

## CRITICAL NOTICE

### **The Fate of Wonder**

Wittgenstein's Critique of Metaphysics and Modernity  
Kevin M. Cahill, Columbia University Press, New York, 2011, pp. 272, £ 31.00  
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*Reviewed by Derek A. McDougall*

Readers who come to study the *Tractatus* and the *Philosophical Investigations* for the first time, are naturally inclined to regard them as works of theoretical philosophy, not only because this is what their training predisposes them to expect, but also because this way of regarding them can be, and has been argued to be integral to a proper interpretation of the texts of these works themselves. On this view, the logical concerns, derived from Frege and Russell, which occupy the first book, are allied to a form of solipsistic metaphysics, a perspective which Wittgenstein gradually came to abandon in favour of an anthropocentric outlook which takes the activities of ordinary human beings acting within a social context, to be the fundamental arbiter when proposing answers to the traditional 'problems of philosophy'. If this latter approach has earned the right to be called 'therapeutic', this can be so, on this assessment, only insofar as it can be shown by *argument* that this is *the* method to adopt when deciding upon philosophical questions. After all, the idea of *therapy*, contrary to how it is often discussed in relation to the work of Wittgenstein, cannot exist in a vacuum. It requires the adoption of a perspective upon language, and upon the use of language which is provided by this distinctly anthropocentric outlook.

Whatever one thinks of this point of view, and there are arguments both for and against it, it is one from which Wittgenstein's familiar comments on his relationship to the times in which he lived, will be regarded as purely coincidental. If, on the other hand, one takes these comments to be integral to our understanding of Wittgenstein's motivations in pursuing philosophy at all, then of course one will reject this more traditional perspective: he will not then be seen to be providing one theoretical contribution amongst many others to the philosophical canon. It would not be unfair to say that this produces a certain tension in Kevin Cahill's new book, a tension illustrated in his claim, for example, that Wittgenstein never *merely* addresses himself to technical problems in the

philosophy of language or of mathematics, say, but always wishes to effect a particular kind of change in his readers' sensibilities which will enable them to alter their outlooks on the very nature of philosophical problems themselves *as* they relate to the historical and cultural contexts in which we encounter them (*Ibid.*, 2). Yet whilst this is surely correct in regard to the *philosophical* problems, the *cultural* perspective referred to is not one that any reader would normally claim to be able to find in the context of any of Wittgenstein's treatments of specific problems in his work, *e.g.*, the discussion of private language in §§ 243 - 315 of the *Investigations*. This leads Cahill to conclude:

But I am not convinced that an adequate story about the cultural significance of Wittgenstein's philosophy can be found directly or conclusively in the *Investigations* or in any other writings. I am much more inclined to think that this understanding has to be teased out and that what one purports to discover in any given text is best supported by using material from other sources. This is the method I use here. (*Ibid.*, 174, Endnote 21).

This passage occurs in the context of a comparison between 'Cavell's idea of the text of the *Philosophical Investigations* presenting us directly with a philosophy of culture', and an opposing idea that Cahill finds in Bouveresse, who 'makes a sharp distinction between Wittgenstein the cultural thinker and Wittgenstein the philosopher who produces clean, objective results' (*Ibid.*). Because he finds no explicit remarks pertaining to the culture of his time in the *Investigations*, Bouveresse as Cahill sees him proceeds as if Wittgenstein's outlook on his times is absent from the book, finding in it no connection between its philosophical content and his remarks on culture. In the same way, discussing Friedlander's book on the *Tractatus*, Cahill whilst not entirely rejecting the claim made in that book to the effect that, in his writings, early and late, Wittgenstein does not engage with the idea that his philosophical work occurs in a historical and cultural context, argues that 'more can and should be made of the presence of the historical and cultural context in and around Wittgenstein's writings' than Friedlander seems to assume (*Ibid.*, 173). Cahill in effect wishes

to show that what is said in one context can 'throw light' on what is said in another.

This for Cahill is importantly connected to the motto, taken from Nestroy, of the *Investigations* itself as translated by David Stern: 'Anyway, the thing about progress is that it always seems greater than it really is'. This motto, which remains, according to Cahill, echoing Stern, to be translated for all German-English editions of the book and is absent from English only translations (*Ibid.*, 107) - though it is now included in the latest Anscombe, Hacker, Schulte 4th edition from Blackwell (2009) - points in two directions, firstly and uncontroversially to the progression of Wittgenstein's own thinking, and secondly to a criticism of a wider concept of *progress* as it relates to Wittgenstein's ideas about the West. The implication is that editions of the work which have avoided including the motto have allowed its evident cultural significance to be missed or ignored. Cahill makes play in an endnote (*Ibid.*, 208, Endnote 3) with the idea that some readers may object to an apparent incompatibility between 'immanent' and 'contextualist' readings in making this claim, but in this context at least, this may seem unnecessarily pedantic.

In fact, the cultural significance of Wittgenstein's concern with language was accepted as early as 1966 by Maurice Drury who, remarking on the increasing number of commentaries and introductions to Wittgenstein's philosophy at that time - what would he have said about today? - echoes this idea by suggesting that 'it would be a tragedy if well-meaning commentators should make it appear that his writings were now easily assimilable into the very intellectual milieu they were largely a warning against' (Drury, as quoted *Ibid.*, 1). G.H. von Wright in his well-known paper, 'Wittgenstein in Relation to his Times' (1977), remarks on Wittgenstein's alienation from the period in which he lived, referring to his feeling that those who professed to be his followers were not actually involved in the same spiritual endeavour as was he (von Wright, as quoted, *Ibid.*, 4).

This 'spiritual endeavour' in which Wittgenstein is presented as being engaged, is said to be reflected in his opposition to 'the hold of the disengaged view on our thought and culture, which has a lot to do, of course, with the hegemony of institutions and practices that require and entrench a disengaged stance: science, technology, rationalized forms of production, bureaucratic administration,

a civilization committed to growth, and the like'. The quote is from Charles Taylor (*Ibid.*, 8), whom Cahill regards as a thinker who has 'grappled with the network of overarching themes concerning philosophy, religion, culture, politics, and modernity central to the conception of and motivation for this book' (*Ibid.*, 10). His initial mention of Taylor, in fact, is closely connected with a useful comparison which Cahill wishes to make between Heidegger's explicit cultural critique in much of his later work, and with how this relates to what he has to say about 'the later Wittgenstein' (*Ibid.*, 9). He also mentions a connection he finds between the early Heidegger and 'the early Wittgenstein', although it ought to be stressed that in making these comparisons at all, the sole aim is to throw light on our understanding of Wittgenstein as a 'philosopher of culture' whose philosophical work implicitly if not explicitly provides a critique of Western Civilisation.

It is largely because of their apparent failure to recognise this critique for what it is, that Cahill criticises the work of a number of commentators. Ray Monk, for example, is said to focus in his biography on Wittgenstein's 'internal moral struggles', making his approach primarily psychological, whilst ignoring 'the conceptual interplay between Wittgenstein's philosophy and his views on cultural matters' (*Ibid.*, 5). Stephen Hilmy, whilst making a connection between Wittgenstein's later work and 'cultural factors', fails because he not only reinforces the 'standard interpretation' which presents a sharp distinction between the early and later philosophy, but also ascribes to Wittgenstein 'a much more systematic, constructive view of philosophy than is warranted' (*Ibid.*) Edward Kanterian's account in his 2007 biography of Wittgenstein in a cultural context, is dismissed because his attempt is 'vitiating' by the 'traditional ascription to Wittgenstein of theoretical ambitions' (*Ibid.*)

This leads Cahill to reflect that little has been written on the cultural concerns that underlie and exert pressure on the 'thoroughgoing nontheoretical ambitions of his work'. Whilst there are a great many volumes about the content of Wittgenstein's philosophy, early and late, and a smaller number concerned with his moral, spiritual and cultural concerns, Cahill emphasises the

lack of any direct concern in the literature with 'the spiritually charged cultural critique running through all his philosophy'. As one possible explanation for this failure, Cahill cites the analytic tradition from the perspective of which Wittgenstein in the English-speaking world has primarily been viewed, a tradition that does not even see 'cultural' questions as philosophical at all; and this leads to a dismissal of certain writers outwith the tradition who may have something useful to say.

Whilst Cahill claims that he does not wish to contribute to what he refers to as the unintentional 'reification' of the categories 'early' and 'late' in referring to Wittgenstein's philosophy, he does distinguish between the period up to and including the *Tractatus*, and that from the *Brown Book*, including also perhaps the *Blue Book*, in making clear his use of the distinction. The material from the so-called 'Middle' period that he finds useful to his approach includes the famous 'Lecture on Ethics' and 'Remarks on Frazer's *Golden Bough*', together with well-known quotations from *Culture and Value* and remarks from the *Nachlass*.

Yet by neglecting the 'Big Typescript' and what is derived from it, the *Philosophical Remarks* and the *Philosophical Grammar*, Cahill is leaving himself open to the charge that he is neglecting works which, whilst admittedly not always relevant to his purpose, are works in which many commentators would see a distinctly *theoretical*, albeit transitional development taking place in Wittgenstein's ideas. In the *Philosophical Remarks* 88-89, for example, with its now quite familiar comments on LW's toothache, which in the first person is expressed as 'there is toothache', and in the third person as 'A is behaving as LW does when there is toothache', we find a clear statement of a first person 'private' understanding of sensation terms which Wittgenstein later came to reject. Whilst Cahill could very well argue that what is presented here as a *theoretical* stage in the development of Wittgenstein's ideas, can nevertheless be accommodated within his broader 'cultural' reading of Wittgenstein's philosophy in general (Cf. also the famous Preface to *Philosophical Remarks*), one cannot neglect the fact that the actual development of Wittgenstein's ideas from 1929 into the early 1930's, leading up to the often different treatment he provides later on in the *Investigations*, has been regularly described by many commentators in overtly *theoretical* terms.

Even if one is prone to accept that the term 'theory' can be used about these works to describe the development of Wittgenstein's ideas in some specific field, irrespective of the standpoint adopted on the general significance of this term for his work as a whole, Cahill nevertheless feels that he is putting his book on a rather controversial foundation by accepting a 'resolute' approach to the *Tractatus* and a 'therapeutic' or 'quietist' approach to the *Investigations* (*Ibid.*, 6). This is closely connected to a 'fairly inchoate notion' that the assimilation of Wittgenstein's philosophy into our current intellectual milieu must be problematic, one that Cahill claims his earliest encounter with Wittgenstein produced in him (*Ibid.*, 2). This led to his acceptance of three main ideas that inform his book, the first of which is that Wittgenstein saw it as his aim 'to reawaken a sense of wonder for what he felt was the deeply mysterious place of human life in the world' (*Ibid.*).

He elaborates upon this thought later on in quoting from the 'Lecture on Ethics', where it is stated that the notion of 'absolute or ethical value' is intimately connected in Wittgenstein's mind to two ideas, the first of which is his '*wonder at the existence of the world*', and the second of which is 'the experience of feeling *absolutely safe*' (*Ibid.*, 28). We cannot, according to Cahill, come to understand Wittgenstein's philosophical work without grasping the importance of these ideas. They lead us to conclude, as Cahill goes on to argue, that Wittgenstein's understanding of the 'ethical' involves his concern for the fate of wonder as described, 'modulated by a critique of metaphysics-cum-critique of culture' (*Ibid.*, 3). This is mentioned in relation to the famous letter to von Ficker, about which one is bound to ask what Wittgenstein must have been thinking of, by telling a publisher intent on having a saleable commodity, that the important part of the book is the part that is *not* written. What can 'delimiting from within' possibly have meant to von Ficker ?

The second idea is that the task of philosophy, presumably in the most *general* terms, can only be carried out as a form of cultural criticism, *because* Wittgenstein's critical relation to Western metaphysics can only be understood in terms of his critical relation to Western modernity. This again is clearly connected to the 'disengaged view on our thought and culture' which Taylor

intimately associates with this modernity. The issue will arise again later in the book in Chapter 6 on 'The Fate of Metaphysics', where Cahill discusses what he refers to as the 'corrosive effect' of certain mythological conceptions of rationality that tend to hold captive individuals and societies that are 'beholden to them' (*Ibid.*, 151). This suggests that these conceptions are directly connected to modernity as such, so that they need not be thought to be 'fundamentally rooted in our humanity', an idea he associates with John McDowell and Stanley Cavell. Wittgenstein was always prone to ask, in any event, whether philosophical questions as they arise for us are rooted in our particular cultural situation and in our language in *that* context; or do they have a more fundamental origin in our basic humanity? Here one is reminded of an idea from Anthony Kenny, that how the kinds of 'problems of the self', originating with Descartes and surely not unconnected to the 'New Science', which played an important role in Western philosophical thinking from the 17th Century onwards, simply did not arise for Aristotle and his followers, who regarded the human individual as a person amongst other persons in a social world.

The third idea that Cahill associates with Wittgenstein on culture is that from the *Tractatus* onwards, 'Wittgenstein believed that only a way of practicing philosophy that both avoided and undermined traditional philosophy's reliance on theory was suited to accomplishing this task' (*Ibid.*, 2). This is badly put, largely because Wittgenstein cannot possibly have so *deliberately* intended to adopt the methodological strategies we discover in his work in pursuit of the particular *predetermined* cultural purpose that Cahill attributes to him. It would be better to say that this purpose can be *shown* to emerge, if indeed it can be shown to emerge at all, from a study of how his cultural concerns can throw light, as Cahill believes, on his philosophy; and *vice versa*. Nevertheless, this does allow Cahill to adopt a methodological strategy of his own: accepting that the *Tractatus* - although this remains to be proved - does embody a critique of metaphysics-*cum*-culture in one sense, and the *Philosophical Investigations* in quite another, a critique recognisably continuous with the first, one may then be able to go on to reveal how the rejection of a certain 'dogmatism' inherent in the 'early' work and connected to certain 'metaphysical' presuppositions, is integral to the development of the 'later'

philosophy with its evident 'criticisms' of the *Tractatus*. As Cahill puts it later in the book:

The *Tractatus* hinders us from having precisely the relationship to language that it seeks to secure for us. If the ethical aim of the book consists in trying to lead the reader to a kind of self-understanding gained through a proper relationship to language, then this is only attainable if its method is true to the phenomenon of language. And this means that it must connect up with the many different ways that language functions in our lives (*Ibid.*, 98).

But this of course is precisely what the *Tractatus* fails to achieve with its 'craving for generality' and 'contemptuous attitude towards the particular case' (*Ibid.*, 97); and it fails to do so because it attempts to provide a 'synoptic view of what a sentence is', a view that is itself stated by Cahill to be an illusion. On a 'resolute' reading, the work's attempt to set our intellects at peace will never be satisfied, so that the author's 'ethical' intention in writing the book will remain unfulfilled because, as Cahill presents it, it is too 'intellectualist'.

This is but one example of how, on a 'resolute' reading, the content of the *Tractatus* can be shown to be 'compatible' with a 'standard' metaphysical reading. The only difference - and it is intended to be one of crucial importance - is that whilst on the latter interpretation Wittgenstein 'really' did adhere to the metaphysical standpoints the book has traditionally been taken to espouse - 'ineffable' truths which his reader can 'grasp' for himself - on a 'resolute' or 'New' reading, Wittgenstein actually 'intends' to produce in his reader an *illusion* of sense which the reader can gradually come to outgrow in the process of realising that Wittgenstein is 'really' talking 'nonsense'. As Cahill presents his case following, principally, Diamond and Kremer, the sentences of the *Tractatus* are deliberately chosen by Wittgenstein *via* a form of imaginative activity: by allowing his 'own imagination to wander and feel the attraction of words that he imagines others may take for the expression of profound philosophical truths', Wittgenstein seduces the reader into the belief that he has become acquainted with insights of metaphysical

significance. But this act is performed in order that he can become aware that he has been duped by an illusion of sense, one to be 'overcome' in the process of 'seeing the world aright' (*Ibid.*, 34).

This explanation occurs in Chapter 2, 'Interpreting the *Tractatus*', the aim of which is to help readers perhaps unfamiliar with current debate on the diverse ways of interpreting this book; albeit that Cahill has no real intention of participating in these disputes (*Ibid.*, 6). The chapter is fairly comprehensive, and covers Ayer on logical positivism, Anscombe, Hacker, and the idea of 'illuminating' or 'substantial' nonsense, and its rejection by Diamond, Conant, and Kremer. It points towards the 'formidable exegetical challenge' collectively provided by the letter to von Ficker, and by what is said in the Preface and in the conclusion to the *Tractatus*, often referred to as the 'frame' bounding what 'New' readers regard as the *nonsensical - as - gibberish* content of the work itself.

What Cahill does not point towards, however, is any suggestion that, just as we cannot see Wittgenstein *deliberately* adopting certain methodological strategies in the course of fulfilling a *predetermined* cultural purpose, we equally cannot possibly see how he could have *deliberately* and *intentionally* presented the reader with what he *already* knew to convey nothing more than an *illusion* of sense, one which his reader, like himself, could eventually learn to 'overcome'. This interpretation can only be derived from an understanding of what the 'frame' of the book can be *used* to convey to us about the content of the book itself. It makes little or no sense to regard it as an account of its *author's* real intentions. This is not simply a matter of the historical record, although this record can, and has been used effectively by Hacker and others to throw doubt on a 'resolute' reading. It is rather that, as an author who developed his ideas *in* the *Tractatus*, it makes little sense for readers who 'understand' its content within the 'frame', to think of Wittgenstein, in the *act* of writing his book, to be promoting a sophisticated 'resolute' account of his own deliberations which 'undermines' itself from within. This in isolation from the 'frame', frankly seems impossible to accept.

What this means, in effect, is that if we wish to uncover this kind of reading, we are duty bound to leave the author's intentions completely out of account in the course of revealing that the 'frame' of the book as presented to us is 'consistent' with a reading of precisely this kind.

Later on in his book, Cahill indirectly provides the evidence for this way of looking at things when he refers to David Stern's account, following Glock, of a so-called 'immanent' reading of a text, a reading which leaves the author's intentions entirely out of account, and which is constrained entirely by 'what a reader can understand by looking at the text itself' (*Ibid.*, 109). In this case, the reading is one which results from looking *externally* at the 'frame' in relation to the content of the book, allowing an interpreter to regard the content as pure nonsense, *i.e.*, *nonsense - as - gibberish*.

Later on in this Chapter 4, concerning 'The Concept of Progress in Wittgenstein's Thought', Cahill provides a further example of the ambivalent nature of his enterprise in the course of discussing the topic of rule-following. The role of this concept in Wittgenstein's overtly philosophical thinking can also point towards its cultural significance. Yet he is constrained to say:

There is nothing wrong per se with understanding Wittgenstein's rule-following remarks specifically, and his later writings more generally, as having as their primary target the dissolution of philosophical puzzles concerning meaning and intentionality (*Ibid.*,121).

But to take such an evidently narrow view of Wittgenstein's work, as Cahill sees it, is to neglect how 'Wittgenstein's attempt to bring out the incoherence of the disengaged picture is of a piece with an attempt to bring out the way our rule-following practices are, as Diamond puts it, "woven into the texture of life"' (*Ibid.*):

We are supposed to see our rule-following practices as making sense within specific contexts of a form of life. But to talk of 'practice', 'custom', and 'form of life' in this way can immediately invoke other words such as 'history' and 'culture'. To become aware of ourselves as embodying rule-following practices is ipso facto to become aware of ourselves as finite creatures who are embedded in a particular historical and cultural setting (*Ibid.*)

Well, yes of course, one is inclined to remark, a reaction which Cahill captures in his statement that in saying this he is really only describing 'the acknowledgement of a truism'. Whether the self-understanding achieved by this acknowledgement 'can take on the feel of an earth shattering insight' is then left for the reader to judge. What Cahill once again wishes to argue is not only, following Charles Taylor, that the disengaged view we have of ourselves in the West is one of the 'central organizing myths of modernity', but also that it is endemic to Western philosophy. Wittgenstein, in the course of successfully dissipating philosophical confusion, is directly confronting this disengaged view we have of ourselves, a point which is particularly relevant to the passages on rule-following, where he is drawing attention to 'the role in our lives' of our rule-following practices.

Whilst accepting that this is not a field in which Cahill is offering theses which can be decisively proved, many readers may be forgiven for thinking that this still leaves the cultural relevance of the philosophy hanging in the air, if only for the reason that the evidence provided is largely circumstantial. On the other hand, Cahill would surely argue that his idea about the cultural comments 'throwing light' on the philosophy, and *vice versa*, is not and cannot be intended to provide any definitive 'scientific' claim of the kind associated with the disengaged view he is anxious to reject. The point is rather that if we are prepared to study the cultural comments and the philosophy in 'the right way', we will come to see that these two aspects of his thinking do allow us to participate imaginatively in his oeuvre in a way which allows his views on modernity to illuminate our grasp of the role that the philosophy plays in Wittgenstein's life.

This is closely connected by Cahill to conclusions he arrives at in the following Chapter 5, 'The Truly Apocalyptic View', in which Wittgenstein's appropriation of certain ideas concerning 'descriptive morphology', which have their origin in Goethe, find expression by Spengler in *The Decline of The West*. It would be quite wrong, on this assessment - whether Spengler was aware of it or not - to think of Spengler's work as presenting in any sense a verifiable hypothesis about the direction in which Western Civilisation is actually heading. What he instead provides is what has come to be referred to as a 'prototype' or 'perspicuous representation' of the phenomena which

allows us to 'see connections', a methodological point expressed by Wittgenstein in what has now become the often referred to passage *Investigations* § 122.

This is used by Cahill, in what has also become a rather familiar way, to describe James Frazer's highly misleading practice of understanding the magical rituals of the natives as what Cahill refers to as 'protoscientific theories'. Frazer fails to see that both his *understanding* of his world and that of the subjects of his research are situated 'within their respective historical horizons'. This leads him parochially to assume that the natives *must* be attempting to 'explain' the world around them in terms of a naive hypothesis, say, about the activities of their gods, when in fact, on Wittgenstein's assessment, they are expressing a feeling of 'wonder' or reverence which is integral to the intimate relationship they enjoy with the natural world in which they live. Yet Cahill invites us to understand that this is a relationship which Frazer, from his more disengaged scientific perspective, may have irretrievably lost as a consequence of his shared participation with us in the 'modernity' that is the subject of Wittgenstein's critique (*Ibid.*, 129).

There are, however, two sides to every coin, and it is worth mentioning that whilst Frazer is undoubtedly in error here, the rituals and practices in which his natives indulge do include human sacrifice. Perhaps his tribesmen also indulge in head-hunting and cannibalism. Consequently, whilst it is true that from a strictly philosophical perspective the criticisms of Frazer are cogent, we can discern a romantic vision lurking in the background to Wittgenstein's thinking, one which reveals how the natives in their unsullied state manage to avoid becoming the victims of the prejudices that underlie Frazer's 'modern' scientific approach. But one only needs to compare the role of witchcraft in more recent history in order to see Frazer combatting naive superstition with the aid of scientific evidence. The last witch was hanged in England in Exeter in 1684, the Massachusetts Salem Witch Trials took place in 1692, and the last witch in Scotland was officially burned alive as late as 1727 in Dornoch, Sutherland, on the eve of the full flowering of the Edinburgh Enlightenment. These are not examples for which *Wittgenstein* would have been even remotely inclined to suggest a romantic form of 'justification': he would have taken the role of witchcraft in Europe during this period, to result from a deplorable prejudice and superstition of the worst kind.

We are, therefore, almost bound to compare Wittgenstein's treatment of Frazer with the kind of aestheticism he espoused when telling Drury that he hoped it had actually been the case that Ivan the Terrible had blinded the architect of St. Basil's Cathedral in order that he could not design anything more beautiful (1), a comment from which Drury recoiled in horror. The point is not, evidently, that Wittgenstein had a wish to see architects blinded, or that he desired the death of millions in the course of appreciating the possible use of the atomic bomb to eradicate our 'soapy water science' (2); or that in reacting to the suffering of mankind he might, unlike Russell, prefer to express not unbearable pity but total indifference. It is rather that because he was not a liberal humanist with a scientific bent, he found a quite specific way of expressing his disdain for what he regarded as the shallow liberalism and humanitarianism of Russell and of his followers, who shared a certain way of thinking which is not uncommon amongst those with empiricist, scientific leanings. It almost goes without saying that this kind of thinking is usually entirely lacking in any awareness of Cahill's 'wonder' about the place of human beings in the world, or about their very existence as such.

These considerations do obviously bear on the question of Wittgenstein's 'conservatism', an issue which Cahill takes up towards the end of the Chapter. A large part of the answer to this charge is provided in his claim that it is the *spirit* in which he writes that distinguishes him from the typical Western scientist, just as it is the *spirit* of the American and European civilisation of his time towards which he is unsympathetic and which he finds totally alien. Cahill talks of Wittgenstein's opposition to a *metaphysical* notion of progress, as one which is severed from the ordinary role of this notion in our lives, a point he makes in the attempt to connect this with what he has had to say about his treatment of rule-following. But on this point it might be sufficient to repeat what Cahill has elsewhere observed (*Ibid.*, 98), that Wittgenstein was opposed to 'what he perceived to be the undue influence of causal scientific modes of thought on modern culture in general and philosophy in particular'. That metaphysical questions are conceptual even although they have the appearance of factual questions is certainly correct, *e.g.*, 'do other people *really* have thoughts and feelings as have I?' (*Cf. Ibid.*, 133), but it is not at all clear how this relates to the notion of progress, even if we take this, as Cahill suggests, to be a notion 'which shapes the way we tend to think and talk about things'.

This Chapter also contains an interesting section in which Cahill reiterates a point he had earlier made in his Chapter 2 on 'The Ethical Purpose of the *Tractatus*', viz., that, as he expresses it, 'the *Tractatus* does not fail in its attempt to lead its reader to a realization about the meaning and value in his life, or in trying to show him how to live, since these were never part of its "ethical aim" in the first place' (*Ibid.*, 86). The subject is Wittgenstein's relationship to religion, which Cahill interprets in terms of the potential it had for him to heal his relationship to the world, a perspective on religious 'belief' which sees it in terms of inner change. This tendency to distance religion from an acceptance of 'truths' about God and the world, and to see it more in terms of a passionate commitment to what is translated in the relevant passage as a 'system of co-ordinates', sometimes as a 'frame of reference' (*Ibid.*, 146), operates with the picture of a 'lost or wretched soul' crying for redemption, a picture which Wittgenstein is evidently applying to himself. The tragedy for Wittgenstein, as Cahill sees him, is that he passionately sought redemption from 'sin' whilst being unable in practice to enter into any of the existing organised 'ways of life', like Christianity, which at least had the potential to fulfill his need (*Ibid.*, 148). The more general philosophical point that Cahill wishes to make about the *Tractatus*, is that in this book Wittgenstein, as in the *Investigations*, is concerned with problems which are more narrowly regarded as philosophical, and not with issues pertaining to life or value in a wider sense, given that this is not part of the book's 'ethical' aim:

...I criticized one part of Conant's and Kremer's interpretations of the *Tractatus* when I argued for a serious disanalogy between the writings of St. Paul, St. Augustine, and Kierkegaard, on the one hand, and the *Tractatus*, on the other. My argument was that the relevant difference is that, unlike the works of these three other writers, the *Tractatus* makes no attempt to point to something outside the self, a paradigm figure like Jesus, for example, that might confer the kind of justification the self requires but cannot provide for itself out of its own resources (*Ibid.*, 147).

This criticism is highly relevant to another topic which takes up a major part of the earlier chapter on 'The Ethical Purpose of the *Tractatus*'. Here Cahill has a fairly long discussion concerning Wittgenstein's relation to Heidegger, and argues for the conclusion that:

.....it deepens our understanding of the ethical point of the *Tractatus* if we bring to light the striking conceptual and structural similarities its philosophical perspective on human life and language shares with a significant part of the early Heidegger's account of authenticity. If I am correct there, then what is surely strangest about Wittgenstein's encounter with Heidegger in 1929 is that he responds to Heidegger's words from a philosophical perspective that in crucial respects is structurally similar to much of Heidegger's own description of authenticity in *Being and Time* without having any detailed knowledge of *Being and Time* itself (*Ibid.*, 74).

Whilst Cahill does believe that the philosophy of the *Tractatus* prepares the ground for what he describes as a form of authenticity (*Ibid.*, 204, Endnote 163), the difference he detects between this concept as it applies to Wittgenstein and not to Heidegger, rests primarily in a very restricted use of the notion in the *Tractatus*, one which 'seems to concern only our relation to language' (*Ibid.*, 199, Endnote 130). However, in what is the longest and most complex chapter in the book, with its 165 endnotes spanning 23 pages of close type, the discussion centres around questions with which rather traditional readers within the analytic tradition who see the *Tractatus* primarily as a work of logic in the tradition of Russell and Frege, or as a work of metaphysics with an associated atomistic ontology and picture theory of meaning, will not find it particularly easy to engage.

This is much less true of the final Chapter already referred to on 'The Fate of Metaphysics', although here as elsewhere in the book one is left with the inevitable feeling that discussions which concentrate on the 'cultural' and 'therapeutic' aspects of Wittgenstein's thinking, can become too far removed from the genuine philosophical difficulties he encounters when he engages with specific

problems in his major works. In the final analysis, it is his method of engaging with these problems, and not more generally whether his work has 'cultural' significance, or whether it can in some sense be claimed to be 'therapeutic', in which his true significance as a philosopher really lies. Certainly, this may be said to be only a matter of emphasis, as Cahill has confirmed with his recognition of Wittgenstein as a philosopher who can be seen to be involved in 'the dissolution of philosophical puzzles', almost as if this is a rather unimportant pursuit when compared to his interest in, and reflections upon the culture of his time. There can be no doubt that whilst many of these reflections are profound, some of them do illustrate little more than personal prejudices, *e.g.*, his liking for Mozart and Beethoven, and his reference to beginning to hear 'the sound of machinery' when listening to the music of Brahms (3). Cahill ends this final Chapter by reflecting, as against what he understands to be the position occupied by McDowell and Cavell, though very much in accord with his three main ideas, that 'there seems little doubt that a hope for a fundamental change in our current way of life informed both his philosophical work and his spiritual life' (*Ibid.*, 169)

This brings to a close what is without question an extraordinarily wide-ranging book which delves into just about every relevant aspect of Wittgenstein's thinking as it relates to the 'culture' of the period through which he lived. The 15 page Introduction provides an excellent overview of the book as a whole, and helpfully points the reader in the direction that the book will go on to follow. Five of the remaining six chapters find their origins in earlier papers, with Chapter 2 having three sources, and Chapters 3 - 6 inclusive having one source each. Only Chapter One with its discussion of how to interpret the *Tractatus*, would appear to have been written entirely anew with the intention of consolidating the book's 'resolute' and 'therapeutic' approaches to Wittgenstein's work. Despite their diverse origins, the chapters do fit together fairly well, although there is an inevitable overlap with some amount of repetition. There are times when one is left with the feeling that the text could have been more concise, and this is also true of the book's most distinguishing feature, the 60 pages of Endnotes in close type which make up 25% of its content, and which Cahill mentions by way of apologising for them at the very beginning of his Preface, whilst emphasising

the need to qualify, explain, and elaborate upon the main text. This book exhibits surely the most ambitious attempt to date to weld the philosophy and the cultural comments together into a seamless whole (4). It is certainly not for want of trying that in the attempt to unite these disparate elements, the tapestry that Cahill tries extremely hard to weave, has the tendency all too often to come apart at the seams.

## ENDNOTES

- 1) M. O' C Drury, 'Conversations with Wittgenstein' in *Ludwig Wittgenstein Personal Recollections*, ed. Rush Rhees (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981), 178.
- 2) L. Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, trans. Peter Winch (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980) 48e - 49e.
- (3) M. O' C Drury, *Op.cit.*, 127.
- (4) With one of its main conclusions that Wittgenstein derived his concept of *family resemblance* from Spengler's *Decline*, while criticising Spengler for failing to grasp that he was actually providing not an account of 'historical necessity' but a 'perspicuous representation' which supplies us with a useful comparison that throws light on the phenomena under investigation, W. J. DeAngelis also provides an account of Wittgenstein's philosophy in relation to his cultural comments, albeit that the treatment is entirely different from Cahill's and not so wide-ranging: W.J. DeAngelis: *Ludwig Wittgenstein - A Cultural Point of View: Philosophy in The Darkness of This Time* (Aldershott: Ashgate, 2007).

*As do most philosophers, Derek McDougall fondly remembers the publication of his very first paper. This was in MIND in 1972. He has, however, continued to worry whether Gilbert Ryle's comment that "the matter is stated well and almost interestingly" referred more to the quality of its treatment rather than to Ryle's aversion to the nature of its subject (religious belief). Other papers have appeared in organs including PHILOSOPHY AND PHENOMENOLOGICAL RESEARCH, PHILOSOPHIA, THE JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHICAL RESEARCH (2008) PHILOSOPHICAL INVESTIGATIONS (2010) and ANALYTIC PHILOSOPHY (forthcoming late 2012-13).*