

11-2015

## Wittgenstein: The Fate of Wonder Wittgenstein's Critique of Metaphysics and Modernity

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### Recommended Citation

White, David A. (2015) "Wittgenstein: The Fate of Wonder Wittgenstein's Critique of Metaphysics and Modernity," *International Dialogue*: Vol. 5, Article 6.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32873/uno.dc.ID.5.1.1095>

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/id-journal/vol5/iss1/6>

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# Review Essay

## **Wittgenstein**

### ***The Fate of Wonder Wittgenstein's Critique of Metaphysics and Modernity***

Kevin M. Cahill. New York: Columbia University Press, 2011.  
272pp.

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That Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951) was one of the most influential twentieth-century philosophers is hardly a controversial claim. However, Wittgenstein's own works, principally the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1922) and *Philosophical Investigations* (1953; second edition 1997), have engendered a considerable range of widely diverse—and divisive—commentary. In *The Fate of Wonder Wittgenstein's Critique of Metaphysics and Modernity*, Kevin M. Cahill has produced a useful and at times provocative addition to this literature.

## I

*The Fate of Wonder* opens with an introduction followed by two parts (chapters 1–3, 4–6). At the beginning of the Introduction, Cahill states (2) the book's three main ideas: Wittgenstein intended to “reawaken the sense of wonder for what he felt was the deeply mysterious place of human life in the world;” this “task could only be carried through as a form of cultural criticism”—in particular, “Wittgenstein's critical

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relation to Western metaphysics must be understood in its critical relation to Western modernity;" and finally, "only a way of practicing philosophy that both avoided and undermined traditional philosophy's reliance on theory was suited to accomplish this task." Cahill insists that Wittgenstein's work is suffused with an ethical dimension, a concern (3) "best understood as modulated by a critique of metaphysics-*cum*-critique of culture, all moving through his concern for the fate of wonder" (Cahill admits that this cultural significance must be "teased out" of Wittgenstein's texts—174n21.) In addition, Cahill clarifies his approach to the standard separation of Wittgenstein's work into "early" and "late," and describes his own methodology regarding the diverse texts comprising Wittgenstein's output. Cahill also announces his intention to confront key aspects of Wittgenstein with elements of Heidegger's early (and seminal) *Being and Time* (1927) employed as a prism to enhance Cahill's line of interpretation. The introduction concludes with an overview of the book; the rest of part I of this review amplifies this outline.

Chapter 1 analyzes the two major interpretive approaches to reading the *Tractatus*—the "ineffabilist" vs. "the resolute;" Cahill offers reasons for preferring the latter, i.e., that the *Tractatus* resolutely avoids advancing substantive philosophical positions, whether about language or anything else. Cahill also announces a theme pervading his approach (31): "One significant consequence of this interpretation is that after we throw away Wittgenstein's nonsensical elucidations, the only sentences remaining are those that can be used to say something: *ordinary* sentences" (italics in text). We shall see (part II below) that to determine the precise content of an "ordinary sentence" becomes crucial to the cogency of Cahill's overall interpretation.

Chapter 2, the longest and "most ambitious" chapter in the book (12), articulates the ethical purpose of the *Tractatus*. Given "Wittgenstein's understanding and practice of philosophy as an activity whose goal is clarity rather than the establishment of philosophical truth or the refutation of philosophical theories" (42), Cahill contends "that the ethical point of the *Tractatus* is to reawaken us to a sense of wonder..." (44). Cahill introduces and explicates several pivotal distinctions Martin Heidegger uses (in order to pursue "fundamental ontology") toward the beginning of *Being and Time*; Cahill's strategy with this apparently inapt interpretive move is comparative and explanatory: "Wittgenstein's attempt in the *Tractatus* to clarify language and the impulse to go beyond its limits and Heidegger's attempt in *Being and*

*Time* to uncover anxiety as a source of understanding into Dasein's fundamental structure ought to be seen as serving what are in central respects the same philosophical end" (62). Chapter 2 also develops Cahill's claim that of particular significance regarding the sources of confusion in philosophy was what Wittgenstein "saw as the distorting effect that causal-scientific modes of thought exerted on our understanding both in philosophy and in the broader intellectual and spiritual life of the West" (51). Wittgenstein had nothing against scientific practices *per se* (cf. 186n48); thus "there is nothing in the content of modern science itself that is incompatible with wonder but...something about the cultural climate in which science takes place blocks a reawakening to wonder" (57)—hence the need for a "cultural critique" in order to disclose the possibility of such wonder. Chapter 2 concludes: "Given his understanding of the nature of philosophical activity at the time he completed the *Tractatus*, the removal of the obstacle of speculative philosophy is all, I believe, he thought philosophy itself could achieve" (87).

These positive effects are complemented by the fact that, as Cahill argues in chapter 3, the *Tractatus* fails in its stated goal to establish philosophically a program to produce a uniform sense of clarity in the expression of language: "Using some of Wittgenstein's own later criticisms of his early work, I show that the failure here is due to a fundamentally metaphysical, essentialist view of language that inadvertently underlies the method of clarification that the *Tractatus* employs." In fact, "the *Tractatus* can be seen as an example of the very 'craving for generality' and 'contemptuous attitude towards the particular case' in philosophy that Wittgenstein would later bemoan" (97).

The initial chapter of the second part, chapter 4, is titled "The Concept of Progress in Wittgenstein's Thought" and its central strategy is to show how the motto to the *Philosophical Investigations* makes the reader aware that reflection on the concept of progress "is relevant for grasping some of [the book's] central philosophical objectives" (14). Cahill concedes that the theme of wonder cannot be found as such in the *Investigations* but he insists nonetheless that close reading shows "how something *essentially preliminary* to wonder can be located in the *Investigations*" (138—italics in text; this is one element in the "teasing out" process of interpretation noted at 174n21). This propaedeutic involves demonstrating "how the remarks on rule-following [as asserted in the *Investigations*] can be taken as an

example of how the *Philosophical Investigations* attempts to lead the reader to a perspective on language that then prepares the way for a distinctive kind of cultural critique” (108). Cahill draws a sharp distinction between (a) rules as examined by reflective, systematic philosophy and (b) rules when actually implemented within the fabric of life: “The relevant difference between how rules show up for us when we are engaged in following them is that in the former case it may be true to say that there is always a question whether someone understands, while in the latter case, in ordinary life, that is, there is usually no question at all” (119).

This separation of life as lived from life as the object of traditional philosophical reflection and analysis is crucial to Cahill’s approach to the *Philosophical Investigations*: “I want to make it plausible to think that Wittgenstein’s engagement with this peculiar way of [compartmentalized] thinking is in large measure intended as a philosophical response to what he takes to be one of the central organizing myths of modernity, what Charles Taylor has called the ‘rationalist’ or ‘disengaged’ view of human intelligence” (114). Cahill consolidates the import of the *Philosophical Investigations* regarding this response: “Wittgenstein’s work of assembling reminders (§27) in the *Investigations* is intended to help us to look (§66) at the multitude of ways in which our expressions find their place in our given form of life (§23) on the occasions of our various philosophical difficulties” (121).

Chapter 5 derives its title, “The Truly Apocalyptic View,” from a passage in Wittgenstein’s *Nachlass* (Cahill’s translation): “The truly apocalyptic view of the world is that things do *not* repeat themselves” (126—italics in text); it may be noted as an aside that this thought is as metaphysical in content as many of the surviving fragments from Heraclitus. Cahill then tersely states his intent: “In this chapter, I try to assess the relation of Wittgenstein’s cultural concerns to his engagement with metaphysics, in particular with the conception of rationality underlying the view of rules as rails” (127). Cahill attempts to show how the *Investigations* can be read as substantially continuous with the *Tractatus*, “both in the way it attempts to embody a nontheoretical conception of philosophy” as well as “to fulfill the earlier work’s ethical purpose” (14).

The core of Cahill’s position regarding the artificiality of rules for practices and linguistic usage is that human beings are necessarily living and functioning within diversified contexts which are basically already determined. From this principle, Cahill draws a conclusion with crucial consequences for the relation between

language and metaphysics: “to talk of normal human *life* as *already* shaped by meaning and understanding is also to imply the existence of the world in which that normal human life is lived, a world without which there can be no talk of normal human life, a world that (normally) neither forces its meanings on us (realism) nor on which we force our meaning (antirealism)” (140—italics in text). Cahill has explicitly introduced “the existence of the world” but the claim as stated deftly straddles whether this world should be understood according to realist or “antirealist” metaphysical characterizations.

An additional inference: “A mark of Wittgenstein’s later thought, then, is the idea that ‘authentic’ clarity in philosophy is inseparable from our acceptance that the meaning of our words is in a certain sense dependent on what shows up as mattering to us. (And a major goal of his later writing is to find a way of making this acceptance as intellectually palatable as possible.)” Furthermore, and more generally stated, “success in this project assumes that at any time a culture has enough (and how many is enough is probably impossible to tell) members who can learn and assimilate the virtues required to respond to and articulate what matters to its members in a way that matters” (141). In short, what matters to a given culture is what has forcefully impressed a certain number of speakers of language within that culture—at this juncture Cahill provides no other criterion to justify “what matters” and its foundational consequences for language as an expression of life and its varied concerns. Chapter 5 concludes with brief discussions of Wittgenstein on religion and on political conservatism in response to commentators who have advanced positions concerning these aspects of Wittgenstein’s overall output.

Chapter 6, “The Fate of Metaphysics,” concludes the work. The history of western metaphysics is complex but Cahill feels justified in asserting claims such as the following: “the craving for explanation of a non-naturalist sort by rationalists such as Plato, Descartes, Leibniz, or Frege is closer in spirit to modern naturalism than one might suspect; rationalists no less than modern naturalists accept a certain dichotomous view of nature and rationality that, if [John] McDowell is correct in *Mind and World*, is one of the central targets of Wittgenstein’s later philosophy” (154). In an endnote (171n3), Cahill comments that Wittgenstein occasionally fell prey to precisely the philosophical excesses which his work intended to reveal and explode; in that vein, however, “Wittgenstein’s occasionally avowed sympathy with some

of the impulses to metaphysics does not mitigate his overall hostility to theory in philosophy;" for Cahill, it is difficult "to imagine his thinking that any resting place could be found in, say, Berkeley or Leibniz, in whose thought the perverse role of theory that began with Plato already exerts a decisive influence" (165).

The tenor of such observations regarding the "perverse role of theory" and its dominance within the history of philosophy might lead one to dismiss philosophy altogether, especially in the guises of its traditionally most influential moments and figures. But Cahill hesitates in maintaining such a blanket rejection: "What philosophers say and write does exert *some* influence on the shape of our intellectual culture, and our intellectual culture, in turn, does exert *some* influence on how people live. If, just to take one example, philosophers abandoned metaphysics *cum* scientific naturalism, they might at the very least stop *contributing* to problems associated with that view, problems, for example, connected to certain reductive views of persons still prevalent in fields that affect the lives of many people" (167—all italics in text). Whether Cahill must necessarily have a certain theoretical picture of the nature of "persons" clearly in mind in order to assert this criticism of "certain *reductive* views of persons" (my italics) prevalent on the current philosophical scene is not discussed. Be that as it may, after extended critiques of John McDowell and Stanley Cavell on Wittgenstein's conjectures concerning the relation between human nature and metaphysics, Cahill concludes the chapter, and the work, with this proposition: "Whether Wittgenstein had any definite vision of how a new way of life and thought might establish itself in the West, there seems little doubt that a hope for a fundamental change in our current way of life informed both his philosophical work and his spiritual life" (169).

A summary impression: Kevin M. Cahill's book exhibits informed awareness of the letter of Wittgenstein's texts, including a number of entries from the *Nachlass* which may not be familiar to a general philosophical audience. Cahill also integrates and discusses within the fabric of his interpretation extensive passages from many of the most influential recent commentators on Wittgenstein. In these respects, the book is praiseworthy. However, I should mention here two procedural points regarding the execution of the book: first, at the beginning of the preface (xi), Cahill advises the reader that "many long endnotes" contain "much useful information" and he invites the reader to attend to this material. The endnotes run from 171 to 230

and if the reader is conscientious in following Cahill's request, there will be extensive flipping back and forth from the text proper to this material. If a third of these notes had either been eliminated or incorporated into the narrative flow of the book (e.g., 201–3n156, an almost three-page summary registering Cahill's disagreements with James Conant concerning Kierkegaard), it is difficult to believe that the argumentative integrity of the book would have been weakened in any way—the work's quotient of “useful information” would thereby perhaps be reduced but the tradeoff in reduction of potential loss of continuity would surely be justified. Cahill's text concludes on 169—relatively brief as commentaries go, especially one involving epochal figures such as Wittgenstein; thus with additional space opened by fewer endnotes, Cahill could have more comprehensively developed a number of key points concerning his main thesis and the implications drawn from them (see II below). The second point concerns the tendency of Cahill's narrative style to employ various modes of “dissertationese,” e.g., many instances of telling the reader in some detail what Cahill intends to show and then, when the discussion is concluded, reminding the reader of what has just been asserted. Cahill also frequently resorts to a “confessional” stance which, although it might be authorially popular in some circles when writing secondary sources, adds another layer of discourse not strictly germane to the content of the argument. In one respect, these observations can be taken as minor concerns; however, if the noted features were less dominant textually, there would have been additional room for more substantive philosophical analysis and discussion.

## II

“...no man of sense will like to put himself or the education of his mind  
in the power of names.”

(*Cratylus*, 440c)

The Wittgenstein scholar as well as a more casual reader examining Cahill's book in order to see what Wittgenstein may mean for contemporary philosophy—especially if philosophy has been characterized as an inherently diverse and pluralistic enterprise—will doubtless be engaged by the direction the book takes toward the history of metaphysics and, according to Cahill, Wittgenstein's systemic rejection of the collective import of that history. Thus: “I try to make the case for thinking that Wittgenstein

believed it possible to let go of the Western metaphysical tradition as one perhaps necessary step in a process of a cultural transformation that was deeply important to him” (152; cf. 15, 36, 165, 169, 230n55).

Part II of this review offers a more detailed illustration of Cahill’s position in this regard and also, if we grant the feasibility of his reading of Wittgenstein, raises a series of questions concerning its theoretical cogency.

### 1. On the “Western Metaphysical Tradition”

Initially it is worth observing that “Western metaphysics” is a hybrid and readily-positing unity the analysis of which may well benefit from Wittgenstein’s own injunction to “look and see” (§66) whether such an extensive and variegated history does indeed display the unity that justifies naming it in this way. Does “Western metaphysics,” if taken as a singular phenomenon, generate sufficient similarities to justify identifying *all* the myriad and diverse practitioners of metaphysical thinking from the pre-Socratics to the present as falling under a single rubric? Hegel, Heidegger and Derrida were all prone to the same mode of assuming a single homogenized tradition of metaphysics in its variegated entirety. But to take this tradition as a unity—i.e., as a diversified whole of many distinct parts—is surely as metaphysical a move as any particular gesture, systematic or regional in scope, asserted within that tradition. The question then becomes whether substantive consequences are available once a philosophical student has imposed such a unity on 2,500 years of subtle and complex reflection.

Consider, e.g., Aristotle (a philosopher Cahill claims Wittgenstein “hardly read”—223n69), in particular the first page of the *Categories* (chapter 1 and the beginning of chapter 2). Aristotle defines homonymy as the state of affairs when two things, e.g., a man and a picture, share the same name. In his Clarendon Aristotle Series translation, J. C. Ackrill comments (71): “it is important to recognize from the start that the *Categories* is not primarily or explicitly about names, but about the things that names signify.” In chapter 2, Aristotle then distinguishes between “things said” singly or in combination—e.g., “man,” and “man runs.” If we stand back from what has happened here, we observe that Aristotle has used, minimally stated, the notions of being (or entity), referentiality and difference. Cahill’s approach to such phenomena, following Wittgenstein, is very different: “If essence is expressed by

grammar (§371), and if grammar tells you what kind of object anything is (§373), then of course grammar tells you that pains, coins, and planets are essentially different in their degree of independence from our grammar” (219n43). For Cahill, it appears that grammar is the ultimate source of our realization that beings exist independently of grammar—e.g., that “man” is a noun and “runs” is a verb, a difference justifying the conclusion that the two designations are, as such, modes of reality existing apart from grammatical distinctions. But for Aristotle, grammar is a reaction to and reflection of more fundamental modes of awareness. After all, if humanity had evolved without language or with language of a much more impoverished sort, then planets would still have existed apart from our experience of these beings and our ability to react to them.

If we look at the phenomena just introduced and describe what we see, which position seems closer to the form of life in which these phenomena come to exist? For example, do we perceive immediately the difference between a person and a picture or is it necessary to examine grammar and then to determine how “difference” should be derived from grammatical considerations in order justifiably to pronounce that the one thing differs from the other thing—a person from a picture of that person, as well as a person stationary from a person running?

Many similar questions arise if we reflect on the positions constituting the history of metaphysics—the pre-Socratics through Whitehead and David Lewis—from a Wittgensteinian perspective.

## 2. On “Forms of Life”

This is a crucial component in Wittgenstein’s approach to language and it is also an especially vexed notion among his commentators. Cahill often appeals to the notion of “form of life” (*Lebensform*) but seldom says what, in general, he thinks the concept refers to. Perhaps the most explicit statement is the following: “A form of life is constituted by common matters of concern that inform the shared actions and practices that let us open up a common world, a common world, furthermore, in terms of which we understand ourselves and our common matters of concern” (139; cf68). Cahill refers to a “common world” in this account. Now “world” is, of course, a loaded metaphysical term—Leibniz uses it when he characterizes the world we all dwell in as “the best of all possible worlds.” Heidegger uses it via an interplay of “world” and “earth” in his

exercise in ontological aesthetics, “The Origin of the Work of Art.” And it is a favorite gambit of analytic philosophy in the construction of counter-examples (“consider a world...”). One wonders then what Cahill has in mind with his usage of “world” as an exegetical component of a crucial Wittgensteinian notion.

It is canonic Wittgenstein that once the senselessness of metaphysical claims has been established, all that remains are “ordinary sentences.” These sentences are the repository of scientific inquiry and investigation, presumably also of scientific theorizing (cf. 60, 84, 85, 92, 95, 191n87). But these ordinary sentences also include referentiality, i.e., designating certain beings for purposes of empirical observation and at least the implicit preservation of differences between and among these beings. Thus all the characteristics of metaphysical cast derived from the opening page of Aristotle’s *Categories* also pertain to the “ordinary sentences” produced by the sciences. The question then becomes the crucial matter of distinguishing between this kind of “ordinary sentence” and parallel assertions displaying the same basic characteristics. But however this distinction may be drawn, it seems necessary to admit that *any* form of life—any “world” in the designated sense—must exist and function in such a way as to allow access to words which “pick out” beings in the world, thus establishing a fundamental relation between word and thing.

Bluntly stated, referentiality is a necessary condition for the establishment of facts. Now if the words “picture” and “person” pick out distinct entities within a given perceptual field, then a description of the underlying form of life will include (a) two distinct entities within that field as well as (b) the fact of difference pertaining to the juxtaposition of these two entities. If so, then the secondary and closely related question becomes whether, when a metaphysician uses a word such as “entity” to identify an element from within the form of life of ordinary perceptual experience, such usage becomes as a matter of principle illegitimate prior to any specification of the theoretical or abstract character of that thing as an element in a metaphysical theory.

The assumption here is that “form of life” can encompass a state of affairs characterized by ordinary perception. If therefore this exemplification of a possible form of life is incorrect, then we must devote more attention to Wittgenstein’s position on reference, in particular whether reference understood as a neutral indicator of a given being or entity is itself as replete with metaphysical underpinnings as more explicitly “theoretical” aspects of language (e.g., the concept of meaning). This

investigation must also show the distinction between reference when it functions as a feature of an “ordinary sentence”—when presumably the ordinariness of such sentences presupposes the capacity to refer to objects outside of language for purposes of scientific scrutiny—and its counterpart as emergent from sentences when they occur during the ordinary activities of daily life.

### 3. The Language Game of Wonder

Cahill contends that if jointly considered, Wittgenstein’s primary purpose in the *Tractatus* and *Philosophical Investigations* was to instill a sense of wonder in the reader and to do so with the understanding that western metaphysics, presumably in its entirety, should not serve as a ladder standing as a source for perspective as far as the pursuit of this sense of wonder is concerned. If so, is it then possible to identify what prospective philosophers should be wondering *about*?

In the introduction, Cahill addresses this concern by stipulating that the sought-for sense of wonder is aimed at what Wittgenstein felt “was the deeply mysterious place of human life in the world” (2). So stated, it appears plausible to see Wittgenstein wondering about how human life existed at all, thereby inspiring additional reflection on the origins of our beginnings, a potentially religious area of concern. But if “I wonder” could also have a more specific, limited object, then this possible state of affairs seems to commit the individual wondering to a relation between (a) whatever the condition of wonder entails on the side of the individual so characterized and (b) the object of wonder—thus, I may wonder why *anything* exists, or why *this* thing exists, or why this thing exists *in this way*.

Cahill refers to speaking “the language (game) of wonder” (96), the “wonder language game” (148), and at one point to “a grammar of wonder” (147–48). These locutions pitch the implementation of wonder within Wittgenstein’s later technical vocabulary. How then would we proceed to involve ourselves with this language game if it is aimed at the specifications just introduced? It seems that this question is not readily answered. Thus: “Experience can teach [the philosopher] not only to become more skillful at knowing where and how to look for relief from particular cases of metaphysical confusion; it can also teach him to regard its occurrences with skepticism and to begin to envisage the possibility and desirability of more radical stances toward its sources” (166). Does Cahill give any indication how “more radical

stances” might be understood, especially with respect to approaching the language game of wonder? We sketch several possibilities suggested by Cahill’s own comments.

*Wonder and Poetry.* At 168, the penultimate page of the book, Cahill refers to a tantalizing text from Wittgenstein’s *Nachlass*: “What is more, Wittgenstein acknowledges that the kind of project I am attributing to him here places him less in the traditional role of the philosopher than in that of the poet....” Envisioning the relevance of poetry to the philosophical enterprise recalls Heidegger, not the Heidegger of *Sein und Zeit* (1927) but rather Heidegger years later, in *Unterwegs zur Sprache* (1959) and *Erläuterungen zu Hölderlins Dichtung* (4th ed., 1971). In his bibliography, Cahill lists twelve Heidegger primary sources (one is *Poetry, Language, Thought*, a collection of seven essays, drawn from various works by Heidegger, several of which concern language and poetry) but he asserts in the introduction that he will only “gesture occasionally” to Heidegger’s later works “in footnotes or a turn of phrase” (9). If one then wonders whether poets have anything important to say to philosophers, an example of Cahill’s insistence on a “more radical stance” might be to adopt the fundamental equality built into Heidegger’s pairing of *Denken* (thinking) and *Dichten* (poetizing), and the senses in which *Denken* and *Dichten* derive from the even more fundamental modes of language Heidegger identifies as *Sagen* (saying) and *Sprechen* (speaking)—these distinctions all integral to Heidegger’s philosophy as developed in the sources cited above.

To pursue poetry in its possible connection to wonder, it may become necessary to rethink one of the main sources of expression for the poet—the imagination. Cahill quotes (with approval) the following passage from the noted Wittgenstein scholar Cora Diamond: the “propositions of the metaphysician...are the result of a sort of disease of imagination, and the philosopher who comes out with them lacks that understanding of himself which the *Tractatus* aims to secure for us” (36). This is an exceptionally strong claim with respect to both its castigation of the imagination when gone awry as well as the ascription of a self-delusional state possessing would-be philosophers who are held captive by such imaginative excess. By contrast, consider this passage from Whitehead’s *Process and Reality* (chapter 1, section II):

The true method of discovery is like the flight of an aeroplane. It starts from the ground of particular observation; it makes a flight in the thin air of imaginative generalization; and it again lands for

renewed observation rendered acute by rational interpretation. The reason for the success of this method of imaginative rationalization is that, when the method of difference fails, factors which are consistently present may yet be observed under the influence of imaginative thought.

For Diamond reading Wittgenstein, metaphysical assertions result from a diseased imagination and the philosopher asserting such propositions suffers from a crucially deficient self-understanding; for Whitehead, the imagination sets metaphysical reflection soaring from observation of what is immediately around us into generalizations which represent one of the finest achievements of civilization.

The stark difference in the two approaches compels additional close study of the capacity of the originating function of human awareness. But the disputed nature of the imagination to one side, the point is not that Cahill should have followed the lead of his own appeal to a passage wherein Wittgenstein envisioned his philosophical efforts as trading on the work of the poet and then, in this vein, introduced pertinent discussions of Heidegger's own efforts concerning poetic language; rather it is only that such texts are available for consideration in order to determine whether existing philosophy, at least as found in later Heidegger, can exhibit the greater degree of radicalness which Cahill sees as implied by a serious response to Wittgenstein's overall project.

*Wonder and Technology.* For Cahill, it is axiomatic that human beings begin to use language within contexts wherein meaning and understanding are already determined (cf. 120, 121, 127). But one way in which contemporary speakers interact with language is in terms of technology. However, the dominance of what Cahill has called "the disengaged view"—an attitude which Wittgenstein sought to expose and undermine—distorts our understanding of technology (among a number of other basic human concerns): "the disengaged view in philosophy is one reflection of a lack of uncritical assumption about and mythological demand on rationality that has often characterized our culture's thinking about progress in science, technology, economics, politics and morals" (122). Is technology (to focus on one member of this list) and our relation to technological processes and products a suitable goal of wondering in Cahill's technical sense?

Again, Heidegger thought so. But to wonder about technology presupposes wondering about things, whether natural in origin or produced by human beings (or to

both, especially in relation to one another). In this regard, Heidegger devoted considerable attention to the notion of “thinghood.” Can human beings comport themselves with respect to things in ways which do not necessarily result in the products of technology? In *Gelassenheit* (1959) and *Die Technik und die Kehre* (2d. ed 1962), Heidegger offers guarded recommendations to thoughtfully approaching this possibility.

I emphasize again: the fact that Cahill uses early Heidegger as part of his interpretive machinery for reading Wittgenstein but explicitly excludes middle and later Heidegger in his discussions is not the point. The point is that if philosophy continues to exist as an activity of human concern, then it becomes incumbent to determine (a) what we should be wondering about and (b) whether there are acceptable and unacceptable approaches to such wondering. To suggest wondering about either poetry or technology or both (following Cahill’s lead) is only a way into the phenomenon in question—the “world” as Cahill has identified the ultimate locus of the fundamental notion of a “form of life.” Only if such questions are raised and addressed will it be possible to interact with Heidegger (or any thoughtful individual) on the matters just introduced in order to determine his relevance to the function and goal of wonder in philosophy.

*Wonder and Metaphysics (Revisited)*. Wittgenstein’s *Blue Book* produces an especially trenchant passage (154) as a prelude to a final thought on the object and structure of wondering: “the undue influence of science in philosophy is the very source of philosophical confusion. Philosophers constantly see the method of science before their eyes, and are irresistibly tempted to ask and answer questions in the way science does. This tendency is the real source of metaphysics, and leads the philosopher into complete darkness.”

But can those philosophically inclined evade the tendency to overextend the effects of science and its methodologies, then derive insight and inspiration from other sources? If so, could there be a language game, defined by its own inherent predilections and drive for abstract constructions, called “metaphysics”? It will be observed that the “craving for generality” (Wittgenstein’s phrase, quoted on 154) has been realized in the texts of Heraclitus, Parmenides, Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Avicenna, Maimonides, Aquinas, Descartes, Hume, Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, Ayer, Russell, Whitehead, Goodman, Lewis and on the current analytic scene, a group of energetic (and typically youthful) philosophers self-labeled “metametaphysicians.” This list is, of

course, not exhaustive. If Cahill's reading of the progression of thought in Wittgenstein is correct, then this "craving" has been misplaced from its inception. If, however, the craving for generalities of metaphysical cast is as fundamental to at least some thoughtful humans (endowed with exceptionally powerful speculative intellects) as that for food, drink, sex, art, etc., has been for humans in general, then we must wonder whether the Wittgensteinian notion of a "form of life" is sufficiently supple to include that kind of living thought which pursues metaphysical projections and analyses. If so, then the "craving for generality" becomes, from this perspective, just another form of life. If, however, this conclusion so bluntly put is not tenable, then the foundational element—"form of life"—must be analyzed and its theoretical and practical limits drawn with much more precision than it has in Cahill's book (as well as in descriptions of the notion Cahill cites from other commentators).

Cahill has stressed that the "ethical point" of the *Tractatus* is a "change in the reader's self- understanding through a change in her relationship to language," but a change "characterized primarily by how we do or do not act, not by what we do or do not know" (81). And again: "language permeates so many of our other activities that it is arguable that the kind of alteration in one's relation to it that I am arguing Wittgenstein sought to bring about would result in a change in the way one engaged in many of those activities as well" (199n130). Cahill comes down hard on the lack of direction regarding such existential practicality contained in or even derivable from the text of the *Tractatus*: "And so naturally too, then, nothing about virtues like courage and openness being helpful for learning how to speak the language (game) of wonder, something the book [i.e., the *Tractatus*] therefore converts from honest difficulty to total incomprehensibility" (96).

How has Cahill determined that this sense of wonder requires "courage and openness"? That issue of conceptual and relational origins aside, would questioning the best way to understand courage, for example, assume that the accounts of this virtue in Plato's *Laches* or Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (book III, chapters 6–9) be automatically stricken from consideration? Perhaps. For if wonder is a unique phenomenon, then it could be argued that all virtues associated with wonder will be commensurately unique. But even if such conceptual isolation were the case, it would surely be useful heuristically to analyze Plato and Aristotle on courage just to determine where these two great metaphysicians have erred in their presentations and conclusions.

This kind of study will, or at least might, provide a sense of direction in order to excite the appropriate dimensions of wonder. In sum, if courage as a virtue integrally related to the exercise of wonder has even faint vestiges of metaphysicality in its nature and operation, then it may be possible to play the language game of metaphysics in order to grasp more adequately what we should be doing when we wonder. But if the door is then open to the resumption of metaphysical thinking in this guarded and circumscribed setting, it may be not only possible but eventually necessary to restore and practice metaphysics to something like its prior position of, in Aristotle's phrase, "first philosophy" (*Metaphysics* 1004a4–6). The craving for this sort of generality is a natural and inevitable consequence of humanity responding to its place in the world, as the history of western metaphysics has so persistently and powerfully demonstrated. From this perspective, such a craving is an especially basic form of life.

### III

If philosophy culminates in wonder but without a sense of foundation or direction other than unspecified appeals to a "cultural transformation" and the need "to begin to envisage the possibility and desirability of more radical stances toward its sources," then it becomes difficult to distinguish between (a) the potency of wonder—which in antiquity begot Plato and Aristotle—and (b) skepticism, systemic silence which muffles in principle any attempt to venture forth philosophically and confront the contemporary world in all its complexity, dangers, and redemptive possibilities.

Cahill's approach to Wittgenstein can be challenged if the reasons attributed to justifying the primacy of wonder in Wittgenstein's texts are found to be inadequate; in this case, the more standard reading of Wittgenstein as providing philosophy with the means for a kind of therapeutic cleansing of its argumentative excesses becomes more attractive. The other alternative is to follow Cahill but then to recognize that this approach requires its advocate (a) to engender new philosophical methods (in order to produce new philosophical results, especially given the necessity to move "beyond" anything metaphysical in its historical manifestations) or, eschewing the need for methodological preparations, (b) to plunge ahead and philosophize in ways which can be duly recognized as fundamentally different from the sequence of positions comprising the entire Western metaphysical tradition. The difference between these

alternatives is stark and dramatic.

It is a singular merit of Cahill's book that if its thesis is seriously entertained, the student of Wittgenstein must reexamine with care a variety of his basic texts in order to demonstrate that Cahill's reading is, in point of textual fact, without solid and trustworthy foundation. We may conclude by observing, perhaps tentatively, that with scant indication from Cahill concerning how to proceed if we believe that philosophy can and should continue by preserving at least a measure of sameness with regard to the practices of its heritage, we seem compelled to embrace the cryptic conclusion of the *Tractatus*: "Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent" (Cahill's translation of the oft-quoted final sentence of the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*). But if philosophy properly characterized and understood culminates in silence, then to whom should we listen for articulated wisdom when confronting a complex and problematic world?