

# Wittgenstein and the Grammar of Character Judgements

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Character judgements are scattered throughout Wittgenstein's correspondence with colleagues and friends, as well as in memoirs and accounts of his conversations as reported by his students. These judgements mostly concern philosophers both living and dead (e.g., Russell, Moore, James, Rousseau), his Cambridge peers and students (e.g., Smythies, Malcolm), notable authors (e.g., Shakespeare, Goethe, Weininger), and composers (e.g., Beethoven, Mendelssohn, Brahms, Schumann). Together they portray a picture of Wittgenstein's cultural sensitivity, his social and sometimes political standpoint, his artistic taste, his relation to his contemporary thinkers, and, consequently, his own character. These judgements are generally articulated by few or single worded exclamations or by concise utterances that use simple adjectives such as "deep", "serious", "human", "honest", "wonderful", "courageous", etc. Rarely explained or argued for, they are thus distinct from factual statements or descriptions of the philosophers' or composers' achievements, method, style, or body of work. In the context of Wittgenstein's famous rejection of the possibility of ethical propositions and ethics as a science, character judgements are *prima facie* an example of ethical nonsense and therefore pose a grammatical challenge: How can their supposed expressive power be accounted for, if not in terms of sense?

In my paper I seek first to distinguish character judgements from factual judgements about behaviour and the psychological features of individuals, which renders the former expressions of an ethical standpoint albeit not constituting judgements *per se*. I then explore the grammar of these semi-judgements, in relation to two other expressive means used and discussed by Wittgenstein when judging individuals' characters, namely, anecdotes –short, typically first-person exemplary narratives, the conclusive judgement of which is never explicitly articulated - and hints, that prompt their receiver to reach an ethical conclusions by herself and whose meaningfulness depends on the listener doing so.

The key example in my analysis is a case that took place in Post World War II Cambridge, when a plaque bearing the names of those who had died for their country was erected in Christ Chapel. Wittgenstein considers the handling of this case by the Cambridge professors to be an example of reprehensible character.

My analysis shows how, rather than being assessments of individual traits, character "judgements" constitute means for portraying a world in which – or surroundings against which – an individual's life can be taken to have a place and be comprehended. As such, they are also instructive of the character of utterer – i.e., Wittgenstein's – and the cultural surroundings that rendered his life comprehensible.