This book was written in Vienna in the winter of 1933/34 – during the period before the development of linguistic philosophy, of the existentialism and the behaviorism of the 1940's, of mathematical models in sociology and of experiments in the social sciences. Its philosophical background can be described in a few paragraphs.

Traditionally opposed to Hegel, the Viennese philosophers studied Hume and Kant, and read Nietzsche and Tolstoy. Earlier in the century, the Austrian philosophical scene had been dominated by two schools: Franz Brentano’s and Ernst Mach’s. The 1920’s witnessed the rise of the group called in Vienna the Schlick-Kreis after its founder and known in the world as the Vienna Circle. All three groups were primarily interested in epistemology rather than in ethics.

Brentano’s ethical ideas are epitomized in sentences such as “Good is that which is worthy of love or what ought to be loved,” “Evil is what it is impossible to love correctly,” “What is worthy of love one recognizes by intuition.” While Brentano’s disciples hailed these phrases as the results of deep insight I have never discovered their cognitive significance. Nor have I been able to derive information from Max Scheler’s and Nicolai Hartmann’s characterization of values as essences given by immediate intuition.

Mach’s positivism and his antimetaphysical attitude profoundly influenced many scientists but had no comparable impact on writers of ethics. Fritz Mauthner, the critic of language, was one philosopher who as a student in Prague was deeply impressed by Mach. He wrote at the beginning of this century, “Morality is only in words,” and criticized ethics for “building its assertions in terms of unclear words of the common language and ending up with monstrous phrases such as ‘I ought to will’.”

The members of the Vienna Circle had originally intended to develop a synthesis of Mach’s positivism and the logic-oriented philosophy of
Bertrand Russell, whence they characterized themselves as logical positivists. In the early 1920's, the group became acquainted with Ludwig Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. When I returned to Vienna in 1927 after an absence of more than two years and was invited to attend the meetings of the Circle I found that the logical and epistemological parts of the *Tractatus* had deeply impressed M. Schlick, H. Hahn, R. Carnap, F. Waismann and H. Feigl. Not so the short concluding part of the book with sayings about that which, according to Wittgenstein is unsayable – the part that includes brief references to ethics. The restriction of science to value-free statements had always been part of the program of the Circle, so that the members found the sentences, “In the world everything is as it is and happens as it happens. In the world there is no value” congenial, if not especially illuminating. On the other hand, they considered as eccentricities statements such as “The meaning (der Sinn) of the world must lie outside of the world,” “Not how the world is is the mystical, but that it is,” “There is indeed the ineffable. It evinces itself; it is the mystical.” These aphorisms were ignored – except by O. Neurath in whom they created a deep distrust of Wittgenstein as a mystic.

In the Circle, I don’t remember having ever attended discussions of ethical problems. In my recollection, Schlick was the only member who at that time pursued studies in ethics. Before I came to Vienna he had written a beautiful, poetic booklet on the meaning of life¹ in which he extolled youthfulness and play. In 1930, he combined these thoughts with a critique of Kant’s ideas on absolute norms and duty in a book, *Problems of Ethics*² – a more systematic work, which yet exhibited only a modicum of logical analysis. Though written at a time when Schlick’s epistemological views were strongly influenced by Wittgenstein that book on ethics mentions neither him nor the *Tractatus*; and from Waismann’s posthumously published notes³ it also appears that ethical questions played only a minor role in his and Schlick’s discussions with Wittgenstein over the years.

¹ M. Schlick, *Vom Sinn des Lebens*, Berlin, 1927.