

Wittgenstein's Letter to Drury*

Dear Drury,

I have thought a fair amount about or conversation on Sunday and I would like to say, or rather not to say but write, a few things about these conversations. Mainly I think this: Don't think about yourself, but think about others, e.g. your patients. You said in the Park yesterday that possibly you had made a mistake in taking up medicine: you immediately added that it was probably wrong to think such a thing at all. I am sure it is. But not because being a doctor you may not go the wrong way, or go to the dogs, but because if you do, this has nothing to do with your choice of profession being a mistake. For what human being can say what would have been the right thing if this is the wrong one? You didn't make a mistake because there was nothing at the time you knew or ought to have known that you overlooked. Only this one could have called making a mistake: and even if you had made a mistake in this sense, this would now be regarded as a datum as all other circumstances inside and outside which you can't alter (control). The thing now is to live in the world in which you are, not to think or dream about the world you would like to be in. Look at people's sufferings, physical and mental, you have them close at hand, and this ought to be a remedy for your troubles. Another way is to take a rest whenever you ought to take one and collect yourself. (Not with me because I wouldn't rest you). As to religious thoughts I do not think the craving for placidity is religious: I think a religious person regards placidity or peace as a gift from heaven, not as something one ought to hunt after. Look at your patients more closely as human beings in trouble and enjoy more the opportunity you have to say 'good night' to so many people. This alone is a gift from heaven which many people would envy you. And this sort of thing ought to heal your frayed soul, I believe. It won't rest it: but when you are healthily tired you can take a rest. I think in some sense you don't look at people's faces closely enough.

In conversations with me don't so much try to have conversations which you think would taste well (though you will never get that anyway) but try to have the conversations which will have the pleasantest after-taste. It is important that we should not one day have to tell ourselves that we had wasted the time we were allowed to spend together.

I wish you good thoughts but chiefly good feelings.

* Rhees, R. (1984) *Recollections Of Wittgenstein*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, pp. 95-96