

What Wittgenstein Thinks Of Ethics

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Abstract

Ethics and religion are connected with values. Although Wittgenstein was not a classical ethicist yet his famous book the *Tractatus Logico Philosophicus* (TLP), *Philosophical Investigation* (PI), *Culture and Value* (CV) etc. consist the possibility, necessity and concept of ethics connection with the linguistic analysis of ontology of the world. His conception of ethics is concerned with the world and the life. For him the exercise of values can alter the limits of the world, not the facts. Ethics, religion and aesthetics are interconnected which lead to mysticism. It cannot promote the meaning of life, and ethical sense is an instrument of the individual's being-in-the world. Wittgenstein holds that ethical judgment is non-sensible and accordingly ethics leads to mysticism. He distinguishes between showing in the sense of representational language and showing to a right view of the world. Ethics can neither be expressed in statements, nor can it name any sort of truth. The ethical questions belong to metaphysics, and the quest for the ethical life is post-metaphysical. In the broadest sense, neither ethics nor religion can be distinguished, since both disciplines fall within the realm of human action.

Keywords: Morality, ontology, form of life, mysticism, universality.

Introduction

According to Wittgenstein, the correct method in philosophy is “to say nothing except propositions of natural sciences— i.e. something that has nothing to do with philosophy”. Philosophical analysis is limited only to the ‘propositions of natural sciences’ or ‘empirical propositions’. In the realm of philosophy, no meaningful discourse is permissible beyond it. Wittgenstein outlines the limits of both — the language and the philosophical activity. The domain of language and the domain of philosophy here are only a systematic description of ‘how things being made to explore the more significant issues in life which otherwise cannot be put within the framework of language and philosophy. They lie in realm of higher. Values— the ethical, aesthetic, and religious, are non-factual, unconditional and are devoid of empirical content. They are seen as transcendental in character. Hence, the world is out of the ethical values as it contains nothing more than the facts. Ethics is viewed as supernatural which cannot be captured within the network of natural world and natural language. Wittgenstein’s entire philosophy

is considered as propounding a new approach to moral philosophy.

A. Moral Universality:

Wittgenstein remarked in *Culture and Value* (CV 1929) --- “What is good is also divine. Queer as it sounds, that sums up my ethics. Only something supernatural can express the Supernatural”. Here, ethics is almost placed on a religious plane, a fact that already emerges from Wittgenstein’s reflections in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (TLP), namely, that on the basis of the limit of language, it makes no sense to refer actions to ethical dimensions. It assumes a specific understanding of ethics, based as it is, neither on an academic conception of individual moral directives for action, nor on a theoretically devised scheme, but on an ethical impulse. That impulse is dismissed by ethics as a normative theory or doctrine that, nonetheless, “by clarifying the status of ethical propositions, expresses the view that human action is not to be philosophically justified or qualified, but rather to be taken as given”. In Wittgenstein’s late philosophy, this supposed

paradox dissolves into a myriad of possible ways of acting, into the plurality and the unforeseen nature of human speech acts, that is, into the multiplicity of the grammar in its expressions of “good” and “evil”. The rejection of ethics as a formative doctrine or theory means that the ethical dimension is treated as transcendental, as it were, neither in need of an ultimate justification, nor with the capacity to make such a thing possible. For Wittgenstein, an ethical theory or doctrine can only be nonsensical. In the *Tractatus*, he justifies that view philosophically in the elucidations for the proposition 6.4 “All propositions are of equal value”, by stating:

So it is impossible for there to be propositions of ethics. Propositions can express nothing that is higher. It is clear that ethics cannot be put into words and it is transcendental. Ethics and aesthetics are one and the same. The ethical dimension is removed from the field of facets that are described in words. That leads to the paradox that acting in the world cannot contain any statements on the ethical quality of action, although the ethical dimension is meant to be linked to the sense of action and the actor’s status. This aspect can be explained by the fact that the same action can be performed by any number of different “selves”; that is to say, the same action can be described at one time as “evil” and at another as “good”. The significance of the “self” for ethics is particularly clear in Wittgenstein’s *Lecture on Ethics*. In his lecture, Wittgenstein uses the term ethics in a sense that also incorporates the greater part of aesthetics. As already noted in the *Tractatus*, he repeats the expression that “there are no propositions which, in any absolute sense, are sublime, important, or trivial”, but adds by way of illustration that he meant “that a state of mind, so far as we mean by that a fact which we can describe, is in no ethical sense good or bad.” Here, the aforementioned plurality of “selves” is explicitly reflected in the possibility to describe the same ways of acting as “evil” and “good”. The ability to define ethical propositions requires a theory of ethics. It would only be possible, if there were a criterion or measure to prove the propositions as suitable or unsuitable, as possible or impossible. To evaluate such propositions, they would have to be part of a system of self-referential statements, for only that

kind of system can demonstrate a criterion with a logically justifiable basis. Hence, propositions only make sense, if they make statements about facts in the world. As in the natural sciences, a theory would have to describe these facts in propositions that are systematically ordered. He forces the destruction of the philosophical idea of a book of the universe, an idea that leads in his late philosophy to the recognition of a multiplicity of behavioral patterns. Ethics really would have to be a science. It seems that nothing people could ever think or say should be the thing. People can only describe their feeling by the metaphor. Ethics is supernatural and our words will only express facts. So far as facts and propositions are concerned there is only relative value and relative, not universal good, right, etc.

Wittgenstein confirms by that flow of thoughts what he already called the transcendental nature of the ethical in his *Tractatus*-- namely, that the ethical dimension is only revealed by its exclusion from articulate expression, that is, the absence of a state of affairs that can be described. For him, in our world of facts and states of affairs, no “absolutely right road” can be recognized with the coercive power of a judge, as it was an absolute ethical power of creating acts and evaluating actions. Even if it were possible to imagine an absolute and normative ethics as given, it could not possess the compulsion of an absolute judge, for that power would still remain an indescribable state of affairs. A consensus in the definitions would obtain, yet it does not follow that this consensus would extend to the judgments. By rejecting the “the coercive power of an absolute judge” Wittgenstein destructs the universality claim of ethics, by conceding that the decision whether the demand to take “the absolutely right road” or the de facto remark “This is the absolute good!”, accepted by individuals, exclusively depends on an individual’s practical approach. Since every demand to adopt a certain way of seeing things always implicitly presupposes that there is another possibility, every idea of an absolute is a delusion. Despite this analysis, Wittgenstein recognizes a “drive” that is manifested in man’s continued attempt to create ethical theories. These ethical theories are interpretations of human actions. That

the number of such theories seems infinite is to be explained by humanity's wish to undertake such interpretations. In his early works, particularly the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein attempted to research this wish by devising an objective philosophy.

Whilst Wittgenstein's late philosophy, on the one hand, destructs the idea of a higher or "absolute judge" and justifies the inaccessibility of theories in ethics, his reflections permit, on the other hand, the definition of "self" as hanging ethics on the peg of "subject or self" and not linking that connection to the prevailing state of affairs in the world. In that way, the quest for an ultimate reason, as well as the definition of the highest aims in human life make no sense in Wittgenstein's context of an ethical theory. His philosophical investigations remain devoid of ethical determinants for human action and without a final justification, since instead of a unified, ultimate truth, what emerges is a plurality and heterogeneity of life forms and a respective variety of behaviors that could contain a multiplicity of truths. In this regard, Wittgenstein's late philosophy could also be described as "linguistic relativism". Wittgenstein's relativism, used as an instrument of critical objection to the metaphysical content of epistemology, is itself not motivated by epistemological factors; its basis is precisely not a skeptical dismissal of the possibility of statements claiming truth, but rather the rejection of that truth claim, as it could be guaranteed with the assistance of the theory of knowledge. Ethics can neither be an ultimate source of reason, nor a guarantee for epistemological truth. As a matter of course, ethical determinants for human actions remain without a conclusive justification.

B. Ethics leads to Mysticism:

For Wittgenstein, ethical judgment is non-sensible and accordingly ethics leads to mysticism. He distinguishes between showing in the sense of representational language and showing, to "climb up the ladder" to a right view of the world. The former can be shown with a symbolic system, at the same time the latter cannot be shown, but must reveal itself. Wittgenstein identifies this with the mystical: "There are, indeed, things that cannot be put into words. They make themselves manifest.

They are what are mystical" (TLP 6.522). The content of the treatise reveals itself to the reader, therefore, not only by its explicit meaning, but also by what is not said. Ethics only commences beyond the limits of language, namely, at the point where silence begins. The limits of language are drawn within language. All other aspects such as ethics, aesthetics, and religion do not belong to the sphere of articulate sense. These things remain inarticulate and can only be shown by the mystical realm. The difference between "showing" and "showing itself" corresponds to the distinction between the representational language of theoretical philosophy and the practical drive, to discover an essential way of thinking and means of confronting the deepest human concerns of life. These aspects do not concern contingent facts, but necessities of human life, such as the question of eternity, of "good" and "evil", of the will that changes the world etc. A key aspect of the *Tractatus* is the ethical deed, even though this viewpoint is worked out in a theoretical work that rather contradicts these formal reflections. The medium is contrary to these thoughts, as it cannot be assumed that the underlying insights into the nature of subjectivity, of ethics, and religion could be articulated by logical analysis. Rather, these aspects show themselves in the form of a philosophy that runs against the limits of language and so endeavors to say what cannot be said. For that reason, it is extremely difficult to identify the link of logic and ontology in the treatise and the transcendental insights that Wittgenstein viewed as the real content of the book. Hence, Wittgenstein also promises that those who are inclined to understand him are to be richly rewarded by "seeing the world aright". In a strict sense of experience, one cannot communicate exactly what one experiences. So, Wittgenstein rules out communal feelings, or communication of impressions. We can exchange impressions and values, we can even partake of the same moral values, and follow the intuitions of other people — yet, all this, only to a certain degree, given that we cannot experience exactly the same sense data and content.

The meaning of life cannot exist within the boundaries of the world, but rather: "The sense of

the world must lie outside the world. In the world everything is as it is, and everything happens as it does happen: in it no value exists — and if it did exist, it would have no value” (TLP 6.41). However, Wittgenstein advocates the thesis that we can have intuitions whose transcendental character cannot be put into words and is based on mystical feelings, whose reality is recognized, as it were, beyond space and time. This supra-natural element is for Wittgenstein “the solution of the riddle in space and time that lies outside space and time” (TLP 6.4312). By reaching such knowledge of the problem of life that drives us to “climb up the ladder”, then the problem as such disappears. It fades, since it must fade, since the solution to the problem of life lies precisely in its disappearance. It is questionable, whether the disappearance is the reason why the solution cannot be spoken, or whether the solution, the “climbing of the ladder”, or the disappearance, from the outset, represent, an expressible experience. Even Wittgenstein cannot give an answer to the question, although he concludes that precisely this incommunicable dimension must amount to what we call mystical and that in this respect what cannot be put into words is shown. For him, the answer to the question of the meaning of life resides in oneself. Attention has to be directed to oneself since the power to change the world only lies in the power to change one’s own attitude toward the world. This power is a mystical force and mystic becomes the last mainstay of things in life that mean the most to us: namely, all ethical conceptions, all things that we cannot express and that are nonetheless of fundamental significance for us. Hence, the ethical intent of the *Tractatus* does not appear as an arbitrary by-product of Wittgenstein’s philosophy of language and thought. As “Logic is not a body of doctrine, but a mirror-image of the world” (TLP 6.13), the treatise’s logic and the language philosophy only proves the philosophical incompetence of atomistic, logical empirical philosophy of language. Because of this, it shows that silence can be the only medium for the revelation of the mystical force.....” Wittgenstein thinks that the subject matter of ethics significantly differs from what most people think ethics is about. Neither theorizing about certain behavioral patterns, nor researching the problems of behavior

among others can be at the heart of ethical enquiries. Rather, the fundamental question in ethics must be a preoccupation with being-in-the-world and the meaning of life. Individuals can only know how to live in this world by understanding the meaning of being-in-the-world and life itself. It is crucial to distinguish these widely diverging conceptions of ethics. To Wittgenstein, ethics has no special task in discourse among different people, while we treat ethics as a whole as a field of inter-subjective discourse.

Wittgenstein’s conception of ethics is scarcely to be distinguished from a religion, as each discipline is concerned with the meaning of the world and life. That Wittgenstein says nothing about how to live one’s life is justified by his theory that “the world is independent of my will” (TLP 6.373). According to TLP 6.423, “it is impossible to speak about the will as the subject of ethical attributes”, and “the good or the bad exercise of the will can alter only the limits of the world, not the facts” (TLP 6.43). Ethical significance can only be traced back to the ethical will, not to the world at large. The ethical will alters the limits of the world by changing the attitude one takes toward the world. In that way, the ethical will also changes the perception of how one sees the world. Only one self can change the limits of one’s world by directing one’s attention to the ethical will, without which it is impossible to allow the development of good will. This attention can only be experienced in the mystical, where the meaning of life can be shown. The significance of ethics, which cannot be put into words, can only lie in a praxeological context, that is to say, in the way in which the individual’s attitude to the world is to be changed and not his basic conviction, in order to learn how to lead one’s life and give it meaning.

The meaning of life is to be revealed in the mystical realm that is devoid of space and time. In the timelessness of the experience of an event, timelessness means the same as eternity. In this sense, a view of the world and of the individual life can be obtained *sub specie aeternitatis*. This holds true “if we take eternity to mean not infinite temporal duration but timelessness, then eternal life belongs to those who live in the present.” For Wittgenstein, ethics is an instrument for giving

meaning to one's own being-in-the-world. Since this meaning can only be achieved through one's own ethical will, every kind of ethical impulse is based on a mystical experience, or on an experience of showing. To assess the importance of the mystical dimension for Wittgenstein's ethics, it is necessary to elaborate the extent to which the mystical corresponds to the metaphysical dimension, or whether, using mysticism as a prop, Wittgenstein merely wants to convey a metaphysical theory of meaning that lies outside of our experience.

C. No Excuse of Metaphysics:

There is a human "drive", to create a "picture of the world" that gives life meaning and helps to explain the world. That is, so to speak, to provide a kind of certainty on the basic questions of our existence. This "drive" in human beings corresponds to a "metaphysical need", a determination for ultimate truths and securities. That anything exists at all; this fact carries the great fascination that preoccupies Wittgenstein. The sudden meaningfulness of this fact is a known experience in the sphere of mystics and it again occurs as such in Wittgenstein's work. The "basic question of metaphysics", that is, why anything exists at all, is described as mystical: "It is not how things are in the world that is mystical, but that it exists." He pursues the question of existence for his entire life, he never touches the secret nature of "the basic question of metaphysics"; and does not even try to clarify this question. In proposition 6.5 of the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein explains why he will never confront this "basic question", even if the underlying experience, namely the sense of wonder about existence, is extremely significant: When the answer cannot be put into words, neither can the question be put into words. The puzzle does not exist. If a question can be framed at all, it is also possible to answer it. Wittgenstein's mysticism is not metaphysical, since it is not about a theory of the "meaning of the world" outside of our experiences. For him, the ethical questions of philosophy as doctrine belong to metaphysics, his own project of ethics as activity, or the quest for the ethical life is, however, post-metaphysical, so to speak, not related to the experience of mystical

knowledge and not appealing to metaphysics to assist with his answers. Mystics can neither be expressed in statements, nor can it name any sort of truth. "True" or "false" are not relevant categories to mystics. The fact that he tolerates the clarification of the "question of the meaning of being", the sense of wonder about existence, does not stop him from producing a critique of metaphysical questions and answers. He exposed the fact, in a paradoxical way and by negation, that every natural language is underpinned by its own ontology. Every "natural" or not "formalized" language must possess a particular metaphysics that is identical with its "meta-language". For Wittgenstein, philosophical propositions are not within the limits of language, defined again by its inner structure. Rather, philosophical propositions, that is, propositions of metaphysics, are speculative, since they transcend the limits of language and also the limits of the world, because: "The limits of my language mean the limits of my world" (TLP 5.6).

According to TLP 5.61 "logic pervades the world" and "the limits of the world are also its limits", there can be no legitimate metaphysics, since there is, next to the sphere of substantive empirical propositions and that of "nonsensical" propositions of logic, no further legitimate sphere. As in TLP 4.022, a proposition shows "how things stand if it is true. And it says that they do so stand." For that reason, a proposition in which a state of affairs is expressed, not only contains "the truth-possibilities of a proposition" (TLP 4.431), but at the same time, it is "the expression of its truth conditions" (TLP 4.431). That is to say that the proposition is an expression for the fact that whoever expresses it holds the view that his truth conditions are fulfilled. No proposition can make a statement about itself, because a propositional sign cannot be contained in itself. So, it is virtually inherent to the essence of metaphysics that "the distinction between the factual and conceptual investigations" is blurred and at the same time it is the task of "philosophical investigations" to make this explicit.

Wittgenstein's thought attempts to bring a philosophy to an end, namely, philosophy as doctrine, of which it is often said that it is 'THE' philosophy. His thought makes it possible to

observe the history of this philosophy from the border, as the history of wonder about the existence of the world and of the need to gain clarity about this astonishing world and the role of human beings within it. His work stands for a philosophical description, instead of attempts at metaphysical elucidation. His philosophy consists of a variety of philosophical perspectives and standpoints. It wards off metaphysics that presents itself as being rational. Wittgenstein's critique of metaphysics also showed two points at the same time ---i) as theoretical options, skepticism and relativism are still based on false, quasi-metaphysical ideas of what we can actually know; and ii) metaphysical pictures already place a burden on many of our everyday notions, even leading astray in "small" cognitive situations. We can become objectivist metaphysicians everywhere, even against our will, when understanding any sensible action.

In the *Tractatus*, "sense" is used as a terminus technicus. To say that a statement makes "sense" is the same as the observation that the statement relates to objects in the world and that it is contingent. By the same token, to say that a statement is nonsense is only to state that it is not about such a statement. The category "nonsense" largely serves in the *Tractatus* to differentiate and is not a tool of critique. Wittgenstein's concept of "nonsense" bears no relation whatsoever to the everyday use of the term. In this regard, it follows that the view of philosophical statements as nonsense is not synonymous with their absurdity or nonsensical character; because it is impossible to make sense about what ultimately is to be "reasoned", it can only be shown. Wittgenstein holds that metaphysical projects are "nonsense", since they lead beyond the sphere of "meaningful statement". However, this nonsense is, for many people, a highly meaningful nonsense that is to be respected; and, hold, metaphysics is not primarily a "nonsensical" chaos, but rather an attempt to domesticate that entity. Wittgenstein undertakes an enduring destruction of metaphysics, since after its fall, that is, the release from a "generality that is already to be assumed", there is no longer any danger of falling back into it, given that the destruction of the dogma of generality "creates a situation of openness and also contributes to a tentative new order." The question of sense is a

basic characteristic of ethical questioning and forms the basis of the desire for metaphysics. Wittgenstein shows that ethics must not be understood metaphysically. Mysticism is not a way of human being but a form of life. In that sense, it is false to claim that Wittgenstein even intensifies the metaphysical interpretation of ethics, by associating ethics with mystical and religious experiences. Neither mystics nor religion are based on a "generality that already exists", a viewpoint that is rather a criterion of metaphysics.

D. Emotion and Religion:

Wittgenstein's ethics is rooted in "wonder about existence", in the fascination "that something exists at all." The connection of ethics, religion and aesthetics is especially striking in Wittgenstein's work. Each element is based on the experience of an event that cannot be articulated in the form of logical-empirical propositions. Rather, it is an event of mystical character, in the sense of an observation of the world following from outside and, as a result, leading to a change of perspective on the world. Ethics and religion are attempts to draw a sense out of life and they are nothing other than answers to the "astonishment about the existence of the world". In this context, it is understandable that individuals lend meaning to their being in the world, by claiming to know their action as ethically considered and often being able to understand their existence as part of a religious whole. For Wittgenstein, this is nothing more than "significant" nonsense, even if it is to be respected. Neither ethics nor religion requires language for belief, since neither can be rejected as "true" or "false". They are expressions of a striving for meaning, a hope for the experience of an event that shows itself-in-the-world in the form of mystical knowledge. The knowledge lies, namely, in the event that can exclusively be perceived as an unspeakable power of the mystical. It could also be said with Wittgenstein that we can name this "meaning of life, that is, the meaning of the world God." (NB, 11.6.16) Such mystical experiences must necessarily be experienced by the self, for "propositions about God, good and evil, the meaning of life etc. are false propositions and these themes therefore point to the sphere that cannot be

put into words, just like all propositions that show no facts.” (Weiberg 1998, 45) Statements about God and religion therefore lose every meaning that they cannot convey in words. The meaning of belief is not discredited in that way, for “How things are in the world is a matter of complete indifference for what is higher. God does not reveal himself in the world.” (TLP 6.432)⁵ The rule of silence also holds true for ethics, namely, the assertion of inexpressibility “in the limits of language that are the limits of our world”. Here, the religious aspect of ethics comes to light, for the definition of what we call God is one and the same as striving for an ethical life, for a meaning in life and in the world that manifests nothing other than a life in the sense of God.

The turn towards religion can be seen as synonymous with the turn to a world-view or a particular world image, since whatever is perceived as truth, after the decision, is independent of the system of values that one decides to support. For that reason, in any system of values, it is possible to see those respective foundations of the house on which one builds one’s convictions. Wittgenstein is not critical of faith, but rather of the attempt to justify faith scientifically. It should not be judged, whether someone believes in religious pictures and symbols or not, but an attempt to prove the existence of God by the means of reason appears dishonest. A proof of God’s existence ought to be something by means of which one could convince oneself that God exists. To persuade others of the existence of God with proofs, as supplied by the Church and believers, is an attempt doomed to failure. In Wittgenstein’s view, this matter is known to Christianity, since it is based on “historical narratives. Wittgenstein’s thought on religion and ethics are in stark contrast to the world-view of science. They have quite different modes of thought, whose foundations are neither to be justified nor reasoned. Whoever develops an ethical feeling or accepts a faith no longer needs an answer for this, since he has already reached the foundation of his faith. The foundation of faith or ethics is a system of values that cannot be questioned, since they are either recognized as “true” or not. For Wittgenstein at the foundation of well-founded belief lies belief that is not founded.

Truth is not the primary aspect, but rather “truthfulness” — truthfulness in the attempt to give meaning to individual life. Above all, that is a question of personal style, because ethics can be judged as little as truthfulness, although it remains the basis of the meaning that an individual desires in life. Here, Wittgenstein also sees a consensus of ethical striving with the Christian religion: “I believe that one of the things Christianity says is that sound doctrines are all useless.

The language itself suggests that the validity of ethics and religion is worthy of generalization, yet that also obscures the fact that it cannot be found in propositional statements. He thinks that the differences between religious and non-religious individuals manifest themselves primarily not in language, but in an individual life. In the broadest sense, neither ethics nor religion can be distinguished, since both disciplines exclusively fall within the realm of human action. However, Wittgenstein differentiates between both these forms of faith, by lending different weight to each. Religious faith represents a higher level of belief, whilst ethical faith can be described as on a lower level. The individual feels ill and in the second case merely imperfect. The quite different attitudes to life are outlined, as far as dealing with problems are concerned and with the independent initiatives of individuals. Whoever feels imperfect regards himself as guilty of this state, he fights with his own self, with his own character, whereas a religious believer, who feels ill, is not conscious of any guilt. Only religion as activity can help individuals in the search for the meaning of life. Religion, like philosophy, cannot be treated as a doctrine, since it is a practice, whose significance can only be shown, by acting accordingly. By contrast to ethics, in its constant relation to the quest for the meaning of life, the religious believer achieves certainty for himself, because the belief in a God means to understand the question about the meaning of life and life has a meaning. All doubts on the problem of life are ruled out for the believer and faith is so strong that he no longer tries to question or prove his faith with the aid of reason. In this case, what holds true of the deeply devout believer is that “religion is the calm bottom of the sea at its deepest point, which remains calm however high the waves on the surface may be.”

E. Conclusion:

The idea of ethics is related, in philosophy, to the attempt to establish a standard of norms and methods to vouchsafe the universality of ethical concepts and rules for action. These norms and methods are directed at ethical questions, conflicts and problems of inter-subjective behavior that are to be resolved by ethics, by developing these issues into a normative science of generally legitimate propositions. This theory of ethics can be seen as a science of the justification of ethical decisions, so to speak, a theory that is identical to the teleology of academic ethics that often makes Being, in a circular way, out of the principle of duty and, ultimately, derives again that principle from an artificially constructed Being. Universalist ethics is, for that reason, largely characterized by the disappearance of the distinction between Being and a sense of moral obligation. Briefly to recapitulate the central results of “these hikes through Wittgenstein’s ethics”: For Wittgenstein, it makes sense neither to search for an ultimate legitimacy to ethics, nor to seek guarantees for truth as a theory of knowledge. Ethical theories for human actions must remain, for him, without a final justification. In place of an ultimate truth, Wittgenstein posits, as a philosopher of pluralism, a multiplicity of life forms and ways of behavior that each contains their respective truth. Ethical knowledge can only be achieved in the mystical sense. According to Wittgenstein, philosophical ethics cannot promote the meaning of life, but only working on one’s individual self, that is to say, the quest for an ethical sense is an instrument of the individual’s being-in-the-world and the desire to find meaning in life. As this meaning can only be found through one’s own ethical will and, in turn, its expression lies in the experience of the perception of the mystical, every kind of ethical belief rests on a mystical experience of showing. This question of meaning is not only a basic feature of ethical, but also metaphysical enquiry. Yet Wittgenstein supplies examples to demonstrate that the ethical impulse cannot nearly be considered as metaphysical, since “the mystical” element that is proposed as the ethics of the individual is not a way of being, but a life form. It is a praxeological concept, whose goal is to understand philosophy as action. Furthermore,

Wittgenstein shows that ethics and religion can only occur through the sphere of action and the doctrine of faith is to be rejected just as a philosophical doctrine of ethics, for neither can solve problems. Religion as activity may help individuals in their quest to find a purpose in life. By contrast to the ethical explorer, who is constantly searching for the meaning of life, the religious believer has already achieved certainty in relation to the meaning of life.

What is the outcome for the traditional conception of ethics as an academic tradition? Wittgenstein adopts quite a different idea than philosophers of what ethics can and should achieve. He intended not to solve the problems of philosophy, but those of his own existence. Hence, he lays no claim to ethics in the sense of a scientific theory. As a philosophical discipline, ethics can achieve nothing, since every attempt to create an objective and absolute claim is bound to fail for problems that cannot be summarized in a general theory. The meaning of ethics for human life cannot be derived from any scientific basis. It cannot be treated as a research field that can be mastered by scientific methods. Ethics cannot be reduced to a system of propositions that establish a code for the phenomena of our world in analogy to scientific theories. Ethics is essentially bound to the “subject/self”. An external, “higher being”, or an “absolute judge” does not exist in Wittgenstein’s view. Any experience of value is always the experience of the individual subject. The question of ethics is always a subjective one about the right way of living. That can only be determined by each individual on his own account and, for that reason, ethics cannot be stated in universally valid terms. The discipline can neither be a science, nor act as a doctrine of the right way of living, since it is more or less beyond the bounds of theory, not within the range of generally valid maxims or moral appeals. Wittgenstein therefore avoids formulating a binding doctrine of virtue and duty, as well as falling foul to an ethical relativism, by developing an alternative philosophy as activity. Hence, the ethical will directing ethical conduct as a practice in relation to the questionable nature of life is turned into the decisive factor of a successful life. The individual world-view determines ethics and

every individual must answer the question of the right conduct, without concrete reference to philosophical theories, in accordance with his own life situation; and that questioning is not an exception, but rather the continual activity that endures throughout his lifetime. Ethics can therefore be seen as working through things for the individual self. In the belief that he had solved the scientific problem of ethics, Wittgenstein also recognized that little is achieved by solving that philosophical problem. The actual ethical matter, the meaning of one's own existence, is to be confronted anew; as though it would be a perpetual mobile time and again the problem of life remains the individual's permanent search for ethical sense. Ethics is a doing, the achievement of individual principles and the constant reflection of the self-consciousness of self and the individual view of the world.

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