

Wittgenstein, Rush Rhees, and the Measure of Language

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Fergus Kerr is in my view right to say, “Rush Rhees is one of the most remarkable philosophers of his generation.”¹ Though known primarily as editor and expositor of Wittgenstein’s writings, Rhees speaks with a philosophical voice that is his own. But I no longer agree with Kerr’s assessment that Rhees’ posthumously published book *Wittgenstein and the Possibility of Discourse*² “casts a great deal of light . . . on the most ancient philosophical question of all – the relation of language to reality, of word to world, of *logos* and being: on what it means to say something.”³ These issues are, simply put, not elucidated by reference to Rhees’ hallmark question: ‘What does it mean to say something?’ It is, however, extremely interesting and philosophically informative to see how Rhees goes wrong.⁴

Rhees’ view arises out of his criticism of some of Wittgenstein’s central analogies in Part I of *Philosophical Investigations*.⁵ H.O. Mounce, a pupil and later colleague of Rhees, suggests that Rhees’ criticism is effective against Wittgenstein’s views in the early 1930’s rather than those in *Philosophical Investigations*. Furthermore, Mounce contends that Rhees, though critical of such views, did not effectively free himself from Wittgenstein’s assumptions during that period: what we might term the problem of *autonomy*. And that in effect, Rhees misses a very important development in Wittgenstein’s later thought. This claim may, at first, seem entirely implausible, leaving followers of Rhees truly bewildered. Rhees, they would correctly note, was an intimate friend of Wittgenstein up to his death in 1951 and later a literary executor of his estate. Indeed,

¹ Reviewing *Rush Rhees on Religion and Philosophy*, ed. D. Z. Phillips assisted by Mario von der Ruhr, and *Wittgenstein and the Possibility of Discourse*, by Rush Rhees, ed. D. Z. Phillips, *New Blackfriars*, January 1999, pp. 46–51.

² Rush Rhees, *Wittgenstein and the Possibility of Discourse*, ed. D. Z. Phillips (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

³ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

⁴ This essay owes much to H. O. Mounce and the many discussions we had in 2003. After a spring and summer of argument in regards to the philosophy of language, I finally understood the point he was making.

⁵ *Philosophical Investigations*, 2nd Edition, ed. G. E. M. Anscombe and Rush Rhees, tr. G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1958).

Rhees had daily talks with Wittgenstein during his extended visits to Swansea that included time in 1944 and 1945 when Wittgenstein was finishing Part I of the *Philosophical Investigations*. It might also be pointed out that Rhees did not start attending Wittgenstein's lectures at Cambridge until c. 1935 during the time when Wittgenstein was working on the *Brown Book*. Mounce is well aware of these points. The thrust of his argument, as we shall see, goes much deeper.

In *Wittgenstein's Lectures: Cambridge, 1930–1932*⁶, we find a very lucid presentation of the philosophical difficulty that consumed Wittgenstein: How do words have meaning or sense? That is, how do they connect to the world? Consider the seemingly obvious answers and why each cannot be *the* link between language and reality:

- 1) A definition, e.g. orange = yellowish red, presupposes knowledge of the words in the definition.
- 2) An inner process like the production of a memory image is not the meaning of the word. For example, the image of green brings us no nearer than the word. It, too, is a symbol. We must be able to compare the image with reality. At least, it must be possible to do so.
- 3) Ostensive definition, wherein we point to the object for which the word stands, must be taken in a certain way and, thus, can be misunderstood.

All we have done in each answer is replace one symbol or sign with another. But, how do we get to reality. In the early 30's, Wittgenstein appeals to the rules of grammar that apply to the sign. There is no further justification for these rules. The choice of rules, say for colors, is arbitrary; but our commitment to their uses makes them not arbitrary. Someone may still object to the fact that the rules themselves are arbitrary. Wittgenstein then asks: Are we to look for further rules to justify the others? But, of course, those rules, too, would need justification. On pain of infinite regress, the rules, he says, are self-contained. Here we have a clear example of what I referred to as the problem of autonomy that Wittgenstein struggles to free himself of throughout his middle and later writings unsuccessfully at many turns and successfully at others.

Philosophical Investigations proceeds through further sophistications and refinements of the reference view of language. Wittgenstein realizes that a rule, too, is a symbol. A rule is just another sign and thus does not determine meaning. It does not connect the word with the world because there is no guarantee that

⁶ *Wittgenstein's Lectures: Cambridge, 1930–1932*, from the notes of John King and Desmond Lee; edited by Desmond Lee (Oxford: Blackwell, 1979).

the person will go on correctly in applying it. The temptation is to think meaning precedes application. Whereas Wittgenstein later saw that meaning is found in its application. Consider a child being shown color samples of red. The meaning of red is not wholly contained in the samples we show him. This point is clear because once the child learns the meaning he goes on to apply the word red in many other instances. That 'going on' in the same way as we do in other circumstances, Wittgenstein points out, depends on behavior, indeed agreement in judgments, not given in pointing to the sample or in any rule (*PI* §242). In other words, the use of the word 'red' depends on behavior not itself the product of language but rather the product of nature.

Rhees, however, transfers the autonomy from the rule to the practice. It is only a rule in the context of a practice. We cannot ask if the practice corresponds to reality. There is nowhere to go. On Rhees' view, sense is internal to the practice or form of life. As his view develops, he attributes the autonomy to discourse itself.

Let us then consider Rhees' view more closely. Rhees' extension of Wittgenstein, as it is seen by Rheesians, follows from his reading of Plato, not from Plato's notion of Transcendence but rather from his emphasis on dialogue, unity, and the growth of understanding. Rhees is right in his rejection of a Sophist view that language is a collection of skills, that intelligible speech is simply effective speech. As such, there can be no growth of understanding. Growth of understanding is not a growth of skills but rather a development and alteration of what was previously there, a unity in time wherein the person may come to see things in a new light, indeed become wiser. In turn, growth of understanding depends on language hanging together.

The autonomy strand in Wittgenstein's writings, we said, is most pronounced and virulent in the early 30's. There Wittgenstein speaks of logically distinct systems each with their own method of verification. The problem is also evidenced in the *Brown Book* where he speaks of different systems of communication, languages complete in themselves. Of course, there is no unity of language on these views.⁷ Rhees' criticism is, no doubt, correct. His point, in short, is that the multifarious contexts of speech and language are indeed related, not isolated. They are interrelated such that the meaning of what we say in one context often turns on its sense in another quite different context. In other words, the context of speech is connected with the lives people lead, i.e. what they do and say elsewhere.

Thus, Rhees thinks that the generality in Wittgenstein's notion of a 'form of life' (or 'way of living') is of great importance. But, if we are

⁷ Note the contrast to his early view in the *Tractatus* wherein language was a calculus and his later work *On Certainty* wherein he implies a unity in speaking of a system of propositions.

going to utilize that aspect of Wittgenstein's thought, Rhees holds that there remains a need to develop it further. If people have a language, then some commonality runs through their lives. But, it is not as if we can take the commonality of their lives and ideas as the reason people are able to speak to one another. The more fundamental aspect of language, says Rhees, is that people engage in *conversation*.

Accordingly, Rhees draws our attention to the 'internal connexions' between remarks, on the bearing they have upon one another, on the reality of 'what is said'. Remarks, that is, bear upon one another because of what they say. A person, Rhees reminds us, speaks with a face of their own. How do the remarks hang together? We need say little more than they are understood. More specifically, the people making the remarks understand one another. The unity of language, he says, is akin to a conversation. Rather than one all encompassing conversation, "it would be better to talk of a hubbub of different conversations all going on at once and getting in each others way."⁸ For our Wittgensteinians, his achievement is a more thorough going return to the everydayness of language.

But for the big question, does Rhees' emphasis on conversation help us? Drawing upon Wittgenstein's call for description rather than explanation, Wittgensteinians following Rhees contend: Life and language form an autonomous, indissoluble whole from which arise the possibilities of sense – all of which it is our task to contemplate. Rhees and his followers, however, lose sight of the original difficulty. Our words in conversation, in life or in discourse more broadly are no less obscure. The problem, recall, is *general*: How does any word have sense or refer to the world? Again, consider the divergence between Wittgenstein's and Rhees' questions: How do words have meaning? Vs. What does it mean to say something? If couched in terms of 'saying something', the answer will obviously be in terms of speaking or saying something. Wittgenstein's formulation readily cedes itself to a deeper understanding of the question 'Where does sense come from?' or put another way 'What is the measure of the real?' (as opposed to the conceptual question 'What is real?'). Consider Protagoras first on these terms. He is not a skeptic of the possibility of discourse. For he does not doubt that our words have meaning, that there is a distinction of sense and nonsense. Rather, he opposes the idea of Truth or Reality with a capital 'R' and, likewise, insists that meaning is to be found in the human sphere not outside it. As such, he marks the beginning of secular humanism. "Man," he announces, "is the measure of all things." For Rhees too, sense is internal to discourse. We create meaning (or sense) through the

⁸ Rhees, *Wittgenstein and the Possibility of Discourse*, p. 113.

activity of life and discourse. Thus, the unity of which Rhees speaks does not get us out of the problem of autonomy.

In contradistinction to Plato, Rhees follows Protagoras in saying that discourse does not require a common measure. Indeed, here we find Rhees' essential disagreement with Plato. For he says wholeheartedly that Protagoras is right in rejecting the idea of an underlying reality behind discourse.⁹ When we review his position in the present light, the following question is pressing: How far then can Rhees be from a Protagorean view?

Wittgensteinians in agreement with Rhees may indeed be a little flustered when pressed with the claim that in the end Rhees' view of language is Protagorean, since it is the Sophists he goes to great length to attack. But, Rhees merely attacks a weak version of Protagoras¹⁰ leaving intact that which we see above is a more robust Protagorean view.¹¹ Let us then consider that our Wittgensteinians settle down and reply: "If you call banishing Transcendence and emphasizing 'our life with concepts' Protagorean, then fine 'I am a Protagorean in that sense.'" The realist position according to Wittgensteinians is the view that the relation between language and reality is external. Protagoras says that there is no gulf between man and a reality beyond. Likewise, Rhees thinks of Plato's Forms as an external realm of pure meanings, thus making a sharp distinction between Forms and actual discourse. Protagoras is right, Rhees thinks, to say that we cannot get behind our talk of colors, for instance, to their independent existence. Rather, talk of colors is dependent on human agreement, i.e. the way we talk. But, this attack on Plato epitomizes the very caricature that the metaphysical realist says is off the mark. Plato's point in regards to the Forms is that our discourse depends on the cosmos being intelligible (or ordered). On the classical realist view, order does not arise from our language and discourse. It is not 'we' who make the connection in language. Rather, Wittgenstein's realist moment is on the mark: We are already

⁹ *Wittgenstein and the Possibility of Discourse*, p. 258. Rhees also makes this point in *In Dialogue with the Greeks: Plato and Dialectic* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2004).

¹⁰ Before changing his own view, Mounce attacked the weaker version of Protagoras in *Moral Practices* (Routledge & K. Paul, 1969), a book he co-authored with D. Z. Phillips. It can also be found in the reprint edition, Vol. 6: *Moral Practices*, Studies in the Ethics and Philosophy of Religion, ed. D. Z. Phillips (Routledge, 2003).

¹¹ It is interesting to note that counter to how Protagoras is often portrayed, he died in high repute. In 443 BC, chosen by Pericles, he drafted the laws of Thurii in Southern Italy. Moreover, not only did Protagoras attach himself to a venerable tradition of poets and Presocratic philosophers, his posthumous esteem is evidenced in the Ptolemaic era c. 300–350 BC by a statue of him built in the Serapeum in Egypt alongside a circle of Greek poets and philosophers including Homer, Thales, Heraclitus and Plato. It does seem that he was forced to leave Athens in 415 BC because of charges of impiety, but so it could be argued were progressives like Anaxagoras and Socrates.

related to the world through natural reactions (pre-linguistic) that are the product of nature, of that natural order.

Rhees' misstep can be well illustrated in his exchange with Norman Malcolm¹² on the relationship between instinctive reactions and language.¹³ Rhees objects to Malcolm's view that instinctive reactions are fundamental. Such a view, Rhees thinks, comes too near a theory of explanation and transgresses the Wittgensteinian task of description. The dispute turns on Wittgenstein's remark "Language did not emerge from reasoning"¹⁴ and his use of Goethe's line from *Faust* wherein he writes "The origin and primitive form of the language game is a reaction; only from this can more complicated forms develop. Language – I want to say – is a refinement, 'in the beginning was the deed'."¹⁵ Malcolm, Rhees thinks, rightly argues that knowledge does not underlie our language game. And when discussing an infant learning language, Malcolm accordingly eschews Noam Chomsky and Jerry Fodor's talk of the child possessing an innate representational system as well as the ascription of a complex intellectual facility of putting forth theories and hypotheses.

Likewise, Rhees believes Malcolm is correct to note that a baby first reacts without doubt. For example, a baby instinctively drinks milk and not chalk-water. So, what would it mean to say that the child believes there is milk in the bottle? The fact of the matter is that the infant will reach for the bottle from which it is always fed and reject that same bottle at the first taste of chalk water. Malcolm writes: "there is this behaviour. . . . This is *just doing*."¹⁶ To speak of belief cannot mean to identify the basis of the behaviour; it is merely to speak of this behaviour we have just described. Malcolm then goes on to say: "In the case of the infant words and sentences will gradually emerge from such behaviour. Not so with a cat."¹⁷

Malcolm also recites an example of a child learning the color red. We point to that object and say its color is red. We expect there to be

¹² Malcolm was a pupil and close friend of Wittgenstein's. During the time Rush Rhees resided in Cambridgeshire, Norman Malcolm (in retirement from Cornell University and a visiting Professor at King's College, London) along with Peter Winch and Raimond Gaita met at Rhees' house for weekly discussions.

¹³ Norman Malcolm, "Wittgenstein: The relation of language to instinctive behaviour", *Philosophical Investigations*, Vol. 15, no. 5, January 1982, p. 3–22. It is reprinted in ed. Georg Henrik von Wright, *Wittgensteinian Themes: Essays 1978–1989* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995). Rush Rhees, "Language as Emerging from Instinctive Behaviour", *Philosophical Investigations*, Vol. 20, No. 1, January 1997.

¹⁴ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, ed. G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright, tr. Denis Paul and G.E.M. Anscombe (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1972) §475.

¹⁵ Wittgenstein, *Culture & Value*, ed. G.H. von Wright and Heikki Nyman, tr. Peter Winch (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1980), p. 31.

¹⁶ Malcolm, "Wittgenstein: The relation of language to instinctive behaviour", p. 7.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

a learning curve wherein the child may at the start mistake the identification we are trying to draw his attention; but, then in little time, the child will go on to say 'That is red' of the same objects we say are red. Soon enough, when we issue the instruction for the child to bring us an object of the *same* color, he will successfully carry out the task. If we did not all react in the same way to the instruction to retrieve an object of the *same* color, then our color concepts would not exist. Although, it may happen that a child would not be able to carry out the task, children do almost always learn their colors. And, so it is that we all go on to use the word red as we were taught.

Rhees believes Malcolm's basic point, thus far, is sound. But, on the other hand, Rhees remains troubled by Malcolm's talk of language emerging from instinct. Take for example the following statement by Malcolm: "Not merely is much of the first language of a child grafted onto instinctive behaviour – but the whole of the developed, complex, employment of language by adult speakers embodies something resembling instinct."¹⁸ Rhees acknowledges that Malcolm is right to insist that without agreement in reactions we could not talk to one another. But, to say these reactions are at the foundation of our language is something rather different. Rhees argues, first, that the agreement here occurs in a form of life. And, second, it is significant that people take the reaction to be an action within a form of life.¹⁹ That is to say, the agreement belongs to people's understanding and language. And furthermore, a human, unlike an animal, takes up the reaction as an action of which he may ask questions. The ways our reactions enter into language are complex. Humans may, for instance, discuss whether the reaction of fright is normal or the result of an illness, perhaps a psychosis. Not so with cats. Indeed, Rhees contends that Malcolm's account of our agreement in reactions and consequently the learning of a concept such as red reads like a flow chart and accordingly misses the very reality of our color talk.

Rhees stresses that the reactions do not determine how we go on. There is no necessity such that the reactions are taken in a certain way. Thus, they are not in his view fundamental. Gathering together Rhees' points made so far, the child's knowledge of red comes with taking up a practice; but it is not just that. Rhees emphasizes that the knowledge cannot develop unless the child joins in the life of those who talk of colors – unless he partakes in conversation with the people with whom he lives. To know the color 'red' or 'blue' and to

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 11–12.

¹⁹ Rush Rhees, "Language as Emerging from Instinctive Behaviour", *Philosophical Investigations*, Vol. 20, No. 1, January 1997, p. 6.

be able to distinguish them is to know how these colors “enter the lives of people with whom one speaks.”²⁰

It may be obvious to the reader that Rhees’ criticism of Malcolm is wide of the mark. But we can readily make this point more clear. Reflect briefly on Rhees’ picture of a child learning to speak. The sense of discourse, Rhees says, comes from our ways of living and speaking together. A child slowly learns (or recognizes) the way different remarks bear on one another from those with whom she talks and lives. And if she does not begin to participate in the ways of speaking of those people around her, she is simply cut off from discourse. In short, the child is related to the world through language. It is as if there is a gulf that speaking spans. But, Malcolm’s point is that the child is already related to the world through reactions rooted in the world. Without these reactions and behavior that grows out of them, there would not be language. And so it is that the later Wittgenstein elucidates the internal relationship between language and the world.

It is easy to fail to see the profundity of Malcolm’s argument in relation to the infant and the cat. The behavior of a cat and that of a human is in some ways alike but in some very important ways different. Malcolm draws our attention to the “natural expressive behaviour of human beings,”²¹ which includes reactions and behavior you cannot see in an animal. The difference between animals and humans is not, as Rhees contends, that humans live together in a society with discourse in a way animals do not. Though, that is true. There is already a difference between an animal and a human. We can readily see, for example, that a human and a cat have different natures. Indeed, it is prudent to point out that we can see some of those differences in a baby and in how the baby relates to us even before the advent of language. Language, though, is an indelible feature of human behavior. It is characteristic of our nature.

Rhees views Malcolm’s description as not fully attending to what breaths life into language. Malcolm, though, is emphasizing the very elements that are the conditions for sense. This dispute is echoed in their respective essays on Wittgenstein’s builders.²² Rhees takes Wittgenstein in his example of the builders in language game (2) to exhaust speech into the activity of building. And, Malcolm asks: What about their humanity? Malcolm rightly

²⁰ Rush Rhees, *Wittgenstein and the Possibility of Discourse*, p. 136.

²¹ “Language Without Conversation”, *Philosophical Investigations*, Vol. 15, No. 3, July 1992, p. 210.

²² Rush Rhees, “Wittgenstein’s Builders” in *Discussions of Wittgenstein* (New York: Schocken Books, 1970); Norman Malcolm, “Language Game (2)” in D. Z Phillips and Peter Winch, eds., *Wittgenstein: Attention to Particulars* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1989); Norman Malcolm, “Language Without Conversation”, op. cit.

underscores Wittgenstein's passages wherein there is a development from non-linguistic primitive reactions to linguistic expressions. Wittgenstein writes:

Being sure someone is in pain, doubting whether he is, and so on are so many natural, instinctive, kinds of relationship towards other human beings, and our language is merely an auxiliary to, and further extension of primitive behaviour. (For our *language-game* is behaviour.) (Instinct.)
(Zettel §545)

When Wittgenstein asks himself what he means by calling the reactions 'primitive', he replies:

Surely that this way of behaving is *prelinguistic*: that a language-game is based *on it*, that it is the prototype of a way of thinking and not the result of thought.

(Zettel §541)

Malcolm argues that in *Philosophical Investigations* §§242 and 244, as well as in *Zettel*,²³ Wittgenstein relates speech to instinctive behaviour and to our activities that grow out of those previous relations to the world – relations that are fundamental to sense.

Malcolm was not dissuaded by Rhees' arguments in their earlier exchange about the role of instinctive reactions. A few years later, he returns to the topic again to make many trenchant points. In *On Certainty*, Wittgenstein writes: "It is our *acting* which lies at the bottom of the language-game" (*OC* §204). Malcolm recognizes how simple it is to skip over the expanse of Wittgenstein's insight in *On Certainty*. It is not *simply* acting. Filling out Wittgenstein's point, Malcolm claims: "Something resembling the primitive reactions that underlie the first learning of words, pervades all human action and all use of language, even at sophisticated levels."²⁴ As Wittgenstein clearly indicates, he "would like to regard this certainty . . . as a form of life" (*OC* §358). And he speaks of this certainty "as something animal" (*OC* §359). Malcolm, showing great insight, appropriately refers to it as "natural certainty" and "fundamental". Language, he notes, emerges from "natural forms of life."²⁵

We can go a step further and quote two more passages, though there are more, that hint at the natural realist strand in Wittgenstein's later thought: "At the foundation of well-founded belief lies belief that is not founded" (*OC* §253). Wittgenstein is here grappling

²³ *Zettel*, ed. G.E.M. Anscombe and G.H. von Wright, tr. G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1967).

²⁴ Norman Malcolm, "Language as Expressive Behaviour" in *Nothing is Hidden* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986) p. 152.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

toward the idea of *natural* belief. As he says, “It is always by favour of Nature that one knows something” (*OC* §505). But let us not get ahead of ourselves here.²⁶

We can further make plain the fallacy of Rhees’ view by examining the concept of intentionality. It is not with language that we develop into intentional agents. For, how can one acquire the concept of intention without intentional behavior? We need language to describe these reactions but not to have them. The dependency runs the other way.

It so happens that Rhees wrote little, if anything, in the philosophy of mind. And, he seems to accept quite uncritically the line taken by ordinary language philosophy in the 1950’s. In his first teaching post at Swansea as a colleague of Rhees, Peter Winch published in 1953 an essay in criticism of Thomas Reid entitled “The Notion of ‘Suggestion’ in Thomas Reid’s Theory of Perception”, part of his BPhil written at Oxford in 1951. Nearly fifty years later, Mounce praised Reid’s insights in his own published work.²⁷ Around this same time, the Winch archives arrived in Swansea; and Phillips stumbled upon Winch’s essay. Phillips was not only impressed by Winch’s acumen, he was in total agreement with the tenor of the essay. In that manner, the opportunity arose for Phillips to borrow from it in his own attack on Mounce. It seems to be one of those moments where ordinary language philosophy reconquers a metaphysical picture of sense perception.

But let us look closely at Winch’s remark that seems to instantiate victory for the Wittgensteinians. Winch objects: “On Reid’s theory, when I feel the table, I at the same time feel a sensation; I do not know what it would be like to feel the table without having a sensation, in Reid’s sense.”²⁸ In other words, there are no separate sets of phenomena, Winch says, of which to ‘point’ as is the case between different senses such as the sense of vision and the sense of touch. Or again, what we have is not a difference of empirical order but rather a difference in the linguistic expressions we employ. In true ordinary language philosophy fashion, Winch argues that Reid’s account of sensation illegitimately extends “the use of the word ‘sensation’ beyond that allowed in ordinary discourse”²⁹ However,

²⁶ The point, as H. O. Mounce says, is not “that Wittgenstein belongs to the tradition of classical realism;” but rather that “he has evident connections with that tradition.” “Wittgenstein and Classical Realism” in Danièle Moyal-Sharrock and William Brenner, eds., *Readings of Wittgenstein’s On Certainty* (Palgrave 2005).

²⁷ H. O. Mounce, *Hume’s Naturalism* (London: Routledge, 1999). Also see his essay, “The Philosophy of the Conditioned”, *The Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 44, No. 175.

²⁸ “The Notion of ‘Suggestion’ in Thomas Reid’s Theory of Perception”, *The Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 3, 1953, p. 339.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

quite to the contrary to Winch's portrayal, Reid is not saying that we feel the sensation and hardness of the table at the same time. The sensation is the *whereby* or *mode* in which we feel the table. In other words, Reid denies that there is an inference from sense-experience to the knowledge of the object. The inference that we feel certain sensations, sensations that make it possible for us to determine whether the table is hard, comes from our knowledge of the way the table feels.³⁰ Thus, it is Reid, rather than Winch, who provides clarity to the problem of mind and world.

Rhees may, also, have thought Malcolm's writings on the topic were sufficient. It is, therefore, useful to consider a parallel dispute between Malcolm and G. E. M. Anscombe.³¹ In "The 'Intentionality' of Sense-Perception", Malcolm objects to her view that seeing involves an intentional object. But Malcolm mistakenly views an intentional object to be "something we *take for* something" rather than simply what we take ourselves to see. Consequently, he argues that it is philosophically confused to say upon every seeing of a horse 'I saw something I took for a horse'. Malcolm explains:

Suppose . . . that when walking in thick woods I came out into a clearing. I saw a horse right in front of me a few feet away: it was not a case of taking something for a horse!"³²

In that case, it cannot be said "that I must have seen something I *took for* a horse."³³ Malcolm concludes: "Only in special circumstances does seeing involve taking something for something." Like Winch does with Reid, Malcolm takes Anscombe's view to be a variation of a sense-datum theory: 1) What we see are sense datum, the immediate datum of our visual experience. And, 2) our

³⁰ In *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, ed. A. D. Woozley (London: Macmillan, 1941), Thomas Reid writes:

I touch the table gently with my hand, and I feel it to be smooth, hard, and cold. These are qualities of the table perceived by touch; but I perceive them by means of a sensation which indicates them. This sensation not being painful, I commonly give no attention to it. It carries my thought immediately to the thing signified by it, and is itself forgot, as if it had never been. But by repeating it, and turning my attention to it, and abstracting my thought from the thing signified by it, I find it to be merely a sensation, and that it has no similitude to the hardness, smoothness, or coldness of the table which is signified by it.

It is indeed difficult, at first, to disjoin things in our attention which have always been conjoined, and to make that an object of reflection which never was so before . . . (p. 143)

³¹ G. E. M. Anscombe's essay in question is entitled "The Intentionality of Sensation" in *The Collected Papers of G. E. M. Anscombe, Volume Two: Metaphysics and the Philosophy of Mind* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1981).

³² Norman Malcolm, "The 'Intentionality' of Sense-Perception", *Wittgensteinian Themes: Essays 1978–1989*, ed. Georg Henrik von Wright (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995) p. 112.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

knowledge of the actual object is based on inference. But, that is not the case. Ordinary language philosophers, like Malcolm, think perception does not involve an inference and as a result deny visual experience is mediated. Anscombe wants to cut through both camps, the ordinary language philosophers and the sense-datum theorists.³⁴ Anscombe's point, as was Reid's, is the classical point lost in modern philosophy that all seeing is intentional, i.e. It has an object.

The advance had its seed in Anaxagoras (c. 500 to c. 418 BC). He was the first Greek philosopher to see a connection between mind and the order of the world: 'All things were together. Then mind came and arranged them.' His view is that the mind acts on the boundless and generates the substances of the world. The interesting aspect of his thought is not his reference to the boundless but his emphasis on the mind. To later philosophers, we have both his insight and why it could not advance in his hands; it is lost to the materialism that he inherits from the Milesians (Thales, Anaximander and Anaximenes). The advance comes with the classical realist view of Plato wherein form is intentional. In other words, the mind is in harmony with the world that transcends it.

Our previous example of the child learning the concept red allows us to better grasp Plato's doctrine of the Forms. It is a mistake to take Plato's doctrine in physical terms.³⁵ To view the Forms that way is to see the instances of red as represented by several small red discs in a straight row and the Form 'redness' as represented by a big red disc residing above the particulars. This reading gives a false picture of Plato's view. For Plato, Form is both transcendent and immanent. It is *through* the particular that one grasps the concept redness that transcends its instances. It may, though, be argued that we have done no more than describe what is to be a speaker; and speaking of transcendence in a metaphysical sense here just muddles the task of elucidation of our life with these concepts. That rebuttal reverts back to a wrong-headed reading of Plato and misses out on how the case of the child learning red by going beyond particulars is symbolic of the transcendent character of the world. The beyond does not mean an entity totally separate; rather, the term denotes a relationship. That which is transcendent is made manifest in the immanent. Wittgenstein, himself, uses the word wherein he writes: "But then doesn't our understanding reach beyond all the examples?" – A very queer expression, and a quite natural one!" (*PI* §209) But his

³⁴ I was helped on these points by a splendid essay by Mounce entitled "On Sensation and its Intentionality" (forthcoming).

³⁵ H. O. Mounce, "Morality and Religion" in Brian Davies OP, ed., *Philosophy of Religion: A Guide to the Subject* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1998) pp. 258–259.

anti-metaphysical side kept reining him in. Plato does not use a different sense than the *natural* one Wittgenstein uses.

The historical advance in regards to intentionality is bourn out in St. Thomas Aquinas as well. We obviously do not have here the empiricist picture of a passive recipient of experience. The mind is certain of an external object – “There is *something*.” That is to say, there is a “real bridge between the mind and reality.”³⁶ But, our Wittgensteinians may ask: Is not Aquinas a mentalistic representationalist? That the relation between mind and the world has become mysterious shows in other things Thomists say. For example, the Catholic theologian Henri de Lubac writes: “Every . . . act of knowledge . . . rests secretly upon God, by attributing meaning and solidity to the real upon which it is exercised. For God is the Absolute; and nothing can be thought without positing the Absolute in relating it to that Absolute.”³⁷ And again, De Lubac states: “One cannot sever the mind’s relation to the Absolute – the Absolute thought as real – without destroying the mind itself.”³⁸ Is not, our Wittgensteinians ask, God operating in a metaphysical realist context in order to secure our objective relations to objects?³⁹ We are, now, deeper into the problematic. Recall, the classical view that the mind does not impose order on a materialist world. Rather, the mind exists through that which transcends it, the world. The mind can only act and judge because there is order in the world. In other terms, the mind depends on the world but not the world on the mind. God is not incorporated to mind a gap or to provide harmony. There is no gap; mind and world are in harmony. The classical realist is not explaining but rather elucidating natural relations that already exist.

The metaphysics in Catholic philosophy to which I had myself objected under the rubric of a Wittgensteinian/Rheesian view of language cannot be stated more clearly than that found in the work of Henri de Lubac wherein he writes:

One would have to stop willing and thinking to have the right to deny God without contradicting oneself. One would have to abandon speech.⁴⁰

The sound Rheesian response is that *the* condition for speech – that there is a distinction between sense and nonsense – is connected to our ways of living and speaking with one another. It is not dependent

³⁶ G.K. Chesterton, *Saint Thomas Aquinas* (New York: Doubleday, 1956) p. 149.

³⁷ Henri de Lubac, *The Discovery of God*, tr. Alexander Dru (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996) p. 36.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

³⁹ For a criticism of metaphysical conceptions of God, see D. Z. Phillips, “What God Himself Cannot Tell Us: Realism Versus Metaphysical Realism”, *Faith and Philosophy*, Vol. 18, No. 4, October 2001.

⁴⁰ Henri de Lubac, *The Discovery of God*, p. 37.

on God in any important philosophical way. Is Rhees not at least correct to free everyday language from metaphysical realism even if he is wrong to countenance talk of transcendence as confused metaphysics tout court? It may be more palatable if someone says my life is dependent on God – even in the metaphysical sense of whether life means anything at all⁴¹ – but not my words themselves. We have already highlighted the difficulties in Rhees' view; and upon revisiting this passage we see that Lubac is speaking of a contradiction between two different levels, not of the level of words alone. He does not deny there is well enough understanding between people. To return to the theme of *natural* belief, there is contradiction "between the assertion expressed in words and the assertion lived by thought."⁴² It is, of course, possible to make the denial in speech; but it is "a total, vital, spiritual contradiction"⁴³ in the individual who renounces God.

We are trying to make clearer the relation between God and language. Recall earlier that symbol hath replaced symbol. And then the question is: How does the series of links get connected to reality? The inspiration of Goethe's line in *Faust* is found in the opening of *The Gospel According to John*, and therein we have our answer: "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." (John 1:1) We need to be careful to avoid a common misreading of the metaphysical realist point here. De Lubac keeps us on track: "God is not the first link in the chain of being."⁴⁴ Rather, the Word is an *Other* of "an entirely different order"⁴⁵ – "a present Absolute at the heart of reality."⁴⁶ And so we return with more clarity to the age-old contrast between Protagoras and Plato: "God is the reality which envelops, dominates, and *measures* our thought, and not the reverse."^{47,48}

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⁴¹ See my forthcoming essay "Wittgensteinianism and the Loss of Transcendence: *The Reality of Christ and His Church*".

⁴² Henri de Lubac, p. 36.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 36–37.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* p. 38.

⁴⁵ H. Paissac, *Preuves de Dieu* quoted in Henri de Lubac, *ibid.*, p. 64 fn. 17.

⁴⁶ Henri de Lubac, p. 65.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 38 (my emphasis). Plato makes this point in *Laws* IV, 716c.

⁴⁸ My thanks to D. Z. Phillips for the invitation to spend a year as an academic visitor at the Associated Centre for Wittgensteinian Studies at the University of Wales Swansea.