WHAT IS THE MEANING OF LIFE?
Program 103
Mankind's Evil Nature
by Ernest O'Neill

We're talking on this program these days about one of the phenomena that all of us experience in our own personal lives. It's the Jekyll and Hyde Syndrome. I don't know if you know immediately what that is, but it takes its name from the famous novel written by Robert Louis Stevenson, "The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr Hyde."

You may remember how Dr. Jekyll was a respected, loving, well-known doctor in a certain area of London who was famous for his philanthropic treatment of the poor and the needy. Yet there appeared on the streets of London at night, when people would roam the streets who were most vulnerable to this kind of creature, a creature called Mr. Hyde who became known for his murderous and violent treatment of strangers in the street.

Of course, you remember how he in some way became connected with a Dr. Jekyll through having presented a check for 100 pounds as compensation to one of his victims. You may remember how we discussed the suicide note that Dr. Jekyll left after he had committed suicide at the end of the novel. In it he described how he had those generous and kindly feelings that everybody knew him for, but along with those he had within him cruel, angry feelings of violence and greed and selfishness and lust and hatred that he could not control.

So he devised a drug, you remember, that was intended to give a physical expression that was appropriate to those angry, callous, cruel feelings. He would take that drug, you remember, at the beginning once a week. Then his features would assume those of the cruel and violent Mr. Hyde.

But of course, he became addicted to the drug and as the years passed Mr. Hyde took over more and more of his life until gradually, without any need of the drug at all, Mr. Hyde's cruel and violent features would take over from the kindly, elderly Dr. Jekyll's. Hyde actually took control of the life completely so that Jekyll had no more control of his own attitude or his own behavior.

What we have said is that most of us here have some experience of that in our own lives. Indeed, we mentioned, you remember, a famous statement of that which you find actually in part of the Bible, towards the end of it, in a book called Romans in Chapter 7:15. The words occur, "I do not understand my own actions, for I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate." That was exactly what Dr. Jekyll found.

If you're like me, and many of the rest of us human beings, you've found that to be true in your own life. "I do not do the good I want, but I do the very thing I hate." In other words, "The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr Hyde" has become a classic, partly because it describes a phenomenon that is universal in human nature. The Jekyll and Hyde Syndrome is something that all of us know in our own everyday lives. We know the reality of that conflict within.
We know that there are times when we want to be gentle with another person, and yet we find ourselves being harsh and sarcastic. When we most want to be pure, we find lustful, licentious passions rising from hearts of darkness.

When we most want to be industrious and useful, we find ourselves overwhelmed with indolence and lethargy so that our wills seem impotent to stem the tide of foulness and evil that seems to rise up from our hearts like a flood tide. So all of us, I think, know the reality of that cry of, actually it was a man called

Paul, who said, "I do not do the good I want, but the evil I hate is what I do."

Probably you've had the experience of going home at night, determined to give your wife, or your children, or the person you live with, a beautiful experience of happiness and rest and relaxation. You determine that you will be the best that you have ever been before. Then you find that your wife has not got the supper or the tea or the dinner ready on time. Or, you find that the dog has got out and you have to go out and look for it.

Or, you find that your newspaper has been opened by somebody else and has been torn, and suddenly you become a little irritable and as act follows act and word follows word, and you express your irritability and your wife and your roommate or your friend responds in a certain way, you respond a little more harshly. Before you know it, you're in the middle of one of those disastrous evenings where the whole domestic unity has been split apart and everybody goes to bed...fed up and insulted and tired of each other.

Most of us know the reality of that Mr. Hyde within us that comes out when it is least convenient for us. What's the answer to that? Suicide was the only answer for Dr. Jekyll. He and Hyde had become so entangled, that the only way to get rid of one was to kill both. In a strange way, if you find no solution, something like that will happen anyway. The evil part of you will finally have to be killed, or it will kill the good in you.

Though you still may appear somewhat good on the outside it'll be a veneer. All your good will be shot through with this old, evil creature that rises up in violence. So, in a sense, there has to be the destruction of one or the other. In most of us, of course, as the years pass, there is. Gradually the evil part takes over more and more. It just clothes itself in a more subtle form, so that we

find ourselves doing good acts, but often for evil motives or evil reasons.

We often find ourselves saying nice things to a person, but our attitude does not really mirror what we're saying to them. So many of us call ourselves hypocrites because we are what that word implies...someone who looks like one thing on the outside and yet that is only a mask such as they wore in the old Greek dramas. Inside is the real person. But really we're not hypocrites, because we're as really ourselves when we're the evil part as when we're the good part.

It's just that we like to think of ourselves better than we ought to think. So we like to pretend to ourselves that the evil part is, of course, not really us. But it is us. How do you get rid of that? Drugs? Shock treatment? Well, you know, they're as temporary and as enslaving as Jekyll's original drug. They merely deal with the symptoms, but they leave the underlying case untouched -- as most of us found who tried to treat ourselves, however mildly, with some kind of drug.

The power of positive thinking? Will that answer it? Self-discipline? Behavior modification? Most of us have found that it's like trying to tame a lion with cookies. It's like trying to stop an overwhelming avalanche with one shovel. It's like trying to stem a tidal wave with a picket fence. The power and the force and the complexity, and the depth of the evil nature that we find within us, is too powerful to be dealt with by such tampering and tinkering.

So most of us find ourselves in the same position as Dr. Jekyll, except that we cannot find any answer or solution to the problem. Of course, for most of us, it is a bewildering and a baffling problem. We wonder, "Why does it occur?" "Why am I not, as Rex Harrison would sing, a most understanding man." I seem in every way to be civilized and sophisticated and kindly and

understanding on the outside, and yet within me I find at times this violent, ugly monster that I cannot control.

It's just as Boswell said, who wrote the famous Life of Johnson...he said at times, "I can be sitting in church, thinking the most holy thoughts and suddenly I can think of having a woman." So most of us have had that kind of experience...the experience of this apparent twin personality within us, this schizophrenia, this ugly, cruel creature underneath that we cannot control. What is the explanation of that? Let's discuss it a little further tomorrow.