CRITICAL NOTICE

Ludwig Wittgenstein on Race, Gender and Cultural Identity
Philosophy as a Personal Endeavour
Bela Szabados,The Edwin Mellen Press, New York, 2010, pp. 300, £ 31.50
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In his well-known paper, 'Wittgenstein in Relation to his Times' (1), originating in 1977, Georg Henrik von Wright was one of the earliest commentators to draw our attention to the remarks 'on philosophy, on architecture, literature and music, on history and contemporary society, and on religion' (*Ibid*., 203) that comprise the collection entitled *Vermische Bemerkungen* that was first published in that year. Its English translation as *Culture and Value* from Blackwell appeared in 1980. In that paper, von Wright identifies three aspects of Wittgenstein's thought that are closely connected to what has come to be referred to as his 'therapeutic' view of philosophy: *a)* that an individual's 'beliefs, judgements and thoughts are entrenched in unquestioningly accepted language-games and socially sanctioned forms of life'; *b)* 'that philosophical problems are disquietudes of the mind caused by some malfunctioning in the language-games and therewith in the way of life of the community'; and *c)* 'Wittgenstein's rejection of the scientific-technological civilization of industrialized societies which he regarded as the decay of a culture' (*Ibid*).

G.H. von Wright goes on to reflect that although all of these aspects are interconnected, it is not at all clear just how closely connected they actually are. For example, there seems on his view to be very little connection between the claim that an individual's judgements and thoughts are made against a set of unquestioned language-games and socially sanctioned forms of life, and Wittgenstein's rejection of the scientific-technological civilisation in which he lived. However, if Wittgenstein genuinely does see philosophical problems as 'disorders' in the language-games and forms of life of the community, disorders that von Wright refers to as 'malignant outgrowths' which obscure our thinking, then it might appear that there *must* be a cancer in the *Lebensweise*, or way of life itself (*Ibid*., 216).

It would seem to follow, therefore, that if Wittgenstein's rejection of the civilisation in which he lived, is considerably more than a purely psychological factor in his thinking, then the nature of his

philosophy *must* be integral to an understanding of his views on culture and civilisation. On the other hand, if what von Wright refers to as the 'Spenglerian' element in Wittgenstein's thought is 'accidental or contingent' to his abstract philosophical reflections, then one may be driven to conclude that his attitude to his times is irrelevant to an understanding of his philosophy (*Ibid.*, 215).

It would be true to say that if this poses a problem for our understanding of Wittgenstein - and it certainly raises a question which von Wright in his paper finds it difficult if not impossible to answer - then it is one which is still with us today. It haunts a number of recent works (2) that are devoted, in the broadest terms, to Wittgenstein's thinking about culture and civilisation. Yet, as von Wright points out, in at least the first two postwar decades, discussion of Wittgenstein's work was, and even today for many commentators remains, narrowly 'professional' in that it totally disregards these broader cultural perspectives (von Wright, *Ibid.*, 2, 'Introduction'). This is largely because, as he presents his argument, Wittgenstein's British and American pupils and followers expressed an 'Anglo-Saxon' outlook. This offers a portrayal of Wittgenstein that from the 'Continental' perspective adopted by Diego Marconi in a book of the period, is that of a 'cultural illiterate' *(Ibid.*, 3).

Nevertheless, that Wittgenstein's thinking in what can broadly be referred to as his major works, can be interpreted in ways which make no room for remarks on culture primarily because these remarks just do not appear in those contexts, remains to haunt Bela Szabados when making the claim that *his* book paints a portrait of Wittgenstein that is 'very different from conventional portraits' (*Ibid.*, 'Introduction', *vii*). Referring to 'one-sided' depictions of Wittgenstein as a 'philosopher's philosopher exclusively interested in abstruse questions of meaning, method and mind', who is silent (in his major works) about social, cultural and ethical questions, Szabados reminds us of the many 'remarks on race, gender, literature, music, religion and ethics' present in his private notebooks and diaries (*Ibid.*).

But this to many readers may appear to be little more than a begging of the important question that von Wright all these years before had actually raised. Merely to remind us that the dichotomy between the technical philosopher with his abstruse problems, and the philosopher of culture that

Wittgenstein undoubtably was, is not a dichotomy that Wittgenstein himself recognised, because he belonged to *both* camps (*Ibid.*, viii), so that 'the two inform each other', takes us no further in the resolution of the difficulty that perplexed von Wright. Yet a failure to resolve this dichotomy arguably underlies the increasing volume of literature that is concerned with Wittgenstein's cultural reflections. Indeed, von Wright indirectly indicates that the 'problem' may not be capable of being 'resolved' at all just because Wittgenstein's thinking points in a number of quite different directions, and ranges over a very wide spectrum of questions of quite different *kinds*.

Having already begun, in a short Introduction, with the thought that the philosophical tradition has drawn a sharp distinction between the purity and objectivity of the results of philosophy as a discipline, and the *merely* personal nature of the facts and reflections of autobiography, Szabados in his first chapter 'Autobiography and Philosophy Variations on a Theme of Wittgenstein' discusses this particular topic. Drawing inspiration from Nietzsche and Fichte, and quoting Nietzsche's remark that 'the history of western philosophy is the history of the unconscious autobiographies of western philosophers' (*Ibid.*, 2), he compares the views of these two thinkers to Wittgenstein's remark that work on philosophy is really a form of work on one's self, thus suggesting an affinity between the autobiographical as personal, and the philosophical. Furthermore, the traditional picture of the philosopher as 'a detached, disengaged, rational objective writer' is said to bear comparison to that of the traditional autobiographer who wishes to identify and describe objective truths about his life (*Ibid.*, 5). Both of these individuals, however, are really only pretending to an objectivity, a 'privileged authoritative perspective' that the circumstances in which they write deny to them.

This leads Szabados to consider the risks involved in this kind of writing, one of the most obvious of which is self-deception. The theme is discussed in more detail in the next two sections, '2. Working on Oneself', and in '3. Self Deception and Philosophy'. Echoing Ray Monk's intention in his biography of Wittgenstein 'to show the unity of his philosophical concerns with his emotional and spiritual life' (*Ibid.*, 8), Szabados reminds us of Wittgenstein's belief that 'one cannot write anything about one's self that is more truthful than you yourself are' (*Ibid.*), and that 'Nothing is so difficult as

not deceiving yourself' (*Ibid.*, 9). According to Szabados, 'Part of this difficulty is to identify, describe and rid ourselves of false self-images as philosophers. This involves dismantling the edifice of our pride, a certain form of false pride. And this is terribly hard work' (*Ibid.*).

Citing Wittgenstein's belief that often the difficulty in coming to understand a subject lies not with the intellect but with the will, and so in combatting what most people *want* to see, Szabados makes a connection with those 'self-deceptions, prejudices and preconceived notions' that are said to underlie some of the main problems of philosophy. The 'false grammatical pictures', those 'pictures that hold us captive' in the *Philosophical Investigations*, involve the philosopher 'in a struggle with language' which also involves a 'struggle with oneself'. This is linked by Szabados to Wittgenstein's anger at Malcolm over his naive presuppositions regarding 'the British national character'. This illustrates that the difficulties and prejudices that accompany our thinking about philosophical problems, are similar to those involved in thinking about ordinary life (*Ibid.*, 10).

Having arrived at the not unreasonable conclusion that Wittgenstein's intention is to 'explore and chart the danger zones for self-deception in the philosophical life' (*Ibid.*, 12), Szabados extends his discussion of this point later on when he draws our attention to that passage in which reference is made to language as an immense network of wrong-turnings which sets everyone the same traps, so that the philosopher (Wittgenstein) can come to identify in advance where thinkers will go wrong, and so erect signposts at all junctions where these wrong-turnings can be identified (*Ibid.*, 14). This suggests, as Szabados remarks, that these kinds of wrong-turnings occur within the network of a *shared* language, so that not all self-deceptions, prejudices or preconceived notions from which a philosopher may suffer need be philosophically relevant (*Ibid.*, 15). This would be in accord with a 'therapeutic' interpretation of Wittgenstein that sees philosophical problems not as 'person-specific' in a Freudian way, but as common to all those who reflect upon language. There is nothing in this initial chapter with which most readers familiar with Wittgenstein would probably wish to take issue; but there is nothing in it either that would persuade these who are unconvinced that his remarks on culture are intimately tied to his philosophy, that they have been provided with

sound reasons for changing their minds.

The second chapter on 'Wittgenstein and Autobiography' is engaged primarily with two themes already touched upon in the first, the notion of self-deception and, connected with it, a so-called 'traditional' concept of the autobiographer as a disengaged objective spectator of his own life who cannot help but provide a truthful account of it. That Wittgenstein would disagree with this concept in part because of the ever-present possibility of self-deception is hardly in doubt, although to what extent this concept could be said to be 'traditional' is yet another question. The following passage shows Szabados at work:

> I have been sketching a portrait of 'the traditional autobiographer'.
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> A salient feature of this fictitious yet recognisable figure is his idea
>
> of himself as a disengaged subject, as a distant spectator of his life
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> who is writing objectively about himself. The later Wittgenstein, as
>
> we have seen, is deeply suspicious of this idea........(*Ibid.*, 40).

By contrast, Augustine is said to write from the vantage point of conversion, so that he appears to share God's omniscience, just as Rousseau locks himself in the inner citadel of his feelings, and peers out through its openings, inviting us to peer in: 'Wittgenstein regards this as a form of self-deception for us moderns. We cannot elevate ourselves like this' (*Ibid*.) Again:

> The traditional idea that the writer is disengaged from life, that he
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> has a superior vantage point, that he is not a citizen of a community
>
> of ideas, is an illusion....The traditional picture of the writer as a
>
> spectator of life, more or less sub specie aeterni, is a chimera. It is
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> an act of idolatry, a divinization of writers and a privileging of the
>
> activity of writing. For traditional writing, in the beginning there
>
> was the word; for Wittgenstein, in the beginning there was the deed
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> (*Ibid.*, 43).

If this leaves the reader with the impression that certain remarks of Wittgenstein are

being taken out of context in order to prove a point about the 'traditional' autobiographer, this becomes even more evident in a passage towards the end of the chapter:

> If we see Rousseau's confessional autobiography as an extended candidate for the idea of a 'private language', then Wittgenstein's argument refutes not only the idea of the solipsistic self, but also puts an end to a certain sort of traditional autobiography. Here is an instructive variation on this Wittgensteinian theme: 'If there were people who always read the silent internal discourse of others by reading their autobiographies, would they still be inclined to use the picture of complete seclusion?' (*Ibid*., 55, quoting from *Philosophical Investigations*, Blackwell, 2001, 189).

Whilst Wittgenstein's point in the quoted passage is a reminder that in ordinary life we have little use for an idea of 'complete seclusion' that may occupy us when doing philosophy, it is difficult to believe that anyone who wrote an autobiography before the modern period could have had any use for it either. We would, equally, find it very hard indeed to believe that such an autobiographer would have been totally unaware of the possibility of self-deception. Certainly, *autobiography* is being viewed in this context from a philosophical perspective; but it remains an open question whether, historically, it ever really was at any time regarded by philosophers in the way that Szabados describes. Finally, to treat Rousseau's autobiography as an extended candidate for the role of a 'private language', is so far removed from the role that Wittgenstein allocates to this notion, that any idea that his thinking could put an end to a certain 'traditional' concept of autobiography by using it, is ruled strictly out of court.

Certainly, the chapter has some worthwhile discussions about Wittgenstein and Dostoevsky, and about Rorty on Wittgenstein, for example, but none of these will be informative except to readers who are not already well-versed in the literature. Consequently, that Wittgenstein can be shown to be demonstrating that a certain 'traditional' concept of the autobiographer is at fault, even if it *is* clearly inadequate, remains strictly unproven in Szabados' account.

The following chapter on 'Wittgenstein's Women Misogyny and its Philosophical Significance in Wittgenstein' provides a comprehensive account of the role that misogyny can be said to have played in Wittgenstein's thinking, insofar as it can properly be said to have played any role at all. The biographical facts are plain, and Szabados lists items like Pinsent's recording that Wittgenstein opposed women's suffrage because all the women he knew were idiots; that he was disgusted at the sight of female students flirting with their professors in Manchester, a form of behaviour which he regarded as proof that they were anything but dead-earnest in their studies (*Ibid.*, 61 *et seq.*). There is also the familar story about his reference to thankfully having got rid of the women after a lecture, so that 'we can then really do philosophy', a remark made to Elizabeth Anscombe, addressed affectionately as 'old man' and so in his estimation an honourary male. Fania Pascal observed that Wittgenstein disliked intellectual women and in company literally turned his back on them. He also advised Norman Malcolm that, whatever else he did, he was not to marry a lady philosopher. Furthermore, the idea of sexual arousal, homosexual and heterosexual, troubled Wittgenstein, just as he was perturbed by the frank and open discussion of sexual matters by some members of the Bloomsbury Group (quoting from Monk, *Ibid.*, 66); and he is reported always to have been rather uneasy about the idea of sex itself.

The obvious question which arises for Szabados is whether these purely biographical facts can be shown to be intimately connected with Wittgenstein's philosophy, or whether they can be understood to illustrate merely personal idiosyncrasies. The link is provided by Wittgenstein's admiration for Otto Weininger's *Sex and Character : An Investigation of Fundamental Principles*, and the general conclusion that Szabados wishes to draw is that Wittgenstein accepted Weininger's apparently misogynist outlook earlier in his career at the time of the *Tractatus*, but abandoned it later on at the time of the *Investigations*, and that 'this re-evaluation of Weininger was an ongoing affair proceeding in tandem with Wittgenstein's struggle with his own sexuality' (*Ibid.*, 64).

In support of this claim, Szabados reminds us that 'Wittgenstein's avoidance of sexual

contact with women and his linking of sexual abstinence with first rate work in logic and philosophy is in ready alignment with Weininger's views' (*Ibid*., 69). A purity of soul untainted by body - and this means especially a woman's body - as Wittgenstein sees it from this Weiningerian perspective, is necessary to create original work in logic. Consequently, Wittgenstein's 'almost physical reaction of disgust' at the contemplation of the sexual act is more than just a revulsion at the idea of sexual contact: it is a recognition that Woman's deepest desire, the very essence of her being, *viz*., her need for sexual fulfillment, is actually hidden from her so that she does not even recognise the hypocritical stance she inevitably adopts throughout her life, one that reveals 'an incapacity for truth and self-knowledge' that is quite incompatible with the duties and aims of a philosopher. This is taken to show that at the time of the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein's attitutes to sex are entirely consistent with a Weiningerian outlook:

> I have given textual basis for the claim that the young Wittgenstein's
> attitudes to women are not only consistent with Weininger's views but
> the latter provide a philosophical framework for their elaboration and
> justification. Interpreters who would still wish to regard his attitudes
> to women and sexuality as a mere psychological idiosyncrasy, as in some
> sense groundless, as having nothing to do with 'official' philosophy, are
> cutting us off from an important source, avowed by Wittgenstein himself,
> for reconstructing his personality and philosophy (*Ibid*., 70).

It will, however, be patently obvious to most readers that if taken literally this conclusion must seem entirely unjustified, because any genuine connection with Wittgenstein's 'official' *philosophy* at that period is clearly not established. Szabados nevertheless provides a 'chronological sketch' of the important changes that took place in Wittgenstein's outlook, from the period of Pinsent's diary in 1913 through the letters to Engelmann from 1917 to 1925 with their expressions of despair over 'sexual guilt and transgression', to his love for Marguerite Respinger who eventually 'announced that she no longer wishes to kiss him because her feelings were not of the appropriate kind' (*Ibid*., 71).

Szabados uses Marguerite's reaction here to illustrate that it is 'hardly an instantiation of Weininger's archetype of deceptive nymphomaniacal woman'. This signals a change in Wittgenstein's outlook, especially when he distances himself from Weininger by speaking of his 'enormous mistake' and the need to negate his entire book to arrive at an important truth. This ultimately leads to the outlook of the 'mature Wittgenstein' who 'left far behind Weininger's view that sex and spirituality are incompatible and appreciates a view of the sexual act that sees it as an object of religious reverence' (*Ibid*., 72). This claim is supported by Drury's report of his visit to the temples of Luxor in Egypt, where a bas-relief depicting male ejaculation, is favourably commented upon by Wittgenstein with the remark that it is only natural that the act by which the human race is perpetuated should be regarded with awe and reverence (*Ibid*.).

Whilst Szabados sees Wittgenstein gradually departing from Weininger's outlook on sexuality, this is clearly not incompatible with his also sharing certain ideas with Weininger at this later stage, albeit that 'Weininger's impact on the later philosophy is largely uncharted territory' (*Ibid*., 91). There is said to be a 'striking similarity in the expressions of their attitude to the "darkness" of their times', just as they share a similar approach to the 'barrenness' of modern psychology which Weininger regards as 'shallow' and Wittgenstein understands to involve conceptual confusions. But there are, too, significant points on which their outlooks differ at this later period, because Szabados sees Wittgenstein in the act of fragmenting 'Weininger's hierarchy of male supremacy over female inferiority' by recognising important differences between people as people, and by recognising qualities in a woman which he could admire, and yet not find in a man (*Ibid*., 89). Another important difference discerned by Szabados lies in Weininger's portrayal of the detached individual male as the 'microcosm', where a certain solitude, together with a solipsistic outlook is celebrated 'as the source of knowledge, understanding and spirituality' (*Ibid*.). This is entirely at odds with Wittgenstein's later emphasis on community as the 'source of language, knowledge, understanding and morality'.

It should, of course, be borne in mind throughout this discussion that the *Masculine*

and the *Feminine* are for Weininger purely *theoretical* categories with no evaluative import, although Szabados points out that this proposal is difficult to take seriously if *Woman* is identified as the *evil force*, as indiscriminate sexuality, given that this accedes to 'crude popular stereotypes' with a great deal of 'negative evaluation *a priori*' (*Ibid*., 88). In spite of this, Szabados recognises Weininger's insistence that a theoretical contempt for the idea of the *Feminine* is to be sharply contrasted with the proper practical behaviour to be adopted towards actual women, so that, according to Weininger, women must be accorded the same rights in the political arena as men, that 'Nobody has the right to belittle or oppress in any way even the most inferior woman. The fact is that the demand for equality before the law is totally justified' (Weininger, as quoted, *Ibid*., 79).

Overall, this is one of the more interesting, as well as being one of the longer chapters in the book, even if its various topics could have been more successfully integrated and its material organised in a less random way. It does not, however, demonstrate - unsurprisingly - either that Wittgenstein's attitude to women, or to his sexuality, is in any way directly related to the content of the *Tractatus* or to that of the *Investigations*; or that Weininger's work acted *in practice* as a theoretical foundation for the attitudes to women that he expressed earlier on. He may just have seen his own outlook reflected in certain of Weininger's major ideas. Szabados is also only too aware that the Anscombe episode from 1947 already referred to, is out of keeping with the supposed change in attitude to women arrived at by Wittgenstein by this time. Consequently if Szabados' analysis is correct, the stance that Wittgenstein adopts to Elizabeth Anscombe may after all have been little more than a joke, a pose purposefully adopted *ad hoc* as a way of paying homage to what was 'traditionally' regarded *pace* Weininger as an exclusively male virtue, *viz*., her philosophical acumen, without of course 'really' endorsing that attitude himself (*Ibid*., 72).

The following chapter, 'Wittgenstein's Judaica The Significance of Anti-Semitism for Wittgenstein's Philosophy', begins with the reflection that throughout his career Wittgenstein sees himself as a Jewish thinker, from his 1931 remark that even the greatest Jewish thinker is no more than talented, to his 1949 comment to Drury that his own thoughts are '100% Hebraic' (*Ibid*., 101).

According to Szabados, few commentators dare to tackle the subject of Wittgenstein's Jewishness, and those who do offer conflicting accounts which neglect any possible significance this topic may have for the transition from 'the early philosophy of the *Tractatus* to the mature philosophy of the *Investigations'* (*Ibid.*)

Szabados next takes Joachim Schulte to task for failing to come to terms with what Schulte evidently perceives to be certain 'deficiencies' identified in the Jewish character by Wittgenstein, without actually wishing to portray Wittgenstein as an anti-Semite (*Ibid.*, 102). More generally, at least some commentators are pictured by Szabados as interpreting the 1931 remarks on Jewishness in *Culture and Value* as having clearly anti-Semitic overtones. They then, unsurprisingly, find themselves rather embarrassed and perplexed that so great a thinker as Wittgenstein should have stooped so low as to express the kinds of racist thoughts usually mouthed only by fascist extremists. The issue comes to a head with Szabados' treatment of Ray Monk, who in his well-known biography of Wittgenstein, comments that had the relevant remarks not been made by Wittgenstein, 'many of his pronouncements on the nature of Jews would be understood as nothing more than the rantings of a fascist anti-Semite', and 'as expressions of anti-Semitic paranoia in its most undiluted form' (Monk, as quoted, *Ibid.*, 103).

Szabados is probably correct to say that Monk finds the entire subject painful, even if the pain appears to be to some extent relieved by Monk's thought that Wittgenstein was really applying these supposedly anti-Semitic remarks only to himself, so that they are not intended to have a wider application to Jewish people in general. But as Szabados argues, that would rather imply that because certain negative characteristics are portrayed by Wittgenstein as Jewish in nature, his remarks in the final analysis really are anti-Semitic. After all, if Michael Dummett should be shocked to find anti-Semitic remarks in the private diaries of so great a logician as Frege (*Frege, Philosophy of Language,* Harvard 1973), why should we be surprised to discover that Wittgenstein expresses similar opinions ? These were, after all, little more than the currency of the period.

Perhaps it ought to have been clearer from the beginning that if we have any

understanding at all of what Wittgenstein is generally about, then the very idea that he could have straightforwardly adhered to beliefs of this kind could make very little sense to us. That is implied by the famous remark that the philosopher is not a citizen of any community of ideas, and that is what makes him a philosopher (*Zettel*, § 455). In fact, the very first remark in *Culture and Value* that makes any reference to Jewishness, the remark on Mendelssohn as the most untragic of composers, where tragedy is portrayed as an un-Jewish characteristic, is hardly anti-Semitic (1e). The next reference of any real substance, the comment about the Jew as a desert region, under whose thin layer of rock lies the molten lava of spirit and intellect (13e) is, on the contrary, complimentary if it is anything at all. We are then advised (16e) that in Western civilisation the Jew is always measured on scales which do not fit him, so that we constantly fail to do him justice, one time overestimating, and another time underestimating him. Following this is the remark that amongst Jews, 'genius' is found only in the holy man, and that even the greatest of Jewish thinkers, amongst whom he includes himself as a Jewish thinker, is no more than talented (18e). While the significance of this remark is not immediately clear, it *is* connected with the claim that the true power of the Jewish mind lies not in original creative thought, but in the ability to understand and reproduce even to a superior degree the original creative work of others (19e). We are advised that Rousseau's character has something Jewish about it (20e).

The real problems for some commentators, however, begin when we are told (20e) that within the history of the peoples of Europe, the history of the Jews is not treated so circumstantially as their actual intervention in European affairs would actually merit. This we can understand to imply that if we have a picture of the Jew at all, then it is likely to be a false or misleading picture because it is based on attributing to the Jews a role in Western society which their actual participation in that society simply fails to justify. But such a picture is precisely the picture of the Jew as as 'a sort of disease', a tumour which no one would wish to regard as a perfectly normal part of the body. For that reason we would not speak of a disease 'as if it had the same rights as healthy bodily processes'. Consequently, a nation could not retain an aesthetic feeling for 'its' body *whilst* making the defacing tumour welcome (20e).

Although Wittgenstein is here recalling a certain historical treatment of the Jew, what he is providing is hardly an endorsement of it. Indeed, the *picture* has arisen because a role has been attributed to the Jew as an unChristian element in Western society, a *tumour* that undermines this society only because we have been inclined, for reasons which are often said to include the historical treatment of Christ, to attribute to him a far greater role - a rather insidious role - than he has actually played. A reference is then made to the fact that power and possession are not the *same* thing (21e). If Jews are said not to have any sense of property (*Ibid*.), that cannot be unconnected with the fact that they lack a sense of having any genuine roots in Western society, so that for them money becomes a certain sort of power. What really annoys Monk, however, as quoted by Szabados, is the content of the passage (22e), where 'It has sometimes been said that the Jews' secretive and cunning nature is a result of their long persecution'. Is Wittgenstein actually implying in this passage that the Jews do have such a nature ? The answer, of course, is not *necessarily*, on the supposition that the passage is informing us that there are people called Jews who have a cunning nature, a nature forged from historical persecution. As Wittgenstein goes on to suggest, it may be true that they continue to exist where they *are* persecuted only because, in fact, their ability to conceal themselves is of some help to them. He then goes on to say that this ability - expressive of a 'cunning nature' - is not something which he is commending *because* it enables them to survive in circumstances of persecution. This is consistent with his denial that the secretive or cunning nature which they are said to have is a *direct* consequence of their having been so persecuted.

This is very much in accord with Szabados' claim that Ray Monk's discussion of Wittgenstein's meditations on Jewishness is 'deeply flawed' (*Ibid*., 106). It remains open, of course, whether Wittgenstein's own remarks concerning the 'talented' nature of Jewish thinkers are valid, just as it is a matter of debate whether Wittgenstein in these passages really is concerning himself with describing and diagnosing the conceptual and political roots of the problem the Western democracies faced after World War II: how to restructure the nation state in order that intolerance and genocide cannot ever recur (*Ibid*., 109). Although this conclusion would not be entirely out of

13

keeping with Wittgenstein's reflections on Jewishness, the fact that Szabados proves his case against

Monk's misinterpretation of Wittgenstein's 1931 remarks from *Culture and Value*, is not in itself

sufficient evidence to support it. It is also hard to see how 'Monk celebrates Wittgenstein's

achievement by detaching it from Western thought' (*Ibid.*, 112). The implication is that Monk

celebrates the work of Wittgenstein, leaving aside the remarks on Jewishness, as something which

takes place in a vacuum, unrelated to his acknowledgement of authors which 'include Augustine,

Pascal, Kierkegaard, Tolstoy, William James, Freud and perhaps others' (*Ibid.*) This surely requires

clarification. A clearer picture of Szabados' intentions can be obtained from the following passage:

> Wittgenstein's remarks on Jewishness were written between 1929 to 1931,
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> overlapping with the crucial transition period between the early and the
>
> mature philosophy. The notebooks of the transition period reveal his
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> struggles to break loose from the grip of essentialist stereotypes about
>
> Jews and 'the other'. I see a link between this personal turn at the time
>
> of the emerging Nazi darkness and a new attitude for life in philosophy
>
> culminating in the relentless anti-essentialism of the *Philosophical Investigations*
>
> (*Ibid.,* 121).

Szabados concludes that the move from the *Tractatus* to the *Investigations* 'has as much to

do with the working out of the internal logic of Wittgenstein's philosophical thought as with the

working out of Wittgenstein's personal/social problems' (*Ibid*.) But if there is such a link, then it is

evidently a link of an extremely subtle and indirect kind: just because certain changes can be shown

to have taken place in tandem with each other, is not to show that they are either conceptually or

even causally connected. This points us once again in the direction of von Wright's initial question.

Szabados believes he can illustrate that the link between the personal and the philosophical in

Wittgenstein is reflected in a connection he can establish between the 'working out' of his attitudes

towards Jewishness, and the development from the 'essentialism' of the *Tractatus* to the *Philosophical*

Investigations with its free and open notion of *family resemblance*. At this point, Szabados re-introduces,

for what to many readers must seem the umpteenth time, the 1939 quarrel with Malcolm over 'British national character'. This is used once again to illustrate Wittgenstein's later 'deep aversion to essentialist pictures of "the other" ' (*Ibid.*, 129).

There follows in the next section a discussion of Ranjit Chatterjee's book on *Wittgenstein and Judaism: A Triumph of Concealment* (New York: Peter Lang, 2005), in which Szabados takes issue with a rather overblown conception of 'one' Wittgenstein who throughout his life, was a covert Jewish thinker who went to considerable lengths to conceal his attachment to Judaism. The chapter ends with a brief account of a Wittgenstein who, as a young man, was inclined to conceal or disavow his Jewish descent, even to the extent, albeit ambivalently, of using conventional terms of cultural criticism which involved a negative picture of Jewishness. This would be in keeping with his later 'confession' to Fania Pascal that he had been guilty of denying to others the extent of his Jewish ancestry. Szabados then quotes George Henrik von Wright as saying that Wittgenstein's biographical notes can be properly understood only against the background of his philosophy, and that they make a contribution to the understanding of that philosophy. He concludes with the thought that by assembling evidence from a number of diverse sources, he is helping to support von Wright's point of view (*Ibid.*, 136). What he does not refer to is von Wright's avowed claim that his attitude to this kind of writing about Wittgenstein as a 'cultural' thinker is ambivalent, commending it when done with proper knowledge and respect for establishing connections, but finding it 'silly', even 'disturbing' when it fails to meet these requirements (von Wright, *Ibid.,* Introduction, 3). This is entirely in accord with von Wright's ambivalence over the question whether Wittgenstein's attitude to his times is irrelevant to an understanding of his philosophy.

G.H. von Wright's problem raises its head again to an even greater degree in the next chapter, 'Wittgenstein Listens to Mahler: Philosophy and Music in the Breakdown of Tradition', which is aptly titled because Szabados intends to discuss 'How to compose music and how to do philosophy in the breakdown of tradition?' (*Ibid.*, 143). This is connected to the question that Szabados sees Wittgenstein asking in the five passages in the *Nachlass* where Mahler is specifically mentioned (*Ibid*., 145), *viz.*, what

is it about Mahler's music that makes it worthless ? Indeed, why was Wittgenstein so preoccupied with Mahler (1860 - 1911) and his music, even to the extent of constantly having Mahler's photograph in his possession, almost as if he were a member of the family ? (*Ibid.*, 144). Szabados provides an answer along the following lines:

> Since the symphonic form is exhausted, Wittgenstein seems to
> have thought that Mahler should not have used it for expressive
> purposes, and that doing so engulfed him in a sort of inauthenticity,
> namely, a betrayal of who he is. Mahler as a composer puts on a
> false identity: he is of this time, culture and circumstances, yet by
> using another epoch's expressive robes, he pretends to be someone
> else of another time and culture. Wittgenstein is scrupulous about
> resisting this form of self-deceptive hyprocrisy by disowning the
> characteristic vocabulary and genres of cultural epochs distinct
> from his own (*Ibid.*, 164).

Whilst this interpretation is to some degree borne out by the texts, it raises no small number of subsidiary questions, not the least of which is why Wittgenstein is so selective as to choose Mahler as distinct from other German composers who were born, roughly, into the same epoch. Alban Berg, for example (1885 - 1935), is sometimes said to have inherited an element of Mahler's Romanticism whilst combining it with Schoenberg's 12-tone technique. Richard Strauss (1864 - 1949) is often said to have developed his own advanced harmonies in his tone poems, and is sometime regarded, along with Mahler, as contributing to a late and final period of post-Wagnerian German Romanticism that flowered into the 20th century. Although the mention of Engelbert Humperdinck (1854 - 1921) in the present context may seem a trifle inappropriate, the fact remains that the opera *Hansel und Gretel*, for which he is famous, was regarded by Richard Strauss, who conducted its first performance, as a new and authentic German masterpiece which combined folk song with Wagnerian techniques. It can only be from what must seem a rather narrow perspective,

therefore, that Wittgenstein is criticising Mahler, and that perspective is one which sees him as a *symphonist* whose works 'indicate a paradigm shift in the form of the symphony' (*Ibid.*, 146):

> The resemblances and ancestry that hold together and help us identify the symphonies of Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven, Brahms and even Bruckner, as belonging to the family of symphonies from the classical period, have faded in Mahler....The great compositions of the tradition are organic, full of wild life, even as the composers struggle to tame it. Mahler is abstract and polite, too civilized; he draws a picture of the forces of nature, while the others enact the forces of nature...(*Ibid.*)

So Mahler's music does not express 'the wild animal tamed' that for Szabados' Wittgenstein is a prerequisite if we are to have 'a great work of art'. It should go without saying that this judgement for most readers must in the present context seem far too subjective to have any real value. Consequently, the role that it can play in helping us to understand Wittgenstein's *philosophy* can only be extremely limited. Viewed from within the context of the development of *music* towards the end of the 19th and into the 20th century, its Spenglerian overtones are difficult to reconcile with the future course of the symphony outwith the German Romantic tradition. This took place in the works of Sibelius and Vaughan Williams amongst many others. Indeed, even within that tradition there are symphonies, like those of Elgar, which within a distinctively 'English' context, could be said to be *failing* to use this form successfully only on the most insular of readings.

In his final summing up, Szabados surmises that Wittgenstein was really so '*down*' on Mahler that he noticed only his faults and not his virtues, *because* of what he refers to as a form of *status anxiety* : Wittgenstein was anxious to avoid the fate that awaited Mahler's music after his death, and so scoured Mahler's work for flaws that might help to explain 'Mahler's fifteen minutes of fame and subsequent descent into oblivion' (*Ibid.*, 169). So Wittgenstein projected his own anxieties concerning his creative moral standing onto Mahler, and this accounts for the otherwise difficult to explain prejudice against Mahler that Wittgenstein repeatedly expresses.

This seems an extraordinary explanation, one that is totally at odds with the fight that Wittgenstein had against any emergence of his own vanity. It even succeeds in attributing to him a form of self-deception that would be incompatible with Szabados' reading of Wittgenstein. In any event, it is not entirely true, as Szabados remarks, that after his death in 1911 Mahler's music 'virtually disappeared from the standard concert repertoire until Leonard Bernstein and other conductors retrieved and rehabilitated it more than half a century later' (*Ibid*.). The neglect of his music after 1911 was only relative, even allowing for the fact that it was inevitably banned in Germany during the Nazi era as 'degenerate'. It did, however, achieve performance in the U.S.A. and in Britain right through the period, albeit that critical reaction was mixed, although it was highly regarded by Aaron Copeland, and Benjamin Britten found it impressive. It even achieved notoriety, if somewhat ironically, in the mid 1930's in Austria itself, where Bruno Walter sought to give Mahler the status that Wagner had achieved in Germany. This, naturally, was all before the *Anschluss*. After the War, Stokowski, Barbirolli and Copeland saw that the music was performed during the 1950's, so that by Bernstein's time, the revival of his music was already well under way to a degree that Szabados neglects to mention. Yet the tendency to overemphasise the extent to which the music *was* neglected during this period, is what principally underlies his rather awkward claim that Wittgenstein suffered from *status anxiety*.

Chapter 6 entitled 'Was Wittgenstein a closet Moral Philosopher? Self-Deception and Ethical Orientation', is concerned with a subject 'fraught with controversy' (*Ibid*., 175), not least because Wittgenstein appears to say a host of different things about ethics, from his implied suggestion that everything he does has an ethical dimension, to the claim that because ethics is transcendental, nothing can be said about it: 'Again, ethics is both extraordinary - since absolute value is out of this world - and ordinary - since many things we say and do are dense with value' (*Ibid*.) Furthermore, according to Szabados, although Wittgenstein is *philosophically* mute about ethics, he is a 'fierce moral critic of himself and others'. Although Wittgenstein's early silence about ethics is usually understood to be a consequence 'of his strictures on propositional meaning', this

explanation can hardly apply to the later philosophy, yet he really is silent in this context as well. Szabados aims to clarify these apparent contradictions, and claims that since Wittgenstein did 'do' ethics in his mature works, it remains to explain what kind of ethics he did, and why so many of his ethical and spiritual remarks are relegated to private notebooks (*Ibid.*, 176).

This has by now become very familiar territory, and Szabados begins by considering the 'two Wittgensteins' solution, with a *Tractatus* 'other-worldly' about value, and an *Investigations* 'this-wordly' about value. From being something that cannot be talked about in the early philosophy, ethics in the later philosophy 'will consist in the clarification of language games associated with the moral forms of life' (*Ibid.*, 177). Generally speaking, Szabados wishes to see an important aspect of the 'ethical dimension' of Wittgenstein's later thinking in his 'many remarks on moral psychology and ethics in the *Investigations* and in *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology* about fear, courage, love, happiness, friendship, grief, mourning, honesty, vanity, self-deception and so on'. Once again, the topic of self-deception plays a pivotal role in Szabados' discussion, and he finds himself agreeing with Steven Darwall that 'whether and how a thinker exercises himself about self-deception is evidence of his basic orientation in moral philosophy' (*Ibid.*, 201). That orientation for Szabados involves Wittgenstein in the clarification of our ordinary moral concepts, with the 'aim of removing the tensions and confusions in the course of our ethical struggles' (*Ibid.*, 203). This requires the rejection of *Ethics* as a traditional subject of philosophical *theorising*.

Nevertheless, Wittgenstein remains a 'closet moral philosopher, because he hides some of his "higher" spiritual/ethical remarks' in private diaries. He does so purely because their public announcement in his major works would be counter-productive: his private struggles with himself would likely be dismissed in a secular age as the ravings of a lunatic, 'the works of a spiritually deeply disturbed person possibly suffering from a kind of "religious madness" ' (*Ibid.*, 207). He did not destroy his remarks, however, making sure that in code they would not be available to everyone, although they could be of help to some people who could appreciate them and find them useful for their own 'ethical/spiritual development' (*Ibid.*)

19

This is clearly unconvincing, and it would be much safer to say that Wittgenstein instinctively knew where to draw the line between remarks that did genuinely bear upon his own personal struggles, and remarks which could have a role to play in his philosophical *oeuvre*. Despite what is once again a fairly rambling discussion, Szabados does cover the field reasonably well in this chapter. He makes what has by now become the generally acknowledged claim that although the content of the *Lecture on Ethics* mirrors a conception of ethics derived from the *Tractatus*, it has a modesty of tone and an informality of expression which clearly serve to justify the claim that it reveals a novel form of approach to the questions it poses. The views of 'The New Wittgensteinians' are rejected on familiar grounds that bear on their incompatibility with the internal logic of the *Tractatus*, with the later comments in the Preface to the *Investigations* about the 'grave mistakes' in the earlier work, and with the evident fact that 'Many paragraphs of the *Investigations* are devoted to the sustained criticism of a theory of meaning that [*sic.*] held by, among others, the author of the *Tractatus-Logico-Philosophicus*' (*Ibid.*, 181). This claim is reinforced by a quotation from Wittgenstein's conversation in 1941 with Robert Thouless, where reference is made to the fact that the *Tractatus* contains a lot that is 'fishy' (*Ibid.*, 182).

The final chapter in the book, 'After Religion? Reflections on Kai Nielsen's Wittgenstein' discusses Nielsen's view that 'religion should drift into obsolescence' because it is both harmful to adherents to religious belief in general, and because of its 'incoherent metaphysical commitments' (*Ibid.*, 211). Regarded by Szabados as 'a masterwork of its kind', Neilsen's *Naturalism and Religion* (New York: Prometheus, 2001) nevertheless embodies a misunderstanding of Wittgenstein as a 'friend of fideism', just as Neilsen had previously misunderstood him as a 'fideist' in what Szabados describes as his 'seminal paper' from 1967, 'Wittgensteinian Fideism'. Szabados quotes Neilsen in his early paper as saying that in spite of his admiration for Wittgenstein, and in spite of the fact that, strictly speaking, the views on religious belief that Wittgenstein espouses have to be gleaned from sources which are indirect, like comments from his disciples, *etc.*, the 'fideistic conclusions are absurd'. The position changes in the later volume, however, because by the new millennium much more direct information

concerning Wittgenstein's outlook on religious thinking has been made available, including the familiar *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief.* Nevertheless, by continuing to attribute to Wittgenstein the view that 'faith does not need the support of reason, nor should it seek it' (*Ibid*., 213), Neilsen misunderstands the nature of Wittgenstein's position when he claims that 'an external critique of religion is both possible and desirable' and that Wittgenstein 'is a conservative thinker who advises us to cease the practice of cultural/political criticism and in effect to abandon our intellectual responsibilities' (*Ibid*., 215).

In the most general terms, Szabados' objection to Neilsen is that he fails to reckon with the full force of Wittgenstein's 'pragmatism' in the matter of religious belief. This pragmatism is captured in the view that religious belief 'could only be something like passionately committing oneself to a system of coordinates. Hence although it's belief, it is really a way of living, or a way of judging life' (*Ibid*., 232). This passionate commitment is intimately connected with the need that someone in a 'hopeless situation' has for redemption, so that it requires the person under religious instruction to grasp the 'rescue anchor' of his own accord. The personal nature of the commitment is integral to an understanding of what religious belief on Wittgenstein's assessment actually is.

Szabados argues that this commitment to a system of co-ordinates includes an ontological commitment, a commitment to God (*Ibid*.), and from this he concludes that Neilsen's claim that there is incoherent metaphysical doctrine at the heart of religion as a form of life, needs to be re-examined:

> For the later Wittgenstein neither the doctrine nor the commitment
>
> in the adopted system of reference has to be spurious as long as they
>
> play a useful role and make a positive difference in one's life. To retrieve
>
> needed moral resources, the old theology is to be rearticulated in light
>
> of the best values that motivated it and in view of our present needs
>
> and condition (*Ibid*., 233).

Neilsen would surely take this to be unsatisfactory, because Szabados here appears to be arguing that even if the commitment to some system of co-ordinates is intellectually questionable,

this is not all *that* important so long as it allows an individual to achieve what from within the context of the religion itself would be regarded as salvation. This point is reflected in Wittgenstein's statement that 'A proof of God ought really to be something by means of which you can convince yourself of God's existence', even although *believers* who offer intellectual proofs of this kind *ex post facto* would not themselves have arrived at these beliefs by way of these proofs (*Ibid*., 234). By taking 'the deed and practice to be paramount' (*Ibid*., 235), the answer that Szabados provides to Neilsen would appear to be that because the beliefs *qua* beliefs play a subsidiary role, they can be allowed at worst to be intellectually disreputable, and this just does not matter provided that they perform the required roles in the lives of those who adhere to them:

> ...Wittgenstein sketches a perspective on religious discourse and
> doctrine that connects them with religious life and frees them from
> an undue dependence on seeing them as presupposing spurious
> ontological entities. Thus in one fell swoop he removes the excess
> baggage of bad metaphysics and obsolete science that has been
> perceived to be obstacles to faith (*Ibid*. 238).

But this would appear to imply that the ontological commitment that Wittgenstein supposedly makes in the passage previously referred to, is after all spurious, so that the viability of religious belief is being made to depend exclusively on its *role* in human life. In keeping with the anthropological thrust of Szabados' understanding of the later philosophy, this is a 'descriptive' account of religious belief *as* it plays a role in the lives of individual believers. But from a historical point of view, it would be difficult not to conclude that Wittgenstein is actually selecting one facet of the religious life which he finds favourable, the life of the soul in need of salvation, the person in a 'hopeless situation' who requires a 'rescue anchor', and using it to describe what an *ideal* picture of religious belief *ought* to be. In doing so, he downgrades the significance of any intellectual component in religious *belief*. This is bound to appear to commentators who see religious belief solely as a commitment to a set of outdated metaphysical theorems, as nothing less than an abandonment of 'intellectual responsibility', and as an

adherence to 'quietism'. Despite these evident shortcomings, Szabados argues that Wittgenstein's treatment of religious belief can be given a far more positive interpretation:

> Wittgenstein's treatment of religion, with specific attention
>
> to Judeo-Christianity, is an exemplary attempt at a possible
>
> reinterpretation and retrieval of our moral resources in the
>
> wake of the moral vacuum left by the ideologies of Fascism
>
> and Communism. It strikes me as ironic that one of the deepest
>
> philosophical critics of our culture, concerned with its re-animation,
>
> is charged with complacency and 'quietism' (*Ibid.*, 237).

Apart from a selection of papers on Wittgenstein, a number of which evidently relate to the chapters in the present volume, Bela Szabados has already published two Wittgenstein books, *Wittgenstein at the Movies*, edited with Christina Stojanova (Maryland, Lexington Books, 2011), and his jointly edited book with David Stern on *Wittgenstein Reads Weininger* (Cambridge, C.U.P. 2004). The current volume is his first consisting entirely of his own writings on Wittgenstein. Szabados has certainly managed to put together a series of thought-provoking chapters that raise serious questions about certain remarks that Wittgenstein, in his diaries, made within a broadly 'cultural' context. The most interesting and provocative chapters in the book from this perspective are those which discuss Wittgenstein's misogyny, his Jewishness and his outlook on Mahler, and not solely because these issues have not been discussed in the literature to anything like the same degree as Wittgenstein on ethics and on religious belief. Szabados does genuinely have important things to say on these questions even if, for the reasons already provided, there are a number of points on which his accounts have been shown to be seriously open to question.

It should never be forgotten, of course, that most of the material from the *Nachlass* that is now readily available, material from so-called 'private' diaries and notebooks, was never intended for publication, at least as it stands, unlike the content of what we have come to regard as the major work that occupied him for about 20 years, the *Philosophical Investigations;* although Wittgenstein was not

unaware of the use which might come to be made of this 'private' material after his death, given that his executors were authorised to publish from it what they thought fit (von Wright, *Ibid.*, 57).

Szabados advises that his book results from revising a series of papers presented at various scholarly conferences over a period of 20 years (*Ibid.*, 'Acknowledgements' *v*). Apart from what readers can glean from the Bibliography, however, there is no direct listing of these original papers and their relationship to these chapters. There is the occasional mishap in the text, *e.g.*, a reference to Fergus Kerr on page 54 (Kerr, 104), which makes no appearance in the Bibliography. The book is printed in a small point size with double-spacing throughout, and this looks rather unusual to the eye, especially in the empty-looking pages of single references and occasionally brief end-notes accompanying each chapter. A more conventional presentation would have been more appropriate.

ENDNOTES

(1) Georg Henrik von Wright: *Wittgenstein* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982).

(2) Whilst this list of books, as distinct from papers, is not intended to be exhaustive, it does illustrate the increased attention that has been given in recent years to Wittgenstein's broadly cultural concerns. Emphases vary with each author, some concentrating, for example, on the work of Oswald Spengler, others giving it scant attention:

Kevin M. Cahill: *The Fate of Wonder - Wittgenstein's Critique of Metaphysics and Modernity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011)

William James DeAngelis: *Ludwig Wittgenstein - A Cultural Point of View Philosophy in the Darkness of this Time* (Aldershott: Ashgate Publishing, 2007)

Edward Kanterian: *Ludwig Wittgenstein,* (London: Reaktion Books, 2007). In a series on 'Critical Lives' with a 'cultural' perspective

James C. Klagge: *Wittgenstein in Exile* (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 2011)

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 and PHILOSOPHIA. A paper on Wittgenstein appears in the 2008 edition of JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHICAL RESEARCH, another on Ebersole / Ayer in PHILOSOPHICAL INVESTIGATIONS January 2010, a later paper on Wittgenstein in ANALYTIC PHILOSOPHY, March 2013 and a further one on Ryle, PHILOSOPHICAL INVESTIGATIONS, 2014.