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I

Wittgenstein is interested in the *Tractatus* in drawing a contrast between how things are in the world and their significance from the point of view of the higher¹. The difficulty in understanding the book’s teaching with regards to ethics concerns how we understand this contrast. In order to understand what Wittgenstein wants to say when he writes that the higher is nothing that we can express we need to attend at what Wittgenstein says sense and nonsense are². I am here following the lead of Cora Diamond. She has written that if we take an “austere” view of nonsense—a view according to which nonsense is the only thing that Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus* says nonsense can be, namely “mere nonsense”—we should then be able to see what he means when he writes that ethics cannot be expressed and that there are no ethical propositions³. Wittgenstein is arguing that what someone who speaks with an ethical intention wants to say is from *that* point of view *simply nonsense*. The difficulty in understanding the *Tractatus* on ethics lies in being clear at this. There is nothing in language that shows our ethical involvement with things. But this means that what *has* ethical significance for us, the fact that things may appear morally interesting or disturbing, is not something that we have to look for *in* the proposition or *beside* the proposition—as most interpretations have done in very different ways—but in *our* involvement with propositions. The point may also be expressed by saying that anything can become ethically active for us; any talk can express an ethical intention, because what makes it ethical does not reside in any of its internal features but in our ethical use of such language.

Professor Diamond has connected this point with the idea that ethical thought, in the sense in which the *Tractatus* treats of it, does not have a subject-matter of its own. There is nothing we can say about what will count as ethical in advance of our being able to draw the requisite contrast, and this requires our being able to enter the speaker’s imaginative intention; there is no possibility of a prior demarcation of ethical talk

¹ L. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*, transl. C.K. Ogden (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1922), henceforth referred to as *TLP* followed by numbered proposition, unless otherwise indicated. See *TLP* 6.432: “How the world is, is completely indifferent for what is higher. God does not reveal himself *in* the world”.

² Cf. *TLP* 6.42-6.421: “Hence also there can be no ethical propositions. Propositions cannot express anything higher. It is clear that ethics cannot be expressed. [...]”.

³ Wittgenstein writes in the Preface to the *TLP*: “The book will, therefore, draw a limit to thinking, or rather—not to thinking, but to the expression of thoughts; for, in order to draw a limit to thinking we should be able to think both sides of this limit (we should therefore have to be able to think what cannot be thought). The limit can, therefore, only be drawn in language and what lies on the other side of the limit will be simply nonsense”. On the notion of “austere nonsense” see C. Diamond, “Ethics, Imagination and the Method of the ‘Tractatus’”, in R. Heinrich - H. Vetter, eds., *Bilder der Philosophie. Reflexionen über das Bildliche und die Phantasie* (Wien: Oldenburg, 1991), pp. 55-90 (see especially p. 60); J. Conant, “Must We Show What We Cannot Say?”, in R. Fleming - M. Payne, eds., *The Senses of Stanley Cavell* (Lewisburg, Penn: Bucknell University Press, 1989), pp. 242-283; “The Method of the ‘Tractatus’”, forthcoming in E.H. Reck, ed., *From Frege to Wittgenstein: Perspectives on Early Analytic Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

from other kinds of talk, apart from our being able to understand what it is to invest such talk with an ethical intention. To see this is to see how the two standard sorts of readings that have been offered of the *Tractatus* with regard to ethics—positivist (emotivist) and ineffability readings, as James Conant has called them⁴—are deeply misguided. They both seek to give content to ethical talk by tracing it to certain independently specifiable features of language: features that pertain to its psychological function (emotivism) or to its “deep” logical nature (ineffability readings). But if we overcome the temptation to look for the mark of the ethical in language itself, then the idea of drawing the contrast between the ethical and the non-ethical will appear as something which is always dependent upon our being able to distinguish sense from nonsense. It will cease to seem to be a contrast that can be drawn within the realm of sense, because it does not concern language but it concerns *us* and our possible intentions in wanting to reach for certain words. Among these intentions, as Diamond has written lucidly, there is one “that would (though [the speaker] himself may not be aware of this) be frustrated by his sentence’s making sense”⁵. This also connects ethics with the goal of the *Tractatus* as a whole⁶. Being able to draw this contrast, to pick out the ethical, is connected to the sort of self-understanding which the *Tractatus* as a whole aims to bring its reader. The difficulty in being clear about what this contrast marks is of the same sort as the one that a speaker finds herself in in being clear about the distinction between sense and nonsense⁷.

The contrast between ordinary and ethical ways of speaking is therefore for the *Tractatus* a contrast between sense and a sort of nonsense, where such contrast is only available to be drawn from the point of view of a speaker’s intentional use of nonsense. There is no contrast to draw at the level of meaningful discourse: at that level all we can say is that “[a]ll propositions are of equal value” (*TLP* 6.4). Nor can the contrast be marked by aligning side by side meaningful discourse and a kind of discourse which has an extra-logical ingredient added onto it, as has been proposed by emotivist readers of the *Tractatus*. This fails to respect something which the *Tractatus* was interested in making clear: that from the point of view of the engager in ethics there does appear to be a meaningful content to her talk—and the emotivist cannot account for this fact at all. An appreciation of the failure of the emotivist reading of the *Tractatus* gives rise to the opposite temptation to think that, if the would-be engager in ethics does seem to have a content in view, then the contrast must be between a clear sense openly in view and a hidden sense that requires one to see beyond or behind the proposition. And this might seem to account for something that Wittgenstein was always interested in respecting, a difference between what is superficial and what has *depth*⁸. But this line of thought

⁴ J. Conant, “The Method of the ‘Tractatus’”. Conant discusses there two readings as overall strategies for interpreting the *Tractatus*. I will confine myself here to some of the implications of these readings with regard to ethics.

⁵ C. Diamond, “Ethics, Imagination and the Method of the ‘Tractatus’”, p. 77.

⁶ It is Wittgenstein himself who draws the connection in his letter to the editor of “Der Brenner”, Ludwig von Ficker, while presenting his book in the hope to have it published in the periodical. He writes: “The book’s point is an ethical one”: L. Wittgenstein, *Briefe an Ludwig von Ficker*, ed. G.H. von Wright (Salzburg: Otto Müller, 1969), p. 35.

⁷ Cf. J. Conant, “The Method of the ‘Tractatus’”: “The premise underlying the procedure of the *Tractatus* (and this is connected to why the point of the work is an ethical one) is that our most profound confusions of soul show themselves in—and can be revealed to us through an attention to—our confusions concerning what we mean (and, in particular, what we fail to mean) by our words”.

⁸ Cf., e.g., L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, eds. G.E.M. Anscombe - R. Rhees - G.H. von Wright, transl. G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1958), § 111: “The problems arising through a misinterpretation of our forms of

is also deeply off track, insofar as it appeals to something that the *Tractatus* is explicitly concerned to overcome: the illusion that there is a sense behind nonsense, that the limit which separates sense from nonsense can be seen from both sides. We need instead to take seriously Wittgenstein's statement that there is *nothing* in a proposition that can express the higher. Thus the contrast can be seen only from the point of view of such a speaker of nonsense, as one which opposes meaningful talk about something with the *same* talk put to a use that makes it morally interesting.

This is a very difficult contrast to make out, not because it is extraordinary or exotic in any way—it is as ordinary as the fact that, by uttering some words, we may succeed in meaning something or we may fail to mean anything *and realize that we have said nothing*—but because it is difficult to command a clear view of it. There is a difficulty in seeing what this contrast is, and the main interpretations of the *Tractatus* have inadvertently shown this by exploring two opposite temptations regarding the inexpressibility of ethics. There is thus a further difficulty, which is actually a part of the same problem. An understanding of this contrast requires one to be able to see differences—between sense and failure of sense—which make themselves manifest in our capacity to overcome confusions about what we ordinarily say. So an understanding of this contrast requires that we see how the *Tractatus* can be used in the way Cora Diamond has suggested: as a possible instrument of illumination which can be put to work in many areas of discourse⁹. Some of the things we want to do with language may become clear to us by applying the teaching of the *Tractatus* to them. Diamond does this by attending to kinds of talk that she finds in literature, in novels and poetry and various kinds of prose, and seeing how the author's intention can become transparent by understanding these sorts of discourse in the light of the sort of contrast that the *Tractatus* wants to make clear. It is in this connection that I want to mention a further difficulty. The difficulty has to do in general with this potentially fruitful task of *applying the Tractatus as an instrument of illumination*. Something that we need to do in following through on this task is to take notice of the variety of language-uses that, from the point of view of even early Wittgenstein's work, should all be seen as belonging to the expressive powers of linguistic signs. (This is also connected to the question of the development of Wittgenstein's philosophy and of how this relates to a change in his ethics. Cora Diamond has also written about this but I will not touch on this topic¹⁰.) So we need to be aware of the variety of contrasts that we should be prepared to countenance as conceptual achievements of some sort and, on the other hand, of contrasts that would be missed if we tried to understand them from within the realm of our conceptual possibilities—precisely because the latter bring in that sort of imaginative entertaining of nonsense which is characterized by the *Tractatus* as the mark for an ethical attitude.

language have the character of *depth*. They are deep disquietudes; their roots are as deep in us as the forms of our language and their significance is as great as the importance of our language”.

⁹ See C. Diamond, “Wittgenstein, Mathematics, and Ethics: Resisting the Attractions of Realism”, in H. Sluga - D.G. Stern, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Wittgenstein* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 226-260: “In our then going ahead with the tasks that confront us [...], we might be *applying* the book in the way it is meant to be applied. On this reading of its intention, the book belongs to what I have referred to as ‘instruments of the language’. It is in certain respects then meant to be like a proverb, a sentence available for repeated applications, meant to be brought into contact with a variety of situations not givable in advance. Only in its ethical use (and in the intention or hope that it have such use) is there anything ethical about it” (p. 249).

¹⁰ See C. Diamond, “Ethics, Imagination and the Method of the ‘Tractatus’”; and “Wittgenstein, Mathematics, and Ethics”.

There is the possibility then that what might appear at first sight to be the kind of contrast Wittgenstein is concerned with in the *Tractatus*, when he distinguishes between how things are in the world and the point of view of the higher, should be understood to be a very different sort of contrast from that which first appeared to be: one the description of which may be exhausted by attending at how a certain department of language works without bringing into view the *spirit* in which such language is used. Diamond mentions different examples of talks that might illustrate this spirit. So I want to try to show the difficulty in seeing the kind of contrast that is drawn there: how there are cases the description of which may incline us to see them either as an exercise of the expressive powers of the proposition—as a talk of a certain sort—or differently, as Diamond has written, as a way of “cutting such talk off from ordinary talk about what goes on, not giving it entry there”¹¹. I find a possible tension in Diamond’s separation of the two perspectives. In what follows I will illustrate how the contrast is marked in the *Tractatus*; then I will approach this tension in Diamond’s treatment.

II

In the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein ties what he says about ethics and the higher to the idea that it is the whole world that comes into view in these kinds of talk. He finds it useful to elucidate the separation that he has drawn between a thing and a sense of things (“The sense of the world must lie outside the world”, *TLP* 6.41) by saying that what we find meaningful in things should not be understood on the pattern of detecting properties of things, but with a different picture in mind, according to which something becoming morally interesting¹² is a matter of becoming a whole world in itself. Therefore he writes about the ethical attitude as effecting a change in the “limits of the world”, and about the mystical experience as one in which the world shows its face to us, as if it takes on an expression—happiness or unhappiness, for example (*TLP* 6.43, 6.45)¹³. In the *Notebooks*¹⁴ he goes to some length to elaborate this picture. He explains the contrast as one between “[t]he usual way of seeing things [which] sees objects as it were from the midst of them” and the view of them from the outside, “[i]n such a way that they have the whole world as background” (*N* 7.10.16).

¹¹ C. Diamond, “Ethics, Imagination and the Method of the ‘Tractatus’”, p. 88.

¹² I am using here adjectives like “moral” and “ethical” to help myself in referring to the phenomenon of our experience which works in the way which can be elucidated by Wittgenstein’s ethical remarks in the *Tractatus*. So eventually it should become clear whether, or which parts of, what we ordinarily call “moral”, and that which ethics as a philosophical discipline has traditionally considered an object of its work, will be found to be ethical in Wittgenstein’s sense. C. Diamond, “Secondary Sense”, in *The Realistic Spirit* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991), p. 235, speaks about Wittgenstein’s ethics around the 1930s qualifying her topic in the following terms: “not *all* of what is said in ethics, but all that is said in ethics characterized by ‘the tendency, the thrust’ Wittgenstein spoke of to Waismann”. The reference is to F. Waismann: *Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle*, ed. B.F. McGuinness, transl. J. Schulte - B.F. McGuinness (Oxford: Blackwell, 1979), pp. 117-118. I am arguing here for a similar thesis applied to what Wittgenstein says about ethics in the *Tractatus*.

¹³ On the idea of the world as looking at us with a certain expression, see G.E.M. Anscombe, *An Introduction to Wittgenstein’s Tractatus* (London: Hutchinson, 1959), chpt. 13.

¹⁴ L. Wittgenstein, *Notebooks 1914-1916*, eds. G.H. von Wright - G.E.M. Anscombe, transl. G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1979), henceforth referred to as *N* followed by date of entry.

And he adds: “As a thing among things, each thing is equally insignificant; as a world each one is equally significant” (N 8.10.16). What these remarks want to show is that there is a profound confusion in the idea that finding an object morally significant is like being aware of one of its properties, that a response to the sense of things is like a response to certain features of things.

There is a criticism here of the idea that our response to what is morally engaging is like a response to how things are in the world. This criticism may be elaborated in different ways and it might prove helpful to compare Wittgenstein’s handling of the idea with other approaches. An interesting comparison may be drawn with G.E. Moore’s position in *Principia Ethica*¹⁵. Moore is also reacting against a naturalistic view of ethics which equates a judgement of value with an ordinary factual judgement (and more generally with a judgement about the existence of something, in time or out of time). The way Moore does this has some resemblance with Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein writes: “The sense of the world must lie outside the world. In the world everything is as it is and happens as it does happen. *In* it there is no value—and if there were, it would be of no value” (TLP 6.41). Moore seems to argue for a similar view when he writes that intrinsic value is something different from anything which can be said to exist. His idea, although it is defended in a somewhat confused way in the first chapter of *Principia*¹⁶, is that the property of goodness is not revealed by investigating the nature of an object or a state of affairs. If we stay at that level there appears to be no value. Moore is also inheriting here an important strand of criticism of naturalism and psychologism both in logic and in ethics, which also has affinities with Wittgenstein¹⁷. He is committed to defending a position according to which neither ethics nor logic can be accounted for by looking at what goes on in someone’s mind. As the analysis of the proposition delivers concepts conceived as “a genus per se, irreducible to anything else”¹⁸, in the same manner judgements of goodness should be thought of as being of a different

¹⁵ G.E. Moore, *Principia Ethica* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1903): references will be from this edition. I am not committed to arguing that in the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein is actually responding to lines of thinking that originate from Moore, but that Moore’s thought can be a useful instrument of comparison. But there could be room to argue also for a direct exchange between Wittgenstein and Moore. Wittgenstein had read some Moore, as he tells Russell in a letter presumably of June 1912: see *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Cambridge Letters. Correspondence with Russell, Keynes, Moore, Ramsey and Sraffa*, eds. B. McGuinness - G.H. von Wright (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), letter 1, p. 13. Wittgenstein writes: “I have just been reading a part of Moore’s *Principia Ethica*: (now don’t be shocked) I do not like it at all. (Mind you, quite *apart* from disagreeing with most of it.)” But then Wittgenstein had certainly been thinking and reacting to Russell’s ethical ideas. His response to Russell concerning his essay “The Essence of Religion” (1912) is known. See on this B. McGuinness, *Wittgenstein: A Life. Young Ludwig, 1889-1921* (London: Duckworth, 1988), chpt. 4; R. Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein. The Duty of Genius* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1990), chpt. 4. But Wittgenstein was acquainted as well with the other ethical writings that Russell published in this period of time. In the letter to Russell that I have just mentioned Wittgenstein continues as follows: “I don’t believe—or rather I am sure—that I cannot dream of comparing [Moore’s *Principia*] with Frege’s or your own works (except perhaps some of the Phil[osophical] Essays)”. In its first edition of 1910 Russell’s *Philosophical Essays* included also “The Elements of Ethics” which is an exposition of theoretical problems of ethics greatly influenced by the *Principia*, as Russell himself acknowledges in the footnote of presentation for the anthology *Readings in Ethical Theory*, eds. W. Sellars - J. Hospers (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1952), pp. 1-32: see p. 1. So there is further ground for thinking that in the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein was responding to this Moorean line of thinking in ethics.

¹⁶ For a discussion of some of these confusions see T. Baldwin’s Introduction to the revised edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. ix-xxxvii, and Moore’s Preface to the second edition, written around 1921 which he never accomplished to publish, pp. 1-27.

¹⁷ See on this P. Hylton, *Russell, Idealism and the Emergence of Analytic Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990).

¹⁸ G.E. Moore, “The Nature of Judgement”, *Mind* 8 (1899), pp. 176-193: see pp. 178-179.

kind from descriptions of what goes on in our minds. In this sense he says that hedonism is wrong and that pleasure cannot be identified with goodness. When we say that pleasure *is* good we are not identifying goodness with pleasure nor are we placing goodness alongside pleasure among natural features of the world. What we do is that we predicate of some pleasurable state of affairs that it possesses, besides this property of being pleasant, such non natural property of goodness.

There are many ways in which we can see how Moore's separation between facts and values goes in a different direction from the one that we find in the *Tractatus*. A first remark would be to say that Moore establishes a separation between two realms which are both meaningful areas of discourse. We would thus need to understand what this means when it is compared to Wittgenstein's distinction between the world and the higher. The tempting line here is to say that the *Tractatus* accepts this and *then* makes the further step of declaring one area (the sphere of the ethical) devoid of sense. But if we follow this line we will lose entirely the sense in which Wittgenstein's statement that there are no ethical propositions may teach us something about ethics. We would in fact be accepting the model of ethical thought conceived as a predication of some sort and then add the thesis that such predication is impossible. So we would be saying that there is a hidden and obscure sense behind ethical nonsense and that the model for such notion of sense is that of ordinary predication. This idea has been exploited in several ways by different kinds of ineffabilist commentators of Wittgenstein's ethics¹⁹. The appeal to the notion of an ineffable content, which lies behind the inexpressibility of ethics and of other areas of which Wittgenstein recommends to stay silent, shows an implicit adherence to the idea that ethical thought follows the same pattern of factual discourse—even though it is actually nonsensical. The pattern is that of saying how things are in the world, that is, of combining things in possible states of affairs of which we assert truth or falsity. This comes out very clearly, for example, from Janik and Toulmin's reading of the *Tractatus*. They press the idea that

the most important prerequisite for understanding the *Tractatus* is a grasp of the distinction between the *philosophy* it contains—the model theory, the critique of Frege and Russell, and so on—and the *world-view* which Wittgenstein is expounding in it. [...] His world view expresses the belief that the sphere of what can only be *shown* must be protected from those who try to *say* it. [...] In this world-view, poetry is the sphere in which the *sense* of life is expressed, a sphere which therefore cannot be described in *factual* terms²⁰.

It might seem at first sight that Janik and Toulmin are actually defending an interpretation which saves an important distinction between factual discourse and moral thought. They argue that the realm of the ineffable has its own mode of expression, which is indirect communication. They write: "Subjective truth is

¹⁹ For two classical expositions, see E. Stenius, *Wittgenstein's 'Tractatus'* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1960), p. 223: "In a logical empiricist's vocabulary 'nonsensicality' means something purely negative. Wittgenstein's identification of the inexpressible with the mystical seems to show that to him 'nonsensicality' has a rather positive ring. The German word *Unaussprechlich* means not only 'inexpressible' but also 'ineffable'. Thus the identification in 6.522 of *das Unsprechliche* with the mystical could be interpreted as a statement of the old thought that the mystical is ineffable". M. Black, *A Companion to Wittgenstein's 'Tractatus'* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1964), p. 377: "[...] there *is* something we cannot speak about, cf. 6.522 (there *is* the inexpressible)".

²⁰ A. Janik - S. Toulmin, *Wittgenstein's Vienna* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973), p. 195.

communicable only indirectly, through fable, polemics, irony, and satire”²¹. So why say that the idea of an ineffable content obscures the contrast which Wittgenstein wanted to show? We should notice, though, that this reading allows no possibility according to which the *Tractatus* may be said to offer a philosophical elucidation of the notion of the ethical content. Ethics is the object of a world-view which is defined independently from—and actually before Wittgenstein started working on—problems of language and logic. What he says about philosophy of language provides him techniques in order to find a solution to his own preconceived problems²². The *Tractatus* therefore is not strictly a work in *philosophy* as far as its ethical doctrines are concerned. The notion of what an ethical problem is, and along with it the idea of what an ethical question sees as problematic (that is, the notion of the content of ethical thought) is not given any elucidation in the *Tractatus*, but originates from preconceived views. In the end, the very distinction between saying and showing is not really elucidated by the logical doctrines expounded in the book: it is a distinction which is perfectly understandable in other terms—Janik and Toulmin refer to the Viennese and more broadly post-Kantian tradition in which they place the *Tractatus*—and which finds in the *Tractatus* “the scaffolding for an elaborate metaphor”²³. But if philosophy does not contribute any elucidation of the notion of the ethical content, then what happens is that an implicit appeal is made to the ordinary notion of the content of a meaningful proposition, although it is said that this is appreciated in an indirect way. The difference, Janik and Toulmin argue, lies in the method of expression, while the notion of sense is not really touched. So it is easy to come to the conclusion that there is a sense that even nonsensical propositions possess²⁴.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 198.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 169.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 190. The view that logical and ethical sections in the *Tractatus* are to be treated as separate has been clearly stated by P.M.S. Hacker, *Insight and Illusion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), especially p. 76: “The originality of the doctrines in Wittgenstein [the doctrines on solipsism, ethics and the mystical] is negligible, their ancestry is of dubious legitimacy, and their validity more than a little questionable. Wittgenstein’s originality in the matter lies in his attempt to dovetail these doctrines into the sophisticated theory of meaning with which most of the *Tractatus* is concerned. Unlike Kant and Schopenhauer, Wittgenstein thought that his transcendental idealist doctrines, though profoundly important, are literally inexpressible”. Other readings along these lines are: R.J. Fogelin, *Wittgenstein* (London: Routledge, 1976), p. 88; Id., “Wittgenstein and Classical Scepticism”, in *Philosophical Interpretations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 214-231: see p. 222; H.-J. Glock, *A Wittgenstein Dictionary* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), p. 108 and the whole entry “Ethics”, pp. 107-111. A consequence of this reading is that Wittgenstein’s ethical doctrines appear to be *arbitrary*. A different but related line of reading is the one which disconnects logical from ethical doctrines but sees this separation as a *conflict* within Wittgenstein’s own philosophical intentions between “the positivistic doctrines of the *Tractatus* and the antipositivistic subtext”: “While Wittgenstein rejected the idea of something lying beyond the facts as incoherent, he nevertheless found it deeply tempting”: D.G. Stern, *Wittgenstein on Mind and Language* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 72; a similar point can be found in J.C. Edwards, *Ethics Without Philosophy. Wittgenstein and the Moral Life* (Tampa: University Presses of Florida, 1985), p. 54. I have tried to discuss the different turns that ineffability readings take in my *Wittgenstein e l’etica* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1998), chpt. 2.

²⁴ J. Conant explains the point in detail in his “The Method of the ‘Tractatus’”. This line of thinking is presented without ambiguity by C. Barrett, *Wittgenstein on Ethics and Religious Belief* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), p. 23: the author responds to logical positivists who “took Wittgenstein to mean that expressions of value and metaphysics are nonsensical in the ordinary sense of the term” in the following way: “Nowhere does Wittgenstein say that expressions of value or metaphysical propositions are ‘devoid of sense’. Not only would it be false to say so, but it itself would be devoid of sense”. Barrett’s book is filled with statements in which he seems to envisage Wittgenstein’s position for what it is (apparently ethical propositions are actually mere nonsense) and rejects it for (what seems to him) its apparent absurdity.

This reading is unsatisfactory for many reasons: the main one is that it regards the *Tractatus* as a book of very limited relevance in philosophy. But there is a different option to embrace, and it is that of taking all that Wittgenstein says in his philosophy of language and logic as tools of elucidation of the problem of the ethical. This means that what counts as an ethical problem cannot be taken for granted in advance but will be shown as the result of an understanding of what the book has to say on language and logic. Thus the idea of the content of ethical thought is connected to a preconceived assumption about the separation between facts and values. It is very tempting to apply Wittgenstein's statement about the nonsensicality of ethics *after* one has already drawn the line between ethics and factual (meaningful) discourse. The result is that one will hold on to some idea of the ethical content—the idea that the expression of an ethical intention, although as much indirect as one wants it to be, is modelled after the pattern of property-ascription in the ordinary factual case.

We need to go back to Moore now and see *where* we should want to place the difference with Wittgenstein. I said that the very notion of a moral property is under discussion in the *Tractatus*. We can draw a connection between what Moore says about this and Wittgenstein's remarks on the fact that ethical aspects bring the whole world with them. I think Moore's position comes out very lucidly in the context of his discussion of how ethics relates to conduct. He examines there the question whether virtue has intrinsic value in itself, besides the value the lies in the fact that it contributes to bringing about good states of affairs. What he does is that he looks at what sorts of states of affairs—and specifically mental states—constitute different notions of virtue. He distinguishes three cases. 1. There is virtue constituted by “the permanent characteristic of mind, which consists in the fact that the performance of duty has become in the strict sense a habit, like many operations performed in the putting on of cloths”; 2. virtue as the characteristic of having a special motive, the motive to do duty for duty's sake; 3. virtue as the mental feature of having all other motives, except a desire to do duty, such as love and benevolence²⁵. He then examines what judgement of value we want to make about these different states of things. He says, for example, that habit in a strict sense (virtue in the first sense) does not have the smallest intrinsic value²⁶. Moore offers no explanation for this statement in this context, but we can provide one by looking at his theory of value as it is formulated in the last chapter of *Principia*. He shows there how value is connected both to the kind of states of affairs there are (graduated in a scale of increasing intrinsic value: from non mental facts, to mental items, conscious mental items, etc.) and to their hanging together in larger wholes (according to the so-called principle of organic wholes). This is not really interesting for our discussion. What is revealing in Moore's investigation for our purposes is the way value comes into view. Recall that Moore rejects hedonism as a theory of value because it identifies goodness with a mental item like pleasure. But then in discussing virtue what he does is precisely to look at mental events from a merely descriptive stance (a stance that could be properly made precise by psychology) and *then* see what value is attached to them. In the case of the virtuous person this comes out very clearly in the way Moore treats the virtuous experience, her responding to situations with appropriate thoughts and emotions. Moore treats this experience as a mental item among others and then goes to see what value it possesses. He never mentions the possibility that such experience may need to be understood in terms that are internal to the fact that it is the experience of a virtuous person, that it has that very object. The

²⁵ *Principia Ethica*, p. 175.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 176.

way in which value latches onto the world is perceived to be unproblematic. There is no problem in understanding the way in which the world comes into the scene. Whatever is relevant from the point of view of value is simply what there is in the world, with the addition of a special ingredient (intrinsic value). So the experience of value which is appropriate to a virtuous person does not bring in a notion of the world as that which is seen by such person. We can understand what goes on in moral experience simply by adding all that is found in the world to the value possessed by it. Moore conceives value as something which is external to things in the world but which is connected to them in a way which does not alter them. Therefore, Moore's rejection of naturalism is a refusal to conceive value as being constituted by natural entities, although it is not a rejection of the naturalist perspective. In order for there being an understanding of value it is enough that the world is open to view and that we connect each natural entity to its correct value graduation (the principle of organic wholes has a part here as well but this does not affect the argument). It is true that in order to see how value connects to things we need to be within the value dimension, but this does not bring with it any change in our conception of things. From the value perspective, we see the *same things* with a further property which now appears into view. So in the case of the virtuous person her experience is taken as consisting in a mental state to which a certain value inheres; but there is no room in Moore's anti-naturalism for the idea that an adequate description of such experience needs to be given in different terms than natural ones, that it has to be a different *kind* of description.

III

Wittgenstein seems to be rejecting precisely Moore's notion of value when he writes that value affects the world in a way that alters our way of taking in things. He uses a number of notions, like the "world as a whole", the "thing seen with the whole world as background", the "bearer of the ethical" which is strictly connected to the notion of the metaphysical subject in the context of his discussion of solipsism. All these notions are brought in in order to reject the idea that seeing value in a thing is like predicating a property of that thing. He says that we have to think of a change in our attitude toward that thing (*N* 4.11.16), and he tries to make this notion clear, and the correspondent notion of the kind of change brought about by value, by using pictures that connects value to logic. (He does this also explicitly by saying that ethics is transcendental: *TLP* 6.421; he had said the same of logic: 6.13²⁷.) A change in our attitude is like a change in the way the world comes to be expressive. He had already explained earlier in the *Tractatus* the sense in which the world is expressive in his discussion of solipsism, and this was by showing how logic pervades the world, how the sense that there is an external point of view is an illusion. He uses those pictures in this new context, in order to say that the change introduced by value is like a change in the mode of expressibility of things. Now this change is an illusion. There is no other expression than what *expression* is. (He had given in *TLP* 6 the general form of the proposition as a way to overcome confusions about this.) But it is also important to realize that ethics is constituted by this kind of illusion. It is marked by the illusion to be able to

²⁷ On Wittgenstein's notion of the "transcendental" see C. Diamond, "Ethics, Imagination and the Method of the 'Tractatus'", p. 85: "What 'transcendental' means in the *Tractatus* is that the 'sign' for whatever is called transcendental is the general form of a proposition, not some particular proposition or set of propositions that says something in particular. The only thing that could be said to do any meaning here—in logic or in ethics—is a sign that *says* nothing, but which contains (in a sense) every combination of signs to which we do give sense, every combination of signs that does say something, and no one of which expresses a logical state of affairs or an ethical one".

see the world as from a different perspective. In trying to elucidate this, it is important that expressions like the one that I have just used (“from a different perspective”) be understood as being meant in an intentionally nonsensical way. Diamond’s characterization of the phenomenon proves very useful in order to see what we are doing²⁸. As long as we conceive the possibility of seeing something from different perspectives as a move that finds a place in our language (that is, as a move for which *we* have found a place in our language), such expression will not do the work it is intended to do. We want to use the notion of a different perspective with the intention to mean a perspective that leaves, as it were, all logic behind and sees the world in a way that from the point of view of logic makes no sense—that is, that simply makes no sense but gives the impression that we are doing *something*, like trespassing the limits of sense. It is important that we have the *impression* that there is something like logic pervading the world and that we can see this from the outside, and therefore that we can decide to see things from different perspectives which are not entangled with the mode of expressibility which defines logic. When Wittgenstein says that good or bad willing changes the limits of the world he is in fact saying that there is a change in logic²⁹, he is saying that the way the world expresses itself changes. So one’s change in attitude is meant to be understood as a change in the way the world is my world, a change in the mode of expression of things. Yet, at the same time, it is necessary that this is an illusion and that we are conscious of this.

If it were not an illusion, we would be saying that there is indeed such a different mode of expression. But then whatever that meant it would amount once again to holding some kind of ineffability thesis: the idea that there is after all a way to see things from a perspective which logic does not really allow but which can be reached in a peculiar (perhaps “mystic”, in some sense of the word) way. And this again will confuse things, because if there is such a perspective then there just *is* one. Although as much indirect as you like it to be, it would nonetheless be a perspective, a mode of expression, and then the idea of having this kind of contrast with ordinary modes of expression would be lost: it would again be a mode of expression among others. Wittgenstein says that there is just one access to things, which is shown in the logic of the proposition, and that we may come to appreciate the contrast of seeing things as they are expressed through a proposition and imagining that they are seen through a different mode of expression: imagining that there is one thing, hanging together with other things in a state of affairs portrayed by a proposition, and the same thing escaping, as it were, from the proposition, with the proposition vanishing behind the thing and making it appear as the sole occupier of the world. Wittgenstein is working with this sort of picture in the *Notebooks*. He mentions the example of concentrating on an object, like a stove: “If I have been contemplating the stove, and then am told: but now all you know is the stove, my result does indeed seem trivial. For this represents the matter as if I had studied the stove as one among the many things in the world. But if I was contemplating the stove *it* was my world, and everything else colourless by contrast with it” (*N* 8.10.16). It is very important to notice that the kind of contrast that Wittgenstein intends to draw here cannot be accounted for if we do not make use of an imaginative entertaining of nonsense. The appearance of the world as colorless as compared to the true color of the object contemplated, or—as Wittgenstein also writes in the same entry—seeing the “bare present image as the worthless momentary picture in the whole temporal

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

²⁹ “Logic fills the world: the limits of the world are also its limits”: *TLP* 5.61. So an alteration of the limits of the world is an alteration in logic.

world”, or “as the true world among shadows”, involves a contrast between the ordinary thing and the illusion to see that thing in a context in which ordinary logical connections disappears. We want to say, for example, that the color of a leaf is the true color and that the color of things around it is not really color in comparison to it. We want to cut off color-description from its ordinary environment and imagine at the same time that there is a meaning assigned to the notion of a green leaf (while on the contrary this assignment depends upon the context of meaning which has been imaginatively abolished). There need to be both the notion of color as it is meant in ordinary contexts (in which a meaning is assigned to such a word) *and* the same word as being cut off from such ordinary contexts: a color as being compared to a world in which there is no color around it. We might think, for example, of the sense of seeing the color of a tree as if it were the first time we ever saw something colored and discovered then what it meant for an object to have a color. There could be then the sense of wonder at what color is. In his “Lecture on Ethics” Wittgenstein will mention this kind of wonder as an example of an absolute sense of things. He writes there: “it is nonsense to say that I wonder at the existence of the world, because I cannot imagine it not existing”³⁰. This wonder comes from wanting to see both that object as it is identified through its ordinary connections with things and language *and* as it is cut off from such connections.

I want to point out once again how our capacity to describe such wonder, say, or the sensation of things becoming colorless when compared to the true color revealed in the sight of a tree, and all other ways of seeing the world from the point of view of the higher, are entirely lost if we do not allow this sort of duplicity to the alleged *content* of our vision of things. One temptation goes again in the direction of the ineffabilist, but it can take here a different turn. We find it expressed very clearly, for example, in Moritz Schlick’s description of mysticism in his lectures on “Form and Content”, where he also acknowledges the influence of the *Tractatus*³¹. Schlick defines knowledge as the comparison of one term with another. Knowledge is as such always expressible: it gives rise to propositions which say how things are: that is, they say that something is like some other thing. But he also introduces a different operation of the mind from that of knowledge—what he calls intuition—which he characterizes as the identification of the mind with an object. Intuition does not belong to the realm of thought but to that of enjoyment: “Intuition is enjoyment, enjoyment is life, not knowledge”³². Intuition is as such inexpressible, for it can only be enjoyed. Therefore, “[t]he mystic who maintains that intuition is the highest form of knowing is condemned to absolute silence”³³. Schlick gives a perfectly naturalistic version of the notion of the ineffable content. What we are dealing with in these cases, he argues, is not thought at all but the apprehension of the content on which thought operates. We may enjoy the experience of the color blue, says Schlick, but we will *know* the color blue only when we recognize something as blue, that is, we compare the content blue with some other content³⁴.

³⁰ “A Lecture on Ethics”, in *Philosophical Occasions 1912-1951*, eds. J.C. Klagge - A. Nordmann (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993), pp. 37-44: see pp. 41-42.

³¹ M. Schlick, “Form and Content”, in *Philosophical Papers*, eds. H.L. Mulder - B.F.B. van de Velde-Schlick (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1979), pp. 285-369.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 323.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 323-324.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 322-323.

Schlick's notion of the inexpressible seems to work simply for any content, therefore it might not satisfy the demand for a proper description of mysticism. So we find later readers of the *Tractatus*, like Brian McGuinness, work with a richer notion of mysticism³⁵. McGuinness specifically draws his characterization from Bertrand Russell's essay on mysticism, written some twenty years before Schlick's lectures³⁶. Russell enumerates the following features which are found in a mystical experience: 1. the presence of intuition in opposition to thought and reason; 2. the appeal to a unity of the world; 3. the negation of the reality of time; 4. the negation of the reality of the opposition between good and evil. McGuinness argues that these four elements can be found in the *Tractatus*. Wittgenstein speaks of an intuition (*Anschauung*) of the world which appears to be addressed to capture the world as a whole and not single things in it (*TLP* 6.45). Then Wittgenstein says explicitly that the solution of the problem of life lies outside space and time (*TLP* 6.4312). The illusory character of the opposition between good and evil depends upon the characterization of the ethical will as an attitude toward the world. Evil is illusory because it is a false attitude toward the world. McGuinness enlarges the interpretation then in order to cover all relevant aspects treated in the book. He follows Russell's "Introduction" in noticing how the *Tractatus* writes about "totalities concerning which Mr Wittgenstein holds that it is impossible to speak logically [but which] are nevertheless thought by him to exist, and are the subject-matter of his mysticism" (*TLP*, p. 23). He argues that different parts of the book show different aspects of what might be characterized as a mystical experience: "there *is* a feeling which may be called *das Mystische*, an inexpressible feeling, to have had which is to have solved the problem of life"³⁷. There are problems with a reading like this, as there are with ineffability readings in general, which concern the place they assign to philosophy in the *Tractatus*. This reading actually maintains that whatever is written in the *Tractatus* can only be used in order to communicate indirectly what should be gained in a different style—by leaving philosophy behind, for example through the enjoyment of an experience of a peculiar kind. To put it briefly it seems to abandon the ladder too soon³⁸. But apart from this line of criticism, what we find here is the same idea expressed by Schlick, according to which what is described as a certain vision of things—for example a sense of our life as being a life of a mortal being and at the same time something unique which can be expressed only through the inclination to see it as being freed from the ties of time and death—amounts to our being in a certain mental state³⁹. This might illustrate a preconceived

³⁵ B.F. McGuinness, "The Mysticism of the 'Tractatus'", *The Philosophical Review* 75 (1966), pp. 305-328.

³⁶ B. Russell, "Mysticism and Logic" (1914), in *Mysticism and Logic and Other Essays* (London: Green and Co., 1918), pp. 1-32.

³⁷ B.F. McGuinness, "The Mysticism of the 'Tractatus'", p. 80.

³⁸ See also A. Janik - S. Toulmin, *Wittgenstein's Vienna*; and E. Zemach, "Wittgenstein's Philosophy of the Mystical", in *Essays on Wittgenstein's "Tractatus"*, eds. I.M. Copi - R.W. Beard (London: Routledge, 1966), pp. 359-375, on the idea of reading the *Tractatus* as a work dedicated *entirely* to convey indirectly an insight into the sense of the world which leaves no room for arguments and reasoning.

³⁹ This idea also shapes the interpretation of the ethical sections of the *Tractatus* briefly exposed by Merrill and Jakko Hintikka in *Investigating Wittgenstein* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), chpt. III, § 12. They argue that when Wittgenstein writes that the world of the happy is different from the world of the unhappy, that the world waxes or wanes as a whole, he means that there is an increase in the number of objects (which they interpret phenomenologically as sense-data) available to that person. But this accounts then for a *literal* change in the world of the valuer which seems difficult to fit with Wittgenstein's statement that value is outside the world.

view of mysticism underwritten by these authors but does not capture at all what Wittgenstein is doing in the *Tractatus*. Once we have pinned down Wittgenstein's sense of things to an experience of a certain kind, we will be dealing with a mere mental state. Wittgenstein makes this point while discussing Schlick's book on ethics⁴⁰: "Is value a particular state of mind? Or a form inhering in certain data of consciousness? My answer is: Whatever one said to me, I would reject it; not indeed because the explanation is false but because it is an *explanation*"⁴¹. A similar line is taken in the "Lecture on Ethics":

Suppose one of you were an omniscient person and therefore knew all the movements of all the bodies in the world dead or alive and that he also knew all the states of mind of all human beings that ever lived, and suppose this man wrote all he knew in a big book, then this book would contain the whole description of the world; and what I want to say is, that this book would contain nothing that we would call an ethical judgement or anything that would logically imply such a judgement"⁴².

Such book would not contain anything relevant for ethics because it would just list descriptions of facts: and the mystical *experience* is one of these facts. Value shows itself not in that it is an experience of some sort but in the fact that imagination and feeling are guided by logic. The illusion of sense which we are experiencing as the expression of value is something which can be understood only as the illusion of *sense*, that is from the point of view of logic. There is nothing in the psychological processes that go on in our minds that is ethically relevant. There is nothing logically relevant either but there is the imagining of there being a sense in what one says: an effort in our imagination and in our sentiment that can be accounted for only from the point of view of logic pervading the world⁴³.

IV

What we have just said can also account for the distance that separates the *Tractatus* from emotivist readings of the book such as the one put forward by Rudolf Carnap. There is actually a common line that connects Moore's position to that of Schlick and Carnap. They all share, in different ways, the idea that there is both a realm of natural facts and one of values. Then they go on differently in characterizing the two spheres. We have seen how Wittgenstein seems to be responding to Moore when he brings in notions like that of the limits of the world in order to show that value-ascription is not at all like the ascription of a property among other properties. We introduced in this connection the notion of an ethical attitude toward

⁴⁰ M. Schlick, *Fragen der Ethik* (Wien: Springer, 1930), transl. D. Rynin, *Problems of Ethics* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1939).

⁴¹ F. Waismann: *Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle*, p. 116.

⁴² "A Lecture on Ethics", p. 39.

⁴³ This point is also connected to the way in which these sorts of readings preclude any technical understanding of the *Tractatus*, and therefore any way in which its sentences must be climbed up, that is, followed and understood in what they appear to say, before being discarded as mere nonsense.

the world. We can see now how there are two ways in which such notion would not do the work it is intended to do in our philosophical talk about ethics. One possibility is to take such attitude as one conceptual attitude among others: to take it as the expression of a possible mode of expressibility. (This can be thought as the idea of a hidden sense behind nonsense or, differently, as a different mode of expressibility within an enlarged notion of sense which includes both ordinary factual discourse and indirect talk.) A second possibility is to take such attitude as merely nonsensical and deny therefore a description of it from a point of view that places it within the space of expression, but argue that we can offer a naturalistic understanding of it. We can unmask its claims to knowledge and understand it in psychological terms. This is what Carnap does, apparently following the indications of the *Tractatus*. He does not say, with ineffability readers, that *there is* a problem of life which finds a solution in the achievement of a certain experience. Carnap says that there is no problem of ethics but that what seems to be a problem, and possibly its solution, are just emotional tones which are felt in association with the nonsensical sentences pronounced. Carnap seems to be following the *Tractatus* very closely when he writes:

Either empirical criteria are indicated for the use of ‘good’ and ‘beautiful’ and the rest of the predicates that are employed in the normative sciences, or they are not. In the first case, a statement containing such a predicate turns into a factual judgement, but not a value judgement; in the second case, it becomes a pseudo-statement. It is altogether impossible to make a statement that expresses a value judgement”⁴⁴.

Carnap seems to follow closely *TLP* 6.41: “If there is a value which is of value, it must lie outside all happening and being-so. For all happening and being-so is accidental. What makes it non-accidental cannot lie *in* the world, for otherwise this would again be accidental”. Therefore he concludes, as Carnap does, that there cannot be ethical propositions (*TLP* 6.42). The argument may be summarized as follows: either ethical propositions are a kind of descriptive propositions, and thus are not ethical, or they are not descriptive propositions, and in that case they are nonsensical. Carnap’s conclusion is that what this nonsense can do is to serve as “the *expression of the general attitude of a person towards life*”, or, as he also writes, as “the quasi-poetic expression of man’s emotional relationship to his environment”⁴⁵. Carnap is very clear in distinguishing his notion of attitude in opposition to any ineffability reading of it. He says that one may also refer to it as a *Weltanschauung* (note that Wittgenstein speaks about the “*Anschaung der Welt*” in *TLP* 6.45), but he remarks that “we prefer to avoid it because of its ambiguity, which blurs the difference between attitude and theory, a difference which is of decisive importance for our analysis”⁴⁶. Carnap opposes any ineffability reading of ethics because he thinks that it is important not to confuse logic with psychology. So if value, and metaphysics, are defined as what “transcends the realm of empirically founded, inductive

⁴⁴ R. Carnap, “The Elimination of Metaphysics Through Logical Analysis of Language” (1932), transl. A. Pap, in *Logical Positivism*, ed. A.J. Ayer (New York: Free Press, 1959), pp. 60-81: see p. 77. A similar line of reasoning is taken by A.J. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1946), chpt. 6.

⁴⁵ R. Carnap, “The Elimination of Metaphysics Through Logical Analysis of Language”, p. 78.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

science”⁴⁷, then value does not have any meaning, and metaphysics is confusing in that it wants to have both: transcendence of the empirical and meaning, which only belongs to the empirical.

There is a difficulty, though, in following through on Carnap’s characterization of the phenomenon. He says first that what the metaphysician does is to offer the illusion of asserting statements, while there are no statements there to assert. The metaphysician’s verbal behavior can be fully analyzed as the expression of an emotional attitude. But what is meant here by the expression of an emotional attitude? If there is no cognitive content connected to such attitude, then it can only be captured as a psychological fact of some sort, comprising the experiences one has, feelings, movements of the body, facial expressions etc. So how should we understand this capacity to select the metaphysician’s discourse as being a case of transcendence of the empirical? If there is no content connected to what the metaphysician says, then there is no way to connect what we have described in perfectly naturalistic terms as transcendence of the empirical. This expression, “transcendence of the empirical”, is either a notion denoting something or is itself nonsense on a par with the sort of nonsense of which the metaphysician’s talk is comprised. But Carnap, who is so willing to be clear in distinguishing between attitude and theory, may not be ready for this choice. He wants to say that the metaphysician’s stance represents in a confused way what could be achieved without confusion if the metaphysician did not express herself through a descriptive-like language. But if such language *is* devoid of sense, as Carnap says it is, there is really nothing wrong with the metaphysician. There is nothing there as there is nothing (in Carnap’s view) in the poet’s words. How should we be able to account for this difference? As James Conant has said very clearly, a positivist elaboration of the *Tractatus* is an intrinsically unstable position: “Any attempt to clearly articulate the positivist variant will lead to its collapse either into the ineffability variant or into the austere conception”⁴⁸. The problem is that Carnap wants to give a representation of what the metaphysician is trying to do, but how can he if he says, following the *Tractatus*, that there is merely nonsense there? But then the alternative is to hang on to some ineffable notion of content—an option which is explicitly rejected by Carnap but which appears nonetheless to be the explanation of his attempt to give a characterization of the metaphysician’s position.

The difficulty we have with Carnap is a difficulty internal to the understanding of the *Tractatus*. Carnap is actually repeating the argument from the *Tractatus*, when he writes that value lies either in the world and is not really value or lies outside the world but then is nonsense. This difficulty must be recognized: it is the central problem of the book. In the *Tractatus* it takes the shape of how we come to command a clear view of the difference between sense and nonsense, and how this requires a transition from confusion to understanding which can only be accounted for from the point of view internal to nonsense in its capacity to be confused for sense. It is transitions of this kind which are not revealed in the light of a psychological description nor in the light of someone who feels no inclination to exchanging nonsense for sense. So the sense in which values are outside the world cannot be accounted for either from the point of view of psychology, which determines the presence of certain psychological goings-on there, nor from the point of view of sense, which would simply not recognize anything at all to be seen. Wittgenstein’s argument is—in the same way as the *Tractatus* as a whole—conceived to be problematic. The *Tractatus* says in section

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 80 (from the remarks added in 1957).

⁴⁸ J. Conant, “The Method of the ‘Tractatus’”.

6.54 that he who has climbed up the book's sentences has to recognize them as nonsensical. If they were taken to be meaningful then there would be no philosophy in them. Yet what philosophy consists in disappears in mere nonsense—and if you hold on to it, it is not philosophy but just confusion. The argument in section 6.41 runs in a parallel way: if value were something expressed by a proposition, then there would be no value; but seeing it as value consists in the capacity to recognize our intending *that* as valuable as merely nonsensical.

The difficulty in understanding the *Tractatus* lies in the fact that the problems it deals with can only be solved by seeing that they are problems that *we* have. Nonsense does not arise out of a something that lies in logic or in language (in a transgression of their limits), but in our treating a word, say, both as an object *and* as a variable, in our not having fixed its meaning, and therefore in our believing to have assigned a meaning to it but in fact in not having done so. This is why Wittgenstein writes that we have to understand *him*, because these problems, and the kind of discussion and criticism that there can be on them, involve changes that can be appreciated only as an effort of will and imagination. It is internal to the understanding of these problems that we see that they are *our* problems, that we recognize that it is our having failed to have assigned a meaning to a word (our wanting it to have two logical roles at the same time) which is creating the problem. But if we see this there can be a liberation from these problems which occurs in overcoming our will. Wittgenstein's chapter "Philosophy" from the Big Typescript expresses the same notion of philosophy lucidly. He writes:

As I have often said, philosophy does not lead me to any renunciation, since I do not abstain from saying something, but rather abandon a certain combination of words as senseless. In another sense, however, philosophy requires a resignation, but one of feeling and not of intellect⁴⁹.

Wittgenstein is saying that if there were a renunciation on our part, if there were something from which we should abstain from saying, than that would not count as philosophical understanding, because it would show that we are still attracted to that combination of words, that we still think that there *is* a meaning even though, maybe, a wrong meaning, a meaning we should refrain from conceiving. Wittgenstein adds that the solution to a philosophical problem appears as a kind of resignation. In fact we do not abstain from saying that which still compels our interest and passions but we overcome that power of attraction. But this overcoming may feel as a resignation: after having held on to some object, to a combination of words, with such strength of conviction and feeling we just let it go. We experience the sensation that our compulsion fades away and realize that the power of the object of our compulsion was in the compulsion itself: the object loses all its attraction now and does not seem to deserve our attention any more⁵⁰.

⁴⁹ L. Wittgenstein, "Philosophy", in *Philosophical Occasions 1912-1951*, eds. J.C. Klagge - A. Nordmann (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993), pp.160-199: see p. 161.

⁵⁰ See also in this connection *Philosophical Investigations*, § 118: "Where does our investigation get its importance from, since it seems only to destroy everything interesting, that is, all that is great and important? (As it were all the buildings, leaving behind only bits of stone and rubble.) What we are destroying is nothing but houses of cards and we are clearing up the ground of language on which they stand".

It is *this* kind of liberation from a problem, this change in ourselves, that counts as ethical according to the *Tractatus*. And understanding this implies a capacity to see how we can find a senseless combination of signs attractive, how we can seem to read a meaning into them. Therefore emotivism, which explains this attraction in terms of the expression of an emotional attitude, does not see what we (ethical thinkers) are seeing. It is right in saying that such attraction should not be explained through an appeal to cognitive meaning. It is also right in saying that there is an emotional attraction: something that is connected to our propensities and will. But the confusion lies in thinking that the relevant portion of the world seen *sub specie aeternitatis* can come into view simply by attending at the emotions involved. Emotion and will have a part only in that they are involved in our attraction to see something both as, say, a thing among things, understood through the laws of causality, and as a thing—so understood—cut off from such causal connections. But ineffability readings also fail in their understanding as they just suppose that there is a content of some sort. This can only be understood as an uncertainty on their part to make such notion of content clear or (and) as an apparently more sophisticated way to appeal to an ordinary notion of content—a notion that can be explained through the expressive capacities of the proposition. (And the idea here is, as I remarked before, that if we are not given any different explanation of what should count as meaningful content then although much indirect as one wants it to be it is still an ordinary *meaningful* content.) But if we are dealing with a content, then we are just rejecting the central trait of Wittgenstein’s characterization of this phenomenon, according to which apparently ethical propositions are actually mere nonsense, and our involvement with the ethical expression of things can only be captured in that it is intrinsically nonsensical.

V

I want to examine now one elaboration that Cora Diamond has offered of Wittgenstein’s notion of the ethical. She connects Wittgenstein’s view in the *Tractatus* with the one expounded by G.K. Chesterton in *Orthodoxy*⁵¹. Chesterton is interested there—and especially in one chapter of the book called “The Ethics of Elfland”—in showing that there can be a view of things, of life, and the world, which is not the view of science. It is not a view that comes from seeing things to be connected by what natural laws tell us, but that originates from a sense of “elementary wonder”, as Chesterton writes, that can be found for example in fairy tales, but which “is not a mere fancy derived from the fairy tales; on the contrary, all the fire of the fairy tales is derived from this. Just as we all like love tales because there is an instinct of sex, we all like astonishing tales because they touch the nerve of the ancient instinct of astonishment”⁵². Chesterton describes this view of the world as that of “a wild and startling place”⁵³, of life as adventure: the adventure and surprise that we find in fairy tales, the shock at the existence of things. Chesterton opposes the two views of things in this way:

⁵¹ G.K. Chesterton, *Oxthodoxy* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1959); see C. Diamond, *The Realistic Spirit*, pp. 9-10; “Ethics, Imagination and the Method of the ‘Tractatus’”, p. 61.

⁵² G.K. Chesterton, *Oxthodoxy*, p. 53.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

First, I found the whole modern world talking scientific fatalism; saying that everything is as it must always have been, being unfolded without fault from the beginning. The leaf on the tree is green because it could never have been anything else. Now, the fairy-tale philosopher is glad that the leaf is green precisely because it might have been scarlet. He feels as if it had turned green an instant before he looked at it. He is pleased that snow is white on the strictly reasonable ground that it might have been black. Every colour has in it a bold quality of choice; the red of garden roses is not only decisive but dramatic, like suddenly spilt blood. He feels that something has been *done*⁵⁴.

Chesterton touches many points here. I am interested in Diamond's remark that Chesterton's view of life offers an example of a notion of ethics according to which there is no subject-matter of its own: "An ethical spirit, an attitude to the world and life, can penetrate any sort of talk or thought"⁵⁵. She makes a connection between our capacity to express such conception of the world as marvel and surprise with Wittgenstein's point that anything in language can be a sign for the ethical because anything can express an ethical intention. So there is a sense in which we can say that the sign for the ethical is any sign⁵⁶. Chesterton's view is not directed at anything *in* the world. Anything happening in it can express such shock at the existence of things, because what comes in in our sense of wonder is not a description of things, it is not language at all. The sense of wonder is not a response to *something* happening but shows how someone who feels such wonder of things actually lives in a different world. Everything is taken differently by her, and this difference is of a sort which is not the object of some discipline because it is not the object of thought at all but engages her imaginative and emotional capacity to respond to things—like they were at the same time those things and something altogether different, out of the reach of causal connections.

Diamond takes up Chesterton's notion of the world as a "wild and startling place" in a different context⁵⁷. She uses Chesterton's notion in order to illustrate a point made by Iris Murdoch, which bears a connection though to the point just made about ethics as not having a subject-matter of its own. Murdoch argues for a notion of ethics in which the whole world is brought in and with it the entire range of our capacities for cognitive and emotional response to things. She writes: "The moral life [...] is something that goes on continually, not something that is switched off in between the occurrence of explicit moral choices"⁵⁸. Diamond is interested in showing the sense in which for both Wittgenstein and Murdoch—and for Chesterton in this respect—ethics is not something that we can understand by looking at specific concepts or reactions but is more like a "general conceptual attitude"⁵⁹. We need to go into Diamond's

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

⁵⁵ C. Diamond, *The Realistic Spirit*, p. 9.

⁵⁶ This is connected to Wittgenstein's notion of the "transcendental". See above fn. 27.

⁵⁷ C. Diamond, "We Are Perpetually Moralists": Iris Murdoch, Fact, and Value", in *Iris Murdoch and the Search for Human Goodness*, eds. M. Antonaccio - W. Schweiker (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), pp. 79-109.

⁵⁸ I. Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970), p. 37.

⁵⁹ I. Murdoch, "Vision and Choice in Morality", repr. in *Existentialists and Mystics. Writings on Philosophy and Literature* (New York: Allen Lane, 1998), pp. 76-98: see p. 85: "a considerable area of personal reflection is morally

argument here a bit in order to appreciate what she is doing. Diamond places her discussion of Murdoch and Chesterton, and of their understanding of ethics as involving a general attitude towards life which is not revealed through particular choices or uses of words, in the context of a criticism of R.M. Hare's theory. Diamond wants to show that there is something deeply unsatisfactory with Hare's conception of moral concepts. Hare holds that we can account for the meaning of a moral concept by distinguishing its descriptive from its non-descriptive meaning. Descriptive meaning accounts for the features in the world in virtue of which such concept is applied. But if we consider descriptive meaning alone we miss an important part of the meaning of a moral concept, its non-descriptive meaning, which consists in prescribing or recommending or praising the features mentioned in the descriptive component and all others which are relevantly alike them (according to the principle of universalizability)⁶⁰. What is central to this account is the thesis according to which the nature of a moral concept is exhaustively explained by the addition of the two components. The descriptive part of the meaning is a feature which moral concepts share with all merely descriptive concepts, which are applied in virtue of the same things but lack the peculiar prescriptive meaning. It should be no surprise that this thesis is very similar to the one that we have remarked upon in discussing Moore's position⁶¹. There is an understanding of what value is that sees value as an addition to things in the world which leaves the world as it is. This picture of moral value can be elaborated either into a descriptivist or in a non-descriptivist theory of morals, and this will depend upon how we conceive the extra-descriptive component. In one case we see it as an addition in description (Moore held it is a *sui generis* addition); in the other we see it as an addition in emotion or in prescription. The point now is to see what kind of criticism is addressed against this picture. Diamond explores two kinds of criticisms in this place. They are both connected to her use of Chesterton. I will then try to see their connection with the *Tractatus*.

We can think of these criticisms as dealing with the way in which a concept contributes to the moral life of people. Hare has a picture. He says that such a connection lies in the fact that we endorse the moral attitude expressed by a moral concept, and therefore we come to praise and prescribe the actions which are praised and prescribed by that moral concept: in this way moral notions come to have a place in our lives and make us different kind of people⁶². Diamond wants to question this way of seeing the moral import of a concept. There is a first criticism that she makes, one that has been made several times against Hare and non-cognitivism, which suggests that there is something wrong with such separation between descriptive and

important in the sense of constituting a person's general conceptual attitude and day-to-day 'being', which will in turn connect in complex ways with his more obviously moral 'acts'".

⁶⁰ Hare has then added to prescriptivity and universalizability a third logical feature of moral terms, overridingness: see *Moral Thinking. Its Levels, Method and Point* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981).

⁶¹ Hare acknowledges his debt to Moore in *The Language of Morals* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952), pp. 83-86.

⁶² R.M. Hare, *Freedom and Reason* (London: Clarendon Press, 1963), p. 23: "In learning that, of all kinds of man, *this* kind can be called good, our hearer will be learning something synthetic, a moral principle. It will be synthetic because of the added prescriptiveness of the word 'good'; in learning it, he will be learning, not merely to use a word in a certain way, but to commend, or prescribe for imitation, a certain kind of man. A man who wholeheartedly accepts such a rule is likely to *live*, not merely *talk*, differently from one who does not".

prescriptive components of a moral concept⁶³. She writes: “the concepts figuring centrally in Chesterton’s view of life are not applied via descriptive criteria to certain sorts of situation. They may indeed cast light on *various* situations; but how they will do that is not tied to any linguistic convention”⁶⁴. Hare holds instead that moral concepts, and all concepts actually, “are applied to a thing or situation *in virtue of* some features of what they are applied to: In any application there is at least implicit some principle governing what a *consistent* application of the term would be (i.e., specifying that *in virtue of which* the term could also be applied to other things)”⁶⁵. Therefore, “Chesterton’s account of his moral understanding of life, and of the relevance to it of fairy tales, involves uses of words, uses of metaphors and stories, which cannot be accommodated by the ‘in virtue of’ model”⁶⁶. One way to understand this criticism is to see that what comes to be touched by the relevance of a moral concept, the features in the world on which a concept sheds its light, cannot be selected in advance or independently from the moral force of a concept. There is no neutral knowledge of reality onto which the moral significance of a concept is laid down. Diamond uses a picture from Murdoch’s in this connection and writes: “A moral concept need not be thought of as like a (more or less) movable and extensible ring laid down to cover some area of fact”⁶⁷. What counts as the relevant portion of reality which is invested by the moral understanding of a concept can be seen only from within such moral understanding. We can see here *one* way of criticizing the distinction between fact and value, which amounts to rejecting an important thesis in the philosophy of mind and language according to which propensities and constations of things are distinct existencies⁶⁸. Conceptions like those of Chesterton and Murdoch can teach us that this is not the case, and that a certain view of things is not understandable in other terms than as a moral attention to things, that what counts here as the relevant description of the world is not available independently from the appropriate moral propensity towards such portion of the world.

It should be clear that this criticism of the notion of a moral concept cannot be put on the side of the *Tractatus*. There is a sense of course in which the *Tractatus* brings into view this kind of criticism, as it shows what is misleading in the idea of there being two separate fixed contributions (one coming from the realm of facts and the other from the realm of values) which combine in a moral judgement. But then the criticism in the *Tractatus* is directed towards a different goal, that of showing how moral uses of language are expressed only through our intentional engaging with nonsense. On the contrary, this criticism of the separation between facts and values wants to show how a moral concept can involve conceptual capacities which cannot be accounted for as an addition of different independent contributions. The thesis here is that moral concepts are not applied to the world like a ring laid down to cover a non-conceptualized reality. So

⁶³ For what is now a classic exposition of this criticism see J. McDowell, “Non-Cognitivism and Rule Following”, repr. in *Mind, Value and Reality* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998), pp. 198-218.

⁶⁴ C. Diamond, “‘We Are Perpetually Moralists’: Iris Murdoch, Fact, and Value”, p. 93.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

⁶⁸ The importance of the rejection of this thesis for understanding the contemporary debate in moral philosophy has been recently canonized by M. Smith, *The Moral Problem* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994).

this is a teaching about moral concepts, as well as it is a teaching about all kinds of concepts⁶⁹. Insofar as this criticism is aimed at exploring the nature of concepts, it cannot be the teaching of the *Tractatus*, which is directed instead at showing how moral uses of language require, as it were, that we intentionally empty our concepts of their meaning (that we imagine that we are doing that).

There is another criticism that is elaborated from Chesterton's view. When Diamond writes that concepts, like Chesterton's notion of life, are not applied to situations through descriptive criteria, she is not just opposing description to evaluation—holding therefore that there is no application of moral concepts conceived as something that can be seen from the outside of their normative grasp—but she is also opposing description to other sorts of activities, i.e., to all those activities which constitute the life-with-such-concepts⁷⁰. So she wants to say that the way a moral concept changes the life of people does not just show in the way in which they react to things (criticism of non-descriptivism) or in the way they group things together under a concept (criticism of the descriptive stance) but in their entire life: in the many activities in which they are engaged. So in a way *anything* can show a moral view of things. Chesterton's view of things can show a sense in which concepts touch our vision of things in a way in which everything is changed. Diamond writes: “Chesterton's application to life of the expression ‘wild and startling’ is not application in virtue of some feature which life supposedly has, even a feature which only life has. It is a rendering in words of a fundamental kind of responsiveness to life”⁷¹.

VI

We need to gain a better understanding of the nature of this fundamental kind of responsiveness to life shown by Chesterton's view. Our goal is to see whether this view of life can be seen as a case of the kind of response to life which Wittgenstein describes as ethical in the *Tractatus*. Diamond uses this example from Chesterton's in both her illustration of the ethical teaching of the *Tractatus* and in her discussion of Hare's theory, where she draws her arguments from a consideration of Murdoch's work. In both cases there is an argument for what she calls the “ubiquity of value”⁷². But now our problem is to understand how this ubiquity of value connects to concept-uses. Diamond is interested in showing that concepts can influence our life in a way which is not tied exclusively to description and evaluation. There can be a way in which concepts influence our life which consists neither in just grouping things together nor in expressing our

⁶⁹ J. McDowell, “Non-Cognitivism and Rule Following”, develops this criticism in fact from a general teaching of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* on the nature of concepthood. More on this theme can be found in his *Mind and World* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994).

⁷⁰ I am using here Diamond's valuable notion of “life-with-a-concept”: on this see e.g. “Introduction II: Wittgenstein and Metaphysics” to *The Realistic Spirit*, pp. 13-38. It is in this sense that she remarks, commenting on Hare's analysis of the notion of “courage”: “Moral life, life with the concept of courage, in a sense *drops out*” (“‘We Are Perpetually Moralists’: Iris Murdoch, Fact, and Value”, p. 99). The distinction that I am advancing between these two kinds of criticisms is intended to resonate the distinction that Diamond makes in “Losing Your Concepts”, *Ethics* 98 (1988), pp. 255-277: see especially pp. 265-266.

⁷¹ C. Diamond, “‘We Are Perpetually Moralists’: Iris Murdoch, Fact, and Value”, p. 95 fn.

⁷² See e.g. *ibid.*, pp. 106-107.

preferences but in showing a sort of a “general conceptual attitude”. We might want to say that a host of things, like our finding certain courses of action morally possible or impossible, seeing things as relevant, finding things profound or shallow, applying notions into our life, like the notion of responsibility or duty, seeing how they bear to the situation we are living—these are all things that we do in ways which are shaped by a general vision of things, by an understanding of life for example as “wild and startling”. Diamond writes: “I have chosen [Chesterton’s] example because I wanted to explain what is meant by Murdoch’s remark that a moral concept need not be like a ring laid down to cover a certain area and may be more like a total difference of *Gestalt*”⁷³. So there is a sense in which Chesterton’s application of the expression “wild and startling” to life is not application in virtue of some features of life (as a description of those features, as descriptivists would say, or as the expression of a preference towards those features that we prescribe for all features relevantly alike those, as non-descriptivists like Hare would argue), but is the expression of a whole sense of life, of a host of activities, of language, of emotions—and also of choices, of a sense of duty and moral importance. How does it happen that a concept is connected to an entire vision of things? And how is it, then, that differences between concepts show like a total difference of *Gestalt*? It is here that I want to try to differentiate *two* sorts of answers. *One* answer says that concepts *can* play this role, that concepts can influence our life in such a way. But then, when we speak of our vision of things as “wild and startling”, what we are doing is something which we can understand from the point of view of our conceptual capacities. This ubiquity of moral vision can be explained by a use of concepts that ties them both to an entire host of activities and to our personal understanding and application of these activities into our life. Both these aspects can be found in very different degrees in different kinds of concepts. (I want to mention for example the differences that shape the way in which mathematical concepts are connected to our lives and the way in which a concept like human being is; and then, with regard to the question of how concepts can involve a personal use, we can think of the differences between assuming responsibility in the political arena and in personal relationships.) So ubiquity of ethics, in this sense, is not a mark of the transcendental in the sense in which the *Tractatus* uses the notion: it is a sort of ubiquity which can be explained as an understanding of what constitutes a concept which ties concept-mastery to something different from both description and evaluation.

(Before going on with the argument, I would like to mention an objection that might be raised at this point. Someone might want to say that the sort of understanding of the workings of concepts that we are tracing to the *Tractatus* is not an understanding that the book really allows. So it might be shown that the transition from the *Tractatus* to the later writings is precisely a transition which brings into view such a possibility of viewing concepts as expressing an attitude towards life as a whole, something that shows in anything that we do. There are two points here. First there is the problem of the development of Wittgenstein’s philosophy, and of what counts as a concept in the *Tractatus* and what comes to count as a concept in the later writings. There is then the different point of seeing how the contrast between facts and values in the *Tractatus* can be marked through the instruments of Wittgenstein’s later philosophy. I want to say here, but I shall not give any defence for this, that whatever changes occur in Wittgenstein’s philosophy, they are not changes that render such contrast unintelligible. There is still a distinction between sense and nonsense in the later Wittgenstein, and as long as there is such a distinction there is the possibility to

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

understand the ethical intention as the intention to use language in that it results to be necessarily nonsensical⁷⁴.)

What I wish to argue for is the thesis that there are moral notions that can be understood only in that they shape life entirely: it cannot be seen that they respond to special features, rather they are connected to the *reality* to which they respond in a different way. We can distinguish two theses here: 1. “Reality” is already a moral notion: it is internal to the normative grasp of moral notions, that is, those notions are not intelligible independently from such notion of reality. 2. “Reality” does not refer to a specific good but to anything that can be described. A notion like that of courage, for example, can be shown to be connected to a whole sense of things in a way which accounts for both the ubiquity thesis and the thesis that there is no such notion apart from an understanding of how the whole world appears to someone. I want to give an example taken from Kenzaburo Oë’s novel *A Personal Matter*⁷⁵. Oë gives a description of how courage is tied to a whole vision of things. The main character of the story, Bird, has to face a terrible event, the birth of his first son with a severe brain damage. The novel opens with a description of Bird, after his son was born, while he is dreaming about how to escape from his present life. He thinks that if he can test himself in the wilds of Africa far away from the ordinary life he might discover his private war and prove his courage to himself. The novel is about the gradual transformation of Bird’s perception of his life in connection with his capacity to come to terms with the implications of his son’s birth. At the beginning he hopes that his son will die quickly but, as he keeps living against all predictions, Bird goes as far as bringing him to an equivocal clinic where he will be fed only with water and sugar awaiting for him to die of consumption. This extreme action marks the beginning of a gradual transformation in Bird’s self-perception. Bird realizes that if the baby dies it will be *his* responsibility. He now sees that he had been deceiving himself and behaved like a coward. At the end of the novel comes the decision to go back to the clinic and take his son with him again. What we see here is that the demands of courage are not activated by specific features, but are intelligible only on the background of a general view of life. The fact that courage demands that Bird takes care of his child can only be understood as a response to how life appears to Bird now. He now sees things connected to himself. There is an example of this in how his perception of Africa changes: “Africa actually in sight! But it was only a desolate, insipid Africa that Bird was able to picture now. This was the first time since he had conceived his passion for it as a boy that Africa had lost its radiance inside him. A free man halted desolately in the grey Sahara. He had murdered an infant on the island hovering like a dragonfly at one hundred forty degrees east longitude”⁷⁶. There is a shared notion of courage, a notion through which Bird sees himself in both situations under the demand to assume responsibility for his actions and not let things go their way. And then there is a

⁷⁴ I am opposing here the line of interpretation of the development of Wittgenstein’s ethics that argues, in S. Lovibond’s words, that “[j]ust as the early Wittgenstein considers all *propositions* to be of equal value [...], so the later Wittgenstein—who has, however, abandoned his previous normative notion of what counts as a proposition—regards all *language-games* as being of ‘equal value’ in the transcendental sense of the *Tractatus*”: *Realism and Imagination in Ethics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), p. 25. Cf. also R. Rhees, “Ethical Reward and Punishment”, in *Value and Understanding. Essays for Peter Winch*, ed. R. Gaita (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 179-193: see p. 187 where Rhees writes: “What had kept ethics, i.e. absolute value, and the world of facts apart had been his idea of the strict logical form of what can be said. When he saw the confusions in this, it was possible to look at the ways in which people do speak of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ in the course of their lives [...]”.

⁷⁵ London: Picador, 1995.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

personal understanding of this notion that draws on related notions like that of the self, of what counts as the self that is to be seen as central for rendering actions the expression of one's personality and agency. Bird's understanding of courage is thus tied to a view of life which cannot be traced down to some relevant features. Courage can be seen only as a response to that sense of life. But then we also want to say that courage is a notion that belongs to Bird's conceptual life. In order to account for its normativity we need to mention the place that such concept has in Bird's life: the personal understanding that he makes of *that* concept. A personal understanding of concepts is an employment of such concepts. An appropriate grasp of a concept may be rendered manifest only through the personal understanding of a concept, in one's being able to apply it in ways that bring in one's entire sense of life⁷⁷.

We can now try to identify a different sense according to which the ubiquity of ethics can be accounted for. What I am trying to do is to distinguish two ways in which a sense of life, life touching the contents of ethics—as we might say—nowhere or everywhere indifferently⁷⁸, can enter moral notions. One sense is intelligible as an exercise of concepts. A different one can be seen as an exercise in which we see ourselves emptying concepts of their meaning. In order to make this difference clear I will go back to Chesterton. Chesterton presents a view of life according to which things are seen as they were the product of magic. He writes: “The only words that ever satisfied me as describing Nature are the terms used in the fairy books, ‘charm’, ‘spell’, ‘enchantment’. They express the arbitrariness of the fact and its mystery. A tree grows fruit because it is a *magic* tree. Water runs downhill because it is bewitched. The sun shines because it is bewitched”⁷⁹. Anything can be described as showing this spirit of magic, a sense of things which is also connected to “a clear and definite perception that one thing is quite distinct from another” and to a sense of modesty and respect for the queerness of things⁸⁰. As we have seen, we can give an understanding of this sense of magic that connects it to a whole variety of responses to things—ways in which we respond to particular situations, activities seen as both defining our social life and as giving content to the sense of ourselves—a variety which can only be illustrated by showing an entire sense of life. The treatment of the notion of courage in Oë's novel is an example of this. According to this understanding, a sense of magic, say, *is* a concept, a grasp of which requires to participate in such a variety of activities.

But then, according to a different understanding, there is a sense of magic that would not be described as a concept at all. The point here is that there are uses of language in which the content of thought is intentionally not fixed. In order to make this a bit clearer I think it can be fruitful to mention Stanley

⁷⁷ There is a connection here with what S. Cavell writes in *The Claim of Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), pt. III, about the fact that moral discussion requires that we discover our personal position in the situation: the “rationality [of moral arguments] lies in following the methods which lead to a knowledge of our position, of where we stand; in short, to a knowledge and definition of ourselves” (p. 312).

⁷⁸ I am borrowing here Wittgenstein's picture of the metaphysical subject as both touching the whole world everywhere (being in contact with its limit) and as being just an extensionless point coordinated with it like from outside (*TLP* 5.64).

⁷⁹ G.K. Chesterton, *Oxthodoxy*, p. 53.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 53; p. 58: “I have explained that the fairy tales founded in me two convictions; first, that this world is a wild and startling place, which might have been quite different, but which is quite delightful; second, that before this wildness and delight one may well be modest and submit to the queerest limitations of so queer a kindness”.

Cavell's treatment of the notion of the fantastic⁸¹. Cavell discusses Freud's notion of the "uncanny" and shows as well how this notion is connected to the experience of the fantastic, for example in the way fantasy and reality are interrelated in films. He writes that the experience of the fantastic depends upon a "hesitation between the empirical and the supernatural"⁸². If the hesitation is resolved in either direction the fantastic disappears. In this sense Cavell corrects Freud who denies that the uncanniness of E.T.A. Hoffmann's tale "The Sandman" is traceable to an uncertainty whether an object is living or inanimate. This uncertainty is, on the contrary, constitutive of such experience. My suggestion here is to think that, according to an *alternative* reading, such hesitation may be considered to be constitutive of the experience of magic discussed by Chesterton. According to this line of reading, the sense in which the world is seen to be "wild and startling" is not expressive of a concept but of a hesitation in our intention of speech which shows an ambivalent attachment to words. We want to see things both as part of the natural world—which delivers to us things with their ordinary connections—and as cut off from such world, seen in their own right, as if causal connections were not behind our view of them as what they in fact are. So what enables us to fix this special sense of things appearing as wild and startling is our capacity to entertain a sense which can be envisaged only as the imagined possibility to be able to do something which is in fact senseless, to see things in a way that cuts off the context that allows us to identify them for what they are (that cuts off the context that allows to confer a meaning to those words).

I think Cavell's idea of a hesitation between the natural and the supernatural can be very useful to bring out what belongs to an understanding of ethics which marks the contrast between the world and the higher in the way Wittgenstein does in the *Tractatus*. What should appear from my discussion is that the *Tractatus* can teach many things on how to draw such contrast. Some of these things may be very different from the assumptions shared by traditional ways of drawing such contrast common both to descriptivists and non-descriptivists in ethics, and yet be also different from what the *Tractatus* itself wants to show. They would still be ways of drawing the contrast that the *Tractatus* would put under the rubric of the expressive powers of the proposition. But then there are ways which cannot be accounted for in this manner. Cora Diamond's treatment of Chesterton's view seems to say something about both sorts of teachings. There is a teaching about the variety of ways in which a proposition may come to be recognized as expressive, ways which are certainly not exhausted by describing how we come to group things together; and there is a different sort of teaching about how an ethical use of language cannot be accounted for by attending at the life of a concept or a proposition alone but needs to bring in a hesitation between our object of attention that involves an illusion of sense. We might also want to put the matter in the following way. The latter kind of teaching brings the *self* into the picture differently. We have spoken about the way in which there may be a personal understanding of concepts. That means that the life with that concept also includes the personal life. But then there is another way in which the self can come into the scene. What Wittgenstein calls the problem of life comes from seeing oneself as both a creature like others, with her limitations, living in a world of contingencies; and then by stripping this context off and conceiving oneself, say, as having no possibility in life, no way out of one's situation. We want to say this—that "we have no way out"—in what Wittgenstein

⁸¹ S. Cavell, "The Uncanniness of the Ordinary"; and "The Fantastic in Philosophy", chpts. 6 and 7 of *In Quest of the Ordinary. Lines of Skepticism and Romanticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 188.

calls, in the “Lecture on Ethics”, an absolute sense, that is, not as a matter of probability (our situation is realistically rather miserable and there are no concrete hopes for change) but as defining ourselves as such creatures with no hope. We want to say that there is no way out as a matter of principle: nothing happening would ever count as a way out. This absolute sense of defeat is an example of what the *Tractatus* calls “unhappiness”. The solution cannot consist in an *answer* to *this* problem, but rather in a liberation from what is—borrowing again a phrase from Cavell’s—a “false idea of the necessary”⁸³, a liberation from a sense of defeat which is perceived to be necessary and which has to be overcome for the kind of perception that it is. The solution lies in understanding that *we* have been putting this weight on the world, that it is *our* perspective which has created this sense of despair, and therefore in changing our way of seeing things.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 184.