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“A Member of No Community? Theology after Wittgenstein.” In *Radical Pluralism: Essays in Honor of D. Z. Phillips*, edited by Brian Birch and Patrick Horn. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, forthcoming.

A Member of No Community? Theology after Wittgenstein

Brad J. Kallenberg

Wittgenstein studies has spawned a new sort of Christian theology. A growing list of theologians have discovered in Wittgenstein a therapy for conceptual confusion and tips for how to go on, not only in religious faith and practice, but also in the practice of theology as an academic discipline.¹ This is not to say that such thinkers have succeeded in turning Wittgenstein into an instrument of apologetics or that Wittgenstein has “delivered” them from the grip of their own religious particularity. No; they have learned

¹ See Fergus Kerr, “The Reception of Wittgenstein’s Philosophy by Theologians,” in *Religion and Wittgenstein’s Legacy*, ed. D. Z. Phillips and Mario von der Ruhr (Aldershot, UK & Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), 253-72. The more recent notables include Kerr’s own *Theology after Wittgenstein* (Oxford, UK: Basil Blackwell, 1986). Garth L. Hallett, *Identity and Mystery in Themes of Christian Faith; Late-Wittgensteinian Perspectives* (Hampshire, UK & Burlington, VA: Ashgate, 2005). Also of note are various essayists in Jeffrey Stout and Robert MacSwain, eds., *Grammar and Grace: Reformulations of Aquinas and Wittgenstein* (London: SCM Press, 2004). To these must be added the classic works by Herbert McCabe, Paul Holmer, David Burrell and Staley Hauerwas. See Herbert McCabe, *Law, Love and Language* (New York: Continuum, 2004). See also, Paul Holmer, “Wittgenstein and Theology,” in *New Essays on Religious Language*, ed. Dallas M. High (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1969), 25-35.; *The Grammar of Faith* (San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row Publishers, 1978). And see David Burrell, *Analogy and Philosophical Language* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1973). Perhaps most prolific of all Christian theologians who write under the influence of Wittgenstein is Stanley Hauerwas. For my analysis of Hauerwas’s use of Wittgenstein, see Brad J. Kallenberg, *Ethics as Grammar: Changing the Postmodern Subject* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001).

from Wittgenstein the skill of silence. Their theology, like Wittgenstein's philosophy, comes to a full stop.

What this full stop amounts to, of course, is a matter of discussion. D. Z. Phillips has described "contemplative philosophy" as culminating in a "radical pluralism."² In this essay, I will argue that the radical pluralism that is said to follow from contemplative philosophy is so radical that the presumed "boundary" between philosophy and theology is once more conceived as semi-permeable, a feature that lets back to the table at least a few theologians.

CONTEMPLATIVE PHILOSOPHY

DZ Phillips describes "contemplative philosophy" as operating in the middle of a spectrum between two extremes.³ On the side of the "too hot," Phillips includes all attempts by passionate thinkers to employ philosophy as an aid for figuring out such puzzles as "the real nature of truth" or as a guide for advising people "how to live well." In the end, passionate ideologues end up constructing totalizing systems. In contrast to this sort of "positive" philosophy, contemplative philosophy seeks to "do conceptual justice by the world in all its variety."⁴

² See D. Z. Phillips, *Religion and the Hermeneutics of Contemplation* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001). See also his essay reprinted as "On Wittgenstein," *Philosophical Investigations* 24, no. 2 (2001): 147-53.

³ "Locating Philosophy's Cool Place: A Reply to Stephen Mulhall," in *D.Z. Phillips' Contemplative Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Andy F. Sanders (Aldershot, UK & Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), 29-54.

⁴ **Opening paragraph of** "Radical Pluralism," in *Festschrift.....* ed. Brian Birch (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, forthcoming). **page #??**

On the side of “too cold” are those who insist that philosophy’s sole task is a negative one, the clearing up of conceptual confusions in others’ work. Such a task will inevitably keep the philosopher busy, since there is such an abundance of grammatical confusion and misuse of language that needs sorting out.⁵ But Phillips resists the suggestion that this is all philosophy can be about. In contrast to “negative” philosophy, contemplative philosophy has more to do than clear away the underbrush. For in addition to conceptual clarification, contemplative philosophy is also constituted by its central concern regarding the riddle of the very possibility of discourse.

Contemplative philosophy, then, occupies the middle ground. The character of this middle ground has been variously described in terms of “disinterest,” “neutrality” and “coolness.”⁶ At stake for my argument is whether theologians are necessarily excluded from the practice of contemplative philosophy, or from the radical pluralism this coolness is said to entail.

⁵ For examples of Phillips’s own “interventionist” style of philosophy see the essays in *Interventions in Ethics* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992). See also *Wittgenstein and Religion* (London, UK: St. Martin’s Press, 1993).

⁶ See Stephen Mulhall, “Wittgenstein’s Temple: Three Styles of Philosophical Architecture,” in *D.Z. Phillips’ Contemplative Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Andy F. Sanders (Aldershot, UK & Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), 13-27; D. Z. Phillips, *Philosophy’s Cool Place* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999); Mario von der Ruhr, “Philosophy, Theology and Heresy: D. Z. Phillips and the Grammar of Religious Belief,” in *D.Z. Phillips’ Contemplative Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Andy F. Sanders (Aldershot, UK & Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), 111-24..

I must raise a minor worry I have over von der Ruhr’s image of contemplative philosophy as “disinterested,” as “disinterest” is all too easily mistaken for the vantage point assumed by a Cartesian spectator. While von der Ruhr is surely right to see contemplative philosophy at a distance from “partisan apologetics,” he uncarefully asserts that contemplative philosophy’s “proper task is attentive and disinterested description” (59). If one is entirely disinterested, why would one bother to begin? Elsewhere Phillips has shown that criteria for description are context dependent—think of someone who, while observing an act of mugging, gives the play-by-play in monotone medical-ese rather than reflexively shouting for help. Such dispassionate action would be neither praiseworthy nor contemplative. It would be subhuman. See the delightful essays in D. Z. Phillips, *Introducing Philosophy: The Challenge of Scepticism* (Oxford, UK & Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1996).

To be sure, historians of philosophy have habitually described philosophy as bifurcated from theology. And many Wittgensteinians have followed suit. This can be felt in the strong temptation to read *Zettel* §455 *proscriptively*.

(Der Philosoph ist nicht Bürger einer Denkgemeinde. Das ist, was ihn zum Philosophen macht.)

(The philosopher is not a citizen of any community of ideas. That is what makes him into a philosopher.)

Stephen Mulhall paraphrases the German this way: “that a philosopher *should not* be a citizen of a community of ideas.”⁷ In favor of a proscriptive reading is Wittgenstein’s own characterization of logician Frank Ramsey as a “bourgeois” (*bürgerlich*) thinker.

Wittgenstein went on to complain that

he [Ramsey] thought with the aim of clearing up the affairs of some particular community [*Gemeinde*; municipality]. He did not reflect on the essence of the state (*Staat*)...but on how *this* state might be reasonably organized. The idea that this state might not be the only possible one in part disquieted him and in part bored him. He wanted to get down as quickly as possible to reflecting on the foundation—of *this* state. This was what he was good at...whereas real philosophical reflection disturbed him....⁸

Wittgenstein apparently thought Ramsey was mistaken to be so grounded in the affairs of “some particular community.” Yet there is another way to read §455. If “bourgeois” translates *bürgerlich*, surely Wittgenstein used the cognate *Bürger* (“citizen”) in §455 for the way it conjures images of clubby, upper-class merchants.⁹ The upshot? Wittgenstein knew that his sort of philosophy made him a *de facto* outsider to the Cambridge

⁷ Mulhall, “Wittgenstein’s Temple: Three Styles of Philosophical Architecture,” 21. Emphasis added.

⁸ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, ed. G. H. von Wright and Heikki Nyman, trans. Peter Winch, English translation with the amended 2nd. ed. (Oxford, UK: Basil Blackwell, 1980), 17e.

⁹ Thanks to Terry Tilley for this insight.

“Philosophers’ Club.” Taken in this way, Z§455 may simply be a self-description, a repetition of the maxim: a prophet is never welcomed by the hometown crowd.¹⁰

There is evidence that Wittgenstein perceived himself in countercultural terms; he perceived himself as living in a kind of self-imposed “exile” from culture at large.¹¹ Recall that Wittgenstein once remarked to Drury, “My type of thinking is not wanted in this present age, I have to swim so strongly against the tide. Perhaps in a hundred years people will really want what I am writing.”¹² In the meantime, Wittgenstein himself wrote for a particular community:

If I say that my book is meant for only a small circle of people (if it can be called a circle), I do not mean that I believe this circle to be the élite of mankind; but it does comprise those to whom I turn (not because they are better or worse than others but) because they form my cultural milieu, my fellow citizens as it were [*gleichsam die Menschen meines Vaterlandes*], in contrast to the rest who are foreign [*fremd*] to me.¹³

The question remains, did Wittgenstein intend the parenthetical remark (Z§455) as anything more than *self*-description? *Must* the *Zettel* text be read proscriptively?

In what follows, I will argue that Wittgenstein’s remark in *Zettel* need not be taken as proscriptive advice to would-be contemplative philosophers for two reasons. First, contemplative philosophy is itself a human craft and as such is constituted by overlapping

¹⁰ “Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house.” Mark 6:4, NRSV.

¹¹ James C. Klagge, “Wittgenstein in Exile,” in *Religion and Wittgenstein’s Legacy*, ed. D.Z. Phillips and Mario von der Ruhr (Aldershot, UK & Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005).

¹² M. O’C. Drury, “Conversations with Wittgenstein,” in *Recollections of Wittgenstein*, ed. Rush Rhees (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1984), 91-189. Citation from 73. Klagge observes that in Wittgenstein’s mind the previous hundred years, at least since Schumann’s death in 1856, marked the beginning of the end of Western culture as per Oswald Spengler’s vision. Oswald Spengler, *Der Untergang Des Abendlandes: Umrisse Einer Morphologie Der Weltgeschichte* (Munich: Beck, 1922-23). These volumes were translated into English by Charles Francis Atkinson and published by Alfred Knopf in 1926-28.

¹³ Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 10e.

modes of discourse with the result that the dividing line between one craft and another passes through the hearts of human speakers. Consequently, the intention to surrender membership in communities of discourse in the name of contemplative philosophy may prove to be as wrongheaded as the quest for “objectivity” proved to be in former times. Second, the grammar of “theology” does not admit the sort of definitional precision needed for either *Zettel* §455 or Phillips’s statement to function as a universal prohibition. I will take up each of these in turn.

CONTEMPLATIVE PHILOSOPHY AS A CRAFT

The word “craft” may raise images of Aristotelian *poēsis* and the related notions of *technē* and “technique.” For Aristotle, making shoes was a craft. But I do not use the term in this sense. By the term “craft” I mean those complex, cooperative enterprises—such as medicine, engineering, mathematics, music—for which standards of excellence (against which novices are measured for progress) are internal to the activities of the craft itself and are embodied by the behavior (both in the sense of tacit skills of judgment and discourse) of the expert practitioners.¹⁴ Just as the standards of excellence may be read off the play of the craft yet never be codified successfully (much less completely), so too crafts can never be reduced to domains of information. The skilled musician knows when

¹⁴ It should be evident that I have been deeply formed by theological reflection on the family resemblance between Alasdair MacIntyre’s seminal vocabulary and ancient Christian notions such as “discipleship.” See James Wm. McClendon, Jr., *Ethics: Systematic Theology, Volume I* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1986), esp. ch. 6. His torturous definition of “practice” can be found in Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 2d ed. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 187.

the bass is “too heavy,” though will be unable to describe this in advance (much less to *non-musicians*).¹⁵

Philosophy, especially as Wittgenstein practiced it, shares important characteristics with other crafts. Chief among these features for my argument is the developmental nature of the craft. Practitioners who try hard in the right way tend to improve in their craft-relevant skills, albeit slowly over a long time. Wittgenstein viewed his craft as necessarily involving “work on oneself,”¹⁶ and even near life’s end he worked hard to shape and reshape his thinking in various ways. Wittgenstein’s students saw this and tried to keep up. It almost goes without saying that Wittgenstein’s students, even the ones who understood him poorly, instinctively responded to him as good novices respond to any master in whose presence there is the best hope of one’s own progress. The means of progress in this case was direct contact with Wittgenstein as mentor. In addition to group discussion, a privileged few carried on private conversations with Wittgenstein. And when they were not in group or private tutorials, they painstakingly wrote down verbatim everything they could possibly remember, put it in order, and published memoirs that reproduced Wittgenstein’s words. Think of conversations transcribed by Friedrich Waismann and Maurice O’C. Drury, of Norman Malcolm’s memoirs, Rush Rhees’s recollections, the compiling, editing and translating of Georg von Wright and Elizabeth Anscombe, the class notes of Alice Ambrose, Cyril Barrett, G.E. Moore, and

¹⁵ This illustration is Wittgenstein’s own. G.E. Moore, “Wittgenstein’s Lectures in 1930–33,” in *Philosophical Occasions, 1912–1952*, ed. James C. Klagge and Alfred Nordmann (Indianapolis & Cambridge: Hackett Publishing, 1993), 46–117. Citation from 05.

¹⁶ Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 24e.

others. If we are honest, we have to admit that for all of these “disciples,” the words of Wittgenstein function as canonical in general and, in particular, tips for their personal growth in the craft.¹⁷

Of course, a savvy reader is understandably leery of student notes. After all, their quality is so very uneven. Fergus Kerr observed that student notes for the Cambridge Lectures of 1946-47 taken by P. T. Geach, K. J. Shah and A. C. Jackson are so dissimilar from one another that it almost appears as if these students were attending different seminars!¹⁸ Wittgenstein was aware of this unevenness and lamented to Drury, “If you write these spontaneous remarks down, someday someone may publish them as my considered opinions. I don’t want that done. For I am talking now freely as my ideas come, but all this will need a lot more thought and better expression.” (Drury goes on to comment parenthetically, “This indeed is what was done later in the volume called *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief*.”¹⁹) Such unevenness of understanding is to be expected among apprentices. Yet one thing is certain: these students adopted the *posture* of apprenticeship precisely because they recognized that studying with Wittgenstein was a craft.

¹⁷ “Can we learn this knowledge? Yes; some can. Not, however, by taking a course in it, but through “*experience*.”—Can someone else be a man’s teacher in this? Certainly. From time to time he gives him the right *tip*.—This is what “learning” and “teaching” are like here.—What one acquires here is not a technique; one learns correct judgments. There are also rules, but they do not form a system, and only experienced people can apply them right. Unlike calculation rules.” *Philosophical Investigations*, ed. G. E. M. Anscombe and Rush Rhees, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (New York: Macmillan, 1953), part II.227e.

¹⁸ Fergus Kerr, “*Work on Oneself: Wittgenstein’s Philosophical Psychology*,” Institute for the Psychological Sciences Monograph Series (Arlington, VA: Psychological Sciences Press, 2008), 8.

¹⁹ Drury, “Conversations with Wittgenstein,” 155.

I want to highlight in particular three marks of contemplative philosophy that display its cooperative, progressive and self-involving character as a craft. First, contemplative philosophers must learn the self-discipline of resisting the craving for general explanation (since generalizing runs the risk of excluding the very differences contemplative philosophy aims to elucidate).²⁰ Correlative with the refusal to generalize is, second, the insistence that description be done in terms commensurable with the thing described. I don't mean that Wittgenstein objected to using object-language to describe cups on tables. I mean rather that since the phenomena under investigation involves moves in language games (sentences, gestures, etc.), those who offer descriptions of these linguistic moves must *work hard* to keep their language of description within the range of the language they are describing lest an alien language be introduced, one that would of course itself require indexing for aptness and so on, *ad infinitum*.²¹

In addition to the self-involving tasks of submission to a mentor and acquisition of the habit of attentive description (while resisting the craving to explain), contemplative philosophy is marked, third, by what Phillips called "moral" prerequisite for practicing

²⁰ "Our disease is one of wanting to explain." Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, ed. G. H. von Wright, Rush Rhees, and G. E. M. Anscombe, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Cambridge, MA and London, UK: MIT Press, 1978), VI §31. The term "craving for generality" was first used by Wittgenstein in the *Blue Book. The Blue & Brown Books* (London: Harper Perennial, 1965), 17.

²¹ Of course, Wittgenstein was the master of conducting contemplative philosophy as an enterprise on the same order as the language under investigation. Novice German readers are often surprised to find Wittgenstein's German so easy to read. Evidently Wittgenstein refused to propagate any sentence that explains or describes phenomena by means of concepts outside the experience as reported by the human subjects themselves. For example, despite all that music meant to Wittgenstein, he consistently resorted to silence rather than employ extra-musical concepts to describe music. Wittgenstein's reticence is often frustrating since philosophers are proud of their technical vocabulary which they invent in hopes of clarifying the sense of the sentence. But Wittgenstein thought this temptation must be resisted. In the place of generalization, one must learn to attend to particulars. For "the limit of language is shown by its being impossible to describe the fact which ...is the translation of a... sentence, without simply repeating the sentence." *Culture and Value*, 10e.

with excellence. In order to do conceptual justice to religious life in all its varieties, Phillips recommends contemplative philosophy be done in a “cool place,” one free from ideological passion, a freedom in which “philosophical contemplation endeavors to let the world be itself in all its variety. It allows the hubbub of voices and their diverse relations to each other to be themselves.”²² Lest this recommendation be mistaken for a mere “live and let live” policy on the one hand or a hankering after dispassionate, Cartesian objectivity on the other, both of which stances Phillips holds to be confused, I propose that the “moral requirement” of contemplative philosophy be understood as linked with the faculty of skilled judgment that is progressively acquired.

Novices—of carpentry, of music, of philosophy, of whatever craft—slowly acquire skilled judgment through training, and they are aided in this pursuit by the gradual mastery of the relevant conceptual language. In fact, conceptual mastery is partially constitutive of this skilled judgment. But as Rush Rhees has shown with his classic essay, no single domain of discourse is hermetically sealed off from the rest of speaking; at least not in real life. When the builders of *PI* §2 return home from an exhausting day of “Slab!” and “Block!” it will be natural for them to use these same expressions when they talk with family members about what they did all day. In order for the builders’ simple language really to be imaginable as a complete language game, there must be much more to their form of life, and how their speaking on the job is related to the rest of their living must be

²² From the introductory essay of this volume by Phillips. Page 5 in the typescript.

evident. In other words, the “complete” language game of building cannot be separated from the rest of speaking and living without ceasing to be a complete language game.²³

The overlapping character of language games itself contributes to the skill development of the novice. Like children, novices learn fluency by clumsy participation in conversations in which each conversant brings something to bear on the conversation. Sometimes what is brought to bear is tremendously helpful: as human practices are constituted by over-lapping domains of discourse, unbidden yet felicitous cross-practice transfer of concepts and judgment sometimes happens. In other words, on occasion, a practitioner is helped toward skilled judgment in one craft by means of fluency painstakingly acquired in an alternate domain of discourse.²⁴ This happy phenomena can be illustrated by Wittgenstein’s own example: his contemplative philosophy was assisted by his ability to view the world under the aspect of engineering.²⁵

Apart from a handful of sources, few Wittgensteinians recognize much of value in the lingering presence of Wittgenstein’s graduate work in engineering on his philosophical investigations. Allan Janik and Stephen Toulmin noted that Wittgenstein deliberately followed physicist Heinrich Hertz’s use of “modeling” (*Darstellung*) rather than Ernst Mach’s “representation” (*Vorstellung*) to express world and language as

²³ Rush Rhees, “Wittgenstein’s Builders,” in *Discussions of Wittgenstein* (Bristol, UK: Thoemmes Press, 1996), 71-84. See esp. 75-77.

²⁴ On the phenomenon of “cross-domain transfer” of tips from one field into an entirely unrelated field (e.g., from bicycling to aeronautics!), see Brad J. Kallenberg, “Cross Domain Transfer and Design,” in *By Design: Theology, Ethics and the Practice of Engineering* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013), 208-47.

²⁵ “Rethinking Fideism through the Lens of Wittgenstein’s Engineering Outlook,” *International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion* 71, no. 1 (2012): 55-73.

internally related.²⁶ Raymond Monk, Brian McGuinness, and Bernhard Leitner each note Wittgenstein's prowess in all things mechanical, how he built a working sewing machine at age 12, patented a propeller design at age 22, repaired machinery at a local factory when he lived in Norway in his early thirties, meticulously designed and oversaw the construction of a *Bauhaus* home for his sister at age 35, and at age 54 built a apparatus for a war-time hospital for recording blood pressure for patients suffering from *pulsus paradoxus* (rapid decline in pulse).²⁷ It is important whether this training conditioned in some way Wittgenstein's later philosophy. Kelly Hamilton sees Wittgenstein's engineering training as limited in scope to his Tractarian outlook.²⁸ But Susan Sterrett argues most convincingly that Wittgenstein's engineering training may have had a lasting influence also on his later philosophy.²⁹

²⁶ The latter term, employed by turn-of-the-century scientists like Ernst Mach, presumes language and world to be *externally* related. However, the former term was borrowed from physicist Heinrich Hertz who described the way in which (engineering) models of the world could be assessed by a criterion that expressed an *internal* relation between modeler and world. On the criterion of *Zweckmäßigkeit* see Allan Janik and Stephen Toulmin, *Wittgenstein's Vienna* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1973), 179-84.

²⁷ Examples in chronological order: *ibid.*; Brian McGuinness, ed. *Wittgenstein: A Life. Young Ludwig 1889-1921 (Volume 1)* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988); Ray Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1990). Bernhard Leitner, *The Architecture of Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Documentation, with Excerpts from the Family Recollections by Hermine Wittgenstein* (London & New York: Academy Editions and St. Martin's Press, 1995). J. R. Henderson, "Ludwig Wittgenstein and Guy's Hospital," *Guys Hospital Reports* 122, no. 1-2 (1973): 185-93.

²⁸ Kelly Hamilton, "Darstellungen in the Principles of Mechanics and the Tractatus: The Representation of Objects in Relation in Hertz and Wittgenstein," *Perspectives on Science* 10, no. 1 (2002); "Some Philosophical Consequences of Wittgenstein's Aeronautical Research," *Perspectives on Science* 9, no. 1 (2001); "Wittgenstein and the Mind's Eye," in *Wittgenstein: Biography and Philosophy*, ed. James C. Klagge (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

²⁹ Susan G. Sterrett, *Wittgenstein Flies a Kite: A Story of Models of Wings and Models of the World* (New York: Pi Press, 2006); "Pictures of Sounds: Wittgenstein on Gramophone Records and the Logic of Depiction," *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 36, no. 2 (2005): 351-62; "Physical Pictures: Engineering Models Circa 1914 and in Wittgenstein's Tractatus," in *History of Philosophy of Science: New Trends and Perspectives*, ed. Michael Heidelberger and Friedrich Stadler (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002), 121-35.

The historical context of Wittgenstein's turn to philosophy and away from engineering at the University of Manchester was the successful solution of heavier-than-air flight in 1905 (Europe 1908). It is immaterial to my argument whether or not Sterrett is correct in her speculation that like many other promising young thinkers, the young Wittgenstein had enrolled in aeronautical engineering with dreams of building flying machines and that the burden of Wittgenstein's genius drove him to seek elsewhere for an outlet once the Wright Brothers had gotten there first. We do know that in response to the two enormous technical problems facing turn-of-the-century aeronautics (namely, building a sufficiently light-weight source of power and steering the contraption despite aerial instability), Wittgenstein himself contributed to the solution of the first problem by designing an innovative propeller with jet-propulsion tips.³⁰ The relevant point is that there is evidence that Wittgenstein *mastered* crucial engineering concept and continued to employ them long after he had abandoned aeronautical engineering. The technical term "method of projection" is particularly germane; for engineers, the projection from model to world passes *through* the skills of the model-maker.

The significance of "method of projection" for Wittgenstein is bound up with the difference between *Darstellung* and *Vorstellung*. This difference can be expressed by a simple historical illustration. At the end of the 19th Century, children in France played with a toy helicopter designed by Alphonse Pénaud. A similar toy can still be purchased

³⁰ Patent is dated June, 1911. Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius*, 34. Fuel was pumped to a tiny reaction chamber at the tip of each propeller blade. Upon reaction, the jet gas would escape the chamber tangential to the rotation of the blade, thus spinning the blade faster. The idea was eventually put into practice—years later by Doblhoff in a WWII helicopter and more recently by Fairey's Jet Gyrodome. McGuinness, *Wittgenstein: A Life. Young Ludwig 1889-1921 (Volume 1)*, 68-69.

today. The helicopter's rotors generate enough speed for lift-off because of the ingenious rack-and-pinion gear arrangement: the child pulls the 18-inch strap (rack gear) quickly, the rotor turns and lifts the toy, keeping it aloft for flights of 30-40 feet. The toy clearly proves that heavier-than-air flight was indeed possible. The trick was how to scale up the toy to a life-sized version.³¹

Simplistically speaking, the approach of *Vorstellung* to this problem is to apply a method of projection that simply multiplies all the dimensions of the toy by a single scalar. If the sitting space of the toy pilot is four inches, and an adult pilot needs four feet of cockpit space, a reasonable suggestion is simply to multiply all the dimension by a factor of 12. For sake of argument, let us set aside technical problems of steering. And let us suppose there is reliable access to unlimited power to pull the strap. Will the thing fly? No.

It is worth the trouble to work through the reasons why not, in order to comprehend the categorical difference between *Vorstellung* and *Darstellung*. Perhaps counterintuitively, flying devices behave differently depending on their size.³² Fundamental to our hypothetical device is the physics of the problem. Because height, length and breadth have each increased twelve-fold, the weight has increased by a factor of 12^3 , or 1,728-fold! Since lift is a function of both propeller speed and air density, it is important to note that the air into which the chopper is to ascend and which must

³¹ Sterrett, *Wittgenstein Flies a Kite: A Story of Models of Wings and Models of the World*, 1-17.

³² Although she has undervalued the significance of *Darstellungen* for Wittgenstein, a concept he learned from Heinrich Hertz, I'm indebted to Susan Sterrett's careful discussion of "method of projection." See *ibid.*, 155-253.

support the lift of the propellers has not increased density between the toy and the machine. This means that the copter must increase its own lift by a factor of 1,728, presumably by increased rotor speed alone. However, here the proposed enlargement runs up against physical limits of materials. The strength of moving parts—propeller, shaft, gear strap—is proportional to the *cross-sectional area* of the part. If length and breadth have each increased twelve-fold, the strength of the enlarged parts has increased 12^2 or 144 times, because the cross-sectional area, by definition, can increase in only two dimensions. Consequently, this is very likely to fail, since the most strength we can build into the enlarged parts falls short of the additional required lift by a *factor of 12!*

Instinctively, engineers know that the *Vorstellung* approach—a modeling-by-proportionality—is doomed to fail.³³ The only “method of projection” that might possibly satisfy the design problem is one in which *the model is skillfully varied according to conditions of the problem*. This method of projection is a function of human experience, savvy, and know-how and corresponds to the concept of engineering design or modeling called *Darstellung*. In everyday German, one attends the cinema to see a film “presented” (*vorstellen*) but attends live theater to see a play “presented” (*darstellen*). The difference is clear: a *Vorstellung* is the same every time regardless of who runs the projector. By contrast, a *Darstellung* of a play varies, sometimes wildly, depending upon the actors, director, and many other features of context.

³³ This is not the only reason *Vorstellung* models fail. Frequently scalars are extrapolated from data drawn from too narrow a range (perhaps the only range measurable). For a brief summary of why engineering can *never* be completely driven by scientific theories or data see Eugene S. Ferguson, “How Engineers Lose Touch,” *American Heritage of Invention and Technology* Winter (1993): 16-24.

Wittgenstein seems to have had something like Hertz's notion of *Darstellung* in mind when in *Tractatus* 4.0141 he wrote:

There is a general rule by means of which the musician can obtain the symphony from the score....And that rule is the law of projection which projects the symphony into the language of musical notation.

We seriously misread this passage if we take the terms “general rule” and “law of projection” to express the analogy-by-proportion of *Vorstellung*. That is to say, not just anyone can listen to a symphony and write out the musical score! However, it may be possible for very *skillful* musicians to do so. Yet we must not for a moment pretend that all there is to musical transcription is working through the one-to-one correspondence between notes played and the score. After all, there are computer programs that can do *that*. By contrast, it also matters crucially to a given performance of a Schumann piece that the composer wrote the command “*Wie aus weiter Ferne*” (“Play as if from far away”) rather than simply “*pianissimo*” (“Play softly”).³⁴ Of course, I have no idea what the difference between the two commands is, for I am not a skilled musician. But I’m told by musicians that “storied” instructions really do matter for performance, and, likewise, narrative phrases akin to the one used by Schumann, are equally crucial for accurate transcription of Schumann’s music performed faithfully. In short, the “projection” of the performance onto a newly transcribed score is internally related to the skill of the musician who is doing the transcription. Only in this way is the performance “analogous” to the score. But this is analogy-as-skilled-use and decidedly not analogy-as-proportion.

³⁴ Wittgenstein discussed this in Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology. Two Volumes*, ed. G. H. von Wright and Heikki Nyman, trans. C. G. Luckhardt and M. A. E. Aue (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1980), I §250.

How then does Wittgenstein call this projection a “law?” Only in the sense that musical convention is regularized, for the *craft* of music is conventional by nature.³⁵ The projection is not a “law” in the sense that what to do could be specified in advance (according to the “law”). Rather, skilled musicians are progressively trained—by intensive participation in the cooperative practice under the watchful eye of a mentor—into a particular set of conventions surrounding musical notation and performance that can be discerned in the play of the experts. This training amounts to habituation in both tacit and verbal know-how.

How then is this a “*general* rule?” It may be illuminating to read this phrase also as an expression of the regularized training that musicians receive. The rule in view, therefore, is not a one-size-fits-all fiat but rather an *iterative training regimen*, perhaps akin to “The Rule of St. Benedict.” Thus we might speak of The Rule of Julliard or the Rule of The London Conservatory of Music.

The Tractarian passage goes on to assert that an orchestra’s performance can also be “projected” onto a gramophone groove. Like the musical score, the projection onto a gramophone disc happens by means human know-how, though in this case it is not the skills of the musician in view, but of the skill of the engineers. This raises an interesting question. Is the law of projection of symphony onto score the “same” as the law of

³⁵ Wittgenstein’s attention is shifted by H. J. Brouwer’s 1929 lecture on conventionalism in mathematics. When Wittgenstein returns to philosophy after nearly a decade’s absence, he employs the term “method of projection” rather than “law of projection.” On the impact of conventionalist H. J. Brouwer’s 1929 lecture on Wittgenstein see John T. E. Richardson, *The Grammar of Justification* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1976), 18.

projection of symphony onto gramophone? Here Sterrett claims the German is unclear.³⁶ But on closer consideration the answer seems clear enough: it cannot be the same law of projection, because the “Rule of Julliard” is not the same as the “Rule of MIT.” These two disparate training regimens do, however, become coterminous in the case of a Schumann sonata captured on CD. More importantly, they also become coterminous in the case of the single individual who learns mastery of both disciplines. The mystery of the unclear German dissolves in view of the fact that Wittgenstein, being highly trained in both music and engineering, instinctively assumed that the projections might pass through a single dually-trained individual, namely L.W.³⁷

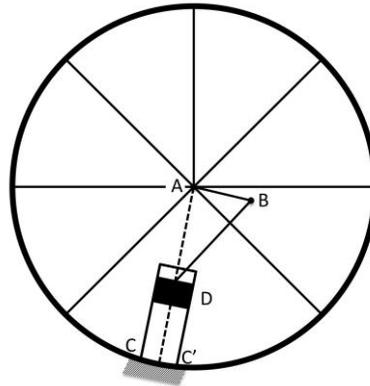
Music never lost its grip on Wittgenstein’s thinking. He wondered if persons untrained in music could fully grasp his views on language: “It is impossible for me to say in my book one word about all that music has meant in my life. How then can I hope to be understood?”³⁸ It is my contention that Wittgenstein *never* lost his engineer’s eye any more than he lost his musical ear. Just before writing the *Investigations*, he composed a book that, though never published in his lifetime, made it as far as a typed manuscript known as the *Big Typescript*. In it he criticized a proposed design for an efficient engine,

³⁶ Sterrett, *Wittgenstein Flies a Kite: A Story of Models of Wings and Models of the World*, 217.

³⁷ As a young person, Wittgenstein did more than learn to read music and play the clarinet with professional precision. His father’s home, one of the wealthiest in Europe, was frequently blessed by the presence of musical geniuses like Brahms who played their own chamber music after dinner. Wittgenstein’s brother Paul, was a concert pianist for whom Ravel wrote a concerto for the left hand after Paul had lost his right hand in the war. Wittgenstein’s childhood was permeated with music. How could young Ludwig fail to think musically?

³⁸ Rush Rhees, ed. *Recollections of Wittgenstein* (Bristol, UK: Thoemmes Press, 1996), 160. See, for example, *Zettel* §§156-177 for Wittgenstein’s comparison of understanding language with understanding music.

quite possibly suggested to him by his father who hankered after perpetual motion gismos:



A perpetual motion engine?³⁹

While this device can be debunked by building a prototype, to the one who is trained according to the “rule of engineering” the device can be simply and instantly *seen* as rigid. (That is to say, either the axel joint (A) is rigid and *nothing* moves or the axel joint is revolute and *everything* moves independently of the wheel.⁴⁰ In either case, the piston does no work.) Not every layperson can see this, though some can. Yet mechanical engineers naturally see it, for they are *trained* to see the world under the aspect of kinematics. I’ll admit that the concept of “aspect-seeing” supplements and in large measure replaces some of the engineering motifs in Wittgenstein’s later writings. However, throughout the corpus Wittgenstein repeatedly drew attention to physical

³⁹ Device diagram based on the diagram in Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Grammar*, ed. Rush Rhees, trans. Anthony Kenny (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974), 194.

⁴⁰ Assuming C and C’ are rigid, the piston D is a slider joint, and B is revolute.

“training,” which is so central to crafts such as engineering, music, and philosophy of language.

Under what circumstances pointing can explain, i.e., convey the use of a word. Not to a baby. *It* learns by being drilled.⁴¹

I have been trained to react to this sign in a particular way, and now I do so react....I have further indicated that a person goes by a sign-post in so far as there is a regular use of sign-posts, a custom.⁴²

By nature and by particular *training*, a particular education, we are disposed to give spontaneous expression to wishes in certain circumstances....In this game the question whether I know what I wish before my wish is fulfilled cannot arise at all...If I have learned to talk, then I do know.⁴³

That the notion of bodily training persists in Wittgenstein’s thinking makes the following question worth asking: To what extent was Wittgenstein’s non-contemplative behavior—from his eating habits to his prayer life—internally related to his philosophical method? In other words, did Wittgenstein naturally assume that there was a *bodily* prerequisite for doing contemplative philosophy well? If so, this fact might make his outlook similar to medieval monks who practiced rigorous asceticism *in order* to achieve spiritual insight and know-how.⁴⁴

The possibility, however remote, that some of Wittgenstein’s non-contemplative behavior may be internally related to his method may shed light on what sort of “moral” requirement might be demanded by contemplative philosophy. On the one hand, the odd

⁴¹ Ludwig Wittgenstein, “Notes for the Philosophical Lecture,” in *Philosophical Occasions, 1912–1952*, ed. James C. Klagge and Alfred Nordmann (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing, 1993), 447–58. Citation from 47.

⁴² *Philosophical Investigations*, §198.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, §441. Emphasis added.

⁴⁴ See Brad J. Kallenberg, “Praying for Understanding: Reading Anselm through Wittgenstein,” *Modern Theology* 20, no. 4 (2004): 527–46.

bits of his biography (giving away his fortune, etc.) may be evidence of nothing more than the sort of eccentricity that sometimes accompanies genius. If that is the case, we can conclude nothing about the hypothesized connection between conduct and philosophy. On the other hand, perhaps Wittgenstein, in strong contrast to modern philosophers, yet in striking similarity to pre-modern philosophical theologians, felt the importance of *bodily* discipline for achieving clarity.⁴⁵

Raymond Monk reports Wittgenstein underwent something like a religious conversion while serving the Austrian army on the Russian front. The catalyst for this experience was his discovery of Tolstoy's *Gospel in Brief*, and for a time, Wittgenstein was referred to as "the man with the Gospels."⁴⁶ This period in Wittgenstein's life can be characterized in terms of monastic-like vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. Immediately upon return from the front, Wittgenstein gave away his share of his father's vast fortune—Karl Wittgenstein was the Rockefeller of Europe—and for a time lived in as ascetic conditions as could be imagined, working as a gardener and sleeping in the tool shed.⁴⁷ In addition to self-imposed poverty, Wittgenstein's diaries show that he considered sexual release to be a detrimental to intellectual rigor. Finally, Wittgenstein

⁴⁵ Compare Hadot with the essays in Klagge: Pierre Hadot, "Wittgenstein, Philosophe Du Language (I)," *Critique* 149 (1959): 866-81; "Wittgenstein, Philosophe Du Language (II)," *Critique* 150 (1959): 972-83; *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, ed. with an introduction by Arnold I. Davidson, trans. Michael Chase (Oxford, UK & Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1995). and; James C. Klagge, ed. *Wittgenstein: Biography & Philosophy* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

⁴⁶ Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius*, 115-16. "For a time he . . . became not only a believer, but an evangelist, recommending Tolstoy's *Gospel* to anyone in distress. 'If you are not acquainted with it', he later told Ficker [an Austrian friend], 'then you cannot imagine what an effect it can have' . . ."

⁴⁷ This strikes a note of similarity with ancient philosophers who maintained that philosophy may demand *homelessness* of the philosopher! See Epictetus *Discourse* 3, 22, 18-20 and Dio Chrysostom, *Oration* 6, 18-20. I am indebted to Luke Timothy Johnson for this insight. Luke Timothy Johnson, *Luke*, Sacra Pagina (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991), 163.

kept a rigorous diet—Malcolm reports that lunch consisted of a single boiled egg—and a strict schedule. As Wittgenstein aged he devoted increasing amounts of time to prayer though, predictably, he thought he prayed badly.⁴⁸ But he recommended prayer to others by giving to Drury, Malcolm and others, copies of Dr. Samuel Johnson’s *Prayers and Meditations*. Perhaps most surprising of all, he initiated with G.E. Moore a plan to read together St. Paul’s *Epistle to the Romans*. As Kerr notes, they soon gave it up. But “that they even tried boggles the mind.”⁴⁹

Suggestive though these biographical details may be, my point is not that Wittgenstein was himself a religious character who thereby falsified a general prohibition against occupying a theological perspective. My point in rehearsing these biographical details is only to alert us to the fact that Wittgenstein presumed that what one did with one’s body is very, very important to one’s work as a philosopher. Particularly germane to my argument is the fact that, forever in search of illuminating comparisons, Wittgenstein instinctively gleaned conceptual insight from those disciplines for which fluency cannot be separated from *bodily* training.⁵⁰ Clearly this is the case for music. And it is the case for engineering. Consequently, it is plausible that there may be other disciplines which

⁴⁸ “I cannot kneel to pray because it’s as though my knees were stiff. I am afraid of dissolution (of my own dissolution), should I should become soft.” Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 56e. For a discussion of the debate surrounding these words see Kallenberg, *Ethics as Grammar: Changing the Postmodern Subject*, 193-97. For more on the connection between biography and philosophy see Klagge, *Wittgenstein: Biography & Philosophy*. For an (overly?) optimistic account of Wittgenstein’s Christianity see James Wm. McClendon, Jr. with Brad J. Kallenberg, “Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Christian in Philosophy,” *The Scottish Journal of Theology* 51, no. 2 (1998): 131-61. For a more measured account see Kerr’s discussion of Wittgenstein’s Catholicism in Kerr, “*Work on Oneself: Wittgenstein’s Philosophical Psychology*, 27-59.

⁴⁹ “*Work on Oneself: Wittgenstein’s Philosophical Psychology*, 37.

⁵⁰ On the role of bodily training in engineering expertise see Eugene S. Ferguson, *Engineering and the Mind’s Eye* (Cambridge, MA and London, UK: MIT Press, 1993), 41-59.

resemble Wittgensteinian philosophy for the way conceptual fluency and bodily conduct are tightly paired. Did Phillips see this? It does not appear so. Phillips explicitly states that the radical pluralism entailed by contemplative philosophy cannot be any ideological perspective. Yet, *pace* Phillips, I will next show the way in which a certain sort of theological craft circumvents his fears.⁵¹ But the conditions are twofold. First, a single practitioner must be fluent in both modes of discourse (i.e., both philosophy and theology); it is under the skin of the “bilingual” practitioner that the boundary between contemplative philosophy and theology may be thought to be semi-permeable. Second, as “theological” doesn’t name a unitary perspective, of the wide variety of modes of theological discourse, the bilingual practitioner must restrict him or herself to that mode of theological discourse that comports with the radical pluralism said to be entailed by the contemplative philosophical outlook.

THE BILINGUAL PRACTITIONER

My intention in the preceding section has been to make plausible the possibility that contemplative philosophy is a craft practiced by human animals who cannot help but do so in an embodied manner. Consequently, it is plausible to test contemplative philosophy against what we know about the bodily nature of other crafts. If Wittgenstein himself undertook philosophical therapy by means of discourse borrowed from music and engineering, it is at least logically possible that contemplative philosophy may, under

⁵¹ For recent attempts see Kerr, *Theology after Wittgenstein*. See also “*Work on Oneself*”: *Wittgenstein’s Philosophical Psychology*.

some conditions, finds resonance with discourse borrowed from still other non-philosophical crafts. If engineering and music are two crafts that resonate with contemplative philosophy, then it is at least logically possible that theology might be a third. Of course, it is easy to show that some forms of theological discourse mutually exclude contemplative philosophy—for example, evidentialist apologetics. On this I fully agree with Phillips. But if we attend to a broader and longer history of what the craft called “theology” has amounted to, we will discover that there is a way to see contemplative philosophy as coming very close to that which some strands of theology have set as their own task.⁵² I close this first section by offering two examples of theology-laden discourse that comes near to contemplative philosophy.

In a new book, one incidentally dedicated to the memory of D. Z. Phillips, Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams writes appreciatively on the thought of Simone Weil.⁵³ The essay entitled “Simone Weil and the Necessary Non-Existence of God” deserves far more thoughtful treatment than space here allows. I should not mention the essay were it not for the striking fact that Williams sees apophatic theology in very strong resonance with Weil’s view that “God is found only in the experience of divine absence.”⁵⁴ To the extent that Phillips has himself repeatedly drawn upon Weil’s comprehensive vision in his own thinking, it is difficult to imagine Phillips denying that similarities exist

⁵² Consider, for example, Boethius’ classic essay “The Consolations of Philosophy.” For discussion see Terrence W. Tilley, *The Evils of Theodicy* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1991), 141-64.

⁵³ Rowan Williams, “Simone Weil and the Necessary Non-Existence of God,” in *Wrestling with Angels: Conversations in Modern Theology*, ed. Mike Hinton (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 203-27.

⁵⁴ Williams’ words, *ibid.*, 212.

between his and Williams' conclusions.⁵⁵ Nor could Phillips have maintained that when Williams writes on Weil, Williams is doing either contemplative philosophy or doing theology but not both! Rather, Williams is simultaneously a practitioner of *both* crafts.⁵⁶ That much seems obvious.

The tendency to strictly divide disciplines within the humanities is, historically speaking, a relatively recent phenomenon that has not been entirely beneficial to either philosophy or theology. The sort of interconnections between disciplines cross-craft transfer of skills alluded to above has a poignant illustration in the contrast between René Descartes and Blaise Pascal. Both were expert practitioners of mathematics. For his part, Descartes was also a philosopher. He invents and posits Cartesian space, a handy convention that helped to give birth to the notion of “objectivity.” However, some aspects of his mathematics end up being hobbled by his epistemology: he is unable to solve the problem of the cycloid (the scalloped loop traced by a point on the edge of a coin as it rolls across a table; see Fig 1).

⁵⁵ On the first page of the Preface to his very early *The Concept of Prayer*, Phillips wrote, “I owe more than I can say to the insights of Søren Kierkegaard and Simone Weil.” A quick perusal found Phillips citing Weil in no less than 10 different books. Citation from D. Z. Phillips, *The Concept of Prayer* (London, UK: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965).

⁵⁶ The Wittgensteinian and apophatic tone of the essays in *Wrestling with Angels* was anticipated by Williams earlier anti-epistemology work. See Rowan Williams, *The Wound of Knowledge*, 2d revised ed. (Boston, MA: Cowley Publications, 1990).

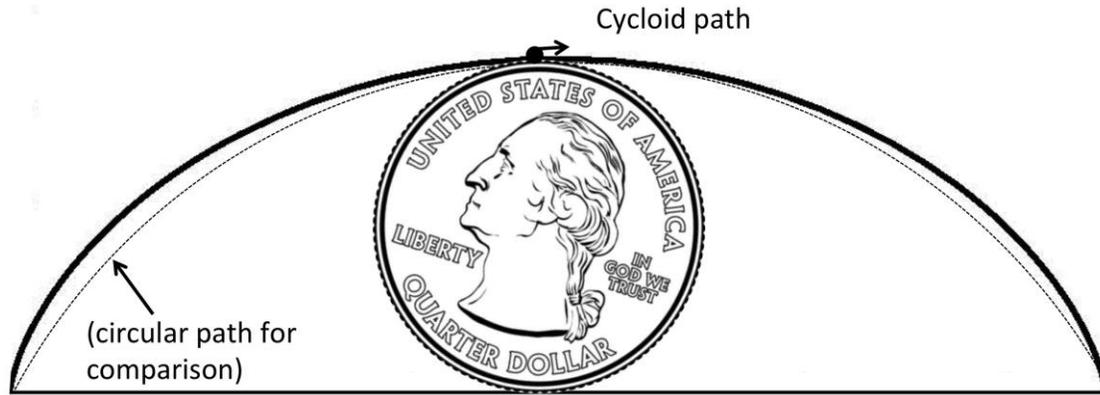


Figure 1 Cycloid path

In Descartes’s mind, in order for a curve to be “properly geometrical,” it must be “that which can be grasped by the intellect in a single intuition, or by a chain of intuitively certain consequences.”⁵⁷ For Descartes, the only curves which passed muster were arithmetic-algebraic forms, which is to say, curves that were describable by *finite* mathematics. Interestingly, Descartes’ considerable mathematical abilities were hamstrung by a philosophical outlook that bifurcated (a) subjects from objects, (b) elegant geometry from “brute mechanicals” (such as the cycloid), and (c) the finite from the infinite. Because he could not *conceive* the problem, much less solve it *algebraically*, Descartes was forced to dismiss the cycloid as “beneath” geometry.⁵⁸

Pascal, Descartes’ countryman, did not share Descartes’s allergy to “brute mechanicals.” Granted, Pascal too was a dualist. But unlike Descartes, Pascal did not pit

⁵⁷ Douglas M. Jesseph, “Descartes, Pascal, and the Epistemology of Mathematics,” *Perspectives on Science* (forthcoming). Citation is from p. 19 of a draft version of the paper.

⁵⁸ Descartes could and did solve the cycloid by other means. But it vexed him that he could not do it, as it were, legitimately. Michael S. Mahoney, “Infinitesimals and Transcendent Relations: The Mathematics of Motion in the Late Seventeenth Century,” in *Reappraisals of the Scientific Revolution*, ed. David C. Lindberg and Robert S. Westman (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 464.

the material against the immaterial, nor the finite against the infinite. Rather, the polar opposite of the infinite was the “nothingness.” The realm of the finite, material and contingent was suspended in the middle, on the one side borrowing its being from the infinite and, on the other side, inheriting its imperfections from the nothingness by *participating in both*. Historian of science Douglas Jesseph summarized:

The foundation of Pascal’s approach to the cycloid, and indeed to geometry generally, is therefore the notion that a finite magnitude hangs, as it were, suspended between nothingness and the infinite, participating in both. As a result, there is no epistemological barrier to the use of infinitesimal quantities. These, it seems, are as easily comprehended as any other geometric objects, and there is no difficulty in assuming that a finite quantity can be divided into an infinite collection of infinitesimal parts, that these parts can be summed up in an infinite collection, and yet this collection adds up to a finite magnitude.⁵⁹

Where did Pascal get this idea? From theology. In his essay on geometry, “De l’Esprit géométrique,” Pascal paraphrases the Latin text of Wisdom 11:20(21), “But you have arranged all things by measure and number and weight.”⁶⁰ This may not sound like much, but Pascal sees these terms—*distance*, *number* and *movement* (weight), and by means of them *space* and *time*—as grasped by intuition since humans, as created beings, are naturally endowed with faculties fit for navigating the rest of creation. As a result, Pascal has no trouble expanding the discipline of mathematics to embrace not only arithmetic and geometry but also “mechanics.”⁶¹ Comprehending mechanicals required infinitesimals. But Pascal was not as cautious as Descartes. Why was Pascal so daring?

⁵⁹ Douglas M. Jesseph, “Descartes, Pascal, and the Epistemology of Mathematics,” *Perspectives on Science* 15, no. 4 (2007): 427-28.

⁶⁰ NRSV. *sed omnia in mensura, et numero et pondere disposuisti*.

⁶¹ Blaise Pascal, “De L’esprit Géométrique,” in *De L’esprit Géométrique Et L’art De Persuader* (Mozambique, 2001), 429.

Pascal was daring because humans and mechanicals together are suspended in the middle participating in both the nothingness and the infinite.

This is a *theological* perspective. (It is sometimes called “sacramentalism.”) Pascal used to place an empty chair to the side of his writing desk in order to remind himself of his own contingency; at any moment he might fall into nothingness.⁶² On the other side, diametrically opposed to the nothingness, his desk opened up to a world shot through with the perichoretic fecundity of God’s presence from which all things borrow their existence. This seemingly trivial physical arrangement of his study space was Pascal’s way of sustaining his bodily habit of seeing the material order (including himself) under the aspect of sacramentality, which is to say, seeing everything that was created as permeated by infinitude.

It is anybody’s guess as to why Descartes missed it. My point is that Pascal saw the world differently than Descartes, because Pascal saw it sacramentally. While Pascal’s outlook may not be shared by many philosophers of religion today, the practical upshot was this: Pascal’s invention of a precursor to infinitesimal calculus that applied to everyday brute mechanicals such as the cycloid was predicated on his ability to “see” the world under the aspect of sacramentality, which for Pascal meant seeing the simultaneous double participation of all things in the nothingness and in the infinity of God. I am not claiming that sacramentality needs to be a metaphysical tenet (though it surely was for Pascal) in order for it to serve as an aspect under which the problem could be viewed and

⁶² William Desmond, *Is There a Sabbath for Thought? Between Religion and Philosophy*, ed. John D. Caputo, Perspectives in Continental Philosophy (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 91.

thereby be solved.⁶³ My point is that Pascal's theology enabled him to see the movement of a coin under the aspect of sacramentality, to "see" the infinite as permeating all things. It was this seeing that rewarded Pascal's eschewal of Cartesian bifurcations and, *pace* Descartes, to presume that this brute mechanical world *could* be described as the real presence of the infinite in the finite (i.e., by *infinitesimal* calculus). Ironically, we now teach infinitesimal calculus inside Cartesian space. And though we, like Pascal, can solve the problem of the cycloid, we have grown unaware of the religious point of view that initially made this solution possible.

THE GRAMMAR OF "THEOLOGY"

The preceding section argued the first move of my argument, namely, that contemplative philosophy is a human craft that, like all crafts, is constituted not by a self-contained mode of discourse but by overlapping modes of discourse. As a result, contemplative philosophy must in principle remain open theological modes of discourse or else it will suffer collapse under its own doctrinaire exclusions. Of course, not every instance of theological discourse may overlap with contemplative philosophy. So I turn now to the second move in my argument, namely a description of the kind of theology that might comport with contemplative philosophy.

In an essay entitled, "Internal Realism," Finnish systematic theologian Tage Kurtén tries unsuccessfully to demonstrate conceptual common ground between Phillips and

⁶³ On aspect seeing see Stephen Mulhall, *On Being in the World: Wittgenstein and Heidegger on Seeing Aspects* (London, UK: Routledge, 1990).

existentialist theologian, Paul Tillich.⁶⁴ Phillips concludes his strong rebuff of Kurtén by recounting three comforting but faulty pictures that theologians wrongheadedly employ in hopes of protecting religion from the impending danger entailed by the fact that certain modes of religious conduct are disappearing (or have already disappeared) from contemporary Western culture. *Religious individualism* is the picture that, regardless of the fate of religion in the external culture, so long as the lone religious believer is rightly related to his or her personal divine Savior, religious belief is garrisoned *ad intra hominis*—on the interior of the person. The second illusory comforting picture is called *religious rationalism*. It protects religious belief by asserting, “No matter what cultural challenges may take place, the validity of religious beliefs is secured by formal arguments which transcend the relativity of cultural contexts.”⁶⁵ The third faulty picture, *religious accommodation*, describes Christianity as a religion constituted by a never-ending response to questions posed by surrounding culture and to which religion supposedly has the answer. “Therefore,” according to this view, “whatever changes in our culture, however dark it becomes for certain religious traditions, Christianity can always accommodate the situation by taking on new cultural forms....”⁶⁶

The ubiquity of these apologetic pictures in contemporary theology is undisputable. However, these defensive measures do not exhaust the number of possible modes

⁶⁴ Tage Kurtén, “Internal Realism: A Joint Feature by Dewi Z. Phillips and Paul Tillich?,” in *D.Z. Phillips’ Contemplative Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Andy F. Sanders (Aldershot, UK & Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), 95-110.

⁶⁵ D. Z. Phillips, “Philosophy and Theology — Too Close for Comfort. A Reply to Tage Kurtén,” *ibid.*, 111-24. Citation from 22. The original argument was made in *Belief, Change and Forms of Life* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1986).

⁶⁶ *Belief, Change and Forms of Life*, 122.

theology may take. Nor does theology, in the end, reduce to playing defense. A hint of what I mean comes from Phillips's own report of a conversation between Rhees and Wittgenstein.

I will mention...a remark Wittgenstein made to me after a talk Farrington had given to our Philosophical Society. Farrington spoke on "Causality in History," in which he advanced some version of the Marxian "dialectic," with the idea that this shows that in the course of history there is "progress on the whole." In the discussion Wittgenstein showed easily enough the incoherence of Farrington's discourse. And when he was walking home with me afterwards he said how he disliked this kind of "optimism" which was supposed to result from the demonstration (from a theory of history, or of how history must go). "If a man says 'Certainly things look bad at the moment; and if you look at past history, you can find plenty that might lead anyone to be depressed. But in spite of all that, I am *still* optimistic.' — then I can admire this, even if I do not agree with him. But if his optimism is just the outcome of a scientific proof — the scientific study of history — then..." That seemed to Wittgenstein a weak and mealy-mouthed sort of optimism, I think; and one with a sort of smugness to it. It was not really facing the problem it pretended to face; it was painting it over.⁶⁷

While Wittgenstein was describing an imaginary individual in the above example, it is hard to take seriously Wittgenstein envisioning any lone optimist without also envisioning him or her as sustained by *some* particular community or other. I might then reasonably ask: What might this community look like? And, shifting away from a scientific optimist to a religious one, I might also ask: What kind of practices, habits, and speech sustains a community whose members are marked by religious belief "come what may?" For that matter, what sort of community of discourse produces martyrs?

Answering these questions is admittedly *not* a philosophical task. And I will not undertake answers here, except to note that the three illusory pictures that Phillips

⁶⁷ Cited in "Philosophy and Theology — Too Close for Comfort. A Reply to Tague Kurtén," 123-24.

describes *may*—although there are no guarantees—may be avoided by the kind of community that gives priority to first-order religious speech over second-order theological explanation.⁶⁸ For example, *religious individualism* might possibly be avoided by the community who consistently prays in the first person plural (“Our Father...”) rather than in the first person singular (“my Father...”). *Religious rationalism* may be avoided to the extent that Wittgenstein’s parenthetical phrase, “theology as grammar,”⁶⁹ is descriptive of the enterprise that *shows* rather than *says* what religious belief amounts to. Conversely, communities whose first-order religious speech and practice is easily supplanted by explanations constructed in alien vocabulary and grammar is perennially vulnerable to bewitchment by these pictures.⁷⁰

Finally, *religious accommodation* may be avoided by the community capable of “witness.” Witness is not the same as apologetics. The speech act called *apologetics* (*apologia*) is a relatively infrequent term in the canonical scriptures. It is overshadowed

⁶⁸ Three paragraphs into his eighteenth lecture, William James describes theological formulations as “secondary products, like translations of a text into another tongue.” As such, theology and philosophy are dependent upon primary products of religion, which for James is religious feeling. Although he clearly admired James, Wittgenstein identified religious *practice* (including speech) as primary, rather than religious feelings. William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, The Modern Library (New York: Random House, 1902), 422. While it is commonplace to think of theology as something that happens later, after “religion” happens, it is less common to realize that theological speech itself becomes part of what the community talks about. Consequently, there is no neat dividing line between theological speech and religious speech as James and others suppose.

⁶⁹ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 373.

⁷⁰ Perhaps the following story can shed some light. An agnostic friend of mine, also a former student of Phillips, once remarked that when I prayed it sounded as though I “believed God to be ontologically real in the metaphysical sense,” something my friend was eager to fault. My reply frustrated him: “Ontologically real?” “Metaphysical sense? Why do you think that these terms make my belief clearer than what we Christians actually say? We say things such as “God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself.” My refusal to leave the realm of ordinary language had the effect of depriving my friend of the leverage he thought he had against religious belief. And to that extent I suppose it functioned as a kind of defense. But in all sincerity I was only trying to remain consistent with the lesson I learned from Phillips, that analysis must be conducted in the same genre as the sentences under investigation.

by *witness* (*euangelizō*) and *preaching* (*kērygma*) by a margin of eight to one. Initially, apologetics was a speech act reserved for special situations, namely, after one had been arrested and required to give an account before civil authorities. By “witness” is meant all acts of communicating the Good News (*euangelion*) that are isomorphic with the manner in which Jesus of Nazareth lived and communicated. (Obviously, this is tricky; witness is a craft in its own right.) But note: religious accommodation is avoided because witness, unlike apologetics, does not require translation of first-order claims into terms the target culture already understands. The point of witness is *enculturation*. By “enculturation” I mean that a community shows what they are saying by bearing out in deeds isomorphic with their speech. Witness cannot be accomplished by translation because word-for-word same saying ignores the behavioral backdrop of our words.⁷¹ When my friend John moved to Ecuador to live among the Quechua, no amount of reading English translations would do the trick! His first order of business was learning to speak Quechuan *as they speak it*. All that goes into the manner in which the Quechua speak Quechuan constitutes the pattern

⁷¹ “...a great deal of stage-setting in the language is presupposed if the mere act of naming is to make sense.” Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §257. A given speech-act has the meaning it does by word-use-in-context. One can subvert what one intends to say by ill-matched behavior. The two-timing cad cannot say “I love you” and mean the same as the lifelong, faithfully monogamous partner. So too, the warrior who cries “Christ alone is the Prince of Peace!” while cleaving the skull of the infidel is out of sync with the community that takes the title “Prince of Peace” as an appellation of Jesus’ pacifism. On the relation of pacifism and witness see the culminating Gifford Lecture by Stanley Hauerwas printed as ch. 6 of Stanley Hauerwas, *With the Grain of the Universe: The Church’s Witness and Natural Theology: Being Gifford Lectures Delivered at the University of St. Andrews in 2001* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2001).

John “must” master in order to communicate. And of course that “pattern” necessarily includes non-verbal patterns of behavior.⁷² There is a parallel in Wittgenstein:

When I talk about language (words, sentences, etc.) I must speak the language of the every day. Is this language somehow too coarse and material for what we want to say? Then how is another to be constructed?—And how strange that we should be able to do anything with the one we have.⁷³

If theologians are disciplined enough to keep their reflection isomorphic with first-order religious language (akin to the way Wittgenstein’s philosophy of language is isomorphic with ordinary language), then such theologians belonging to the “come what may” community learn a craft that is naturally loathe to transgress the marks of contemplative philosophy precisely because they are loathe to transgress the boundaries of first-order speaking. To say the same thing differently, *Wittgensteinian* theologians maintain that the way to “go on” begins with the assumption that religion, theology, and philosophy of religion share a first-order (ordinary) grammar. This is not to deny that each of these disciplines may have their respective technological terminology. But for Wittgenstein, importantly, technical terms depend for their very sense upon first-order language. What is sought by theologians of this stripe, then, is neither explanation nor justification, neither accommodation nor apologetics, but skilled first-order use. And part of this skilled-use is knowing when advocacy and explanation come to an end. I turn finally to an attempt to make clear with a concrete example of theology in action.

⁷² I recognize that I’m writing more about the application of Wittgenstein to hermeneutics than about Wittgenstein per se. Yet Wittgenstein himself worked hard to do philosophy within first-order speech and resisted the temptation to invent a philosophical language (as did Tarski and others).

⁷³ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Grammar*, §77. Also §27: “The calculus is as it were autonomous.—Language must speak for itself.”

Theology after Wittgenstein

Consider the ordinary, if astonishing, appellation, “Christ is God.” Clear attestations of Christ’s divinity show up in very early Christian worship. There is no sense pretending that there is a nifty solution to the seeming contradiction entailed by the claims that “God is one,” “The Father is not the Son,” and “Christ is God.” Nor is there a point in reducing the claim “Christ is God” to something as mundane as “Jesus is really swell.” For, were there an acceptable way to dodge the problem of Christian worship of Christ as God, the Church could have avoided several tumultuous centuries of excommunicating those whose proffered explanations were deemed as *not* going on in the same way, not to mention avoid three centuries of executions at the hands of those who insisted religious loyalty to Caesar trumps worship of Jesus the Christ.

One of the earliest written claims is rendered doxologically by St. Paul, “...the one being Christ according to the flesh who is, above all, God!”⁷⁴ Contemporary Christians, who unblinkingly affirm the intelligibility of this sentence, may do so inappropriately or appropriately, and the difference between them is exactly the difference Wittgenstein makes for doing theology in a contemplative manner. In the first case are those theologians (and philosophers of religion) who approach St. Paul’s words under one or more of the following assumptions: (a) This is surely a “metaphysical” claim; moreover (b)

⁷⁴ The Greek construction is crystal clear: *hōn ho Christos to kata sarka, hōn epi pantōn theos* (ω{ñ ο(Xristo_j to_ kata_ sa&rka, ο(w@n e0pi\ pa&ntwn qeo_j) Romans 9:5. Other clear NT affirmations are Jn 1:1; 1:18; 20:28; Titus 2:13; 2 Pe. 1:1; 1 Jn 5:20; Heb 1:8-9, Gal 2:20 (variant ms.).

this is a labeling claim that is either true or false in the label it affixes; and possibly going further, (c) the veracity of this label must be decided on grounds *other* than first-order religious speech (say putative analytical or historical grounds, etc.).

Central to this first group's strategy is the unwritten and (to them) self-evident assumption that the copulative "is" expresses identity. "Identity is a precise conception," wrote a presumptive Bertrand Russell, "and no word in ordinary speech stands for anything so precise."⁷⁵ When one assumes that the word "is" functions in a perfectly clear and obvious way, then when one meets puzzles of the form "*a is b*," it is easy to conclude that such puzzles are best solved by defining or explaining the two terms *a*, *b*. Garth Hallett describes how, apart from Wittgenstein's help, this story has gone:

To the query "How can *a* possibly be *b*?" theologians have responded by carefully defining, distinguishing, and comparing *a* and *b*, critics have replied by applying "Leibniz's law" (the indiscernibility of identicals) and challenging the theologians' solutions, and the faithful have responded by either accepting the apparent contradiction (such, they may believe, are the requirements of faith) or losing their faith (such may appear the requirements of reason) or leaving the whole matter to the experts and simply living with the mystery.⁷⁶

Well-intentioned as they may be, theologians of the first group by the very shape of their advocacy, have mucked up the works. But there is another way.

The second alternative follows ordinary language in refusing the univocity of "is." The word "is" is a word in ordinary language and whose enormous range of appropriate use must be learned like that of any other word: by using the word in a wide variety of ways in a broad range of situations. Either to lump or to restrict this variety begets

⁷⁵ Cited in Hallett, *Identity and Mystery in Themes of Christian Faith; Late-Wittgensteinian Perspectives*, 9.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

confusion. Thus the following sentences, each of which employ “is,” are entirely befuddling so long as “is” is taken as strict identity.⁷⁷

- The rose *is* red.
- This *is* my brother (pointing to a picture).
- Olivier *is* Hamlet (in the movie).
- The evening star *is* the morning star.
- Ignorance *is* bliss.
- War *is* war.
- Life *is* a bowl of cherries

As Wittgenstein pointed out, “The words ‘the rose is red’ are meaningless if the word ‘is’ has the meaning ‘is identical with’.”⁷⁸ Of course the word “is” does not in this case have the meaning of “is identical with.” But English speakers already know this.

It would take very little thought to extend the above list *indefinitely*. And in each case the average person understands; persons of average fluency are capable of adapting well enough to each new usage of “is” because extending words into new contexts is part of what Stephen Mulhall (following Cavell) calls the inherent projectability of language.⁷⁹ Fluent speakers are sometimes successful in extending familiar words into new contexts.

⁷⁷ The illustrations are Hallett’s, although Hallett appears to be saying that “Christ *is* God” in the same way that “John the Baptist *is* Elijah.” In the face of NT affirmations, Hallett’s conclusion is overly simple. Thanks to Ethan Smith for pointing this out. *Ibid.*, 7.

⁷⁸ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, p. 175.

⁷⁹ The fourth of Mulhall’s Stanton Lectures at Cambridge (17 Feb 2014, “Analogical Uses and the Projectiveness of Words: Wittgenstein’s Vision of Language”) is available for download from <http://sms.cam.ac.uk/collection/1637674>. The relevant section on projecting a word is from {Cavell, 1999 [1979] #5789@180-190}

Some attempts may be better or worse than others, and the conversation will flourish or founder accordingly. But here is the point: Sentences of the form “*a is b*” are *not* understood by means of a strategy that precisely defines *a* and *b*, but by reading each occurrence of “*is*” *extensionally*, a reading that is accomplished by means of a method of projection that passes *through* the skill (fluency) of the speaker.⁸⁰ What then of the “*is*” in first-order religious utterances such as “God is love” or, our present puzzle, “Christ is God?” Theologians operating in this second mode, neither define nor explain. Yet that does not leave them with *nothing* to do. They seek to read the “*is*” *extensionally*. They articulate where the riddle lies.⁸¹ They elucidate patterns in ambiguous data and help others see under one aspect rather than another. They intervene in wrongheaded or confused claims en route to showing how the conversation might go on. And they may creatively project non-metaphorical analogies into new contexts. Such would be the theological grammarians whose own speaking is itself part of the complicated life lived together with other believers in the religious community. Simply put, theology after Wittgenstein amounts to language tutorials, literary criticism, and poetry practice for those who want to appreciate Christian religion for what it is and intelligibly join in, and extend, the conversation.

CONCLUSION

⁸⁰ The term “analogical” is too freighted to be useful in many contexts. The problem in the temptation to reduce “analogical” to mere “proportion.” David Burrell has tried to salvage analogical from misunderstanding by emphasizing “analogical use.” See Burrell, *Analogy and Philosophical Language*.

⁸¹ Behind Mulhall on riddles lies Cora Diamond and Roger White, “Riddles and Anselm’s Riddle,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volumes* 51 (1977): 143-86.

If attunement to contingency—the contingency that is bound up with the sheer physicality and timefulness of human experience—is at the heart of contemplative philosophy, then my seemingly innocuous and unobjectionable proposal is that our physicality and timefulness imply that contemplative philosophy is itself but one of a host of habit-forming and progressive crafts. Detractors may object that I have painted myself into a corner. For does not Wittgenstein’s self-descriptive claim (“a philosopher is not a member of any community of ideas”) naturally become normative for apprentices who are intent on imitating Wittgenstein? Likewise, has not Phillips, himself a second generation Wittgensteinian, claimed that contemplative philosophy is part of a radical pluralism that in the end simply cannot be a theological perspective?

Perhaps surprisingly, I have argued to the contrary that neither Wittgenstein’s “exile” nor Phillips’s assertion are general prohibitions against theology per se. I concede that both *may* function as excellent training heuristics that will enable apprentice theologians to learn the trade more expertly than if the heuristics are ignored.⁸² But part and parcel of mastering a craft is learning to correctly judge when craft-constituting heuristics are provisional. Piano instructors drill students early on “never, *ever* cross your hands when playing piano!” (Student cross hands to cover lack of dexterity of the weak hands.) Only when pupils have learned this habit thoroughly will they be able, with

⁸² For an outstanding study of the absolute centrality of heuristics, tips and “rules of thumb” for the learning of one skilled craft, engineering, with sensitivity to Wittgensteinian concerns see Billy Vaughn Koen, *Discussion of the Method; Conducting the Engineer’s Approach to Problem Solving* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). Koen argues that heuristics are not special cases, but in fact the heart of practical reasoning. He also shows that, if we stick with Aristotle’s categories for sake of argument, practical reasoning subsumes theoretical and productive reasoning. In other words, physicians run the most theoretical aspects of their craft according to skills of *practical* reasoning. In Koen’s apt phrase, “to be human is to be an engineer” (58).

trepidation, to progress to the level of skill that is commensurate with cases where hand-crossing is partly constitutive of expertise.

In light of human crafts, then, I've argued that there are two conditions under which a practitioner of contemplative philosophy may possibly find themselves entering uncharted theological territory. First, it is possible for the boundary between the two crafts to become semi-permeable when a single person approaches fluency in both crafts, the craft of contemplative philosophy and the craft of theology. Should cross-discourse transfer of conceptual skill occur, it need not nullify the particularities of either craft.⁸³ (Thus Rowan Williams and Pascal.) Moreover, I have conceded that there are times when the prohibition may prove useful for rooting out "uncontemplative" forms of theology (e.g., apologetics). Yet I maintain that there *is* a variety of theological discourse that is not by nature tilted agonistically against Wittgenstein's method. It is this family of theological discourse (what Fergus Kerr called "theology after Wittgenstein") that comports with contemplative philosophy. The theologian who restricts him- or herself to this mode of theological discourse, while meeting with silence *apologia* and explanation exemplifies the second leg of my argument. I conclude that the budding theologian may become a contemplative philosopher and as a contemplative philosopher may discover that the craft of philosophy from time to time involves a certain sort of theological perspective.

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⁸³ As Cavell argued, the inherent projectability of language from one discourse to another cannot be ruled out in advance but is itself part of the contingency of our life with language.

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