

*Life,
World
&
Meaning*

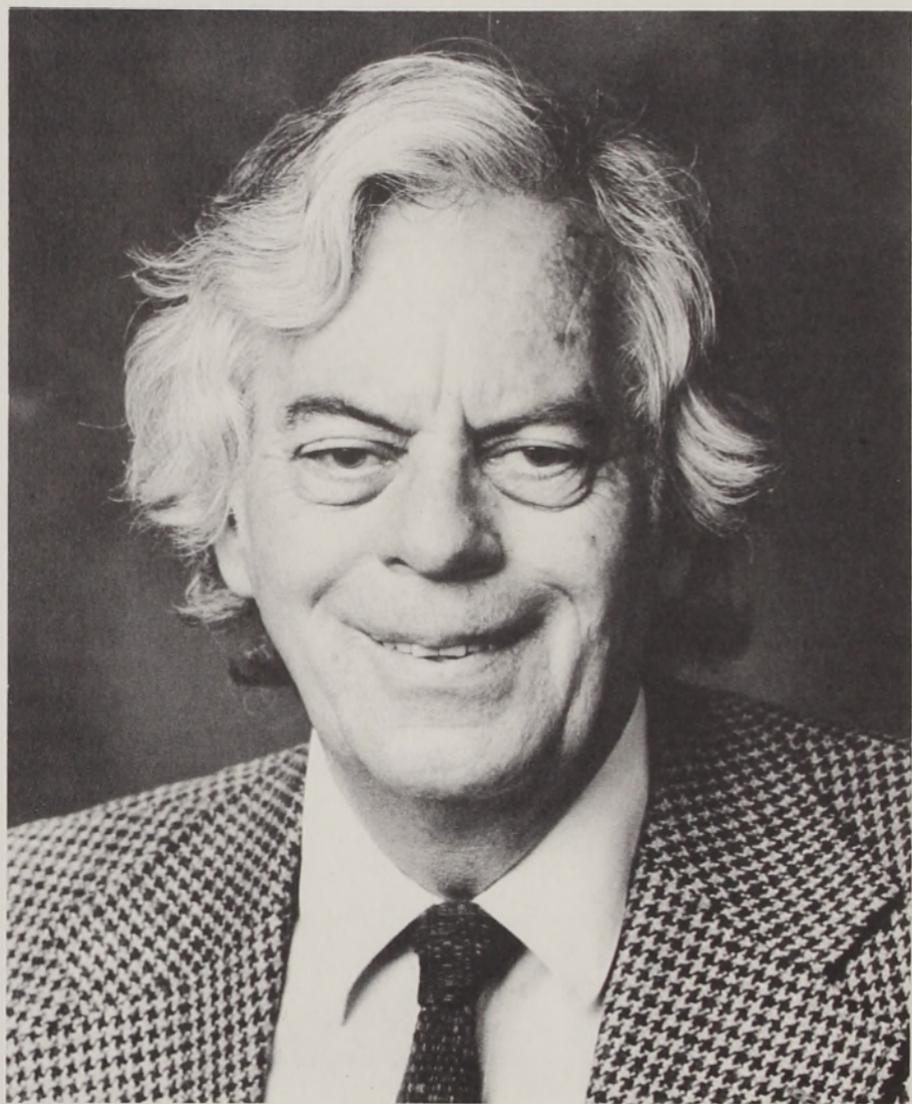


*Essays in Honour of
Professor Michael Macnamara*

A P J ROUX
Editor

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UNISA





Professor Michael Macnamara

LIFE, WORLD AND MEANING

Essays in Honour of
Professor Michael Macnamara

Editor

A P J ROUX

Department of Philosophy, University of South Africa

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Preface

In 1989 Professor Michael Macnamara completed 25 years in the service of the University of South Africa. At the end of that year he retired as Professor of Philosophy and as Head of the Philosophy Department. On 5 January 1990 he turned 65. It is against this background that his colleagues and friends honour him in this publication. Much was said in his honour when he left Unisa, but the contributors to this volume, as representatives of this wide circle, are concerned to pay him a more lasting tribute, one that will dovetail specifically with his interests and achievements as an academic and be available to an extended audience.

Professor Macnamara's most marked philosophical interests over the past twenty years have been world views and existential meaning. He was one of the first analytical philosophers to tackle these issues, by trying to plot the 'logical geography' of 'world views' and 'the meaning of life'. The work he did, and is still doing in these fields, warrants more attention. In this publication, therefore, we have made it our first aim to bring together a number of articles which address various aspects of existential meaning. We hope this will emphasize the significance of his contribution and stimulate further work in this important field.

However, one of the most striking characteristics of Michael Macnamara, as shown by his curriculum vitae at the end of this volume, is the wide span of his interests, both in philosophy and in other fields. In the extra-philosophical realm, these range from science and art to social issues, and in philosophy, apart from his concern with world pictures and existential meaning, from the standard disciplines of epistemology and metaphysics to applied forms such as philosophy of literature and philosophy of time. The extra-philosophical is represented by Professor Dreyer's contribution on 'Life and society at ancient Memphis according to the Saqqâra texts', and Professor Skawran's contribution on 'The cultural boycott: an act of censorship or a tool of liberation?'. By including papers touching on some of the other areas in philosophy, such as epistemology, philosophical logic, philosophy of literature and political philosophy, we hope to highlight the breadth of his philosophical concerns, and to hint at the way in which philosophy, or rather philosophizing, is an essential part of the man, Michael Macnamara.

Interdisciplinary co-operation, and in particular the role that philosophy has to play in this regard, was very important to him. He succeeded in involving a variety of researchers with no philosophical training in the philosophical debates pertaining to their own disciplines, persuading them to co-operate in finding and exploring these more general problems. Some of these 'encounters' led to joint publications, which are reflected in his curriculum vitae. In the university he made a point of discussing the importance of philosophical studies for other disciplines such as mathematics, physics, theory of literature, computer science and linguistics with senior colleagues. This has been one of his most important contributions to academic life. To highlight this facet of his academic activities an essay which is co-authored by him and Professor Jeanette Ferreira-Ross, of the Department of English, 'Drama and the notion of scheme-role meaning', is included in this publication.

This joint effort draws attention to and actually exemplifies yet another of his important contributions. Research is usually regarded as an individual effort, and in philosophy in particular, there is a widely held view that joint or team research is not possible. Michael Macnamara does not agree. A few years ago he began identifying and working on joint projects with colleagues and friends. In this way he succeeded not only in increasing his department's research output but also in establishing a definite research culture in the department and in popularizing a certain style of research. In this way he also helped young colleagues to find their feet in research, and to start publishing. Although his personality has had much to do with his success in this regard, working on joint projects, especially on those of an interdisciplinary nature, can now be taken as having been institutionalized in Unisa.

Michael Macnamara's sensitivity to thinking things through with others can also be seen in the Department of Philosophy's lively programme of guest lecturers from overseas. Through his efforts the department has been visited by world-renowned philosophers over the last eight years. Provisional arrangements have also already been made for the immediate future. The first of the department's visitors on Professor Macnamara's initiative, Brian Farrell, has contributed to this volume. In his article his own interest in psychology is expanded so as to link it with the problem of existential meaning.

Not all areas in which Professor Macnamara took an active part are represented or reflected in the papers collected here. The teaching of philosophy, for example, is not included, although he made a considerable contribution in this field. Perhaps one of his best pieces of writing is a section on atomism in a Unisa study guide. His own books were written specifically for student use. Although he was not directly involved in first-year teaching at Unisa, his views on the general aims of the course are evident in its content. Only about one third of first-year students continue to read philosophy, but even a year of philosophical training can be of value in other fields. It was Professor Macnamara who played an important role in establishing the first-year philosophy curriculum offered by his department as a service course. His involvement in one particular aspect of distance teaching should also be mentioned specifically. He helped to propagate the possibilities of using and of improving the available facilities of what he dubbed 'teleseminars', that is, the use of the conference telephone, a medium which he used with great success.

Under his guidance, the Department of Philosophy last year also moved into the field of community teaching. A series of lectures on 'Six great Western philosophers' was presented under the auspices of the Institute for Continuing Education. This proved so popular with the Pretoria public that the service will be continued and extended.

But Michael Macnamara has made his mark in a much wider context than that of the Philosophy Department. He is a poet of note, with several published volumes to his credit. As chairman of the now defunct Pasquino Society in 1968 and 1970 he played a leading part in the fight against censorship. At Unisa he is well known for his positive and wide-ranging contributions. For years he has been a member of the Management Committee of the Unisa Art Gallery, which has requested him to stay on after his retirement. Thanks to him, an ad hoc committee was appointed to investigate the academic boycott and Unisa's position in this regard. As a result of his initial concern, the university has adopted a policy regarding the disease Aids. He is also known as a critic and as a fighter, especially for the underdog. For example, when the policy of financial recognition for research publications was announced, he realised immediately the problems implied for departments where there are other kinds of 'products', as in the instance of Fine Arts, Music and Literature. He used every opportunity to state and argue the case for creative art in the university.

A change in the conditions of service for temporary staff members and discriminatory inscriptions on the buildings on the new Unisa campus raised his ire.

These are some examples of his interest in and involvement with what goes on in the world and how people can be affected. We are now back where we started: Michael Macnamara's interest in world views and existential meaning. His philosophical activities are not ivory tower concerns. He is involved with live issues as linked to their origins in the life-world, with the explicit aim of trying to come to a better understanding of ourselves, our fellow man and the world.

I know Michael Macnamara's first reaction to this presentation will be: 'Am I worthy of it?' His contributions to his department, his university, to academic life and his community have not been aimed at recognition or honour. They have been made in the true philosophical spirit of reaching a better understanding of our situation and living a better life. Although the final judgement of the value of what he has done and produced is in the hands of time, what has been said above shows that Michael Macnamara made important contributions to Philosophy, to academic life in general and to the institution where he has spent most of his working life. Moreover, as he well knows from his study of existentialism, honouring someone for what he is, or has done, or has accomplished, does not mean putting a full stop behind that life, or fixing the essence of that person: it is to add a new challenge, widening the scope of his freedom and responsibility. Michael Macnamara will now be free *from* ... free from administrative duties, from personnel problems, from meetings, from concern about closing dates and from all the other issues of the academic arena. But life goes on and at all times the unexamined life is not worth living. In other words, he will now be free *to* ... to go on examining, to think, to publish, etc.

With this publication, we are taking leave of a respected colleague and friend. We are thanking him for his co-operation, assistance and many contributions. May the years to come be as fruitful and rewarding as has the last quarter of a century.

Braam Roux
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9 March 1990

1

The meaning of life: a psycho-logical exploration

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I

Consider the following conversations between an adolescent, Bob, and his father:

(a) Bob: 'Why are all those birds settling on that field?'

Father: 'Looking for the grain left over from the harvest, I think.'

(b) B: 'Why are those people over there making all that noise?'

F: 'They are shouting for their teams – they are rugby supporters.'

(c) B: 'Why are we living here in this ugly city, and not in the much nicer countryside?'

F: 'It's much more convenient for my work. That's why.'

(d) B: 'Why are we living at all?'

F: 'Sorry, I don't follow. What are you talking about?'

The 'why ...?' questions in (b) and (c) presuppose that we humans can and do have purposes in mind by reference to which our conduct can be explained. This is the home use in this sort of context of the expression 'why are ...?'. In question (d), the expression is not being employed in its home use. We have no purpose in mind by reference to

which our existence can be explained. Naturally, therefore, the father is puzzled by the question, and, by implication, asks Bob to explain how he is using the expression.

The parent might go on to try to help him. 'Do you mean: "How did human life arrive on the planet?"' If Bob accepts this reading of this question then his use of 'why are' in (d) serves to ask for a scientific explanation. This is a very difficult question to answer, but it is not conceptually baffling. What, however, if Bob rejects this reading of (d) and says:

No, when I ask: 'Why are we living at all?', I want to know why the material was there out of which we humans developed. Please don't tell me that the material was produced by the Big Bang a very long time ago. For this presupposes that very dense material was in existence when the Bang happened. What I am really asking is: 'Why is there material at all?'

I can put it differently, father. When you explain to me that, and how, we humans developed out of pre-existing inorganic matter, you are explaining the fact of human existence by showing how it developed out of the fact of pre-existing inorganic matter. But you are only explaining how, roughly speaking, one fact produces another, and why, therefore, the latter exists. You do *not* explain why there is fact at all. Why is that here? And since we humans are part of fact itself, why are we here?

To this response from Bob, the father can reply on the same lines as before:

We humans have no purpose in mind by reference to which we can explain our being here. The most we can do is, for example, to explain why our family is living in the town rather than in the country. Hence, to ask why we humans are here at all is to take the words 'why are', and connected expressions, out of their home contexts, and to frame a question to which no sense has been given. You have asked the 'why' question once too often. The same applies if we ask for an explanation, not of a particular fact or facts, but of fact itself. For now we take the expression 'an explanation' out of its home context and fail to give it a sense. So to look for the meaning of life along this road is a senseless endeavour.

Should Bob accept this way of dealing with his question? It is, of course, a very well-known way. One description of it amounts to saying that the meaning of life can logically only be found within the world; it cannot be found outside of it. Another description is that it amounts to pointing out what happens in this context when we do depart from the literal use of language. All I have done is to explore a little of what is involved in dealing in a literal way with Bob's difficulty. This exploration can be tedious, but it does have the merit of exhibiting the nature of the force of the literal way. The force resides in the fact that this way makes us face the reality with which our concepts apparently confront us. Such facing can be, and often is, a psychologically upsetting business, just as it is quite often upsetting to be obliged to face the reality of our own personal conflicts and difficulties. If we now claim that the father's replies do really confront the adolescent with conceptual reality, then it seems to follow that we are also claiming he should accept that his father's replies are telling him the truth. His question has no sense, and hence it is silly to ask it.

II

But is this the true or correct answer? We all know that the literal answer from the father runs into an objection which is widely accepted. We can put this objection as follows: The father's replies do *not* present the adolescent with conceptual reality; the cosmos and our life in it have a purpose and meaning, even though we may not know with confidence at present what it is. For we have good and sufficient reason to believe that there exists a supernatural person, God, who transcends the cosmos and ourselves; and it is by reference to His purposes that we humans can, and do, give our life a meaning. Thus, for example, Archbishop Tutu said (on BBC 2, at the time of the Lambeth Conference) that he would regard life as a very 'bad joke' if we did not have an afterlife in which God's purposes could be revealed to us. By this remark, the Archbishop is claiming that, since life without God and an afterlife would be a bad joke, we have a good and sufficient reason to believe in both.

What then should Bob do at this point? Which answer should he choose, the literal or the theistic? Most of us, and especially no doubt the professional philosophers in the West — who are committed to

the pursuit of truth with a very large 'T' — will be much inclined to say: 'Bob should choose the right or correct answer, the one that embodies the truth. That is, the one which does present us with conceptual reality.' But is this good advice? It presupposes that it is sensible to try to find the right or correct or true answer. But is it? Is it sensible to claim that there is a true answer to Bob's query?

III

Let us approach these doubts indirectly by looking again at the literal answer. What is it about this answer that leaves Bob, or the ordinary person, very uneasy? I suspect that he remains uneasy because it still leaves him compulsively wanting to take the relevant words and expressions out of their home context, and to ask the 'why are' questions once too often. What are the sources of this compulsion?

An important one is that mentioned by Tutu. If our life has no meaning in the sense that there is no purpose behind it that humans can make sense of, then it is a bad joke — it is a bitter, empty affair in which nature has just made fools of us. But we resist regarding life as a bad joke, and so we are inclined to say that life *does* have some transcendent purpose which makes it worthwhile. Very well, but note that this inclination is the outcome, in part, of Tutu's own use of 'bad joke'. The context in which we learn and use this expression is one where, for example, someone, X, plays a joke on Y in which the humour is bitter, and which makes Y feel something of a fool. In his argument Tutu is comparing the natural order to X. But the natural order is not a person and can play no jokes, bad or otherwise. Hence he is covertly using the expression 'bad joke' outside its home context, and without explaining how he is using it in the new context he has given it. This covertly extended use then allows, and encourages, us to say that life has an overall meaning. When, however, we take in this feature of Tutu's verbal behaviour, our compulsions are likely to be weakened or even inhibited. For we are now encouraged to say that there is no sense in speaking about the purpose *of* life, and this in turn encourages us to notice and affirm that there is still a great deal of purpose left *in* life — for example, in the efforts by Tutu and many others to end apartheid and racial domination by whites in South Africa.

Consider another source. If there is no overall further purpose to life, why do we maintain it? For *mere* living and *mere* existence is of no value, and we would then have no reason for not committing universal suicide, as we would have nothing to live for. But this is absurd. No doubt, there are occasions when some of us feel like agreeing that we dislike the human race with its ugly face. However, we do all believe that human life should be maintained and hence it must have some overall purpose and meaning.

This argument works by inducing us to assimilate life with no overall purpose to a state of mere living, and to overlook that a life with no overall purpose is quite compatible with the people in it living lives which are full of significance and purpose. This way of talking helps to give rise to the compulsion to doubt the value of life as such, and hence to extend our language so as to allow us to affirm some transcendent purpose. Of course, there is a moral question half buried in this argument. 'Might it not be right to exterminate ourselves and leave the planet to be enjoyed by the animals, which will preserve the earth better than we are doing?' But we do not need to resort to transcendent purposes to deal with this moral question. It is also worth noting that the doubt expressed in this argument about the value of living is very apt to be a pseudo-doubt, like our doubt about the sun rising tomorrow morning. For we do not *really* doubt the value of living and seriously contemplate suicide. If we discover that Bob is seriously contemplating suicide we would, and should, stop at once giving him our philosophical treatment, and hand him over to our psychiatric and psychotherapeutic colleagues.

I have now worked sketchily through two sources of our compulsion to answer the question about the meaning of life by using key words and expressions outside their home contexts. There are, however, an indefinite array of such sources. If Bob's father does not work through some of these other sources, or does not teach and encourage Bob to do so for himself, then Bob will be left exposed to the threat to his peace of mind which arises from these other sources. Any 'philosophical satisfaction' which he may have achieved so far will not be very secure. On the other hand, if the parent and he do work through some further sources of his compulsion — especially those he finds the more disturbing — he will then be in a better position to appreciate what it is that makes the question about the meaning of life both so moving

and seemingly important, and yet also one without sense. The philosophical satisfaction he obtains from his literal discourse will be more secure.

IV

But is this view of the matter correct? Has the question really no sense? Say Bob accepts this way of reasoning. Let us then contrast Bob with the adolescent Koos. Whereas Bob has plainly no particular wish to go beyond a literal way of talking, let us suppose that Koos has. He has a wish to believe in God, by reference to whom the purpose of life can be settled. He is predisposed, therefore, to answer the question by adopting a theistic way of talking about it. This way at once confronts Koos with the challenging obstacle of having to explain to himself, and to others, the extended use of the words and expressions he employs in his answer. Thus, since the meaning of life is to be explained by reference to the purpose of a supernatural person, God, he has to explain this extended use of the word 'person'. How, for instance, can a disembodied person, such as God, be identified? When Moses or Mohammed heard the voice of God, how did they know that they were not hearing the voice of the Devil, or merely suffering from auditory hallucinations like many schizophrenic patients? There are two ways at least in which Koos can meet this challenge. He can try to give to the words and expressions he employs (for example, 'person') an extended use which will avoid incoherence, and yet will do the work for him which he requires. Or Koos can try to lessen the impact of the challenge by dissociating it from the rest of his way of talking. For example, by maintaining that to try to elucidate in literal terms a sense in which God is a person is quite impossible, since this attempt overlooks that God is a mystery, which we, His creatures, cannot penetrate. If Koos's wish to believe in God is strong, he may be ready to try to meet these threats to his conceptual security, which are presented by his extended theistic discourse. The conceptual equilibrium he achieves in this way may be more satisfying to him than any which literal discourse can provide.

V

Which answer is correct, Bob's or Koos's? How are we to settle this question? Presumably, if Bob's answer (say) is correct, and does

present us with conceptual reality, then the conceptual equilibrium at which Bob arrives is likely to be more secure, or stable, than Koos's. But how are we to determine whether Bob's condition is more stable than Koos's? But even if it were more stable, we cannot affirm the consequent here in order to infer that Bob's answer is correct. It looks very much as if we cannot tell which answer presents us with conceptual reality. Well, is there any way of dealing with this question which is strong enough to produce a rationally grounded consensus? Again, it looks as if there is no such way. If Bob and Koos wish to take the matter further, then it is clear that they must direct their attention to these questions.

But Bob (or Koos) will probably be very inclined to believe that his own answer is correct, or on the right lines, or getting near the truth, and so on. This is quite understandable. For the answer he arrives at (over the meaning of life) is the one which resolves his conceptual conflict in a way which is psychologically most satisfying to him. This fact may then tempt him to give to his personal resolution the extra security that comes from applying to it the honorific and reinforcing words 'true', 'right', and so on. But of course to do this is to plunge him at once into further difficulties. Can he speak of his own answer as true or correct, and so on, if he and Koos are in principle unable to arrive at a rational consensus? This doubt, in turn, suggests that for Bob (or Koos) to claim that he really has the truth, or the correct answer, and the like, is to reveal that he is in the grip of yet another compulsion — one which is psychologically unfortunate, as it leads to further troubles, and which requires to be explored and brought under control.

Let me stand back and ask: does Bob (or Koos) now still have the same urge to *press* the original question about the meaning of life? I hope not. I hope that an exploration on these lines can do something to help him to master the relevant concepts, and thereby do a little to bring his compulsion under control. But, of course, an adequate treatment of this matter would take us far away into other parts of the large and tangled network of our conceptual difficulties — a network which both afflicts and enriches our lives.

As for my own remarks, I do not now have to throw away a ladder of nonsense or surmount pointless discourse. For my remarks amount

merely to a description of a certain cluster of conceptual conflicts, somewhat analogous to a description in psychiatry of the nature and pathology of (say) obsessional difficulties. Like any such description, it can be supported or upset or modified by further empirical enquiry.

2

The relevance of philosophy in the quest for the meaning of life

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Die Philosophie muss, um dem Menschengeschlecht zu helfen, den gefallenen und schwachen Menschen aufrichten und leiten, nicht seiner Natur Gewalt antun noch ihn in seiner Verderbnis verlassen (Giovanni Bathista Vico).

In this quotation Vico expresses the view that it is the task of philosophy to assist the human race in difficult times and not to do violence to human nature. Vico's view, which is representative of a philosophical approach, is one among many and cannot be taken for granted. The view that philosophy has on one hand to help the human race, and in doing so to assist and guide the weak and the ruined and, on the other, not to do violence to human nature or leave men to their fate, has to be tested.

If we ask how philosophy is to avoid doing violence to human nature or is to guide human fate we are presupposing that we know what human nature is and that human fate has to be understood with

reference to the weak, the ruined and the doomed. For Vico philosophical assistance ('helfen') consists in consolation or comfort ('aufrichten') and guidance ('leiten').

CONSOLATION, COMFORT AND GUIDANCE

These concepts are universals and thus polymorphous in nature; they can have different manifestations. A request to different persons to console, comfort or guide someone may be 'understood', but understood differently depending on whether 'different persons' relate to homogeneous or heterogeneous groupings. Priests, medical doctors, psychologists or relatives may comply differently with such a request.

The question now arises as to what a philosopher would do. This question cannot be decided without reference to a view on what philosophy is and how it can assist in the sense of consoling, comforting and guiding. This question will be set aside until the concept 'human situation' has been dealt with.

THE WEAK, THE RUINED, AND THE DOOMED

These terms refer to and interpret situations of human suffering. Such situations give rise to questions about the meaning of life since people want to make sense of their own situations. Although people may wonder about the meaning of life in circumstances where they are strong and successful, it is especially the case with reference to situations of suffering.

One can be weak, ruined or doomed in several ways, which means that these words can have different meanings in different situations of human existence. Someone who hears that he is a terminal patient may feel doomed or ruined in a different way from one who is declared insolvent, whose marriage has broken up or who has lost a loved one. Not only are the facts in these cases different, but the way in which people discuss their fate may also differ. We can, however, expect to find the feeling that their lives have no purpose, which leads to the question of why they exist at all. To make sense of this question it must be remembered that the world of the terminal patient is the world of disease; the world of the insolvent person is that of economic laws which have been created by the community in which he lives; a broken marriage concerns the world of relations between people and

death means a world without someone and everything that involves. The question 'Why do I exist?' is thus related to the question 'Why *this* world?' — irrespective of whether 'world' refers to laws of nature or human creations.

These questions may be answered differently (by the theologian, psychologist, etc.), as we have seen, and the answers may be proclaimed as credos or argued for. Arguments are valid or invalid and the premisses of arguments acceptable or unacceptable. A theologian may either proclaim certain beliefs about the relation between God and man in dealing with suffering, or argue about it. When a theologian tests his viewpoints for acceptability or his arguments for validity, he transcends the boundaries of theology. Such questions are not asked *within* theology, but *about* theology, *about* the claims made by theologians.

The same applies in the case of other types of answers that can be given, for example by psychologists, psychiatrists, medical doctors or economists: there are questions asked *within* a particular field and there are questions that can be asked *about* the claims made within the disciplines with a bearing on these fields.

Questions about the validity of arguments and the acceptability of premisses are questions about claims made in disciplines and transcend these disciplines.

The difference between questions within disciplines and questions about disciplines can be clarified with reference to examples of different types of human suffering. I shall deal with one example and analyse it with respect to different approaches.

THE TERMINAL PATIENT

In *Cancer ward* by Alexander Solzhenitsyn a senior doctor discovers that she has cancer:

Dontsova had never imagined that something she knew inside and out, so thoroughly, could change to the point where it became entirely new and unfamiliar. For thirty years she had been dealing with other people's illnesses, and for a good twenty she sat in front of the X-ray screen. She had read the screen, read the film, read the distorted, imploring eyes of her patients. She had compared

what she saw with books and analyses, had written articles and argued with colleagues and patients. During this time what she had worked out empirically for herself, had become more and more indisputable, while in her mind medical theory grew increasingly coherent ...

Until now all human bodies had been built identically, as described in the standard anatomical atlas. The physiology of the vital processes and the physiology of sensations were uniform as well. Everything that was normal or deviated from the normal, was explained in logical terms by authoritative manuals.

Then suddenly, within a few days, her own body had fallen out of this great, orderly system. It had struck the hard earth and was now like a helpless sack crammed with organs — organs which might at any moment be seized with pain and cry out.

Within a few days everything had been turned inside out. Her body was, as before, composed of parts she knew well but the whole was unknown and frightening.

It is clear that cancer is viewed by the medical doctor in one way and experienced by the patient in another. The quotation starts with the medical view: reading the screen, the film and the distorted imploring eyes of patients, reading books and articles and arguing with colleagues and patients, building up a coherent medical theory which supplies the meaning of the illness. However, in suffering from cancer, the orderly system disappears and the body is experienced as unknown and frightening, 'a helpless sack crammed with organs — organs which may at any moment be seized with pain and cry out'.

With reference to this example I now wish, firstly, to consider three areas in which attempts are made to help people give meaning to life: the natural sciences (the medical doctors), ideology (religion: the priest) and the humanities (psychology: the psychologist), and secondly to consider the role of philosophy in helping people to give meaning to their lives.

THE DOCTOR AND THE MEANING OF LIFE

The two views depicted in the quotation represent two conceptual schemes: one of medical theory and the other of suffering. Medical

theory is concerned with the treatment of diseases for which the study of life in terms of the human body is a necessary condition. It enables the doctor to tell his patient what he is suffering from, what the prognosis is, and what can be done to relieve his suffering. But does the patient's question as to the meaning of life belong to this group? It is clearly not a medical question. Although doctors do not deal with diseases but with sick people with whom they have to co-operate and communicate and with whom they can discuss the meaning of life, these aspects are not covered by medical theory.

In a question as to the meaning of life, 'life' includes more than just the biological life which is studied in medicine. Of course biological life is not completely different from human life, and suffering is not disconnected from biological functions — knowledge of one's bodily functions can even assist in finding an answer to the question 'why do I exist?', but biological knowledge itself is too restricted to supply the final answer. Knowledge of the function of bodily organs can help in finding an answer to the question 'what am I here for?' in terms of the question 'why exactly do I have this body and not another one?' This type of knowledge can explain limitations to performances and assist in caring for the body in order to live the life which one has chosen. But this knowledge can neither determine one's choice nor provide premisses for deducing an answer to the question 'why do I exist?', because such an answer (conclusion) must transcend the possible premisses. Descriptions of bodily functions do not contain clues for any answer to the question posed.

But is knowledge of biological functions not relevant to answering the question 'why do I exist?', in that this question is linked to the question 'who am I?', which includes the body and its functions? To decide on this, we have to consider how we refer to persons in ordinary language. References to Dontsova are originally in terms of her job as a medical doctor and later in terms of suffering. The references to her profession are by means of the jargon of doings (she *dealt* with other people's illnesses, she *read* the film and *compared* what she saw with books and analyses) and references to her suffering are couched in the jargon of happenings (her body as *having fallen* out of this great, orderly system, and *having changed* into a helpless sack of organs). A medical doctor as a professional person is concerned with diseases, and diseases as happenings and not doings. To claim that a person's

body is what a person is or that it is part of a person, is to claim that a happening is a doing or part of it, which is unacceptable.

However, in order for a person to do something, bodily movements are involved, and in order to identify a person, descriptions of his face, height, build and the colour of his skin are most important, if not essential. A person is not imaginable without a body but it does not follow that a person is identifiable with his body. A person is not composed of a number of bodily organs and their functions. Descriptions of a person are, in the majority of cases, descriptions of doings or descriptions that can be related to doings. Persons are alike or different in terms of ways of life or values they adhere to. Bodies of persons can be different or similar for doctors or physiologists since their interest is not strictly in persons but in bodies as such.

The argument from identity may be adduced to disprove the claim that persons can be described and even identified in terms of bodily descriptions only.

Anthony Quinton (1973: 91) remarks as follows about Ayer's view that the criterion of personal identity is a bodily criterion:

A person is composed of those total mental states that contain an organic sensation belonging to one particular human body, itself to be identified in terms of continuity of qualities and spatial position. Ayer drew the conclusion that properly follows from this as from any account of personal identity that involves reference to a particular human body: that the notion of a person's disembodied existence is self-contradictory and, further, that the notion of the association of a personality with different bodies at different times is inconceivable ... Human beings are thus treated as just one variety of concrete objects.

According to this quotation, all mental states of a person belong to one particular body. The same applies to doings: they are doings of persons who engage in bodily activities.

The conclusion which follows if this analysis of happenings and doings is accepted, is that the body is involved in both cases, but in different ways. The point of the analysis is to show that one cannot console, comfort or guide bodily functions or for that matter, happenings, but one can do this to persons.

To say that life has meaning is related to doings and not to happenings, because 'what am I here for?' or 'why do I exist?' cannot be answered in terms of happenings because the answer is not, for example, 'I exist because I must digest my food'. The answer must be in terms of doings, for example 'I exist because I have to or ought to fulfil certain ideals'. For this reason a medical doctor cannot give guidance to his patients about the meaning of their lives without transcending his field.

THE PRIEST AND THE MEANING OF LIFE

It can be argued that a theologian is in a better (or the best) position to give guidance, to console and to comfort the patient in the example above, since he can deal with a terminal patient in terms of religious viewpoints and beliefs. According to these beliefs God exists and we matter to Him. He has a plan for our lives and we must try to find this plan and carry it out. What occurs is part of God's plan and it is impossible for God to do anything unjust to anybody.

This approach is concerned with doings — people are expected to carry out God's plan for them. The question 'why do I exist?' seems appropriate in this context because people can be guided, consoled and comforted by being told what to do or by being helped to find the answer.

However, there are two problems. The first concerns the fact that a person must accept religious beliefs; the second that the reasons for accepting them must be acceptable. Accepting religious beliefs can be based on good reasons, but someone can accept them without being able to supply good reasons; furthermore a person may also refuse to accept such beliefs in spite of good reasons for accepting them.

With reference to the example from *Cancer ward: Dontsova* or people in her position may argue that God is cruel to her, or she may fail to see a divine plan for her, or may refuse to accept God's plan if a priest should explain it to her. There can be different reasons why a person in this situation may refuse to accept religious consolation: she may query the internal consistency of such beliefs (e.g. a God who allows suffering may be regarded as irreconcilable with a God of love and mercy) or she may consider God completely transcendental (and thus irrelevant) to her situation of severe suffering because He can

never be known personally; or God's plan, if somehow spelled out, may not coincide with her plan for her life and thus be unacceptable; or for lack of empirical evidence, the existence of God may be doubted. These considerations neither exclude the possibility that she could have accepted these beliefs when she was a doctor and that all her performances subsequently would have been inspired by them, nor do they exclude the possibility of Dontsova's giving meaning to her life without any religious beliefs being involved.

Dontsova may, however, accept the account of such religious beliefs and God's plan for her and be comforted and consoled in this way. She may start to see suffering in general and her suffering in particular as part of God's plan and an opportunity to resist temptation, and to show that she has the courage and faith to accept her fate and carry on with what is left of her life.

However, whether a person accepts religious beliefs or not, the question whether there are good reasons for accepting them still remains.

The question 'why do I exist?' concerns our lives and not something beyond. We do not have conceptions of matters beyond our experience. God transcends our lives altogether and it is not possible to know what God's plan is. Our notions of justice, goodness and what is meaningful may contradict His. Knowledge of God's view is based on an analogy to our own view, since we can only know things within the field of our experience. Built into man's views on the point and content of God's will and interpreting the revelations in the Bible are our own ideas of what is good, right or meaningful.

As a medical doctor Dontsova's life is meaningful to her, but it loses its meaning when she discovers that she is suffering from cancer. We can come to this conclusion in terms of what is implied by the way she is described: from an enthusiastic doctor she turns into a helpless sack crammed with organs. If life had meaning for her as a doctor because she held certain religious beliefs, then the same religious beliefs cannot hold in the new situation. Say she believed that God had given her the gift of treating and trying to cure cancer and that this was God's plan for her, then this way of making sense of her life would be destroyed by her suffering from cancer; God's plan for her would have been destroyed in this way. This analysis shows God's will as being interpreted from within: Dontsova read the screen, read

the film, compared what she saw with books and analyses, wrote articles and argued with colleagues and patients. These activities of hers were meaningful to her. To say that God had a plan for her in terms of these activities is to interpret God's plan not from without but from within. Talk of the plan of God, then, on this analysis, is parasitic on our human ideals and objectives.

In the changed situation (suffering from cancer), God's plan can be seen as destroyed, not because of a knowledge of God's plan or will from without, but again from within: Dontsova's possible conclusion that God's plan has been destroyed would be based on her having become a helpless sack crammed with organs. In both cases it has been shown that knowledge of or discourse about God pivots on knowledge of or discourse about our own experiences. The two discourses cannot be separated. To accept everything that happens to people as the will of God is to render the will of God inconsistent, if not absurd and unreasonable.

In human life we do not equate what we regard in any situation as right with what is wrong, or what is good with what is bad, although it is sometimes difficult for people to realize the badness or goodness of someone or something, for example to convince some parents of their children's vices or a wife of her husband's unfaithfulness. The trust of some people in others is just unreasonable and absurd. If this trust can be proven not to be absurd it is not logical but psychological, which does not mean that it cannot also be logical (but then it can no longer be called absurd or inconsistent). It is psychological when no reasons can be provided for the trust and logical when attempts are made to back it up in terms of the interpretation of facts. Different persons may identify patterns of behaviour, that is the point of doing something in certain situations, differently. If someone starts singing a song while travelling on a bus full of strangers, it is possible to find different patterns in what is going on — for example, he is trying to impress the girl sitting next to him by showing off; he is trying to shock his fellow passengers; he suffers from an inferiority complex and is trying to show his superiority; he is fulfilling a wager; he is a first-year student and is performing an initiation ceremony; he is ill-mannered. However, not all of these interpretations are true and their truth has to be decided on or argued for with reference to facts about the person. The point is that an accusation that he is behaving, for

example, in an ill-mannered fashion can be backed up or criticized by interpreting his behaviour in different ways. Backing up and criticizing claims are of course different kinds of performance.

If we apply the notions of substantiating and refuting claims to religious beliefs, we find the following defences for God's will as always being good: God is a perfect being who can never make mistakes and who governs our lives according to His plan; He cares for the well-being of man and whatever befalls us is always for our ultimate well-being. If things go against our ideas of good and bad or right and wrong, it is either because we do not understand the mystery of God's will or we misinterpret God's intentions (as in the case of the young passenger on the bus about whom we do not know all the facts). In the case of suffering, God's intentions are not to be cruel to us, but to punish us for our sins or to try us in order to ascertain the strength of our faith in Him. The problem, however, is that if the reasons for the punishment are not clear or no reasons can be given for its being necessary for Him to try us, then it looks like a patching up on the basis of empty applications of analogies like the relationship between a father and his children. If, however, it is argued that a person has led an evil life in terms of a certain value system and is being punished for the sin he committed, then this is not an empty application of, for example, the father-son relationship, but it makes sense, and would make complete sense if it were not for the fact that not all suffering falls into this category.

The upshot seems to be that religious beliefs are redundant in the search for the meaning of life since they are based on human discourse, sometimes with correct and sometimes with empty applications, and the same sense can be made both with and without them.

An important aspect of the discussion is that a critical attitude concerning the appropriateness of religious beliefs for rendering human situations meaningful is not an attitude stemming from religion itself; it is not a religious criticism of religious beliefs, but an attitude transcending the field of religion. This indicates that there must be a discipline transcending the field of religion even when a theologian becomes selfcritical.

THE PSYCHOLOGIST AND THE MEANING OF LIFE

There are many schools of psychology, but generally speaking psychology is concerned with the mind of a person, and the important question here is what is to count as the mind of a person. In Cartesian terms it is regarded as an entity over and above the body; in Freudian terms as consisting of the id, the ego and super-ego; and in behaviouristic terms as a logical construction for patterns of behaviour like thinking, experiencing, believing and communicating. Freud can be interpreted in two ways: the id, the ego and the super-ego can be regarded as logical constructions in the sense that different patterns of behaviour are distinguished, or they can be interpreted as entities, different mental substances. For our purpose it is sufficient to distinguish between the two main approaches to mind: if the mind were regarded as a substance consisting of powers, abilities, control mechanisms and causal structures, the task of the psychologist will be different from what it would be if the mind is regarded as a logical construction on the basis of particular patterns of behaviour. Most contemporary professional psychologists reject the first view and prefer to deal with human behaviour. This fact does not, however, imply that there are no differences among them about the methods to be used.

Clinical psychologists are trained to deal with psychological problems such as stress, neurotic behaviour, and depression and they can also act as, *inter alia*, marriage counsellors. One of the methods they use to determine people's aptitudes, intelligence, and personality traits or to determine mental disorders is psychological testing. The results of these tests have a place in a consideration of the meaning of life because they are used for choosing a profession in line with aptitude, intelligence and personality traits, or for overcoming stress or depression, or for a better understanding between people who are attempting to save a marriage. However, there is a growing uneasiness, about psychological testing in particular, but also about psychological practice in general, when it comes to dealing with individuals.

K. F. Mauer and A. I. Retief (1985:19–24) discuss two problems which psychologists encounter. One concerns the conflicting models of causality used and the other, difficulties encountered in cross-cultural psychology. They say:

Mainly as a result of the history of the discipline, psychology has long nurtured a positivistic tradition. While many psychologists nowadays acknowledge the inappropriateness of this model, they are, nonetheless, trapped in a tradition where they have to buy the respect of their colleagues by producing research results firmly embedded in the positivist world. The conflict which arises is particularly evident in research conducted in the field of therapeutic psychology. The resultant situation is that the researchers in this area conceptualize their research problems against a theoretical orientation derived from general systems theory (Von Bertalanffy 1968) but in conceding to the pressures of their peers they formulate hypotheses (preferably null hypotheses), measure their variables, and manipulate their data along simplistic linear models which have traditionally been used by psychologists. When they try to interpret the results they find themselves in a totally untenable position, and reading their research reports requires something akin to intellectual hopscotch between the different and conflicting models which they employ.

The second issue relates to the difficulties encountered in the area of cross-cultural psychology. While battles royal used to rage in the area of the intellectual structure of various cultural groups, the focus shifted to the difficulties associated with measuring attitudes, interests, and personality dimensions (Mauer & Retief 1985:23-24).

The authors point out that the linear causal model (started in 1879 at Wundt's laboratory in Leipzig) can be related to the development of Newtonian physics. Newton's methods made a wonderful knowledge of the universe possible and it was presumed that the same could happen in the field of the humanities if a slightly changed scientific method could be applied to gain a better understanding of man. Psychologists such as J. B. Watson and B. F. Skinner thought that an objective science of behaviour technology could assure the salvation of mankind. The positivistic approach, as formulated here, implies that man can be controlled in the way nature can be controlled. According to this view, man's life has meaning if the linear causal chain can be restored or controlled. Meaning in life is in this sense equivalent to the (passive) control of human functions or operations.

The authors further point out that the acceptability of this methodological approach was strengthened by the rise and development of behaviourism, which is based on stimulus and response explanations. This pattern of stimulus and response does not contain any intervention as a variable for the earlier behaviourists. The later behaviourists admitted an organism as a variable but emphasized that only what could be perceived was acceptable and they believed that matters such as thought, feelings, experiences and attitudes did not fit behaviouristic methods since they could not be measured, weighed or counted. Anything that exists, exists as measurable quantity for the behaviourists, a conviction which impoverishes psychology although the intention was to rule out all sorts of postulated entities which populate speculative psychology (known as Ockham's razor in philosophical circles). More often than not this view leads to unacceptable generalization from the behaviour of laboratory rats to human behaviour.

Meaning in human life consists, according to this view, in a passive process of stimulus and response; human beings do not give meaning to their lives, because it is there as a perceptible mechanical process. Giving meaning to one's life requires agency or intervention between the stimulus and the response. The organism is for the later behaviourists a kind of intervention, but still an intervention which is determined by causal laws and not that of agency, which is a logical construction for unpredictable behaviour based on improvisation and freedom. Applied to the case of Dontsova, it would mean that she is captured in a deterministic causal order which can be controlled only by mechanical means such as chemical treatment or shock therapy. However, if we accept that the question as to the meaning of life is not related to happenings, but to doings, these types of treatment cannot be related to questions about the meaning of Dontsova's life.

According to Mauer and Retief other developments in psychology have contradicted the presuppositions of the behaviourists. On one hand the view is developed that man is a being who strives after the satisfaction of a number of needs which are integrated hierarchically, with self-realization at the top of the system; on the other hand we have systems theory, in terms of which man lives in a community and cannot be understood as an individual unless his relationships with other people are analysed. As a matter of fact, it is argued, a person sees

himself as other people see him. Problematic behaviour can in this sense be dealt with and evaluated only against the background of man's functioning within the community. According to both these views the meaning of life consists in the active participation of man in giving meaning to his own life.

This view of the meaning of life is completely opposed to the behaviouristic view that behaviour is to be explained in terms of linear causality. A psychologist would be inconsistent if he used both approaches to the meaning of life in his dealings with people; moreover, he would simply be wrong in thinking that questions about the meaning of life can be asked in the context of linear causality (stimulus and response), since these questions concern doings and not happenings.

Self-realization and man's functioning in a community system are not only complex, but presuppose agency. Mauer and Retief distinguish between linear and circular causality: a kicked stone moves according to the physical laws of mass and energy; a kicked dog's reaction cannot, however, be predicted exactly, because the dog may react by running away, barking or biting. The same applies in the case of the person who kicked the dog — he may decide not to kick it again, but rather to use a whip or a stick, or to get rid of the dog or to become more friendly with it. We note from this complex structure of actions and reactions that they are unpredictable because of the many alternatives. The alternatives can be limited or open-ended. If they are limited, it is relatively possible to predict reactions but it is impossible if the alternatives are open-ended.

Concepts like predictability, freedom, determination, causality and agency transcend the field of psychology and call for a more general reflection in order to ascertain the criteria for their application. Psychologists define concepts operationally but do not analyse them, which does not imply that an analysis is not necessary. It only implies that there is a logical difference between the application of concepts (operationally defined) and knowing the criteria for their application. Concepts can be defined operationally to serve the purpose of any specific empirical discipline, but this cannot be done without analysing the criteria for the application of these concepts (see the quotation from W. J. Jordaan on p. 27).

Mauer and Retief also express the need for a philosophical reflection on psychological methodology:

Wat ... baie duidelik is, is die feit dat daar heelwat werk op metodologiese, teoretiese en meta-teoretiese (of wetenskaps-filosofiese) gebied gedoen sal moet word om metodes te ontwikkel wat dit vir navorsers wat 'n sirkulêre siening huldig, moontlik sal maak om navorsing te doen wat wel van 'n wetenskaplik-aanvaarbare standaard is (Mauer & Retief 1985:21-22).

We may add to this that a certain view of man is involved here which forms part of philosophical anthropology. Philosophical anthropology is concerned with the question 'what is man?' and tries to arrive at parameters in terms of which man should be considered. A psychologist, in order to describe what an individual is and to gain clarity in this way about the 'I' in the question 'why do I exist?', must use certain parameters or conceptual schemes in terms of which personality, intelligence or character traits are to be considered. He may start with determination, causality, and stimulus and response or he may start with freedom, improvisation and agency. To reflect on which scheme is the correct or relevant one, he must transcend his own field by reflecting on man in general, which involves spelling out the criteria for the concept 'man' in terms of a wide range of comparisons which are strictly not the concern of the psychologist (e.g. the place of man in the cosmos, man and things, the soul and the body, agency, etc.).

The second problem raised by Mauer and Retief is the problem of the measurement of variables like attitudes, interests and personality traits within a multicultural context such as we find in South Africa. Researchers apply test material which was developed for Western groups to non-Western groups. Mauer and Retief refer to the very low level of reliability coefficient in cross-cultural testing, and argue that the bad results in such cases can be assigned to the difference in culture; it is possible that if tests which are developed for non-Western groups were applied to Western groups, they might fare just as badly.

It was also found that the metrical properties of the measuring instrument are less affected when applied to non-Western groups when only two alternatives ('Yes' or 'No') are set than when the respondent is required to make a choice between three or more alternative answers.

The consideration of the notions of culture and cultural differences again requires a general reflection which covers a much wider field than psychology, but without which psychology cannot do. The 'I' in the question 'why do I exist?' can have different meanings in different cultures, and to analyse or ascertain the nature of this 'I' by means of psychological tests, and in terms of parameters abstracted from a particular culture which is different from other cultures, is to fall into the trap of illegitimate abstraction. This implies that the meaning of behavioural concepts is defined in terms of situations which are not representative of the whole spectrum of situations that have to be considered in order to find the criteria for the application of these concepts.

These views can be substantiated by considering a few examples from the SA Wechsler Intelligence Scale for adults. This test is divided into different parts such as general information, general comprehension, arithmetic, digit span, similarities, vocabulary, picture completion, object assembly, block design, digit symbols and picture arrangement. Before considering examples from each category, let us first consider whether these categories are all concerned with intelligence, whether they are the only categories of intelligence, whether they overlap and whether they bear on human abilities or human knowledge.

Philosophers like Aristotle and Kant introduced categories of the understanding as a means of understanding the relatedness of man and world. Categories of intelligence as offered by Wechsler should be considered in the light of such attempts.

Let us briefly consider Wechsler's categories in turn.

According to the questions appearing under general information, this category presupposes a kind of orientation in a world which is supposed to be familiar to the respondents. An empirical method can be used in order to determine statistically which questions most respondents are able to answer and to take this as an indication of the aspect of orientation as one of the properties of intelligence. However, orientation cannot be divorced from interest and people who fare badly in this test may do so because of specific interests which determine their type of orientation in their specific fields.

The questions on general information cannot therefore be regarded as a reliable test of intelligence. A brilliant mathematician may be a bad biologist and the saying 'Jack of all trades, but master of none'

is illustrative of the error committed. 'Orientation' is not properly analysed in terms of the criteria for its application. Average achievements determined by statistical methods as a basis for such a test can also be queried because they do not provide for special interests. The question is whether a person who has a superficial knowledge of many different things is really intelligent. This gives rise to the question whether general information is really a category of intelligence.

The second category is concerned with general comprehension. Many of the questions are introduced by 'ought' and are therefore loaded with presuppositions about a universal ethical code applicable to all cultures and even to different groups within the same community. 'What ought one to do if one picks up an envelope which is sealed, addressed and provided with a new stamp?' In different cultures people may entertain different views about how lost articles are to be handled, and even people of the same culture may differ here. The fact that an average norm can be established statistically does not eliminate its being logically possible for a few to think otherwise and therefore to be seen as less intelligent.

We further note that in the answers to questions like 'What is rubber manufactured from?' and 'Why are shoes made from leather?' there is a difference between reproduction of knowledge and insight as to the reasons why a thing is what it is. However it cannot be taken for granted that insight is at stake in 'ought' questions except when a certain law of one's country may be interpreted and applied.

Orientation has to do with reproduction of knowledge which can be of a mechanical nature, whereas insight is an intellectual phenomenon. However, not all questions under general comprehension demand insight: 'Why must one pay tax?' can be seen as testing knowledge of a law and not necessarily insight, especially when the law stipulates the reasons. We can say that in this test the questions do not clearly differentiate between habits, reproduction of facts and insight. Reproduction is a case of memory and it is questionable whether memory is identifiable with, or forms part of, intelligence.

To see similarities between things is based on the ability to classify. However, different people may classify differently. Take for instance 'dog' and 'lion': the expected answer to a question is that they are both animals; but there are numerous other possibilities, for example that both are predators or dangerous or even holy objects.

Too much is taken for granted here. The notion of classification has not been given the attention it deserves.

The vocabulary test is concerned with definitions of concepts. However, there are many kinds of definitions, and definitions and contexts cannot be separated. The test requires not synonyms, but descriptions of essential properties, which implies that one must be able to identify the object described. If we take the example of 'apple', descriptions or definitions which are acceptable to the compiler are: fruit of an apple tree, edible fruit, deciduous fruit, a round, firm edible fruit. These definitions do not, however, make identification possible. The respondent may thus find himself at a loss as to what answer to give on the instruction: 'Tell what "apple" means.' In compiling the test, classification and identification have clearly not been distinguished in terms of a preceding conceptual analysis but an operational definition has been taken to be sufficient.

The assignment of a low or high mark after a person has been tested can have an effect on how the testee gives meaning to his life. In the case of a low mark, the psychologist may advise him to take training in jobs which require a low intelligence. However, he may eventually find that his life is meaningless because he cannot realize himself in his work. This may be due to the fact that the test did not address his interests.

It is not necessary to go into the tests for attitudes, interests, etc. We have the same pattern throughout. It is clear that conceptual analysis is a prerequisite for psychological practice. A lot is taken for granted in the use of psychological testing to guide and console people. Moreover, to revert to our example from *Cancer ward*, none of these tests seems relevant to Dontsova while suffering from cancer. This objection may be circumvented by arguing that she then became a case for the psychiatrist or clinical psychologist. A question may in turn be raised as to what the jobs of these people are. Dontsova was suffering and her 'I' became the 'I' of a suffering person. What is now required is reflection on the sense of suffering, which again transcends the field of the psychologist, for the sense of suffering forms part of the general question in philosophical anthropology about man's place in the cosmos. This can be called the 'existential role' of philosophy in psychology, which can be distinguished but not separated from its methodological role.

The discussion of the methodological role of philosophy in psychology can be summarized with reference to a quotation from Jordaan (1989:55):

Surely the employment of operational definitions is not invalid in itself, but there are limitations to this procedure that are often not sufficiently realized, or simply ignored by many mainstream psychological scientists precisely because they lack 'philosophical ... commitments to other issues'. Exactly at this juncture logical defects often slip into the psychologist's theoretical armamentarium. This happens when he/she *arbitrarily* assigns certain meanings to key concepts in a research project, and then interprets/applies the empirical results beyond the confines of these meanings.

It is, for example, conceptually unjustified (logically defective) to define 'thinking' as 'proficiency in problem solving', and then to assume that the results of an empirical investigation into problem solving apply to *all* 'thinking situations', or that the 'geography' of the concept of thinking has been sufficiently mapped.

To draw the threads together: To guide, comfort and/or console people is to act in certain ways in certain contexts but such acts are not limited to a specific group of people. Ordinary people like parents do these things continually. Because of their special training doctors, priests and psychologists are in a special position to guide, comfort and console people, that is, to play a part in their making sense of their lives. I argue, however, that medical science operates with happenings and in such a context meaning is not relevant, religion is transcendental to human experience although parasitic upon it (which renders it redundant), and psychologists operate with operationally defined concepts and thus in a world of their own making. For these disciplines to make contact with human reality and thus to become relevant in the quest for meaning, it must be realized that in practising sciences such as these, reflection about (inter alia) the criteria for the application of concepts, the justification of values and value judgements, the understanding and justification of procedures is necessary. As was shown, this kind of reflection always transcends the boundaries of particular disciplines or fields of activities. This implies that reflection is an activity in its own right which cannot be bypassed.

In the statement quoted above, Vico by implication classifies philosophy with these disciplines as being in a privileged position to guide, comfort and console people. It is clear that Vico is presupposing a particular view about the nature of philosophy in making this claim. This view is not acceptable. It not only leaves philosophy open to the same kind of criticism lodged against the other disciplines, but in so doing also makes philosophy a house divided against itself. Vico's claim implies that philosophy will have to face considerations which transcend it. It is clear that we have to do with a confusion of logical levels and it seems to me that in this way the important role philosophy has to play in the context of life and meaning gets lost.

Looking at the professions of the doctor, priest and psychologist in so far as guiding, comforting and consoling people are involved, I argued that in order to do these things in an effective, rational and responsible way, philosophical input in the sense of a logico-conceptual reflection on what they are and should be doing is a necessary element. Living a meaningful life or assisting people to do so is, of necessity, a dialectical process, doing certain things or talking about doing things and reflecting on what was or should have been done or said, which in its turn acquires concrete shape in yet further activities, and so on. This kind of reflection can in its turn be considered at a higher level of generality and abstraction, that is, one then reflects on the meaning of life in general. Seen in this way this problem is a purely philosophical one.

The philosopher's task is not to guide, comfort and console but to think about the logical conditions for the possibility of guidance, comforting and consolation. This kind of reflection must ultimately lead to considering these phenomena in a wider context, and then the question becomes 'What are the logical conditions for the possibility of a meaningful life?' Struggling with this problem was Michael Macnamara's lasting contribution to philosophy in South Africa.

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