

FROM THE ARCHIVES

Section editor Alois Pichler

# “With regard to the last article in the volume...” – A note on Rush Rhees and “The Study of Philosophy” in *Without Answers*

Peter K. Westergaard  
pkwest(at)hum.ku.dk

“To say, when they are at work, “Let’s have done with it now”, is a *physical* need for human beings; it is the constant necessity when you are philosophizing to go on thinking in the face of this need that makes this such strenuous work.”

Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 75–76 (1948)

“Philosophers sometimes get into the state of mind in which they wonder whether their words really make contact with anything outside them, or whether all their talking and writing is not just empty.”

Rush Rhees, 3rd July 1976<sup>1</sup>

## **Abstract**

Based on material from Rush Rhees’ *Nachlass*, this article reconstructs, in PART I, the circumstances that motivated Rhees to include “The Study of Philosophy” as the concluding chapter of his 1969 publication *Without Answers*. As originally conceived, this chapter was longer than the version that eventually appeared in print. The reconstruction references the correspondence between Rhees and the editor of *Without Answers*, Dewi Z. Phillips. It outlines the central ideas of “The Study of Philosophy”,

---

<sup>1</sup> R. Rhees in a radio conversation with G. Vesey under the heading “Locke, Russell and Wittgenstein”, The Open University Arts Faculty, theme: “Thought and Reality: Central Themes in Wittgenstein’s Philosophy”. Broadcast on BBC Radio 3 on 3 July 1976. Transcript of interview (15pp), RBA, UNI/SU/PC/1/4/4/2.

including Rhees' clarifications of Wittgenstein's call to "Go the bloody hard way". The original, somewhat longer version of the chapter is reproduced in PART II of the article. It consists of two text extracts from two letters to Maurice O'C. Drury from July and September 1963. Drury's "intermediate" letter to Rhees from August 1963 is also reproduced. This article is also a "narrative" about the way one of Wittgenstein's editor's experiences being edited and published via an editor.

### **"... to get the matter clearer for my own sake"**

It is well known that Rush Rhees frequently expressed and was plagued by doubts about the value of his own works. He found it difficult to express his thoughts in a satisfactory written form. Rhees published several articles and two books. Both books were published on the initiative and with the help of Dewi Z. Phillips after Rhees' resignation from Swansea University in 1966. Rhees' extensive and diverse literary estate and parts of his correspondence are now preserved in the Richard Burton Archives, University of Swansea, Wales. Rhees' first book publication, an anthology of texts entitled *Without Answers*, is from 1969, while the second, *Discussions on Wittgenstein*, was published the following year in 1970. According to the correspondence between Rhees and Phillips, both books owe their existence to initiatives taken by Phillips in the first half of 1968. At the time, Rhees was in the final stages of preparing the manuscripts for the publication of "Wittgenstein's Notes for Lectures on 'Private Experience' and 'Sense Data'" (LPE 1968: 271–320) and *Philosophische Grammatik* (PG: 1969). Rhees and Phillips discussed and considered the possible form and content of the book publications, including the question of whether to publish two books or just one.<sup>2</sup> The final selection of texts for the two books encompasses articles, lectures and, not least, excerpts from letters to R.F. Holland, D.Z. Phillips, H.O. Mounce, W. Gealy, G.E.M. Anscombe, P. Winch, and M.O'C. Drury.<sup>3</sup> Roughly two-thirds of the texts in *Without Answers* consist of excerpts "from letters written to

---

<sup>2</sup> The initial proposal was for a single publication in two parts (15 articles), with Part I containing nine articles, most of which are later published in *Discussions of Wittgenstein*, and Part II containing six articles, several of which are included in *Without Answers*. The single-page draft of the book's table of contents is by D.Z. Phillips, RBA, UNI/SU/1/4/4/5.

<sup>3</sup> D.Z. Phillips to R. Rhees, 13 May 1968, RBA, UNI/SU/1/1/3/6 and D.Z. Phillips to R. Rhees, 19 July 1968, RBA, UNI/SU/PC/1/4/4/5.

various people between 1954 and 1966”.<sup>4</sup> Many of Rhees’ letters take the form of fairly elaborate philosophical disquisitions, discussions, and conceptual inquiries, whereby those addressed to friends and acquaintances are generally framed by opening and concluding sections of a more personal nature. For Rhees, a letter is more than just an occasion for a friendly exchange of courtesies, news, and anecdotes; it is, if anything, a philosophical genre and an opportunity for philosophical reflection and probing analysis. Drury writes of Rhees’ talent for and “ability to write philosophical letters”.<sup>5</sup> In the last of four letters to Drury from July-September 1961, largely devoted to the subject of learning, Rhees begins with the words:

Dear Con,

I will try to be shorter this time. On many of the important questions I am without an answer and am confused myself, so it will not be surprising if I make little clear to you. But we do understand one another quite a lot. And if I should emphasize points where I think you have not got what I was trying to say, this does not mean that I fear we are not talking the same language, or anything like that. For the most part it will be an attempt to get the matter clearer for my own sake.<sup>6</sup>

Prior to the two book publications, Phillips was given access to several of Rhees’ works and sections of his correspondence. At the time, Phillips had a number of editorial commitments, including as general editor for the series *Studies in Ethics and the Philosophy of Religion* published by Routledge & Kegan Paul. *Without Answers* and *Discussions on Wittgenstein* both appeared in this series.

Although most of the texts and passages for these publications were selected by Rhees himself, Phillips added a selection from the letters he was familiar with.<sup>7</sup> Initially, Rhees was sceptical and hesitant towards the idea for these publications. He had doubts about the quality and value of his texts.

In the following, I wish to focus on one particular aspect of Phillips’ and Rhees’ concluding editorial work on *Without Answers*. As the publication neared completion, Rhees suggested a late addition to the

---

<sup>4</sup> Phillips, D.Z., 1969. “Editorial Note”. In: R. Rhees, *Without Answers*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, vii; D.Z. Phillips to R. Rhees, 19 July 1968, RBA, UNI/SU/PC/1/4/4/5.

<sup>5</sup> M.O’C. Drury to R. Rhees, 21 May 1967, RBA, UNI/SU/1/1/3/4.

<sup>6</sup> R. Rhees to M.O’C. Drury, 13 September 1961, RBA, UNI/SU/PC/1/4/4/5.

<sup>7</sup> D.Z. Phillips to R. Rhees, 11 July 1968, RBA, UNI/SU/PC/1/1/3/6 and Phillips, D.Z., 1969. “Editorial Note”. In: R. Rhees, *Without Answers*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, vii.

book. Although he sought to withdraw the proposal just a short time afterwards, the supplementary material did in fact make it into the book in reduced form. The text in question, the last of the seventeen items in *Without Answers*' list of contents, has the title "The Study of Philosophy" and begins with the familiar words: "Wittgenstein used to say to me, 'Go the bloody *hard* way'; and he would write this in letters as well" (Rhees 1969: 168). In other words, in its original form, "The Study of Philosophy" was significantly longer than the version that was printed. This earlier, complete version is reproduced as PART II of the current article. What we have here are text extracts from two different letters written by Rhees to his friend Drury on, respectively, 29 July and 1 September 1963. Both letters were written during the period when Rhees was working on Wittgenstein's so-called Moore volume (TS 209), which was published the following year (1964) under the title *Philosophische Bemerkungen (Philosophical Remarks)*. Also included in PART II is a letter that Drury wrote to Rhees on 5 August 1963, which constitutes the "intermediate link" between the excerpts from the two letters by Rhees. Drury adds to Rhees' reflections on the study of philosophy and inspires him to pursue them further.

But before presenting this material as PART II of the article, let us consider the circumstances surrounding the late modifications to *Without Answers*. In the following, I shall describe Rhees' proposal to include "The Study of Philosophy" and his subsequent misgivings about its inclusion in the reduced form it assumes as the final chapter of the publication. At the same time, I shall touch on some of the circumstances that gave rise to the publication of *Without Answers* as a whole. In a way, the current article can be viewed as a response to the growing interest in Wittgenstein's original editors and as serving in particular as an illustration of what in another context has been described as the "ethos of Rhees" (Wallgren 2023: 11). It also serves to show how one of Wittgenstein's editors himself responded to an encounter with the will of an editor as part of the publication process. Thus as a prelude to the abovementioned excerpts that make up Part II, I shall first offer a brief account of Rhees' reflections on Wittgenstein's injunction to 'Go the bloody hard way'.

Both the narrative in PART I and the texts of PART II are based on and incorporate material from Rhees' preserved papers and correspondence, currently in the keeping of Richard Burton Archives.

## ***PART I***

### ***“I may include two short letters”***

In order to prepare and discuss the contents of *Without Answers*, Phillips and Rhees had a number of meetings. At the time, Phillips was working as senior lecturer at the University of Swansea, whereas Rhees had moved to London following his resignation from the same university. Rhees harboured doubts and concerns about the publication. On 13 May 1968, Phillips wrote from Swansea: “Dear Rhees, I have been very depressed about our meeting last Thursday – especially if you were serious when you said that I had helped to show you that you ought not to attempt to publish your work.”<sup>8</sup> But the work continued and in a letter dated 11 July, Phillips proposed an ordering of the selected texts in a single volume, effectively determining the list of contents and structure of the book.<sup>9</sup> Although the proposed arrangement corresponds to the layout of the book as it was eventually published, it included only sixteen texts. The one item that was missing at this point was the concluding chapter “The Study of Philosophy”. In the original list of contents for *Without Answers*, this text did not figure and was evidently unknown to Phillips at this ‘early’ stage in the editing work. Rhees’ initial reaction to Phillips’ proposal for the ordering of the book’s material was sceptical. A few days after receiving Phillips’ proposal, and still plagued by misgivings about the quality of the texts, Rhees replied: “Almost all the stuff to which you refer and which you now send me seems lousy. And I do not see how I can say to anyone I think this stuff is worth publishing.”<sup>10</sup> Just a few days later, however, Rhees seemed more accommodating. In a new letter, he sets his reservations aside and suggests the possibility of supplementing the sixteen selected texts with a new and concluding item. This latter would consist of excerpts from two letters he had written to Drury in the summer of 1963. On 17 July, Rhees writes: “I may include two short letters, which are not better baked, but may be preferable. I do not think they are good. – Trouble is, I do not think I get to the questions in the philosophy of education in any of these scraps.”<sup>11</sup> For the time being, Rhees leaves it as a mere suggestion. Two days later, on July 19,

<sup>8</sup> D.Z. Phillips to R. Rhees, 13 May 1968, RBA, UNI/SU/PC/1/1/3/6.

<sup>9</sup> D.Z. Phillips to R. Rhees, 11 July 1968, RBA, UNI/SU/PC/1/1/3/6.

<sup>10</sup> R. Rhees to D.Z. Phillips, 14 July 1968, RBA, UNI/SU/PC/1/1/3/6.

<sup>11</sup> R. Rhees to D.Z. Phillips, 17 July 1968, RBA, UNI/SU/PC/1/1/3/6.

Phillips sends a new overview of the book's sixteen intended chapters. This time he encloses proposals for informative footnotes about the circumstances that led Rhees to write the texts. In the letter, Phillips repeats a suggestion for the title of the book, originally made by Mounce,<sup>12</sup> namely *On Living in a Scientific Age*.<sup>13</sup> The manuscript for the book is approaching its definitive form.

Rhees has reservations about the title – it “does not sound to me much like philosophy”<sup>14</sup> – and now suggests “WITHOUT ANSWERS” instead. In the respective letter to Phillips of 20 July, he writes: “What you call footnotes should not be given as such: should not be printed each as a footnote to the paper in question. Rather the information should be given all together in a paragraph of the preface.” Rhees adds: “Please do not mention the names of the people to whom the letters were written. Simply say that numbers 8 to 16 are taken from letters written to various people between 1954 and 1964.”<sup>15</sup> Phillips follows Rhees' instructions. The book's “Editorial Note” is dated August 1968. Rhees considers the biographical information and dates of writing irrelevant. The thought progressions within the letters must be left “naked” and speak for themselves. In a postscript, Rhees indicates that he has now decided to include the aforementioned “two short letters”, suggesting they could form a concluding seventeenth chapter. The two excerpts are attached to the letter, which Rhees concludes with the following lament:

What a worthless performance I have given in my life.  
Thanks once again for soiling your hands and wasting your time in this way.  
Yours Rush Rhees

P.S. I enclose two letters which I should like to see together at the end, [handwritten addition: “with the title: The Study of Philosophy,”] following the ones on education. I think they just fall within your field for your series.<sup>16</sup>

In other words, it is only at this late stage during the preparation of the manuscript for *Without Answers* that Rhees actually passes on the two text excerpts to Phillips. They are typewritten and contain 6 and 7 pages

---

<sup>12</sup> D.Z. Phillips to R. Rhees, 13 May 1968, RBA, UNI/SU/PC/1/1/3/6.

<sup>13</sup> D.Z. Phillips to R. Rhees, 19 July 1968, RBA, UNI/SU/PC/1/4/4/5.

<sup>14</sup> R. Rhees to D.Z. Phillips, 17 July 1968, RBA, UNI/SU/PC/1/1/3/6.

<sup>15</sup> R. Rhees to D.Z. Phillips, 20 July 1968, RBA, UNI/SU/PC/1/1/3/6

<sup>16</sup> R. Rhees to D.Z. Phillips, 20 July 1968, RBA, UNI/SU/PC/1/1/3/6.

respectively. They are to be incorporated into the book, where they will form its concluding chapter. The proposal stems from Rhees himself, and it is he who has undertaken the abridgement of the original letters to Drury. Phillips takes care of the matter, and the book is expanded to include the new and final seventeenth chapter “The Study of Philosophy”. Shortly before, towards the end of July, Rhees had informed Phillips that he would prepare an index for the book: “I will try to make some sort of index. (An “index of names” always seems to me a cheat.)”<sup>17</sup> The manuscript for the book has now achieved its final form. It is forwarded to Routledge & Kegan Paul, who confirm receipt on 31 July 1968. A week later, Phillips receives a letter from the publisher: “Dear Phillips, I am delighted to have the Rush Rhees collection and congratulate you on this scoop. It goes straight to the printer.”<sup>18</sup>

### ***“Discussion closed”***

But publication is slow in coming. Rhees corresponds with Phillips and the publisher. Rhees has suggestions for additional corrections. In several of the chapters, he wants to change paragraphs by shortening or omitting them or by adding material; he wants to change titles and in one case even to include an entirely new and different text.<sup>19</sup> Although the manuscript has already been submitted, Rhees continues to hesitate, express doubts, and to make modifications. On 5 January 1969, six months after the initial submission of the manuscript, the publisher receives another letter from Rhees with new corrections and instructions for omissions. Rhees had recently received a first corrected proof of the manuscript. In a letter, he now withdraws “the entire last article”, in other words, Chapter 17, “The Study of Philosophy”, which was the last thing to be added and in compliance with Rhees’ earlier wishes. At the same time, Rhees remains open to the possibility that the first part of the chapter, in other words, the first of the two text excerpts, could be published alone. But his instructions are far from decisive. In the letter to the publisher’s editor, he states:

---

<sup>17</sup> R. Rhees to D.Z. Phillips, 24 July 1968, RBA, UNI/SU/PC/1/1/3/6.

<sup>18</sup> C. Franklin [Vice Chairman, Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd] to D.Z. Phillips, 8 August 1968, RBA, UNI/SU/PC/1/1/3/6.

<sup>19</sup> R. Rhees to D.Z. Phillips, 30 September 1968, UNI/SU/PC/1/1/3/6.

"I want to cut the entire last article, i.e., pages 171 to 180 inclusive. I wish I did not have to ask you to do this." But then he adds in handwriting: "If I cannot do it, then cut all from 2/3 down on 174."<sup>20</sup>

Evidently, Rhees now regrets ever having suggested the inclusion of the two text excerpts and shortly before the start of printing, he asks for the concluding chapter to be excluded, if not in its entirety, then at least in part. The publisher's editor promptly gets in touch with Phillips.<sup>21</sup> By this time, Rhees has, however, already informed Phillips, who tries to persuade Rhees to leave things as they are. The book is finished. Rhees should abandon his idea of retracting the final chapter and allow it to be printed in its entirety. Rhees considers the matter but decides that the text must absolutely be shortened. He categorically rejects the inclusion of the latter half of the article, namely the second of the two text excerpts; the first of them can stand alone and be published. But beyond that, Rhees is still ambivalent and is tempted by the idea of recalling the entire book. He writes to Phillips:

5a, Greville Place,  
London, N.W.6.  
January 8th, 1969.

Dear Phillips,

I am enclosing a text to replace pages 112, 113 and the first two lines of page 114, in the uncorrected proof. (The article 11, Natural Theology.) This will cause trouble, delay, expense. The only simple and to me most agreeable solution is to withdraw the whole volume. The only consideration which prevents my insisting on this, is the amount of work you have put into it. – Anyway, that Natural Theology cannot appear as it stands. Full stop. – I have used up all my emotive language on myself for allowing it to be included. I repeat: those two pages go out, and I am not discussing this further – except for discussing the form of butter and honey to feed to Freshwater [the publisher's editor at Routledge].

-----  
With regard to the last article in the volume:

No.

Nothing after the line on page 174 which reads "had for Plato anyway, and for Wittgenstein too."

I could give reasons for this – whatever "could" means; I cannot at the moment.

---

<sup>20</sup> R. Rhees to T.J. Freshwater, 5 January 1969, RBA, UNI/SU/PC/1/1/3/6.

<sup>21</sup> T. J. Freshwater to D.Z. Phillips, 7 January 1969, RBA, UNI/SU/PC/1/1/3/6

Discussion closed.

I am posting my volume (not very well corrected) under separate Cover.

Yours,

Rush Rhees<sup>22</sup>

The matter is closed. And that's how things are done! Only the first of the two excerpts from the letters to Drury is actually published, namely the part we know of today as the seventeenth and concluding chapter of *Without Answers*, with the title "The Study of Philosophy". The second is omitted and set aside.

Rhees has made up his mind. The book must be finished. Now! Despite his reservations. Four days later, he sends a few final corrections and instructions to Phillips. He writes: "About the dates for the table of contents (which should be under the carpet and not on the table anyway): I am sorry I bothered you about this, and I advise you to leave things as they stand and not to give yourself any further trouble over them. Who CARES when the bloody things were written?" To which he adds: "The pity is that they ever were." He continues: "The only thing important now, and for you especially, is to get shot of the thing. [...] Rule to follow: Don't try to do anything about it. Lets close the doors and start the motor and get out of here."<sup>23</sup> The work must be completed. Enough is enough!

Early in the autumn of the same year, by which time the book has been published<sup>24</sup> and its author is hard at work on his next book, *Discussions of Wittgenstein*, Rhees writes to Phillips:

5a, Greville Place,  
London, N.W.6.  
September 5th, 1969.

Dear Phillips,

I had this pen for you when you came to see me here, and characteristically I forgot it – until we were on the way to the tube station.

It never needs an explanation when I forget things (pace Freud). If ever I don't forget something, you can wonder what has happened. But I was feeling

---

<sup>22</sup> R. Rhees to D.Z. Phillips, 8 January 1969, RBA, UNI/SU/PC/1/1/3/6.

<sup>23</sup> R. Rhees to D.Z. Phillips, 12 January 1969, RBA, UNI/SU/PC/1/1/3/6.

<sup>24</sup> For reviews of the book see for example: Reddiford, G., 1970. *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 2 (1), 63–64; Geach, P.T., 1971. *The Journal of Philosophy* 68 (17), 530–532; and Donnelly, J., 1971. *The Modern Schoolman* 48 (1), 92–93

embarrassed, and in this sense reluctant, about this, because it seemed so absurdly inadequate. I had been wishing I could find some way of suggesting my gratitude and appreciation to you when that volume appeared. Whenever I thought of anything, I was sure you had one already. I finally thought I'd like to send you a pen, at least; since I know that many people like to have more than one, and shift from one to the other. But in the circumstances it is about on a par with sending you a four-penny postage stamp.

If it had not been for you, there would never have been this volume, nor the one which is supposed to follow either. – Anyone wiser than you and I are would probably say: 'twere better if there'd never been either of them.' But I can never forget the time and energy you gave to it, and your generous consideration which started the thing and kept it going.

Yours,

Rush Rhees<sup>25</sup>

### ***"Go the bloody hard way"***

There are several reasons why Rhees wanted to end *Without Answers* with "The Study of Philosophy", over and above methodological rounding off and respect for tradition. The two text excerpts originally envisaged for "The Study of Philosophy" contain observations of relevance to several of the book's chapters, including "Philosophy and Science", "Religion and Language", "Art and Philosophy", "Learning and Understanding", and "Education and Understanding". Before presenting the two excerpts from Rhees' letters to Drury in their original unexpurgated form, let us consider some of themes that Rhees addresses in them.

In the first excerpt, the point of departure is Wittgenstein's remark "Go the bloody hard way". Rhees seeks to identify some of the essential characteristics of the philosophical practice to which this "imperative" alludes. This elucidation is deepened and elaborated in the second of the two excerpts, Rhees seeks to elaborate and deepen this clarification in response to an intermediate letter that Drury had

---

<sup>25</sup> R. Rhees to D.Z. Phillips, 5 September 1969, RBA, UNI/SU/PC/1/1/3/6. – Two decades later, shortly after Rhees' death in May 1989, Peggy Rhees writes in an addendum to section 4 of Phillips' "PROPOSAL FOR A RUSH RHEES ARCHIVE AT THE UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF SWANSEA": "Bob [Rhees] made indications to me when he was becoming very frail, which papers and lecture notes, he would be pleased for me to hand to Dewi, [...]. Bob would have been happy for Dewi to edit or do whatever he thought wisest with all the papers, letters and lectures which I handed over to him [Phillips]" ("In response to: PROPOSAL FOR A RUSH RHEES ARCHIVE AT THE UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF SWANSEA, July 1st 1989". *Response*, in: The Georg Henrik von Wright & Wittgenstein Archives, Box 511, 1p (Helsinki University, Finland)).

sent with his own reflections on “teaching philosophy”. Rhee begins by pointing out that the phrase “Go the bloody hard way” can be viewed as having two aspects; on the one hand it “has some reference to the way you live”, and on the other it “has its sense in the way in which the difficulties of philosophy itself are treated”. For Rhee, the remark implies an internal connection between the two.

For Wittgenstein, “Go the bloody hard way” is associated with a certain understanding of a “philosophical life”. “Philosophy, as he practiced it, was ‘the bloody hard way’ in the sense of being opposed to looking for consolation or for stimulus. And it was not only a way of thinking and working, but a way of living as well. And the ‘hardness’ was really a criterion of the kind of life that was worthwhile. Perhaps I should add ‘for him’.”

Accordingly, for Rhee, the remark refers not only to the difficulties of philosophical work, which arise from all the preconceptions, expectations and unspoken desires that exert an influence on our thinking. The phrase also draws attention to a certain approach to life and is not concerned exclusively with the tiresome effort of confronting and overcoming what we *want* to see. This is an issue Wittgenstein addresses also in *The Big Typescript*: “Difficulty of Philosophy not the intellectual difficulty of the sciences, but the Difficulty of a Change in Attitude. Resistance of the *Will* Must be Overcome.” (BT 2005: 300)

The remark “go the bloody hard way” does not refer primarily or exclusively to the fact that philosophical thinking entails a critique of one’s personal gaze and one’s yearning for consolation, and neither, in Rhee’s view, does it refer to the need to acknowledge the effort and exertion that philosophical work requires in order to achieve a result. And neither does the remark amount to an injunction to demonstrate endurance and resilience in the face of the resistance, indifference, and incomprehension that thinking and the attempts to convey thought are often met with. It is, however, the latter sense that Wittgenstein had in mind when in November 1944 he wrote to a despairing Rhee:

Please don’t give in, or despair! I know how immensely depressing things can look; and, of course, I’m the first man to think of running away, but I hope you’ll pull yourself together. [...] Anyhow, there’s nothing more difficult than to teach logic with *any* success when your students are all half asleep. (I’ve

heard Braithwaite *snore* in my lectures.) Please go the *bloody rough* way! – I wish you one moderately intelligent and awake pupil to sweeten your labour! [...] I repeat: Please go the bloody, rough way! *Complain, swear*, but go on. The students are stupid but they get something out of it (McGuinness 2008: 371).

For Rhees, there is more to say. In these texts, he wants to dig deeper. What the remark entails above all else is a special relationship to philosophical work, one that also brings to light a characteristic feature of Wittgenstein's life and thinking. "Go the bloody hard way" is concerned primarily with a way of life, a life orientation; an attitude to life characterised by a personal and uncompromising search for understanding. The "hard way" implies a life and a way of thinking that *wants* to understand and to grow in comprehension – a life where achieving clarification or understanding is the most important and decisive thing. "Important' and 'hard' are inseparable here." From this angle, to "go the bloody hard way" is a rallying cry for a life that seeks to understand. In other words, a watchword for a life that chooses, grasps, and confronts philosophical disquiet and difficulties with a view to clarifying them. And these moments of disquiet, difficulties, questions and problems are multi-layered and complex. They are related to life and action.

Confronted with "the philosophical difficulties", there are no easy ways out or solutions. The desired clarification and understanding are difficult to achieve. The philosopher must walk the path *him- or herself*, or, as Rhees puts it: "in philosophy there are no 'means of transport' by which you can reach your objective." Nothing and no other person can do the philosophical work for the enquirer. Here every individual has to rely on their own abilities, on their own cognition and powers of thought, their own life experience and their own questioning. "There can be nothing like the service which computers bring to mathematics." We have to go through the trouble which the disquiet, difficulties, questions and problems confront us with. And these are by no means simple in nature. They are difficult and complex. The path through these questions and problems is *hard* and *bloody* and calls for stamina and a determination to arrive at clarity and understanding; a desire to understand what presents itself in and via our life and which affects it.

Thus for Rhees, "Go the bloody *hard* way" denotes a life and a will that stubbornly seeks an understanding of the disquiet, questions, and

problems that arise in life. The orientation to life and thought that upholds this endeavour regardless of the difficulties associated with it is “the philosophical life”. The relationship between life and disquiet *and* that which is important and hard *and* an uncompromising search for understanding is internal. “Go the bloody *hard* way” is an injunction to acknowledge the disquiet and to pursue understanding no matter what the cost may be. In the second text excerpt, Rhees writes that for Wittgenstein philosophy “was not ‘being able to endure difficulties’, it was choosing them.” Put another way: “if you want to pursue philosophy as something in which you can take it easy, then you should leave it alone. (Or in other words, if you try to do anything that way, you will not be doing philosophy.)”

### ***“The growth of understanding”***

In a response to the letter from Rhees, Drury summarises and adds to his correspondent’s reflections.

On the theme of recognising a connection between philosophical difficulties, life and the determination to understand, Drury writes: “A philosophical difficulty is a painful difficulty. A difficulty in mathematics may be fascinating – and one can leave it aside for another day. A difficulty in philosophy can’t be put aside any more than a toothache can. [...] Simone Weil speaks of ‘affliction’ as a suffering which is not chosen; ‘why is this happening to me’. Philosophical difficulties have this quality too.” And Drury admits and recalls that: “Wittgenstein’s attitude to philosophy has always perplexed me. He was so serious about his work, his whole existence centered round it.”

At the same time, Drury raises the question of whether the “hardness” in philosophy, the nature of philosophical difficulties and their relation to life and a determination to understand, is compatible with “teaching in philosophy”. He asks: “Isn’t the object of lectures and text-books to make something difficult easier for the learner?” If “teaching in philosophy” makes philosophy easy, does this not negate the aspect of the special and personal struggle that philosophical thinking entails?

Drury suggests that there are two tasks for a teacher in philosophy of primary importance. First he must “make the learner see the

difficulties". He must awaken the student from his dogmatic slumber. And secondly, he must "do more than just puzzle people. He must show the way out of the puzzle – and isn't this making things easier." In short: "Philosophy as dialectic. First developing a difficulty to its maximum and then and only then indicating the solution."

In the second excerpt from Rhees' letters, Rhees expresses several reservations about Drury's proposal. But before commenting on Drury's reflections on "teaching philosophy", Rhees seeks once again to clarify what the remark "doing philosophy is 'going the hard way'" entails. He emphasises that decisive and strenuous effort involved in philosophy results in a "growth of understanding".

Philosophy does not lead simply to a resolution of questions and problems. It achieves a growth in understanding. Philosophical description results in an understanding that we did not have before. Which does not necessarily imply, however, that one has made a discovery of the kind one might make in physics. The outcome is not a scientific insight. The new understanding is concerned with the thinker's personal life and actions. Here, Rhees echoes his reflections in the two foregoing chapters in *Without Answers*, on learning, education, and understanding. In these, Rhees emphasises the link between learning and understanding on the one hand and the learner's life, desires, and relationships on the other. Learning is not just the acquisition of some isolated knowledge or technical skill.

Learning and understanding also relate to the individual's understanding of him- or herself and of the world. Learning is a life-shaping concern: "in learning there is something to *learn* – besides methods of responding successfully" (Rhees 1969: 160). Learning and understanding include a kind of illumination of our life which changes our conception of ourselves and of what we want. "So that we see things we were blind to before" (Rhees 1969: 157). Here, Rhees draws attention to the kinship between the consequences of philosophical understanding and the consequences of other forms of learning and understanding. He writes: "I am trying to emphasize that in all this [learning and understanding] we have not to do with discovering more complex and more all-inclusive ways of satisfying one's responses: of achieving a better economy in one's responses, so that one may avoid frustration, and so on. It is not that one has found a better method of getting what one wants. It is that one's eyes have been opened. And

this has been through what has *come* to one, not in the form either of reward or punishment, but from people and from culture and from teachers. It is because one has learned from something, and one would never have grown otherwise” (Rhees 1969: 158). Learning and understanding are a kind of “imparting” and acquisition that adds nuance to and further qualifies and enriches the learner’s horizons. Philosophical description results in a similar circumstance.

For the same reason, Rhees expresses reservations about Wittgenstein’s analogy of philosophy and therapy, of philosophy as trying to bring about a cure, and he is sceptical about the description of philosophical difficulties as “illness of the understanding”. For him, they suggest the existence and possibility of a “healthy minded” person who either remains undisturbed by or who has definitively clarified the disquiet and bewilderment that ensue from philosophical questions. Rhees emphasises that when doing philosophical work, it is not “as though you were simply being restored to a normal state of mind”. To which he adds that philosophy clarifies and facilitates access to and imparts understanding: “it cannot be the aim of philosophy to make a man incapable of such difficulties: incapable of becoming entangled in a difficulty which seemed to call everything in question. And Wittgenstein did not think it could. In his own work he constantly calls attention to difficulties which would never have occurred to more mediocre people. And through his discussion of them – of difficulties in connexion with mathematics, for instance – he helps us to understand what mathematics is, in a way that would never have been possible if we had never been bothered by the difficulties (i.e. if we had not been able to see that they were real difficulties when he did point them out to us).” – Philosophy “is not just the restoration of the status quo ante questionem”. Philosophy is growth of understanding.

Behind the assumption that philosophy involves a growth in understanding, while not necessarily making us resilient to bewilderment and questions, is Rhees’ assertion that philosophical disquiet, difficulties, questions and problems result from characteristics of language, which could entrap *anyone* and does so continuously. This observation also echoes Rhees’ crucial notion of “the unity of language”. Rhees insists that we should be aware of the way that every action or event is framed by and relates to a broader context. Every *Sprachspiel* presupposes a larger background that needs to be taken into

account when seeking clarification in or of a language game. In *Without Answers*, Rhees draws attention to "the unity of language". This unity, he maintains, should be regarded not as a great overarching formal unity or as a common logical system, but rather as consisting of a complex and confusing network of connecting lines, interactions and crossovers between the various regions of language. This overarching background, "the unity of language", "the weave of life", (PI 1953: 174) is a precondition of life and of every speech act. Consequently, for Rhees, philosophical disquiet, difficulties, questions and problems are related with a diversity of things, with patterns in this broader background. And for the same reasons, philosophical disquiet also raises the crucial philosophical questions about language and understanding. In *Without Answers*, Rhees writes that philosophical puzzlement and problems are expressions that always presuppose the context of language, and as such they raise fundamental questions about language: "what belonging to a language is; what being intelligible is". They may "help us to understand better what speaking and understanding is".

Such reflection may help us to understand how it is that language – thinking and speaking and the understanding that there is in life among men – has led men to wonder what things are. [...] We cannot understand the central ideas of philosophy – such ideas as reality, truth, things, intelligibility, understanding – we cannot understand the role they play in language unless we try to understand what language is (Rhees 1969: 134-135).

### ***"There is not a philosophical method"***

At the end of the second excerpt, Rhees expresses his reservations about Drury's proposal that the teacher in philosophy must first awaken the student from his dogmatic slumber and then show the learner the way out of the philosophical puzzlement. Addressing Drury, Rhees writes: "I doubt if any serious teacher of philosophy would say that he must show the way out of the puzzles. Many would not speak of the way out anyway." Rhees has Wittgenstein's methodological *credo* from *Philosophical Investigations* in mind: "There is not *a* philosophical method, although there are indeed methods, like different therapies" (PI 1953: § 133). Accordingly, Rhees draws Drury's attention to the fact that philosophical puzzles can be resolved in a variety of ways depending on the nature and context of the problem.

One cannot specify nor even speak of “the one way” that provides a general and predetermined route for resolving philosophical difficulties. Next, Rhees comments on the supposed premise behind Drury’s proposal, to the effect that Wittgenstein was teaching a method. Rhees states: “But this can be extremely misleading for one thing, it might seem then as though one ought to be able to say what the method is. This is nonsense.” Because there is no method that can be stated and learned independently of the perplexities and discussions in which it appeared. To which he adds: “The discussions which Wittgenstein gave in his classes in philosophy did not have the character of ‘exercises’. [...] They were all of them discussions which were important on their own account. And he would not have been teaching philosophy otherwise. If I may put it in a corny way: You cannot illustrate a method of discussion without discussing.” – Or in very different terms, to quote one of Rhees’ later remarks: “If someone asked me what Wittgenstein called ‘Philosophy’, I should not send him to ‘Philosophie’ [TS 213, 405–435]. I should send him to the Untersuchungen.”<sup>26</sup>

## **PART II**

As we have shown in PART I, in its first intended form, the concluding Chapter 17, “The Study of Philosophy”, in *Without Answers* was originally envisaged as consisting of two text excerpts. This material was sent to Phillips on 20 July 1968. The two excerpts are taken from two letters that Rhees wrote to Drury, the first dated 29 July 1963, the second 1 September 1963. The two letters are not to be found in their full length among Rhees’ papers. Both excerpts from these letters are reproduced below (see II.a and II.c). Inserted between them is the letter from Drury to Rhees, dated 5 August 1963 (see II.b), which Rhees received before drafting the second of the letters to Drury. The excerpts from Rhees’ letters are preserved today under the catalogue signature UNI/SU/PC/1/15/10, Drury’s letter under the catalogue signature UNI/SU/PC/1/1/3/4, in the Richard Burton Archives, Swansea University.

---

<sup>26</sup> Rhees, R., 11/21/82. Loose sheets *ad* ‘Philosophie’, RBA, UNI/SU/PC/1/4/4/4.

**II.a – Rhees' excerpt from a typewritten letter to Drury of 29 July 1963 (6pp)**

The excerpt that is published in edited form as "The Study of philosophy" in *Without Answers* (pp. 169–172)

[p. 1] [In Rhees' handwriting: 17 THE STUDY OF PHILOSOPHY  
1  
1/2]

Wittgenstein used to say to me, 'Go the bloody hard way'; and he would write this in letters as well. I remember this more often, perhaps, than any other single remark of his. He might have added something like (I am not quoting his words now): 'Otherwise you will never be able to do what you want to do. There is even something important in going the hard way: in going against the tendency to seek comfort or stimulus in this or that.' For generally he was not thinking of different 'ways' which you might follow in order to get what you were after seeking. It was a question of what you seek.

He was not saying, 'Whatever you seek, you will have to accept the drudgery on the way to it', or 'if you spare yourself you will never get there'. As though the drudgery or the struggle were a special misfortune: and if someone could invent a machine ... then we might be spared it.

Unless one understands this, then I do not think one can understand Wittgenstein's conviction that philosophy is important. For he did not think that philosophy is important simply in the way in which therapy is important to the patient – as though it were important simply that there is no other way to get rid of the evil or the malaise of philosophical perplexity. (If it were like that, then you might say to someone, [p. 2] 'Try tranquillizers first: they might work, and they are easier'.) Philosophy, as he practised it, was 'the bloody hard way' in the sense of being opposed to looking for

consolation or for stimulus. And it was not only a way of thinking and working, but a way of living as well. And the ‘hardness’ was really a criterion of the sort of life that was worthwhile. Perhaps I should add ‘for him’.

This is why it would be absurd to look about for something to help you over the hard way so that you might enjoy the goal which is really important. ‘Important’ and ‘hard’ are inseparable here. (Not because in doing something hard you prove your own capacities, or anything of that sort.)

‘I should like to go that way, but it is too difficult for me.’

Answer: Unless you ‘like’ the difficulty – unless you see the importance of its being difficult – then you are fooling yourself.

Or we might say: Choose philosophy because it is hard – not for the sake of any fruits you may imagine from it.

~~I suggest that Simone Weil is speaking in this sense in much of what she says about ‘le vide’. It is important not to seek consolation or dream of it; not to think of some rest or fulfilment of your desires which shall be the reward for perseverance.~~

~~This goes with what she says of purity. But for her purity will always savour more of affliction than of peace.~~

~~Of course her views and Wittgenstein’s diverge. But there is something important here in which they run together.~~

~~Suppose Simone Weil said, ‘You cannot lead a holy life unless you achieve a considerable measure of ‘detachment’ from satisfaction [p. 3] [one page or a longer passage excluded] patience.~~

May I return to Wittgenstein’s ‘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.

In the manuscript books on which I am working he makes remarks like, ‘In logic one cannot by-pass any difficulty. (This method reminds one of trying to catch your thumb.)’ I wonder if we

might say in the same sense, 'In logic you cannot dissolve any difficulty'. (I need not remind you that at this period – 1929 – he often spoke of 'logic' when he took it to cover the whole of philosophy.)

Or again he said: 'In logic there is no substitute (Surrogat).'

Part of what he meant (I think) was that in philosophy there are no 'means of transport' by which you can reach your objective. No development outside philosophy, for instance, can make philosophy any easier. Nor are there any developments which will make it possible to reach results which were impossible before. There can be nothing like the service which computers bring to mathematics. But neither can we hope for the development of new and simpler techniques which will enable us to carry out the whole thing much more simply, without having to go through all the trouble which used to beset us before.

Wittgenstein remarks, 'No philosophical problem can be solved by a calculus'.

The philosophical difficulties have to be met and worked through. There is no sort of 'simplification' which will make them any less difficult.

This is connected with the fact that the point, or the importance, of a calculus is nothing like the point or the importance of [p. 4] philosophy. Or think of the kind of difficulties (or questions) which we have here: we are concerned with the idea of 'understanding', for instance. And the 'fundamental' character of this notion is one the reasons why we cannot give a simplified account of it.

Put in another way: 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.

This bears on the attitude which may be taken towards philosophy. I suppose someone might say: 'I just want to play tennis; I don't care about playing it well'. But for some reason you cannot say anything like this in philosophy. 'Unless you feel like taking philosophy seriously, then leave it alone.' And this means: take the difficulties seriously: '... unless you recognize that they are

difficulties; unless you recognize that they are difficult – unless they make things difficult’.

Contrast: ‘There are some rather tortuous difficulties here, but we need not to go into these. We just want to get the general idea’. Whatever else that is, it is not philosophy.

Or: ‘He has a genuine interest in philosophy, but it is of a more bland and easy-going sort’. Then why does he bother with it at all?

I do not mean that if you cannot do philosophy as well as Wittgenstein did – or even that if you cannot have the same measure of seriousness that he had – you should leave it alone. But I do mean that if you want to pursue philosophy as something in which you can take it easy, then you should leave it alone. (Or in other words, if you try to do anything that way, you will not be doing philosophy.)

[p. 5] I think this is the reason for what has been said – by Plato, for instance – about the relation (or contrast) between philosophy and self-indulgence.

Suppose someone said, ‘I know you cannot do it really well without going the hard way. But I am going to achieve what I can in it – even though I cannot bring myself to go the hard way.’

I do not find this hard to imagine. Mea culpa.

And when I do feel like this, I think I have a tendency to be sceptical about ‘Go the bloody hard way’. To ask, perhaps, ‘Is it true that you cannot do it without “going the hard way”? Might we not find examples of people who ...?’ And if I ask that this, I am in the nonsense of talking about ‘the means of getting there’.

As though the necessity of going the hard way were like the need for rigorous training if you are going to be a good runner. People might ask whether there are not examples of men who have been good runners without keeping to rigorous training.

Well, this sort of confusion is the work of the devil.

One might well ask – I agree – for an account of what comes under this ‘hard way’. For although it has its sense in the way in

which the difficulties of philosophy itself are treated, it also has some reference to the way you live. So it had for Plato, anyway, and for Wittgenstein too.

This is ground on which I am hesitant to tread, although – or because – I think it is important. A great deal has been said – in ancient times more than in modern – about ‘the philosophic life’. Some of this seems to me very important. But it may lead to silly [p. 6] 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. Some of what Simone Weil says seems to me a better guide – or to be a better sign post – than anything else I know.

Above all one must avoid the suggestion that ‘the philosophic life’ is the kind of life you must lead if you are to do philosophy: as if doing philosophy and leading that kind of life were distinct or separable. As though it made sense to say, ‘It is a pity that you cannot do philosophy without going the hard way – or it is a pity that you cannot do philosophy and also lead a life of self indulgence – but I am afraid there is no other way’. As though the checking of self indulgence were the price that you have to pay in order to be able to do philosophy. All this is nonsense: but it is not easy to make this clear.

(I expect the stoics were right in suggesting that if someone is a philosopher, he leads the life of a philosopher. But I do not think they were right in placing the emphasis and the interpretation which they did on ‘peace of mind’ and ‘equanimity’ as characteristic of a philosophic life or ‘philosophic spirit’.)

It would be stupid to say: ‘If he is ever foolish or ever loses his head – or even if he frequently does – then he cannot be a philosopher.’

~~But neither could one say, I think, that if he is ever foolish or ever loses his head then he cannot have in his life any measure of detachment, in the sense in which Simone Weil speaks of this.~~

~~Notice, by the way, that for Simone Weil detachment did not [end of text excerpt]~~

***II.b – Drury’s handwritten letter to Rhees from 5 August 1963  
(10pp)***

[p. 1]

St. Edmondsbury,  
Lucan,  
Co. Dublin.

Aug. 5 1963

Dear Bob,

Many thanks for your letter of July 29<sup>th</sup>. I had hoped you would forget about the duty on the clock, but knowing you I might have guessed you wouldn’t! In the end I had to pay £11-6-0; less than your cheque for £13-0-0, which I have not cashed. I fear it will be no use arguing with you, so I will now pay in your cheque and I am sending you one for £1-14-0. [p. 2] You will probably object to this, but it will make me feel easier in my mind [after?] all you have done for us. The clock continues to keep time like a chronometer.

We had an excellent holiday in spite of showery weather, and towards the end had some real warmth and sun. On the spur of the moment we went to Sligo for 4 days and had perfect weather there, most of the time on the sands at Rosse’s Point. We were saying that one year you and Jean must join us there, it is wonderful country.

— · —

[p. 3] Your remarks about “Go the bloody hard way” were very opportune. I had begun to work at a paper along these lines. What started me off on this was seeing a display in a book shop of a new American series “Chemistry made easy”, “Algebra made easy” etc etc. And there among them “Philosophy made easy”! The latter title pulled me up, why did it jar so, why was it all wrong? The other books might or might [p. 4] not be good (as a matter of fact the Algebra one seemed excellent), but one knew that the philosophy

must be bad — why? I thought this might make a good introduction to a paper about the place of “hardness” in philosophy. All I have done so far is to make a few notes about the points I want to bring in.

1 If philosophy can't be made easy, how can it be taught? Isn't the object of lectures and text-books to make something difficult easier for the learner?

[p. 5] 2 The teacher in philosophy has to make the learner see the difficulties. A person who has no philosophical problems needs to be awakened from his dogmatic slumber. Wittgenstein used to speak of a disease endemic among professional philosophers which he called “loss of problems”.

3 But the teacher must do more than just puzzle people. He must show the way out of the puzzle — and isn't this [p. 6] making things easier.

4 Philosophy as dialectic. First developing a difficulty to its maximum and then and only then indicating the solution.

5 Difficulties in philosophy need a period of gestation. Philosophy as mid-wifery, but only at full term.

6 Wittgenstein's attitude to philosophy has always perplexed me. He was so serious about his work, his whole existence centered round it, but he spoke often as if he would be better if he could do [p. 7] something quite different. He once told me he did philosophy “because it interested him”, I don't think this was a right diagnosis.

7 A philosophical difficulty is a painful difficulty. A difficulty in mathematics may be fascinating — and one can leave it aside for another day. A difficulty in philosophy can't be put aside any more than a toothache can.

8 Simone Weil speaks of “affliction” as [p. 8] a suffering which is not chosen; “why is this happening to me”. Philosophical difficulties have this quality too.

Or is it rather that it is the feeling of affliction which gives rise to the philosophical questions?

8 You raise important questions about “the philosophical life”, and about detachment. And I agree with you that this is not a form of voluntary training, like a necessary preparation for athletics. Isn't

it rather that the pain of [p. 9] philosophical difficulties, if it is not stifled, produces a detachment, alters the relative value of rewards — “what should it profit a man if he gain”.

9 A philosopher like Hume puzzles me. Taylor once said “he wasn’t sure whether Hume was a great philosopher or only a very clever man”. Is this a valid distinction? Surely Hume was a great philosopher. But detachment here? Affliction here? [p. 10] Perhaps Hume’s thinking caused him more suffering than he allows to appear.

— · —

I am sorry these remarks are so fragmentary, I hope to write something more connected and worthwhile later on.

Best wishes from us all

Yours

Con

**II.c - Rhees' excerpt from a typewritten letter to Drury from 30 August - 1 September 1963 (6pp)**

This excerpt was originally submitted for inclusion in "The Study of philosophy" in *Without Answers*, but was ultimately excluded.

[p. 1] [In Rhees' handwriting: 2.

1/2]

~~64a, ——— Eaton  
Crescent,  
Swansea,  
Glamorgan.  
August 30th, 1963.  
September 1st,~~

~~Dear Con,~~

~~The idea of 'Philosophy Made Easy' is clearly relevant to what I was trying to say in my earlier letter. So are your other remarks. But many of these emphasized the notion of 'teaching philosophy'. This makes me wish I could discuss the matter, and at the same time it makes plain that it is too big for me to cover and I do not even know how one should begin.~~

When I try to show that doing philosophy is 'going the hard way', I am still unable to give more than statements which must seem like prejudices, although I do not think they are. I think there is something which could be said, but I am not able to get to it. I wanted to deny that the hardness is 'the price you have to pay' if you want to do philosophy. I insisted that unless you are devoted to the 'hardness' on its own account, you are not devoted to philosophy either. Or in other words: the point is not that 'Experience has shown that you cannot be a good philosopher if you lead a life of self

indulgence'. ~~Unless you~~ ~~The hardness~~ The connexion is an internal one.

There are difficulties enough in any form of study, I think. The American physicist Robert Oppenheimer said in one of his public lectures, 'Even things which are not practical discoveries ... but are quite abstract, come with a sense of terror. I have found that among my colleagues in the sciences, when people know that they are making some deep finding, not a finding which has any threat in it to the security or comfort of man but some new insight into the order of the natural world, they measure its depth by the fear that comes over them. Niels Bohr once said to me, "When I am up to something important, I am touched with the thought of suicide".' – But what I meant, and what I think Wittgenstein meant, is not quite the same – although I imagine there is close kinship.

There is a cheap and popular sense in which 'being [p. 2] philosophical' means 'being able to take troubles with equanimity (sic.)'; or looking on things as Dr. Pangloss does in Candide. (Pangloss is a lampoon of Leibniz, but the other view – equanimity (sic.) in the face of trouble – comes from a misunderstanding of stoicism at a time when 'the philosopher' or 'the sage' meant the stoic.) But for Wittgenstein philosophy was not 'being able to endure difficulties', it was choosing them.

Wittgenstein's remarks may sometimes seem in conflict with this – especially when he is using the analogy of philosophy and 'therapy'. He speaks of philosophical difficulties as 'illnesses of the understanding'; and he says that 'a philosopher gives treatment to a question – as to an illness'. There are many reasons for his speaking this way, but it seems to me more misleading than helpful. For one thing, it leaves us with the question, 'Well, what is health of understanding, then?' Sometimes his discussion suggests that philosophical perplexity is just an unfortunate effect which our language has on some people (rather as rheumatism is a common result of the damp British climate), and that it were better if people never suffered from it. On the other hand, Wittgenstein certainly did not think that the unreflecting philistine – the 'healthy minded' man – was in a better state of mind than Socrates was. He used to express

deep admiration for Lessing because of the expression which Lessing gave to a deep philosophical (and religious) puzzlement.

Socrates wants to understand, where now he is perplexed. But suppose we call the achievement of understanding a 'cure', still it is not just the restoration of the status quo ante questionem. If our discussion had led us through a philosophical difficulty, so that we can see what it was that made everything seem hopeless, – this does not mean that we have made a discovery, as a physicist might (and Wittgenstein wanted to emphasize this), but it does mean that we have an understanding which we did not have before. And this understanding is not something like a scar which our misfortune has left with us.

Further: granting that Wittgenstein in his discussions was trying to bring about a cure – he was not really trying to cure the [p. 3] person with whom he was arguing, nor cure himself either; he was trying to cure the difficulty or the 'illness' which was not a personal condition of either or any of the disputants. If I insist on this, then it is hard to avoid speaking in a way that seems 'metaphysical'. And I think this is one reason why Wittgenstein spoke in the ways that he did.

If we do not know how to speak of 'health' in this connexion, we cannot think of 'illness' in any literal sense either. We may say of someone suffering from one or another of certain forms of insanity that 'he has lost his understanding'. I think there are important philosophical questions connected with this, and Wittgenstein did too. The difference between the condition of one who 'has his reason' and one who 'has lost his reason'. This is important also in understanding what the problems of philosophy are. On the other hand, the man who has lost his reason is not (generally) in philosophical perplexity, and certainly he cannot be cured by philosophical discussion. And it is obvious that Socrates's persistent discussion of philosophical problems did not show that he was a man whose understanding was impaired. To say that Socrates was suffering from an illness of the understanding (and Wittgenstein did not say this) – to say any such thing would suggest that there was something 'pathological' about his difficulties.

When Wittgenstein spoke of ‘illnesses of the understanding’ I think he was considering tendencies towards skepticism: to raise questions which seemed to call in question the possibility of understanding altogether, and to call in question the possibility of speech. I should say that this is a characteristic of the big problems of philosophy: that they do all of them run into skepticism. (Suppose one is puzzled by the relation of thought and language, or the relation of thought and reality, for instance. It might begin something like, ‘My thoughts are in my mind; how can a thought contain something which is not a thought: which is not in my mind?’ Etc., etc.) For this reason the discussion of them is unlike the discussion of the difficulties which a physicist may meet in his research. Nor can skepticism be met by putting forward a [p. 4] theory of any kind.

On the other hand, it cannot be the aim of philosophy to make a man incapable of such difficulties: incapable of becoming entangled in a difficulty which seemed to call everything in question. And Wittgenstein did not think it could. In his own work he constantly calls attention to difficulties which would never have occurred to more mediocre people. And through his discussion of them – of difficulties in connexion with mathematics, for instance – he helps us to understand what mathematics is, in a way that would never have been possible if we had never been bothered by the difficulties (i.e. if we had not been able to see that they were real difficulties when he did point them out to us). You speak of his reference to the ‘loss of problems’ among professional philosophers. And I suppose we might say that when a philosopher is not in difficulties, he is not a philosopher at all.

(But neither is he a philosopher if he simply finds the problems ‘intriguing’ or ‘fascinating’.)

-----;

You say, or ask, ‘If philosophy can’t be made easy, how can it be taught?’ and a little later, ‘But the teacher must do more than just puzzle people. He must show the way out of the puzzles – and isn’t this making things easier?’.

Here you are trying to make the pupil see the difficulty, and you can answer better than I can. I suppose Socrates was the first to ask ‘How can philosophy be taught?’ in a serious way, and he made it

part of a question about education (or the growth of understanding) generally. As far as his own teaching was concerned, I do not think he believed he had the answers to the questions he was raising; and he did not think this was any reason why he should not raise them. I doubt if any serious teacher of philosophy would say that he must show the way out of the puzzles. Many would not speak of the way out anyway. And they would be particularly encouraged if some one of those to whom they were speaking were to show a defect in the presentation and suggest a different way. In order to do this, the pupil must understand the difficulty, and he [p. 5] must have some grasp of philosophical discussion: and this is what encourages the teacher.

Wittgenstein used to say 'What we are studying here, or trying to learn here, is a certain way of investigating questions'. This might have been put in a more banal way, perhaps, by saying that he was teaching a method. But this can be extremely misleading for one thing, it might seem then as though one ought to be able to say what the method is. This is nonsense. And if we say that 'Wittgenstein was trying to teach a method, rather than any particular solutions or particular results', we shall be putting it very badly, because he was not thinking of any method which could be learned as if it was independently of the perplexities and the discussions in which it appeared.

Suppose someone teaches me how to play the violin. (You might try 'Violin playing made easy'.) Why can you not imagine that he begins by giving me an analysis or 'break-down' of violin playing, and then goes through certain of the 'operations' to illustrate them, and has me go through some of them to make sure that I understand? He might do this if he were teaching me how to operate a certain gun or machine. Maybe it is quite easy when you know how. In fact I suppose there is no method of playing the violin which I can study without playing it. (And I do not believe there is any way of making violin playing easy.) I have got to learn to play it by playing it – under instruction and criticism.

The discussions which Wittgenstein gave in his classes in philosophy did not have the character of 'exercises'. (I am leaving the violin analogy.) They were all of them discussions which were important on their own account. And he would not have been

teaching philosophy otherwise. If I may put it in a corny way: You cannot illustrate a method of discussion without discussing. It is no good going through the motions of discussing, or pretending to discuss. It is for this reason that I say it can be misleading when one suggest ‘all he is trying to do is teach the method’. I imagine this is part of what you had in mind when you said that he must be able to show the way out of the difficulty. At any rate, he [p. 6] has to do philosophy: he cannot make you begin to do philosophy otherwise.

And this means that he has to discuss – i.e. work at – a real difficulty. He would be just as intent on getting you to see this difficulty and the issues he was raising in regard to it, as he would be illustrating a method of investigation.

Of course it makes a difference what questions the teacher discusses. There are some questions which he would discuss with people who had considerable familiarity with philosophy but which he would not discuss with those coming to it for the first time. It were stupid to start beginning students on the Tractatus. But I should not say that this is because the Tractatus would be too difficult for them – not in the sense in which one says that the problems of philosophy are difficult, anyway.

Beginning students just would not see what it was all about: they could not even try to understand it.

\*

## **References**

This account of “The Study in Philosophy” is based primarily on material from the Rush Rhees collection (Ref. No. UNI/SU/PC/1) at the Richard Burton Archives (RBA), Swansea University, Wales, United Kingdom.

Donnelly, J., 1971. “Review: *Without Answers*”. *The Modern Schoolman* 48 (1), 92–93.

Geach, P.T., 1971. “Review. *Without Answers*”. *The Journal of Philosophy* 68 (17), 530–532.

McGuinness, B., ed., 2008. *Wittgenstein in Cambridge. Letters and Documents 1911–1951*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Reddiford, G., 1970. “Review. *Without Answers*”. *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 2 (1), 63–64.

- Rhees, R., 1969. *Without Answers*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd.
- Rhees, R., 1970. *Discussions of Wittgenstein*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd.
- Wallgren, T.H., 2023. "Introduction". In: T.H. Wallgren, ed., *The Creation of Wittgenstein: Understanding the Roles of Rush Rhees, Elizabeth Anscombe and Georg Henrik von Wright*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc.
- Wittgenstein, L., 1953. *Philosophical Investigations*. Ed. G. E. M. Anscombe, R. Rhees, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe. Oxford: Basil Blackwell. (PI)
- Wittgenstein, L., 1984. *Culture and Value*. Ed. G. H. von Wright in collab. w. H. Nyman, trans. P. Winch. Oxford: Basil Blackwell. (CV)
- Wittgenstein, L., 2005. *The Big Typescript. TS 213*. Ed. and trans. C. G. Luckhardt and M. A. E. Aue. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing. (BT)

### **Acknowledgements**

My thanks to Peter Cripps for comments on and translating the article and for his assistance with transcribing Maurice O'C. Drury's letter (5 August 1963). Thanks to the Richard Burton Archives (Swansea University, Wales) for their help and hospitality on various study trips. The letters by Rush Rhees are reproduced with permission of Volker Munz who is the copyright holder of Rhees' letters. The copyright to the letters of Drury is held by Éanna Drury and Luke Drury, who has given permission for their publication.

### **Biographical note**

Peter K. Westergaard is associate professor at the Department of Cross-cultural and Regional Studies, University of Copenhagen, Denmark. His areas of research are the history of ideas and the philosophy of religion. Westergaard's interests centre on the philosophy of Wittgenstein and Nietzsche. His publications include *Mennesket er et ceremonielt dyr. Ludwig Wittgensteins Bemærkninger om Frazers 'Den gyldne gren'* [Man is a ceremonial animal. Ludwig Wittgenstein's Remarks on Frazer's 'The Golden Bough'], Copenhagen 2013, *Kritik og tro. Hume, Kant, Nietzsche og Wittgenstein* [Critique and Belief. Hume, Kant, Nietzsche and Wittgenstein], Copenhagen 2015, *Nietzsche. Hvis man altid går til grunden. En afslutning* [Nietzsche. If one always goes to the ground. A closing], Aalborg 2018, *George Bataille. Hulen, offeret og maleriet*, [George Bataille. The cave, the sacrifice and the painting], Aalborg 2021, and a translation of with an introduction to Friedrich Nietzsche: *I rum sø. En sentenser bog* [On the high seas. A book of sentences], Copenhagen 2023.