant discusses these issues in great detail, but with a considerable overlap of material in 'On Going the Bloody *Hard Way* in Philosophy'; 'Philosophy and Biography'; and in 'What "Ethics" in the *Tractatus* is *Not*', in *Religion and Wittgenstein's Legacy*, eds. D.Z. Phillips and Mario von der Ruhr, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005.

44 Rush Rhees, 'On Wittgenstein IX', *Philosophical Investigations* 24:2 (2001), p.161.

anyone who is a serious philosopher, and was at the same time a playboy or a man about town', and goes on to say:

And this is not just because of the tradition of the Stoic 'sage', nor is it just because certain philosophers who come to mind (Socrates or Spinoza, for instance) have lived that way. We may feel that there is something more like an internal connexion between what you are engaged on in philosophy and the sort of life you lead.<sup>45</sup>

When Rhee speaks of the demands of a contemplative philosophy, he sees them as internally related to the kind of philosophical activity involved. This does not mean that the demands are always met, of course, otherwise Wittgenstein's cautionary reminders to himself would not be needed, but deviations from the demands of philosophy could not predominate. One would not expect to find the kind of attention to, and wonder at the world involved in philosophical contemplation of the world in a playboy, but here Rhee is not dogmatic. He says it would be surprising, not impossible, and speaks of something *more like* an internal connexion between philosophy and the life one leads.

On the other hand, in the same context, Rhee emphasizes that his central concern is with the character of the philosophical enquiry, and warns against underemphasising *the independence* of philosophical problems. Philosophy is not simply the means of removing obstacles in other fields, for example, the advancement of science, even if, on occasion, it succeeds in doing so. He would say the same of any suggestion that philosophy is the means to a better way of living. Speaking of Hume's discussion of causality, Rhee says:

it was with problems in *philosophy* that he was most concerned. And if he is a great philosopher, it is because of what he did about *them* ... A great deal has been said – in ancient times more than in modern – about 'the philosophical life'. Some of this seems to me very important. But it may lead to silly misunderstandings. I think it would have to be presented rather differently today than it was in Plato's time, and it would need someone of unusual calibre.<sup>46</sup>

The difficulty which confronts us, then, is like one of doing justice *both* to what Rhee says about internal relations between contemplative philosophy and a way of living, and to what he says about the independence of philosophical problems and their sources. When this balance is disturbed, in certain ways, there may be an occasion for distinguishing between 'the philosophical' and 'the personal'. Since writing *Philosophy's Cool Place* and reading Conant's more recent essays I do not think these occasions have disappeared. For example, Conant, in order to show us how there can be an intimate relationship between the philosophical and the personal, calls to our attention the aims of Hellenistic schools of thought:

The spiritual disciplines internal to each of the Hellenistic schools of philosophy seeks to promote a certain kind of existential *telos* – for the Skeptics, the *telos* is *ataraxia*: for the

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45 Rush Rhee, Preface: 'The Fundamental Problems of Philosophy', in Rhee, *Wittgenstein and the Possibility of Discourse*, p.xii.

46 Preface to Rhee, *Wittgenstein and the Possibility of Discourse*, pp.x–xii.

Neo-Platonists, it is ecstatic union with the cosmos, and so forth – and the telos in question is not a merely theoretical (as opposed to practical) matter: it is a matter of successfully giving a certain sort of shape to one's self and this is achieved in part by giving a certain sort of shape to one's life.<sup>47</sup>

Conant admits that there is a difference between these ancient concepts and modern conceptions of philosophy, but he puts this by saying that 'the relation between philosophy and life is no longer as perspicuous as it once was'.<sup>48</sup> He also tells us that Kierkegaard and Nietzsche were nostalgic for this aspect of ancient philosophy.<sup>49</sup> Could we find such nostalgia in Wittgenstein? I do not think so. Whereas Conant wants to deny that there is a difference *in kind* between modern philosophy and the schools he mentions, I think that, in certain respects, Wittgenstein would say there was. I know Rhee would, since he spoke often of the way Stoicism had led to popular expectations, still with us today, that philosophy should provide a philosophy of life. Think of the way contemporary moral philosophy is dominated by advocacy, and the way in which contemporary philosophy of religion is dominated by apologetics. In this latter context, the dominance of advocacy and apologetics are forms of confusion, stemming from the thought of philosophy as a guide to living. Such a thought seems to be present in Conant's readiness to talk of 'shaping the self' and 'shaping one's life'. Peter Winch has shown that morality, not to mention moral philosophy, is not a guide to conduct, if only because moral considerations are already partly constitutive of the situation in which we have to conduct ourselves.<sup>50</sup> Any suggestion of the philosopher as the sage who points us in the right spiritual or moral direction would be anathema to Wittgenstein and wholly repugnant to Rhee and Winch. Nevertheless, Rhee would not say that the ancient schools were confused. In their notion of philosophy as a spiritual exercise, he would say that we have a different *conception* of philosophy. That is why it is misleading to speak of a modern conception as a *less* perspicuous representation of the relation between philosophy and life. On the other hand, this is not to deny important continuities between contemplative philosophy today and ancient philosophy.<sup>51</sup> Wittgenstein insisted that his problems were those of Plato. Conant says of modern philosophy:

there is no longer ... any such thing as *the* relation between philosophy and life – there are as many species of this relation as there are conceptions of philosophy, and, across these conceptions, widely varying degrees and kinds of intimacy among the relata.<sup>52</sup>

I hope it is clear that I am concerned with a certain conception of philosophy as I find it in Wittgenstein. I believe it to be present throughout the history of philosophy.

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47 Conant, 'Philosophy and Biography', p.21.

48 Conant, 'Philosophy and Biography', p.23.

49 Conant, 'Philosophy and Biography', p.21.

50 See Peter Winch, 'Moral Integrity', in Peter Winch, *Ethics and Action*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972. See also my 'What Can We Expect from Ethics?', in *Interventions in Ethics*, Albany, NY/London: SUNY Press/Macmillan, 1992.

51 See Rush Rhee, *In Dialogue with the Greeks*, vol. I: *The Presocratics and Reality*, and vol. II: *Plato and Dialectic*, ed. D.Z. Phillips, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004.

52 Conant, 'Philosophy and Biography', p.23.

It is in that context that I think it is important to distinguish, for certain purposes, between the philosophical and the personal. I shall try to illustrate some occasions on which I think making the distinction is necessary. Speaking of the Hellenistic schools of philosophy, and their notion of philosophy as a spiritual exercise, Pierre Hadot says:

This is not only to say that it was a specific type of moral conduct ... Rather it means that philosophy was a mode of existing-in-the-world, which had to be practised at every instant, and the goal of which was to transform the whole of the individual's life.<sup>53</sup>

In the context I am concerned with, once we go beyond the internal relations between philosophy and life I have discussed, the attempts to make connections between philosophy and 'the whole of an individual's life' become extremely precarious and dubious undertakings. Consider, for example, the following comments by Conant:

When Wittgenstein remarks about A. J. Ayer, 'He has something to say but he is incredibly shallow', this is, in the first instance, of course, a remark about the quality of Ayer's philosophy. But it is not *merely* a remark about the quality of Ayer's efforts at philosophizing, and as such wholly without bearing on an estimate of the shallowness or depth of the sensibility of the person whose philosophizing it is. Similarly, when Wittgenstein says about James Frazer: 'Frazer is much more savage than most of these savages',<sup>54</sup> this is a comment on both the man and his thought. It is a comment on something that shows itself in Frazer's writing about the forms of life and the modes of thought of the primitive peoples he studies – where part of what shows itself is something about what sort of possibilities of thought and life are (and are not) closed to Frazer himself.<sup>55</sup>

Conant does not actually show us an internal connection between the shallowness said to be in Ayer's philosophy, and the shallowness said to be in his life. It is supposed to show us 'something' about Ayer's sensibility in the latter context. But it is important to spell out what that 'something' is supposed to be. This becomes more apparent in Conant's remarks on Frazer. We are told that Frazer's comments on primitive practices show *something* about what possibilities of thought and life are closed to Frazer himself, but again what that 'something' is, is rather important. There are certain internal relations between the philosophical and the personal, in this context, which makes one spelling out of that 'something' fairly obvious (which is not to say obvious in our technological culture). These internal relations are elucidated in Rhee's remarks on the wonder which is characteristic of philosophy, which he says is also found 'in the thinking of less corrupted peoples':

Wonder at death – *not* trying to escape from death; wonder at (almost: reverence towards) madness; wonder that there should be the problems that there are, and that they should

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53 Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, ed. Arnold Davidson, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1995, p.265. Quoted by Conant in 'Philosophy and Biography', p.21.

54 'Remarks on Frazer's *Golden Bough*', in *Wittgenstein: Philosophical Occasions*, eds. J. Klagge and A. Nordmann, Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1993, p.131.

55 Conant, 'On Going the Bloody *Hard* Way in Philosophy', p.89.

have the solutions that they do ... Wonder at the beauty of human actions ... And in the same way, wonder at what is terrible and what is evil ... Wonder – treating as important – what is terrible just *because* it is terrible; as primitive peoples may celebrate it in rites: the burning of human figures, perhaps of children, in effigy; treating what is terrible as a sacrament. If someone can think of those practices only as ‘morbid’ or as ‘perversions’ – or if he can think of them only as methods designed to *ward off* the terrible things they celebrate – this means he cannot imagine how people might wonder at terrible events because of what they are (as opposed to wondering what neglect should have allowed them to happen, how they might be avoided, etc).<sup>56</sup>

What Frazer’s sensibility lacks is the ability to imagine that human life can be like that. This lack of imagination can, and usually does, lead to condescension in thought and deed towards primitive peoples. Here, there is an internal connection between the philosophical and the personal. But things are far more complicated once we go beyond these internal connections. Sometimes, of course, it wouldn’t make sense to do so. For example, the opposite of saying that the primitive rituals were closed to Frazer, is not to say that they could be open to him. Their practices *could not* be his. As Rhees says, ‘If there were a group of people in Dundrum today who began to practise child sacrifice – that would be something different.’<sup>57</sup>

But suppose that there is no misunderstanding about a primitive practice, and that a philosopher, by giving it contemplative attention, provides an illuminating account of it in an attempt to dispel confusions such as Fraser’s. Where is the ethical continuity between this philosophical clarity and its connections with a person’s way of life? Internal relations will not make these connections for us. In the course of a letter to Rush Rhees, Elizabeth Anscombe wrote:

An irreligious man *rejects* certain *conceptions*; he is not innocent of them. Don’t misunderstand me: there are forms which such conceptions can take, such that a man is better off if he rejects them than if he retains them in these forms. I would rather a man were like Bertrand Russell than that he were a worshipper of Dourga. (I rather believe that Wittgenstein would not: he’d certainly have me up for thinking I could say anything about a worshipper of Dourga.)<sup>58</sup>

Rhees comments, ‘I am sure she is right in thinking Wittgenstein would react in that way.’<sup>59</sup> But why? Rhees writes:

I know next to nothing about the religion of Moloch. I have heard that it included child sacrifice in certain of its rituals. And it may have included other practices which people in Western countries today would call cruel or worse. I never heard Wittgenstein speak of this. But if he had heard someone condemn such a religion because it includes child sacrifice, he would certainly have objected. He would have said that you would not know for your life what the state of mind of the people was who practised that religion and

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56 Preface to Rhees, *Wittgenstein and the Possibility of Discourse*, pp.xii–xiii.

57 Rush Rhees, ‘Picking and Choosing’, in *Rush Rhees on Religion and Philosophy*, ed. D.Z. Phillips, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, p.308.

58 Rhees, ‘Picking and Choosing’, p.309.

59 Rhees, ‘Picking and Choosing’, p.309.

sacrificed the children. And you could not begin to apply the standards by which you may judge actions in the society in which we live.<sup>60</sup>

Here, Wittgenstein is condemning judgements based on misunderstandings. But we see in the writings of Wittgenstein and Rhees that they *do* have insights into rituals which treat the terrible as a sacrament. What one cannot do is to show that there is an internal relation between these insights and one's moral reactions to the rituals. For example, Wittgenstein, it seems, would not intervene to stop them, and would not condemn them. But even if Anscombe *had* understood the rituals, she might still be horrified by them and want to put a stop to them given the opportunity. Rhees himself writes:

When I am discussing as we are now, I feel I can see why Wittgenstein spoke in that way. If it affected some practical decision I had to make, perhaps I'd waver. I cannot be sure.<sup>61</sup>

So here we have *the same* philosophical insight leading to three *different* moral reactions. One could not show that there are internal relations between them. Moreover, as Rhees points out, it may be difficult, sometimes, to go along with what Wittgenstein says because he makes connections in a way that many people would not. For example, Rhees writes:

When I said his view can lead to consequences that are hard to take, I meant first that in a form of worship like the worship of Dourga should have the respect due to a form of *worship*, and should not be judged as though it were a depraved practice in our own community. But I meant also that it led Wittgenstein sometimes to view certain actions – which on first view are horrible and repulsive – to view them as *tragic*; and this means that they are seen in a different way, not just as morally abominable ... When you view it as 'tragic' – then you have moved away from the question whether the policy was the right conclusion to draw from such and such deliberations, or whether it was the prudent course to take in view of the circumstances, or even (and this is where I'm less certain of my interpretation) to ask whether it showed the consideration for other men that it might have shown.<sup>62</sup>

What we have seen, in these examples, is that sharing the clarity Wittgenstein may be said to achieve with respect to primitive rituals, does not lead, necessarily, to shared moral reactions to such rituals. Philosophers will have different personal moral views about them which cannot be internally related to their philosophical conclusions. Thus there will be good reason to distinguish, in this context, between what one appreciates philosophically, and one's personal moral reactions to what one sees. Indeed, part of a contemplative attention to the situation will involve doing conceptual justice to this variety of moral reactions.

It is interesting in this context to compare Conant's discussion of Russell in 'On Going the Bloody *Hard* Way in Philosophy' and in 'Philosophy and Biography'. In

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60 Rhees, 'Picking and Choosing', p.308.

61 Rhees, 'Picking and Choosing', p.309.

62 Rhees, 'Picking and Choosing', pp.309–10.

the former, the emphasis is on Wittgenstein's judgement that Frege was a deeper philosopher than Russell; a judgement which rests on *the character* of Frege's treatment of central issues in logic. That character can be elucidated by what we have called the ethics of enquiry. Whether one agrees with his conclusion or not, Conant makes an excellent case in support of Wittgenstein's judgement. In 'Philosophy and Biography' there is a far more ambitious attempt, with reference to Ray Monk's biography, to co-ordinate Russell's changes of heart in philosophy, with fluctuations in his personal relationships, and his frenzy of political and educational activities. Conant thinks that these aspects of Russell's life both trigger and are triggered by each other. What emerges in Monk's biography, he claims, is that:

Many elements of the whirl become expressions of Russell's fluctuating philosophical aspirations, and of the restless oscillation between the poles of yearning and disenchantment that characterize both his philosophy and his life as a whole.<sup>63</sup>

Monk himself is worried by the adverse reaction of many to his biography of Russell. Unlike his biography of Wittgenstein, they claim that, in this instance, his dislike of Russell has led to his entering the frame which should simply reveal his subject. Whereas Monk and Conant see the fluctuations in Russell's life as an adverse comment on him, others may say he was unlucky in being surrounded by so many unstable characters. Monk writes:

I can say 'Look at it like this and you will see that everything fits', but if I am met with, 'No, look at it like this and you will see that it all fits together in quite a different way,' then the opportunities for reasoned debate look rather slender.<sup>64</sup>

Monk is puzzled by what kind of disagreement that is. I do not think it can be met by saying that a more perspicuous representation should clear it up. Wittgenstein, rather, would say that the important thing is to accept that these differences are what one can expect in such cases; that they are part of the indeterminacy in human relationships. One further question is pertinent here. Monk speaks of different readings of Russell's life as differences in seeing how 'everything fits'. But why must everything fit? Surely there are biographies which show lives in which it is essential to see that everything does not fit. Russell's various fluctuations might be seen in that light. What is more, reactions to that life may emphasize different aspects of it as what is of lasting importance. Conant sees Russell's life as falling into a pattern. He writes:

Contrary to what the compartmentalist urges, what strikes one as one reads first Monk's biography of Wittgenstein and then his biography of Russell, is not how Wittgenstein's life is relevant to an understanding of his work, whereas Russell's life is not relevant to an understanding of his work, but rather how differently relevant the life is to an understanding of the work in each case.<sup>65</sup>

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63 Conant, 'Philosophy and Biography', p.36.

64 Ray Monk, 'Philosophical Biography: The Very Idea', in *Wittgenstein: Biography and Philosophy*, ed. James C. Klagge, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, p.13.

65 Conant, 'Philosophy and Biography', p.37.

Conant has been chiefly concerned, philosophically, with Russell's fluctuations of thought since his acquaintance with Wittgenstein. But what about *Principia Mathematica*? At the outset of his article, Conant warns us against reductionism with respect to the relation between Russell's personal relations and that work; a reductionism which says: 'You only have to consider the way Russell treated his many lovers to see that *Principia Mathematica* cannot be the work of a great mind.'<sup>66</sup> I remember Rhee's commenting on the kind of interest many people would have in the personal details of Russell's life. He regarded that interest itself as a low form of curiosity. He said to me, 'If they really wanted to know what Russell had in him, I'd tell them that he had *Principia Mathematica* in him.' Speaking of what he takes to be the boring autobiographies of Ayer and Quine, Conant says that they reveal, with an unintended sublimity, 'only surfaces all the way down'.<sup>67</sup> Conant thinks that writing a biography relating the poverty of a life to the poverty of thinking would demand 'tremendous talent and tact', and is 'far better left unattempted by those of us who possess a merely average prospect of success'.<sup>68</sup> But, for others, there would be no topic, so described, to require talent or tact, for they would refuse to describe the life of any human being 'as surfaces all the way down'. Again, a contemplative philosophy would ask what *kind* of disagreement confronts us here.

What accounts for what I take to be a too easy transition from the philosophical to the personal in some of Conant's arguments? It begins with a proper emphasis on the ethical demands of philosophical enquiry; demands that are as present when Wittgenstein is discussing logic as they are when he is discussing moral questions. Conant emphasizes, quite rightly, that Wittgenstein was opposed to dividing philosophy into distinct subjects,<sup>69</sup> but wrong in thinking that this amounts to saying that there are no distinctive moral subjects in philosophy.<sup>70</sup> What is true is that, insofar as Wittgenstein's interest, from first to last, is in what it means to say something, discussions of moral, political and religious questions are different if seen from that perspective, from what they are when treated as separate fields from which a philosophical underlabourer removes confusions. When contemplative attention is paid to moral matters, we see the heterogeneity involved. Just as Wittgenstein abandoned his view of the general form of a proposition in the *Tractatus*, so he gave up the search for the essence of 'the ethical' seen in his 'Lecture on Ethics'. In his later discussions with Rhee, he emphasized the variety in moral points of view and how one should not try to get behind this variety in the search for a spurious unity.<sup>71</sup> Given this variety, it is not surprising that philosophical clarity may still lead to very different moral reactions to what one has become clear about. As Mulhall points out, there are times when Conant acknowledges this,<sup>72</sup> but I am concerned with

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66 Conant, 'Philosophy and Biography', p.18.

67 Conant, 'Philosophy and Biography', p.47, n.46.

68 Conant, 'Philosophy and Biography', p.48, n.46.

69 See Conant, 'On Going the Bloody *Hard* Way in Philosophy', p.87.

70 Conant, 'On Going the Bloody *Hard* Way in Philosophy', see p.90.

71 Rush Rhee, 'Some Developments in Wittgenstein's Views on Ethics', in Rhee, *Moral Questions*, ed. D.Z. Phillips, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999.

72 As when Conant insists that after benefiting from Kierkegaard's clarification of Christianity, a person may become a Christian, remain a Christian or remain an atheist. See

other contexts where this possibility is obscured. For example, given the examples I have been discussing, we have the distinct impression that Conant would resist the view that a person may be philosophically confused about something while being clear about it in his own life. This is because he holds, as we have seen, that 'One's philosophical sensibility is not independent of one's sensibility *tout court*'.<sup>73</sup>

Consider the following example. In the course of a letter to M. O'C. Drury concerning the latter's doubts about whether he had done the right thing in becoming a doctor, Wittgenstein says, 'I think in some sense you don't look at people's faces closely enough'.<sup>74</sup> Winch says that Wittgenstein expresses a concern with Drury's spiritual welfare in language that is 'poised on the edge of the religious'.<sup>75</sup> The discussion as a whole illustrates what Conant means by the moral or spiritual importance of philosophical clarity. The language of *Philosophical Investigations* is very different, but, here, too, Winch thinks that a spiritual dimension can be found, for example, in the following remarks:

But isn't it absurd to say of a *body* that it has pain? – And why does one feel an absurdity in that? In what sense is it true that my hand does not feel pain, but I in my hand?

What sort of issue is: Is it the *body* that feels pain? – How is it to be decided? What makes is plausible to say that it is *not* the body? – Well, something like this: If someone has a pain in his hand, then the hand does not say so (unless it writes it) and one does not comfort the hand, but the sufferer: one looks into his face.<sup>76</sup>

Winch reacts to these remarks as follows:

The last sentence gives me a wonderful sense of a fog suddenly lifting; the confused shapes that loom up and disappear again in the familiar philosophical discussion of 'mind and body' vanish and I am left with a clear view of something very familiar of which I had not noticed its importance. Its 'importance' lies in the first instance in its relation to the philosophical discussion. At the same time in attending to this minute detail that plays such an enormous role in our relations to each other, my sense of the dimensions of those relations is both transformed and enriched: when comforting someone who has been hurt, I look into the sufferer's eyes.<sup>77</sup>

As far as I can see, nothing in these remarks excludes *any* of the following possibilities: that the clearing of the philosophical confusion was, at the same time, a liberation from a personal deficiency; that the philosophical clarification enriched an already sensitive relation to the sufferings of others; that the philosophical clarification releases one from one's philosophical confusion about an already rich sensibility in

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'On Putting Two and Two Together', p.279.

73 Conant, 'On Going the Bloody *Hard* Way in Philosophy', p.124.

74 Peter Winch, 'Response', in Norman Malcolm, *Wittgenstein – From a Religious Point of View?*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994, p.126.

75 Winch, 'Response', p.126.

76 Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §286.

77 Winch, 'Response', p.130.

one's personal life. In the last context, the lifting of the philosophical fog is not, at the same time, a lifting of a personal fog. There was no personal fog to lift.

Sometimes, Mulhall takes me to be saying that a person who is confused in his or her religious life could nevertheless be leading one. Put in that general way, the claim would be absurd. But I do not think one can lay down rules about the extent to which one can have occasion to pray, 'Lord I believe – help thou my confusions', and still be a believer. But Mulhall goes on to recognize the obvious when he says (p.22):

Perhaps Phillips rather has in mind someone who is living a genuinely Christian life, but who is inclined to reflect on her life in a philosophically confused manner (say, by responding positively to a philosopher who asks her whether her God is a kind of entity).

But, then, Mulhall tries to connect this philosophical confusion to 'the personal' by saying (p.22):

what shows such forms of self-reflection are an expression of confusion, if not the life that the reflecting person leads outside the context of such reflection? In other words, it is precisely vigilant attention to how such a person lives her life that can show her the way to avoid such confusions – which is exactly the point Conant is making.

These remarks beg the question being discussed. Consider the case of a non-believer. Plenty of philosophers think that if the word 'God' does refer to an entity it is unintelligible, but they are convinced that religious belief requires that it does. One cannot ask them to reflect on their lives when not philosophising. They have no religious inclinations to reflect on. What they need to reflect on is the language of worship, whether they can make that language their own or not. Here, the contrast between the philosophical and the personal is obvious.

What of the genuine believer who is philosophically confused? Mulhall says she should be more vigilant about her life. But what is in dispute is the character of the vigilance. The lack is not religious vigilance. On Mulhall's own admission, that is already present. What is more, the primary language of their faith may be what leads a person into philosophical confusions. This is a common phenomenon. What is needed is a revealing of the path from the philosophical confusion to the genuine belief. Again, a distinction between 'the philosophical' and 'the personal' is important.

One may share a religious belief with someone who gives a confused philosophical account of it. When I hear some of the views of my contemporaries in the philosophy of religion, I confess to wondering whether we are talking of the same God. But in order to even try to answer that question, I'd have to know *them* far better than I do. To infer so much from their philosophical accounts would be a highly dubious undertaking on both philosophical and religious grounds. I have been suggesting that a passage from 'the philosophical' to 'the personal' which goes beyond internal relations between them is an equally precarious journey.

A final word in this section of my reply: given the emphasis on 'the ethical' in the writings of Conant and others, it is important to remember that Wittgenstein said that although he was not a religious man, he could not help seeing *every* problem

from a religious point of view. Even in his earliest remarks on ethics, the *kind* of ethics he refers to is clearly related to religious conceptions. Conant may point out in reply, that Wittgenstein said that the point of the *Tractatus* is an ethical one. In a discussion he says:

Wittgenstein is talking about an ethical point here, but not about religion. So the ethical, as a kind of passion for clarity runs through the whole in a way in which the religious or aesthetic does not.<sup>78</sup>

There are a number of points to be made about these remarks, but at this point in my reply, I must be brief. First, Wittgenstein still speaks about 'the ethical' in very general terms. Nothing he says precludes a certain religious sense. On the contrary, it seems to include it, as when he says, 'The mystical is not *how* the world is, but that it is' (6.44). As Malcolm says, this remark is connected with wonder at the existence of the world, which, as I have suggested, is connected with philosophical contemplation of it.<sup>79</sup> If Conant sees the ethical demand running all through Wittgenstein's work as a passion for clarity – a demand for purity in that sense – then one can say equally well, and perhaps better, that a religious-like demand for purity runs all through his work. Is not this suggested by the following?

I have had a letter from an old friend in Austria, a priest. In it he says he hopes my work will go well, if it should be God's will. Now that is all I want: if it should be God's will. Bach wrote on the title page of his *Orgelbüchlein*, 'To the glory of the most high God, and that my neighbour may be benefited thereby'. That is what I would have liked to say about my work.<sup>80</sup>

If indeed his work could be 'to the glory of God', then certain concerns would be impure:

Is what I am doing really worth the labour? Surely only if it receives a light from above. And if that happens – why should I worry about the fruits of my work being stolen? If what I am writing is really of value, how could anyone steal the value from me? If the light from above is *not* there, then I cannot be any more than clever.<sup>81</sup>

Furthermore, in a remark about purity which impressed Conant, the context is a religious one:

I would like to say: 'this book is written to the glory of God', but nowadays this would be the trick of a cheat, i.e. it would not be correctly understood. It means the book was written in good will, and so far as it was not but was written from vanity, etc., the author

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78 In a discussion of 'What "Ethics" in the *Tractatus* is *Not*', p.95. Conant is Voice B.

79 Norman Malcolm, *Wittgenstein – A Religious Point of View?*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994, p.10.

80 Rush Rhees, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Personal Recollections*, pp.181–82, quoted by Malcolm, *Wittgenstein*, pp.13–14.

81 Quoted by Malcolm, *Wittgenstein*, p.18.

would wish to see it condemned. He can not make it more free of these impurities than he is himself.<sup>82</sup>

As we have seen, I do not dispute that this demand for purity is as personal a demand as it is a philosophical one. I agree that philosophy, for Wittgenstein, was a religious-like vocation. Yet, he feared that if he really gave himself to religion, the bending of the knee required of him would conflict with the commitment philosophy asked of him. And for all his passion for philosophy, he never, as Winch points out, speaks of it in a remotely similar way to that in which he speaks of religious passion: 'when he spoke of religion as a "passion" through which one's life must be "turned around" he was speaking of something different'.<sup>83</sup> There is a good reason, therefore, to distinguish, in this context too, between 'the philosophical' and 'the personal', instead of being content with a generic notion of 'the personal'. As Winch says:

Kierkegaard believed religious belief to stand at an 'infinite distance' from philosophical clarity. He did not believe that such clarity could by itself bring anyone one whit closer to religious faith. I think that Wittgenstein would have taken the same view.<sup>84</sup>

### 3. Beyond Language Games

So far, in my reply to Mulhall, I have been commenting on what I take to be the inadequacies of two conceptions of philosophy which have been combined to give a therapeutic reading of Wittgenstein's philosophy. In *Philosophy's Cool Place* I contrasted this reading with what I take to be Wittgenstein's contemplative conception of philosophy, one that is concerned with the possibility of discourse. Mulhall thinks that such a contrast is unnecessary, since, for him, while I have succeeded (p.20)

in identifying a dimension of Wittgenstein's interest in language that relates it to a perennial preoccupation of the Western philosophical tradition since Plato [I have] not [appeared] to have succeeded in showing that its further exploration must involve going essentially beyond the familiar Wittgensteinian business of perspicuously representing the grammar of everyday words.

In my reply I hope to show that this conclusion misses the character of philosophy's perennial preoccupation with the possibility of discourse. From first to last, Wittgenstein's preoccupation is with the possibility of discourse, with what it means *to say something*. The earliest form of this preoccupation in the *Tractatus* is the question of the sense in which a proposition pictures reality. The early form of an answer is the emphasis on the method of projection within which the proposition has its sense. These logical concerns are missed in Mulhall's therapeutic reading of the *Tractatus* in which it is simply seen as an attempt to specify (p.14)

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<sup>82</sup> Wittgenstein, Preface to *Philosophical Remarks*, quoted by Winch in his 'Response' to Malcolm, *Wittgenstein*, p.131.

<sup>83</sup> Malcolm, *Wittgenstein*, p.128.

<sup>84</sup> Malcolm, *Wittgenstein*, p.129.

'the strictly correct method in philosophy' – that of saying only what can be said, and demonstrating to those who fail to respect this condition on speech that they have failed to give meaning to some portion of their putative utterance.

On this view, the only major difference between the *Tractatus* and the later works is that forms of language and the sources of our confusions about them are more varied than the early work presupposed. The concern with logic drops out of this account. In wanting to determine the general form of the proposition, Wittgenstein was giving a structural account of language, and he criticized himself later for doing so. By the time he has introduced the analogy between games and language, of course, Wittgenstein has given up the idea that language has a general form. But in the emphasis on games, and 'following a rule', Rhees sees 'the structure of the proposition' being replaced by 'the structure of the language game'. But Wittgenstein has not given up the question of the nature of language. It is difficult to see how he could since it is raised by the notion of a language-game itself. There is an obvious disanalogy between games and language-games. All the games we play do not constitute one big game. Thus, it is misleading to say, as Mulhall does, that 'knowing how to play a specific game presupposes a grasp of what it is to play games' (p.17), since it is the latter that is parasitic on the fact that games are played. But the language-games are played within *the same* language, by which we do not mean English or Welsh. The question of the unity of that language, therefore, remains an issue. Wittgenstein's answer to that question is in terms of family resemblances. No language-game possesses a feature common to all uses of language-games, but *some* have features in common with some others, while they share different features with those others. In this way, Wittgenstein was able to avoid the idea that language has a common form. Language has the unity of a family of language-games. Mulhall denies that Wittgenstein actually says this, but it would be difficult to avoid accepting that, at the very least, he offers it as an illuminating analogy. As such, it still offers a structural account of language. Rhees argues that it is not an account of language at all, and that, were it true, it would be impossible to *say* anything. Mulhall, on the other hand, thinks that Rhees' misgivings about the analogy between language and games are misplaced.

Mulhall argues that in many games the rules allow for a great deal of innovation and creativity. Everything is not strictly determined by the rules. There is room for self-expression.<sup>85</sup> Rhees's reply is to point out that there is no difference between what a move means in a demonstration game and what it means in a real game, whereas this cannot be said of the distinction between a rehearsed conversation and a real one; it is not 'internal' as a game is.<sup>86</sup> And when Mulhall reminds us that the significance of games in people's lives can be connected with character and understanding in all sorts of ways, that simply begs the question of whether those 'other ways' can be understood by analogy with playing games.

Rhees is interested in what kind of puzzle a puzzle about language is. He argues that it is not like being puzzled about a game, where one would explain by reference

85 Mulhall elaborates this point in *Inheritance and Originality*, §16 and 17.

86 See Rhees, *Wittgenstein and the Possibility of Discourse*, p.98.

to other games. But if one is puzzled about language itself, there is no 'other' something to go to, since that, too, would be an example of language and, hence, of what puzzles one. Mulhall has some curious responses to this issue. First, he says that in learning what a game is, much that is presupposed is not simply a matter of other games. Fine, but the question, once again, is whether the 'much else' that is presupposed is illuminated by the analogy between language and games.

Mulhall does not discuss some of the most powerful disanalogies Rhees presents. He argues that although Wittgenstein gave up the analogy between language and a calculus in the *Tractatus*, it continued to influence him in the *Investigations* in the discussion of 'following a rule', 'going on in the same way', and the importance of 'and so on' in learning a language. The same would apply to emphases on 'training', 'function', and 'mastering techniques'. Rhees recognizes the importance of these considerations in the context of learning the meanings of words, and of the agreements in use which show themselves in that we naturally take such-and-such as the *same* use of the world. On the other hand, he does not think that these emphases throw much light on what it means to *say* something. How does a child come to ask a question? Rhees's answer is: by coming to an appreciation of what it makes sense to say; something the child picks up by the conversations that surround it. And these conversations would be oddly described indeed in terms of 'following a rule', or 'going on in the same way'. Similarly, it would be odd to speak of speaking to another person as the mastery of a number of techniques; still less to talk of mastering them in this context. Mulhall is tempted to speak in this way:

That mastery of specific language-games presupposes that speaking- the general impulse and capacity to do things with words – is part of the natural repertoire of human beings, and so lies beyond the reach of any philosophical accounting of the kind Rhees imagines.<sup>87</sup>

But when we speak with each other, are we 'doing things with words', or displaying our natural repertoire in this respect? Our words are not the instruments by which we do things, but are constitutive of what we do. That is why Rhees insists that we do not *use* language. That is why 'following a rule' cannot account for *saying* anything. As David Cockburn points out in her perceptive review of Rhees' work, a person could reel off 'the colours of all objects in his field of vision', without having anything to say about colours. As he says,

Rhees ... introduces a clear distinction between 'knowing what is permissible' and having something to say. We can, perhaps, imagine someone who has mastered the moves (at least up to a point) – who knows, for example, that 'She is in serious pain' is to be followed by 'We must get help' – and yet has no sense of the bearing of the one remark on the other: for whom, perhaps, this is simply a response one must make if one is to move reasonably smoothly through life in this community.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Mulhall, *Inheritance and Originality*, pp.75–76.

<sup>88</sup> David Cockburn, 'Critical Notice of Rhees' *Wittgenstein and the Possibility of Discourse*', *Philosophical Investigations* 25:1 (2002), p.81.

The bearing that one remark has on another is shown in the life we share with one another. Not that our shared life *enables* remarks to have the sense they do – that, too, would be an *external* explanation – but that that sense *shows* itself in the lives we share. That is why Rhee keeps repeating that *language makes sense if living makes sense*. Thus, Rhee is not, as Mulhall thinks, seeking a philosophical *accounting* of language. Rather, he is engaged in a philosophical *contemplation* of it. The contemplation takes the form of the kind of discussion I have been engaged in, not of comparing one perspicuous representation of a form of discourse with another. Thus it will not do *at all* to respond, as Mulhall does, by saying (p.19):

We do not have to give a perspicuous representation of the whole of language; we simply have to give a perspicuous representation of the ways in which we use the word ‘language’.

Rhee does not say, as Mulhall thinks, that language has the unity of a dialogue. He recognizes that all language is not conversation, but that if we take conversation as a centre of variation, it throws light on those parts of language which are not conversation. Here, Rhee is indicating the kind of unity that language has – that of a hubbub of voices in all sorts of relations to each other. When Wittgenstein gave up the analogy between language and a calculus, he gave up, wrongly, one of its important aspects. He was right to reject the view that different aspects of language are related to each other formally, but wrong to underplay the interlocking intelligibility of language. It is with the nature of that interlocking that Rhee grapples, and which I tried to elucidate in *Philosophy's Cool Place*.

It is in some ways understandable that Mulhall should think that this is a recent emphasis in my work. That work, for the most part, he thinks, has been dominated by making distinctions between religion and other activities by bringing out the different rules which govern them – an emphasis which he thinks also governed Winch's *The Idea of a Social Science*. But Mulhall is wrong about Winch, who wrote in that early work:

To ask whether reality is intelligible is to ask about the relation of thought and reality. In considering the nature of thought one is led also to consider the nature of language. Inseparably bound up with the question whether reality is intelligible, therefore, is the question of how language is connected with reality, of what it is to *say* something. In fact the philosopher's interest in language lies not so much in the solution of particular linguistic confusions for their own sakes, as in the solution of confusions about the nature of language in general.<sup>89</sup>

Winch's work was published in 1958. He acknowledged his indebtedness to Rhee. Even at this stage, Winch is emphasising the important difference between understanding what language is and explaining it. What he regrets, in his preface to the second edition, is that he elucidated that understanding too much in terms of rule following. In later writings, he becomes far more influenced by Rhee's

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89 Peter Winch, *The Idea of a Social Science*, pp.11–12.

'Wittgenstein's Builders' and the kind of issues I have been engaged with in my reply to Mulhall.

Mulhall acknowledges that, in 'Religious Beliefs and Language Games', published in 1970, I was aware of the dangers in treating religious beliefs as distinctive language-games cut off from the interlocking intelligibility of life, dangers which led to the accusation of fideism.<sup>90</sup> But, by and large, Mulhall thinks I have been concerned with clearing up the confusions between the grammars of religious beliefs and other grammars. It would be wrong to assume, however, that I have ever embraced Mulhall's therapeutic conception of philosophy. It is easy to miss that fact because for much of the time I *have* been responding to what I take to be grammatical confusions in contemporary philosophy of religion. But that task is intimately related to the question of the nature of language, since it is the subliming of particular grammars that leads, so often, to the over-simplification of the character of that interlocking intelligibility, resulting in the case of religion, in assigning a wrong place to it in our language, or denying that it has an intelligible place at all.

Even before 1970, I was partially aware in my undergraduate years, 1952–1956, of the importance of a contemplative conception of philosophy.

I gleaned, however vaguely, that philosophy was not a collection of specialisms; it was one subject, and its central theme was the nature of reality ... We were vaguely aware, through Oxford linguistic philosophy, that perhaps one should drop any ambition to give a general account of reality. Philosophy was a matter of logical geography, a clearing up of linguistic muddles about different uses of language. There is no 'reality' as such, only the reality of this, that, and the other thing. Through the way we were taught at Swansea, I had a sense, early on, that this was somehow an evasion of philosophy's central concerns.<sup>91</sup>

What is undoubtedly true is, as Mulhall says, that my editing of 'the Rush Rhees *Nachlass* have deeply influenced [my] present understanding of [my] own work' (p.13). I hope it has also deepened my understanding of Rhees. But this is not a new departure. That *Wittgenstein and the Possibility of Discourse* should have this effect on me is not surprising, since, as Cockburn says, it is 'clearly one of the most important books on the philosophy of language to have appeared since the *Philosophical Investigations* and *The Blue and Brown Books*'.<sup>92</sup>

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90 See Kai Nielsen and D.Z. Phillips, *Wittgensteinian Fideism?*

91 Phillips, 'On Wittgenstein', pp.148–49.

92 Cockburn, 'Critical Notice', p.93.