

Looking for Good Work: From Matthew Crawford to Pope Francis via Wittgenstein

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EACH SEMESTER, I TEACH third year business students a course in theological ethics. Since my students' choices of majors (e.g., "accounting," "marketing," etc.) directly reference the jobs they hope to have after graduating, it has seemed fitting to make 'work' one of our topics of study. I am an Aristotelian, which means that my goal ought to be to teach about the manner in which my students' work is part of their ongoing formation with the ultimate goal, one hopes, of becoming successful moral agents—or, in Aristotelian terms, achieving excellence in goodness. However, I have often been tempted to teach work's moral significance by drawing on the studies of empirical psychology and social science. Indeed, the fact that these studies adopt and adapt concepts from Aristotelianism makes the temptation greater. For instance, a body of empirical research aims at scientifically identifying the constituent parts of "happiness." The studies in "positive psychology" typically identify "meaningful work" as a feature of the lives of those research subjects who report a higher than average (subjective) experience of well-being. The studies define "meaningful work" by such characteristics as believing one's job has "room for growth." The characteristics for study are drawn up to be explicit and quantifiable criteria so that their presence could be measured. One might imagine that becoming familiar with these studies would arm students with a set of criteria enabling them to choose among alternative employment options more likely to be satisfactory; perhaps even, using the studies' other features of happiness, help students find their way to a happier life. For instance, a job advertised as having opportunities for advancement within the firm would seem more likely to fulfill the "presence of challenge and room for growth" characteristic than another job lacking a clear path of promotion. Alternatively, a job at a company whose representatives make clear that the management style is "employee-centered" would seem promising for another characteristic of meaningful work identified by positive psychology, namely, the employee's sense of being recognized by her supervisors for her

accomplishments.

So, a set of categories with a family resemblance to the Aristotelian ones of flourishing, formation, and growth are transposed into terms with which social psychologists can run their experiments. Yet I suspect this approach misleads as much as it sheds light on how to understand the moral significance of work and what students might expect from a job. It imagines the student/employee as standing outside the activity of work, coordinating features of a job that suit her preferences. The study of work in an ethics class should not leave the student with an orientation wherein work is seen as one more of life's contingent constraints through which she must find a way to maximize her own preferences. In a class such as mine, students should be pushed to see work as a potential domain for discovering and exercising distinctively human capacities. Work can involve growth that occasions joy.

The search for meaningful work faces many obstacles in the contemporary world. One set of obstacles derives from what Pope Francis calls "the technocratic paradigm." The technocratic paradigm is an important source of widespread fantasies regarding work and its meaning. It seems to account, at least in part, for the authority enjoyed by empirical studies in the academy today, for it exalts the same "outside," or technique-privileging, point of view. Pope Francis affirms work's potential to contribute to human development. He continues a tradition of Catholic reflection on work in affirming that work answers a profound human need. In chapter 3 of *Laudato Si'*, titled "The Human Roots of the Ecological Crisis," Pope Francis invokes the tradition of Catholic social thought where work is related to a theologically shaped vision of human flourishing. He begins his treatment by reminding us that "meaningful work" was a revolutionary discovery within monastic life, where Benedict of Nursia saw fit to combine prayer and spiritual reading with manual labor in community life. Thus "we need to remember," writes Francis, "that men and women have the capacity to improve their lot, to further their moral growth, and to develop their spiritual endowments. Work should be the setting for this rich personal growth, where many aspects of life enter into play: creativity, planning for the future, developing our talents, living out our values, relating to others, giving glory to God." He goes on to say, "Work is a necessity, part of the meaning of life on this earth, a path to growth, human development and personal fulfillment" (no. 128).

Pope Francis also alerts us to the widespread currency of the technocratic paradigm as a social imaginary, especially in North Atlantic societies. An "epistemology" that grows out of our increasing dependence upon, and indeed worship of, technology, the technocratic

paradigm shapes not only our dealings with matter but also human beings and their social lives. Reducing intelligent activity to techniques of manipulation, the technocratic paradigm presents human life as fundamentally consisting in the manipulation of inert matter (nos. 106–109). What is more, because of its ubiquity, we can expect this paradigm to have a profound impact both on contemporary understandings and organization of work and upon the self-conceptions that drive programs of pre-professional education whereby universities prepare their students to succeed in the “work world.”¹

Again, the pressure on students to think of work as a technically manipulable constraint on their efforts to maximize personal preferences is formidable. To get them beyond this sticking point, I propose to illustrate how versions of the technocratic paradigm generate fantasies about what work is like that frustrate the potential of work to be meaningful. In this paper, therefore, my approach consists in focusing attention on our captivity to the technocratic paradigm and the confusions that arise from it. These muddles lead to our finding ourselves caught up in moral fantasy with respect to the contribution of work to the moral life. Put another way, this alternative approach would concern itself with tracing the gap that opens up between the anthropology standing behind Pope Francis’ affirmation of the human value of work and the organization of work in contemporary corporate culture.

This approach of identifying the fantasies that hold us captive as regards the human meaning of work informs a teaching method and can be articulated in the following two questions. First, “How does the technocratic paradigm show up within the modern design of work and the formation to which such work necessarily subjects workers?” Second, “what connections pertain between the technocratic paradigm as an ‘epistemology’ and the organization of modern work?”

This fantasy involves sidestepping the centrality of Aristotelian

¹ Stanley Hauerwas describes the impact of this model on universities. “The incoherence of university curriculums,” he writes, “reflects the university’s commitment to legitimate the abstraction effected by money. For example, it is crucial that the university insure that learning be organized not to be a conversation between disciplines, but rather that disciplines be representatives of competing opposites. ... Education is now job preparation for a career in a profession. But work, whether it is done in the academy, a profession, or industry, is now designed so that the workers are separated from the effects of their work. The workers are permitted ‘to think that they are working nowhere or anywhere—in their careers, or specialties, or perhaps in ‘cyberspace’” (Stanley Hauerwas, “What Would a Christian University Look Like? Some Tentative Answers Inspired by Wendell Berry,” in *The State of the University* [Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007], 98–99). The quotation is from Wendell Berry, *Another Turn of the Crank* (Washington, DC: Counterpoint, 1995), 13–14.

phronesis or practical reasoning via the exaltation of a technical style of thinking which tends to strike us as more universal because more transparent. Indeed, one of my worries about the empirical approach to work is its own capacity to make such technical reason appear sufficient for the clairvoyant pursuit of good work. That is, it projects an image of good work as something already identifiable by the student, without the transformation in character that moral goods require. Thus, my treatment will keep an eye on the distinction between knowledge understood as *techne* and *phronesis*.

MATTHEW CRAWFORD ON WORK

To display the connections I seek to make visible, clarifying the role of work in the moral life, I turn to a narrative of one person's experience as an employee. This employee, whose name is Matthew Crawford, describes one miserable experience in a job as a stage in his own journey to find work that is meaningful. Crawford is a writer and mechanic specializing in vintage motorcycles, living in Richmond, Virginia. Having worked with his hands in various trades throughout high school, he went on to gain college as well as advanced degrees. These led him to the kinds of jobs often referred to as "knowledge work," such as writing position papers at a think tank in Washington, DC. In time Crawford grew more skeptical about the correlation between such jobs and the exercise of human intelligence.

Before launching into this narrative, it is important to note that running through Crawford's book-length exploration of the moral significance of work, *Shop Class as Soulcraft*, is the assumption that good work answers to a profound human aspiration.² In other words, he shares Pope Francis's vision of work as "a path to growth, human development and personal fulfillment" (no. 128). Indeed, Crawford's story of miserable work makes sense only when seen against the background of deep personal longing for work that fulfills.

Crawford had high hopes when he was hired to write abstracts for Information Access Company in Silicon Valley, yet those hopes were soon deflated by his experience on the job. The character of the fantasy gripping the executives who first envisioned this futile and demeaning form of work is well disclosed by Crawford himself. So, one might ask, what further value could my analysis have to contribute? My modest hope is that by re-examining Crawford's account in terms at home in the work of Wittgenstein—terms Crawford does not use in his own analysis—some fresh light will be thrown on the example. In other words, what I offer is a Wittgensteinian reading of Crawford's experience, using concepts borrowed from the great philosopher such

² Matthew Crawford, *Shop Class as Soulcraft: An Inquiry into the Value of Work* (New York: Penguin, 2009).

as “language game,” “method of projection,” and “form of life.”³ Concepts such as these, forming part of Wittgenstein’s method of doing philosophy, enable us to see and name fantasies that confuse our thinking about work and ultimately frustrate our practical pursuit of it. By so doing, these concepts automatically place us back on “the rough ground” of *phronesis*, or the discernment of “how to go on” satisfactorily in the circumstances of life as well as work.⁴

At the same time, Crawford’s experience analyzed through Wittgenstein provides a specific illustration of Pope Francis’s technocratic paradigm which I believe adds clarity to his claim that it operates as an “epistemology.” Again, the technocratic paradigm has become the implicit horizon for our engagement not only with the material world but also the social one. Crawford’s story, read through Wittgenstein, helps us spot how such a background gives rise to actions that reflect the blindness in the paradigm of which Francis warns.

WITTGENSTEIN AND LANGUAGE GAMES: “I’LL TEACH YOU DIFFERENCES”

A few years ago, I wrote an article included in an issue of an established journal of business ethics published by the international group Springer. In the last stages of its preparation, I left the final editing to Springer’s team, telling myself they knew best how citations and so forth were to look to meet their standards. When I saw the text in print, I was unhappily surprised to see that the editors had made changes to the structure of certain sentences. For instance, they had inserted commas in a few places where I had opted not to use commas. While their choice to insert these commas made sense in light of a rudimentary understanding of general grammatical rules (or, how these are typically taught), these specific applications overruled deliberate choices on my part to forgo the use of commas. In trying to improve the copy through the application of grammatical rules, the editors had instead introduced imprecision in the phrasing, so that the reader would have to push through to get the point. What is more, the decision not to place commas in these places could be called a product of my aesthetic judgment as a writer trying to express a point in fitting form. The editors, for whom English may not even have been a first

³ Regarding Wittgenstein’s use of the term “language game,” see Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (New York: Macmillan, 1953), no. 23. Discussions of a “method of projection” can be found in Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. C. K. Ogden (London: Routledge, [1921] 1992), 3.11–3.12, 4.0141. For “form of life” (German, *Lebensform*), see Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* nos. 19, 23, 241.

⁴ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, no. 107.

language, were engaged in a process of rule-following much like following a set of assembly instructions, trying to make sentences as one might put together a piece of IKEA furniture. To use Wittgenstein's terms, two distinct language games had collided.

Wittgenstein told associates that among the titles he considered for *Philosophical Investigations*, the great work of his later period, was "I'll teach you differences."⁵ Wittgenstein developed the notion of language games in his later period as a means of drawing his readers' attention back to the most fundamental character of our life with language. In his earlier masterpiece, the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, Wittgenstein had endeavored to lay out the structure of logical form, such that language and reality can hang together.⁶ In the process, he laid down—or thought he had—the rules to which all sentences *must* conform if they are to succeed in making sense; all other constructions he dubbed "nonsense." For the early Wittgenstein, logical "form" names the intermediary that relates language to the world, a kind of condition of possibility for language to make meaningful reference to things, thus making it possible for us to share a common reality.⁷

The concept of logical form in the *Tractatus* is accompanied by that of "method of projection,"⁸ according to which a form of words can be meaningfully joined to its bit of reality.⁹ In his later work, Wittgenstein shows us how signs function in human life, tying together words/signs and behavior by exploring "language games." The basic structure of language games is that of representing one object (or "fact") in another form (description), or recognizing *this* as *that*. In its simplest form, one may think of language making a drawing ("picture") of an object. This picture might be found in the service of two agents engaged in some activity together, part of which involves using the picture in place of the object with the aim of getting each other to do something with the object in question (e.g., hand it back and forth). Ostensive definition, the teaching of words by pointing at the object to which they are meant to refer, is both a language game itself and preparation for participation in further games.¹⁰

⁵ Ray Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius* (New York: Free Press, 1990), 536–537.

⁶ For a detailed and clear account of the transformation of Wittgenstein's use of the word "form" from the earlier to the later period, see Brad Kallenberg, *Ethics as Grammar: Changing the Postmodern Subject* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 83–112.

⁷ Kallenberg, *Ethics as Grammar*, 84–87.

⁸ See note 6 above.

⁹ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Notebooks 1914–1916*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 30(e).

¹⁰ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, nos. 1–8, 23.

Similarly, writing an abstract of an academic journal article is a language game (*this is that*). The abstract is to be a representation (portrait) of the original. The writer is to model the original article in the form of a short precis of, say, 200 words. *This* (i.e., the 200-word summary) is to stand in for *that* (i.e., the 12,000-word article). One may think here of the relationship of a trail map to a long hike to be taken. The similarity (or shared “form”) between the two lies in the fact that the map intends to offer the hiker an overview of the terrain (its difficulty, etc.) that she will come to know in detail when she sets off on the hike. In the same way, the abstract is to be used by the reader as though offering a faithful “map” of what she would survey in detail were she to read the entire article.

While the *Tractatus* implied that the form shared between linguistic description and “fact,” between language and world, was something unitary—and thus, that the capacity to use language was one-dimensional—the later Wittgenstein comes to see “form” differently. Wittgenstein came to see that “methods of projection,” the joining of language to the world of facts, is carried out in innumerable ways in human life. The whole point of the turn to language games as a method was to help students attend to such variety, or learn to see differences.

Writing an abstract for an academic article may be viewed as a “language game.” In the early 1990s, shortly after being awarded an MA in Philosophy from the University of Chicago, Crawford landed his first job as a “knowledge worker.”¹¹ During his teens and early adulthood, much of his work experience had been in manual trades such as electric and mechanics. He was now given articles published in scholarly journals to read for which he had to write abstracts. These abstracts were to be included in the company’s indexing services and marketed to libraries with the idea that they would be used by students and scholars for their own research projects.

Crawford’s abstracting writing work at Information Access Company (IAC) is a kind of parable of the failure to attend to differences of language games, as well as the consequences of such failure. The company began as an indexer of popular magazines, before branching out to the arena of management journals and ultimately to a variety of academic journals. Somewhere along the line it was determined that including abstracts was necessary to secure the “value-added” nature of its product. The procedure for writing an abstract seems to have been minted in the stage of management journals. Writing an adequate abstract for the typical management journal article turns out to conform to a predictable, even

¹¹ Crawford, *Shop Class as Soulcraft*, 126–128.

“mechanical,” procedure. Such articles, structured by bullet points, tend to introduce a new idea every fifth bullet point. To write an abstract one need only string together every fifth bullet point. Yet the company was still evolving. As Crawford writes, “through a series of mergers and acquisitions, it now found itself offering not just indexes but also abstracts (that is, summaries), and of a very different kind of material: scholarly works in the physical and biological sciences, humanities, social sciences, and law.”¹²

The problem is that the step from management journals to scholarly works in these other disciplines did not imply a superficial change for the work of the abstractor (i.e., a change in style, quantity), but a radical one, shifting the very character of the task of producing an abstract. Those calling the shots at the company were unable to detect the nature of these new demands placed on those producing their product.¹³

Techne

Wittgenstein believed that many of the (unnecessary) problems that preoccupied his fellow philosophers stemmed from being duped by appearances of similarity in our language. We fail to notice the diversity of the ways we join word and world (*this is that*) in our language, because the deep “grammar” of our language games does not readily show itself to us. Wittgenstein’s method of language games, beginning with the most basic or primitive kinds of communication, was a means of training our attention on this grammar where we discover that meaning is bound up with use. In this mode of attentiveness, he is able to teach us differences, that is, show us the dissimilarities of language games we tacitly acknowledge in everyday life but find hard to see when we think theoretically.

In our times, the tendency to assimilate our uses of words to just one pattern takes a particular shape. If one picture is to serve for all linguistic practices, that picture is of language as a quasi-scientific “technique,” a process in which explicit rules do the guiding as one works step by step toward the desired outcome (i.e., communicating a piece of information, building pre-fab furniture, or writing an

¹² Matthew Crawford, “The Case for Working with Your Hands,” *New York Times*, May 21, 2009, www.nytimes.com/2009/05/24/magazine/24labor-t.html.

¹³ Although it is not an insight for which I am beholden to Wittgenstein, but rather Alasdair MacIntyre, I further note how this short narrative history of IAC’s evolution as a company also serves to make visible the key differences to which IAC’s chiefs seem to have been blind. Narrative is also a form capable of helping us to see differences, then. Perhaps, if those calling the shots at IAC had made a habit of rehearsing their history, some of the complications to arise might have been foreseen. See Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984).

abstract). Wittgenstein would say that we are “captivated by [this] picture.”¹⁴

At IAC, Crawford began his abstract writing with a quota of 15 articles a day. Among the articles he was given to read he notes one written by a classical philologist wherein “practically every other word was Greek.”¹⁵ Another, written by an evolutionary biologist, was in English of so rare a form it may as well have been a foreign tongue. About the experience, he remarks: “I was always sleepy while at work, and I think this exhaustion was because I felt trapped in a contradiction: the fast pace demanded complete focus on the task, yet that pace also made any real concentration impossible.”¹⁶

Whether or not his supervisors fully appreciated the contradiction here described, they were clearly confident it would be resolved by the training they offered to abstract writers in which they would be given a *method* for writing abstracts. As the brief company history in the previous section pointed out, the method in question seems to have been the very one laid down in the management journal stage of the company, which by this time has become a paradigm for articles in any and all disciplines. It is modeled on the kind of syntactical procedure we might associate with computer programming. We might imagine it thus: “Identify each new idea, typically separated by five paragraphs from the previous one; String resultant sentences together in paragraph form; Revise each of the author’s sentences by changing active voice to passive; Add required punctuation....” Thus, this “solution” shows that those responsible for the design of Crawford’s job were captivated by the picture of language as technique.¹⁷

The paradigm status of this picture is strongly affirmed in Pope Francis’ encyclical *Laudato Si’*. There the pope describes the morphing of technology into an “epistemological paradigm” that elevates as ideal a popular image of scientific technique. He writes: “This paradigm exalts the concept of a subject who, using logical and rational procedures, progressively approaches and gains control over an external object. This subject makes every effort to establish the scientific and experimental method, which in itself is already a technique of possession, mastery, and transformation” (no. 106). Furthermore, as a “technocratic *paradigm*,” this picture has insinuated itself into several dimensions of human life. “The technocratic

¹⁴ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, no. 115.

¹⁵ Crawford, “The Case for Working with Your Hands.”

¹⁶ Crawford, “The Case for Working with Your Hands.”

¹⁷ Naturally, as Matthew Whelan has pointed out to me, the path that led to this so-called solution began with a business model that demands the maximization of profits. The demand for speed that such a model requires makes the reduction of complex tasks to a method very attractive.

paradigm,” he continues, “also tends to dominate economic and political life.” What is more, we have become highly dependent on it. According to Francis, “The technological paradigm has become so dominant that it would be difficult to do without its resources and even more difficult to utilize them without being dominated by their internal logic” (no. 108). As the pope here suggests, technology as a conceptual framework has become so ubiquitous in our times that we have come to think of having a self as consisting in the exercise of control over an inert, formless world of matter.¹⁸

Phronesis

Taking us back to language games, beginning with the most elementary or “primitive,” Wittgenstein also drew our attention to how language is learned, namely, at the level of bodily habit.¹⁹ To learn a language is to be initiated into a form of behavior that predates one’s own entry on the scene; it is to enter into a particular, socially established way of life. For instance, a child learns the meaning of the word “chair” by climbing into one as he strives to conquer the heights of the living room. To have learned a language amounts to a kind of mastery of these particular ways of negotiating the world into which one was born. One can be called fluent in the language insofar as one is able to continue navigating one’s life, that is, with no more than the usual physical and social scrapes characteristic of human life. Indeed, to be able, through one’s words and actions, to make oneself intelligible to others—and avoid debilitating collisions with reality—requires both careful observation and imitation of those around you and creative application of past lessons to new circumstances. In ethics, we might follow Aristotle in designating the result of this inculcation of tacit knowledge for managing one’s world with the term *phronesis*.²⁰

Above I described the activity of abstract writing as an example of a language game, the term is used by Wittgenstein to point out the different patterns of use characteristic of our life with words. In Wittgenstein’s language games, we may glimpse the key role of *phronesis* in human forms of life. To have mastered a language game is to have learned how to go on within one of these patterns of communicative behavior. The proof of learning is the ability not

¹⁸ For a complementary account of the modern identity, see Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), especially 143–176.

¹⁹ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, trans. Denis Paul and G. E. M. Anscombe (New York: Harper and Row, [1969] 1972), no. 476.

²⁰ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Martin Ostwald (London: Pearson, 1999), Book VI.

merely to imitate, but to extend the rules of the game into new contexts. Having seen and comprehended how the game is played, one is able to follow the directive: “Now, do the same!” It is, if I may return to a phrase from the *Tractatus*, to have acquired skill in a particular “method of projection.”²¹ To have mastered that skill is to be capable of seeing the kinds of connections assumed in the language game (“this” is “that”) and of making similar connections on one’s own.

Writing an abstract can rightfully be called a language game insofar as it involves a method of projection from the original article to a neat summary thereof—*this is that*. The question is whether the same language game is being played when one is writing an abstract for a) a management journal article, b) an article in classical philology, and c) an article in genetics. To see whether these language games involve the same method of projection, one simply asks whether the skill required to “go on” or “do the same” is the same in each case. We might imagine that during Crawford’s training he successfully abstracted several management articles. Did this achievement enable him to go on, “do the same,” when given an article in classical philology? As it turned out, he was not. He lacked the skill or fluency needed to play *this* language game (i.e., the one required to write an abstract of the article in classical philology). In this case the missing skill seems easy to identify. If you do not read Greek, you will have little comprehension of an article in which every other word is Greek! To illustrate the incommensurability, even when the language remains English, Crawford offers a further example, this one from *Nature Genetics*, another source of articles he was asked to work on. The following example comes from the Letters section of that journal, at the time of his writing about his experience at IAC (2007):

We show that miR-214 is expressed during early segmentation stages in somites in that varying its expression alters the expressions of genes regulated by Hedgehog signaling. Inhibition of MAR-214 results in reduction or loss of slow-muscle cell types. We show that *su(fu)* mRNA, encoding a negative regulator of Hedgehog signaling, is targeted by miR-214.²²

As this example shows, fluency in a language game is not reducible to knowing what a word means in the sense of a dictionary definition. Fluency in a discipline like genetics can only be gained through long years of practice under the bodily presence of a mentor. Just like, we may say, when a child first enters into language through being in a

²¹ See note 5 above.

²² Crawford, *Shop Class as Soulcraft*, 132.

home with older persons present. Earlier we approached the problem by asking whether writing an abstract for the three articles involved playing the same language game—whether, that is, it involved the same skill. Now we are in a position to see that this question is equivalent to the question of whether the fluency required for handling each of the articles is found in the same person, where “person” names the experience and training unique to each human being’s biography.²³ In the design of this job, what the company leaders believed could be bypassed was precisely the mastery in a language game of the seasoned practitioner. The later Wittgenstein saw language less and less as something to be studied apart from language users. Ultimately, the skills of language use are inseparable from the people who deploy them.²⁴

While Wittgenstein’s language games reveal *phronesis* to be at the heart of our way of life, the technocratic paradigm shoulders out *phronesis* in favor of its own, purportedly supreme, language game. At IAC, once trained in their abstract writing “method,” it is assumed that Crawford and his coworkers will be able to go on doing the same for the various examples of writing they are given. Of course this assumes that as the abstract writer plows forward, she will simply flatten the landscape before her, reducing all articles to some fundamental commonalities. As Crawford saw, this method presupposed that to write an abstract of an article does not require that one understand it. That is, one does not need to enter into the thought-world of the author in order to represent her reasoning. Ironically, it is supposed that close attention to the article itself would distract one from the method, which is presumed to be the important thing. Thus the fluency characteristic of the writer of the article, and expressed *in* the article, does not touch the abstract writer as she carries out her task. *Techne* is said to be a method of a different order from such skill. In the Pope’s words, it stands apart from the world, and dominates it. In Wittgenstein’s terms, this language game sits enthroned above all sub-cultural fluencies and is able to dominate them. So elevated, *techne* appears universal.

²³ For a deeper treatment of the role of “biography” as part of the human form of life, see Herbert McCabe, *Law, Love, and Language* (New York: Continuum, 2003).

²⁴ Kallenberg, *Ethics as Grammar*, 104–107. We may think here of how the very body of a professional pianist differs from that of a professional gymnast, their training over time having inculcated different habits into them. This is not to say there will not be overlap in these habits, or that their lives as human beings do not need certain virtues if they are to flourish.

FORM OF LIFE

A final Wittgensteinian term of art that can be usefully brought to bear on Crawford's experience at IAC is "form of life," a phrase we have already seen. The failures mentioned above culminate in the failure to design work in sync with the human form of life. The human form of life belongs to our nature as embodied reasoners, or linguistic animals if you prefer. We are inescapably bodies living together in a shared world determined by our language, when "language" is conceived broadly as Wittgenstein does to encompass non-verbal forms of communication such as gesture, painting, music, etc. As theologian Brad Kallenberg has shown, the word "form" undergoes a transformation from the early to the later Wittgenstein.²⁵ In the *Tractatus*, form signified the logical space in which objects, considered as simple entities, existed. This implied that language must somehow picture an object in its relation to a surrounding world. Form thus makes possible a world of "facts," understood as logically possible combinations of objects representable by language.²⁶ By the time of the *Philosophical Investigations*, form had come to refer to the myriad ways we communicate or live together or our "form of life." Wittgenstein's adoption of the term form of life in his later work thus shows his increasing acceptance of the richly varied social life of human beings.²⁷

Put differently, in retrospect, Wittgenstein's adoption of the notion of form of life can be seen as his moving past a problematic outgrowth of his approach in the *Tractatus*: the bifurcation of language (i.e., what he would come to see as skill in speech, learned through the body, but once focused on "propositions") and world (i.e., what he formerly envisioned as real or imagined "states of affairs" and would eventually become for him the social form of life we inhabit).²⁸ The way of seeing that arises from such habitual bifurcation, where the technician or philosopher stands in the gap devising means for fitting language to world, also captivates the designers of Crawford's work at IAC.

²⁵ Kallenberg, *Ethics as Grammar*, 83–112.

²⁶ Kallenberg sums up that, for the Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus*, "form is the a priori structure of the world" (Kallenberg, *Ethics as Grammar*, 85). See Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 2.014, 2.0141.

²⁷ Kallenberg shows the gradual nature of the change in Wittgenstein's understanding of form, pointing to a middle period characterized by Wittgenstein's critical encounter with Sir James George Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, and the positive influences of Johann W. von Goethe and Oswald Spengler (Kallenberg, *Ethics as Grammar*, 96–100). For a helpful description of Wittgenstein's mature period, see Kallenberg, *Ethics as Grammar*, 101–112.

²⁸ For example, Kallenberg points out: "Once Wittgenstein undertook to explain the mechanism of language by means of the picture theory, he had trouble preventing himself from speaking about language as one thing and the world as another" (Kallenberg, *Ethics as Grammar*, 89).

Crawford's work had been designed according to a kind of ideal language, one first abstracted from the form of life that was its natural surroundings and then by an act of will transported elsewhere. This process, we may say, exemplifies Pope Francis's technocratic paradigm as it begins in economics and gradually usurps politics and other institutions of human life (*Laudato Si'*, no. 108).

We noted above in our discussion of the language game we play with the word "chair" that such games involve bodily engagement with our environments. We first learn what chairs are by climbing into them. Through climbing, the one-year-old hopes to overcome the obstacle called "up," or perhaps intends nearness to the adults. Having surmounted the prior physical challenges, an older child might climb a chair as a means of getting a glimpse of a card game, yet another world to be conquered. When in high school one presumably learns the importance of sitting erect—one's own back flush against the back of one's chair—throughout dinner with one's new girlfriend's parents, who are deciding whether you are a trustworthy date for their daughter. These examples show that language games are interwoven with ways of communicating bodily with other human bodies in a shared world.

Arguably, the early Wittgenstein held a "picture theory" of language, claiming that language was a means of representing objects which existed, in some sense, "over there," that is, outside of language itself.²⁹ This framework, according to which a gap separates language from the world, naturally gave rise to the question of just how language does this. That is, how can we be sure that this bit of language really does correspond to that bit of reality? As the term was applied in the early work, the question concerned how language and world shared a "form."

One unhappy consequence of this way of framing the problem is that it tempts philosophers to re-make spoken language into something ideal so that it fits the abstract logic that is meant to guarantee the fit between language and world. Rather than attending to our actual linguistic behavior, the philosopher strains to make practice conform to the ideal. But if language and world are not separable, the need to account for how language fits the world evaporates. Where does this leave the philosopher?

In his later work, as previously noted, Wittgenstein acknowledges that the ways our language construes the world are multiple and irreducible, and gives up on the *Tractatus's* aspiration to present *the* way in which language and world must correlate. Language and world are internally related, and so there is no need for attempts to explain

²⁹ Kallenberg, *Ethics as Grammar*, 88; Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 2.223.

how they fit together.³⁰ Following from this, Wittgenstein turns from “language” *per se* to language as used by a community of speakers.³¹ “Form” for him ceases to refer to a logical structure supposedly underlying both language and world and comes to signify “forms of life” found in human communities.³² He therefore turns his attention away from the effort to construct a new, ideal language—now seen as the philosopher’s peculiar “temptation”—and turns toward the language we already have. Ordinary language, words in their customary uses, become both the object and the instrument within Wittgenstein’s method of doing philosophy. The philosopher, moreover, steps out of the gap supposed to have existed between language and world and into the “hurly burly” of our everyday life with words.³³

For our purposes, in what follows, there are two crucial characteristics of what Wittgenstein calls our form of life. First this form of life is social, meaning that we flourish or wilt depending on the quality of the relationships within which we subsist. Second, our linguistic skill—that by which we accomplish the tasks necessary to sustain those relationships that are a given within our form of life—involves our brains and bodies being in tune with each other. In other words, linguistic fluency is largely a matter of tacit knowledge; it is a kind of knowing-how that rarely reaches the heights of explicit formulation.³⁴

The human form of life makes relationships, and their good order, primary. One theologian has called justice “the virtue of togetherness.”³⁵ Yet Crawford recounts how the key relationships were corrupted as a consequence of the organization of his job at IAC. These relationships were constitutive of the business as a network of persons. They include: 1) the relationship between the laborer (i.e., the

³⁰ Kallenberg, *Ethics as Grammar*, 189–90.

³¹ Kallenberg takes on the question of discovering a unity underlying Wittgenstein’s earlier and later writing by proposing that such unity has a narrative form. He traces this story like thread by detailing how the human subject “migrates” from the periphery to the center of Wittgenstein’s focus as he arrives at his later philosophy (Kallenberg, *Ethics as Grammar*, 11–47).

³² Kallenberg, *Ethics as Grammar*, 103.

³³ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Grammar*, trans. Anthony Kenny (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), no. 29.

³⁴ Brad Kallenberg, *By Design: Ethics, Theology, and the Practice of Engineering* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2013), 150–158. Kallenberg there discusses the work of neuroscientist Antonio Damasio. See Antonio Damasio, *Descartes’ Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (New York: Penguin, 1994).

³⁵ John R. Donahue, SJ, “Biblical Perspectives on Justice,” in *The Faith That Does Justice: Examining the Christian Sources of Social Change*, ed. John C. Haughey (New York: Paulist, 1977). Quoted in Paul Wadell, *Happiness and the Christian Moral Life* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2008), 222.

abstract writer) and the customer or end user of the abstract, such as a scholar pursuing her own research in a related field; (2) the relationship between the abstract writer and the original authors; and (3) the laborer's relationship with himself, or the laborer's sense of dignity, which is impacted by her awareness of the quality of work she performs. What is more, collateral damage ensues upon the quality of relationships within the organization, such as those among the abstract writers and between them and their supervisors.³⁶

First, in a healthy economic arrangement the supplier of a good or service and his customer share a common interest in a quality product.³⁷ From the supplier's side, this helps ensure a satisfied customer, more likely to return in the future. The customer desires something truly helpful for her own needs or projects. Digging deeper, Crawford notes that his own desire for knowledge, which might have been fulfilled in the work of reading and writing abstracts, aligns with the customer's presumed desire for knowledge which animates her own research activities. Both of these shared goods are undermined when poor workmanship issues in a product of poor quality. Just as Crawford's abstract writing failed to engage him in the author's thought world, so the shoddy abstract provides no genuine glimpse of this world to the end user.

Turning to the abstract writer's relationship with the author, Crawford again observes that his own desire to know might have found its mirror image in the author's desire to be known, or to share what she has learned.³⁸ Yet the circumstance of a quota of 28 articles per day made it impossible for Crawford to expend the time and energy necessary to read comprehendingly. He was therefore plagued by the feeling he was not doing justice to the authors.³⁹

Finally, Crawford's work was so structured that he was incapable of taking pride in it, making it hard to be within his own skin at work. His relationship with himself was fractured because he could not observe in his performance an authentic exercise of his own skill. As noted above, Crawford recalled the soporific effect of his work:

This exhaustion is surely tied to the fact that I felt trapped in a contradiction. The fast pace demanded absorption in the task, but that pace also precluded absorption, and had the effect of estranging me from my own doings. Or rather, I *tried* to absent myself, the better to meet my quota, but the writing of an abstract, unlike pulling of levers on an assembly line, cannot be done mindlessly. The material I was

³⁶ Crawford notes for example that because of the futility they perceived in their work, the social life of fellow workers tilted toward fantasy and escapism.

³⁷ Crawford, *Shop Class as Soulcraft*, 136.

³⁸ Crawford, *Shop Class as Soulcraft*, 136.

³⁹ Crawford, *Shop Class as Soulcraft*, 134.

given was too demanding, and what it demanded was to be given its due ... my efforts to read, comprehend, and write abstracts of 28 academic journal articles per day required me to actively suppress my own ability to think.⁴⁰

Sadly, as he recounts, this alienation from himself gradually eats away at his attunement to the needs of the customer and the author. It is difficult to remain committed to one's customer as worthy of honor while serving them up a piece of junk.

That *phronesis* or knowing-how is characteristic of our form of life is a theme that runs throughout Crawford's book. Throughout *Shop Class as Soulcraft*, Crawford elucidates the claim that manual work satisfies a deep human need. It does so in part because it involves the mind's focused engagement with the messy, often recalcitrant material world. The objective standards discovered in such work provides a basis for just human relationships.⁴¹ He finds that so-called "knowledge work" often ironically lacks the same requirement for concentrated intelligence. Indeed, the very labeling of certain jobs "knowledge work" involves mistaking (mis-taking) a certain technical or abstract sort of cognition for the whole of human intelligence.⁴²

It is then no accident that this mentality issues in designing work in which human intelligence is neither challenged nor developed. In the case of Crawford's abstract writing, the opportunities for *phronesis* would have run parallel to the mental activity of the authors in creating the articles. The world of thought found in the article is a language game whose mastery stems from the author's many years of bodily training in field, lab, and lecture hall, under the supervision of

⁴⁰ Crawford, *Shop Class as Soulcraft*, 133–134.

⁴¹ Crawford, *Shop Class as Soulcraft*, 65–68.

⁴² Crawford, "The Case for Working with Your Hands." Furthermore, Wendell Berry has written about intelligence in a way reminiscent of both Crawford and Pope Francis. For Berry, the grand story of technology, what he in one place calls "technological determinism," leads to the separation of human intelligence from place. This results in human disorientation or confusion, reflected in our language. A natural consequence is tyranny over places and the world as such. "The technological determinists have tyrannical attitudes, and speak tyrannese, at least partly because their assumptions cannot produce a moral or a responsible definition of the human place in creation. Because they assume that the human place is any place, they are necessarily confused about where they belong. Lacking a place that would provide an intimate field of action, intelligence becomes tyrannical. It fails to perform the attention to local differences required for intelligent action. In contrast, in any culture that could be called healthy or sane we find a much richer, larger concept of intelligence. ... And we find that the human mind, in such a culture, is invariably strongly *placed*, in reference to other minds in the community and in cultural memory and tradition, and in reference to earthly localities and landmarks" (Wendell Berry, "Standing by Words," in *Standing by Words* [Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 1983], 57–58).

a past mentor. Similarly, for Crawford to enter into this thought world even as an informed spectator would require time, effort, and imagination. Yet the technocratic paradigm employed in designing Crawford's job suppresses the reality of training. In allowing a simple procedure to take the place of attention and imagination, it creates deadening forms of work. In short, a distorted vision of our form of life is created as the role of *phronesis* is displaced by overreaching *techné*.

CONCLUSION

A reasonable aim of a course on the ethics of work might be to identify and explore the chasm between the claim of Catholic tradition that work has human value and the deformed (and deforming) jobs too often encountered in the contemporary work world. This will require of the teacher some awareness of how academic knowledges fund a degraded and degrading work world.⁴³

I have argued that Pope Francis's "technocratic paradigm" helps us understand the nature of the intrinsically frustrating, if not morally injurious, kinds of jobs on offer in today's work world. Furthermore, Francis's reiteration of the meaningfulness of work presumes the principle of the common good and its assumption that human beings subsist within social relations upon whose good ordering each member's happiness depends. Crawford's experience illustrates that poorly conceived work entails degradation of human relationships.

Moreover, I have used Wittgenstein to spell out just how the technocratic paradigm operates in the deformation of the work world. Crawford's experience at IAC, elucidated using Wittgenstein, allows us to see how being beholden to the technocratic paradigm occludes precisely those differences constituted by skilled, tacit knowing. Correlatively, Wittgenstein and Crawford show us that resisting the technocratic paradigm requires learning to see differences. Crawford

⁴³ In a complementary discussion, Wendell Berry points out the tendency of the disciplines of the modern university toward greater and greater abstraction of knowledge from local communities. Another name for this abstraction is "specialization." The specialist's abstract knowledge serves states and large corporations through its pretensions to universality. Knowledges fitting for "anywhere" accompany organizations understanding themselves to be from "nowhere," that is as having no local place of residence. As Berry puts it, correlative to the trajectory of abstraction, such knowledge progressively prescind from its own accountability to the human localities that spawned them. In a way highly reminiscent of Wittgenstein's comment that the speech of academic philosophy often represents "words on holiday," Berry points out that these sciences generate habits of speech wherein words are severed from communities of speakers or, in Wittgenstein's terms, "forms of life" (Berry, "Standing by Words," 24–63). For a helpful account of how Berry's insights might be applied to the project of envisioning an authentically Christian university, see Hauerwas, *The State of the University*, 92–107.

himself relied upon his upbringing in the trades, a training based on responsive engagement to material realities independent of one's will, to name the "contradictions of the cubicle."⁴⁴ He returns to the shop as a motorcycle repairman, and finds there a community of practitioners with shared moral standards. Furthermore, I suggest seeing Pope Francis's own alternative to the technocratic paradigm, namely "integral ecology" as his way of "seeing differences" and thus showing a way forward to a more human way of life. Integral ecology in *Laudato Si'* is in part a way of seeing the world. Rooted in the "gaze of Jesus" (II.VII), this vision presumes the doctrine of the Trinity (no. 240), and is expressed in the phrase repeated throughout the document, "everything is connected." The vision of integral ecology, moreover, becomes a moral principle as the awareness of solidarity between human societies and nature generates a new frame for human responsibility.⁴⁵

Finally, preparing students for the ethical task of discovering meaningful work will not likely be served very far by providing them a set of empirically verifiable criteria ("opportunities for advancement," etc.). Students simply will not know what to do with such a list, though they may deceive themselves into thinking the procedure for its use is obvious. The deception is in the idea that meaning will be discovered if we simply get the criteria to line up within our jobs. Indeed, if we want to help our students name the kind of technocratic fantasy behind Crawford's work at IAC, our best resource may be narratives like his, taught with some Wittgensteinian prodding. **M**

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⁴⁴ Crawford, *Shop Class as Soulcraft*, 126 (chapter title).

⁴⁵ Vincent J. Miller, "Integral Ecology: Francis's Spiritual and Moral Vision of Interconnectedness," in *The Theological and Ecological Vision of Laudato Si': Everything Is Connected*, ed. Vincent J. Miller (London: Bloomsbury, 2017).