

“What Time Is It On the Sun?”

An Interview with Cora Diamond

HRP: WHAT I WANT TO BEGIN WITH IS AN ASPECT OF YOUR work I find particularly interesting: your notion of the riddle, and the idea that certain philosophical questions can be recast as riddles. At what point in time do we take a riddle to be nonsense? It seems that Wittgenstein would want to reject some riddles as nonsense in the *Investigations*. At what point in time is Wittgenstein, to take a term from one of your essays, Anselm’s fool?

Diamond: Well I think—that’s a difficult question, in some ways—we should begin, not with a philosophical question, but, rather, “what time is it on the sun?” Which is one of Wittgenstein’s examples in the *Investigations*. I think he wants to suggest that we reject that riddle in the same way we might reject the philosophical questions we ask. Somebody might well want to reject the question “what time is it on the sun” as a question we don’t want to do anything with.

On the other hand, it’s possible to imagine somebody picking up that question and doing something with it that we didn’t see—so that when that person gives the answer, we say “Yes!”—as it were—“you’ve done something really wonderful with the phrase.” So I think the suggestion is that with philosophical questions we’re not laying down what you might not, ever, make something of, but that sometimes we say that this is not a question we want to do anything with at this point. It’s just a phrase that we’ve put together by analogy with other phrases that we use. We don’t know what to do with it, even though it attracts us; it doesn’t fit in with any of the activities of our language that we’re familiar with.



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HRP: In your work you discuss the idea of the answer to the riddle having a “goodness of fit” that somehow seems correct—some clever thing comes up. It seems that the way we sense a “goodness of fit” is similar to the way, in reading Austin, one senses a rightness in what he’s saying, a satisfaction with the way he’s put it. Do you sense a connection there? In the satisfaction of reaching a—surprised—agreement?

Diamond: I think somehow Austin thought that the resources of the language deliver an answer. I’m not sure of that.

HRP: That there’s no refashioning of the language?

Diamond: There’s no, as it were, imaginative further step that we’re taking.

HRP: When reading your article on Anselm about riddles, it seems as if you’re dealing with a very particular kind of riddle. Whereas, one could pose a riddle such as “there’s one man that always lies, one that always tells the truth...”

Diamond: Yes.

HRP: And that would seem to me to be a very different kind of riddle than the one you deal with in the Anselm article, because it can be solved by logical means alone. There’s no revisioning of the language that’s needed there. What might the connections between these different riddles mean? What is the relation of this kind of riddle to the one you’re holding up for examination?

Diamond: I don’t think this is a matter of trying to find a definite line with things going one side, things going on the other. Wittgenstein somewhere says is it the case that the use of a word, the use of the same word, is significant in that it shows us how to play the game. In the case of some riddles, the familiarity of the word does not show us what to do with it.

I think here of a passage from the *Investigations*, section 563, where Wittgenstein asks, if we use the king in chess to draw lots to see who goes first, we will count that as part of the role of the piece in chess. The idea would be that if there’s an essential connection, it has to do with the fact that you recognize from the fact that the piece is the king what you’re going to do with it in this new context.

Whereas in Austin’s case, say, the words ‘accident’ and ‘mistake’ I think are supposed to *show* you what you’re supposed to do. The identity of the words is supposed to deliver the answer to the problem. Yet that’s just what we don’t have in the case of what we’re more inclined to identify as riddles—we don’t have the identity of the words delivering to us what we’re trying to do.

One of the examples I used in that riddle paper was from the upbringing of my niece, when she was eighteen months or so, when my sister told her, “kiss your elbow.” She struggled to do it—but it was clear what she was meant to do. And there the identity of the words kiss and elbow, which you’re already familiar with, tell you what you’re meant to do, only you can’t do it. And then my sister said, “kiss your ear.” Now what my niece did was kiss her hand and put it to her ear. There the identity of the piece does not tell her at all how to interpret the command. And so she invents a solution to the riddle.

HRP: In a sense, that solution wasn't invented for the elbow because the other was too close to being possible.

Diamond: It's so clear, one might say, what you're meant to do. Whereas in the other case the identity of the words doesn't tell you what you're meant to do at all. One of Wittgenstein's own examples is, "what color is the looking glass?" And again, you know the pieces, "looking glass" and "color." And yet the identity of the pieces doesn't tell you at all how to answer that question. And that's the one that's more analogous to the philosophical question.

HRP: Another question I find interesting in your work is the relation of skepticism in Wittgenstein, and skeptical treatments of Wittgenstein, to your criticism of Singer's argument for vegetarianism. Reading that criticism, it's as if you're dealing with a certain kind of moral skepticism. One person simply doesn't believe that there is any question of morality; it isn't even that she questions the degree. To make the analogy, it isn't the way in which the table is real, but rather that one person claims not to believe there's a table there at all. What do you see as the relation between morality and skepticism here?

Diamond: This is a complicated question because with skepticism in the senses in which we take it as central, skepticism about the external world, about other minds, and so on, there is, as Cavell has pointed out, a question of how we are with others and how we actually are responding to them. And we, as it were, mislocate that as a cognitive issue. So I do want to suggest that it's wrong to just take standard skeptical issues, if I can refer to them as such, as straightforwardly cognitive. They were presented as cognitive, but the cognitive issue is not necessarily the only one. This, I take it, is one of the things that Cavell points out.

On the other hand what I do want to suggest is that, within what goes wrong with philosophical treatments of ethics, we're beginning with those parts of ethical thinking that we take to be puzzlingly analogous (to a degree) to what we consider to be straightforwardly cognitive activities. And I'm going to regard those "cognitive" issues as straightforwardly cognitive although, if I were to focus on them, the whole issue of their being cognitive would have to be examined. So we look at questions of what ethical judgement someone is making as central, and, focusing on that in our philosophical puzzle, we ask whether it's objective, we ask what it is for it to be rational, we look for some kind of construction of what it is to be "rational," "unbiased." I think that this is central to Singer—it's partly derivative from Hare's work.

Anyway, we end up not looking at those elements of ethical thinking that are really at some distance from anything analogous to the cases of judgements about the world and about other people. What I have in mind is the way in which someone's ethical thinking can come out in the kind of factual description he gives.

A very obvious kind of example would be Primo Levi's descriptions of life in Auschwitz, where he, on the whole, does not use moral language very much. It's straightforward descriptive language. Then again, it's *not* such straightforward descriptive language, because there's moral passion in the way in which he is constructing that description. His moral passion is coming through in his use of "factual language." The idea that descriptions can have that kind of moral tension in

them, and in that way reflect the kind of being that the speaker or writer is, doesn't quite match anything within the range of issues that we're looking at in, let's say, classical skeptical questions.

There's another example—I'm not sure exactly how to move from the example to the question, but let me develop the example and then try to move there. There's a recent book by the South African writer Coetzee about animals, and our lives in relation to animals. It was given as a series of lectures and among the people that responded was Peter Singer; the lectures and responses were published in a single volume later on. Coetzee's lectures are in the form of a fiction about a lecturer in English literature who is obsessed with the deep going evil that comes out in how we use animals and close our minds to it. Singer sees this simply as a peculiar way to state an argument. He cannot see this as ethical thinking. In his response he understands Coetzee's book to be as if someone thought: this is my argument—how shall I put it into words?—well, I might as well make it a fictional narrative.

I'm very interested in the kinds of ways in which people do what I take to be misreadings of Wittgenstein, seeing him as laying down conditions for sense.

What Coetzee is really doing is taking it that prior to, and in some degree independent of, our attempts to find the solutions to ethical problems, is the kind of being-in-the-world—if you want a phrase—that includes responsiveness to striking and puzzling and hurtful

features of our lives. Someone can go through life with a wound—the wound being the question what can it mean, the way in which we relate to animals.

That's, I think, what I'm trying to get at in what Coetzee is doing. He's trying to ask questions about where we are coming from, what our life is from which we come, and asking us to forget about this whole business of should we do this, or should we do that. What Singer wants to do is see the rational, ethical creature as concerned with should we do this or should we do that, what are the arguments for this, what are the arguments for that. And in this way he isn't able to respond to Coetzee's work as anything else.

Now I don't know that there is something. Maybe that is analogous to things that Cavell is saying about our relationship to other human beings and the way in which it gets changed and distorted in the representations of skeptical questioning.

HRP: When I was reading about the idea of the escape from the thrall of metaphysics, I read that as an escape from the thrall of skepticism. That suddenly we don't have to be obsessed by the particular language in which we are asked to arrive at a proof of the table, if you like.

Diamond: Well I see the issues of philosophy often in terms of what the conditions are for our being able to speak about the table. This is really the same question from

a different angle. I'm very interested in the kinds of ways in which people do what I take to be misreadings of Wittgenstein, seeing him as laying down conditions for sense. And so in that sense, in that kind of misreading, we're still looking at the skeptical issue, but from another direction. Instead of saying can we or can't we actually make claims about the table, we ask what the conditions are for which we can make true or false claims about the table, and we go on: we have to have agreement in judgement, we have to have this, we have to have that, we have to be playing a language game in which there are these features.

So I think what I want to resist there, what I see as metaphysical, is the notion of what has to be in order for us to do such and such, to see Wittgenstein as theorizing in that kind of way. Now to see him theorizing so is to see him in connection, in very close connection, with the kind of skeptical issues you're talking about.

HRP: In your treatment of Anselm's riddle you discuss Malcolm's argument that uses Wittgenstein to show that the fool's claim is incoherent, and you make the analogy with the pseudoargument that one can't regard the God of the Old Testament as a genocidal maniac because in this language game, "God is good." And therefore, the argument goes, you're "outside the game," you're "no longer playing." But then in your essay on eating meat, you write: "it is not morally wrong to eat our pets, people who ate their pets would have not have pets in the same sense of the term. If we call an animal we're fattening for the table a pet we're making a crude joke of a familiar nature." It seems to me that if we can have an evil God of the Old Testament, why can't we eat our pets?

Diamond: That's an interesting question. What I want to say here is that there's no short way with the kinds of clash that arise between people who think in different ways. In this case, I think Malcolm is making too short work of a genuine conflict. This actually comes up for me—it's a very, very interesting and, I think, important question—in a paper that I've just finished a draft of. There, I was asked to do a paper on Wittgenstein's lectures on religious belief. Which have been taken to contain Wittgenstein's stating that the believer and the unbeliever cannot contradict each other—it's very close to the Malcolm view that you refer to.

What Wittgenstein actually does in the lectures is imagines people who have a belief in the Last Judgement who ask him, "do you believe it to be right or wrong?" "I can't respond," he says, "I can't say this man is wrong." He, as I see it, is responding in a very personal way there. He's not saying nobody could say they're wrong. He's saying that's not the move that he sees himself as being in a position to make in response to them, that he's just nowhere with what they say.

I don't think you can move from that to any claim that if you're in one language game you cannot contradict people in another, that you cannot get a genuine clash. These clashes are interesting and hard to describe, and are often among the most poignant kinds of clashes.

For example, I've seen people claim that Jews and Christians are not genuinely contradicting each other about whether the Messiah has already come and whether Jesus was the Messiah. That the claim is that within the Jewish language game they have one way of talking about the Messiah; in the Christian language

game they have another way. So for these people there is no genuine contradiction. This seems to me to really miss what's going on, just as, in the case of the view of the God of the Old Testament as a genocidal maniac, to say that you can't really say that is to miss the argument that the person is trying to make. It may be that because people are not using words in the same way, getting at the kind of conflict is difficult. Yet it's wrong to say, "O there's a kind of genuine contradiction, I have a logical insight into the nature of contradiction, and according to my logical insight, you can't have one of those if you're playing different language games."

Now in the case of if it's your pet, you can't eat it, I do certainly want to allow for genuine contradiction between different ways of thinking about animals. I think that in the case of trying to get clear what's going on in such a conflict, one should be aware of the problems in using the language. And indeed there could be—I don't think there is—a way of talking about animals where people actually used the word pet, the English word pet, and their language and lives had diverged from ours and there was a real clash between their mode of thought about animals and ours that emerged in their use of the word pet. Which we shared with them, but then we didn't share it, like the way Christians and Jews share and do not share the word Messiah.

I don't think that is the case with the word pet. I think that the conflicts

that we have there don't focus on that word. And within the context of trying to think about this issue philosophicaly, probably that's not the word to focus on.

I do want to say that agreement and disagreement are something we see and we don't have to postulate some kind of logical underpinnings in terms of language games or something else to make sense of our relationship to others as agreement or disagreement.

HRP: In these discussions, the question is pushed more towards that of how close two people have to be before they're "playing the same game."

Diamond: Yes—and I

think that this issue of "playing the same game" has been taken up in philosophy and overused. One thing I would want to say is that in Wittgenstein's own use of it, often what he's calling "the same game" or "a different game" is spoken of with a view to the particular philosophical problem he has in mind. So why should we say—or why should he say, as he does in some lectures—that when you're talking about, "I remember X," this is one game if we're talking about, say, "I remember getting off the train at the station this morning" (where other people can bear you out, and so on), and it's another if you're saying, "I remember thinking of X just before I did so and so." That's a different game because there's no interpersonal, intersubjective complication there.

Why call it a "different game"? Because he's talking with people who think that memory is some one thing. That there's a sort of essence of memory. And

within the context of thinking of memory as a particular mental process that you're trying to focus on, it might be useful to say "this is one game, this another." In a different context, why not just speak about the ways we speak about memory as a game?

To get back to the issue of "are we talking the same game, how close do we have to be," I think many of our disagreements involve complex disagreements in the ways in which we apply words. I don't think that we're going to get very far by trying to say that we're not playing the same game and so we're not genuinely disagreeing.

HRP: We're forcing an end to the argument prematurely, so to speak.

Diamond: Yes. There's a discussion that has been going on involving Hilary Putnam and a couple of papers this past summer, one of mine, one of Steve Gerard's, on issues that Putnam has raised partly in response to Dick Rorty.

You raised the question about when it is that people can disagree with each other if they're playing "different games." The issue we were involved with is the question of when can we say that people are agreeing with each other if "they're playing different games." The example that Putnam inherited from Rorty—or, rather, it's Putnam's example, but it's in response to a Rorty example where somebody utters in the 10th century the Latin sentence that later on Newton uses in stating one of the laws of motion. According to Rorty we can say he uttered a true sentence, but it would better—that's to say we would be pragmatically in better shape—if we were to follow what he takes to be the Heideggerian view that we're not going to regard the sentence as either true or false if it's really just a sentence that has no role whatsoever within the context of the people who utter it.

So there's this 10th century sentence: it's identical with the 17th century sentence, but to call it true is simply to pay ourselves a queer kind of compliment. That's the Rorty line. Putnam's example is to suppose that in the 17th century some bones are dug up and someone there speculates "these bones, I wonder if they're possibly millions of years old." Now we know that these bones are millions of years old—we, now. Can we say that he was right without it being merely that we are again, as it were, paying ourselves this compliment?

What we don't want, if we're Putnam, is to say that what makes this an agreement, what makes it correct to say, "yes, he got it right" is that the person is in relation to some Platonic entity, namely a proposition thought of as something that is timeless and independent of our existence altogether. He doesn't want to go down that route. But why should we not just take him to be saying something that connects up with what we are saying? In the sense that what he is saying, as a guess, is something that we now know to be correct. So that there's a use of a "what" clause—what he said, we now know to be correct. Without sort of reifying that into propositionality up in Platonic heaven.

So there you have the converse question of how close we have to be to disagree; and here we have the case of how close do we have to be to agree. This is connected up, for Putnam, with questions like this: suppose that in the 17th century the way in which people tell something is water is quite different from the way in which a chemist today would; that does not mean that we cannot take the word water, as they ordinarily use it, to be saying things that we can understand, that

what they say is incommensurate with what we say. And I think the issues there of relationship across linguistic activities, across all these different language games—well, why not say that language games are different in many respects that we could list? I mean, they do do things that we don't do, they do have different criteria from ours. OK, fine, but this doesn't mean we can't agree just as the difference in criteria doesn't mean that there isn't something we can well describe as disagreement.

Wittgenstein isn't suggesting there that there's some limit to what we might do with words. What he is suggesting there is that we often take ourselves to be having intentions of doing something in language which are not thought through and which are self-defeating.

This has been a very long-winded account! But I do want to say that agreement and disagreement are something we see and we don't have to postulate some kind of logical underpinnings in terms of language games or something else—propositions in Platonic heaven—to make sense of our relationship to others as agreement or disagreement.

HRP: In that same vein, I think about the exam-

ple you take of Orwell, being unable to shoot a fascist running across the line of fire holding up his pants. You imagine his lieutenant saying, nonsense, just shoot him, he's a fascist. There you understand they're disagreeing without even getting to the question of, say, what propositions the lieutenant and Orwell hold in common.

Diamond: Peter Winch has a long and interesting discussion of an issue that is like this. Orwell has an essay where he's immensely critical of Gandhi—it begins with the wonderful sentence, "saints should be presumed guilty until proved innocent." Anyway, Orwell and Gandhi obviously, in many ways, think quite differently from each other. Their thoughts about social and political issues run in very different directions. What Winch wants to suggest is that you can't say because they're playing different language games there isn't a genuine conflict of view. You can't, as it were, set up boundaries in the kind of ways we try to do in philosophy.

HRP: To take up a different subject for the moment, your discussion of the *Tractatus*, and the "mythologizing" that goes on there: it seems as if one could make the case that, where Wittgenstein, in the *Investigations*, does suggest that words have a "home," a home from which they may be displaced, we might take this idea to be a new "myth"? That, again, we are placing limits on what language might be, might look like?

Diamond: Ah, well there you have another dangerous, complex word that crept in there: limit. Although, obviously, there is the notion of the limits of language in the *Tractatus*, there is also the very serious question of what, in particular, is going on

with that notion. Because Wittgenstein isn't suggesting there that there's some limit to what we might do with words. What he is suggesting there is that we often take ourselves to be having intentions of doing something in language that is not thought through and that is self-defeating in a certain kind of way, such that pushing further on those intentions will lead us ultimately to see that we didn't want to say anything at all, to withdraw, to move backwards from that route.

In a sense the language itself is not limited in that, if there's something that you want to say, then you can say it. This is why I think that "what you can't speak of, you have to be silent about" reduces to "what you can't say, you can't say." And it's not that there's some content, there's the "what" that you can't say and you can't say that. I think ultimately that it's just, if you find out you're not saying anything, then you're not saying anything. There's not a genuine, peculiar kind of content that you cannot express. There is the notion of the limit as you get it in other thinkers—for example, in Russell—where you do have a notion of "what's out there," and we just can't get there; we are, in some sense, "back behind something." And I don't think that's the picture of the limits of language that you're getting in the *Tractatus*.

On the other hand, it is equally true that there are many uses of language that he is not considering as, in a sense, interesting—say, for example, the use of language in poetry. Obviously he himself is a reader of poetry, but he's saying nothing at all about those uses. And, in a sense, he's leaving them alone. There's a letter he wrote to the person he hoped would publish his book, and Wittgenstein writes there that the part of the book he didn't write was the most important. So there he isn't writing about many other uses of words that don't count, it's true, don't count as language in the sense in which the *Tractatus* takes language.

I want to go back and look at the original notion of mythology as it turns up, in Wittgenstein, as a term of criticism for what we invent when we won't look at the kinds of ways we do use words. Here I'm thinking in particular about the kinds of ways in which this shows up in a person like Kripke, in the idea that what we want, in our use of words, is to make certain kinds of connection with meanings that will enable us to have a clear answer to any question. That will give us clear answers to whether some term or other applies to some case, say. For Kripke, if we can't make contact with those things, then we're landed in some kind of skeptical situation: we don't have the fixity of meaning that we thought was necessary to make sense of what we say. What Kripke can't do is look at the kinds of ways in which, for example, to shift to another of his cases, we don't need to have to be making some kind of contact with a length, as it were, conceived as something independent of the footrule, in order to measure something.

You know the Wittgenstein remark where we see the signpost as a piece of wood, we see it as dead when we abstract it from some kind of life. It's as if, from Kripke's point of view, what we need is something that has it in it to indicate a direction. And a piece of wood does not have that, as we see it; it doesn't have it in it. Therefore, Kripke isn't looking at the fact that people respond, within this activity, to certain kinds of pieces of wood that are placed in some activity and that are used in certain ways. What he's laying down is that, in order for us genuinely to have a bit of information about where to go, we have to have a direction indicator—and a piece of wood cannot be that. Again, a piece of wood can only be, for

us, a measure of a foot because it has a certain length—namely a foot—and so it is, for us, a sample of something that is independent of it.

There is, as it were, “the length one foot”, which is what we really need when making a measurement. We need to make contact with that length—the comparison with this particular dead piece of wood won’t do. So Kripke isn’t interested in the fact that we have games in which we make comparisons with pieces of wood, he isn’t interested in how that game goes; what he is doing is saying that in order to measure we have to make connections with something that has it in it to tell us how long things are. In order to mean something, we must make contact with some meaning, which will tell us whether we’re applying the word correctly or not. So in all these cases, what he’s doing is laying down what we need in order to genuinely make sense of our activities rather than being able to turn his attention to the “home” of the words—to use this notion of home—to turn his attention to the notion of the everyday. So if you want to call this a kind of displacement—I’m not sure what’s getting displaced, the words or the man—it’s as if he got, somehow out of connections with his own activities, his own life.

HRP: I’d like to return to the notion of the riddle in philosophy for a moment, and to the example you take in an essay where Orwell cannot shoot the fascist—you can turn that into a riddle, it might go “when is a fascist not a fascist?” How far can one go here in making any question that seems philosophical into a riddle?

Diamond: I think that’s interesting. One of the things that Wittgenstein does is to say at one point that what he’s doing as a philosopher is trying to let you see certain things together and see certain things as distant. He’s sort of changing the ways in which you see things. It’s reported in Moore’s notes of the 1933 lectures when he’s talking about ethics and aesthetics. There, he notes that, in an aesthetic argument, one is putting things “here, rather than there,” one is moving things: you are looking at it this way, let me invite you to look at it that way. And that’s very close to your case, look at him as a fascist, look at him as a man. The way of seeing this man as a fascist, as enemy, is connected up with certain kinds of ways in which one does respond, and seeing this person as a fellow human being is then seeing the situation in a totally different way. We’re reorganizing one’s perception of the situation here, where one’s perception connects up with the ways in which one understands which ways are right and appropriate responses.

Of course, there may be many notions we may use of shifts in our understanding of a situation, shifts in our understanding of, even, how we use language in a situation—riddle might be very good for some of those, but let’s not necessarily group them all together.

HRP: What are you currently working on? What’s occupying your mind right now?

Diamond: Well, there’s what I’d like to get back to, and then there’s what I’m in the position of having to work on at the moment. I mentioned a paper that I had to write for a conference on Wittgenstein and religious belief, and so that’s something that’s not quite finished, but that’s not something that I myself would have chosen.

I’m supposed to be giving a paper for the APA in December [1999] and I

must very soon decide what I want to do about that. One of the things I'd really like is to follow up on a notion of unfolding truth. Let me talk a little bit about that.

Frege has arguments against trying to give any kind of definition of what truth consists in. He says at one point that the concept of truth is unfolded by the laws of logic, and he says similar things later on. So there is this idea that we understand what truth is when we understand the normative structures of the thinking that is tied to truth. Now, that notion of unfolding truth is very, very interesting. You reject the idea of a theory of truth, of a correspondence theory, of a coherence theory, of a redundancy theory. (Although there are elements of Frege that have been developed and led to the redundancy theory, I don't think that's really what you should ascribe to him.) Instead, you have this idea of unfolding truth by laying out what it is to be involved in thinking directed at truth, what are the norms of this activity.

HRP: What you're doing when you determine the truth of something.

Diamond: Right—what do you do when you give justification for your statements. That's subject to—if you're giving justifications—the laws of logic. And, in that way, if you are justifying what you say, what's internal to that is that you are seeking to establish a truth. So what it is to show that something is true is tied to what truth is, and you make clear what truth is, therefore, by showing the norms that we recognize when we try to establish truth.

I think that Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus* rejects the notion that you have laws of logic which play the role they do for Frege. For Wittgenstein, you can use them but they don't have the

same status that they have for Frege. The propositions themselves are the only justification you need. So unfolding truth, so far as it has any kind of place as an idea that you can see as present in the *Tractatus*, would be unfolding what's involved in propositions and their relations to each other. If you can do that—which the *Tractatus*, in some sense, does—then you have “unfolded the concept of truth.” So you have a transformation of the notion of unfolding truth. That naturally leads to the question, what would it be to “unfold truth” from the point of view of Wittgenstein's later philosophy?

So that's the question I would like to deal with, but it seems to me—it's not exactly a totally new question—that Peter Winch has said some things which lead into grave difficulties. Namely, if you start saying that you unfold truth by looking at the ways in which you establish what is true in various language games you lose any sense, it seems to me, of why we should make any connections among

Truth interests me a great deal because . . . it turns up within contemporary theory of meaning where it often is totally abstracted from the kinds of circumstances in which it has moral significance.

these sorts of activities, why we should think of truth as in any way, “one thing.” And also I think you lose sight of, or can lose sight of, what might be involved in the Dummett idea of “that in virtue of which some proposition is true.” This whole issue: if you’re not putting forth a correspondence theory, you’re not putting forth a Platonic understanding of a proposition, what kind of understanding of truth *do* you have?

Well, Winch pulls you back to the circumstances of the game in which you make the original assertion. But that seems to me again to be very peculiar because, to get back to the kinds of thing we were saying earlier, the circumstances in which the fundamentalists say that this animal came into existence may be that they read it in the Bible, let’s say (to be fairly crude about it). The circumstances in which someone else says the animal, or the species of animal, came into existence, might be those he sees as those of modern biology. Now the fact that these two people have different circumstances in which they make their assertions does not mean that they are making statements that do not, in some sense or other, clash.

This is not a new question. It is, in a sense, a question that’s been exercising Hilary Putnam, in another sense exercising John McDowell, and so it’s a question I want to look at in connection with the notion of unfolding truth. Whether I can do that for this December conference I don’t know. So that’s one thing I’d like to do more with.

Truth interests me a great deal because it is, on the one hand, a moral notion, and I’ve written about it, not in *Realistic Spirit* but elsewhere, as a moral notion. Truth interests me as a notion as it turns up within contemporary theory of meaning where it often is totally abstracted from the kinds of circumstances in which it has moral significance. So what I would like, in a sense, is to be able to bring those strands together. I’ve done stuff on truth from the two different sides, and I would like to be able in some way or other to do more to bring those together. So that’s one thing.

I’m interested also in the idea that there’s this sentence—let’s call this a riddle—“truth is one.” What are you going to do with that sentence? Is it something you just want to drop? In a world of language games, does it just drop out of sight? Does it have any significance? Can I make any sense of it?

I have an essay I clipped some time ago by someone—I’m not sure what he’s doing now—Peter Marin, who was writing about a criticism that had been published of an associate of Martin Luther King, Abercrombie, who had written about King’s sex life. And Abercrombie has been criticized because, people have said, he was tarnishing a saint or, at least, the image of a saint, and this shouldn’t be done. Marin was arguing that this was a wrong way to think, and that in fact it deepened our picture of King to see him as a human being who was like everybody else in having things that were not so wonderful about him. That it was very important to see that he could be a great man and that he was a human being, that this was very important. And he wanted to connect this at the end of this essay with the notion of truth being one. That in some sense we shouldn’t shy away from seeing the whole truth of somebody.

Anyway, there’s a moral understanding there of the notion of truth “as one,” and there’s another notion—a very, very important logical notion—that all

truths, one thinks, are compatible with each other. And again the language game picture seems to make that a puzzle. Why should something said in one language game, why should that—or does it—have any relationship to what is said in other language games? Why shouldn't something count as assertible in one game, and something else assertible in another language game? What can be the relationships between them? So, again, we seem to lose this notion of, let's put a heavy philosophical word here, 'objective reality'—the reason all truths are compatible is because of reality.

There are all these notions that Platonists emphasize and mythologize in a certain way; what is left of them for us? As it were, once the Platonistic misunderstandings are something we can see as misunderstandings, what can we do with notions of truth as one—or similar notions. I like Wittgenstein's remarks that he can't say anything "truer than he is" (though I think there's a difficulty in understanding that in translation; I don't think the distinction between true and truthful goes through in German in the way it does for us). But I think that his own understanding of what it meant to be committed to truth and the way in which he admired Frege's commitment to truth—well these are moral issues—how are they connected with the ways in which we see the logical issue? It's that range of topics that connects up, as you said, with notions of agreement and disagreement across language games.

I'd like to do more with ethics. As it happens, fairly recently, I've been asked to do this or that and it's been reasonably interesting but it's all been either about Wittgenstein or about early analytic or, in some ways, about both. The kinds of things I've found myself committed to in the last two years have not involved direct work on ethical issues. So I would like to get back to some of that. ∅