

Wittgenstein's Non-Explanatory 'Craving', 'Discomforts' and 'Satisfactions'

Frank Cioffi, Kent

What is disastrous in the scientific way of thinking (which today rules the whole world) is that it wants to respond to every discomfort by giving an explanation. (Wittgenstein, TS 219,8)

Wittgenstein questions the pertinence of empirical enquiry to a wide range of problems. Among these are the problems Freud addressed; the problems Frazer addressed; the problems Darwin addressed in the 'Expression of Emotions'; the problems aesthetics addresses; the problems experimental psychology addresses; some of the problems of colour that Goethe addressed; an indeterminate number of the problems science in general addresses; the creation of the world; the situation of someone troubled by love; the teachings of Jesus.

What these cases in which Wittgenstein denies the pertinence of empirical enquiry have in common is not that he holds the phenomenon necessarily inexplicable but rather that empirical explicability is not what is wanted. What is wanted varies from an *a priori* overview of the phenomena to a better grasp of the impression they make on us, and – where this is appropriate – a less troubled one.

Wittgenstein sometimes anticipates an acknowledgement from others that in proffering explanations they had failed to grasp the conceptual character of the question they addressed he also suggests that, even where this is not the case, they will, on consideration, acknowledge that explanation is not what that they really wanted. Wittgenstein's anti-explanatory remarks are often really an incitement to us to know our own minds better.

How one can best convey the distinctive nature of the search for those 'feeling and thoughts' which confer 'depth' on a phenomenon or explain why, for example, it strikes us as 'sinister', 'tragic', 'terrible' etc.

Dilthey makes clear the a priori character of such an enterprise when having asked ‘What happens when an experience becomes the object of my reflections’ he replies ‘I bring this situation to discriminating consciousness. I abstract the structural connections and isolate them. All that I thus abstract is contained in the experience itself and is only being illuminated’ (Dilthey 1961, 102). Wittgenstein puts Dilthey’s account more colloquially in his remark on Freud’s joke analyses: ‘All we can say is that if it is presented to you, you say yes, that’s what happened’ (Wittgenstein 1970, 17).

Georg Simmel gives an account of the epistemic nature of this non-explanatory, non-empirical direction of interest and the matters it might deal with.

Emotional reactions are associated with our ideas even though they are conceived purely from the standpoint of their qualitative content and without regard to the question of their reality. We associate the mere idea of a very noble or very abhorrent deed, a uniquely complex personality, or a remarkable turn of fate with certain feelings. These feelings are independent of our knowledge that those men and events really existed, persisting even if we discover that they did not exist. (Simmel 1977, 160)

Or as it has also been put: ‘Feelings attached to pure contents constitute a domain in themselves.’

The domain Wittgenstein attempts to articulate in his remarks on Frazer is that of the feelings attached to human sacrifice. There have been many attempted characterizations of this general phenomenon of turning our attention on our experience itself and away from that of which it is the experience. In his book on nests Bachelard writes ‘It is not the task of a philosophical phenomenology to describe the nests met with in nature’ but rather ‘to elucidate the interest with which we look through an album containing reproductions of nests.’ (Bachelard 1969, 93) Wittgenstein in his remarks on Frazer was proposing to ‘elucidate the interest’ with which we contemplate the phenomenon of human sacrifice and of ritual in general. He was giving an analysis of the impression they produce and contesting the analysis which he imputes to Frazer. (Moore 1966, 307)

The most general characterisation of the enterprise of analyzing impressions (which William James calls ‘the most incessantly performed of all our mental processes’ (James 1950, 502)) I found in the entry on apper-

ception in a psychological dictionary: 'the process of bringing any mental content to clear comprehension'. Such empirically intransitive transactions with our experiences are not themselves unfamiliar. What is puzzling is how Wittgenstein's charge, that they have been mistakenly eschewed in favour of empirical enquiry can arise. Here is an example of how it might.

A holocaust victim, Chaim Kaplan recorded in his diary seeing an old peddler whipped to death by a Nazi in the Warsaw ghetto. Kaplan comments, "It is hard to comprehend this sadistic phenomenon... How is it possible to attack a stranger to me, a man of flesh and blood like myself, to wound him and trample upon him... without my reason? How is it possible?" (Steiner 1967, 37) Although Kaplan's outburst may have been an indictment disguised as a question many empirically minded enquirers have taken such questions at their face value and insisted they are resolvable by empirical investigation and should be so resolved. Why should we not treat the sadistic Nazi like one of Skinner's pigeons and trace the reinforcement history that led to his sadistic behaviour? But Peter Winch and others have maintained that this mode of response betrays a profound misunderstanding of the problem such behaviour poses.

Winch says with specific reference to the holocaust that the bewilderment provoked 'is not to be removed by any sort of explanation.' (Winch 1989, 155) This same misgiving has been provoked by Frazer's dealings with human sacrifice. Paul Redding writes of Wittgenstein's view of Frazer's account of human sacrifice: 'Frazer's question "Why does this happen?" is treated as a type of exclamatory outburst which gives expression to and reveals his real but misperceived needs.' (Redding 1987, 263). What are these 'misperceived' needs? Wittgenstein thought that Frazer purported to tell us why we are disturbed by rituals like the Beltane fire festival and that Frazer's account in terms of an original rite in which a man was really burned is mistaken ('like a backward looking Clever Else'). (Wittgenstein 1979, 76) (Clever Else, the eponymous heroine of one of Grimm's fairy tales, became profoundly upset on the fatuously inadequate ground that her unborn child might one day be killed in a freak accident.)

How does the non-empirical direction of interest fare in the case of the problems addressed by Frazer or of ritual sacrifice in general?

I will attempt to show that it involves abandoning the original hermeneutic question – 'Why did they do what they did?' for another – 'Why

does it trouble us as it does?’ But I will first give some examples of the non-empirical direction of interest in general.

The Two Directions: Animal Life

The philosopher of science, Gaston Bachelard, spoke of ‘the double perspective that might be attached to all problems connected with the knowledge of any particular reality.’ (Bachelard 1964, 3)

This is strikingly true of our relation to non-human creatures. This doubleness pulls us in the direction of learning more about them, of the kind of fact that naturalists could inform us – and which as children many of us were obsessed with, and at the same time of wanting to better evince our distinctive relation to their being – what one might call ‘phenomenological zoology’. That this distinction is sometimes obscured is illustrated by some remarks of Rilke who wrote in a letter: ‘Can you imagine ... how glorious it is, for example, to see into a dog ... to ease oneself into the dog exactly at the centre, the place out of which he exists as a dog.’ (Rilke 1987, 77) Empirical studies of canine life might plausibly claim to reconstitute the *Umwelt* of a dog but this does not seem to be the kind of thing Rilke had in mind.

A remark belonging unequivocally to the second non-empirical perspective is exemplified in Freud’s observation that the charm of certain animals ‘which seem not to concern themselves with us’ such as cats and large beasts of prey ‘lies in their narcissism, self-sufficiency and inaccessibility.’ (Freud 1914, 89) Santayana captures still another ‘internal’ aspect of our response to felines: ‘Who as he watched the cat basking in the sun has not passed into that vigilant eye, felt all the leaps potential in that luxurious torpor’. (Santayana 1962, 93) On the other hand the myth of the big cat as ‘a solitary and ruthless killer proud and aloof who lives in isolation, caring for none but himself.’ evinces graphically our misconceptions of the life of a big cat that only naturalistic observation could correct.

Our feelings towards the animate but strikingly non-human are evinced in Adrien Leverkühn’s reflections on his diving bell experience (in Thomas Mann’s *Dr. Faustus*) when he speaks of the ‘frantic otherness’ of the extravagant living creatures’ which ‘... went whisking past the windows in a blur of motion; frantic caricatures of organic life; predatory

mouths opening and shutting; obscene jaws; telescopic eyes' (Mann 1968, 258). This is more than just informative, empirical description; it is an attempt at evocation.

Here is a jokey attempt at conveying the sense of extravagant otherness:

Tell me O Octopus I beg/Is those things arms or is they legs?
I marvel at thee, Octopus/If I were thou; I'd call me "us". (Ogden Nash, The Octopus)

Though, as Wittgenstein says, if a lion spoke we would not understand it, if an octopus spoke we might not even know it was talking.

Remarks which raise the question of the two directions – Bachelard's 'double perspective' – occur in the notebooks Wittgenstein kept while he was writing the *Tractatus*: 'As I can infer my spirit (character, will) from my physiognomy, so I can infer the spirit (will) of each thing from its physiognomy.' He then adds 'Only remember that the spirit of the snake, of the lion, is your spirit for it is only from yourself that you are acquainted with spirit at all... The same with the elephant, with the fly, with the wasp.' (Wittgenstein 1969, 85) Subsequent remarks don't make this any clearer. All that is clear is that whatever the problem raised by Wittgenstein as to our relation to the non-human animate world it was not such as to be resolved by further empirical enquiry.

What an Overview can and cannot accomplish

Wittgenstein's counsel to confine ourselves to the perspicuous arrangement of what we already know has generated much enthusiastic comment but elucidation is exiguous and disabled by a determination to be appreciative.

Rudich and Stassen in the first published commentary on Wittgenstein's Frazer remarks do not even notice the theses later commentators so emphatically commend. Rudich and Stassen treat Wittgenstein as addressing the hermeneutic question, e.g., why must the Nemi priest be killed, exclusively, and giving bad advice on how to resolve it. (Rudich, Norman and Manfred Stassen 1971, 84) Later commentators place great value – rightly in my view – on Wittgenstein's incitement to reflect on our relation to the phenomena productive of perplexity and awe, but they are insuffi-

ciently candid as to its comparative worthlessness as a solution to the hermeneutic problem – e.g., why were human beings sacrificed?

Nor was I myself behindhand in my indiscriminating enthusiasm. In retrospect I can see that I wasn't pertinacious enough in pressing the relevant questions. How could the arrangement of what we already know resolve the puzzles explicitly raised by Frazer such as why the Nemi priest must be killed by his successor? I might have been forewarned by the sour and disputatious tone of several of Wittgenstein's comments that doing justice to Frazer's explanatory preoccupations was not uppermost in his mind. He claims that 'Frazer is much more savage than most of his savages.' and compares Frazer's spirituality to 'the stupidity and dullness of an English parson' (1979, 65). You don't have to entertain any special tenderness for the Church of England to find this gratuitous. And yet I failed to take in the damaging implications of such remarks. Why?

There were two features of Wittgenstein's counsel to eschew explanation for a putting into order the already known whose emancipatory appeal numbed my critical sense. One was its legitimation of the synoptic craving I had long been subliminally aware of; the other was Wittgenstein's insistence on our recognition that not all the problems and perplexities, which trouble us can be resolved by enlarging our fund of information, and that we are often deluded as to this ('the stupid superstition of our time.') (Wittgenstein 1979, 67)

Wittgenstein offers several alternatives to empirical explanation as a response to the problems raised by Frazer. That which seemed to hold most promise is the putting into order what is already known, i.e. dissipating perplexity via an overview of ritual practices rather than by hermeneutic speculation as to their rationale. By contrast consider Fontenrose's criticism of Frazer's account of Nemi. Fontenrose amasses evidence for an alternative account not connected with kingship or attempts to guarantee the fertility of the soil. (Fontenrose, 1971). If our interest is in the veridicality of Frazer's explanations then such a procedure seems much more appropriate than any putting into order of what we already knew.

Peter Hacker makes a case for Wittgenstein's overview method, which depends, however, on eliding what Wittgenstein claims for it.

Professor Cioffi contends that I err in claiming that the inner nature of a practice is accessible to us only in so far as the practice relates directly or indi-

rectly to our own experience. But he objects how can its accessibility to us determine its inner character? It is, he rightly observes, one thing to express dissatisfaction with an account that does not leave us feeling that we understand it and quite another to insist that an account can be true only if we do understand it. ... But my claim was not that accessibility is a criterion of truth, but rather that it is a condition of hermeneutic intelligibility. The appeal to a tendency in ourselves is a condition of our finding the symbolism of the ritual intelligible... (Hacker 2001, 96)

This is cogent but it is not Wittgenstein.

Wittgenstein wrote not only 'And Frazer's explanations would be no explanations at all if finally they did not appeal to an inclination in ourselves.' But also, 'we have only to put together in the right way what we know without adding anything, and the satisfaction we are trying to get from the explanation comes of itself.' (Wittgenstein 1979, 63)

What is the nature of the satisfaction that Wittgenstein says is normally attendant on explanation but can be provided by putting into order what we already know? Does it come with the realisation produced by the accumulation of examples that 'Human life is like that?' (Wittgenstein 1979, 63)¹ Wittgenstein seems to think so when he argues that puzzlement about the Beltane festival is not diminished by learning that it developed from a real burning but is by finding other similar festivals' since these will make it seem 'natural' (Moore 1966, 309).

This is epistemically reminiscent of the solution to the riddle of why a dog licks its balls – 'Because it can.' The epistemic moral of this riddle is that perplexity may be dissipated by changing the point of view from which a phenomenon is contemplated, conferring on it the status of an Ur-phenomenon, rather than by learning more concerning it.

What would over-view-produced understanding amount to in the case of the ritual burning or mutilation of images? When these are ranged

¹ In the case of the love troubled one we might, in lieu of attempting to bring him 'peace' via an explanation of his condition, produce an enumeration of others in similar straits such as Troilus, Dora Carrington, Ophelia, Charles Swann, the Chevalier des Grieux etc. – thus inciting him to the peace-conferring thought, 'If King Kong's infatuation could get him killed on top of the Empire State building, what am I complaining about? Human life is like that.'

along phenomena like kissing the picture of a loved one, what is it that we understand that we have not previously understood? A plausible answer is that the more comprehensive overview produced a shaper awareness that an expressive rationale for magic is as eligible as the instrumental one which Frazer favours. But this cannot in itself resolve the question of whether the rationale of the practices itemised by Frazer was instrumental or expressive.

Here is an example of the kind of contribution a comprehensive overview of our ritual inclinations, which comprises the expressive as well as the instrumental, can make to the dissipation of perplexity. I was visiting my wife in hospital. On my way to her bed I passed two women, one peacefully sleeping, the other in the adjacent bed sobbing. When I arrived at my wife's bedside I asked her why no one was seeing to the woman who was sobbing. My wife explained that the woman's sobbing was the aftermath of her distress that the woman now peacefully sleeping had been in great agony only moments before when a doctor had arrived to administer an opiate. On my next visit they were both dead.

It was then that instead of a conventional and inane expression of regret – 'What a shame; so they won't be going home then', – for the first time in several decades, I crossed myself. Why?

At one time the gesture of crossing myself on such an occasion would have been transparently doctrinal. I would have been commending their souls to their maker or something of the kind. But what was I doing decades after such convictions had left me? Was it just thoughtlessly anachronistic? The overview of ritual practices with its documentation of the many instances where belief is redundant made my crossing less puzzling. The crossing was a gesture which seemed an appropriate expression of my acknowledgement of an aspect of human life which the deaths of these women forced on me and which my secularism left me no way of coping with – a feeble attempt to compensate for 'the immense indifference of things'.

But why the sign of the cross in particular? In the remarks on Frazer Wittgenstein says that if he, who does not believe that there are superhuman beings can nevertheless speak of his fearing 'the wrath of the gods' 'then this shows that with these words I can mean something or express a feeling that need not be connected with that belief.' (Wittgenstein 1979, 68)

My non-doctrinal crossing of myself is akin to Wittgenstein's speaking of the wrath of the gods. On learning of the death of these two women I rummaged about among the detritus of my early religious upbringing and came up with the most ubiquitous – the sign of the cross. But of course I could make a non-doctrinal use of this only because it had an earlier, doctrinal use. Just as Wittgenstein – though he seems to overlook it – could only speak figuratively of the wrath of God because those who originally used the expression believed in its literality.

This example illustrates both the benefits of overviews and their limitations. The question of whether the Nemi priest was killed (or effigies burned) to guarantee the fertility of the land remains unresolved by an overview. Nevertheless putting into order the already known was not without issue. What my non-doctrinal crossing seems to expose to view is the presence of a primal expressive need; in this case, for a gesture which takes account of the untowardness of the fates, which may overtake our fellow creatures while yet only momentarily interrupting our wholesome obliviousness. ('Man shall give death no dominion over his thoughts.') (Mann 1960, 497)

When Is it Inappropriate to Ask for a Causal Explanation?

Wittgenstein says that we sometimes ask for causal explanation when it makes no sense to do so. But the situation may really be one in which our desire to have certain matters explained, though coherent, competes with our need to have our 'thoughts and feelings' concerning them clarified or to express more adequately the experience undergone.

Moore reports Wittgenstein as arguing that 'to give a causal explanation in answer to the question 'Why is the smell of a rose pleasant?'' would not remove our "aesthetic puzzlement". Is this because a causal explanation is conceptually ineligible (as optics is said to be to be to colour qualia), or for another reason, that its causal conditions are not the feature of the experience, which is of interest to us. There is no more reason to deny that we can speak intelligibly of the physical cause of a rose's scent than of a toothache but the experiences have different interests for us.

Sometimes the interest of an experience is what it permits us to infer as to its causal structure or its causal basis. There is a pathological ol-

factory state in which everything smells vile. The problem this would set us is the causal-explanatory one rather than that of evincing more adequately what is vile about the smell. Although ‘the act of pointing determines the place of pain’, as Wittgenstein observes in the *Blue Book*, this is no guarantee that the wrong tooth won’t be pulled.

Though it may be the case that a rose’s scent is pleasant because it evolved to attract insects to pollinate it this speculation takes us in a different direction from the character of the fragrance, which is the focus of our interest. What we may want with respect to our delight in the fragrance – if we want anything at all – is not a causal explanation but rather what Baudelaire attempts to do for the scent he alludes to in his poem ‘Correspondances’, when he describes it as ‘mellow as oboes, green as fields’. We want a felicitous evocation of our experience in another modality, rather than its explanation.

Action at a Distance: From the Totem Feast to the Communion Rail

It has been denied that a state of affairs temporally remote from the ritual practice it purports to explain can do so. ‘No action at a distance’ as Peter Hacker neatly puts it. But is this so?

Holy Communion is paradigmatic of a practice subjected to genealogical accounts, which are felt by participants to be alien to its spirit. In his book *Myth and Guilt* Theodore Reik writes, “Even to this day cannibalistic acts are performed in the Masses of our Churches.” (Reik 1958, 13) A Catholic reviewer expressed indignation at this claim. (Times Literary Supplement, Jan 16, 1969) Nevertheless it is the case that some apostates have described communing in cannibalistic idioms. One wrote ‘I could never take part in Holy Communion for the very thought of eating bits of Christ’s dead flesh and drinking cups of his blood made me sick...’

This account is unrecognizable by those who have ever regularly taken communion. They feel like saying of the cannibalistic accounts by former celebrants that though they have remembered the words they have forgotten the tune.

It is not the concept of cannibalism in the abstract but its ludicrous associations, which make the cannibalistic analogy alien to the experience of a communicant. The term cannibalism conjures images of dark-skinned

men with bones through their noses putting light-skinned men kitted in tropical gear into cauldrons of boiling water and this is incongruous with the spirit of the practice.

When those who take the cannibalistic view are assured by ordinary communicants that nothing like 'eating bits of Christ's dead flesh and blood' goes through their heads could they help themselves out by citing Freud's derivation of the Eucharistic sacrament from the totem meal? Not on this particular issue where Hacker's 'no action at a distance' thesis applies, since the practice 'has its own complex of feelings' and eating bits of dead flesh is not among them.

But this does not entirely preclude the influence of a tradition of homeopathic cannibalism on the practice of ingesting the host. Some special significance seems to have been placed on the ingestion of the host (See the opening of John Updike's story 'The Music School' 1966) and it is this aspect that confers on Freud's explanation of genesis from homeopathic cannibalism its pertinence.

Of course the goings on at a totem feast are remote from Gerard Manly Hopkins' description of communion as 'our sweet reprieve and ransom' for 'the strengthening and refreshing of our souls', and from the spirit expressed in the *panis angelicus* lines 'What wonder! A poor and humble servant consumes the Lord.' But is there no feature that the derivation from homeopathic cannibalism could shed light on? Perhaps in consulting my own experience of communicating in search of some feature analogous to cannibalism I have been looking in the wrong place. Even if eating bits of Christ's dead flesh is remote from anything that goes through a celebrant's head there is still the symbolic ingestion to be accounted for and Freud's claim that the Eucharistic sacrament stands in a line of descent from the practice of homeopathic cannibalism could bear on this issue. Freud holds that the primitive belief that the attributes of ingested animals are incorporated as part of the character of those who eat them persists 'through the series of usages of the totem meal down to Holy Communion' (Freud 1923, 29 n2). It could be objected that Freud's analogy is too schematic. Though the communicants may feel exalted or elated after communicating they do not feel that they are better able to make the lame walk or the blind see, as Freud's homeopathic rationale would imply.

I recall that striding homeward unbreakfasted after taking communion on a brisk sunny day I experienced a rare sense of spiritual and physical well-being. For if I were to be hit by a truck and killed before I got home my soul would go straight to heaven and if I made it, there would be pancakes and syrup waiting.² Where does cannibalism come in?

And yet this very reminiscence can be invoked to support the pertinence of a homeopathic rationale. For why did the euphoric certainty of salvation not supervene on the walk back from confession on the day previous? Why did it have to wait on the aftermath of communicating? Doesn't this show that there is something far from inert, but essential in the notion of ingesting the host; something, which requires explaining, and which the influence of the tradition of homeopathic cannibalism might explain?³

Is There a Primal Appetite for Perspicuous Views? Irving Goffman as a Purveyor of Synoptic Satisfactions

Some support for the claim that there is a primal appetite for overviews – for ‘clarity for its own sake’ – but that these overviews may dis-

² (That my intermingling of spiritual elevation with mundane enjoyments cannot be completely idiosyncratic is suggested by a passage in Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist*. ‘He sat by the fire in the kitchen not daring to speak for happiness. Till that moment he had not known how beautiful and peaceful life could be. ... breakfast in the morning after the communion in the college chapel. White pudding and eggs and sausages and cups of tea.’ (Joyce 1960, 146)

³ There is also a less arduous procedure than putting what we know into order in which Wittgenstein takes satisfaction. It is that which we employ, when in attempting to understand better an aesthetic experience we find ‘the word that sums it up’. (Wittgenstein places the question why the Beltane festival impresses us among aesthetic questions in the lectures of which Moore gives an account (Moore 1958, 166-167). (In the case of Nemi, ‘the word that sums it up’ for Wittgenstein, is the phrase ‘the majesty of death’. This is careless. It is incompatible with the account Frazer gives us of a terrified priest taking every precaution not to be surprised. A terrified man is anticipating a mortal assault by a desperate one. Where is the majesty in that?)

guise themselves as explanatory enterprises or at least as prelude to such, as can be found in the work of Erving Goffman. (Cioffi 2000, 108-123) It struck me that the kind of satisfaction readers take in Goffman is akin to the satisfaction Wittgenstein took in the non-explanatory bits of Darwin – 'putting facts into a system helping us to make a synopsis of them'. This thesis has been denied by among others, e.g. George Smith (2006, 111). I will attempt to explain why the dispute is not readily resolvable.

Let us take as an example Goffman's monograph on stigma – 'abominations of the body ... blemishes of individual character ... the tribal stigma of race, nation, and religion...' (Goffman, 1963, 4)

One of the things about stigma, which we all know but of which Goffman reminds us, is that a stigma can be manifest or hidden. If manifest the stigmatic's predicament is one of how to create a relaxed atmosphere, perhaps by jocular allusions to his status or condition, ('managing tension'). If his stigma is a hidden one then his predicament is that of deciding if, when, and how to declare it. If it is to be kept hidden then acquaintances must be segregated into those that know and those that don't and kept from communicating ('controlling information'). If the decision is made to declare the stigma then judgment must be exercised as whether it is safe to delay until one is sufficiently established for the revelation to be least disruptive or whether there is then too great a risk of the stigma coming to light of itself and thus of one's being exposed as devious as well as deviant. These are not matters of which readers of Goffman could be ignorant.

In a critical review of a volume of Goffman's papers the objection was raised that merely specifying 'paths of potential action', as Goffman does, without explaining why one path is taken rather than another is not acceptable social science (Strodtbeck 1968). Goffman's defenders intermittently concede Goffman's failure to produce novel data or explanations. Burns' book on Goffman, for example acknowledges that Goffman did not 'bring to light new facts or reveal information that was previously unknown'. (Burns 1992, 6) and goes on to characterize him in terms evocative of Wittgenstein's 'putting into order what we already know' (Burns 1992, 112). Another of Goffman's champions, Philip Manning speaks of Goffman as providing a 'new way of reordering familiar facts'. (Manning 1992, 169)

As an example of a recapitulation of the known which nevertheless led to explanatory achievements consider Frank Gilbreth's systemization of the movements made by an industrial worker for the purpose of measuring standard performance times: search, find, select, grasp, transport loaded, position, assemble, use, disassemble, etc, etc. Gilbreth named these movements 'therbligs' – an anagram of his name. The discursive deployment of therbligs could be used to explain why one worker is more productive than another.

Someone might argue against my overview for its own sake characterisation of Goffman's taxonomy for stigma that the constituents of his overviews, for example, 'controlling information' and 'managing tension' are interactional 'therbligs' and could expedite advances in a similar fashion.

There is another analogy which might be used to justify an instrumental, beyond 'clarity for its own sake', rationale for overviews. Imagine a community with telephones but no telephone books so that knowledge of telephone numbers is dispersed in the heads of those who are personally known to the subscribers. In what terms shall we describe the transition to publicly accessible telephone books? What was diffuse has become centralized. And what of the transition from telephone books in which the subscribers numbers though correctly assigned are arranged higgledy-piggledy, to one in which they are arranged alphabetically? Shall we say that although accessibility is enormously increased, since nothing previously unknown is therefore known, we should not speak of the telephone book as having advanced our knowledge or shall we say that centralization and enhanced accessibility itself constitutes an advance in knowledge?

Whichever we say it seems to me that the telephone book and therbligs analogy could not preclude the characterisation of Goffman as a provider of Wittgensteinian overviews for their own sake. Goffman's grateful and appreciative readers do not frequent him in the spirit in which they consult telephone books or the classification of industrial movements. What makes the arrangement of what we already know a Wittgensteinian overview rather than an agenda of unexplained social phenomena for further investigation need be nothing intrinsic to it but the use we make of it.

Behind the apparently conceptual issue as to whether Goffman's overviews are bona fide social science may lurk another issue, one as to the

relative priority to be afforded to different kinds of discourse. Might there not be circumstances under which someone might reasonably prefer a treatment of stigma which explained what determined the waning or tenacity of discriminatory practices to the astute and gratifying, though vaguely familiar, taxonomising which Goffman gives us in his monograph on the subject?

Consider the following exchange:

'An overview of the known features of stigma suggests that in time having African features will be as little remarked as speaking with a regional accent now is.'

'That's nice to know but couldn't social scientists dealing with stigma find some way of hurrying things up a bit?'

Is it unreasonable to hold that research on stigma should contribute something to expediting the disappearance, or at least attenuation, of physiognomic racism? And to object to being fobbed off with taxonomic felicities like those introduced by Goffman in his discussion of passing, say? No. But this does not preclude Goffmanian overviews having provided many with the same mode of non-explanatory satisfaction as Wittgenstein took in Darwin's 'expression of the emotions', 'putting the facts into a system. making a synopsis of them' (Moore, 1966).

What Manner of Thesis Was Wittgenstein Advancing?

When Wittgenstein tells us that 'what is satisfactory in Darwin' is not the hypotheses he advances but 'his putting the facts into a system, helping us to make a synopsis of them.' or that 'what is valuable in Freud is the large number of psychic facts that he arranges.' (Moore 1966, 309) he is giving *Übersicht* an epistemic priority, which many would not concede it. Is he then straightforwardly mistaken? Not if what he says is nevertheless true of those for whom or to whom he takes himself to be speaking.

These would include Hacker and Baker (1980, 540) who claim in connection with human sacrifice that *Übersicht* can resolve perplexity in a way in which a developmental hypothesis cannot. On the other hand, Avishai Margalit finds Wittgenstein's synoptic alternative to explanation – 'its significance with respect to our own tendencies' – 'extremely odd',

since it is ‘irrelevant to the question of the significance of the ritual for the participants’. (Margalit 1992, 303)

How much does it matter that an overview of the significance of the ritual ‘with respect to our own tendencies’ is irrelevant to its significance for the participants?

Consider one of Wittgenstein’s examples. He tells us that in reading accounts of exotic survivals like the mimic burning of men at Beltane we think we are responding to conjectures as to the probability of their origin in rites in which men were really burnt, but we are mistaken. Such a response to the sacrificial origin of Beltane would make us as foolish as ‘clever Else’ because our worry about Beltane ‘is not that kind of worry’ (Wittgenstein 1979, 76) We are really responding to our pre-existing suspicion of ‘the overwhelming probability of the idea’ (Wittgenstein 1979, 79) that humans are man-burning creatures.

What would show that Wittgenstein was right and those who take the empirical, historical route wrong about ‘the kind of worry involved’? Only that they came to agree that it was. (‘An entirely new account of correct explanation. You have to give the explanation that is accepted.’ (Wittgenstein 1970, 18)

Wittgenstein’s answer to his question why we are impressed by human sacrifice is analogous to one of Freud’s joke reductions. Wittgenstein takes us from one end of the account of fire festivals to another in hopes that at some point we will agree of our experience, ‘yes that’s what happened.’

What could those who are so sure that Frazer’s explanatory ambitions were misconceived say to those who deny this? They could say that though they themselves may have once felt that the issue raised by Frazer was one calling for historical reconstruction, they had come to realize, perhaps under Wittgenstein’s prompting, that explanation would not relieve the perplexity these phenomena aroused in them.

The issue is not one of conceptual propriety but is akin rather to that raised by the famous one-sentence dismissal of a work on penguins: ‘This book tells me more about penguins than I want to know.’ Although there are those for whom Frazer says more about the history and prehistory of human sacrifice than they want to know these must acknowledge that there are also those for whom Wittgenstein says more as to their feelings and

thoughts apropos human sacrifice than they want to know. Ought we worry about what we, and the people we pass in the street, are capable of, as Wittgenstein suggests? ('the strangeness of what I see in myself and in others'). Would not the irrelevance of this equally expose us to the reproach of being as fatuous as 'clever Else.'?

The genre of Wittgenstein's remarks is one that we all engage in from time to time. We implicitly assume the role of spokesman for some indeterminate 'we'. Ray Monk for example tells us that 'We naturally think that dreams mean something' (Monk 1990, 448). I don't doubt that this is a fact but what kind of fact is it? Is it the same kind of fact as that lilac is a pinkish blue or that stars twinkle but planets don't? From whence do such facts derive their authority? I think of them as communitarian – the community in question being of indeterminate scope and identified intuitively and contextually.

When Wittgenstein says that our attitude to inflicted suffering differs from our attitude to natural suffering he does not strike us as presumptuous in speaking for us all. But when Hacker and Baker say that what 'is most deeply perplexing and disturbing' about human sacrifice 'is not to be resolved' by empirical enquiry they evince a notion of what is called for by the phenomenon of human sacrifice (and as to where empirical questions in general stand in the hierarchy of what is 'deeply perplexing and disturbing') that many would make it a point of honor not to share. There are those who find nothing more deeply disturbing about human sacrifice than the question why it was done, and even when they do suffer a residual non-explanatory disturbance they think it lacking in public spirit to pursue their thoughts in that direction. If someone on reading accounts of the Aztecs dismembering thousands of sacrificial victims in the course of a year found himself compelled to ask why they did so rather than why he felt about it as he did would this make him 'like a backward-looking clever Else'? And if he wondered which of the explanations advanced, the nutritional, the political or the psychodynamic, was correct how would putting into order what he already knew help him?

In their assumption that they are speaking for the epistemic community at large both the advocates of explanation and the advocate of overviews, could be mistaken. There may be no representative sensibility to express. Shall we say, rather, that two forms of life confront each other?

Consider a comparable case where two forms of life do confront each other. Suppose that in the course of a discussion provoked by a large scale human disaster such as flood or famine someone objects to the theodicy issue having been raised because theodicy discussion should be confined to inevitable evils and not usurp the place of policy discussion on how best to deal with avoidable ones. It could be argued that had Manby – the inventor of the breeches buoy – responded to his dismay at seeing a ship founder and its passengers drowning by devoting himself to the theological problem of reconciling such horrors with the goodness of God rather than to the practical problem of how rescue could be effected under such circumstances he would not have invented the breeches buoy.

And yet there is other than the empirical-ameliorative direction that our thoughts might ‘naturally’ take – that which provokes D H Lawrence’s observation on the folly of a generalized concern for the welfare of humanity. (1936, 541) You can’t save everyone so wouldn’t you do well to devote some thought as to how you are to live with this fact, at least during the fortunate intervals when you are yourself among the saved? And this problem would take your thoughts in a very different direction from that of the empirical-explanatory.

What is at issue here? How is it to be determined which direction our thoughts should take?

I have a practical though not a theoretical solution to this question. The recipient of such claims should not bother himself as to how general is the response imputed to him or what the natural direction of our thoughts is or ought to be but merely with how he himself stands in relation to them.

Does ‘This Christ Business’ Constitute a Domain in Itself?

One of Wittgenstein’s most extravagantly anti-empirical utterances was his reply to Drury’s remark (round about 1930) that the New Testament, unlike the Old, lost its significance if it was not an account of what really happened. Wittgenstein disagreed, maintaining that it would make no difference if there had never been an historical person such as Jesus is portrayed in the gospels. (Drury 1981, 116)

The remarks of Georg Simmel I quoted earlier go some way towards mitigating the extravagance of Wittgenstein’s sentiments as to the

irrelevance of the historicity of Jesus. 'Emotional reactions are associated with our ideas even though they are conceived purely from the standpoint of their qualitative content and without regard to the question of their reality.' (Simmel 1977, 62)

Can't this a-historical non-empirical category of Simmel's extenuate the apparent perversity of Wittgenstein's denial of the pertinence of the historicity of the gospel stories? Wittgenstein's statement about Jesus is so obviously false that it cannot mislead. Huizinga says somewhere that a strong rhetoric functions like the skull and crossbones on a bottle of poison. It is obvious that the millions of Christians who publicly concur with Paul: 'If Christ is not raised then our faith is in vain'- are neither hypocrites nor self-deceivers. Nor does Wittgenstein think they are. If Wittgenstein's statement is obviously false, in what sense is it true? In the sense that not everyone taken with the message of Jesus need treat the stories in which it is imbedded as does a traditional Christian. We can readily concede that a demonstration that the gospel stories are a-historical would have no bearing on Miss Lonelyheart's attempt to cope with his demoralizing and self-destructive compassion by finding what he refers to as 'a rational solution' to 'this Christ business'. (West, 1961, 9)⁴

⁴ Others have held Wittgenstein's a-historical view. J. C. Powys also maintained that 'It does not matter to us whether Jesus "Really lived"; or whether, like other great figures, his personality has been created by the anonymous instinct of humanity.' (Powys 1975, 240)

An exchange on the topic of the historicity of Jesus occurs in W H White's *The Autobiography of Mark Rutherford*: The narrator in a discussion with a clergyman friend claims that 'it did not matter whether Christ actually existed or not. What the four evangelists recorded was eternally true, and the Christ-idea was true whether it was ever incarnated or not in a being bearing his name' (White, 50-51). Some years after his remark to Drury Wittgenstein argued that 'queer as it sounds' the account in the gospels might be 'demonstrably false and belief lose nothing by this because historical proof is irrelevant to belief.' (1980 32) Not only is there a shift in this remark from historical disproof to lack of historical proof but there is all the difference between a non-negotiable historical belief: 'Everything counts against its being so. Nevertheless it is so. Jesus was crucified and did rise on the third day.' and a declaration of the irrelevance of historicity: 'It does not matter whether the story of the crucified and risen Christ is true.'

Wittgenstein's remark may be taken as *Flaschenpost* (a message in a bottle). Here too, Simmel provides us with a category, which sheds light on the issue. In his essay on philosophy Simmel introduces "a mental category...a third something in man beyond his individual subjectivity and the logical objective thinking which is universally convincing..." (1965, 296) Wittgenstein's claims as to the character of our response to human sacrifice exemplifies Simmel's 'third something', though so taken it appears to be false since it does not transcend his 'individual subjectivity'. Of what use then is it?

What Paul Celan said about his poems, that they were messages in a bottle, sent out 'in the not always greatly hopeful belief that sometime they might wash up on dry land' (Felstiner 1995, 115-116) can be adapted to Wittgenstein's anti-empirical, anti-explanatory pronouncements. We best not take them as presumptuous or risky communitarian claims as to what 'we' are really interested in, impressed by, want, etc, but as *Flaschenpost* – messages directed at anonymous others some of whom, it is hoped, will on reflection acknowledge themselves to have been beguiled by the prospect of explanation.

Although it can be argued, against Wittgenstein, that you misrepresent our epistemic predicament if you don't give a prominent role to our craving for causal knowledge, for causal narratives and for our need to reconcile ourselves not just to inarticulacy but to vulgar causal ignorance, it can also be argued that Wittgenstein's anti-explanatory sentiments ought nevertheless to be circulated and discussed.

This is because, though for all of us the darkness in which we live is the darkness of vulgar empirical ignorance, some of us can also be brought to realize that their predicament is not exhausted by this genre of darkness and that they had an inadequate grasp of the problems that plagued them and had persistently misconceived them as predominant matters which empirical discoveries could resolve.

Wittgenstein appears to have had a change of heart even on this point for he later wrote: 'What inclines even me to believe in Christ's resurrection. It is as though I play with the thought – if he did not rise from the dead then he decomposed in the grave like any other man. He is dead and decomposed. In that case he is a teacher like any other and can no longer help' (1980, 33). Wittgenstein's hawing illustrates how difficult it can be to persist with an irrelevance of historicity thesis.

The possible minuteness of this constituency has no bearing on the personal momentousness for its members of their realisation that they have persistently mistaken ambivalence, vacillation and indecision for ignorance.

Orwell's tribute to Joyce's *Ulysses*, that it broke down the solitude in which the human being lives, is not shown to be ill-deserved because there are many of whom it is not true. In Orwell and in many others Joyce's bottle found dry land. Why should not Wittgenstein's?

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