

## Ethics without Propositions

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May 8<sup>th</sup> 2014

§1. “It is very easy to point out some among our every-day judgments, with the truth of which Ethics is undoubtedly concerned. ... [B]ut [this] falls very far short of defining the province of Ethics. That province may indeed be defined as the whole truth about that which is at the same time common to all such judgments and peculiar to them.”

“[G]ood conduct’ is a complex notion: all conduct is not good; for some is certainly bad and some may be indifferent. And on the other hand, other things, besides conduct, may be good; and if they are so, then ‘good’ denotes some property, that is common to them and conduct.” (Moore, *Principia Ethica*, pp.54-5)

§2. “It would be a great improvement if, instead of ‘morally wrong’, one always named a genus such as ‘untruthful’, ‘unchaste’, ‘unjust’. We should no longer ask whether doing something was ‘wrong’, passing directly from some description of an action to this notion; we should ask whether, e.g., it was unjust; and the answer would sometimes be clear at once.” (Anscombe, “Modern Moral Philosophy”, p.33)

§3. “All propositions are of equal value. / 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. / 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. It must lie outside the world. / Hence also there can be no ethical propositions.” (Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 6.4.6.42)

§4. “[T]he *Tractatus*, which does not allow us to distinguish kinds of nonsense-sentence through our understanding of them, does allow us to distinguish nonsense-sentences by the external circumstances of their utterance, by the character of the imaginative activity involved in it. And I believe that if we consider the external features of ‘ethical sentences’ we can see them as a third group: they are different in some ways from both the *Tractatus*’s own sentences and from philosophical nonsense-sentences.

...

So ‘ethical sentences’ are distinguishable from those of the *Tractatus* by the intention with which they are uttered or written.

...

There is an important resemblance between ethical sentences and philosophical ones, seen imaginatively as apparently making sense: both ethical and philosophical nonsense reflect the attractiveness of the idea of a point of view on the world as a whole, whatever may happen in it. But I think that if we read the *Tractatus* right, the upshot of the book will be different in regard to the two sorts of utterers of nonsense. The attractiveness of philosophical sentences will disappear through the kind of self-understanding that the book aims to lead to in philosophers; the attractiveness of ethical sentences will not. But if we understand ourselves, ourselves the utterers of ethical nonsense, we shall not come out with ethical sentences under the illusion that we are talking sense.” (Diamond, “Ethics, Imagination and the Method of Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*”, p.161)

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