THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

TRYING

by

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The undersigned certify that they have read and
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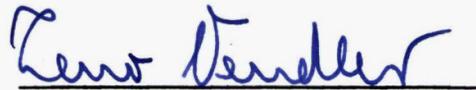
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ABSTRACT

Most of us learn this pearl of commonplace reflections at an early
age: 'If at first you don't succeed, try, try and try again.' 'Try' is
a widely used word in everyday speech. We speak of trying to lose some
weight, of trying on a pair of shoes, of trying to move a piece of furni-
ture, of trying to control our anger, of trying to decide what to do.
What I propose to do in this thesis is to examine the concept of trying
and consider some of the philosophical problems that arise in the course
of such an analysis. I start off by asking the question, 'How is the
word 'try' used in ordinary English sentences?' After sketching the
grammar of the word I turn to the questions 'What sort of a verb is
'try'?' 'What can we not try to do?' Wittgenstein claimed that 'a
language-game comprises the use of several words.'[1] What are some of
the other words belonging to the language-game that 'try' belongs to?
Are 'making an effort,' 'difficulties,' 'intending,' 'succeeding,'
'failing,' 'attending' relevant concepts to the concept of trying?
If so, how are they relevant? Can one try to do something which one
believes is impossible to do? Does one's set of beliefs about the world
determine what one can try to do? These are some of the philosophically

[1] L. Wittgenstein, Zettel, p. 112.

perplexing questions that stand in need of discussion. Trying is such an ordinary and familiar concept that it might breed contempt among some philosophers. It may be asked 'What does all this matter?' What is the importance of all this about 'trying'? In the first place, philosophers in the past did not pay much attention to this concept thinking perhaps that it is philosophically trouble-free. I aim to show that it is philosophically interesting and important. Philosophers have long been preoccupied with the concept of action. However, only lately it is being realised "that even the 'simplest' named actions are not so simple — certainly are not the mere makings of physical movements, and to ask what more then, comes in (intentions?, conventions?) and what does not (motives?) and what is the detail of the complicated machinery we use in 'acting' — the receipt of intelligence, the appreciation of the situation, the invocation of principles, the planning, the control of execution and the rest."[1] Surely we are not to forget about 'trying.' But let applications be damned. After all the clarification of concepts is one of the tasks of a philosopher.

[1]J. L. Austin, Philosophical Papers, p. 127.

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SECTION 1

Two Senses of 'Try'

From where do we get the concept 'trying' that I want to consider
here? The straightforward and correct answer is: from everyday language.
So we should direct our attention to the word 'trying.' The employment
of this word is not so clear as that of a term in physics. A term in
physics, 'gravitation' for example is used in a precisely defined fashion.
Not so with 'trying.' How is the verb 'try' used in ordinary English
sentences? The answers at first appear multifarious. A mother on a
shopping tour with her daughter may ask her to try on a charming dress.
One may try out a new motorcycle. A gambler may try his luck at chemin-
de-fer. A captured criminal is tried by the jury. One may try one's
hand at selling insurance or at playing tennis. Ill-brought-up children
try our patience. We sometimes try a new brand of coffee. I may try
reading a book of Evelyn Waugh's (in spite of the heated discussion in
the office) or I may try to snub someone. These examples perhaps suffice
to show that we do use the word 'try' in many ways and contexts. But it
is reasonable to ask if there are some primary uses of 'try.' I suggest
that the following are the primary uses.

1) I shall try to lift that weight.

2) I shall try a piece of that cake.

We may speak of two different senses of 'try' if we make the reservation that we do not wish to enter into a discussion of the slippery philosophical problem concerning 'the senses of words.' The first sense is that of 'make an attempt' and the second is that of 'put to the test.' There is a different construction corresponding to each of the primary uses. In 'I shall try to lift that weight' the verb 'try' is followed by the infinitive of a verb. This construction may sometimes collapse into a slightly different one, as in 'I shall try lifting that weight.' In 'I shall try a piece of that cake,' 'try' is followed by a substantival expression. So it appears that 'try' in the sense of 'attempt' is usually followed by the infinitive of a verb or by the participle of a verb, while 'try' in the sense of 'put to the test' is followed by a substantive or a substantival expression. Suffixes like 'out,' 'on,' are prevalent with 'try' only in the second sense but hardly in the first sense. Adverbs like 'hard,' 'desperately' and adverbial phrases like 'my best,' 'with all my heart' go along with 'try' in 'I shall try to lift that weight,' but not with 'try' in 'I shall try a piece of that cake.' Now that we have distinguished between the two senses of 'trying' and developed, more or less satisfactorily, criteria for such a distinction, I confess that I am interested here only in the first sense of 'trying' because it is this sense which is relevant to such traditionally important philosophical concepts as the concept of 'action' and the concept of the 'will.' Henceforth, I shall be talking about 'trying' in the sense of

'make an attempt' unless it is otherwise indicated.

SECTION 2

The tie between 'try' and the verbs following it.

Some words must be said about the logical and grammatical character of this rather interesting verb 'try.' When we are asked the question: 'What are you doing?' I may quite legitimately answer: 'I am trying to open this wine bottle,' or 'I am trying to understand what Kant meant in such and such a passage of the <u>Critique of Pure Reason</u>.' But I am not permitted to answer simply 'I am trying' unless the context or previous remarks make clear just what it is that I am trying to do. The upshot of these observations is that what counts as trying depends on the verb following it. The expression 'I am trying' cries out for the question '<u>What</u> are you trying to do?' 'Trying' is like 'wanting' in this respect. One can't just say 'I want.' The words 'I want' cry out for the question 'What do you want?' or 'What do you want to do?' The only way to identify and describe an attempt is by saying that it was an attempt by such and such a person to do such and such. This point is mirrored in the grammar of the word 'try.' ('Try is not the only verb which exhibits this grammatical tie to the verb that completes it. Others are: 'attempt,' 'endeavour,' 'strive.').

SECTION 3

'Trying' is an Activity Verb

What sort of a verb is 'try?' The time schema associated with
the verb tempts us to say that it is an activity verb.[1] 'Try' readily
admits of the continuous tense as in: 'I am trying to move this block
of stone,' or 'I am trying to convince you that I am right.' Now, if
I am trying to convince you that I am right (or if I am trying to move
this block of stone) even if I stop trying the next moment, it still
is true to say that I did try to convince you (or I did try to move
this block of stone.) The question 'For how long did he try to con-
vince you?' or 'For how long did you try to move this block of stone?'
are meaningful, appropriate and grammatical. 'For an hour,' or 'for
what seemed at the time an unendurably long time,' are informative
answers. My trying to move the block or my trying to convince you may
go on for some time, for a short period or for a long one. In these
respects 'trying' is very much like any other activity verb, 'listening
to,' or 'running,' for example. If I am listening to Beethoven's *Eroica*
it follows that even if I stop listening to it, that I did listen to it

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[1] For a thorough analysis of achievement, accomplishment, activity and
state verbs cf. Zeno Vendler, *Verbs and Times*, Philosophical Review.

for a while. You may at once ask me, 'For how long did you listen to it?' Fifteen minutes, 'not long enough,' 'until the end of the second movement' are good enough answers. 'Listening to,' 'running,' 'whistling,' like 'trying' are activities and one of their characteristic features is that they do go on for some time. So much for the similarities between 'trying' and other activity verbs. Now let us turn to the differences.

SECTION 4

Is it possible to give a purely behaviourist account of 'trying'?

While there are paradigmatic forms of behaviour which we might call 'listening to,' 'crying,' 'running,' 'laughing,' there is no paradigmatic form of behaviour which is called 'trying.' One can try only by trying to do something or to understand something or someone, and so on. One can try to jump the fence on one occasion, one can try to seduce a likeable lass on another, or one can try to find a missing person on a further occasion. We go about trying these things in very different ways, displaying very different forms of behaviour indeed! What counts as 'trying' in a particular case depends on the verb that follows 'try.' We go about trying to win someone's affection in a very different way from trying to incur someone's wrath. From these considerations I conclude that a purely behavourist account of 'trying' is doomed to fail. 'Trying' is not the name of a behaviour pattern like 'running' is because what behaviour counts

as the behaviour characteristic of 'trying' depends on what one is trying.

How one goes about 'trying to V,' what steps one must take, what procedure

one must follow (if any) in order to try to V, depends entirely on what

the verb 'V' is. There is no one behavioural feature common to all cases

of trying.

SECTION 5

'Trying' is not an adverbial verb

There are philosophers[1] who argue that 'trying' is not an activity

verb but rather an adverbial verb. According to this view 'trying' is

a way in which we act. It characterizes the manner in which an activity

is conducted. This suggestion roughly amounts to the claim that when I

say 'I shall try to swim the English Channel,' I mean 'I shall swim the

English Channel tryingly.' But this is clearly wrong. The adverb

'tryingly' in 'I shall swim the English Channel tryingly' describes

how I shall swim the Channel. The speaker, when uttering the locution,

is quite confident that he will swim the Channel but the going will be

rough; he will be battling the waves, and even when exhausted he will

keep on swimming. At least this is the most likely interpretation of

such a locution. Two things seem to follow from 'I shall swim the English

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[1]Gilbert Ryle, Adverbial Verbs.

Channel tryingly.' Firstly: I am confident that I will complete the proposed undertaking, namely swimming the Channel. Secondly: I shall accomplish this feat through constant and observable exertion and some personal suffering. 'Tryingly' describes how I conduct the activity of 'swimming.' I may be faltering or halting every now and then. On the other hand, nothing of this sort follows from 'I shall try to swim the English Channel.' What is implied in the latter locution is: firstly, I am somewhat in doubt about the outcome of the proposed undertaking; I may succeed or fail at it. Secondly, I expect hardships and difficulties but these need not be overcome by me 'tryingly;' they may be overcome with greater effort but still smoothly, or with no effort at all.

Perhaps the difference between 'I try' and 'tryingly' can be illustrated more effectively by another example. 'I tried to make your party' does not mean or imply 'I made your party tryingly.' In fact it implies something quite different, that I did not make your party. Something or another prevented me from coming to your party. While it does follow from 'I made your party tryingly' that I was present at your party but I had a rather difficult time getting there. To phrase our conclusion precisely then: from the assertion 'I tried to ϕ' it can, at least ordinarily, be inferred that I did not ϕ, while 'I ϕ-ed tryingly' says in effect that I did ϕ.

The absurdity of the claim that 'trying' modifies an activity and is not an activity itself becomes even more conspicuous if we use a

complementary verb which is <u>not</u> an activity, e.g., 'understand.' 'I

am trying to understand what your argument is.' How shall we translate

this into the adverbial form? 'I understand tryingly,' or 'I am under-

standing tryingly' are both incorrect. One may understand an argument

perfectly well, more or less, clearly, immediately but never tryingly.

I hope that I managed to show that 'trying' is not a way of doing things,

that is, it is not an adverbial verb.

SECTION 6

Trying and its linguistic Milieu

What striking relations of affinity there are between 'trying' and

'doing.' We intuitively put the two concepts in the same camp. 'What

are you trying to do?' we ask of the man when we don't know what he is

up to. We talk, walk, run, drive nails into walls when the need arises,

and pursue a great variety of activities. (From our childhood, we learned

to do things by trying to do them.) It makes good sense to say of a baby

or of a man on his deathbed, or of a person, who has just undergone

tonsilectomy that 'He is trying to talk;' or a boy with a broken leg,

or of a baby that 'He is trying to walk;' or a chap who happens to have

a severe nervous condition causing his hand to shake, that 'He is trying

to drive a nail into the wall.' At this point we might be tempted to say:

firstly, that it makes sense to talk of trying only those things which

it makes sense to talk of doing. Secondly, whatever we can be said to
do, we can also be said to try to do. Thirdly, whatever we can be said
to try to do, we can also be said to do. Let us examine these assertions.
As to the first proposal; although it is quite true that there are many
things that we try and do, there are many which we try but cannot be
said to do. For example, 'I am trying to believe what you say in spite
of the lies you told in the past.' 'Try to realize the gravity of your
crime,' 'I am trying to decide on the issue at hand.' Surely, 'believing,'
'persuading,' 'realizing,' 'deciding' are not the sorts of things we do.
They are not activities. Thus we see that the verb following 'try' in
'trying to V' may very well be a state verb like 'believe,' an achieve-
ment verb like 'realize' or for that matter an accomplishment verb like
in 'He is trying to put a bomb together.' Given this, it follows that
it is false to say that we can try only those things which we do. This
argument also gives strong evidence against the view that 'trying' is
an activity verb merely in virtue of the fact that the verb following
it is an activity verb. It is an activity no matter what sort of verb
follows it. As far as the second and third proposals mentioned above
are concerned, I shall deal with them later.

SECTION 7

Trying and Auxiliary Activities

'Trying to V' is logically distinct from 'V-ing' and also from
'having V-ed.' When a person is trying to V, he has not yet V-ed.
We do not have the slightest difficulty in distinguishing between
our trying to understand someone and having understood him, between
trying to win the race and having won the race, between trying to lift
a weight and lifting it. The question I am asking is: 'What is involved
when a father is trying to understand his son?' There are certain
auxiliary activities. Listening to what the son has to say is one of
these auxiliary activities. Discussing the problems at hand in a
sympathetic fashion is perhaps another. A father who does not do
anything which shows or could count as trying to understand his son
cannot be said to be trying to understand him. Trying to win a hundred
metre dash would involve running as fast as one can. When in a nostalgic
mood one usually tries to remember how it was when a child in one's native
land. Visualing , conjuring up images, looking at one's old photographs
may be some of these auxiliary activities. One stipulation must be
added: these 'auxiliary' activities must be thought by the agent to
lead to V-ing. If not, then one may have intended to V but surely one
can't be said to have tried to V. E.g., putting the kettle on the stove

is not an activity involved in trying to win the race. This last remark
is anticipatory in nature.

SECTION 8

Trying and Attending

When a naughty child offends his mother by his prankish conduct,
he might try to please her, to make up to her. Surely, when he is
trying to please her, he is displaying a certain attentiveness. It
is by no means trivial to point out that the child is 'minding what
he is doing' when trying to please. The hunter, crouching in the
bush, trying to spot the coveted deer, is paying careful attention to
what he is doing. Trying to learn how to ride a bicycle or trying to
say something precisely, do require at least some attention, concen-
tration or care on our part. I should like to say then that 'trying'
is a 'heed concept.'[1] We cannot properly be said to be trying to
listen to a piece of music or to an argument without paying some
attention to them. The hunter cannot be said to be trying carelessly
or unwittingly to shoot at the target. 'He was biting his fingernails
absent-mindedly.' Yes, that will do. But can one try absent-mindedly
to bite one's fingernails? Hardly! 'Try to live by these rules' a

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[1]The phrase 'heed concept' is due to Professor Gilbert Ryle. Cf. The
Concept of Mind, p. 135-49.

father might say to his son. His exhortation does imply 'Keep these rules in mind.' He can't say without absurdity 'Try to live by these rules but pay no attention to them.' It seems then that 'trying' entails but is not entailed by 'heeding.' Saying of Jones that he is trying to do such and such is already saying that Jones is paying heed to what he is doing. We cannot, without doing violence to the language, describe someone as trying inattentively to read, or trying carelessly to lift a heavy weight or trying negligently to cook a superb meal while we may quite appropriately describe someone as reading inattentively, lifting a heavy weight carelessly, cooking a superb meal negligently. It is redundant to say that a man who is trying to repair a television set is paying attention to what he is doing. One can try to sink a billiard ball, but can one be said to be trying heedlessly to sink a billiard ball?

There are occasions when one tries and tries hard to forget an unpleasant experience or a headache. In these cases one's attention must be focused on something other than the unpleasant experience or headache. One usually lets one's attention be caught by and absorbed in a good book, in a film or perhaps in soothing music. Very similar in nature to this example are four others: 'trying to think of nothing,' 'trying to relax,' and 'trying to sleep,' and 'trying to ignore a person.' Surely one might say, these are just the occasions when we do not pay heed to anything at all. Although one may be tempted to say that these

are counterexamples to our thesis, further analysis shows that this is

not so. Consider an overworked executive, beset and troubled by problems

even after his working hours. He paces up and down, behaves nervously,

treats everyone abominably and can't sleep at nights. His wife, being

a reasonable woman, proposes a vacation, to which he agrees. On the

plane flying to Jamaica she tells him to sit back and 'try to think of

nothing in particular.' The suggestion is to try to forget about his

problems. He can do this by letting himself take an interest in his

fellow passengers, or by thinking about the pleasures of the upcoming

holiday, or by reminiscing about his childhood vacations. He does pay

attention to these things, he perhaps concentrates on them because would

he not, his business problems which he does not want to think about,

might just occupy a foremost place in his mind again. 'Try to think of

nothing' is taken by the plain man as an exhortation to try not to

worry about one's problems, to put them out of one's mind as it were.

One goes about doing this by thinking of pleasant or cheerful things,

perhaps. The remark 'Try to think of nothing' need not be taken literally.

If it is, then it loses its force in ordinary contexts since we wouldn't

know what to make of it. It is rarely left up in the air without any

qualifying phrases. 'Try to think of nothing that might worry you or

trouble you or exasperate you' are the frequently used expressions.

What if I take 'Try to think of nothing' literally? I ask myself, 'Can

I think of nothing?' It seems not. For as soon as I say 'Now I am

thinking of nothing' I refute myself. But I can try to do this as well. How? By going to sleep. But would this count as 'trying to think of nothing?' Someone else, who does not realize the implications of 'thinking of nothing' and believes that it can be done may justly say 'Now I am trying to think of nothing.' If we ask how does he try to do this, he may answer 'by concentrating on the colour of the door and then letting the colour fade in my imagination. This way, I believe, I can rearch a state wherein I am thinking of nothing.'

'Try to relax!' one may be told by one's friends after one has been involved in an automobile accident. One is tense, worried; one may have a long drink and try to relax by engaging in and concentrating on such trivial, if pleasant, activities as playing ping-pong or billiards. Surely one does these things with some degree of attention. This is not the only way of trying to relax. There are many other ways. E.g., one may try to relax by sitting back in an easy chair and stare at the ceiling and hum a favourite tune. One is not paying attention or heed to anything in particular. I ask myself 'Is this trying to relax?' And find myself answering: 'If this is trying to relax, I don't know what relaxing is.'

'Trying to go to sleep' may require counting or reciting a long poem for some, for others thinking about plans for tomorrow. One disregards distractions by focusing one's attention on these things, keeping one's mind on them. 'Trying to ignore an obnoxious person'

or someone who we don't want to talk to for one reason or another, may involve inspecting pieces of furniture or chatting to someone enthusiastically, or listening attentively to a friend whenever the obnoxious person is in talking range. It is, however, essential that one direct one's attention or rather pretend to direct one's attention away from the person to be ignored. By now it should be abundantly clear that the above examples, which seemed to counter our thesis that 'trying' is a 'heed concept,' also involve exercises of heed.

To sum up and add a word of caution: in the foregoing discussion I argued, persuasively I hope, that 'trying' is a 'heed concept;' that is to say, whenever a person is trying to do something, to achieve, to accomplish something, or to get into some state or another, he is attending to what he is doing. And now, a word of caution. Some may want to foist upon this account an interpretation that I regard as erroneous. Namely that when I am trying to do something, I am doing two things at once: trying to V and heeding what I am doing. Nothing could be farther from the truth. When I am trying, for example to translate a poem of Ezra Pound into Hungarian, I am not doing two things at once, trying to translate and paying attention to what I am doing. When something distracts my attention it also distracts me from my trying to translate. What of course I can do is to translate inattentively. But then I am not, and cannot be said to be trying.

For what <u>could</u> be the point of saying 'I am trying inattentively to translate?' The concept of 'heed' is built into the concept of 'trying.'

SECTION 9

Trying and Self-Knowledge

Often we are in a quandary about what we are going to do. Not infrequently we say, in a tone of voice revealing exasperation, 'I don't know what I am going to do.' This remark may be taken at least two ways; firstly, as an answer to a query about my plans, e.g., 'Are you going to the cinema tonight?' 'I am not sure. I don't know what I am going to do.' Secondly, the remark may be taken as an outburst expressing helplessness when one happens to be a victim of circumstances. It is the first case that is of interest to us here for purposes of comparison. The man who doesn't know what he is going to do tonight simply has not made up his mind as to what he wants to do or will do. While the man who will try to see the German film The Bread of Our Early Years at the Jubilee Auditorium did make up his mind as to what he will try to do. It follows that he knows what he will try to do. If our man is linguistically equipped, he can tell, without hesitation, reflection, or mind-searching what it is he will try to do or accomplish.

When I say 'I am trying to finish my thesis,' I imply that I am working on it and it is my purpose to complete it. One cannot, without

absurdity, say 'I don't know what I am trying to do.' And one cannot, without redundancy say 'I know what I am trying to do.' Such locution is appropriate but still redundant in cases where I want to reassure some of my sceptical companions that in spite of the fact that they can't see any sense in what I am doing, there is sense and purpose in it. I mentioned above two related knowledge claims that one is ready to make when one makes statements of the form 'I am trying to V.' Let us see now if such claims are also applicable to statements made by us about other people's attempts. Imagine someone in the following situation. In a packed streetcar, a young lady's purse somehow opened and she is not aware of it. Neither is she aware of the fact that a five dollar bill is temptingly sticking out of it. Suppose that I am next to her and see this. So is an older lady, who without my knowing it, is keeping an eye on the 'scene.' When I move my hand towards the bag and grab the five dollar note, she may cry out, pointing at me: 'He is trying to steal your money.' But I may claim, and justly I think, that I was trying to do no such thing. What I was trying to do is to put the five dollars securely in her purse and close it. Not being competent in English, I could not warn her; this was the best I could do. It seems then that the lady with the public spirit made a mistake. She saw my hand moving towards the bag; she was not mistaken about her observations as to my behaviour. She was mistaken about the purpose of my behaviour; she was mistaken about why I was doing what I was doing.

It seems then that we may easily be mistaken about what someone is trying to do because we don't know the 'whys and wherefores' of his behaviour. This, of course, does not mean that we are always mistaken as to people's attempts. In fact most of the time we are successful in telling what people are trying to do. It is, however, a necessary condition for saying of another that he is trying to do such and such, that one be able to tell what the purpose of the other's activity is. What sense, if any, can be made of utterances like 'He does not know it but he is trying to seduce my daughter,' or 'She was trying, without being aware of it, to climb through my window into my room,' or 'I don't know it but I am trying to believe you.' The last example sounds blatantly absurd. 'I am trying to believe you' implies that I am on purpose, taking certain appropriate steps which I think will get me into a state so that I can say 'I believe you.' E.g., disregarding your past lies and keeping in mind your good points may be such steps. I suspect that a new language would be necessary if we are to admit first person utterances of the sort 'I don't know it but I am trying to ϕ.' If I say 'I am trying to ϕ' it follows that I know that I am trying to ϕ. Psychoanalysts find such a new language useful. A psychoanalyst who observed his patient's behaviour at a party may say to him next morning, 'Ah, you were trying to seduce the hostess last night.' And the patient responds 'I am afraid you are wrong. I was trying to do nothing of the sort. I was polite, pleasant and helpful. I helped her move the dinner

table to the middle of the room but so did many others. I chatted with her for a few seconds but so did others. I had one dance with her and so did others. Do these count in your eyes as trying to seduce her?' The psychoanalyst may say 'Ah, you do not know it but you were trying to seduce her.' This is not how the word 'try' is used in ordinary language. Given the structure of our language in which we talk about 'attempts,' it follows that we know what we are trying to do. It is all right to get a new language going which would admit unconscious attempts and desires, motifs, etc. What is not all right is to pretend to accept the given language and refuse to talk in terms of it. 'She was trying, without being aware of it, to climb through the window into my room.' Suppose she was sleepwalking or rather sleepclimbing. Then she is not aware of what she is doing. We might describe her as 'trying' but she would not admit to any such thing when asked next day. 'I was sleepwalking' she would say, and rightly. 'I. was not trying anything.' If we were to grant unconscious attempts admission to our conceptual scheme then any activity, piece of behaviour, thought, intention, waking, sleeping, breathing could be regarded as an 'attempt' to do whatever comes next. This view is wholly inimical to our common sense. We would greatly suffer from such a move. We could never be really sure whether we are trying to do something or are doing something. The use of the verb 'try' would be universalized. It would not longer have a distinct, logical and linguistic function. There would be no point to its employment. We would

have blurred a useful distinction in our language: that of trying to do

something and doing something.   And to what avail?

SECTION 10

Trying and Deciding

When a friend asks me what I am going to do tonight I might answer:
'I don't yet know.'   I may have several invitations to do various things.
I may want to play tennis however.   After some deliberation I inform him
that I shall try to play tennis.   I say 'I shall try' because I am aware
of the fact that Friday evenings the tennis courts are usually packed.
In view of this I make a rather cautious statement with 'I shall try.'
'I shall try to play tennis' expresses my decision to try.   One's
decisions need not be expressed in the explicit form: 'I decided to
do such and such' or 'I decided to try to do such and such.'   They may
be expressed in such implicit forms as: 'I will do such and such' or
'I shall try to do such and such.'   A man may be undecided as to what
he will do.   But as soon as he announces that he will try to do such
and such, it would be absurd of us to say 'He is still undecided.'
'I shall try to play tennis tonight,' said in a hesitant tone of voice,
is perhaps the expression of a shaky decision, but still it is the
expression of a decision.   The revealing feature of decisions is that
they are subject to change.   One can make up one's mind to try to do

something, but also, one can change one's mind about trying to do

something. 'I shall try to play tennis tonight' said with conviction,

is a firm decision to try. Should we say then that it is a necessary

condition for 'trying' that we must decide to try? What I ask is this:

must (and this is a logical 'must') I make a decision to try to do some-

thing at a definite moment before initiating my attempt to do that some-

thing? There are fatal objections to such a view. The man who is

desperately pulling his wife towards himself in order to stop her from

falling into a canyon is obviously 'trying to save her life.' It does

not, however, follow from this that he made a clear, full-fledged, or

any other kind of, decision, at a moment preceding his attempt to save

her. There was no time to deliberate or to ponder about alternative

courses of action. There was no time to make a decision to try to

save her life and then act upon this decision. Such emergency situa-

tions demand quick reactions. People who act quickly and decisively

in such emergency cases are said to have good reflexes and great

'presence of mind.' Such people do what must be done promptly,

decisively, resolutely; but to reiterate our previous point: it does

not follow that there was an act of decision or resolve to try involved

in trying to save her life. One, of course, may say of someone: 'He

tried to act decisively.' The adverbial expression 'decisively' modi-

fies the infinitive 'to act.' He tried <u>to do</u> whatever he wanted to do

in a manner that was determined and unvacillating.. It was his aim to

bring it off decisively. The adverb 'decisively,' however, does not

modify the 'trying.' 'He, decisively, tried to act,' makes sense only

if there was some question as to whether he did or did not try to act

and now they conclusively found that he did try. But here 'decisively'

modifies the statement and not 'try.' The same points cover the sen-

tences, 'Decisively he tried to act' and 'He tried decisively to act.'

This feature seems to confirm my suspicion that 'decisiveness' is not

a wholly appropriate notion with respect to 'trying.' This is perhaps

on account of the conceptual point that someone who is seriously trying

to do something already possesses certain qualities of mind: resolute,

firm of purpose and so on.

Since it is a reprehensible and sloppy habit to operate with one

counterexample, I shall provide others. If I am trying to listen to

Bartok's Quartets amidst the painful chatter of my guests, it would be

foolish as well as wrong to ask me whether I decided to try to listen to

them. Imagine a foreigner, trying to make himself understood, vivid

gestures, movements of arms and hands, English words interspersed with

those of his mother tongue: did he necessarily have to decide to try

to make himself understood? Not necessarily. He might have simply

walked up to a native of the country and tried to make himself under-

stood. Therefore deciding to try to V is not a necessary condition

to try to V. This is not to say that statements of the form 'I shall/

will try to V' cannot be expressions of decisions. They often are, as

I pointed out at the start of this section. An interesting link between 'deciding' and 'trying' must not be overlooked. When we decide to do something we intend, at least if we have been strictly brought up, to try to carry out our decision. Of course we sometimes change our mind, usually for a reason. We say in such cases 'What made you change your mind?' The question is not a rhetorical one. We expect an answer.

SECTION 11

The sorts of things we can't be said to try

Consider for a moment the verbs 'digest' and 'perspire.' If one were asked 'What were you doing yesterday evening?' and one answered 'I was digesting my dinner' or 'I was perspiring profusely,' one would have failed to have answered the question . One could be accused of evading the question, or be dismissed as a man with a quaint sense of humour, or be told: 'You mean to say that you were not doing anything in particular.' Digesting is not like running. We can start to run or stop running at will. But we can't stop or start digesting or perspiring at will. These are bodily processes which are not within the realm of the voluntary or involuntary, intentional or unintentional, deliberate or accidental. The Wittgensteinian distinction between something that we do and something that happens to us is applicable here. 'I should not say of the movement of my arm, for example: it

comes when it comes, etc. And this is the region in which we say significantly that a thing doesn't simply happen to us but that we do it. 'I don't need to wait for my arm to go up — I can raise it.' Here I am making a contrast between the movement of my arm, and say the fact that the violent thudding of my heart will subside.[1] The distinction that Wittgenstein draws is useful but rough. The phrase 'happen to us' is used in varied contexts. Accidents do happen to us; extraordinary things, queer, unexpected things may happen to us. But surely, digesting, perspiring, do not happen to us in this sense. They are not unexpected but rather taken for granted. We would be surprised and alarmed if our heart, liver, or kidneys ceased functioning. The beating of the heart, the action of the liver, the working of the kidneys, the circulation of the blood, the digestion of food are bodily processes which do take place in us. The idea of agency does not strictly apply to these processes. 'Who is digesting in this room?' 'Whose heart is beating?' are very rarely appropriate questions. I can think of one situation where the question 'Whose heart is beating' could be considered appropriate. Suppose that some people were rather summarily executed by the representative of a revolutionary government. The man in charge of the execution asks the soldiers, pointing at one of the victims 'Is his heart still beating?' A modified version of the first question is appropriate in a doctor-versus-patient talk. The doctor may ask 'Have you been digesting your food properly, Mr. Jones?' Notice,

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[1] L. Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, p. 612.

however the presence of 'properly' in the question. <u>That</u> makes a difference. First person pronouncements about such processes are rare and can invariably be paraphrased by replacing the personal pronoun by the appropriate bodily part: 'My stomach is digesting the dinner,' 'my body is sweating,' 'my heart beating' and so on. In view of these distinctions it is not surprising that we do <u>not</u> speak of 'trying to digest, trying to sweat, trying to work one's liver,' etc. Neither does one 'try to grow old,' unless we mean this remark not in the chronological sense but in the sense of 'try to be more mature.' Nor would we order people to try <u>not</u> to digest their food, not to produce saliva or not to sweat. Similarly, direct orders of the sort: 'Sweat,' 'digest,' 'beat your heart' are hardly appropriate. We cannot try to stop the circulation of our blood because it is not something that we can decide to do or not to do; it is not something that is subject to our will or whims. It is not something that we can have direct control over.

One may ask, 'What about the eliminatory functions of urinating and excreting? Surely we can delay them, though not indefinitely. We do have some control over them. I agree. We can say to a child, 'try not to urinate until we get home.' He may comply with the request. Or the doctor wanting a sample of the urine may request him to try to urinate in spite of the fact that at the moment he doesn't have to do so.

It is imperative to point out that I did not say that we cannot

try to bring about smooth digestion or for that matter, indigestion.
We can take Eno after a heavy meal and that might do the trick for a
smooth digestion. In this sense I can also try to sweat by engaging
in some arduous physical exercise. But these are not bona fide counter-
examples to our thesis. When I take Eno after a heavy meal, I cannot
be described as 'trying to digest my food' but rather, and even this
sounds odd, as 'trying to facilitate my digestion.'

To sum up then, the crucial reasons for not speaking of 'trying
to digest,' etc. are: firstly, that bodily processes, to use this
Wittgensteinism, 'happen to us;' secondly, and this is important,
they normally do occur without trouble or difficulty. And thus they
do not require the exercise of effort on our part. I daresay that
talk of 'trying' only makes sense against the background of obstacles
and difficulties.[1]

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[1]Cf. Section 14 of this thesis, p. 34.

SECTION 12

The Sorts of Things We Don't Usually Try

There are a vast number of things we do in our everyday life. We walk, we eat, look at thing, sit in an easy chair on a warm afternoon, speak to others, sigh, yawn, move our hands to grab things we might need, and so on. We do all of these things at one time or another. And given that we are normal and healthy people without physical handicaps, we do not _try_ to do them. We walk but do not usually try to do so. We speak but do not usually try to do so. These are perfectly ordinary activities that we do naturally and with ease. We do not usually try to do them.

Wittgenstein makes two succinct remarks about 'trying' in the Philosophical Investigations. They are:

1) "When I raise my arm I do not usually try to raise it."
    (Philosophical Investigations, 622)

2) "'At all costs I will get to that house.' --But if
    there is no difficulty about it--can I try at all
    costs to get to that house?" (Philosophical Invest-
    igations, 623)

The lessons to be learned from these examples are obvious but important. Why don't I usually try to raise my arm, but simply raise it? Because one raises one's arm with ease, as a matter of routine, it is the sort of ability one takes for granted. There are of course

circumstances when I may legitimately say 'I am trying to raise my arm.'
These circumstances are easily envisaged. Someone might be holding my
arm down forcibly, or he might have placed heavy weights on them or my
arm may be paralyzed. By now it should be abundantly clear that 'trying'
and 'effort' go hand in hand. They are, to put it rather indiscreetly,
natural and by no means strange bedfellows. Concerning Wittgenstein's
second example: . 'I can try to get to that house' if for example, the
driving conditions are hazardous, or if there are road blocks set up by
the police who, presumably are after me, or if I have no adequate means
of transportation and the house is a good distance away, etc. The con-
cept of effort is clearly relevant again. When do we _try_ to breathe?
When we have lung trouble due to illness or when we lie on the beach
after being saved from drowning.

The question arises then whether we do ordinary everyday activities
without trying. The answer seems to be 'not always.' Human abilities
are inherently liable to failure and to break-down on occasions. One
day I may find that I am unable to move my head. I may want to turn to
a colleague to make a point and find that I can't turn my head. I find
this quite difficult to believe so I _try_ to move it but without any
success. Every further attempt is accompanied by excruciating pain.
The family doctor diagnoses a 'pinched nerve.' But the root of the
trouble may not be medical at all. After a heavy meal I may find it
a painful chore to get up and walk back to the office. I must, literally,

try to tear myself away from the table. Again we perceive that talk of 'trying' only makes sense against the background of obstacles and difficulties.

SECTION 13

Trying, Emotions and Some State Verbs

Now I should like to push further back the limits of 'what we don't try' by considering the role of 'trying' in the milieu of such words as 'fear,' 'love,' 'hate,' 'respect,' 'happy,' 'sad,' 'proud,' 'scornful,' 'jealous,' 'despair,' 'like,' 'dislike.' In everyday speech we come upon expressions like 'being overcome with joy or grief,' and 'getting carried away with enthusiasm,' and 'being overwhelmed with sorrow.' We also speak of 'conquering our passions,' 'subduing our feelings.' These metaphors, dead or alive, are not to be dismissed lightly. They are philosophically relevant and interesting in this way: they tell us something about the nature of feelings, sentiments, passions and emotions. We think of them as coming and going, as taking hold of, dominating a person for a time and then leaving him. One's fierce hatred may blind one to the extent that he fails to see the truth about some person. One is sometimes swept away by emotions as if by a wave of the ocean. The lesson to be learned from these everyday expressions is that we ordinarily do not decide to feel happy or sad; we do not set out to feel scorn, love

or hatred. Feelings do not strictly fall within the realm of the intentional or unintentional, of the voluntary or involuntary. Commands do not, make much sense in this realm. 'Feel scornful, or proud, or jealous' seem to be out of order. We may on certain occasions work up a feeling of anger or enthusiasm but this requires effort and the very exercise of effort in this connection takes away the crucially important element of genuineness, and renders the feeling artificial and 'put on.' Such a 'put on' feeling might become genuine however. If someone says something nasty to you and you do <u>not</u> feel insulted at the moment for one reason or another, you may go home and brood over it, and you still don't <u>feel</u> insulted. Perhaps on further reflection you do feel insulted.

In view of these remarks about the nature of feelings and emotions it shouldn't surprise us that locutions like 'try to feel jealous,' 'try to respect him,' 'try to feel happy,' have a hollow sound in ordinary situations. But whenever the order implies the exercise of effort to combat or repress an emotion, 'trying' becomes quite appropriate again, e.g., 'try to control your anger.'

It must not be overlooked that we have imperatives in ordinary language which do not seem to be in accord with what I am proposing. 'Try not to be sad,' 'try not to despair,' 'try not to be jealous' make good sense while 'try to be sad,' 'try to despair,' 'try to be jealous' are very odd commands indeed. There are two factors at work here; when

one feels sad, or jealous it does take a certain amount of 'will-power'
to shake off such moods, or feelings. Therefore, 'trying' is appropriate.
Also to be noticed is the general undesirability of such feelings. We
try to avoid them, to get out of them but do not try to get into them.

'Being happy' may be called a state of mind. 'Being able to lift
a 100-pound weight' may perhaps be called a state of my body. The re-
quest 'try to be able to lift a 100-pound weight' is odd. But why isn't
it equally odd to say 'Try to be happy'? Both make certain essential
presuppositions; one is not yet able to lift a 100-pound weight in the
former case, and one is not happy in the latter case. One can get into
the state of 'being able to lift the 100-pound weight' by doing certain
exercises on a regular basis. This we would not describe as 'trying'
but rather as 'training.' But one does not train to be happy. One tries
to get into the state of happiness by thinking of cheerful things perhaps.
It takes some discipline to cast away chagrin, melancholy or what not.

Let us consider now some examples which do not readily sound
acceptable. 'Try to hate him' is a paradigmatic example. We as a rule
do not set out to hate anyone. We find ourselves hating certain people.
It is perhaps because they are evil, obnoxious. Since hatred is not the
sort of thing about which we have a pro-attitude, in fact quite the
opposite, we may want to repress it. But let us put 'trying to hate'
in a context of intentionality and also against a background of diffi-
culties. A father may say to his daughter that one of her acquaintances

is evil and obnoxious. Nevertheless he detects a certain fascination
towards the evil chap in her, perhaps some hidden liking. So he urges
her 'to try to hate him.' This locution still sounds odd but now at
least we have a story and know how to take it. What he urges her to
do is to try to work up an intense hatred towards the chap. 'Trying'
here will consist in brooding over the evil and malicious deeds of the
chap in question.

When can we be said to try to love another? Perhaps when we feel
some hostility or enmity towards him, when we do not readily take to him.
'Trying' makes sense here because in order to get to the desired state
one must--and this does require effort of will--overcome the feelings of
hostility.

One is sometimes reluctant to eat food of some kind for the very
good reason that one doesn't like its taste. One of course may very well
try to change one's likes and dislikes. One may try to cultivate a taste
for cheese and this can be done by forcing oneself to eat a great variety
of it. At the end one may find that one likes cheese. Could such a chap
be described as 'trying to like cheese'? Overcoming one's distaste for
it is a formidable task.

Similarly, one may have a great predilection for 'pop-music' and
dislike all of Beethoven's compositions. One decides to try to cultivate
an 'ear' for Beethoven. One forces oneself to listen to all his symphonies

and other compositions. Why can't he be described as 'trying to like Beethoven's music'? Food, music, literature are excellent examples of areas where cultivation of tastes, likes and dislikes are not only possible but commendable. (Notice however, that in these cases the attempt is made in order to appreciate what others have already learned to appreciate, but I have so far failed to do so.)

One tries not to despair in a difficult or hopeless state-of-affairs. But one never tries to despair. (Need we have a pro-attitude towards objects of 'trying'? Surely this is the wrong explanation, of 'try to steal, murder, assassinate, etc. We may say these things but do not have a pro-attitude to them) Although contexts can be made up where there is a pro-attitude; e.g., 'try to assassinate Hitler.'

To sum up: Feelings, emotions and sentiments do not have a surrounding of intentionality[1] about them. Their background is one of spontaneity rather than of difficulty and the display of effort to overcome it. Wherever the surrounding of intentionality and of difficulties can be provided by concocting contexts and situations, 'trying' is properly used but in spite of this such locutions may sound strained. But a hollow sound is hardly a philosophical criterion for misuse of words. (Although it is a good indication of it.)

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[1] Cf. Section 19 on Trying and Intending, p. 60.

SECTION 14

Effort

I have made several overt and covert references to the great
importance of the concept of 'effort' in a discussion of the concept
of 'trying.' The time has come to make a definite stand on the nature
of the relationship between the aforementioned concepts and in the
process we might throw some light on the concept of 'effort.'

To start off I shall make the audacious claim that it is a necessary
condition for 'trying to V' that one 'make an effort to V.' This may
appear to be the sort of claim that is readily susceptible to counter-
examples. The claim is certainly true in such blatantly obvious cases
as a weightlifter trying to lift a 500-pound weight or an ordinary chap
trying to move a heavy piece of furniture from one room to another.
Indeed, in these cases the making of the effort is displayed. We can
see the weightlifter exerting himself strenuously. We can see his
flexed muscles, hear him grunting and groaning; 'look at the expression
on his face!' a spectator may shout. 'His features are distorted by
the tremendous effort he is making.' He might be grinding his teeth or
muttering encouraging phrases to himself like 'Come on, you can do it.'

But why don't we consider more subtle cases. Say, a ballet perform-

ance. Imagine the performance of the <u>Nutcracker Suite</u> with Dame Margot

Fontayne and Rudolf Nureyev. Follow them through a difficult and compli-

cated series of steps. Suppose that in rehearsals they didn't bring it

off very smoothly, so now they say to themselves: 'we shall try to dance

through this difficult part smoothly and gracefully.' They bring it off.

The critics praise them for a poised and effortless performance. How does

this affect our claim? Does it follow from the example that when they

were trying to dance through the difficult part smoothly, they did not

make an effort to dance through the part smoothly? Clearly not! All

one has to do to refute this sort of criticism is to point out that the

making of an effort need not always involve the display of zealous energy,

grunting and groaning, the grinding of teeth. 'Trying to dance through

a difficult part smoothly' may result in a seemingly effortless perform-

ance, surely, a smooth effortless performance is the very object of such

an attempt. But this does not preclude the making of considerable effort

in the process. 'Trying' necessarily involves the making of some effort

but does not necessarily involve the <u>display</u> of the making of such an

effort. It is a well known fact that in ballet, gymnastics and skating

where grace, smoothness and 'effortlessness' in a performance draw high

points, the dancer, gymnast or skater often try to bring off a feat and

make great effort to do so, but they deliberately do not display the effort.

Compare now the weightlifter trying to lift the 500-pound weight

with a broken-down old horse trying to pull a buggy up a steep mountain.
The display of physical effort is striking in both cases: the flexed
muscles, the beads of sweat, the strained movements are all there to be
seen. We observe these and say: 'Aha, he is trying to do such and such
and it is trying to do such and such.' We use these solely behavioural
features as evidence for 'trying.' In ordinary language there are
already drawn distinctions among various sorts of effort. These dis-
tinctions are marked by the use of different words for the different
sorts of effort. 'Exertion' and 'strain' are the appropriate 'effort'
words used in contexts where physical effort is displayed. When the
foreman sees the underpaid worker, making strenuous efforts, he might
say: 'Don't exert yourself, mate. It isn't worth it.' (All this is
said in a humane tone of voice.) 'Exertion' and 'strain' are often
used as criteria for 'trying.' When we see a horse displaying the sort
of effort described above, we say: 'He's trying to pull the buggy uphill.'
We judge solely from behavioural criteria. We see the weightlifter
displaying great physical effort, we say of him: 'He is trying to lift
that weight.' But there is a crucial difference. The weightlifter may
make a great effort to lift the weight without displaying it. Suppose
he fails to lift the weight. We may say: 'Aha, he didn't try hard
enough.' He may retort: 'I did try very hard. I made a desperate
effort to lift it but I couldn't.' We take his word for it, knowing he

is a simple and honest chap. (Here our criteria for 'trying' is not behavioural.) But what if the weightlifter is known to have succeeded, several times in his career, to lift such a heavy weight? And what if in addition to this we saw a man, recognizably the agent of his best opponent, giving him a large sum of money? He may say: 'I tried very hard to lift that weight. You saw me yourselves; we indeed saw the display of effort, the flexed muscles, the grunting and groaning, the beads of sweat, etc. But do we believe him? No! We suspect bribery, and deception. 'Something is rotten in the state of weightlifting,' we may say again; our criteria for 'trying' is not wholly behavioural even here. The possibility of pretension is not to be slighted. It shows that one can lie about one's attempts. One can say: 'I am trying to do such and such' but may say in one's heart: 'The fools, they really think that I am trying. In this case, to be convincing, <u>one pretends to try</u>; this is done by displaying an all-out effort, to push for example, the by-now proverbial piece of furniture. This feature shows a link with intention. One can lie about one's intentions easily enough. 'I intend to help you move that furniture' while saying in one's heart: 'I don't have the slightest intention to do so.' Here no immediate behavioural criteria is relevant. But one must exhibit certain appropriate pieces of behaviour if one lies, saying 'I am trying to push this piece of furniture.' Otherwise, his pretense is a very poor one! The effort

is to be displayed in order to be convincing about pretending to try.
The effort in such cases is very much like the power of an automobile
engine when idling. One hesitates to say that the effort is undirected;
it really isn't. The display has a purpose: to deceive. In this con-
nection we should bear in mind "that talk of deception only makes sense
against a background of general non-deception."[1]

And now let us consider different examples altogether. When one
is trying to win a chess game (played with a formidable opponent) or is
trying to solve a difficult crossword puzzle, one indeed makes an effort
to do these things. Here making an effort does not involve physical
exertion, flexing of muscles, etc. In trying to win a chess game one
needs to exercise 'mental' effort which presupposes thorough attention
to the game, planning one's moves with extra caution and care, con-
centrating on the opponent's moves. The chess player may be very tired
after such a game. So may the weightlifter after the tournament is over.
But they are tired in different ways. The chess player may suffer from
mental fatigue, while the weightlifter suffers from bodily exhaustion.
Different consequences are to be drawn in both cases. The chap who
suffers from mental fatigue might want to go for a swim or a long walk
to refresh himself. The weightlifter would dread this suggestion. He
would want to rest, lie down, sleep, sit around or what not. When one

[1]Cf. J. L. Austin, Sense and Sensibilia, p. 11.

tries to solve a crossword puzzle one necessarily makes an effort to do so. One pays careful attention to the formulation of the problem. A tutor may ask one to try to understand the implications of a certain philosophical problem. He does not ask for the display of strenuous exertion (walking up and down the corridor) but for assiduous concentration and the paying of heed, for the exercise of <u>mental effort</u>. 'Physical and mental!' you might say. This is the reappearance of vicious dualism. Not at all! There are efforts and efforts and efforts. I am sometimes confronted with a rather difficult choice: should I continue with my studies of philosophy or should I get a well-remunerated job so that I could support my mother? Let us for the purposes of discussion, assume that the two are mutually exclusive. For the more light-hearted among us the difficult choice may be one between a piece of strawberry short-cake with cream on top or a piece of warm apple pie. Assume that you can afford only one and not the other. So one must make a choice. I may find, as often I do, that I am quite unable to make up my mind. My friends may urge me: 'Try to decide what you will have.' But I hesitate, being attracted equally by both of the offered alternatives. Such situations, 'trying to decide,' 'trying to choose,' call for an <u>effort of the will</u> to conquer and overcome the difficulty to decide or to make a choice. One may dispell this mood of indecision by muttering to oneself encouraging phrases like 'Be resolute and decisive!' This is not, of course, a

necessary concomitant to 'trying to decide.' But the making of an effort of the will is. These remarks on the 'effort of will' are anticipatory. We should not forget about such ordinary use of 'effort' as in 'The war effort will suffer if commercial ties with the U.S. are cut' or 'His book is the result of great literary effort.' We are not to assume that the 'war effort' will fall into our neat categories of 'mental,' 'physical,' and 'volitional.' It doesn't. And I ask, why should it?

Then there are the everyday expressions 'She went to <u>great pains</u> to prepare a good dinner for you' and 'She went to a lot of trouble to find time to type your thesis.' Both imply the making of considerable effort. It is interesting to notice that there is at least one parallel between ordinary talk about effort and ordinary talk about pain, aches and such. One <u>suffers</u> from an all-out effort to win the race and one also <u>suffers</u> from a toothache. But differences abound. While one can reasonably command someone 'Make an effort to do better next time,' one can't command anyone, reasonably or unreasonably, 'Have a toothache or pain.' We wouldn't know what to make of such orders. One can also announce one's intention to make an effort by saying: 'Now I shall make an effort.' But it is odd to announce one's intention to have a pain. (I ask myself though 'Can't a masochist announce such an intention?') It would follow then that 'making an effort' is not a sensation like pain but something which we <u>do</u>.

Now I should like to backstep a bit and deal further with the
relationship between 'trying' and 'making an effort.' Imagine the
following situation. We are at a party. The hostess has invited a
conjuror and he performs his tricks for the edification of the guests.
Does he <u>try</u> to do these tricks? Not in the least! He is an expert.
He can do his tricks without a flaw. He simply <u>does</u> them without
<u>trying</u> to do them. He has been practicing for years and now he is
a skillful, accomplished master of the art of conjuring. But there
might be one trick which he hasn't done 'for many a day.' One of the
guests, a rather unpleasant fellow, asks him if he could do this
particular trick. With some embarrassment the conjuror confesses that
he is a bit rusty at that trick but nevertheless he will try to do it.
When trying to do it, he makes an effort to be especially careful; he
is minding what he is doing. The lesson from this is that if one is
an expert at something, if he can do it with ease he does not <u>try</u> to
do it. He just <u>does it</u>. If you ask an expert, a professional wine-
taster to tell the year of a bottle of Beaujolais by tasting it, he
will not <u>try</u> to tell you, he just does. That is what being an expert
entails. But as soon as someone indicates his doubt whether he can do
something or not, if he is sceptical about the outcome of an enterprise,
he is entitled to say: 'I shall try.' 'I can do it' implies 'I know I
can do it', 'I give you my word that I can do it' where 'I can do it'

is uttered with conviction. It is of course assumed that I am not lying. 'How do you know you can do it?' 'Well, I have often done it in the past.' That is good evidence for being able to do it.

Now let us turn to a more ticklish context, namely the contexts of challenges and bets. Suppose someone performs a special feat in front of me: he throws up his hat ten times and each time the hat falls back on his head. He then says to me: 'I bet you can't do that.' I say: 'I shall try to do it' because I have never done it before and therefore I don't know whether I can do it or not. I make some effort when trying to do it: exercise care and caution. 'I shall try to do it' implies that 'I am not sure whether I can or can't do it.' Such an attempt always requires effort, mental, physical or effort of the will, etc. as the case may be.

What if I say: 'I can do it' with conviction and certainty. I simply do it. I don't try to do it. If you can do something, you don't have to try to do it. Doing it may require some effort. That is all right! But you don't have to try. Examine the difference between: 'I can do it' and my betting partner says 'try!' he does not mean 'make an attempt' or for that matter 'make an effort' but simply 'Prove it.' 'Put yourself to the test!' And this is clearly and distinctly a different sense of 'try.' It is the sense that I referred to at the very beginning of this philosophical ordeal.

SECTION 15

Trying and Degrees of Effort

Trying, in all its sorts, can vary in degree. This is borne out by
such ordinary locutions as 'He tried hard (or very hard) to win the race,
but Joe tried harder (or hardest)!' Some people try half-heartedly,
others may try to do something with all their heart. How curious these
adverbial expressions 'half-heartedly' and 'with all your (my) heart'
are. We also say: 'Put your heart in it,' 'His heart is not in what
he is doing.' We mean by the former: Do what you are doing with the
utmost earnestness, with zeal. The latter does not imply that what you
do is not satisfactory. It implies that you don't do it with sufficient
zeal or interest. You don't seem to be absorbed in what you do. So it
seems then that 'trying with all one's heart and soul' is not merely
making a great effort to do something but also the proper frame of mind
is to be there; 'earnest,' 'intent' and 'serious' are some epithets appli-
cable to such a frame of mind. We speak of a person displaying great
effort in a race as 'trying with all his might to win the race.' Some-
times we order people, who are somewhat unsure of themselves with regard

to the success of a proposed course of action, 'to try their best to bring it off.' Or we may urge someone whom we think capable of doing better: 'Try harder!' We frequently scold students for not 'trying hard enough.' Our ordinary talk about effort also justifies philosophical talk about 'degrees of effort.' This will not surprise anyone who is competent in English (or any other language). We talk of making little or no effort to do something. Also, of making a lot of effort to do something else. Passing an examination may demand great or considerable effort, swimming the English Channel takes strenuous effort, escaping from Sing Sing demands the making of a desperate effort, training for the Olympics presupposes intensive effort on the part of the athlete. The claim that I previously made, namely that 'making an effort' is a necessary condition for 'trying' is further supported by the perfectly ordinary observation that 'the harder one tries to do such and such,' the greater effort one makes to do such and such.' To use a piece of jargon which is not misleading in this case but rather revealing, there seems to be a 'relation of direct proportion' (as opposed to the 'relation of inverse proportion') between degrees of trying and degrees of effort. Examples can be multiplied to the point of tedium to illustrate this. When someone tries half-heartedly to do something, e.g., 'He is trying rather half-heartedly to sell his house;' it is implied that he makes half-hearted

efforts to sell the house. It would be absurd to say in this case that he is making an all-out effort to sell the house but he is trying half-heartedly to sell the house. Similarly, it is logically and linguistically odd to say 'He tried very hard to win the race but he made little effort to do so.' By saying 'He tried very hard to win the race' we necessarily imply that he made a tremendous effort to win the race. When the schoolmaster gently pats the student's shoulder saying: 'Well, you must try very hard (or as hard as you can) to study for your examinations,' he necessarily implies that the student must make intensive and conscientious efforts to study. In the same way 'He tried desperately to hang on to the rope' implies that he made a desperate and strenuous effort to hang onto it.

'Trying' necessarily implies 'making some effort.' If I say 'I am trying to understand your view' when I don't make any effort to understand it, I am lying. If you say 'I tried my best to solve that problem 'when you didn't make more than the usual effort to do so, you are lying or deliberately misleading. How absurd it is to say: He tried to control his temper but didn't make the least effort to control it. This seems to border on the line of contradiction. Now we must qualify our claim. Although 'making an effort' is a necessary condition for 'trying;' it is not a sufficient one. 'He played tennis displaying vigorous effort and energy.' Surely it is <u>not</u> implied that he tried

to play tennis. Why should he <u>try</u> to play tennis when he is a competent

player. It may take some effort to lift a ten-pound suitcase but does

an adult therefore try to lift it? Of course not. To reiterate our

point then: making an effort is <u>not</u> a sufficient condition for trying.

SECTION.16

Trying is An 'Effort' Verb

It is important to get this straight: talk of 'trying' only makes

sense against a general background of 'non-trying.' You can't <u>try</u> to do

things all of the time is 'analytic.' It must be possible for

us to recognize a case of 'trying' by comparing it with normal cases

where it is not the case that we try. The same point, I should think,

applies to 'making an effort.' 'Making an effort' or for that matter

the very word 'effort' only makes sense against a background of 'non-

effort.' You can't do all things with effort all of the time seems to

be analytic as well. It must again be possible to recognize a case of

'making an effort' by comparing it with cases where I do things with

ease and facility. 'I sometimes try very hard to understand what he

is saying' indicates that usually I understand readily what people say

and I don't have <u>to try</u> to understand. 'I sometimes do make great effort

to understand what he says. This in turn indicates that as a rule I don't

make effort to understand what people say. Generally speaking I understand them with ease, having acquired a certain competence in speaking English. When I say 'I am trying to understand what he says' I imply that I have some difficulty understanding him. The chap whom I don't easily or readily understand and thus I am trying to understand may have a speech impediment of some sort. He may be stammering or have trouble in pronouncing English words properly, or he may be speaking too fast for my comprehension or still, he may be asserting some wild metaphysical proposal which is too profound for immediate comprehension; it may take some time or reflection for it to 'sink in.' Again, when I say, 'I am trying to solve the assigned mathematical problem' I imply that I make efforts to solve it and also that I encountered some difficulty en route. Suppose that I am trying to run the mile within 15 seconds. Being a rather bad athlete, I must exert myself considerably to do it. I can't do it with ease or facility. 'Effort' is a word which perhaps can best be understood by contrasting it with its opposites. When I lift the chair with effort I don't lift it with ease. When I try hard to convince someone, i.e., when I make an all-out effort to convince someone, I don't do it with ease. When I make an all-out effort to explain a ticklish problem to someone I don't do it with facility. Perhaps then we would not be far wrong to say that the adverbial phrase 'with effort' has some common characteristics with the group of words called

'excluders'[1] in recent literature. 'Effort' is to be applied, directed,
focused, concentrated. It is very much like the word 'energy' which is
also applied, directed, etc. It would seem then that 'effort' is a
target-hungry word. Consider when we make an effort to do something.
Clearly, when we encounter difficulties, when there are obstacles in
our path, when impediments confront us. I called 'effort' a 'target-
hungry' word[2] because efforts are directed at targets like difficulties
which are to be overcome, efforts are applied to targets like obstacles
and hardships which are to be removed and endured. Efforts are made to
dispose of hindrances. We concentrate our efforts on recalcitrant pro-
blems which are to be solved. Military effort can be focused on resist-
ance to the regime. The resistance is to be suppressed. These could
equally well be described by the locutions 'trying to overcome difficulties,'
'trying to remove obstacles,' 'trying to endure hardships,' 'trying to
dispose of hindrances,' 'trying to solve recalcitrant problems,' 'trying
to suppress resistance to the regime.' How hard we try, how much of an
effort we make depends partly[3] on how great the difficulties are. Given
that we are not very good swimmers we can be said to try to swim across
the Elbow on a day when there is not much of a current. Obviously we must

[1] Roland Hall, Excluders

[2] others are: energy, attention, force, etc.

[3] Cf. Section on Trying and Valuation, pp. 53-55.

try much harder on a day when the current is strong. If a boy is locked into a room by his mother he may try to break out (by smashing the window, etc.) but later on when he tries to break out of Sing Sing he will have to try very much harder to succeed. Given that our argument, for saying that 'making an effort' is a necessary condition for 'trying' we can call 'try' an 'effort' verb. Other 'effort verbs' are 'struggle,' 'strive,' 'strain,' 'exert yourself' in such contexts as: 'he struggled to free himself from his opponent's clutch,' 'he strives to get to the top of the business world,' 'he strained to lift the heavy weight,' 'he exerted himself tremendously to finish his thesis.' In the above sense of these verbs, they are all effort verbs, i.e., 'making an effort' is a necessary condition for 'struggling,' 'striving,' 'straining,' 'exerting.' It would be absurd to say 'He is struggling to free himself but he is not making an effort to do so.'

In view of our previous remarks, it would appear that it is a necessary condition for 'making an effort to V' that there be some difficulty which has to be overcome in order to V. One may wonder about cases wherein we want to do something and it looks very difficult. It is something we have never done before. We don't know whether we can do it or not. So we decide to try very hard to do it. We go about it displaying great effort and to our surprise we discover that all that effort was not needed because in spite of the fact that it looked very

difficult, it really was not that difficult. In fact, it was easy. These sort of surprises often come to us when we try our hands at something new and discover that we have a 'knack' for. it. Or we may be surprised in a rather similar way due to an error in judgment. Suppose we see a large block which looks very heavy. We approach it flexing our muscles, gathering our energy, making a splendid effort to lift it and we nearly fall backwards with the block. In this case we are not pleasantly surprised. Quite the opposite. We are annoyed. Alas, it was not a block of stone as we had thought but rather rubber which looked very much like a block of stone. We make avowals to be more observant next time. The block appeared heavy and difficult to lift. We wasted our effort; it was made in vain. The block was light and very easy to lift. In view of these considerations we shall have to weaken our earlier thesis. The qualified thesis which I have argued for and believe to be true is then this: It is a necessary condition for 'making an attempt' that there be some difficulty which has to be overcome or that it be thought by the agent who makes the attempt that there is some difficulty to be overcome.

At the risk of being considered simple-minded and tedious, I must point out that difficulties are to be recognized as such. Whether something is recognized as a difficulty or an opportunity depends entirely on what one is trying to do and not on 'trying.' Darkness

for example, constitutes a difficulty when I am trying to find my

wedding ring which I lost while playing football. On the other hand,

total darkness offers a perfect opportunity to try to spot an otherwise

not easily visible star in the heavens. Similarly, roadblocks set up

by the police are impediments if one is trying to get home quickly or

if one happens to be the criminal and is trying to escape from the police.

On the other hand, the roadblocks are viewed by the law-enforcement

people in a different light: they are taken to be aids in trying to

catch the criminal. The playing of records may be a source of distrac-

tion for someone who is trying to study but it may be a perfectly good

source of enjoyment for someone who has been trying to hear that record

for a long time or for someone who wants to relax. We sometimes cry out

in a conversation: 'Ah, that poses (or constitutes) a difficulty!' (or

a problem.) We also say in a cheerful tone: 'Ah, that offers (or pro-

vides) a perfect opportunity!' (or chance.) The question which is on

the tip of the tongue of the person who just joined the conversants is:

'A difficulty in what?' 'An opportunity to do what?'

Almost anything can pose a difficulty; if we are trying to cross

the street which is extremely crowded due to the St. Jean Baptiste parade,

people are in our way. That poses a difficulty in crossing the street.

On the other hand, if I am trying to observe Montrealers in action, this

offers me a perfect opportunity to do so. Objects like bottles, pieces

of glass may pose a difficulty in walking through shallow waters. They

offer a good chance to make some money if we are trying to collect these

bottles and sell them at the grocers. People's laughter, boisterous and

loud, usually disturbs us when trying to write a letter or paper. I

shan't deal with these examples longer for as I pointed out before

whether we recognize or consider or judge something to be a difficulty

or an opportunity depends entirely on what we are trying, i.e., on the

verb following 'try.' And the investigation of all possible verbs

which can follow 'try' would be philosophically unenlightening as far

as the concept of 'trying' is concerned.

At this stage a few anticipatory comments seem to be in order about

an issue the discussion of which will be incumbent upon us eventually.

Given that there must be some difficulties confronting us in a situation

wherein we can be properly said to try, surely this is by no means the

whole story. A person who tries to do something in spite of what are

generally considered insurmountable difficulties is usually called a

number of 'names' none of which are complimentary; foolish, unwise,

rash, wild, over-zealous, foolhardy are some of the applicable epithets.

He is not to be commended for his sense of the practical or for his

ability to size up a situation, to appreciate or appraise a situation,

for weighing the chances of failure and success. So I think, and

this is very tentative, that there is to be at least some chance of

success; how slim this chance must be is a question I shan't enter now.[1]

SECTION 17

Trying and Valuation

When one is trying one's best to win a race or pass an examination it is reasonable to assume that one wants to win the race very much or one wants to pass the examination very much, or one want's, rather badly, something that is obtainable only by winning the race or passing one's examination; e.g., the runner may want the gold medal, or the fame that goes along with it, or both. It seems to follow then, that how hard one tries is related to the intensity of one's wants and desires. If one wants a fishing rod with all one's heart it would be natural for one to go out and try one's best to get a fishing rod. It is of course pre-supposed that we talk about serious wants as opposed to idle wishes. "The primitive sign of wanting is trying to get." (Miss Anscombe, _Intention_, p. 68). While this may be disputed, e.g., a morally sound person won't try to make love to his neighbour's wife in spite of the fact that he may want to, nevertheless Miss Anscombe has a basic insight into the nature of 'wanting.' The philosophical ground covered by the words 'wants' and 'motifs' is so well trodden by the angels and so complicated that I for one will not pursue it here in details but simply

[1]Cf. Section on _Failure and Success_, pp. 6 -7 .

in connection with 'trying.' If one is trying very hard to get a
fishing rod it seems to follow that one wants very much to have the
fishing rod for one reason or another. Trying very hard seems to imply
that one sets a high value on the object of trying. If one tries half-
heartedly to do something it may justly be said that he perhaps doesn't
value the thing in question highly or that he doesn't really want to
do it, or that he for these reasons tries reluctantly. We sometimes
say 'Ah, now that is worth trying for!' We mean, although it would
be difficult to get it, we may have to go to great trouble or pains
to get it, it is worth making the effort which is required to get it.
We also say, 'Ah, it isn't worth the effort!' Consider the following
situation: A boy wants very much to have a bicycle. His parents
might say: 'Peter, if you obtain first class marks in all your
subjects, we promise to get a bicycle for you.' The boy perhaps
realizes how hard he will have to try to obtain such marks and may
refuse the offer saying: 'Having a bicycle isn't worth the effort I
would have to make to get such good marks!' Here the boy wants the
bicycle and values having a bicycle but he is not prepared to go to
all that trouble to get it. We usually, and if not usually, then at
least sometimes, appraise the situation before we decide to try or
not to try to do something. We size up the effort we shall have to
make in trying to do such and such, or how much we value doing such

and such. Or it may be the case that we have already embarked upon
the attempt and find it rather arduous. We didn't realize that such
tremendous effort is required in trying to get such and such done.
But now, alas, we do realize it. So we decide to give up trying
because we think that getting such and such done is not worth the
fantastic effort we have to make. This realization prompts us to give
up trying. But we shouldn't be obsessed with this tallying of effort
and value. A civil servant who has a sense of duty will keep on trying
to classify certain unimportant documents in spite of the fact that he
doesn't place any value on the classification of these documents nor
does he want to classify them. It is a laborious chore requiring
considerable effort. What he wants is to carry out his duty and that,
unhappily for him, involves classifying these documents. He also places
high value on carrying out one's duties. If he has an extraordinarily
strong sense of duty he will try harder than chaps with a moderate
sense of duty. There are also cases where one is <u>forced</u> to try to do
certain things which one doesn't really want to do. When the bank-
robber at gun point orders the hapless clerk to try to open the safe,
he will comply in spite of the fact that he doesn't want to. (He
doesn't know the the combination of numbers but he tries.) What he
wants is not to open the safe but to save his life. How hard he tries
is perhaps dependent on the seriousness of the threats. These are
examples of 'warring' or conflicting wants. And now I shall take up
the elucidation of the role of 'trying' in the exercise of will power.

SECTION 18

Trying and the Will

The traditional account of the concept of the will has had its
share of scathing and able criticism by contemporary philosophers.
Professor Gilbert Ryle[1] argues that the will 'is an artificial con-
cept devised by philosophers to explain human action and behaviour.'
He proceeds to expose the fallacies involved in what he calls 'the
traditional view' in a convincing fashion. He claims that the con-
cept of the will is not a useful technical concept like 'ionization'
but is rather like 'phlogiston,' one without utility. I have no
quarrel with these statements. Philosophers in the past may have
'messed up' the concept beyond recognition. Professor Ryle's
discussion enables us to see it function in its 'natural surrounding'
in ordinary language. Such words as 'strong-willed,' 'weak-willed,'
'strength of will,' 'effort of the will,' etc. are used by us with
confidence and with meaning. So it is in this sense that I want
to claim that the concept of the will is not an artificial one. I
shall make the further assertion (which gets us back to our job: the
analysis of 'trying') that the analysis of effort-verbs, namely 'try,'
'attempt,' 'endeavour,' 'struggle,' 'strive,' 'make effort,' would shed

[1]Gilbert Ryle, The Concept of Mind, p. 61.

light on problems associated with the concept of the will. 'The will' may have been concocted by philosophers. But surely 'try,' 'attempt,' 'make an effort' which we widely use in daily life and are not 'soiled' by the hands of philosophers, could not have been 'concocted' by them. Thus the concepts cannot be called useless and artificial. There is no myth to be exposed and destroyed in connection with them. Let us go on then doing a bit of philosophy, clearing the ground covered by the verb 'try' and see how it can be related to 'the will.'

Consider the man who has a notoriously bad temper. He is prone to passionate outbursts of feeling, to fits of anger. One day, after a nauseating display of anger, he vows to put an end to such undesirable spectacles. He resolves to control his anger. Comes the morrow he is contradicted and ridiculed by a business partner. Our chap feels the intenseness of blood pouring into his head, he is red in the face, his head is pounding like a sledge hammer, his hand is shaking ominously; he feels like showering verbal denunciations on the man; they are on tip of his tongue. He seems to be compelled to throw at the man whatever comes in hand. Remembering his resolution, he tries his best to control himself. He makes a supreme effort, trying to exercise self-restraint. His hands which were reaching out for some heavy object to throw, he folds in an obviously self-imposed fashion. His face, still bearing some of the quivering rage, is forcibly turned to a much liked

painting of an Indian chieftain on the wall. He does not _say_ anything.
He is still in doubt whether his temper will or will not 'run away with
him.' He is in doubt whether he can or cannot control it. He is trying
to do so. After a few seconds he manages to recover himself and get on
with business. He tried his best, through a commendable effort of will,
and managed to control his ugly temper. If he does this consistently
then we may truly say of him: 'There is a man who can control his
feelings. Superb will power!' Our chap is to be contrasted with the
man who suffers from a lack of self-control. Perhaps we can distinguish
between at least two distinct species of chaps who are properly described
as 'having no self-control whatsoever.' Firstly there is the man who
lets his temper run loose in gay-abandon. Secondly there is the man
who tries to control it but fails. Our first chap could truly be
described as a man with a vicious temper who refuses to do anything
about it. He, as a matter of fact, wallows in his fits of anger.
Therefore he can't be said to be 'weak-willed' on this count alone,
for this epithet applies only to chaps who want to accomplish some-
thing which is clearly within their powers but can't bring it off.
Our second man, however, can be called 'weak-willed.' He tries to
overcome his anger but he can't bring it off. We say to him when he
complains to us: 'You give up too easily. You don't try hard enough.'
If he insists that he did his best, we may reply that 'his best was not

good enough.' A person cannot always tell whether he has made an all-out effort or simply a moderate one to control his temper, for example. The man who tries to control his temper may think that he made an all-out effort to do so because he was gazing at the painting on the wall ignoring the other chap for a while or was tapping his fingers on the table, etc. But if without there occurring further provocations or insults, he abuses the other chap, strikes him, i.e., loses his temper, his claim that he tried hard to control his temper will be rejected by witnesses and even perhaps withdrawn by himself.

The man who is trying to act upon a decision he made, as opposed to the man who puts it off, who procrastinates without having good reasons, is justly called determined, firm of purpose. If he continues trying in the face of turmoil and grave difficulties he is perhaps appropriately described as persevering or steadfast. The men, who possessed immense strength of will, were the explorers of the Antarctic (e.g., Scott). In spite of awful weather conditions, lack of supplies, they kept on trying to find the land. They were relentless in their pursuit.[1] These epithets mentioned in the last sentences are expressive of 'pro-attitudes' on our part. We admire people who we describe as 'determined,' 'firm of purpose,' 'persevering,' etc. Were some of the circumstances different one might use 'negative' epithets in describing such people: 'pigheaded,' 'irrational,' 'foolish,' etc. A man who gives

[1]Other predicates of interest: 'obstinate,' 'stubborn,' 'persistent,' 'resolute.'

up trying to do something because of insurmountable difficulties, we do not call weak-willed but wise. A change of mind for good reasons is not blameworthy but laudable while persistence at a 'hopeless' task is not praiseworthy, but foolish.

SECTION 19

Trying and Intending

Consider the statement 'I shall try to see her tomorrow.' The following analysis might be offered for it. When I utter the above locution I imply that I intend to see her and also that I foresee certain circumstances which might prevent me from seeing her. If I say, 'I shall try to see her tomorrow' but I don't have the slightest intention of seeing her, then I am lying or deliberately deceiving. If I say 'I shall try to see her tomorrow' and I am not aware of, and cannot foresee any circumstances which might prevent me from seeing her then I am misusing the word 'try.' This sounds like a plausible analysis and may induce us to think that 'trying to do something' is necessarily 'intending to do it.' However there are some important distinctions which are not to be glossed over. When I say 'I intend to see her tomorrow,' there is an air of confidence, of assurance that I will succeed accompanying the statement. There is

no doubt that I will succeed. In such cases I can try but do not

intend to do it. How odd it is to say 'I intend to meet her but I

probably won't be able to.' Compare this with: 'I shall try to meet

her but I probably won't be able to.' Also, 'I intended to see her

but I forgot about it.' All right! But 'I tried to see her but I

forgot about it.' Queer! If you tried to see her you couldn't have

forgotten about it.

   If we accept this difference between 'I intend to V' and 'I try

to V' then the analysis for 'I shall try to V' in terms of 'I intend

to V but I doubt if I will succeed' won't do. Such an analysis may

also foster the fallacious view that whenever I am trying I am also

intending, i.e., some may infer that when I am trying I am doing two

things, trying and intending, two episodes lurking in the background.

This of course is blatantly wrong. 'Intending' is not something that

one does, neither is it something that goes on for a time. While 'try-

ing' is something that one does and it does go on for a time. One can

encourage or discourage, persuade or dissuade someone else to try to do

something but one can't discourage or encourage, persuade or dissuade

someone else to intend to do something. When I order someone to try

harder, do I also want to say that I ordered him to intend harder?

'Intend,' or for that matter, 'intend harder' are orders which do not

make sense.' When an attempt comes to naught does the intention come

to naught as well? Hardly! Intentions are formed and more often than not they are carried out. But intentions, even if not carried out, do not come to naught.

When I say 'I am trying to wiggle my ears' the time for 'intending to wiggle my ears' has passed. I <u>could</u> have said before I initiated the trying 'Now I intend to wiggle my ears,' but I didn't need to intend to wiggle my ears in order to try to wiggle them. I could have simply started trying to wiggle them without ever intending to wiggle them. There is, I think, no contradiction in this. Of course I may intend to impress my girlfriend by trying to wiggle my ears or may intend to prove that I am in complete control of all my bodily parts (which is rather silly). Perhaps we may conclude that 'intending to do something' is not a necessary condition for 'trying to do something.'

Now I propose to examine how 'try' gets along or doesn't get along with a host of adverbs from 'intentionally' to 'inadvertantly.' It is interesting to notice that ordinarily when we make a statement of the form 'I shall try to V' adverbs like 'intentionally,' 'unintentionally,' 'deliberately,' 'voluntarily,' 'involuntarily,' 'advertantly,' 'inadvertantly,' 'wittingly' or 'unwittingly' <u>seem</u> to be out of place as modifiers of 'try' or as modifiers of the verb following 'try.' Let us get down to particular examples. If somebody tells me that he is trying to sell his house it would be ludicrous to ask him the following questions: 'Are you

trying intentionally to sell your house?' or 'Are you trying to sell your house intentionally?' The adverb is out of place in both questions. The man wouldn't know how to take these questions, wouldn't know what to make of them. In the case of the native speaker he might dismiss it as a 'slip of the tongue.' In the case of the foreigner learning to speak English, he would (if in an instructive mood) give him lessons in and examples of using the verb 'try.' Consider the situation where one steps on someone's foot inadvertantly. The man whose foot hurts after this may look at the 'clumsy fool' giving him a rather 'dirty' and vicious glance. The other responds indignantly: 'Don't look at me as if I had _tried_ to step on your feet!' The utterance 'I didn't _try_ to do it' spoken with some indignation in the face of an accusing glance, gesture or phrase is a sort of _excuse_. It functions very much like 'I didn't step on your feet deliberately.' 'It was an accident,' 'How clumsy of me.' On the other hand if I say 'I am trying to sell my house' it follows that whatever I am doing in order to sell the house, e.g., having an open house every second day, I am doing _intentionally_. If I say to you 'I am trying to irritate Bill it follows that whatever I am doing in order to bring this feat off, I am doing deliberately, _on purpose_. 'I am trying to irritate Bill but I didn't mean to irritate him' is a very queer thing to say.

The verb 'mean' in 'I meant to hurt him' is very similar in function

to, though much weaker than, the verb 'try' in 'I tried to hurt him.'
In both cases it would be redundant to ask me if I hurt him deliberately,
intentionally or on purpose. The verbs 'try' and 'mean' already guarantee
the intentionality of the activity involved in 'trying to V,' and 'meant
to V' respectively. Therefore the inclusion of adverbs which have solely
the logical function of pointing to the intentionality of the activity
involved in 'trying to V' is superfluous. It also follows that the
inclusion of adverbs, which have the function of pointing out the ways
in which an activity may not be intentional, in 'trying to V' would bring
about a sort of inconsistency. Let us put these strong claims to the test
of examples. Suppose that one is playing chess with a worthy opponent.
One can try to win the game and may succeed. 'I am trying to win this
game deliberately' or 'I am trying to win this game intentionally' are
all superfluous and offend our ears as well as 'the principle of the
economy of language' (a principle which hasn't been explicitly formu-
lated yet to my knowledge). This example is useful but also misleading
for this reason. To be playing chess seriously is to be moving one's
pieces with the object of winning or at least not losing. The object
of winning is built into competitive games like chess. So it would
follow that if one plays chess seriously then one wants to win. The
question arises 'can one win a chess game intentionally?' The question
sounds unusual; we hardly ever would say anything of this sort. What

I want to know is can we say it? And I don't mean by this whether we
can make the noises corresponding to the sentence but whether it makes
sense to say it in certain contexts and circumstances. 'I didn't win
this game by fluke or by mistake. I won it intentionally.' Perhaps
in this context we see what is meant. But it is significant that one
has to provide a 'picture' to make some sense out of 'winning intention-
ally.' Can one try to lose a game of chess? Yes! Imagine a very good
chessplayer having a game with a beginner. The beginner is a child and
his great ambition is to beat the expert at a game. The expert wants
to please the child, wants to make him happy. So he tries to lose the
game. When he is trying to lose the game, i.e., when he is making the
wrong moves, surely he is making these moves intentionally, wittingly,
aware of what he is doing, with a purpose.

Now we come to 'voluntarily' and 'involuntarily' which are a
different kettle of fish.[1] Under normal circumstances when we say 'I
am trying to cross the street' or 'I am trying to get in touch with my
wife' we imply that we do these voluntarily. Under what circumstances
would we say, explicitly using 'voluntarily,' 'He is trying to help us
voluntarily?' Perhaps in the past he had to be persuaded to try to
help us. In this case we didn't have to push him or persuade him, or
force him; he was not under constraint. 'He is trying to mow the lawn
involuntarily.' Was he forced to try to mow the lawn? Is he trying

[1]Cf. J. L. Austin, A Plea for Excuses, in his Philosophical Papers,
pp. 138-40 for a discussion of 'voluntary' and 'involuntary.'

against his will? Perhaps. There is a definite strain in such a locution. 'He tried to jump the fence involuntarily.' This may be taken as 'He was forced to try to jump the fence. How was it done? Perhaps somebody pointed a gun at him, or threatened him with bodily injuries. The point is this: in such cases we use locutions like 'He made me try,' or 'He pressured me to try' but not 'I tried involuntarily.'

Even the locutions 'He made me try' and 'He pressured me to try' are somewhat hollow. We speak ordinarily of making people do things as in 'You make him eat that cake!' but not of making people try to do things. There seems to be a parallel between 'try' and 'believe' in the following respect. We can persuade people to believe and we can persuade people to try. We can convince people to try and we can convince them to believe. We can talk them into trying or believing but we can't make them believe and neither can we make them try. Of course we can a la methods of the Inquisition. But after the tortures you may say 'I believe' or 'I am trying' and we don't take your word for it. Neither the 'belief,' nor the 'attempt' is genuine or sincere. You may say 'I believe' and you may exhibit all the behavioural criteria for 'trying' but we wouldn't say 'he believes ...' or 'he is trying;' rather, we would say 'he was brainwashed' or 'he does, whenever he can, what he is told.' He is 'broken in spirit!'[1]

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[1] Cf. Sections on Success and Failure, and Trying the Impossible, for more on the parallels between 'try' and 'believe.'

One can and often does try <u>reluctantly</u>. If someone asks us to try to throw a cartwheel, we may comply with the request and try reluctantly. 'Trying reluctantly' is very much like 'trying half-heartedly.' Both adverbs take some rather, important 'element' out of 'trying' and the absence of this 'element' is made conspicuous (very often) in the performance. This 'element' is a frame of mind which can be characterized by the epithets: earnestness, readiness, being set on (to do such and such), determined to do such and such, being bent on doing such and such. Perhaps I shouldn't say that these words constitute a 'frame of mind.' These states for lack of a better word are not to be assigned to the 'mind.' They are to be assigned <u>to the heart</u>. How much 'heart' is in one's trying or in one's effort depends largely on these states. The language game we play with 'try' is a complicated one. It guarantees that I know what I am trying to do, that I can lie about what I am trying to do, although not as safely as about what I intend to do.

SECTION 20

Success and Failure

I shall start off by saying some words about 'can' and then about 'try' and see how they differ. The challenge to the user of the statement 'I can do that trick' is 'Prove it; let us see you do it, show us!'

There is doubt in the <u>challenger's</u> mind as to whether the challenged

will or will not be able to bring off the feat. 'He <u>says</u> he can do it,

but I don't believe that he can, or I suspect that he can't.' Surely

such disbelief, doubt or suspicion is <u>not</u> shared by the person who says

'I can do it.' You are prohibited from saying 'I can do it but I doubt

that I shall succeed.' You are also prohibited from saying 'I can do it

but I am not sure if I shall succeed,' 'I can do it but I don't believe

I can,' 'I can do it but I don't think I can.' If you are aware that you

might not be able to do it then you have no right to say you can do it.

You are also prohibited from saying 'I can do it but I may fail.' For

if you are aware of any concrete reason that you might fail then you

have no right to say 'I can do it.' 'I may fail' does not mean the

general and rather commonplace reflection that 'human beings are

fallible and weak and therefore human abilities are liable to failure

on occasion, for no reason at all.' But this by itself is not a good

enough reason for not using 'can' as we in fact use it. When I say

'I can do it' I at least believe that I can do it and if I have been

sufficiently strictly brought up I know I can do it. I have reasons

for saying 'I can do it.' I have done it many times or a few times in

the past. When I say 'I can do it' and I don't believe that I can, I

am lying or misleading. When I say 'I can do it' I assure others that

<u>they can count on my being successful</u> at an undertaking. One can't help

but detect the similarities between 'can' and 'know.' Professor Austin
makes the following penetrating comment about 'know:'

> 'When you know you can't be wrong' is perfectly good
> sense. You are prohibited from saying 'I know it is
> so, but I may be wrong ... If you are aware you may
> be mistaken, you ought not to say you know ... When
> I say 'I know,' I give others my word: I give others
> my authority for saying that 'S is P.'[1]

And now to 'try.' When I say 'I try to do it' I imply that I don't
know whether I shall succeed. It makes perfect sense to say 'I try to
do it but I will probably fail to bring it off' or 'I try to do it but
I don't think I can' or 'I try to do it but I don't believe I will
succeed.' No one in his right mind will challenge a man who says
'I try to do such and such.' Challenges are not made about <u>attempts</u>
but about their <u>outcome</u>. A person may say 'I will try to swim across
the Elbow.' Since this locution implies that <u>he might not be able</u> to
bring it off he is not challenged by anyone, neither is he willing <u>to</u>
<u>bet</u> with anyone. Two other chaps who witness his struggle with the waves
might bet about the outcome of the attempt. One might say: 'He won't
make it,' while the other may say 'He will make it.' There is a definite
(financial in this case) commitment by one party to the success of the
attempt and an equally definite commitment to the failure of it by the
other party. This is essential to the betting situation. The man who

[1]Cf. <u>Other Minds</u>, by Austin, Phil. Papers, p. 66-67.

says 'I will try to swim across the Elbow' can't bet because he implies that he might be able to bring it off and also that he might not be able to bring it off. He is not sure about the outcome of the attempt. He could say 'I can swim across the Elbow.' Then he could bet and also could be challenged by 'Prove it.' The 'existence' of an ability, capacity, or human power to bring a feat of some sort off is challenged but the possibility of an attempt is not (usually) challenged. What is presupposed by a sincere attempt is that one fully intends to succeed; 'I am trying to wink at her but I don't intend to wink at her' is a monster of a bad utterance. It is logically inconsistent. On par with such a 'statement' is the sort of doing which is described by the common man as 'His left hand doesn't know what his right is doing.' Both are examples of self-stultification; in the first case it is self-stultification in what one says and in the second, in what one does. Were we to do these things all the time or frequently, the point of saying things and the point of doing things would vanish. If I say 'I am trying to help you' and I don't intend to help you then I am pretending to try to help you. I am lying or deceiving you or someone has forced me to try. Furthermore when one says genuinely 'I am trying my best to finish my thesis' I imply that I hope to succeed and not to fail. If anybody would say to us 'I am trying my best to do such and such but I hope to fail' we would consider him a 'queer' fellow and justly

doubt whether he is trying at all (never mind his best) or whether he hopes to fail. We wouldn't take him seriously, or if we did, we wouldn't know what to make of the things he said. Now perhaps we can say with some confidence that when we say 'I will try to do such and such' we do not know whether we shall succeed and we do not know whether we shall fail, but we usually intend and hope to succeed.

Attempts are not always successful. One may try to steal great sums of money from a bank but given that the bank is well-guarded, the chances are that one would fail in this undertaking. A prisoner may try to escape from jail and be unsuccessful. Whether these attempts are successful or not depends on how skillfully the robbery or escape is planned, and how efficiently the plan is carried out, and on various other factors. A beginning student of physics may try to understand Einstein's theory of relativity, but find that he can't. 'I tried to do it but I couldn't' is an admission of failure. 'I tried to do it and look, I did it' is a declaration of success. What follows from all this? The rather dull point that people's attempts do not always succeed. But, they do not always fail either. What would it be like if no attempts would ever be successful? Or for that matter, if no attempts would ever misfire? In both cases, I daresay, the concept of 'trying' would be a radically different concept from the one we have now. An apt comparison to this is the Wittgensteinian question

'What would it be like if no order would ever be obeyed?' We can
without much difficulty conceive of a world where all 'attempts'
would be successful. Every time we would say 'I will _try_ to do such
and such' it would be certain that I accomplish doing such and such
if I undertake 'trying.' Furthermore every time we would say 'I am
trying to do such and such,' we would in fact be doing such and such.
Every time we would say 'I tried to do such and such' we could equally
well say 'I did such and such' or rather 'I succeeded in doing such and
such.' That is to say the concept of 'attempt' would be swallowed up
by the concepts of 'doing,' 'succeeding,' 'accomplishing,' 'achieving.'
Whether 'success,' 'accomplishment,' 'achievement' would have a sense in
such a world is itself doubtful. After all the verb 'fail' could hardly
be used in the way we use it in our conceptual framework. One _could_
not say 'I _tried_ to win the race but I failed,' or 'I _tried_ to kill
him but I couldn't.' 'Trying' would be a necessary and sufficient
condition for success at an undertaking. But this is not the way we
use the word 'try.' The language game we play with 'try' _demands the_
possibility of success and failure. It is, similarly, possible to
conceive of a world where every attempt would necessarily fail. In
this conceptual scheme 'attempt' would be swallowed up by 'failure.'
Again, this is _not_ the way we use the word 'try.' Statements of the
sort 'He read Tolstoy's _War and Peace_ last year' are true or false.

They are characterized by the dimension of truth and falsity, to put it rather grandiosely. Statements of the sort 'Raskolnikoff murdered the old lady' and 'He gave two million dollars to charity' are characterized more appropriately by the epithets 'good and bad' or 'moral and immoral.' Statements with 'try' are perhaps most appropriately (but not always or solely) characterized by 'successful' or 'unsuccessful;' they are within the dimension of 'success' and 'failure.' This is a contingent matter about our conceptual framework. Now that we have seen the conditions for the application of 'try' and given our concept of God, it seems to follow that it is <u>logically impossible</u> for God to try to do anything for He can't fail. He cannot (this is a logical 'cannot') utter first person utterances of the sort 'I shall try to ϕ,' 'I tried to ϕ.' 'Difficulty,' 'effort,' 'failure,' are concepts that He can't apply with reference to Himself in His situations and therefore, since these are some of the essential words in the language game we play with 'try,' it follows that He can't apply the word 'try' to situations involving others. Now I shall say some more words about 'failure,' 'success,' and 'attempts.' I shall discuss these concepts in relation to our ordinary experience and yet it is a great advantage to keep before our minds a world such as that of God where such concepts as 'try,' 'attempt,' 'effort,' 'success,' 'failure,' are inapplicable. It may help to give us a continuing sense of the strangeness of this related family of concepts.

The verb 'succeed' in the sense relevant to our inquiry is used with the suffixes 'in' or 'at' and is followed by nouns like 'enterprise,' 'effort,' and by appropriate verb 'nominalizations' like 'finding the watch,' 'controlling his patience,' 'winning the race,' 'undertaking,' 'attempt,' 'endeavour.' 'Enterprise,' 'undertaking,' 'effort,' 'attempt,' 'endeavour,' are linguistic dummies which can at will be omitted from statements like 'I succeeded in my efforts to find my watch.' In such eventuality 'my efforts to find my watch' will be replaced by 'finding my watch.' Another example: 'He failed to score a goal' is 'He failed in his attempt to score a goal.' In the first example it is implied that I tried to find my watch and in the second that he tried to score a goal. Such implications are not present in 'He did not find his watch' and in 'He did not score a goal.' And now we are ready to ask the question, 'Can one succeed without trying?' The question necessitates a distinction between 'ϕ-ing successfully' and 'succeeding in one's attempt/effort/endeavour to ϕ.' If the question is understood in the first sense, then the answer is 'yes!' One can cheat, pretend, enjoy oneself, sit, write, read, etc. without trying to . And one 'can ϕ successfully' at that! But if the question is understood in the second sense then we must insist that trying is mandatory. If I say that I succeeded in my efforts to complete my thesis I imply that I tried to complete my thesis. If I say that I failed in my attempt

to solve a problem, I imply that I tried to solve that problem.

The adverbs modifying 'succeed' do support my view. Such adverbs are 'finally,' 'at last,' 'eventually.' 'He finally succeeded in (his efforts to go to sleep) going to sleep' implies 'He tried in vain for a long time.' To reiterate our point then: from 'He ϕ-ed successfully' it does not follow that he tried to ϕ. From 'He succeeded in his attempt/ effort/endeavour to ϕ' it follows that he tried to ϕ.

Could God have the concept of success? 'Attempts,' 'efforts,' 'endeavours,' 'undertakings,' 'enterprises,' are not the sorts of things we could predicate of Him. We speak of 'my attempt to do such and such' 'his efforts,' etc. We use possessive pronouns with them. Like 'thoughts,' 'intentions,' 'actions' of which we also speak in a 'possessive' fashion. They are close to us. We feel and are held responsible for them. But to speak of God's attempts, endeavours is to betray ignorance of the common concept of God. Such things are inconsistent with His nature. So He cannot succeed at these because He does not have them. We spoke of 'achievement verbs' like 'spotting a deer' or 'winning the race' as success verbs.[1] Also of 'task' or 'activity verbs' like 'looking,' 'sitting,' etc. Usually the former we try, the latter we simply do. God could not distinguish between achievements and tasks. He can't try to get such and such. He has got such and such. He can't fail

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[1] Ryle: Concept of Mind, p. 149.

at such and such. Therefore He cannot have the concepts of success or failure.

And now to failure, that all too human concept. We speak of failing to pass examinations, failing to support one's ex-wife, failing persons, failing to keep resolutions, etc. Once again, talk of 'effort,' 'attempt,' 'endeavour,' 'undertaking,' 'ambition' are relevant with regard to fail (just like with 'succeed'). One can certainly fail at what one sets out to do, at what we were about to do intentionally but it does not make sense to talk of having failed at something we did unintentionally. Failure verbs like 'miss the target' do not make sense unless you aimed at the target. 'His eyes were twitching' is a good example of something that 'happens' to us. It does not make sense to say that he failed to twitch his eyes. It is a different matter with winking. It makes perfect sense to say that you failed to wink at her when you told me that you were going to do so. Winking is something we do intentionally.

One can fail to pass one's examinations due to lack of effort. In these cases we may say: 'Aha, you didn't try hard enough,' or 'You didn't try at all.' One can fail to do something due to lack of opportunity. In the former case one is blameworthy but rarely in the latter. Lack of ability is another cause of failure. 'He couldn't pass his examinations because he is very stupid.' You might not have a 'knack' for academic activities. Failure due to overconfidence or

overanxiousness is not uncommon. 'You couldn't sink that billiard ball because you <u>tried too hard</u>.' Backsliding is a form of moral failure. If one resolves oneself to refrain from seducing young lasses and continues on doing so, one failed to keep a resolution due to lack of determination, will power and so on. One fails people if one makes promises to them and does not keep them. Failure is sometimes falling short of certain expectations or prescribed schedules. e.g., 'He failed to register in time.' The question arises whether trying is a necessary condition for failing. Let us produce some enlightening examples. 'He failed to win the 100 meter dash.' This, I would like to think, necessarily presupposes that the chap in question participated in the race, tried to win it, and failed to do so. So in this case 'trying' is a necessary condition for 'failing.' Notice that one can fit in, following 'fail' such dummies as 'in his effort/attempt/endeavour.' But there are many examples where 'trying' is not a necessary condition for failing. E.g., I may fail to keep an appointment and not try to keep it, or I may fail to support my wife without trying to support her. So 'trying to ϕ' is not a necessary condition for ϕ-ing but often plays part in the language game we play with 'fail.' We often fail to do something because one is prevented from doing that something. One may be prevented from following a discussion by a person e.g., if the person is throwing paperballs at you or kicking you under

the table. But sometimes we are prevented from doing something by non-persons like smoke, flood, insanity, etc. e.g., 'The smoke prevented us from seeing each other' or 'the flood hindered the transportation of the children across the river,' or 'insanity prevented him from completing his thesis.'

We sometimes say 'He didn't win the race because he didn't try hard enough' implying that he could have won the race had he tried harder. Yes. In some cases 'not trying,' 'not trying hard enough' can be summoned as reasons for failure. But this is only in some cases. Clearly if I run in a race with Peter Snell I can try as hard as I can, yet I won't win.

SECTION 21

Trying the Impossible

'Trying' might be said to be like 'believing' in that we sometimes use similar locutions involving both. We say that he gave up trying to do such and such and also that he gave up believing (in) such and such. We also speak of abandoning attempts as well as beliefs, of trying earnestly as well as of believing earnestly, of trying wholeheartedly, half-heartedly, with all one's heart and soul, as well as of believing wholeheartedly, halfheartedly, with all one's heart and soul, seriously.

We spoke of 'degrees of trying' in the sense that we speak of trying one's best, hard, harder. 'How hard did he try?' is a question that makes perfect sense. We ask questions about beliefs when the occasion demands it. 'How firmly do you believe in such and such?' One may speak of believing passionately, fanatically, intensely and so on. People (at least some people) believe in ghosts, devils, angels, God, in other people, in resurrection, in the end of the world, in miracles and so on. Some beliefs are qualified by such adjectives as 'childlike,' 'irrational,' 'stupid,' 'passionate,' 'mystical,' 'foolish,' 'fanatical,' 'zealous.' People (at least some people) try to square the circle, try to perform miracles, try to talk to God, try to reach the moon, try to attain the salvation of their soul, children (babies) try to grasp the moon, some people try to travel backwards or forwards in time, try to make themselves invisible, try to jump to the sun. Some attempts are qualified by such adjectives as hopeless, bound to fail, doomed to fail, futile, made in vain, determined, resolute, all-out. Now people who believe in miracles or ghosts do not <u>think</u> that miracles are absurd or ghosts are fictitious. On the contrary they think that miracles do happen and ghosts do visit or appear to people. The point is that they do not believe in absurdities, fictitious and mystical entities, in contradictions as such. Such people view the world differently from others, their explanations for certain phenomena will differ from others,

their ontological commitments differ from others'. Hobbes believed that the circle could be squared but he did not believe that squaring the circle·is a contradiction. We must pay particular attention to the description of the object of belief because it is very important and makes a great deal of difference _how_ you describe it. What someone might do is to show that the 'concept' of a squared-circle is an absurd one. He could demonstrate that it leads to a contradiction in terms. This may lead to the abandoning of such a belief. But it does not necessarily do so. After all don't we speak of obstinate, irrational beliefs? But the chap who refuses to give up his belief does _not_ think of it in such terms. In spite of the argument he thinks the squared-circle a possible entity. People who believe in time travel might not be in the least affected by arguments which show that it is a notion which leads to self-contradiction. They might say imperturbably: 'I said that I believe in time travel but I did not say that I believe in what you make it out to be.' 'Irrational,' 'pigheaded,' and 'illogical,' such a person could be called. But then such people also have beliefs. Having beliefs is not something which is restricted to rational, logical and clear-thinking chaps.

When Hobbes _tried_ to square the circle, he in a sense·at least did not try to do the impossible. If somebody had asked him 'What are you doing?' he would not have answered· 'I am trying the impossible.' But

rather 'I am trying to square the circle.' He thought that it was possible to square the circle. People who try to perform miracles do not and would not claim to be trying to do the impossible. They think that it is possible for miracles to happen or to be brought about. The person who tries to travel backwards in time thinks that this is possible. Someone who is trying to jump to the sun believes that it is possible to jump to the sun. People do not try to do the impossible as such. For saying that 'I am trying to do the impossible' involves a contradiction which is not too difficult to detect. For trying to do something implies that one is, in the face of obstacles, taking certain steps which he believes will bring about that something. But if one says that something is impossible to do, one implies that one believes that no steps which one could take would bring about that something. Therefore it follows then that when a person is trying to do the impossible he believes that he is taking steps to bring about something which he believes no steps could ever bring about. This is clearly absurd. Therefore the notion of trying to do the impossible is absurd. Therefore no one in his right mind would say 'I am trying to do the impossible.' What might happen is this: Someone may say 'I shall try to travel backwards in time.' A friend might point out that that is impossible to do. He proceeds to explain the logical inconsistencies in the notion of time travel. This might cause the other to abandon

his attempt. But then it might not. 'Irrational,' 'obstinate' and 'pig-headed' such a chap would be called. But such people try to do things as well as rational and logically-minded ones. It seems to follow that there is a definite relationship between what one believes and what one tries to do. We could put this more precisely by saying that it is a necessary condition for trying to ϕ that one believe that it is possible to ϕ. One's sets of beliefs condition one's attempts. Religious healers believe that it is possible to cure a person of some disease through prayer and incantations and thus they try to cure in this fashion.

The two inevitable questions that come up in such cases are, the following: 'Why do you believe that it is possible to ϕ,' and 'How do you propose to try to ϕ?' The first question does not challenge the 'existence' of your belief but merely asks reasons for it. Why do you believe that miracles are possible to bring about? A religious person may say that there have been instances of miracles in the past. (Of course what is precisely at issue is whether he is entitled to call these 'miracles.') The second question would demand an answer in terms of steps, procedures, methods, techniques. How do you propose to try to bring about the cure of this patient who has been given up by all medical authorities who were consulted? The religious healer may answer by specifying the 'rituals': Praying to God, soaking the patient in holy water, chanting certain appropriate incantations, etc. A scientifically

or philosophically-minded person would say to the answer, given to the
question 'Why do you believe that such and such is possible?' 'I don't
consider your 'reasons' reasons at all. You ought not believe that doing
such and such is possible.' The answer outlining the steps in trying to
cure the ill person would be dismissed in a similar fashion. The scientific-
ally or philosophically minded person would <u>not</u> consider 'prayer,'
'sprinkling holy water,' etc. as steps which count as an attempt to cure
the person. So there is a great divergence here between people with
different 'ideas about the world.' The question 'What will count as
criteria for trying to cure the disease-ridden patient who has been
given up by the doctors?' is decided on differently by the religious
healer and by the doctor. The religious healer may truthfully say of
himself: 'I am trying to cure this man' while the doctor might say,
with a sad smile: 'He is trying to cure the man, believing that he can
be cured.' What will count as criteria for trying depends on their
different ways of 'looking at the world.' It is not that the doctor
doesn't understand the religious healer's way of looking at the world.
He understands it and rejects it as one which gives a distorted and
erroneous view. If praying and chanting count as trying to cure the
chap, why not walking, thinking, doodling or biting your fingernails?
It is to be appreciated that no experiment can settle the issue between
them. Suppose that the patient recuperates after the praying and chanting

Even then, the doctor would not concede the point that the healer succeeded to cure the man. For the very good reason that if he is consistent nothing that the healer did could count as trying to cure the patient.

Throughout this section I have given various examples; and it is clear that there are different sorts and types of possibility and impossibility involved in these examples. Squaring the circle and traveling in time backwards or forwards are logically impossible. That is to say whenever we think about what 'squaring the circle' or 'traveling in time' would mean we find that we either uttered a piece of nonsense or contradicted ourselves. If a person believes that time travel is possible then he can say 'I am trying to get back to twenty year ago.' As soon as he realises that getting back to twenty years ago is logically impossible, he can no longer say 'I am trying to get back to twenty years ago.' He would say: 'I was trying but now I know that nothing could have counted as such because time travel is logically impossible. Therefore I can no longer try.'

A child tries to grasp the moon. He views the moon as an object within his reach. We say of him 'He is trying to grasp the moon' and smile. We know, given our information about the laws of nature, that 'grasping the moon' is empirically impossible. Can one try to jump to the sun? Again I say, whether a person tries to do such a thing is contingent on his set of beliefs about what is possible or impossible

to do. Given the information we possess about the laws of nature we cannot say 'I am trying to jump to the sun.' For what could count as criteria for trying? What could count as an attempt in such a case? Jumping a yard or two or three in the air? Surely not! And if it is asked why not? We may reply that if jumping one or two or three feet into the air is considered an attempt to jump to the sun then why not admit doodling, brushing your teeth, fiddling with your fingers also as attempts to jump to the sun? If someone refuses to accept this view about jumping to the sun then he refuses to accept the ideas that scientists have of the world. Perhaps he has a different 'picture' one wherein he can say 'I am trying to jump to the sun' or 'I am trying to jump 16,000 feet in the air.' He would believe it possible to jump to the sun or 16,000 feet in the air. Consider the Biblical phenomenon of 'ascension.'

Curing the victim of leukemia is perhaps an adequate example of the technically impossible. At the moment we do not possess enough knowledge about the disease to cope with it. We do not have the ways and means to effect a cure. We don't know how to go about curing a victim of leukemia. A doctor who believes or thinks that a certain procedure or treatment may help can say 'I shall try to cure him although so far we have not been able to cure victims of leukemia! Were the doctor to believe that no procedure or treatment could count as an attempt to cure the patient, he could not properly say: 'I shall

try to cure him.' If he was to say it, he would be lying or deliberately misleading.

To sum up our contentions then: people do not try to do the impossible as such, neither do they believe in absurdities as such. The description of the object of trying may be mistaken, inappropriate, incorrect, or putative or a misdescription. Trying to do the impossible leads to a contradiction in terms. To reiterate the argument for this: Trying to do something implies that the agent is, in the face of difficulties, taking certain steps which he believes will bring about that something. But doing the impossible implies that the agent believes that no steps which one could take would bring about the required end. It follows then that when a person is trying to do the impossible, he believes that he is taking steps to bring about something which he believes no steps taken could ever bring about. And this is a blatant contradiction. We also contended that a person who says 'I am trying to ϕ' and expects to be taken seriously, must be able to answer the questions 'How do you propose to try to ϕ;' 'What would <u>count</u> as trying to ϕ?' Trying we argued is subjective in this sense: if a person is trying to ϕ he must necessarily believe that it is possible to ϕ. There was also some discussion of different ways of looking at the world (the religious, the scientific) and how criteria for trying to ϕ would vary according to these different 'pictures' of the world. Perhaps we could say tentatively that how one looks at the world determines what one can try to do.

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