THE LANGUAGE GAME

OF

ETHICS

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Introduction

There is a certain amount of doubt among modern philosophers as to what a philosophical study of morals should be like. After Moore's Principia Ethica and Wittgenstein's Tractatus with the resulting rejection of metaphysics of any kind; ethics as it had been studied previously seemed to be finished. The notion that through some kind of total or complete explanation of the world, man's place in the scheme of things would be revealed, and his duties, obligations, etc made clear, seemed to be no longer tenable.

Wittgenstein for reasons which I will explain in detail, and which were in the main the result of a certain atomistic theory of language, was forced to conclude towards the end of the Tractatus that 'in the world everything is as it is, and everything happens as it does happen; in it no value exists—and if it did exist, it would have no value. If there is any value that does have value, it must lie outside the whole sphere of what happens and is the case. For all that happens and is the case is accidental.' And that 'It is impossible for there to be propositions of ethics. Propositions can express nothing that is higher. It is clear that ethics cannot be put into words. Ethics is transcendental.'

Moore changed the perspective of moral philosophy by claiming that the term 'good' was indefinable; and he claimed that previous moral philosophers had been mistaken in attempting to define 'good' in terms

of some other non-natural entity such as 'happiness' or 'rationality'. It was the linguistic aspect of Moore's philosophy which appealed to later writers; and there came to be less metaphysics in ethical theory, and more attention paid to the actual structure and workings of moral language.

The central question of ethics changed from 'What is goodness?' where an answer was expected in terms of some real and permanent structure of the world, to the question 'What is the activity of valuing?'. The task becomes one of an analysis of the familiar human activity of endowing things with value. The 'good' is no longer to be talked of as something real or transcendent.

Problems of ethical theory were now to be regarded not as problems of morals but as problems of moral language. Ethical theory is to consist of the logical analysis of ordinary moral language ie, an investigation into the nature of the terms and modes of reasoning which are actually employed in discussing and settling moral issues in practice. The task of the moral philosopher is to strive after a clarification of certain key concepts.

Ethical questions such as 'What is the meaning of life?' or 'What is the right way of living?' or 'What makes life worth living?' were set aside as being too speculative, too metaphysical in kind.

I will suggest towards the end of this thesis that not enough attention has been paid to this type of question; and hope to show why I am of the opinion that a meaningful, and worthwhile discussion can be had on these matters. I will suggest that these questions are 'genuine' questions, and that one can, for example, distinguish between

appearance and reality in a man's life.

The plan of this thesis will be as follows. I will present what Wittgenstein thought of as the characteristic features of ethics; and this particular notion of ethics must be borne in mind throughout the thesis. Consideration of his notion of ethics, leads one to raise certain questions which have largely been ignored in recent ethical inquiry.

Secondly by an examination of the Tractatus I hope to bring out that the few remarks on ethics which it contains, are not just a few propositions added on to what is primarily a work of logic, language, inference etc; but are the necessary result of the view of language, and its relation to the world, which he held at that time.

At the time of the Tractatus he thought of language as being primarily descriptive. Ethical propositions were not descriptive as there was nothing for them to describe. Therefore they must be meaningless.

In the second chapter I want to show how his views on ethics changed and developed as he came to hold a different and less rigourous view of language. I will do this through an examination of the 'Lecture on Ethics'. I will also refer to the Philosophical Investigations as I think that his later remarks on ethics are very similar to his discussion of language, logic, and mathematics, as given in that book. The notion of 'intelligibility' becomes important 'there are certain replies one can make and certain questions one can ask and others which would mean nothing'. This is implied in the Tractatus but it is not worked out and couldn't be with the view of

language which he held at that time.

But his view of language had changed, and he held that every proposition belongs to a system of propositions and that there are several of these systems. He no longer thought that one could give a general account of propositions in terms of truth functions. The formal rules or internal relations of one system were not those of another. And only certain remarks are intelligible in what one might call the language game of ethical judgements.

Having in the first two chapters dealt almost exclusively with an account of the Tractatus and the 'Lecture on Ethics'; I feel that it is necessary for me to comment in greater detail on what has been said so far. His remarks on ethics are few and often cryptic. One gets the impression that he left many things unsaid, but his remarks do, I think, point the way to further inquiry.

The third chapter consists of remarks on ethics which, I think, follow from what has been said so far. And I draw certain conclusions from these remarks which I think he might agree with. In general the discussion is based on notions which had special importance for Wittgenstein. The notions of intelligibility and meaning in language are compared with the notions of intelligibility in life. I try to apply to ethics certain notions which Wittgenstein used in general in his discussions on epistemology and logic, eg, the notion of 'and so on...'; that understanding might be said to consist in 'knowing how to go on' as opposed to some kind of weird mental process; that the giving of reasons must come to an end; that one shouldn't look for a 'foundation' for logic (or for ethics for that matter). There are also

various remarks on 'rule-governed behaviour'; the notion of 'mistake' in a man's life and the implications of this.

The fourth chapter consists of a more detailed discussion of two points raised in the third chapter. I discuss the suggestion that there are deep connections between what makes discourse possible, and what makes possible the kind of life that has meaning. And I then suggest an explanation of why some rules in a society are singled out as having the status of 'moral rules' and others are not. This will lead to the position that there is no common agreement on what constitutes human good or harm; and to the unpopular conclusion that human good, far from being independent of the moral beliefs people hold, is in fact determined by them.

What may appear to be a disproportionately large portion of this paper must be devoted to matters whose bearing on the nature of ethics is not immediately evident. That is to say, the first chapter is devoted to a discussion of the Tractatus; but this is essential as without some understanding of this work, one cannot appreciate how Wittgenstein was able to arrive at the novel conclusion that 'there can be no ethical propositions'. A discussion as to the nature of language and its relation to reality as Wittgenstein saw it at the time of the Tractatus is an essential part of this thesis and cannot be skipped as a tiresome and time-wasting preliminary.

To the accusation that this thesis should be limited to either an exegesis of Wittgenstein's views, or, a discussion of ethical theory, I can only say that I don't think the mere tracing

of another person's point of view to be a very valuable undertaking in philosophy. In support of the general strategy of this thesis I quote from the preface to the Philosophical Investigations by Wittgenstein, 'I should not like my writing to spare other people the trouble of thinking. But, if possible, to stimulate someone to thoughts of his own'. I am not using this quotation in defense of any erroneous conclusions which might be arrived at in this thesis; these must stand or fall on their own merit. But the attempt is, I think, quite in order.

Wittgenstein had pointed out that there are many books written on ethics in which there is no mention of specific moral problems. Part of the point here is that a moral vocabulary cannot be understood except against the background of a certain kind of social life. Many twentieth century philosophers write as if morality, and with it, moral philosophy, existed apart from all social forms. This is misleading. A moral philosopher is neither a scientist nor a preacher. He is concerned with gaining some understanding of the nature of morality as such. This pre-supposes some idea as to the nature of ethical inquiry. I think that faced with the problem of scepticism we tend to fly to the other extreme and adopt some kind of metaphysical system. The sceptic presents us with a certain model - a certain way of seeing ethics. He suggests that given any moral situation - a description of the situation is compatible with any conclusion. The logic of the sceptic seems unassailable, and he claims to have eliminated the possibility of justifying ethical conclusions by

deductive or casual inference. If ethical conclusions cannot be justified in either of these two ways, it seems that they cannot be justified at all. It seems that one has to accept the fact that they have no truth values, are not really propositions at all. They come to be viewed as emotive expressions, and much energy and recourse is used in the careful examination of their prescriptive and commendatory function.

But the situation is rarely as clear as it first looks. The position of straightforward problems of logic, tidy little dichotomies is to be viewed with suspicion. (Think of Austin's treatment of The Argument from Illusion in 'Sense and Sensibilia'.) The model of ethical reasoning which the sceptic presents is misleading. The problem is seen as one of getting logically from, say, a description of an event to a judgement on the event. But this model blinds us, forces us to see ethics in a certain way. And in a way which I think is seriously misleading, though not entirely unproductive. We must shake off our habit of viewing ethics through spectacles provided for us by the sceptic. A character in one of John Galsworthy's novels remarks that he no longer views people as being good or bad but rather as comic or pathetic. This remark may seem bizarre to an ethical absolutist. Bizarre too, is the remark by the sceptic that discussion in ethics is discussion concerning matters of taste. But these remarks do change our perspective. And it is in doing this that they are valuable.

The point of studying ethics is not to find some system

which will enable us to 'look up' the answers to our moral problems, neither will we find some method which enables us to categorise those around us unequivocably as 'good' or 'bad'.

There are no answers to be found in ethics just as there are no answers to be found in novels and plays.

To try and assign truth values to Yeats' poems would be to misunderstand what Yeats is trying to do. Poets, novelists, tell us something about life, increase our understanding of life. A study of ethics should have a similar effect. One can gain considerable insight into the nature of morality by reading literature.

I have used Wittgenstein to give some form to this thesis because his Tractatus seems to lead to the typical sceptic's position as regards justifying our ethical judgements. And because the method he uses in 'The Philosophical Investigations' seems to be the one most likely to give us some insight into the nature of morality.

Don't ask whether the painting is 'good' or 'bad'. Try and see it for what it is. (Wittgenstein's expression - 'give it a face'.) Think of what is called 'giving advice' in this connection. Sometimes this is simply impossible. In Graham Green's novel, 'The End of the Affair', Sarah, who is a Catholic, is having an affair. All the priest can do is remind her that she is a Catholic. She is fully aware of all the facts. In this situation there is nothing which could count as 'the giving of advice'. Sometimes though one can 'make a situation clearer to a person', get them to see things in a different light, change their perspective. And this may help them.

What you can't do is consult a chart or look at the stars and tell them what they ought to do. Moral problems are not scientific problems and neither are they exercises in logic.

Chapter 1

In Principia Ethica Moore explains the term ethics as being the general inquiry into what is good. Wittgenstein uses the term in a wider sense. He gives a number of more or less synonymous expressions, and suggests that the characteristic features which these expressions have in common are the characteristic features of ethics.

Ethics he suggests, is the inquiry into what is valuable, or into what is really important, or, the inquiry into the meaning of life, or, into what makes life worth living, or into the right way of living.

The Tractatus speaks of 'problems of life', and Wittgenstein thought that it was strange that one could find books on ethics in which there was no mention of a genuine ethical or moral problem.

What then led him to the conclusion in the Tractatus that: 6.42 'The sense of the world must lie outside the world. In the world everything is as it is, and everything happens as it does happen: in it no value exists—and if it did exist it would have no value.' And at 6.42 'And so it is impossible for there to be propositions of ethics. Propositions can express nothing that is higher.' And finally at 6.421 'It is clear that ethics cannot be put into words.'

To understand this it will be necessary to examine the Tractatus. I will try and bring out the underlying logic, or, reasons for his main doctrines, and will pay special attention to the picture theory. This should bring out why he was forced into the novel con-

clusions on ethics which he arrived at in that book.

It is clear enough from an examination of the seven main propositions that the principle theme of the Tractatus is the connection between language, or thought, and reality. And the main thesis about this is that sentences are pictures of facts. Through considerations of language and meaning he developed a metaphysical system. His inquiry was never in any way empirical. If we think about the essence of language and neglect its superficial features we will see that the foundations of language and reality had to be as he described.

The world, Wittgenstein, said, was the totality of facts. A fact was a kind of complex entity existing in the world, a group of things arranged or combined in a certain way. Most facts are highly complex and composed of less complex facts. Ultimately, and this is a central point of Wittgenstein's system we get down to facts which cannot be reduced. These, he calls, atomic facts and the link between language and reality consists in the relation of these atomic facts and, what he calls, elementary propositions.

He arrived at the existence of these atomic facts through certain considerations about language. In order that a proposition could have sense, the world had to have substance. And the substance of the world was made up of objects. Each atomic fact was like a chain in which these objects 'hang in one another'. The simplest elementary propositions are pictures of atomic facts. All other propositions were truth functions of elementary ones. Language is the mirror in which the logical network of reality is 'shown' or reflected.

This is to state his theory rather baldly. What I shall do now is show how he arrived at the theory of atomic facts and how he justified their existence. I will do this through an examination of his notion of proposition.

His argument rests on two assumptions. Namely, that the correct analysis of a proposition gives it real meaning, and that the meaning of any term is whatever it denotes. Russell had pointed out the manner in which many propositions cloak their real form. Many propositions which looked like subject-predicate propositions on analysis turned out to be existential propositions. Wittgenstein in the Tractatus is showing that the forms of statements in ordinary language are not a sufficient guide to the relation of such statements to reality.

The real puzzle with which he is dealing in the Tractatus is that of how words signify at all. These questions can arise after consideration of expressions such as 'the golden mountain' or 'the present king of France'. How can we understand certain propositions when they contain expressions which refer to nothing at all?

Both Wittgenstein and Russell thought that the correct analysis of a proposition expressed what a proposition really meant.

On this view of analysis, the terms of a proposition can be said to signify something indirectly, via the terms of the simpler propositions into which it is analyzed. Thus the meaning of the terms of the analyzed proposition may be said to depend on the meaning of the terms of the simpler propositions. But if the

terms of the simpler propositions of the analysis are themselves definable in other, still more basic terms, then their meaning will be dependent on the meaning of those other terms. And this process will continue as long as the terms at each level of the analysis are still definable. But if the meaning of a term is what it denotes as Wittgenstein thought, then the series cannot go on for ever. At some point there had to be immediate connection between sign and thing signified. There had to be a completed route from words to something outside words which they denote, and which is ultimately their meaning.

He says in the Notebooks: 'Components of our proposition can be analyzed by means of a definition, and must be, if we want to approximate to the real structure of the proposition. At any rate, then, there is a process of analysis. If it is true that every defined sign signifies via its definitions then presumably the chain of definitions must some time have an end'.

The end, in the Tractatus was the point at which one had elementary propositions, consisting entirely of names—of terms that could not be defined. It is at this point that one has the immediate connection, he thought necessary between sign and thing signified. This connection consisted of the relation of simple names standing over against simple objects.

Wittgenstein was pointing out that unless one had this immediate relation of 'signification' then you couldn't decide whether any proposition had sense. As he puts it in proposition 2.0211 'If the world had no substance than whether a proposition

had sense would depend on whether another proposition was true'.

His conviction that the complete analysis of a proposition would result in elementary propositions consisting entirely of names, has thus led him to a view of reality as consisting of atomic facts which are concatenations of primary elements which he calls objects.

There must, he is saying, be objects if there are to be propositions—if there is going to be anything in the shape of a language. As he says at proposition 3.203 'A name means an object. The object is its meaning.' If there were no objects, the elementary propositions would consist of terms that had no meaning and would thus be meaningless. But as the meaning of all propositions depends ultimately on that of the elementary propositions, no propositions would have any meaning. Therefore Wittgenstein concludes that any language, if it is to be meaningful, must be founded on names, on indefinable terms that directly denote objects.

One can already gather that there is no room for ethical propositions in his scheme of things. Our words to be meaningful must refer to facts, and there is consequently no room for value statements.[1] The expressions we use in ethics must be meaningless for there is nothing for them to refer to. Language is primarily descriptive and there is nothing for ethical expressions to describe. The world is the totality of facts, of the counterparts in reality of true propositions. And nothing but picturable situations can be stated in propositions. There is therefore much that is inexpressible, and this includes ethics.

Wittgenstein having stated that a proposition, at least an elementary one, consisted entirely of names had a problem to face. Because how can a list of names tell us anything? How can a mere list of names state a fact? And he also thought it a puzzling feature of language that we can understand a proposition even though we have never heard it before (this is not the case with a word). We can understand the sense of a proposition without any previous acquaintance with it. To account for these matters Wittgenstein thought that one must see a proposition as being a picture of the situation it describes.

Understanding the sense of a proposition is knowing what situation it describes. Just by looking at a proposition I can tell what situation it describes. Therefore he thought that the proposition must be some kind of representation, or picture, of the situation.

4.021 A proposition is a picture of reality: for if I understand a proposition, I know the situation that it represents. And I understand the proposition without having had its sense explained to me.

4.022 A proposition shows its sense. A proposition shows how things stand if it is true.

4.03 A proposition communicates a situation to us and so it must be essentially connected with the situation. And the connexion is precisely that it is its logical picture. When Wittgenstein says that propositions are pictures of reality, one thing which he is trying to bring out is the way in which logic is fundamental

in connexion with them. Logical form is common to both reality and propositions.

In order for A to be a logical picture of B three conditions are necessary:

(a) there must be a one to one correspondence between the components of A and B.

(b) to every feature of the structure or form of A there must correspond a feature of the structure or form of B.

(c) there must be rules of projection connecting the components of A and of B.

Probably this third condition is the most important to bear in mind when talking about picturing. Wittgenstein points this out at proposition 4.0101 'It is the fact that there is a general rule by which we can derive them one from another which constitutes the inner similarity of the score and the music and the gramophone record—for all that these seem about as diverse as things could be.' And he had just referred to this inner similarity at 4.014 'A gramophone record, the musical idea, the written notes, and the sound waves, all stand to one another in the same internal relation of depicting that holds between language and the world. They are all constructed according to a common logical pattern.

Though Wittgenstein does say that 'reality is compared with propositions', this is when he is going on to distinguish between true and false propositions. And it is important not to confuse picturing reality with saying what is true i.e., not to confuse what we do when we want to decide whether a proposition is true or

false, and what we do when we want to decide whether it has sense. He brings this out when he says at proposition 4.06 'A proposition can be true or false only in virtue of being a picture of reality.'

One can understand a proposition; it is not just a jumble of words. It is an arrangement of words which says something. What we start with is just this recognition that it does say something. We do not start by recognizing any correlation between it and anything else. And this makes it rather like recognizing a picture.

We may say that we understand a picture when we do not know the scene from which it is taken. I may be comparing a drawing of University Hall with the building itself. But in an important sense I would see what the picture is, and even what it is of, even if I had never been to Hamilton.

When one says in Wittgenstein's sense that my sentences picture reality, this does not mean simply that they are a true description of what is happening. Rather it is because they do picture reality that they can describe anything at all. It is because of their logical form, because they are propositions, because they say something.

You understand something that is said. It is possible to say something—i.e., there are expressions which picture reality. And a picturing of reality is possible because there is a general rule—a rule by which we distinguish between sense and nonsense.

Part of the point here is that there must be logic if there are empirical propositions—propositions which we can understand without knowing whether they are true or false. This is what

Wittgenstein means at proposition 6.124 'The propositions of logic describe the scaffolding of the world, or rather they represent it. They have no subject matter. They presuppose that names have meaning and elementary propositions sense; and that is their connexion with the world.' Logic, as Wittgenstein says, pervades the world.

One cannot talk as if the truth or falsity of empirical statements, or the possibility of empirical statements at all, were something logic has nothing to do with. As though the relation of logic to the world were something external as it were.

There can be no 'proving' that empirical propositions depend on logic. To understand the relation of logic and empirical propositions is to become clear about what can be said and what can only be shown. We recognize the relation of logic to empirical propositions when we see them as picturing.

Wittgenstein stresses that the sense of a proposition must be independent of the facts at proposition 4.061 'It must not be overlooked that a proposition has a sense that is independent of the facts; otherwise one can easily suppose that true or false are relations of equal status between signs and what they signify.'

If I say 'the pen is on the desk' this may be true or false. If it is false, it says just what it would if it were true. Otherwise I would never know what was true or false. When Wittgenstein says at 4.061 'The propositions p and -p have opposite senses but it is one and the same reality that corresponds to them', he means that one must have sense if the other does. This is one reason why he says that tautologies and contradictions are not pictures of reality 'they do not

represent any possible situation. For the former admit all possible situations and the latter none.' He is insisting on the point that the sense is independent of the facts. What gives sense to p is also what gives sense to -p. But what makes p true is not what makes -p true.

When he says that a proposition shows its sense this is because I can understand a sentence that I have never heard before. I could not understand a word I had never met before.

You could say that no one can explain to me what 'saying something' is. 'Saying' and 'having sense' are the same. It is in saying something that a proposition pictures reality. This is why he says that tautologies, and contradictions lack sense, they show that they say nothing.

I said previously that there must be a one to one correlation between the components of a picture and those of the thing pictured. This must also hold of a proposition and the situation it describes. Now, it is only elementary propositions that consist entirely of names each directly denoting an object. Wittgenstein explains this as follows:

4.0311 One name stands for one thing, another for another thing and they are combined with one another. In this way the whole group—like a tableau vivant—presents a state of affairs.

4.0312 The possibility of propositions is based on the principle that objects have signs as their representatives.

4.04 In a proposition there must be exactly as many distinguishable parts as in the situation it represents. The two must possess the

same logical multiplicity.

4.041 This mathematical multiplicity, of course, cannot itself be the subject of depiction. One cannot get away from it when depicting.

One might object that it is impossible for a series of names to state a fact—picture a state of affairs. But this would be to ignore the importance of the relations between the objects.

2.14 What constitutes a picture is that its elements are related to one another in a determinate way.

2.15 The fact that the elements of a picture are related to one another in a determinate way represents that things are related to one another in the same way.

If we call this connexion of its elements the structure of the picture, and the possibility of this structure the pictorial form of the picture then one can understand the following propositions.

2.151 Pictorial form is the possibility that things are related to one another in the same way as the elements of the picture.

2.1511 That is how a picture is attached to reality; it reaches right out to it.

2.1512 It is laid against reality like a measure.

What Wittgenstein is stressing is that there is a definite relationship among the component names. They are arranged in a certain way which is significant; (just as the patches of paint in a picture are related in a way which is significant). It is the fact that the words of the propositional sign are related in the way they are that represents the situation described.

Every proposition is a perfectly definite representational

picture of a certain perfectly determinate situation. Not a spatial picture but a logical one.

This is necessary because of his central doctrine that all propositions are truth-functions of elementary propositions. An elementary proposition, since it consists entirely of names of definite objects, must describe a unique state of affairs. Any proposition, then, being a truth-function of elementary propositions, must describe a determinate situation.

I have mentioned some of the most important theories held in the Tractatus—the picture theory—the notion of simples. And I would now like to show how Wittgenstein came to realize that these major doctrines were false.

He had held that the world divides into facts (not things), and into a uniquely determined set of atomic facts. He also held that any proposition had one and only one final form of analysis—into elementary propositions—which in turn consisted of names which stood over against simple objects. The kind of relation in which names stand to the object they name is seen as simple or uniform. So we arrive at a situation where we have a metaphysical bedrock of hard fact. The assumption is that the ultimate constituents of anything are fixed in the very nature of the thing.

For any thing x there is only one correct answer to the question 'What are the ultimate constituents of x?' (3.25 A proposition has one and only one complete analysis.) But this is not so. And Wittgenstein came to realize that the simple components of a thing are not given in reality. One account or analysis may be better for

some purposes, or more appropriate. He points this out in section 47 of the Philosophical Investigations where he says: 'If I tell someone without further explanation: 'What I see before me is composite', he will have the right to ask 'What do you mean by composite?', for there are all sorts of things that that can mean'.

The question 'Is what you see composite?' makes good sense if it is already established what kind of complexity is meant i.e., which particular use of the word is in question.

'To the philosophical question 'Is the visual image of this tree composite, and what are its component parts?' the correct answer is: 'That depends on what you understand by composite' (And that is of course not an answer but a rejection of the question)'.

With this realization Wittgenstein removed the plausibility of his earlier position—that there was a final and complete analysis of anything, be it propositions, states of affairs, or general propositions for that matter.

Another argument to be found in the Tractatus for the existence of indefinable signs, concerns the determinateness of sense of propositions. He states in the Tractatus at 3.23 'The requirement that simple signs be possible is the requirement that sense be determinate.' And at 3.251 'What a proposition expresses it expresses in a determinate manner which can be set out clearly.'

Everything in the world is as it is. And the sense of a proposition is the situation it describes. Now as nothing in the world is indefinite or vague, then the sense of a proposition must upon analysis be seen to be perfectly definite. Therefore it was

natural for Wittgenstein to think that all propositions were analyzable into elementary propositions as only these were free from all ambiguity. He describes his thought on this matter in section 91 of the Philosophical Investigations: 'It may come to look as if there were a final analysis of our forms of language, and so a single completely resolved form of every expression. And in section 99 he says: 'The sentence must have a definite sense. An indefinite sense--that would not really be a sense at all. An indefinite boundary is not really a boundary at all. But is this true?'.

In the Tractatus his account of language was not any sort of empirical description. He was giving an account of the essence of language, of the concealed foundations. The account was not in any way 'seen' to be true. He simply maintained that the foundations of language must be as he described them. Later when he looked closely at the workings of language; made an attempt to 'command a clear view of the functioning of words', he realized that his position had been both misleading and false.

In section 88 of the Investigations he says: 'If I tell someone 'Stand roughly there' may not this explanation work perfectly well? And cannot every other one fail as well?' In other words it just is not true that every proposition has an absolutely definite sense. Many of the things we say are inexact and indefinite, and could not be otherwise. So Wittgenstein had to drop this notion of a supposed standard of absolute definiteness. And along with it go many of the fundamental tenets of the Tractatus.

I will give one final example of the kind of mistake he was making in the Tractatus. He had held that a proposition could be analyzed into simpler propositions and that this process of analysis makes the meaning of the propositions clearer. Now though analysis may in certain cases help, it certainly isn't the most important way of telling us what a given form of words means.
Section 63 of the Investigations: 'To say, that a sentence in (b) is an 'analyzed' form of one in (a) readily seduces us into thinking that the former is the more fundamental form; that it alone shows what was meant by the other and so on.' Wittgenstein shows how misleading this is in section 60 of the Investigations: 'When I say: 'My broom is in the corner', —is this really a statement about the broomstick and the brush? Well, it could at any rate be replaced by a statement giving the position of the stick and the position of the brush. And this statement is surely a further analyzed form of the first one. —But why do I call it 'further analyzed'? —Well, if the broom is there, that surely means that the stick and brush must be there, and in a particular relation to one another; and this was as it were hidden in the sense of the first sentence, and is expressed in the analyzed sentence. Then does someone who says that the broom is in the corner really mean: the broomstick is there, and so is the brush, and the broomstick is fixed in the brush? —If we were to ask anyone if he meant this he would probably say that he had not thought specially of the broomstick or specially of the brush at all. And that would be the right answer, for he meant to speak neither of

the stick nor of the brush in particular.

I hope to have shown to a certain extent how Wittgenstein shows in the Philosophical Investigations that language is not, even in some hidden way as he had represented it in the Tractatus. There is no one pattern to be revealed, no single account to be offered, no small set of definite rules. On the contrary, the forms and uses of languages are infinitely various. A language is like a whole family of games, and the rules for, the purposes of, the ways of playing these games are themselves endlessly diverse.

I hope that I have also given some idea of his view of language as given in the Tractatus. At that time he saw language as being primarily descriptive, the uses of language were not diverse. Language described facts. Ethical propositions weren't descriptions as there was nothing for them to describe, therefore they were meaningless. And so he was forced by the misleading picture which he had of language and its relation to the world to conclude that 'All propositions are of equal value'.

This must be so because propositions describe facts and all facts are on the same level. 6.41 'In the world everything is as it is, and everything happens as it does happen: in it no value exists.'

There can be no value in the world because how things are in the world is purely contingent. Propositions can only relate to the world and therefore any attempt to utter value propositions must necessarily be meaningless. This is why Wittgenstein says that we strive against the limits of language. Propositions

can express nothing that is higher. We may strive, we may do violence to language but we are doomed to failure because that which we wish to express concerns value, and our words can only express facts.

The correct method in philosophy would be to say nothing but propositions of natural science. By propositions of natural science Wittgenstein means propositions about the world. Any person who wanted to say something ethical or metaphysical must be shown that he has failed to give a meaning to certain signs in his propositions.

Some of the positivists thought that with the Tractatus, the distinction between good and evil went out of the window, but this was a sad misunderstanding of the book. Carnap for example is reputed to have said in comment on proposition seven of the Tractatus (what we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence) 'Yes we must be silent but not about anything'.

Wittgenstein never denies the reality of the distinction between good and evil. Rather what he holds is that it is because of what judgements of good and evil do mean that it is pointless to look for their meaning in any events or facts that might be found by science, or in the world.[2] To understand the Tractatus is to understand why Wittgenstein found it necessary to conclude that there could be no ethical propositions; but it is not to be shocked or horrified by this. He is not claiming that his theory has shown that the reality of the distinction between good and evil is an illusion. But he did feel his theory showed was that the sense of the world must lie outside of the world, and that therefore

ethics could not be put into words. This will become clearer in the next chapter.

The essence of trying to talk ethics consists in trying not to talk facts. But he has shown that the world is the totality of facts, and therefore significant propositions must on analysis refer to these. Thus there is no place for ethical propositions in his system.

The few remarks on ethics which come at the end of the Tractatus are extremely difficult to understand. Part of the point is, I think, that whatever ethics is, it can't be explained in terms of something which it is not. Question: 'What is mathematics?' Answer: 'That which you find in mathematics books.' Question: 'What is the nature of morality?' Answer: This will start to come clear to one who has faced moral dilemmas, who has begun to appreciate what certain novelists from Francois Mauriac to Dostoyevskey are trying to tell us. My point is that you can't explain the nature of morality in terms of pleasure, or the happiness, or the consequences of certain acts. Perhaps a few remarks on aesthetics will serve to make this clearer.

To understand what is great about J.D. Salinger's 'Catcher in the Rye' is to a great extent to remember what it felt like to be an adolescent. (We've all been adolescents and this in part might explain its popular appeal.)

It has been suggested that Norman Mailer is a 'religious' writer. To understand this it is necessary that one has asked oneself religious questions. If one has never felt the need to

do this then one will never really understand this remark no matter how carefully one reads the works.

Just what makes a work of art great or sentimental or religious or whatever always slips through the critics' fingers. It is something like this which is possibly being suggested in the Tractatus.

We can't explain the nature of morality in the way in which a logician can show us why a given argument is valid or in the way in which a doctor can account for our stiff neck by pointing to the open kitchen window.

I think that this is part of the point of proposition 6.421. 'It is clear that ethics cannot be put into words.' The main value of the few cryptic remarks on ethics in the Tractatus is the implicit rejection, contained in them, of our normal way of 'doing' ethics. A rejection for example of the idea of setting ethics on some kind of indubitable base. 6.422. When an ethical law of the form 'Thou shalt...,' is laid down, one's first thought is, 'And what if I don't do it?' And of course any explanation, any reasons which I supply here can be rejected by the sceptic. And this is a feature of the logic of ethical statements. (I can't 'prove' to you that a joke is funny. The notion of 'proof' doesn't have any application in talking of jokes.) Similarly I can't really explain to you that $p \equiv \sim\sim p$.

'It is clear that ethics cannot be put into words' doesn't mean that we don't or can't say of certain acts that they are good or bad, or of certain things that they are beautiful or ugly.

Because this, of course, is just what we do. It is the way in which we try to justify our ethical judgements which is misleading. 'The sense of the world must lie outside of the world' is a rejection of a 'way of looking at ethics', one might say a 'scientific' way.

At 6.43 we read 'The world of the happy man is a different one from that of the unhappy man'.

One might also talk here of the world of the good man, the world of the humble man, the world of the man with understanding etc. The point is that when I talk of the world in an ethical sense I talk about how I see the world. If you wish I talk about 'my world'.

Strictly speaking I cannot say in an ethical sense 'the world is like this' only 'I see the world like this'.

The facts of the world don't change though my way of seeing them does. This is why I cannot say in language wherein lies the difference between the man who has 'understanding of life' and the man who doesn't. The sceptic would readily admit that one can understand chess, or even mathematics. But what on earth would count as understanding life? Wittgenstein's point is that the answer cannot be given in words, cannot be expressed by means of language. What is the meaning of it all? This must lie outside of it all. He is pointing out the difficulties involved in this type of question. How different it is from a scientific question. He says a 6.52 'We feel that even when all possible scientific questions have been answered, the problems of life remain completely untouched. Of course there are then no questions left, and this

itself is the answer.' And yet he does talk about people to whom the sense of life has become clear. This would make one think that the question 'What is the sense of life?' could be a genuine question, though the answer could not be put into words.

It is often said that philosophy begins in wonder. And it certainly is the case that most people at some time or other feel the need to ask themselves what 'everything is about'. Yet the moment I formulate the question I see that there is something peculiar about it. What sort of an answer could such a question have? Ordinarily, when I ask a question about an object or thing, I define it or put it into a class. I say something about its relation to 'other' things, compare it and contrast it. And it is for this reason that it seems impossible to say anything about 'everything'. What class will fit 'everything'? Logically, it seems, as if the question is meaningless. I cannot conceive of a verbal answer which would be satisfactory.

Yet one is not satisfied by this exercise in logic. One still wants to ask the question. Sometimes one feels that it is the most profound question one could ask; sometimes the only one really worth asking. This is man's metaphysical instinct. And it cannot be cured by logic.

Wittgenstein faced with this problem says: 'There are, indeed, things that cannot be put into words. They make themselves manifest. They are what is mystical.' Mystics have generally realized that there can be no verbal answer. They claim rather to have a vision, a revelation, which explains

without words why there is a universe, and what it is all about. They claim to see the connections, the total relevance of everything that happens. This of course escapes science, as science is selective in its questions. Perhaps this is the kind of thing Wittgenstein was suggesting.

The thorny question remains - Does this experience or revelation tell us anything about the universe or is it more akin to a hallucination? This question hasn't been satisfactorily answered. I don't think the mystics claim can simply be thrown out. There is such a thing as discovery by 'reflection on the facts'. And even Aristotle felt that the final purpose of philosophy was contemplation.

When Prof. Wisdom talks about reflecting and coming to see things 'as they really are', one oftens feels that this kind of talk wanders (dangerously?) close to mysticism.

Chapter 2

This chapter is based upon Wittgenstein's 'Lecture on Ethics', and upon conversations which he had on the subject with Rush Rhees and Friedrich Waismann. I hope to illustrate the way in which his views on ethics changed as he developed a different notion of language. He came to realize that one could not give an account of all propositions in terms of truth functions. Rather that every proposition belongs to some system of propositions and that there are several of these systems; and that the formal rules or internal relations of one are not those of another.

This is to suggest that we should look at what we are doing when playing the language game of ethical judgements; and this is why there are many examples used in the 'Lecture on Ethics'; and later in the Investigations. One must not imagine that there is one single pattern to be revealed, or single account of language to be offered. The situation is in fact quite the contrary. The forms and uses of language are extremely various and flexible. Language is like a whole family of games, and the rules for, the purposes of playing these games are themselves endlessly diverse. He warns us against thinking of language as something isolated and on its own. Using a language is not only among the most ordinary things that we do—'as much a part of our natural history as walking, eating, drinking, playing'; it is also in countless ways actually involved in many other things that we do, so that it without them is unintelligible and they without it.

As he says in Section 19 of the Investigations, 'To imagine a language is to imagine a form of life.' It follows from this that often to explain or understand language involves bringing in what at first sight looks wholly non-linguistic, something, simply, about what people are, and want, and do.

To inspect words, then, in a contextless vacuum, away from any actual use which they may have in an actual 'language game' is to invite confusion.

This leads Wittgenstein to the rather startling view expressed in the following quotations from the Investigations:

124. Philosophy may in no way interfere with the actual use of language; it can only in the end describe it. For it cannot give it any foundation either. It leaves everything as it is.

126. Philosophy simply puts everything before us, and neither explains nor deduces anything. Since everything lies open to view there is nothing to explain. For what is hidden, for example, is of no interest to us.

127. The work of the philosopher consists of assembling reminders for a particular purpose.

At the time of the writing of the Tractatus, he was, he says the victim of a misleading picture—113. 'But this is how it is——'I say to myself over and over again. I feel as though, if only I could fix my gaze absolutely sharply on this fact, get it in focus, I must grasp the essence of the matter.'

He was mislead by preconceived ideas, as it were,—of the picture of naming, the picture of dismantling something composite in

order to find its basic components, the picture of a calculus with clear and fixed rules. But now he is rejecting all this, and description is to take the place of explanation. Philosophical problems are to be solved by looking into the workings of our language; they are not to be solved by giving new information, but by arranging what we have always known.

Wittgenstein does apply this kind of approach to ethics, bringing attention to the fact that we do not express, or try to express, judgements of value at any time whatsoever, but only in certain specific circumstances ie. circumstances in which it makes sense to do so. He also emphasizes the point that within a given system of ethics there are certain replies one can make and certain questions one can ask, and others which would mean nothing. This is implied in the Tractatus at proposition 6.422. (When an ethical law of the form 'Thou shalt...', is laid down one's first thought is 'And what if I do not do it?'), but it isn't worked out and couldn't be with the view of language which he held at that time. He was in the process of changing his notion of language at the time of the 'Lecture on Ethics', and it is worked out to an extent.

Wittgenstein points out at the beginning of the 'Lecture on Ethics' that all expressions pertaining to ethics are in fact used in two very different senses, the trivial or relative sense on the one hand, and the absolute or ethical sense on the other. For example, the word 'good' used the relative sense simply means coming up to a certain pre-determined standards.

If for example I say that Expo '67 is a good world fair, then

I simply mean that it compares favourably with the Brussels Fair, the Paris Exhibition etc. My criterion may be that the exhibition pavilions are more interesting, that the atmosphere is more cheerful, or even that there are more bars. Either way, all I mean when I state that Expo '67 is a good fair is that it comes up to my notion of what a world fair should be like—it satisfies my standards, my criteria.

If I say that it is 'important' that I catch the train to Montreal, this means that otherwise certain undesirable things will happen to me. I will be late for my appointment, or, I will miss the boat for Europe, or, my ticket will no longer be valid.

Again if I say that this is the 'right' road, I mean that it is the right road relative to a certain goal. The right road from Hamilton to Toronto would in most cases be the one which would get a person there in the shortest possible time.

Used in this way, these expressions present no difficulty; but this is not how Ethics uses them. It is of prime importance to grasp this fact. The following examples will serve to make this clear.

If, for example, whenever I drive to Toronto I take a very devious route along third class roads thus involving myself in a much longer and tortuous journey, and a Canadian says to me, 'That isn't the right road to Toronto'; then I might answer, 'I know it isn't but I don't want to travel on the right road'. This person might shake his head, and think me a fool or a masochist but that is all.

Now note how different this example is from the following one.

Suppose I spent my life being cruel and intolerant and constantly telling lies. Then if you come up to me, pointing out

the fact that I behave very badly, and I reply to the effect that I know that I do, but that I have no desire to behave any better, then you are not just going to say, 'Oh, well that's alright'. You are going to think, and very probably say 'Well you ought to want to behave better'.

And this is what Wittgenstein would call an absolute judgement of value. The essence of the difference is that every relative judgement of value is really a mere statement of fact; and can be reduced to the form where it loses all appearance of a judgement of value.

For example, 'This man is a good shoe-salesman' can be reduced to 'This man sells more shoes during the year than any other salesman in the store'.

Wittgenstein is pointing out here that though any judgement of relative value can be reduced to a mere statement of fact; it is not the case that a statement of fact can ever be or imply an absolute judgement of value.

He illustrates this further, in a manner which throws a great deal of light on his position as given in the Tractatus.

If an omniscient person wrote down the whole description of the world, then if we examined all the propositions making up this description, we would find nothing which we could call an ethical judgement. We would find a list of all true scientific propositions, a list of all relative judgements of value, a list of all true propositions that could be made, but nowhere would we find an ethical judgement or anything that would logically imply one.

All the facts described would stand on the same level, and in the same way, all the propositions describing them. There are thus no propositions which in any absolute sense are important, sublime, or, trivial. And now we see what he meant by the following propositions from the Tractatus.

6.4 All propositions are of equal value.

6.41 The sense of the world must lie outside the world. In the world everything is as it is, and everything happens as it does happen: 'in' it no value exists—and if it did exist, it would have no value.

If there is any value that does have value, it must lie outside the whole sphere of what happens and is the case. For all that happens and is the case is accidental.

What makes it non-accidental cannot lie 'within' the world, since if it did it would itself be accidental. It must lie outside the world.

6.42 And so it is impossible for there to be propositions of ethics.

Propositions can express nothing that is higher.

6.421 It is clear that ethics cannot be put into words.

One might at this point suggest that good and bad though not qualities in the external world, are attributes of our states of mind. But a state of mind, in so far as we mean by that a fact which we can describe, is in no ethical sense good or bad. If I feel disgust at murder, then the description of this psychological fact will simply be on a par with any other proposition. In other words, in the final analysis, the description of a state of mind, eg. Brown feels disgust

at murder; and a proposition referring to the external world eg. the desk is in the room, are both simply descriptions of facts. What Wittgenstein means by proposition 6.421 of the Tractatus now becomes clear. Our words as we use them in ordinary and scientific discourse are capable of conveying only 'natural' meaning and sense, and ethics if it is anything must be supernatural, but our words will only express facts.

It is our verbal attempts at expressing 'the ethical' that he wishes to point out as being wasted effort, or as he later puts it, a mis-use of language.

One cannot talk about the 'right road' unless one had in mind some predetermined goal. What then could one mean by the expression 'the absolutely right road'? Wittgenstein suggests that this would be the road which 'everybody' on seeing it would, with logical necessity have to go. Obviously there could not be such a state of affairs. And similarly with the 'absolute good' which would be the state of affairs which everybody, independent of his tastes, personal foibles, and preferences, would necessarily bring about. But no state of affairs, has, in itself, what he calls 'the coercive power of an absolute judge'. That is to say, we get back to the position that all states of affairs are composed of facts, and all facts are on the same level. Or to put it another way, 'All propositions are of equal value'.

Several questions must be asked at this point. How and why does this constant mis-use of language come about? What are the characteristics common to all ethical expressions? Why do people

constantly use these expressions, and what is happening when they do so? In what way are we being mislead? We have certain feelings, certain tendencies, and according to Wittgenstein, when we try to give verbal expression to them, the result is nonsense, or, a mis-use of language. What then is taking place?

We are, he says, victims of a desire to go beyond significant language. There are no correct expressions in these matters, in fact, their essence just is their nonsensicality. When we try to speak of ethics we 'run against the boundaries of language'. Propositions about ethics can add nothing to our knowledge, because they are not meaningful. What he means by this is made clearer by the following passage.

Wittgenstein describes a certain experience which he sometimes has; that of 'wondering at the existence of the world'. I am, he says, inclined to use such expressions as 'How extraordinary that anything should exist?' or, 'How extraordinary that the world should exist?'. These expressions are similar to the remark which he made in the Tractatus at

6.44 It is not how things are in the world that is mystical, but that it exists. But he then goes on to show why he is of the opinion that the verbal expression which he has given to his experience is nonsense. (Tractatus 6.54'My propositions serve as elucidations in the following ways; anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical.')

There is a perfectly clear sense in the way in which I might say that I wonder at something being extraordinary. I can for example wonder at the speed of an exceptionally fast racehorse, one which can

run faster than any racehorse which I have previously encountered. Now in every case like this I am wondering at something being the case which I 'could' conceive 'not' to be the case. I wonder at the speed of the racehorse, because I can quite easily conceive of a normal racehorse at whose speed I should not wonder.

To say that I wonder at such and such being the case only has sense if I can imagine it not to be the case. Wittgenstein concludes from this that it is nonsense to say that I wonder at the existence of the world, because I cannot imagine it not existing.[1] This is a most difficult part of Wittgenstein's philosophy to understand. It seems to be a fact that one cannot imagine the world not existing, and yet if one has said what it is that cannot be expressed, one begins to wonder how expressing it would differ from saying what it is.

However Wittgenstein was of the opinion at the time that a similar, characteristic mis-use of language runs through all ethical expressions.

All these expressions seem to be similes, but this just is not the case.

We tend to think that when we say, for example, 'He is a good man' the use of the word good in this instance is somehow similar to its use in the phrase 'He is a good swimmer'. We get the impression at any rate that there is some kind of analogy between the use of these terms in a trivial sense and in an ethical sense. Now a simile must be a simile for something, and if I can describe a fact by means of a simile, then I must be

able to drop the simile and describe the fact without it. But in these cases if one drops the simile and tries to state the fact behind it, one finds that there are no such facts. And what appeared to be a simile is now seen to be mere nonsense. He points out further that any experience whatsoever is still on the final analysis only a fact, and a fact simply cannot be said to have absolute value. Wittgenstein concludes that no description would do to describe what he means by 'absolute value', and that further, he would reject any significant description 'on the grounds of its significance'. We should not imagine that some day we will find 'correct expressions' for what we want to say in these cases, because in fact, their nonsensicality is their essence: because in them we try to go beyond the world and hence beyond significant language.

As he says in the concluding section of the 'Lecture on Ethics', 'Ethics in so far as it consists in the desire to say something about the ultimate meaning of life, the absolute good, the absolute valuable can be no science'. It cannot add to our knowledge in any sense because it can never result in significant expression. And if it did so result it would no longer be ethics. It is a priori certain that whatever definition one tried to give of 'the good', or 'the valuable' it would not and further could not correspond to what one really meant.

The 'Lecture on Ethics' is neither wholly of the Tractatus period, nor wholly of the Philosophical Investigations. Though he stresses that it is a mis-use of language which runs right through our attempts at ethical expression; and illustrates how any kind of relative value judgement can be reduced to one of fact, he gives

several examples pertaining to what we actually do when making ethical judgements. And these are interesting as they are more akin to the kind of approach he takes in the Investigations. He no longer thought that one could give a general account of propositions in terms of truth functions. But every proposition belongs to some system of propositions and there are several of these systems. That is to say, within any given language game there are certain questions one can ask, and certain replies one can make and others which are unintelligible. He has the appearance of rejecting the Tractatus view on the general form of proposition, and is beginning to take a position more in line with his work in the Investigations.

For example in section 65 of that work he says, 'For someone might object against me: 'You take the easy way out'. You talk about all sorts of language games but you never say what the essence of a language game and hence of language is; what is common to all these activities and what makes them into language or parts of language. So you let yourself off the very part of the investigation which once gave you the greatest headache—the part about the 'general form of propositions' and of language.'

And this is true. —Instead of producing something common to all that we call language, I am saying that these phenomena have no one thing in common which makes us use the same word for all—but that they are related to one another in many different ways. And it is because of this relationship, or these relationships, that we call them all 'language'. I will try to explain this.[2]

66. 'Consider for example the proceedings that we call 'games'. I mean board-games, card-games, ball-games, Olympic games, and so on. What is common to them all?--Don't say: 'There 'must' be something common, or they would not be called 'games'--but 'look and see' whether there is anything common to all. --For if you look at them you will not see something that is common to 'all', but similarities, relationships, and a whole series of them at that. To repeat: don't think, but look!'

He goes on to say that if someone asked him what games were, he would describe games, and then add 'This and similar things are games'. If we substitute ethics for games here, then this would seem to fit in with his express desire at a later period, to deal always with a specific genuine moral problem, when asked about ethics. And his surprise that books were written on ethics in which there was no mention of specific moral problems.

I think that what he is suggesting is that we should look at what makes sense, at what is intelligible in any given game of ethical judgements. Hence the point of his remark that if someone says 'I know I play tennis badly, but I don't want to play any better', then all one can say is 'Oh well, then, that's alright'.

But if I say 'I know I behave badly, but then I don't want to behave any better'. He points out that here I could not make the same reply, meaning that such a reply would make no sense. This has nothing to do with what would be intelligible in a description of facts. It is a question of what is intelligible in this game of ethical judgements. One might express this by saying

that we don't make ethical pronouncements in a vacuum.

The first example which he gives in the 'Lecture on Ethics' to show what he means a judgement of absolute value is not a distortion, or mis-use of language—'Well you 'ought' to want to behave better.'—is a natural remark to make in the circumstances; the only remark you could make in fact. And when he says at proposition 6.422 of the Tractatus that one's first thought on meeting an ethical law of the form 'Thou shalt' is 'And what if I don't?' —he is wanting to show that with a judgement of absolute value this question makes no sense. To ask this question is to treat the law as if it were a judgement of relative value.

If I say 'you ought to want to behave better' and you reply 'And what if I don't?' meaning this as a question, then you have mistaken what I said. What Wittgenstein is trying to bring out here is that there is nothing more I can tell you! I can't find any foundation which you must logically accept. If I say 'Don't go near that horse' this is because if you ask me why I can give you a reason, something like 'If you do you will get kicked in the teeth'. But to ask the question in an ethical context is to treat a judgement of absolute value as if it were a judgement of relative value.

He was of the opinion that you can only frame a question where an answer is possible. And in the case of ethics no answer can be given. This kind of approach is very similar to his later work. Compare someone who asks whether two multiplied by two equals four; and someone who asks whether the multiplication tables are

the correct ones? —What possible answer could I give in the latter case? Similarly he said at one stage in reply to someone who talked of 'the right ethics'. The right ethics, this means nothing. To ask which ethics is the right one is like asking which standard of accuracy is the right one. What does someone who asks this want to know? What answer would satisfy him?

There is no one system of ethics which we can study in its purity and essence, to find out just what ethics is. We use the term ethics for a variety of systems, and the variety is important. Though different systems of ethics do have points in common, this does not mean that by an examination of these we will come to the heart or essence of ethics. The variety is important in order that we stop ourselves looking for the 'pure or unadulterated form'. This is tied up with the temptation we have when looking at different systems of ethics to think that what we imagine to be the justification of an action is what in fact justifies it in that system. This is a warning against interpreting other ethical systems.

We must then do away with explanation in ethics, in the sense of trying to give a foundation for ethics. This is both misleading and pointless. We must not indulge in statements such as 'Murder is wrong because it brings unhappiness'. This is merely to state facts. I might possibly think that unhappiness is a beneficial state, or I might murder a millionaire and give his money to the starving, or poor. This way of talking can only be misleading. If we try to give justification for our ethical laws, we can only refer to the world, and to facts, and Wittgenstein is of the opinion that all facts stand

on the same level. No fact is trivial or important in the absolute sense. This is why he says that the sense of the world, if there is a sense, must lie outside of the world. It is precisely because of what judgements of absolute value do mean, that it is impossible to find their justification 'in' the world. If our propositions are meaningful, then they are all of equal value. They refer to the world, and in the world everything is as it is, and might have been otherwise. No state of affairs has as Wittgenstein puts it 'the power of a coercive judge'.

Again, you cannot ask whether a judgement of absolute value is true or false in the way in which you can ask this of a scientific prediction. It would make no sense to ask whether a judgement of absolute value had been corroborated by something that happened, or, something that had been discovered. If you try to give an empirical foundation for ethics then no satisfactory solution could ever be reached, because I could always reject your ultimate premise. And where could you go from there? Ethical discourse should never be confused with or assimilated to scientific discourse, as this can only lead to confusion.

Nothing in Wittgenstein's work involves the rejection of the imperative in morality. And he never suggests that the notion of 'the importance of different ways of living' is a spurious one. Neither is he sceptical, as some positivists were, about the reality of the distinction between good and evil. He says towards the end of The Lecture, ''The Ethical' which cannot be expressed is that whereby I am able to think of good and evil at all, even in the impure and nonsensical expressions I have to use.'

One point I wish to stress is that Wittgenstein's whole approach prevents him from coming down on one side in ethics, as some of the more hard-headed positivists did. His point is only that it is impossible to speak on ethics. If there is any sense to the world, then it must lie outside of the world, and consequently can't be spoken about. To try and talk ethics is to run against the boundaries of language. Ethics if anything is supernatural, and our words are capable of conveying only natural meaning and sense.

If a sceptic attacks 'the ethical' pointing out that we can give it no foundation, then Wittgenstein would say that he was misunderstanding the situation. It is because ethics is what it is that we cannot ask for a foundation, explanation, or theory. All that happens and is the case is accidental he said in the Tractatus. Therefore if there is any value that does have value, it must lie outside the whole sphere of what happens and is the case. For all that happens and is the case is accidental.

Where Wittgenstein goes further than those philosophers who have said that we cannot talk about the ethical, or absolute value, because of our limited intelligence; in that he explains why, if there is value, and sense to the world, it cannot be revealed to us, because once revealed it would lose its value. As he says in proposition 6.41 of the Tractatus

'The sense of the world must lie outside the world. What makes it non-accidental cannot lie 'within' the world, since if it did it would itself be accidental. It must lie outside the world.'

Chapter 3

At the beginning of chapter 1, I quoted several propositions which Wittgenstein thought contained the characteristic features of ethics. 'That ethics is the inquiry into what is valuable, or, into what is really important, or, an inquiry into the meaning of life, or, into what makes life worth living, or, into the right way of living.'

He comes to the conclusion that no description could suffice to express what one means by absolute value. And further that he would reject any significant description 'on the grounds' of its significance. He also rejects any superficial or rationalistic conception of the Good, by which he means any conception which suggests that the Good could still be given some foundation. He says to Waissman in 'Notes on Talks with Wittgenstein', that we must cut off the path to any and every explanation 'why' the good is good. The essence of the Good has nothing to do with facts and therefore cannot be explained by any proposition.

Towards the end of the 'Lecture on Ethics' he shows how in our expressions of value judgements, we take a word like 'safe' and join it with absolutely—which results in a mis-use of language, a distortion of meaning.

But his first example of what he meant by a judgement of absolute value—'Well you 'ought' to want to behave better' is a completely natural remark in the circumstances. One might say it is the only remark you could make in fact. And it is not a distortion of

language.

This kind of example of what we do in playing 'the language game of ethics'; together with his later notion that every proposition belongs to some system of propositions, the formal rules or internal relations of one system not being those of another; and his express reluctance (at a later period) to discuss ethics except in relation to a particular moral problem; suggests to me that one can still have a discussion on ethics. A discussion similar in kind to that which Wittgenstein held on other philosophical problems. We must examine the language game of ethics, not with the hope of finding any essence, or indeed any foundation, but to try to make clearer what we are about when playing the game of ethical judgements. This chapter will consist of remarks on ethics most of which follow from what has been said so far. And I shall draw certain conclusions which I think Wittgenstein might agree with. One gets the impression that he left many things unsaid, but his remarks do, I think, point the way to further inquiry. To begin with one should not talk as if one of the ethical systems was the right one, or nearer the right one. If you say for example that Christian ethics is the right one, this simply accounts to choosing Christian ethics. It is not like saying that one of two physical theories is the right one. The way in which some reality corresponds to, or conflicts with, a theory has no counterpart in the first case.

Neither can one make sweeping assertions about 'life in general' as the existentialists, for example, have tried to do. Existentialism either in the form given by Sartre, or, by Heidegger

is simply the skilful presentation of a viewpoint, psychologically attractive perhaps but that is all. Their error is to try and present it as an ontology, as saying something fundamental about the world, or, about reality and man's relation to it. To put it simply one should not say 'Life is meaningless, absurd' but rather 'I find it so'.

To make a statement like 'man is free' or 'to be free is a condition or mode of man's being' may not be to say very much. At first, it may sound very exciting - a contradiction of determinism in any sense, or perhaps an attack on Freud's conception of 'the unconscious'. I suggest that it is similar to, though in important ways different from Rousseau's 'man is free but everywhere in chains', which is similar to though different from 'every cloud must have a silver lining'. The latter is a homely euphemism, and not likely to be treated or understood as a purported statement of fact.

Rousseau's 'statement' when first made was perhaps a perceptive paradox. And again it's not likely to be treated as being on the same logical level as 'Most men are free to work a 40 hour week but they must pay their union dues and mortgages'.

At first sight 'Man is free' sounds like an assertion of fact, sounds like a statement which could conceivably be tested as being true or false. Something like the assertion 'The Canadians are, though the Spanish are not, free' (from political oppression) - similar though more general.

But is this the case?

To the Russian who doubts the last statement, we display in

all their democratic glitter, our free institutions, our parliamentary party system, the circus of our leadership convention, the lack of press censorship, our legal system etc. And we contrast this with the Franco regime - with its refusal to accept trade unionism, its veto on student citizens, restrictions on the press etc. (If one is not too prejudiced, some measure of agreement or understanding will be reached.)

Now contrast this with a debate between one who says in a sweeping or all embracing sense that 'man is free'; and one who says 'man is a slave to his passions' or something similar.

We point to———? Well, what exactly?

What on earth would be relevant to settling this 'disagreement'? There is no disagreement as to the facts - or as to what may happen in the future.

Isn't this simply a disagreement in 'attitude', more a way of 'looking at things' - more a 'picture preference'? In fact aren't these 'purported' assertions simply expression of attitude? This is the danger involved in making statements which purport to, define, or describe 'man's nature' - or 'how 'man' is in the world'.

These statements tend to be either trite or to degenerate into non-significance.

Flew points out when discussing the nature of religious 'assertions' that: 'to assert 'x is the case' is necessarily equivalent to denying that 'x is not the case''.

If you wish 'that $p \equiv \sim\sim p$ ' - for example, 'French girls are chic' is equivalent to 'it is not the case that French girls

are not chic'.

If you are in doubt as to whether a person is actually making an assertion then one way to try and understand his utterance, is to find out what he could regard as being incompatible with its truth.

Imagine a person confronted with a large selection of French girls. Some are Dior models but others are country girls 'rude and healthy' - others drag themselves home after twelve hours in a factory 'pale - dishevelled - exhausted and dressed in overalls' - still others parade the streets at night 'painted but drab and defeated' etc., etc. No matter which girl you point out, our friend says 'How chic!' or rather (for that is clearly not an assertion) 'She is chic!' Will nothing count against, or cause our friend to withdraw his 'assertion' - well if nothing will - then it's not 'an assertion'! If there is nothing which a putative assertion denies, then there is nothing which it asserts either - and so it isn't really an assertion. The point I am labouring is this 'Is there any conceivable event which would be admitted by the existentialist to be a sufficient reason for conceding Man isn't free after all?'

The general 'assertion' 'Man is free' is more akin to 'Man is free but everywhere in chains' than it is to 'Canadians are free, though Spaniards are not'; and the former is more akin to poetry, than the latter which is clearly a factual statement.

The latter statement might be made by a student of political science and we would test it for truth or falsity. But we wouldn't examine poetry for truth or falsity.

'Man is free' is an illuminating paradox. And it is useful drawing attention as it does to aspects of life often ignored or not sufficiently emphasized. The fault lies in accepting this kind of statement as having a 'literal' significance.

If 'to be conscious is to be free' means only that unlike ashtrays, desks, and trees, we can sometimes choose one way of life rather than another (and not <u>any</u> way of life either), then what he says is true, interesting, as it curbs the rein on the wild horses of determinism, but neither new nor startling.

The American negro can choose to riot or loot, or choose to follow the slower way of non-violence to achieve his aims. His ancestor could choose to work seventy hours a week in the cotton fields and eat, or choose to lift his head and get it shot off. He was free to whittle pieces of wood and sing songs, or free to sleep during his leisure hours. But now the concept of freedom or choice has been stretched to its limit!

Words like 'choice' or 'freedom' can't be picked out of the stream of language and 'given' a new meaning. (What would it mean 'to give a word meaning' anyway?)

To understand what is meant by freedom or choice we must examine how these words are used in the language games we play with them. And to say that 'Man is free' is to make a purported assertion which can be, I think, on the one hand false, or on the other hand an illuminating paradox. (We may have freedom of thought, but not freedom to think - Einstein.)

The interesting questions are (a) to what extent <u>are</u> we

free? (b) what are we really free to choose? (c) given that we are free to make choices, does it make sense to say that we ought to choose for one thing rather than another? (d) are some choices better, others worse? These questions arise when one is tempted to ask questions about the purpose or point of man's existence; and these questions are very different from questions about the purpose of Trudeau's existence, or the point of the U.N. peace force. And note that we can't dogmatically assert that questions which can't be answered empirically are meaningless. We don't know what we can, and cannot ask, until we've formulated the question, and tried to attach a sense to the words.

Secondly bearing in mind Wittgenstein's notion of ethics as being an inquiry into the meaning of life or into what makes life worth living; I should like to ask whether one can in fact apply the distinction between appearance and reality to a man's life. And if one can say that a man's life is meaningful, can one say in what this meaningfulness consists? In a discussion of this kind the most fundamental question of right and wrong concerns what a person 'wants out of life'.

It is an important fact that there is a possibility of being deceived as to what one wants out of life. This follows from the fact that there is a difference between thinking something worthwhile and its being worthwhile. Now this notion of deception cannot be applied to that of an animal. Because an animal cannot plan an action ahead. There are certain phenonema, including hope and deception, which are modes of our form of life — a form of life involving

language.[1] As Wittgenstein says in the Philosophical Investigations — Part Two. i. One can imagine an animal angry, frightened, unhappy, happy, startled. But hopeful? And why not? A dog believes his master is at the door. But can he believe his master will come the day after tomorrow?—And 'what' can he not do here?—How do I do it?

How am I supposed to answer this?

Can only those hope who can talk? Only those who have mastered the use of language? That is to say, the phenomena of hope are modes of this complicated form of life. (If a concept refers to a character of human handwriting, it has no application to beings who do not write.)

The point I would like to make is that animals cannot plan an action ahead, and certain attempts at throwing light on ethical problems by reference to animal behaviour hit wide of the mark.

Consider what is going on, for example, when we talk of an animal learning to change the wrong response to the right one. We put a rat in a maze at the centre of which lies his food. The first time he is put in the maze he takes quite some time to get to the centre and get the food. His performance improves each time he is put into the maze. Psychologists say that the rat gets reinforcement of response owing to pleasure. And then they try to apply this notion to human beings. This is a misunderstanding.

The interesting point, the point where ethics is involved, is that a human being has a decision to make first 'concerning what it is that he wants'. An animal does not.

The decisions which interest the student of ethics concern, not how to get what we want, but what it is that we want. These are the problems that raise interesting points, not those that concern purely practical means of reaching a goal.

This is why ethical advice of the form 'pursue happiness' or 'pleasure is the ultimate good' or 'do what ever you want' is of no value. The problem is precisely 'What do I want to do?' or 'What will count as or give me pleasure or happiness?' If a concept like pleasure is extended to mean anything that one pursues, it becomes useless as a guide to action. (The correct answer to 'Gather ye rosebuds while ye may' is 'Which rosebuds?')

A psychologist whose white rats were occupied in learning to press bars suggested to me that this is basically all we are engaged on. This may throw light on something (possibly rat behaviour) but it tells us nothing about ethics. Our problem is which bars should I press, if any. The rat may learn to press the bar which releases the food the most quickly, but he has no decision to make concerning whether and which food he wants.

It is possible to think that you know what is worthwhile and be deceived about it--be wrong about it. People question what it is they want to do, and regret courses of action which they have taken in the past. This is the raw material of good literature and tragedy. And it also supports Wittgenstein's notion of ethics as being the inquiry into the right way of living.

The next point which I try to make, bears upon Wittgenstein's point that we should not talk about finding the 'right ethics'.

It is a fact that we do recognize certain considerations in deciding the best course for actions, and people on opposite sides of an argument have a lot in common. Now you can't establish logical principles at all by argument or reason simply because you would be employing logic to do this. And you can't ask whether logical principles or methods are true. Because in this case what would you be asking? The whole meaning of the distinction between truth and falsity depends on logic; so you can't raise the question of truth or falsity of logic itself.

Now compare this with the fact that there is often a confusion between the idea of right and wrong, and standards. The meaning of right and wrong cannot be separated from the standards. And this is important with regard to the question of different morals in different societies. One tends to say 'Those people have different standards', but what one should say is that they make different judgements.

You can't say 'Such and such standards are better', because it looks as if you could say that both sets of standards are correct. But it has no meaning to ask whether standards are correct.

The philosopher should not get perplexed about different customs in different societies. The interesting thing for the philosopher to note is that in every society there is a recognition of the distinction between good and evil. This is to say, different ways of living are regarded as 'important'. The notion of 'importance' is closely linked with the notion of 'good' and 'evil'. And this too, seems to support Wittgenstein's idea of ethics as being the inquiry

into 'what is really important'.

Plato was asking whether there was any point in trying to come to understand life; understanding the point of human existence in general; and one's own life. He was interested in the fact that people thought they understood life, but were in fact often governed by illusion.

He points out that we have the ideas or concepts of circularity, straightness, etc, and these ideas enable us to talk the language of mathematics. Though we have never seen a geometrical circle we are capable of using the concept. Similarly though we have never seen a perfectly just action, we have the conception of justice.

Now in a tragedy for example, the morally weak person seems to have an appreciation of good and evil and yet fails to do the right action. Plato wishes to say that all men in a sense have a knowledge of such moral principles. One talks for example of 'getting into a mess'. Plato seems to be suggesting that being the kind of being that makes mistakes pre-supposes a knowledge of the Forms.

But how can one know whether a person's sense of life is mistaken or not? I will discuss this at length in the next chapter, but would mention now that it has nothing to do with whether he can put the meaning of his life into words. Rather it has something to do with whether he 'knows how to go on...' in the sense in which Wittgenstein talks of understanding in mathematics as consisting in knowing how to go on—what figure to put down next. Don't, he says, think of understanding as being some queer kind of mental process.

Similarly with life. One might say that understanding consists of knowing how to go on (in a purposeful sort of way) as opposed, say, to the kind of character one gets in Samuel Becket, eg, Murphy who sits all day putting his clothes on, and taking them off, looking for a reason to go out; similarly with the lead in 'Happy Days' who buried in the earth up to her neck, files her nails all day, chattering in a completely aimless fasion. One can, as the above mentioned characters do, live a life devoid of understanding or reason.

A subjective ethics over-emphasizes and over-simplifies the place of the sentiments in ethical effort. On the other hand a transcendental ethics may over-intellectualize the process. That religious and political persecution is the perogative of ethical objectivists makes one suspect that to rely on principles is to cease to think. Paradoxical though it sounds, one often feels that to 'adopt' wholeheartedly a code of ethics is to opt out of morality. What I mean by this can be best illustrated by an example. This example was used by Wittgenstein in discussion with Rush Rhees. Try and imagine, or understand, the problem facing a man who has come to the conclusion that he must either leave his wife or abandon his cancer research. This example is useful in that it brings forth the many facets of a moral problem. It also illustrates how different the problem is where a man has previously adopted, or been brought up to accept a particular code of ethics. Such a man's attitude will vary at different times. Suppose I am his friend, and I say to him, 'Look, you've taken this girl out of

her home, and now, by God, you've got to stick to her'. This would be called taking up an ethical attitude. He may reply, 'But what of suffering humanity? how can I abandon my research?' In saying this he may be making it easy for himself: he wants to carry on that work anyway. (I may have reminded him that there are others who can carry it on if he gives up.) And he may be inclined to view the effect on his wife relatively easily: 'It probably won't be fatal for her. She'll get over it, probably marry again.' and so on. On the other hand it may not be this way. It may be that he has a deep love for her. And yet he may think that if he were to give up his work he would be no husband for her. That is his life, and if he gives that up he will drag her down. Here we may say that we have all the materials of a tragedy; and we could only say 'Well, God help you'.

The above, says Wittgenstein is the situation with regard to a man who has no ethics. If he has, say, the Christian ethics, then he might say that it is absolutely clear that he must stay with her come what may. And his problem is a different one; that of making the best of the situation. A moral problem does have the form 'I don't know my way about'. One has all the facts and yet one cannot decide what to do. It may be that whatever one does one will hurt someone. To talk of the 'right ethics' here does not make sense.

I would suggest that ethics should not be regarded either as purely an affair of the sentiments, nor as purely a matter of obeying certain commands either supposedly laid down by God, or

supposedly formulated by conscience or intuition. (Some people know by intuition that simply no one could dislike chocolates.) A book on ethics is boring when it tries to give rules and cannons which will enable us to deduce whether a particular action is good; or if it tries to set out in general terms what makes an action good; like a logician sets out what makes a good demonstration good. It is the same with aesthetics, when one is given a set of rules or points to notice, in order that one can deduce whether a picture is good.

This kind of approach is not only ridiculous, but invariably a dismal failure. Far from leading to 'understanding' which is what we seek, in ethics and aesthetics, it leads to the rigid, dead, and unimaginative reaction to recognized points, found in garage mechanics studying a car engine, or, judges at the 'Miss America' beauty contest.

Criticism should not be directed solely towards showing that a work of art is good or bad—but directed towards showing it to us 'for what it is'. A work of art may reveal the familiar; show us what we have looked at and not seen.

Similarly in ethics, we should, I think spend more time in trying to see actions and problems 'for what they are'. Trying to understand a problem in ethics does not mean that we are going to give a solution, as for the most part there won't be one.

Coming to understand an ethical problem consists in coming to see it 'for what it is', and now how we may have superficially interpreted it. I will find problems where you will find none, and vice versa.

This relates back to a previous point that moral decisions aren't made in a vacuum, and to a point I will make later that not every moral decision is possible in any society.

You should not talk about ethics in the abstract—wrenched away from the context which gives it sense and meaning, and force or importance. This is why I think that novelists treat so well of ethics. A novel is a study of persons. Out of the apparently chaotic, complex, procession of events which make up a person's life, some kind of order is made by the novelist. And we begin to see the pattern in these events. In a good novel we come eventually to see 'the person for what he is, and his problems for what they are'.

Trying to come to some understanding of a moral problem is not some process leading to a solution.

Finally when you describe an action as good or admirable, this does not simply amount to saying that it brings happiness. You cannot for example say 'Killing is wrong because it brings unhappiness'. I might kill a millionaire and give his money to the poor, but this would not justify the action. You cannot give an account of killing, and many other things in terms of the human good or harm that it brings to others. And neither is the distinction between good and evil to be accounted for in terms of what one likes and dislikes. 'Killing is wrong' is not equivalent to 'I do not like killing' or 'The majority of people do not like killing'. And the same applies to generosity, virtue, etc.

On page one of The Blue Book Wittgenstein says—'The question 'how do we measure a length?' helps us to understand the

problem 'what is length?'.

The questions 'what is length?', 'what is meaning?', 'what is the number one?' etc., produce in us a mental cramp. We feel that we can't point to anything in reply to them and yet ought to point to something. (We are up against one of the great sources of philosophical bewilderment: we try to find a substance for a substantive.)'

One might say bearing this in mind. Everyone knows what goodness is. The unclarity about goodness comes when it is discussed out of context, when it isn't familiar. Look at particular problems when discussing ethics.

Note the similarity between questions like 'What is goodness?', and 'What is sadness?', and 'What is length?', and 'What is importance?'. One gets confused by all these questions—feels that there is no answer.

It is a mistake, I think, to raise the question in this form. Just as it is important to ask 'How do we measure size?', and not 'What is size?', so, in connection with'goodness' it is useful to ask 'How did I learn to use the words 'good' and 'evil'?'

Wittgenstein had concluded that in so far as ethics springs from a desire to say something about the ultimate meaning of life it can be no science. One strains against the boundaries, the limits of language. But this is not to say that a certain amount of worthwhile discussion cannot be had on ethics.

What we cannot do is:

(a) accept any rationalistic conception of the good ie. any conception which suggests that the good can be given some foundation

as it were.

(b) talk of finding 'the right ethics', in the way in which one could say of two rival scientific theories 'This is the right one'.

(c) accept as universally valid any ethic resulting from some ontological theory.

(d) accept any 'theories of goodness' which are motivated by the premise that all men want the same thing. (This has been suggested by certain psychologists, but on the contrary the problem in ethics concerns 'what it is that man wants'. If you say 'all men desire pleasure' - my reaction is to ask 'and what is pleasure?'. If you reply 'that which all men want' - your original statement becomes 'all men want what they want'. If however you specify pleasure as being one object of desire among others eg. 'to contemplate the truth' or 'wine, women and song' then your statement will be false! Neither formulation is very useful.

(e) accept the notion that the difference between good and evil is a matter of what one likes and dislikes.

(f) and finally we must dismiss the notion that 'scientific method' be introduced into ethics, and that one can talk in terms of rules by which one might deduce whether an action is good or not.

What we can do is examine what is going on when we 'play the language game of ethics', and I draw certain tentative conclusions.

(a) We can I think distinguish between appearance and reality in a man's life.

(b) We can conclude that the meaning of right and wrong can't be

separated from the standards.

(c) Moral decisions aren't made in a vacuum, and only certain moral decisions and standpoints are possible in any given society.

(d) Understanding language and understanding life come about in a similar way, and I will bring out the importance of this in the next chapter. (My words become meaningless when I have nothing to say, when it makes no difference what I say—similarly a person's life becomes meaningless when it makes no difference to him what he does.)

(e) And finally one must conclude that only certain remarks and questions are intelligible in any given 'ethical context'. One must not appeal to 'the common good', or to 'what all men want'. One cannot demonstrate goodness by appeals to evidence which operates 'independently' of the various moral opinions which people hold.

The next chapter consists of a more detailed discussion of two points raised in this chapter. I discuss the suggestion that there are deep connections between what makes discourse possible, and what makes possible the kind of life that has meaning. And then I suggest an explanation of why some rules in a society are singled out as having the status of 'moral rules' and others are not. This will lead to the conclusion that there is no common agreement as to what constitutes human good and harm, and that human good far from being independent of the moral beliefs people hold, is in fact determined by them.

Chapter 4

In 1943 Simone Weil was asked by the Free French in London to write a report on the possibilities of bringing about the regeneration of France. The report took the form of a book, 'L'Enracinement', or, 'The Need for Roots', of which part two begins:

'To be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul. It is one of the hardest to define. A human being has roots by virtue of his real, active and natural participation in the life of the community which preserves in living shape certain particular expectations for the future. This participation is a natural one, in the sense that it is automatically brought about by place, conditions of birth, profession and social surroundings. Every human being needs to have multiple roots. It is necessary for him to draw well nigh the whole of his moral, intellectual and spiritual life by way of the environment of which he forms a natural part.' And she goes on to say:

'And a given environment should not receive an outside influence as something additional to itself, but as a stimulant intensifying its own particular way of life. It should draw nourishment from outside contributions only after having digested them, and the human beings who compose it should receive such contributions only from its hands.'

One might go even further and say that a man's spiritual, intellectual, and moral life is not even conceivable in the absence

of the ways of living in which he participates; ways of living, many of which could not have developed apart from language.

Various moral phenomena are modes of a complicated form of life. There is a two way dependence between 'forms of life' and 'modes of discourse'.

We speak of 'understanding' and 'meaning'; both in regard to what a person says; and in regard to what he does. Both in regard to his utterances and his actions.

Just as a person may speak and yet have nothing to say, so also may a person do various things without finding much sense in what he does. If he doesn't find much sense in what he is doing this means that it doesn't matter much whether he does it or not. Just as if my utterances have no sense, it makes very little difference what I say.

Having 'something to say' belongs with the idea of speaking. This is why we can say that someone's words have degenerated into meaningless chatter. Similarly with a person's life—and the fact that his actions and activities can lose their sense. This too depends upon there being 'various ways of living' and 'forms of life' which others take part in. This is why, as Simone Weil suggests, we must bring in the notions of uprootedness and alienation into an account of the conditions whereby a man's life is said to have lost its meaning.

One might ask what makes a person's life meaningful in the sense that one wonders what he finds in the activities, preoccupations, which make up the tissue of his life.

Here one might be asking what sort of a person one must be, what sort of outlook one must have on life in order to get anything out of that kind of life. One might say, for example, 'I couldn't face the thought of being a professional acedemic' or 'He sells motor insurance, I couldn't live that way—to me that way of life would be meaningless'. But this is not to say that his way of life is meaningless! (though it might be)

The thing to bear in mind is that one cannot separate a life from the person whose life it is and judge the life by our own personal standards—standards that we apply to our own life.

This doesn't reduce the whole inquiry to subjectivism. On the contrary there exist perfectly good standards for us to appeal to in judging another person's life; ie, the standards of the other person. To discover these is to study the person and the life he leads. (And this is frequently done by novelists.)

Though these standards may be personal, they are still objective in the sense that I and other people can use them just as well as he. It is because others can use them that another person can point out to him what he hasn't recognized; can say something like 'The way you spend your time must seem rather futile to you even though you refuse to accept or recognize this.', or 'For God's sake, don't you realize what a fool you are being—carrying on like that'—and so on.

Isn't this just what Socrates does in many of his dialogues? He is continuously trying to bring home to people that they are living 'lives of illusion' not by his standards but by theirs.

As Alcibiades says in The Symposium, 'He compels me to realize that I am still a mass of imperfections and yet persistently neglect my own true interests by engaging in public life. So against my real inclination I stop up my ears and take refuge in flight'.

It is because I can use another's standards to point out to him what he has failed or refused to recognize that we can distinguish between appearance and reality here.

It can be the case that one has all the items of a pattern before one's eyes, and yet one still misses the pattern. Consider the following conversation from H. M. Pulham, Esq., by John P. Marquand, quoted by John Wisdom in his 'Gods'.

'And I think Kay and I are pretty happy. We've always been happy.'
Bill lifted up his glass and put it down without drinking.
'Would you mind saying that again?' he asked.
'I don't see whats so queer about it. Taken all in all, Kay and I have really been happy.'
'All right,' Bill said gently, 'just tell me how you and Kay have been happy.'
Bill had a way of being amused by things which I could not understand.
'Its a little hard to explain,' I said. 'Its like taking a lot of numbers that don't look alike and that don't mean anything until you add them all together.'
I stopped, because I hadn't meant to talk to him about Kay and me.
'Go ahead,' Bill said. 'What about the numbers?' And he began to smile.
'I don't know why you think its so funny,' I said. 'All the things

that two people do together, two people like Kay and me, add up to something. There are the kids and the house and the dog and all the people we have known and all the times we've been out to dinner. Of course Kay and I do quarrel sometimes but when you add it all together, all of it isn't as bad as the parts of it seem. I mean, maybe that's all there is to anybody's life.'

Bill poured himself another drink. He seemed about to say something and checked himself. He kept looking at me.'

In this kind of case, one is asking questions because one fails to see the meaning in another's life, or perhaps one wishes to learn from the way this person lives. This is simply a request for what is not apparent to be made plain. One wishes to deepen one's understanding.

But one might be asking a more philosophical question than this. One may be more concerned with what it is that gives meaning to anyone's life. What, we might ask, is the nature of the relationship between any life and the meaning it has for the person living it? And eventually we might ask what it is that makes it possible for any life to have meaning.

One would not at this point appeal to the natural law or, to some metaphysical scheme which would reveal to us 'man's place in the scheme of things'.

But neither should the question be dismissed out of hand, as not genuine or suspect. (the kind of thing one asks when in despair—more a cry of terror than a genuine question—a symptom of something having gone wrong.)

Rather one should do as I have suggested, and compare what is being asked here with the questions philosophers have asked about the meaning and intelligibility of discourse. These questions run into each other. As Wittgenstein has shown there are deep connections between what makes discourse possible and what makes possible the kind of life that has meaning. As Simone Weil says 'A human being has roots by virtue of his real, active and natural participation in the life of a community'.

And in fact man's moral, spiritual and intellectual life are not even conceivable in the absence of the ways of living in which he participates—ways of living many of which couldn't have developed apart from language.

It is the society in which he lives with its customs, traditions, and culture that gives sense or meaning to a man's life, that which Simone Weil calls the roots.

When a man's life does lose its meaning he will no longer be able to derive intellectual and spiritual nourishment from the culture and tradition to which he owes his whole being.

There are countless examples of this in literature. Graham Greene's A Burnt Out Case will suffice as an example. The main character, a successful architext confesses that his great success is just a bore and has left him 'spiritually' empty.

Now one might agree with what has been said so far but suggest that it is trite in that I have failed to give any explanation of why some rules in a society, a culture, are singled out as being 'moral' rules and others are not.

The point I would like to make here is that to understand why any given rule is regarded as a 'moral' rule, one must come to appreciate the background which attends it. Once we see a rule in its context we will understand why it is called a moral rule. This will lead to the conclusion that human good is not independent of the moral beliefs people hold, but determined by them. In other words we must accept that there are different conceptions of what is to count as human good or evil.

A background of moral beliefs and principles must be central in any attempted account of morality.

Consider the following example:

I have the habit of eating a steak dinner every Friday evening. Now if for some reason I am unable to have my steak dinner, then I might well be a little annoyed, but I wouldn't feel any great upset. And neither does it annoy me on a Friday when I see people around me in the restaurant eating other than steak dinners.

But what of a person who insists on eating fish on a Friday. He takes great care to follow this rule, and indeed feels extremely angry, and even guilty, if he or his family infringe this rule.

At first glance it would be very hard for me to understand why he felt so strongly about this matter. It would be difficult for me to see the point in his attitude. I should certainly refuse to attach any moral significance to it.

But, say, he provides me with a 'context', a background within which this rule operates, then it might begin to have the appearance of a moral rule.

The background he provides me with is that of the Roman Catholic Church. And now I see the rule as having some moral significance, it is tied up with reverence, and disrespect for the laws of the church, and hense disrespect for God. By the linking and connecting of what seemed an arbitrary rule, with religious notions which I understand such as reverence and disrespect I come to see how this rule could have moral significance.

The important point to stress is that unless a given rule has some relation to such a background, then I could never understand it as being a moral rule. To make sense of moral beliefs and judgements, and rules I must consider their conceptual background.

Those philosophers who suggest that moral propositions are 'commendations' don't really get very far. So I commend one's never eating meat on a Friday. The fact that I commend this, in itself, would hardly give a point to the activity, and certainly not a moral point. One cannot explain the point of a moral rule in terms of commendation.

Another suggestion was that the point of calling a rule, 'a moral rule', or, the point of calling an action 'morally' good was that it could be explained in terms of the human good which it led to, and the harm which it avoided. What was to count as human good and harm was said to be a 'factual' matter. As if one could talk of human good or harm without any context. But it simply is not the case that there are 'pure facts' as it were, from which one can deduce moral rules or conclusions. And this

is important in shedding light on the radical differences which manifest themselves in the moral climates of divergent societies. It also helps us to see why there are different views concerning what constitutes human good or harm, within the same society.

Consider the following example:

I am due to read a paper at a seminar tomorrow and I do not turn up.

(a) because I was out at a party all night and felt tired.

(b) I received a telegram to the effect that my father is seriously ill.

(c) I consider the paper which I have written worthless.

(d) I felt that the task was unfair as I had already presented as many papers as the other students.

In case (b) I would not be considered 'inconsiderate and rude'. In case (c) you might in certain circumstances even praise my sincerity. Case (d) might be open to argument. ('You're getting paid by this university and you do as I say!, or on the other hand, 'I will not under any circumstances be victimized', etc.)

There are no pure facts here from which you can deduce a moral conclusion about me. See how important were the circumstances in each case. But you might object and say 'What about case (a)?' In this instance we would all castigate you as being 'inconsiderate and rude'. But this is only because standards already prevail in the context in which the offense was recognized. You didn't deduce my action as being an offense from a 'pure fact'. The notion of offense is parasitic on the notion of a standard or norm!

And it is not difficult to imagine a society where I would

not be castigated in case (a). (Perhaps it was my 21st birthday party!)

There is unfortunately perhaps no way of determining the 'inconsiderateness' or 'rudeness' of an action in a way which will logically guarantee the settling of any disagreements which might possibly arise. You and I might both share the moral concept 'rudeness' but disagree strongly over its application. This is because our views of rudeness are influenced by our other moral views.

Let us consider the case of abortion. And let us imagine that you disagree strongly with this notion. Perhaps this is because of a certain religious background which leads you to hold certain other moral beliefs such as 'the sanctity of human life', or, a belief in 'the soul', and life after death. Then indeed, what could be worse than to prevent a foetus reaching its full development, passing no matter how short and painful a period in 'the valley of tears', but having the chance of eternal life.

I am more humanitarian if you wish, have been exposed to more suffering. Perhaps there is a strong possibility that the child if born will be badly crippled or mentally retarded. Or, perhaps the mother's life will be in great danger during the birth. Then I may be in favour of terminating the pregnancy. The point to notice is that we both see the position clearly. It is not as if I have noticed something which you have not. But that which is of prime importance to you in arriving at your position is of minor importance or relevance in my eyes. We place

emphasis on different aspects of the case. What is to count as an important fact in coming to a decision is governed by a person's other moral beliefs.

My opinions or beliefs on abortion, euthanasia, or anything else are influenced, one might even say governed by still wider other moral beliefs.

'Euthanasia is wrong' or 'Euthanasia is justified' is not 'entailed' by the facts. There will always be the possibility of permanent and radical moral disagreement. The desire to press on to complete agreement, moral finality is quite misleading. If there was an end which was not in question or dispute, and if one could talk of human good or harm outside of a context, then this would be possible. In that case if you claimed to have a good moral argument,you could spell it out for me in terms of human good or harm. But the disagreement would be <u>what is to count as</u> human good or harm!

Some philosophers have tried to throw light on human good and harm by considering non-moral concepts of goodness. Like Aristotle they have concerned themselves with 'function'. When a thing has a function then whether or not it is good, will depend on whether it serves that function well. If I am to decide whether McMaster is a good university, then I must ask what a university is for. But I cannot see the point of moral concepts in this way. To ask what generosity, or kindness is 'for' is simply to vulgarize the concept. It is to talk as if 'Love your neighbours', or, 'Honour thy father and thy mother', was some kind of political policy!

Consider two horse trainers in the following situation:

It is pretty certain that they will agree as to what constitutes a good, fit and well-trained horse. They might disagree over technicalities in training methods, but the 'end product', the good or fit racehorse will be accepted by both of them as such. Now say that one trainer discovers that a horse will be just as fit if it is starved for several days before a race, and kept in a confined space. (Perhaps it reaches a state of nervous excitement which enables it to run just as well as if it had been trained by more conventional methods.)

Now no person who understood horse racing might disagree as to the horse's performance, but the majority of people would say that this trainer was a bad trainer. He might produce a 'good' horse in this way, ie, a horse which performs its function as well as could be expected, but we feel that one should not treat a horse in this way.

And here we have a moral dispute. Concepts of cruelty, and care for animals enter into the discussion.

The point to notice is that where the end is not in dispute we can reach agreement. We all know what constitutes a good and fit horse. This is why we can talk of expert and inexpert trainers. But when we consider training methods (and bring in the concept of cruelty) we find that there are different conceptions of what constitutes a good trainer. This dispute, a moral dispute, cannot be settled by reference to the horse as its performance is the same whether trained in 'the cruel way' or not.

Similarly we shall find that there is no common agreement

as to what constitutes human good or harm. Far from human good being independent of the moral beliefs held by people it is in fact determined by them.

Moral views are not founded on the 'facts' concerning human good or harm. The situation is that the moral viewpoint determines what is to count as a relevant fact in reaching a moral decision. If one could appeal to 'the facts' then I could not reject your reasons for any moral beliefs, on euthanasia or anything else, because they would be based on 'the facts' and you could point them out to me.

But factual relevance is parasitic on moral beliefs. This is why deadlock on ethical matters is a common occurrence eg. capital punishment, divorce, suicide, birth control, nuclear disarmament.

The peculiarity of the position we have arrived at can be illustrated as follows.

You say 'x is good' and produce a careful and adequate moral argument in support of your position.

I say 'x is bad' and likewise produce a careful and adequate argument in support.

But surely this is absurd. One feels like saying 'This can't be the case!'.

The fallacy is that of imagining that moral judgements are founded on some <u>incontrovertible fact</u> of human good or harm.

This is the mistake of any philosopher who talks as if there is some 'common factor' which is the reason for holding moral opinions. One's common factor might be pleasure, wisdom, happiness, human good, and the theory is that one's moral opinions are right and valid

depending on whether they lead to pleasure or human good. The fallacy is that of thinking that pleasure or human good is strictly a factual matter. This is quite misleading and is to minimize the point that a certain conceptual background is necessary for beliefs to have moral significance.

One might argue at this point that surely something like pain or injury is something that no person could want. Surely the 'badness' of injury or pain is founded on what all men want! Surely a man wants the use of his limbs and organs, if he wants anything.

But even injury or pain is not necessarily bad. Simone Weil cultivated her insight through suffering. Some of the saints prayed to be sharers in the sufferings of Christ. St. Paul thanked God for the thorn in his flesh, as it was a reminder to him that he was not sufficient unto himself. Brentano who towards the end of his life went blind denied that this was a bad thing. One of his weaknesses was, he said, a tendency to concentrate on too many diverse interests and now he could concentrate on his philosophy.

Now the average person does not think like this, but we can I think understand to an extent what these people had in mind. And neither can we just say that these are exceptions and to be disregarded. As Georges Sorel says in 'Reflections on Violence', 'The philosophers always have a certain amount of difficulty in seeing clearly into these ethical problems, because they feel the impossibility of harmonizing the ideas which are current at a given time in a given class, and yet imagine it to be their duty to reduce everything to a unity. To conceal from themselves the

fundamental heterogeneity of all this civilized morality, they have recourse to a great number of subterfuges, sometimes relegating to the rank of exceptions, importations, or survival, everything which embarrasses them..'

To understand why St. Paul thought of his suffering as human good is to understand his dedication to God ie., is to pay attention to the context, and to the importance and sincerity of St. Paul's other moral opinions.

Similarly to understand Simone Weil, or Brentano, is to try and appreciate their incredible dedication to 'the truth', or to 'intellectual inquiry'.

I can say that injury is bad, but only because I do not share St. Paul's dedication to God, or Brentano's to intellectual inquiry. We have different conceptions of human good and harm.

The search for unity in ethics is pursued with eyes blinkered against the important and far reaching differences of societies, and religious groups of every kind.

I shall give random examples of these, and develop one of them in more detail, as support of my position.

(a) When the Profumo Case first reached the French press, a member of the French Government asked an English colleague what all the uproar was about. On being told that Profumo had a mistress, he replied 'Yes, perhaps, but what is all the uproar about?'.

(b) Certain religious sects refuse to let their children have blood transfusions even if this is necessary to save their lives.

(c) A quite recent case in Denmark concerned a woman of consider-

able intelligence who killed her husband whom she loved deeply, at his own request, after it was discovered that he had cancer. She was jailed by the authorities.

(d) The Roman Catholic Church remains adamant on the allowance of birth control, and is deaf (in the name of Christ) to the wails of starving children in India, or, southern Italy for that matter.

(e) In the name of democracy and freedom, peasants in Vietnam were driven off their land into 'strategic hamlets', or, 'agrovilles'.

(f) A dam was being constructed in Wales which involved destroying several small villages, and moving the mostly aged inhabitants to '...suitable accommodation elsewhere', (the most nauseating phrase ever coined in my opinion). A Welsh student blew up the construction sight with dynamite in the name of democracy and freedom.

(g) In a discussion on bullfighting among Spaniards the notion of cruelty would never enter. The Spanish have an absolute distaste for boxing.

(h) A Roman Catholic housewife firm in her belief in the honour of motherhood, ordered out of her home in disgust, a social scientist (rationalist?) who with touching sincerity tried to explain to her that 'there was a lot of harm involved in having <u>too</u> many children'.

Now how could the housewife and the rationalist reach the agreement some philosophers think necessary if all the facts were known?

The rationalist stresses the physical or economic harm another child will bring about. The housewife stresses the honour of motherhood, the sanctity of the sexual act, marriage being a

sacrament, etc. Now how could they reach agreement?

One cannot regard their respective moral opinions as hypotheses which the facts will either confirm or refute. There is no 'common evidence' by which they can settle the issue in terms of human good or harm. Because this is precisely what they differ over ie. what is to count as human good or harm! Here we see how central is the notion of what a person considers 'important' in life, or as I have expressed it before, 'the notion of what you want out of life'. And this pre-supposes a whole conceptual background.

For the rationalist, the possibility of the mother's death, the provision of enough food for the baby would be of prime importance.

The housewife probably agrees with the latter point, but might think that it is a good idea to bring them into the world before worrying about that! For her the will of God, the creation of new life within the sacrament of matrimony are the important things to bear in mind.

They cannot settle the issue in terms of some supposed evidence called human good or harm. It is precisely what is to count as human good or harm that separates them. Their opinions are 'rooted' in different moral traditions.

And it is important to notice that within these traditions there are rules for what can, and what cannot be said. Because deadlock is reached in ethics, this does not mean that one can argue as one chooses. The rationalist and the housewife cannot just say what they like.

The view that there are ways of demonstrating goodness by appeals to evidence which operates independently of the various moral opinions which people hold is mistaken.

There will always exist the possibility of radical moral disagreement. Do not imagine that despite moral differences all men are pursuing the same end, namely, what all men want. I hope to have shown that the notion of what all men want is as much a dream as the common evidence which is supposed to support it. There can be no theories of goodness.

NOTES

Chapter 1

1. Note here the model which if forced on us of 'fact and value'.
Are value judgements so different from factual statements?
Is it a question of fact whether Susan after drinking a bottle of whiskey, drove at 80 m.p.h. down Main Street with her eyes closed, was careless or not? Or is this merely a matter of taste or opinion?
Surely I can say that in this instance 'she was careless' and be right or correct?
There will of course be borderline disputes where I am unable to decide whether an action was careless or not. But the very existence of borderline disputes implicitly suggests the existence of other clear cut cases. I cannot just describe any action as 'careless'. I speak a language and language is a rule-governed activity. (If that isn't careless then what is?) I can say 'she was careless' and be right or correct.
And isn't carelessness tinged with moral disapproval?
Well if I can be right or correct when I say 'she was careless' then why not when I say that she is a good person or a bad person?
Are questions concerning matters of value and questions concerning matters of fact so different? Isn't the tidy dichotomy

of the sceptic just a little too tidy?

2. Because we could not answer the question 'What is the meaning of life?' in a phrase this does not mean that we cannot understand the question, that it does not have a significance. Wittgenstein showed us how different this type of question is from a scientific question. And we may accept this while denying that it cannot be answered. Because of his view of language at the time he felt that the only genuine questions were scientific questions. Once we are freed from this view, we can examine the peculiar logic of this type of question. It is I imagine accepted now that we don't turn to the metaphysician for an answer. There is no big system builder who can explain to us in one 'fell swoop' man's place in the scheme of things. It is misleading to talk of looking for 'an answer' to this kind of question. One can flee to a certain kind of writer who gives one comfort. But this is as much an evasion of the question as drinking a bottle of Scotch a day.

There are novelists and artists who do throw a little light here and there. And these piecemeal insights are of value. What makes certain novelists 'great' cannot be put into words by the critics. And what makes life meaningful cannot be put into a metaphysical treatise, nor into an Archbishop's sermon. There is no one kind of question and no one kind of answer. And scientific questions are not a paradigm to which all other kinds of questions should aspire. Again there is no one kind of understanding. And what 'understanding' consists of cannot always be put into words. (Think

of the understanding which can spring up between two people.) I may not be able to say what constitutes the sense or the understanding. But this is not to imply that it is not there. Similarly with life in general. You can't just point to 'the kids, the wife, and the dog' and explain anything to the sceptic. (He simply smiles and thinks 'How quaint!')

'What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence' just points out that fact.

A question like 'What is the meaning of life - or what is, or wherein lies the sense of life?' is very different. There is no answer to it in the way in which there is an answer to the question 'What is the meaning of the French word 'pion'? or What is the meaning of THIS?' said perhaps on entering a noisy classroom.

It is more akin to 'What is the meaning of S. Becket's Malone or Fellini's 'Blow Up'? Here there is no set answer. One can point to certain aspects of a novel or a film - perhaps change a person's perspective. Eventually he may come to understand the meaning of 'Malone' but there will always be the possibility that he won't. This makes this type of question very different from a scientific question but no less genuine. And I would like to say that it is the same with the question 'What is the meaning of life?' It has, if you wish, a logic of its own. (The attempts which have been made to throw light on this question (outside of novels, plays etc.,) lends credence to Wittgenstein's point that this isn't the kind of question you

can answer in words.) And it is at this point that he uses the expression 'There are indeed things that cannot be put into words. They make themselves manifest. They are what is mystical'. It is because of his rigid view of language that he had to say this. Language was descriptive of facts. If a question could be framed then it must also be possible to answer it! Here I think he is talking of a scientific answer and of course this would be impossible. What is important to bear in mind is that Wittgenstein does not identify the important with the verifiable. It is the unsayable which alone has value. His silence is a respectful one.

Chapter 2

1. This may be made clearer by considering the nature of questions such as 'What is the meaning of life?' A question which one cannot help asking and yet on reflection one may be tempted to say that it is unintelligible. One can only ask 'What is the meaning of 'x'?' if there are y's and z's in terms of which the meaning can be explained.

One is then tempted to say that to ask about the meaning of it all is nonsensical as there is nothing in terms of which it can be explained.

In the poem 'Father William' the young man asks Father William his reason for 'turning somersaults in at the door'. Father William explains 'the point' of this exercise.

Austin remarks parenthetically that some people ask 'What is the

point of it all?' and then join the Church or commit suicide. Again we get the suggestion that a question can only be asked where there is a conceivable answer.

2. You cannot separate language-social life-morality. You could not say of me that I was a good man, or an enlightened man, or an eccentric man, because I do not keep slaves. Yet this remark would have been perfectly intelligible spoken of a U.S.A. citizen only a hundred years ago. This indicates the importance of context, of environment when giving reasons for or against predicating 'good' of a man. Some of the understandings which arise in ethics are I think partly the result of thinking of man as two substances, a mind and a body. You then tend to think that you can somehow reflect about or look into your soul and discover 'how you ought to live', 'what your duty is' etc.

I want to suggest that there are difficulties here. You can't just feel 'anything', you can't just think 'anything'. What you think, how you feel, depends upon the society you live in, the forms of life you can take part it, the relationships you have with other people, the books you read, and the music you listen to. The soul is not a box full of feelings and emotions which you can stare into, selecting certain emotions and giving them names. Imagine a primitive man discovering a strange feeling and he doesn't know what to call it - doesn't realize that it is, say, 'nationalism'.

Imagine a man who has never had contact with other beings. Could he by staring into his soul discover love, duty, patriotism, joy?

No one felt nationalism until boundaries were built, one language, one culture felt threatened or something like this. What you can feel is bound up with your way of life.

(I have heard English Instructors saying that there was no such thing as romantic love before the novelists wrote about it. Or think of Oscar Wilde's remark that there was no fogs in London until a certain school of artists painted them.)

You can imagine a dog 'being in love' only if you can imagine him paying rent, having responsibilities, giving up his career to marry, etc., ie. living a certain way of life -- a human way of life.

Trying to find out how I 'ought to live', or what my 'duty' is, is not a process of discovering something lurking at the 'bottom of my soul'. Something which I can discover by introspection alone. To find out what my duty is will be to examine my relationships with other people, it will get its sense from the way of life I lead.

You cannot have a religious man in a society which has no concept of a 'God'. You can have a man who acts in certain ways which if he was in a different society would lead you to say he was religious, but this is quite different. What I can do, say and think, are all tied up with the form of life in which I partake.

You can apply no concepts to pre-social man. In the discussions

on Nature and Convention which occupied the Greeks they talked of pre-social man as being selfish and aggressive. But these are social concepts and only get their sense in a social context. Neither could you say that pre-social man was 'free', nor of course that he was a slave.

Its not that I haven't sufficient imagination to be able to think of a worm as suffering from a 'moral problem'. Its just that a worm doesn't lead the kind of life which could engender 'moral problems'. What would it be to apply the notion of decision to a worm, and of course worms don't have a religion, or the concept of fidelity to their wives, or any of the other human characteristics which are essential for applying the concept of 'moral problems'. (Snoopy is funny because he thinks in a human way - as if he had responsibilities, duties etc.)

Certain concepts (including moral concepts) only make sense within 'a way of life'. I learn what love, hate, nationalism, joy are through leading a certain way of life without which these concepts would be unintelligible.

What would a stone have to do or what would I have to do to make a stone feel joy or pride?

To ask what I ought to do, or how I ought to live is to ask this as a particular person in a particular society. Not as 'man'. The question only makes sense in a social context.

Or rather the question gets its sense from the social context.

One tends to talk as if I knew from my own case what love, hate, duty, obligation, oneness with God, etc. from my own case. That I inwardly pick out a feeling and name it. What could this mean?

And how would anyone else know what I meant by the word? The concepts of duty, right, good, etc., change as my society changes. To ask moral questions pre-supposes a way of living. This doesn't mean that my choices are limited to the current practices of the society. But what is 'to count as a choice' is 'given'. The problems and the questions you can ask are engendered by the 'way of life' in which you participate. The concept of duty or right or good are not then absolute. Don't imagine that you can be, or could be 'plopped down' as 'a man' and could then just 'peer into your soul' and find 'absolute duty' or 'absolute good'.

Ideas, concepts, can't be torn out of their context and examined independently of that setting in which alone they get their sense or meaning. I cannot help a Catholic who is in a dilemma over the issue of birth control. But I wouldn't even understand what his problem was about unless I had and understood the concept of religion.

When I reflect on 'what I ought to do' this is often because I have to deal with a situation foreign to my previous experience. In a rapidly changing social environment this will happen frequently, not just because customary modes of behaviour have broken down, but because of the novelty of the situations. It is as a 'person' within this changing way of life that I ask myself 'what ought I to do?'. I ask the question as Fred Brown not as ' a man '.

There existed storms and thunder before people had concepts of

them. But it doesn't make sense to talk of people giving commands, doing their duty to God and The Queen before they had these concepts.

The Laws of Mechanics were a problem for Descartes as a Catholic. Birth Control was not.

Chapter 3

1. The sense in which a philosopher asks about the nature of reality involves the problem of man's relation to reality. The philosopher's question is not a scientific question. What difference will it make to my life - why is it important that my mind have some contact with reality?

I base my life - decide how I 'ought to live' on the basis of my view as to what is the case in the world around me and how I relate to it. (Compare the 'ways of life' of the Eastern Mystic and the Western Academic; and think of their completely different concepts as to the nature of reality and how they relate to it.)

The point I wish to make is that I can be completely deceived as to 'how the world really is' and 'how I relate to it'. This is why I use the expression appearance and reality in relation to a man's life. Think of Brigitte in 'Woman of the Pharisees'. She imagines herself to be a pillar of religious feeling, full of love for others, concern for their well-being in and through God. In fact Mauriac portrays her in all her mean and cruel shortsightedness.

In 'The Keys of the Kingdom' by A.J. Cronin, a similar situation

is illustrated. The young man who eventually becomes a Bishop is portrayed as being entirely devoid of religious feeling and humility. He is of course completely unaware of this and has no clear idea concerning his real relation to the Church and God and those around him. This possibility of living a life of delusion is of prime importance in ethics. The possibility of being deceived either as to how one is living one's life, or as to what it is one wants out of life, enables us to use the concept of 'mistake' when talking about a person's life. And the concept of 'mistake' gets its sense from concepts like those of 'a rule' and 'knowledge' and a correct way of living. I don't mean to imply that there is one single and correct way in which we can all live our lives. Only that of any one person we can say that he is living a life of understanding or that he is not.

Austin suggests in 'Sense and Sensibilia' that a definite sense attaches to the assertion that something is real, only in the light of a specific way in which it might be, or might have been, not real. He goes on to say that this is why the attempt to find a characteristic common to all things that are or could be real is doomed to failure. Analogously I want to suggest that this is more or less the cases when we predicate of a man's life 'understanding'. He is aware of the situation around him for what it really is and it is important to realize that this might not have been the case.

Note that nothing I have said here could apply to animals.

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