

‘Tell them I’ve had a wonderful life!’: Wittgenstein’s Final Words from the Perspective of the World  
*Sub Specie Aeterni*

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On his death bed, shortly after being informed that his close friends would be by his side the following day, Ludwig Wittgenstein spoke his final words, ‘Tell them I’ve had a wonderful life!’, before losing consciousness. These words have perplexed many, not least because Wittgenstein appeared, even to those closest to him, to have lived a profoundly unhappy life, full of intense mental and moral suffering. Ronald L. Hall considers the meaning of these words against the background of Wittgenstein’s remarks in both *Culture and Value* and *Lecture on Ethics*, as the expression of a man who at that moment had awoken to the wonder of the world, and the miracle that it exists at all. Beth Savickey challenges Hall’s reading, arguing this makes the meaning of the words too general, and too philosophical, thus diminishing the importance Wittgenstein attached to the role of friendship throughout his life. After all, Savickey notes, Wittgenstein’s words were addressed to *them*: his friends. Savickey understands her challenge to Hall to shift the focus from an expression of wonder *about* the world, to an expression of gratitude for the life lived *in* the world.

I argue that Hall’s and Savickey’s readings need not be mutually exclusive. To bring this out, I consider Wittgenstein’s remarks on happiness from his *Notebooks 1914-1916* and elsewhere, including the idea that ‘[a] man who is happy must have no fear [...] [n]ot even in the face of death’. I explore how such remarks may shed light on Wittgenstein’s final words as an expression of a perspective on the world *sub specie aeterni*, as a ‘limited whole’ (TLP 6.45). In doing so, I reflect on how a man for whom the difficulties of philosophy and the difficulties of life could not be easily separated may be understood to be expressing a sense of satisfaction that no more questions remain, at the point at which philosophy and life come to an end.