

# Present at the Creation: Essay Review of *The Creation of Wittgenstein*, edited by Thomas Wallgren

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Thomas Wallgren (ed.), *The Creation of Wittgenstein: Understanding the Roles of Rush Rhees, Elizabeth Anscombe and Georg Henrik von Wright*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2023. 395 pp.

## 1.

On the fiftieth anniversary of Wittgenstein's death in 2001, Brian McGuinness wrote that "a full account of the last (and first) fifty years of Wittgenstein studies" was "a story for which the world is not yet prepared".<sup>1</sup> Things have since changed, and year by year, new scholarship is bringing us closer to having such a full account. *The Creation of Wittgenstein: Understanding the Roles of Rush Rhees, Elizabeth Anscombe and Georg Henrik von Wright* is one of the most important and accomplished contributions to this process so far. In fact, if readers are interested enough in the subject matter of the book to read it, upon finishing it they are likely to feel hungry for more.

*The Creation of Wittgenstein* examines, as human beings and as philosophers, the three literary executors appointed by Wittgenstein in his will, and looks at the contributions each of them made to bringing Wittgenstein's writings available to the world. The work for the volume was funded by an Academy of Finland research project overseen from 2016 to 2021 by Thomas Wallgren, and the papers are derived from presentations given at two events organised by this project: one at Cambridge in 2016, the other in Finland in 2018. Due to both the nature of the research project and its subject matter, the contributions are linked to each other in many ways. Across the book, the same quotations, examples and points of comparison recur and intertwine like threads in a woven carpet. Nevertheless, each of the contributions deserves to be dealt with separately.

The volume opens with biographical sketches of Rhees, Anscombe and von Wright. In his chapter on Rhees, Lars Hertzberg portrays the same singular philosopher familiar from previous scholarship on Rhees's work and on the so-called Swansea school of philosophy, of which he is the founding father and D. Z. Phillips and Peter Winch probably the two most prominent later representatives. Rhees had a combination of outlooks and normative commitments that are rarely seen together:

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<sup>1</sup> McGuinness 2001: 138. The allusion was to a Giant Rat of Sumatra briefly mentioned in a Sherlock Holmes story, which accordingly doesn't supply any further information about it.

he was politically a left-wing firebrand who contributed to anarchist newspapers, but at the same time a glum cultural conservative with elitist tastes in art and aesthetics; and a religious seeker who was in some sense a Christian, but who never felt he belonged to any church.

Among relatively well-known philosophers, the only one with at least a somewhat similar combination of traits is Simone Weil. And it is not surprising that, at least among his contemporaries, Weil was after Wittgenstein the next most important philosopher for Rhees – a fact that Hertzberg somehow doesn't mention. What he does suggest is that “there was a close temperamental affinity between Wittgenstein and Rhees, closer, I think it can be said, than that between Wittgenstein and his other literary executors, Anscombe and von Wright” (33). But Hertzberg is also careful to bring out the differences between Wittgenstein and Rhees, both in terms of their writing styles and some fairly central philosophical views having to do with the nature of language.

The book's only contributor to come from the English-speaking world is Duncan Richter. His biographical sketch of Elizabeth Anscombe builds on his existing research on both her published and unpublished writings. Richter has many illuminating things to say about Wittgenstein's influence on Anscombe, especially in her philosophy of action and the philosophy of mind. But almost inevitably, he spends as much effort opening up the well-known moral and religious views which separated Anscombe, a theologically conservative Roman Catholic, from most members of her peer group – leading her to be widely perceived as what Richter, disarmingly frankly, calls “a scary kook” (37).

Richter's not sharing the Nordic background of most of the contributors would not be philosophically relevant otherwise, but it comes to the surface when he discusses Anscombe's having promised to God to give up smoking cigarettes if her son recovered from a serious illness. Withdrawal symptoms soon made her decide that her bargain had not mentioned cigars or pipes, which she thus took up. Richter wants to defend Anscombe's actions, but he focuses primarily on “[t]he (supposedly) comical image of a woman smoking cigars” (38). What struck me instead, as a native of a Nordic country whose Protestant state church is an important part of its national identity, was how Anscombe's smoking was a perfect fit with the stereotypical, arguably tendentious image of Catholicism which I was given already as part of my religious education in childhood. This is what Catholics are like at their worst, I was told: they delight in finding ingenious ways to avoid observing a moral rule while formally adhering to it. And that Catholicism had come to this was exactly why Luther and the Reformation were supposedly needed.

Anscombe's famous 1956 attack on US President Harry S. Truman for having ordered the atomic bombing of Japan is also commended by Richter, in accord with many previous commentators. Regrettably, he is also like these commentators in not attending to an interesting, somewhat unexpected line of objection that has been put to Anscombe more than once, based on disputing her empirical claims about military

history and not so much (or at all) her position in moral philosophy.<sup>2</sup> It is to be hoped that Richter will someday address this in his ongoing scholarship on Anscombe, as he would certainly have something illuminating to say on it as well.

In his obituary notice of Anscombe, Michael Dummett recalled “a tiresome period when, stimulated by the foundation of the state of Israel [in 1948], which she took as the fulfilment of prophecy, she kept anticipating the imminent return of Elijah and the Second Coming of Christ” (Dummett 2001: 62). When the context is Wittgensteinian editing, it could perhaps be illuminating to let the overfamiliar Truman episode and Anscombe’s other moral philosophy to recede into the background for a moment, and to consider instead the following: the *Philosophical Investigations* were translated and co-edited by a person who was apparently uncertain whether she would have time to finish this work before the Second Coming of Christ. As for Anscombe’s relations to her fellow literary executors, it is worth mentioning another relatively little-known fact: the only openly hostile attack any of the executors ever made on the substantive philosophy of one of the others was made by Anscombe on Rhees’s philosophy of religion, which she traduced in 1976 as “the Swansea sigh” in a Wittgenstein-related book review published in an English Catholic magazine (Anscombe 1976: 906). Yet neither Rhees nor Anscombe ever let their personal differences interfere with their joint work as Wittgenstein’s heirs and editors.

The title of Bernt Österman’s chapter, “Georg Henrik von Wright – A Biographical Sketch”, is a tacit tribute to von Wright’s own most widely read and reprinted text on Wittgenstein, and also looks forward to Österman’s forthcoming book-length biography of von Wright. Österman strongly emphasises the cultural background shared by Wittgenstein and von Wright, two of whose key features were a passion for German-speaking high culture and a tendency towards cultural pessimism. The latter was something which von Wright had in common, to some extent, with Rhees and Anscombe as well, but the former was not.

Österman notes that it may seem paradoxical that von Wright was “no clear-cut follower of Wittgenstein” (62), and that he himself suspected that Wittgenstein would have actively disliked his researches in logic. The explanation von Wright himself had was that his “style of thought” was simply different from Wittgenstein’s. But one interesting consideration here is precisely von Wright’s status as a native speaker of a Germanic language (Swedish) from a traditionally German-oriented country (Finland). Basically *all* of Wittgenstein’s Cambridge students who came from such a Germanic background were, each in their own way, quite independent of him philosophically: think of Georg Kreisel, or Peter Munz, or J. P. Stern. None of them had the kind of idolising, worshipful attitude to Wittgenstein which many of his British students had. Maybe it was hard for them to be awestruck in the usual manner by their encounter with Wittgenstein, as they were already familiar beforehand with

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<sup>2</sup>See, e.g., Fussell [1981] 1988; Newman 1995.

the kind of figure he represented – the stormy, fearsome Romantic genius –, this being a cultural archetype much more in Germanic culture than in British.

Christian Erbacher examines the intellectual relationships between Rhees, Anscombe and von Wright through the more than 900 surviving letters they sent to each other in the half-century between Wittgenstein's death in 1951 and Anscombe's in 2001. For Erbacher, reading the letters has been "a thrilling literary experience", since "each literary executor had a strong personality, each was a full-fledged philosopher, and each contributed his or her own tone, colour and view to the conversation" (71). He quotes Rhees's apt description of the executors as "that triangle whose interior angles will never equal 180°" (71). Most of Erbacher's chapter is taken up by a detailed year-by-year overview of the correspondence, including statistics on letter-writers and recipients, and also a chronologically ordered list of nearly 250 different topics dealt with in the letters.

Interestingly, Erbacher states that "[a]lmost throughout the whole of the 1980s, there was a conflict between von Wright and Anscombe", which resulted in "a breakdown in any constructive communication" between the two (73), and seems to have been finally resolved only after Rhees's death in 1989. The conflict was related both to Anscombe's dissatisfaction with Blackwell, Wittgenstein's traditional British publisher, and to her continued strong support for Michael Nedo's ultimately ill-fated editorial endeavours after the collapse of the Wittgenstein archive at the University of Tübingen. Of the three executors, it is perhaps common to think of von Wright as the placid, irenic one, compared to Rhees and Anscombe, who both were "difficult" human beings by contrast (as was Wittgenstein himself). Yet it was von Wright who had a rift with Anscombe that dragged on for years, and delayed the publication of the last Wittgenstein volume edited by the executors by a full decade, from 1982 to 1992. This is one of the several noteworthy things in the book which would have been practically impossible to deduce from the previously existing historiographic image of the executors.

Kim Solin's chapter looks at the collaboration between Rhees and von Wright on the revised edition of *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, published in German in 1974 and in English in 1978. While the *Philosophical Investigations* had immediately received the status of a classic upon publication in 1953, the first edition of the *Remarks*, which followed only three years later and was intended as a companion volume, met with a hostile and even bewildered reception. The correspondence between Rhees and von Wright illuminates well the divergent sensibilities of two editors who approached logic and mathematics from almost totally different directions.

As a prominent formal logician himself, von Wright was troubled by the disapproving attitude to Wittgenstein's philosophy of mathematics displayed by fellow logicians, such as Alan Ross Anderson and Wittgenstein's own student Georg Kreisel. To von Wright, the revised edition of the *Remarks* was an opportunity to deal with what struck him as unfortunate misunderstandings of Wittgenstein's position by philosophers of mathematics. Rhees, by contrast, thought that it was

simply not his job to humour mainstream analytic philosophers; if they ended up approving of Wittgenstein, that would be a nice bonus at most, but Wittgenstein was plainly not writing for the kind of readers they were. Rhees wrote to von Wright: “Wittgenstein was not pretending to do mathematics. He was describing a general schema or form of a procedure which could be mathematics” (117). Solin does not take sides in the disagreements between Rhees and von Wright, but he does note that the correspondence between them is “an important antidote to readings of the *Remarks* as if they were formal work in the same sense as, say, a paper in the *Journal of Symbolic Logic*” (129).

Solin opens his chapter with an anecdote told by Rhees to Ray Monk, according to which Wittgenstein changed an encyclopedia article on himself to conclude with “Wittgenstein’s chief contribution has been in the philosophy of mathematics” when asked to comment on it in 1944. However, thanks to the research of Brian McGuinness, it has been known for some time that Rhees misremembered more than one thing about this episode. It only took place in 1947; Wittgenstein actually rewrote almost the entire article; and in reality, the final sentence was “His researches since 1929 (unpublished) bear chiefly on the philosophy of psychology and mathematics” – a far less startling and engaging statement than the mathematics-centric version (McGuinness 2008: 409).

Joel Backström takes as his topic the work of Anscombe as a translator and editor of Wittgenstein. He examines a number of translation decisions and editorial policies that have been criticised over the years. For instance, Backström questions whether the recent changes made to Anscombe’s translation of the *Philosophical Investigations* by Peter Hacker and Joachim Schulte have been advisable, and takes as his example Anscombe’s decision to render *Seele* occasionally as “soul” instead of “mind”. Backström suggests that criticisms of this decision are not philosophically innocent: they come from a philosophical world picture that was not Anscombe’s, and in her view not Wittgenstein’s either. The decision to demote Part II of the *Investigations* to the appendix-like status of a mere “fragment” in Hacker and Schulte’s edition is also rendered deeply questionable by Backström’s research (as well as that of Hugh Knott, whose two earlier journal articles on the matter have not been responded to by Hacker or Schulte; cf. Knott 2017, 2020). By both Backström’s account and Knott’s, it is safe to suppose that Wittgenstein wanted Part II included in the book, and that he had made this clear to Anscombe when she visited him in Dublin in 1949.

Backström describes Anscombe’s ideal of editing as a minimalist one, where the editor should avoid intervening whenever this is possible. Anscombe once even wrote to von Wright: “I don’t believe in editing!” (145). And she often downplayed her own ability to understand Wittgenstein, seemingly afraid of doing a disservice to his thinking by excessive “meddling” with the texts. This contrasts especially with Rhees’s much more hands-on approach to editing, which did not have the same misgivings. Rhees once wrote: “In any editing I have done I have asked myself again and again what Wittgenstein would have wanted” (146). He was even compelled to

ask himself that, as his method was closer to a publisher's editor working his red pencil on manuscripts by a living author who can have the final say about the end result, than to typical scholarly editing of the texts of a deceased author. But Anscombe and Rhees, together with von Wright, nevertheless agreed that there was no need to make the editorial interventions visible to the reader on the final printed page.

A fascinating piece of information in Backström's chapter is that, while the literary executors have often been criticised for keeping secret the coded diary entries in Wittgenstein's 1914–17 notebooks, it is unclear if any of the executors had even *read* all the content of the coded remarks when they published the non-coded parts in 1961 as *Notebooks 1914–1916*. While the executors had long been conscious of the personal nature of the coded remarks, they seem to have deciphered them in their entirety only in 1964–66. So it is not as if the executors wanted to keep to themselves something which they were embarrassed by (e.g. Wittgenstein's mentions of his sexual behaviour); they felt Wittgenstein's coded remarks to be so private that they initially disqualified even *themselves* from reading them!

Backström proposes that the sexual content of the coded diaries has been overemphasised. (The reception of their recent English translation certainly confirms this.) The sex-related remarks are both minor as a share of the total and not especially illuminating philosophically. To Backström, the most interesting thing about the coded entries is instead the unceasing, seemingly visceral disgust that Wittgenstein feels for his fellow soldiers. Wittgenstein's wartime notebooks – as preparatory work for the *Tractatus* with its plangent, cosmic vision of the otherworldliness of ethics – were clearly written by a person who had constant trouble dealing with his fellow human beings in everyday life in anything like an ethically commendable way.

Bernt Österman's second chapter in the book traces the processes that led von Wright to compile, edit and publish Wittgenstein's *Vermischte Bemerkungen*, known in English as *Culture and Value*. Using archival sources, Österman shows how von Wright's editorial work on the volume was influenced by contact with the Hungarian Wittgenstein scholar Kristóf Nyíri, and also by the appearance of Allan Janik and Stephen Toulmin's book *Wittgenstein's Vienna* in 1973.

When the first edition of *Vermischte Bemerkungen* appeared in 1977, von Wright marked it with "Wittgenstein in Relation to His Times", his keynote lecture to that year's Wittgenstein conference at Kirchberg in Austria. In it, he suggested that not only the remarks selected for the book, but Wittgenstein's philosophy as a whole, should be seen to diagnose contemporary civilisation as suffering from a deep disease: the hegemony of scientific and technological reason. Österman provides a reading of von Wright's lecture which importantly complements Erbacher's earlier work on the topic (Erbacher 2015).

Österman asks a thought-provoking question: what does it mean when von Wright speaks of the *Culture and Value* remarks as *aphorisms*, as he often does? Did he end up privileging some remarks at the expense of others because of what struck

him as their literary and aesthetic merits? This is interesting especially because most readers of *Culture and Value* do not probably realise how very selective von Wright was in his editorial work. Nobody who makes any extended use of the digital editions of Wittgenstein's *Nachlass* can fail to come across, not just one or two, but *many* remarks that are similar to those of *Culture and Value* in terms of subject matter, intellectual quality and literary quality – but which von Wright nevertheless excluded from his selection. In his preface to the book, he wrote: “At one time [...] I played with the idea of not making a very extensive selection, but including only the ‘best’ remarks. The impression made by the good remarks would, I thought, only be weakened by a great mass of material. *That*, presumably, is true – but it was not my job to be an arbiter of taste.” This disguises the significant extent to which von Wright *was* actually acting as an arbiter of taste, whether he realised it himself or not.

Österman's chapter should be – but won't be – read together with an excellent essay by Lars Hertzberg, which examines changes that occurred over time in von Wright's view of Wittgenstein as a philosopher of culture (Hertzberg 2016). Unfortunately, Hertzberg's highly perceptive study has so far only been published in Swedish and Finnish. In it he suggests that, as often as von Wright's 1977 lecture has been quoted appreciatively, it does not intellectually reach the same high level as the more moderate views on the civilisational weight of Wittgenstein's philosophy that von Wright expressed both earlier and later. It was perhaps a temporary aberration, a case where a train of thought rooted in a kernel of truth got out of hand. But if this train of thought is what gave *Culture and Value* to the world, then perhaps it was worth it nevertheless.

The chapter by Peter K. Westergaard reviews Rhees's editorial work on Wittgenstein's “Remarks on Frazer's *Golden Bough*”. Westergaard goes deep into the way in which Rhees was able to see significant continuities in texts written by Wittgenstein for different purposes, at different times, and on different subjects. Once Rhees had discovered the Frazer remarks in the early 1960s, he came to see them gradually as a kind of fulcrum of Wittgenstein's later philosophy. In Rhees's view, attention to the remarks could potentially illuminate many areas far beyond the narrow contexts of the philosophy of religion or the philosophy of social science – where the remarks attracted by far the most attention in the ensuing decades.

Also discussed by Westergaard is the curious editorial history of the Frazer remarks. Rhees initially published them in German as a journal article in 1967, but later omitted some twenty remarks when publishing them in English in 1971 and as a new edition in 1979. At the same time, however, Rhees did not refuse his consent to his original, longer edition being translated into several different languages. As with Rhees's much discussed decision to omit the “Philosophy” chapter of the *Big Typescript* when editing it into *Philosophical Grammar*, his intention in abridging the Frazer remarks was to avoid undue attention falling on material which was not in his view beneficial to Wittgenstein's own broader purposes in the end. But it might be asked if Rhees's omissions of materials already widely known to exist did not in the end backfire, by engendering the so-called Streisand effect, where attempts to

constrain the spread of a piece of information paradoxically prompt increased attention to that very same information.

Westergaard closes by quoting an entire letter written by Rhees in 1976 to Frank Cioffi, who had asked him about the differences between the 1967 and 1971 editions of the Frazer remarks. Rhees's response has more than a touch of the passive-aggressive about it: "I wonder if I understand your question. [...] And I do not know what you want." He objects even to being saluted as "Dear Professor Rhees": "I have never been a Professor." I don't know about Cioffi, but if I had sent an enquiry in good faith to one of Wittgenstein's literary executors, I would have been crestfallen to receive this kind of reply. I would namely have had no way of knowing what the posthumous publications of Rhees's other letters and writings show: that this was the tone in which he regularly addressed even his most trusted and valued friends – and even himself.<sup>3</sup> (As readers of Rhees's *Moral Questions* will know, in 1976 he was also still deeply in mourning for his dog Danny, killed by veterinarian malpractice in November 1974.)

Lassi Jakola's chapter handles a theme that is unavoidable when the contributions of Wittgenstein's literary executors are discussed: exactly what counts as a "work by Wittgenstein", when all of the philosophical books published under his name (except the *Tractatus*) are posthumous creations by various editors? This question was already being debated actively by the 1990s, by scholars such as Joachim Schulte and David Stern,<sup>4</sup> and it has remained a live issue in Wittgenstein studies.

Jakola examines the process by which the material in Wittgenstein's manuscripts from the last three years of his life (1949–51) came to be published in four different volumes: *On Certainty*; *Remarks on Colour, Culture and Value*; and volume 2 of *Last Writings on the Philosophy of Psychology*. He shows that in 1967–68, von Wright had made plans for an edition of the manuscript material in a single volume divided into thematic chapters. This did not end up being published, due importantly to Anscombe's strongly held view that what would be published as *On Certainty* in 1969 was a clearly delineated treatise on certainty and not just a loose collection of remarks on similar topics.

The preface to *On Certainty*, signed by Anscombe and von Wright, concludes:

It seemed appropriate to publish this work by itself. It is not a selection; Wittgenstein marked it off in his notebooks as a separate topic, which he apparently took up at four separate periods during this eighteen months. It constitutes a single sustained treatment of the topic. (Anscombe and von Wright 1969, vi)

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<sup>3</sup>Lars Hertzberg has also written of how he initially found the style and tone of Rhees's published writings off-putting: conceited and pretentious. It was only after meeting Rhees in person in 1978 that he realised that behind the style was "a striving for honourableness: a determination not to smooth things over, not to say more than what one can stand behind" (Hertzberg 2016: 134, my translation).

<sup>4</sup>E.g. Schulte [1989] 1992: 28–37; Stern 1994; Stern 1996; Schulte 1999; Schulte [2005] 2006.



Jakola's research shows that this was much more Anscombe's view than it was von Wright's. Rhees, who did not participate in editing *On Certainty*, also wondered in a letter to von Wright "if she does not look on those remarks as much more abgeschlossen [self-contained] than (I believe) they are" (254). Jakola goes on to discuss Rhees's wish, in 1969–70, to publish a German volume that would have combined *On Certainty* with the *Lecture on Ethics* and "Remarks on Frazer's *Golden Bough*". Anscombe reacted to this negatively, and the plan was dropped.

This publication plan by Rhees, which is also mentioned in their respective chapters by Backström, Westergaard and Thomas Wallgren, is *philosophically* perhaps the most intriguing archival discovery disclosed in this book. It appears that in 1970, Rhees had come to see deep underlying continuities between *On Certainty*, the ethics lecture and the Frazer remarks, three texts by Wittgenstein written at different times over a span of more than 20 years, and at first glance dealing with three completely different subjects. Whether one agrees or disagrees with Rhees's views here, reading his account of where he took the continuities to lie is bound to have an analeptic effect on many readers' own thinking about Wittgenstein's texts.

On the other hand, Anscombe's view of "separate treatises on separate topics" has something to be said for it as well. It was not merely some coarse imposition of an inappropriate interpretative frame on the material. Backström asks in his chapter:

How, for example, should one characterize the 'single topic' of OC? Is it 'certainty'? Why not, equally, 'the nature of a world picture', 'cultural differences', 'sanity and madness', 'the limits of argument', 'faith', or 'the relation between logic and experience', say? [...] And, on the other hand, however one might characterize the OC-discussions, wouldn't the characterization also be applicable to ROC and LW2, even if not in precisely the same way? (152)

One thing at least that favours a negative answer is the way in which the discussions in *Remarks on Colour* are generally not on the same level as *On Certainty* in terms of existential depth or weight. It is rather challenging to think of questions such as "Can a transparent green glass have the same colour as a piece of opaque paper or not?" as having to do with "the nature of a world picture" or "sanity and madness".

Hanne Appelqvist's chapter is not as closely related to questions of editorial policy as most of the others. Taking von Wright's inclusion of music-related remarks in *Culture and Value* as a springboard, Appelqvist argues that in Wittgenstein's thinking, questions of art and aesthetics were closer to "the supposedly hard logical or grammatical core of his work" (276) than has been realised in English-speaking analytic philosophy. She further proposes that this cannot be understood without relating Wittgenstein to the Kantian tradition, which in turn should be seen as having at its core not only the *Critique of Pure Reason*, but the *Critique of Judgement* as well. As someone who thinks that attempts to relate Wittgenstein to Kantian critical philosophy usually obscure more than they illuminate, I find myself welcoming this, as the parallels between Kant and Wittgenstein seem to me much more defensible with respect to some aspects of Kant's aesthetics than to Kant's philosophy as a whole. – For some reason, Appelqvist does not mention the German philosopher

of art Wolfgang Iser. Already in the 1980s and 1990s, Iser saw Wittgenstein's philosophy as a long-awaited return to the 18th-century conception of aesthetics shared by Kant, where aesthetics is defined as the study of what sensory experiences are like and how they entail what they entail.<sup>5</sup>

The editor, Thomas Wallgren, wraps up the book in the final chapter. He discusses the wider context in the history of philosophy where Rhees, Anscombe and von Wright found themselves engaged in their editorial work. Among other things, he points out that the "minimalist" editorial policies they adopted, where the editor's clammy handprints are brushed away from the smooth surface of the finished texts, were of a piece with the wider modernist ethos of mid-century analytic philosophy. "G. E. Moore, Bertrand Russell, young Wittgenstein, the Vienna Circle and others were seen as thinkers who had liberated philosophy from impotent tradition and given it new vitality. What was fresh and new was important, and presenting it in a distilled form was the goal of all publishing, hence also of the publishing of Wittgenstein" (296). In this atmosphere, questions of whether Wittgenstein wrote something in 1930, 1940 or 1950; which kinds of crossed-out variants there were in the manuscript; or how many different typescript stages the text went through, were bound to appear as peripheral.

Already in his introduction to the book, Wallgren suggests that "engagement with Wittgenstein matters for the future of Western civilization" (1). In the concluding chapter, he reiterates this by drawing parallels between Wittgenstein and Socrates. He proposes that among the literary executors, Rhees was closest to the Socratic ideal – although von Wright was on the other hand more alert to some individual key elements of it than Rhees. Regardless, "[p]hilosophy was for Anscombe and von Wright not at the heart of their search for answers to the morally and existentially most fundamental questions in life" (303). And Wallgren even suggests that in this area,

[t]he fact that [Rhees] could not bring Anscombe and von Wright to share, or even understand, his view created an acute sense of an intellectual difference, but also of a moral distance, between him and his colleagues [which] was, at times, a source of pain, at least for Rhees. (305)

If we take Rhees to have been close to Wittgenstein himself in his Socratic emphasis on the civilisational import of philosophy, this would seem to confirm Hertzberg's estimate in his chapter that, of the three executors, Rhees was the most similar to Wittgenstein as a person. But in the context of their editorial work, it would be crass and inappropriate to think of comparative "degrees of Wittgensteinianness" where Rhees would be the most Wittgensteinian, with von Wright perhaps coming next and Anscombe last. Maybe Wittgenstein selected each of the three precisely because, as different from each other as they all were, none of them were "Wittgensteinians" in the most conventional sense of the term. Each of them had important philosophical interests unrelated to Wittgenstein, and for none of them was their own philosophy a straightforward continuation of what they took to be

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<sup>5</sup>See, e.g., Iser 1997.

Wittgenstein's intellectual project. (Incidentally, one much more banal factor that must also have recommended the executors to Wittgenstein was that they all had to have a fluent reading knowledge of German. This already ruled out many otherwise potentially suitable candidates.)

But it seems to me that the real *Gretchenfrage* here is: does engagement with Wittgenstein matter *enough* for the future of Western civilisation? Engagement with philosophy, and especially engagement with a canonical classic of philosophy, is generally a less cost-effective way of contributing towards desired real-world outcomes than straightforward political and social participation. If I believed myself morally entitled to engage with Wittgenstein only if I can prove that this engagement matters for the future of Western civilisation, I would not engage with him.

## 2.

*The Creation of Wittgenstein* will hopefully open up avenues for further research in more than one direction. I will now highlight three areas about which the contributors might well have said something, but ended up saying little or nothing. They are not the only such areas, but merely the ones which struck me personally as being the most interesting.

*First:* there is very little in the book about the preconditions set by the fact that the publication of books attributed to Wittgenstein was a *business*, a commercial venture intended to make a profit. The relationships of Rhees, Anscombe and von Wright to Wittgenstein's various publishers – including his two most important ones, Blackwell in Britain and Suhrkamp in Germany – have hardly been researched at all as yet. Henry Schollick and Siegfried Unseld, the respective managing directors of these two companies, are mentioned in passing, but the causal chains passing through them are not gone into in any detail. Anscombe's temporary falling-out with Blackwell in the 1980s is mentioned (73), but were there other sources of friction, and if so, what kind? What would also be interesting to know are the actual global sales figures for, say, Anscombe's translation of the *Investigations* from 1953 until today: a hundred thousand, half a million, one million, five million? Clearly the cumulative figure over the decades, whatever it may be, is comparable to the success of a best-selling work of fiction.

When Wittgenstein's literary executors are criticised for allegedly questionable editorial decisions, it is practically never kept in mind that his posthumous publishers were *not prepared to publish just anything they were offered*; and that they may even have *rejected outright* some proposals made by the executors. Siegfried Unseld, for instance, was a very significant gatekeeper figure in German book publishing.<sup>6</sup> And it is interesting to read in the book some examples of how he intervened in Wittgensteinian matters – by objecting to some of von Wright's German grammar

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<sup>6</sup>It says something about the insularity of English-speaking scholarship that while Unseld is a major, almost towering figure to those familiar with German literary history of the post-1945 era, he does not even have an article on English Wikipedia.

(118) and coming up with the title *Vermischte Bemerkungen* (199, note 13), for instance. Special attention is paid to Unseld's role in the publication of the 1970 German edition of *On Certainty*: he rejected as too uncommercial an introduction that Rhees had been laboriously persuaded by von Wright to write, but at the same time he was enthusiastic about Rhees's proposal to include the *Lecture on Ethics* in the same volume (for which, as we have seen, Anscombe refused her consent).

Another relevant consideration is how the editorial decisions made by Rhees, Anscombe and von Wright may have contributed to the commercial success and wide dissemination of Wittgenstein's work. This relates, for instance, to their aim of keeping editorial commentary and scholarly apparatuses to a minimum. Backström notes: "The 'naked' editions of Wittgenstein that Anscombe and her fellow editors produced are slender and so manageable volumes, relatively cheap to buy, easy to bring along on trips, etc." (148). The characteristics of the books as material objects are thus another factor which makes the editing and publishing of Wittgenstein connect to *book history*, the scholarly study of which has so far overlapped with Wittgenstein studies only slightly. Much remains to be done here.

*Second*: there is nothing in the book on the publication of *lectures* by Wittgenstein, with the exception of the *Lecture on Ethics*. In some sense this is understandable, as Rhees, Anscombe and von Wright did not edit any of the lecture volumes published under Wittgenstein's name from 1966 onwards. But it would be interesting to know more about the attitude of the executors towards these volumes, several of which were put out by Blackwell and Suhrkamp, Wittgenstein's "default" publishers. The attitude cannot have been completely negative, as Rhees contributed his own lecture notes to two of the volumes, while Anscombe's husband Peter Geach edited a third.<sup>7</sup> But the executors nevertheless seem to have held that there was a deep qualitative difference between Wittgenstein's manuscripts and the various lecture notes, to the detriment of the latter.

Anscombe seems to have thought this particularly strongly. Erbacher, Backström and Wallgren all mention that she refused to allow lecture notes to be published under the same cover as writings by Wittgenstein himself (95; 166–167, note 21; 300). Not only did Anscombe object to people quoting the notes as Wittgenstein's own words; she was also very concerned about how patchy and incomplete the notes were, in her view invariably. Thus she totally condemned *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief* in a letter to von Wright, speaking of editor Cyril Barrett's "conflation of three sets of lecture notes in that horrid little book. *How* far they are from giving us a text of any lecture you can tell by seeing how long it takes you to read one of them, quite slowly, out loud" (167, note 21). This is in fact a rather odd claim. If we take Lecture I of the lectures on aesthetics, for instance, it runs to approximately 4,500 words. Taken at a slow speed of 100 words per minute, reading it out loud takes 45 minutes. As Anscombe

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<sup>7</sup>In addition, the cover design and typography of Rhees's edited collection *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Personal Recollections* indicate that Blackwell viewed it as forming some kind of loose trilogy together with *Wittgenstein's Lectures: Cambridge 1930–1932* and *Wittgenstein's Lectures: Cambridge 1932–1935*.

herself certainly knew from experience, and as many other students have described, Wittgenstein's lectures were constantly interrupted by long silent gaps, as he struggled with what to say next. Assuming a typical two-hour time slot for the lecture and for half of it to consist of such gaps, it may well be that little or nothing of it is missing in the notes.

*Third*, perhaps surprisingly: through what kind of mechanism were the *titles* of the various posthumous publications decided upon, and by whom? The title is a completely crucial element, perhaps *the* most crucial, of the horizon of expectation created by any literary work in its encounter with prospective readers. But for the scholars writing in this book, “the creation of Wittgenstein” almost never involved the various titling decisions.

To take an extreme example, *Vermischte Bemerkungen* certainly seems like a very different publication depending on whether the head title is ‘Miscellaneous Remarks’ (German, French); ‘General Remarks’ (Finnish); ‘Separate Remarks’ (Dutch, Swedish); ‘Culture and Value’ (English, Danish, Greek, several others); ‘Diverse Thoughts’ (Italian); ‘Antiphilosophical Fragments’ (Japanese); ‘Miscellaneous Notes’ (Czech); ‘Philosophy and Culture’ (Norwegian); ‘Aphorisms’ (Spanish); ‘Observations’ (Hungarian); or ‘Posthumous Notes’ (Romanian). To what extent were the literary executors consulted about the wildly heterogeneous titles of the various translations, and did they disapprove of any proposed ones? How did Peter Winch's widely read English translation come to bear the peculiar “clickbait” title *Culture and Value*, about which the executors later seemingly developed misgivings? (Erbacher notes that in their 1995 correspondence, Anscombe and von Wright “rename it *Miscellaneous Remarks*” [100], but it is unclear what this renaming amounted to; the book is still being published in English as *Culture and Value* even today.)

Again, whose idea was it to use *Zettel* as an English title, analogously to the likes of *Das Kapital* and *Mein Kampf*? How expedient a decision was it to bill the *Blue and Brown Books* as “preliminary studies for the *Philosophical Investigations*”? And why was *On Certainty* titled that – and not *Remarks on Certainty*, in line with “Some Remarks on Logical Form”, *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, *Philosophical Remarks*, “Remarks on Frazer's *Golden Bough*”, *Remarks on Colour* and *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*? Was the title perhaps an attempt to bolster the Anscombean view that the book was a clearly circumscribed treatise, and not merely one more collection of Wittgenstein's “remarks”?

### 3.

There are a few straightforward factual errors in the book. The revised second edition of the *Blue and Brown Books* was published already in 1960, not 1969 (342). The 1960 *Schriften* volume included the first German publication of not only the 1913 “Notes on Logic”, but also the *Notebooks 1914–1916* (342). The 1971 English translation of the Frazer remarks was by Rhees and A. C. Miles, not by John Beversluis (343). And the original British bilingual edition of *On Certainty* was not

published by early 1969 – when the idea of the aforementioned 1970 German edition was already being discussed (216) – but only in the second half of the year. In the May 1969 issue of *British Book News*, it was listed as forthcoming “in or about July”, and was first announced as available in the *Times Literary Supplement* on 24 July 1969 – incidentally the exact day when Apollo 11 returned to earth, having suddenly put in a new light the remarks in the book about travel to the moon.

More mistakes are to be found in the proofreading and copyediting. People and other entities whose name appears in a misspelled or otherwise incorrect form include Alan Ross Anderson, Walter Boehlich, Anthony Kenny, Georg Christoph Lichtenberg, Clare Mac Cumhaill, Newnham College, Viggo Rossvør, John Stonborough, Swansea University, Edvard Westermarck and Hermine Wittgenstein. The same goes for German terms such as *Beiheft*, *Bemerkung*, *Untersuchung* and *Weltanschauung*. Dostoevsky’s name is spelled in two different ways even within the same paragraph. Dubliner George Bernard Shaw is called an English writer. What first appear to be missing footnotes promised in an endnote (168, note 32) turn out not to be missing, but to be included as further endnotes later on. “In the elder days of Art / Builders wrought with greatest care / Each minute and unseen part”, but we are clearly no longer in the elder days of Art.

These, however, are minor points relative to the merits of the book. Not only does it bring into view a mass of philosophically relevant archival material hitherto unknown to scholars, and develop this material into consistently interesting directions. It is also a salutary departure from the stuffy, scandal-tinged atmosphere which dominated the earliest discussions of the posthumous editing of Wittgenstein’s work in the 1980s and 1990s. At that time, it was common to hear voices which accused the literary executors of downright violations of normal scholarly ethics – abuses of the trust that Wittgenstein had put in them. And Jaakko Hintikka, for instance, even proclaimed in 1997: “Only a psychiatrist could say what Rush Rhees and Elizabeth Anscombe were really trying to accomplish. Their whole identity was vested in being Wittgenstein’s interpreters” (cited after: Toynnton 1997: 32).

None of the contributors to *The Creation of Wittgenstein* would dream of making this kind of remark. Indeed, it is easy to imagine them shaking their heads at it in disbelief. In the light of their judicious scholarship, Hintikka-type criticisms themselves strike one as more aberrant than anything Rhees, Anscombe or von Wright ever did with Wittgenstein’s writings. *The Creation of Wittgenstein* shows that even where the literary executors’ decisions have been regretted in retrospect, they had intellectually respectable, morally honourable reasons for making those decisions. And they always frankly made these reasons known at least to each other – even as they failed to disclose them in the publications themselves, in line with their adopted policy.

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