

# Depending on Ethics: Kierkegaard's View of Philosophy and Beyond

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*Abstract:* According to the standard reception, Kierkegaard thinks of ethics as a possible stage in human life. In this paper, I do not want to contest this interpretation, but I will argue that it often overlooks how the concept of ethics plays another vital role in Kierkegaard's thinking, namely that of establishing a necessary connection between ethics and certain forms of philosophy. To avoid the unfruitful thinking of 'the speculation', the philosopher must accept that her vantage point is given, not in pure objectivity, but in the fact that she is this particular human being; that is, the ethical dimension of her life. In this way, Kierkegaard claims that any philosophy concerning human existence must also include ethical considerations. This is a view also held by Ludwig Wittgenstein, but a comparison of the two philosophers shows that even if Kierkegaard finds such fruitful philosophy possible, he also strives to show that it has a limited scope.

## *1. Two views of ethics in Kierkegaard*

According to the standard reception, Kierkegaard thinks of ethics as a possible stage in human life, a stage that arises from the individual's realisation that one cannot establish meaning and continuity in one's existence simply by mindlessly taking over the expectations of others, for example by becoming a model citizen, a good wife or mother, or a loyal or gifted employee. Similarly, the attempt to focus on one's enjoyment of life, filling it with pleasurable experiences, is just as inadequate. According to this interpretation of Kierkegaard, the reason why such views of life must fail is that existential meaning cannot be established simply by actualising certain forms of content in one's life; instead, the individual will have to create a particular relationship to that content. The individual must accept, embrace and ascribe meaning to

her very life. That is, living ethically is to see that one ought to make this particular life one's own, that one has to establish a foundation for one's life by choosing to live this very life.

According to the standard reception, Kierkegaard presents the ethicist as a representative of this important insight into of human existence. However, he also shows how this insight has certain limitations, as it take for granted the individual's freedom and power to rule her own life. Something is missing, Kierkegaard tells us. This deficiency reveals itself when the ethical person's respect for the value given in her life almost inevitably closes in self-absorption or self-centeredness; a tendency especially visible in Kierkegaard's portrait of the arch-ethicist, Judge Wilhelm and his somewhat self-righteous lectures on the value of marriage and friendship (EO II/ EE II). What is missing in the ethical stage is the humble recognition that our very life is a gift, a gift that reveals how we are all fundamentally dependent and powerless creatures. Despite its self-conscious character and its recognition of responsibility, the life of the ethicist becomes a form of pride as she closes her eyes to the recognition that we all owe our very existence to the mercy of God. That is why, in Kierkegaard's writing, we find the ethical stage presented as a form of life that we should find the courage and strength to transcend, by plunging into the deep waters and giving ourselves over to God.

In this paper, I do not want to contest this interpretation of Kierkegaardian ethics. Instead, I want to pursue a much more modest goal, namely that of arguing that it cannot monopolise the use of the concept of the ethical in Kierkegaard's writings. The standard interpretation fails to notice how this concept plays another vital role, as it establishes a necessary connection between our individual existence and certain forms of philosophy. Kierkegaard develops this connection via a critique of new-Hegelianism in particular and philosophy in general, claiming that philosophers' traditional belief in a purely objective description of the world results in empty speculation or pure scepticism. To avoid such fruitless ways of thinking, Kierkegaard insists that the philosopher must accept that her starting point is given, not in pure objectivity, but in the fact that she is this particular human being; that is, in the ethical dimension of her life. To Kierkegaard, this means

that any philosophical investigation of human existence must include the ethical, and reflection on ethics simply forms a necessary part of any valuable philosophy in this area. In opposition to the vilified Hegelianism, Kierkegaard wants to show the possibility of a sound philosophy, namely the philosophy that 'remembers' ethics. In the paper, I will show how Kierkegaard develops his alternative view of philosophy by means of this second use of the concept of ethics. I will further argue that to Kierkegaard, even such fruitful philosophy has a limited scope. Finally, at the end of the paper, I will contrast Kierkegaard's view of the relation between philosophy and ethics with the views of a thinker, who also considers them to be connected, but who use this connection to reach a very different conclusion, namely Ludwig Wittgenstein.

## 2. Kierkegaard's critique of traditional philosophy: 'The Speculation'

Kierkegaard is famous for his critique of new-Hegelianism. However, Kierkegaard criticises New-Hegelianism as the representative of a dominant tendency in human thinking, a tendency that often referred to as *the speculation* and he thereby raises a problem that concerns philosophy in general. To Kierkegaard, the concept of the speculation denotes a general stage in the development of our thinking where we attempt to gain a completely objective view of the world by engaging in an objectifying and des-engaging process that persistently leads us further away from our human starting point. Objective thinking is thus thinking released from the subject, and as such, it is valid in areas where the subject falls away as irrelevant. The problem with philosophy is, however, that we here find an inherent tendency to regard such abstract thinking as the only road to true knowledge.

Kierkegaard criticises this tendency from two different angles. The first is an epistemological critique presented by his pseudonym Johannes Climacus in the *Postscript*. Climacus does not offer a criticism of objective thinking as such, but he criticises philosophy for not seeing its limitations. Objective thinking is relevant and appropriate when it comes to areas as logic, nature, mathematics and history, because such areas of scientific research is ruled by a necessity that makes it possible to achieve knowledge unrelated to particular subjects. However, according to Climacus, speculative philosophy transgresses

this scope of objective thinking in two ways: Firstly by applying this form of thinking to questions, where it is by no means justified, namely questions concerning the human existence. Secondly, it advances the further claim that only this form of thinking is relevant to philosophical thinking. Hegelians have found a positive and certain starting point in empirical, historical and speculative thinking, but their fault to think that they therefore may treat anything from such an objective viewpoint.

To Kierkegaard, it is precisely because objective knowledge is objective that it does not apply to human life. What we investigate in objective thinking is the layout of available possibilities and their possible connections in a certain area, for example as we in logic establish the possible forms of inference without making judgements about which of them we should actually use. However, this means that objective thinking is useless in the investigation of the lives of human beings, because when it comes to a particular, concrete human being we are not presented with a number of necessarily possible, but complete neutral possibilities, instead knowledge of a person will always also have to relate these possibilities to that particular human being. The limit of objective thinking is the living subject. Human life is essentially formed by what possibilities we have actualised, which means that we are always start from the possibilities that has been chosen or forced upon us; it is not possible simply to retrace our steps and try a different road, but because of its very structure, objective thinking cannot accommodate this fact. “The infinite advantage that the logical, by being the objective, possesses over all other thinking is in turn, subjectively viewed, restricted by its being a hypothesis, simply because it is indifferent to existence understood as actuality” (CUP 110).<sup>1</sup> The speculative philosopher does not realise how she is herself placed in time and that any human being she may examine is placed in quite the same way, and the temporality of human existence means that life develops indefinitely. To reach a correct description of such existence, philosophy will therefore have to recognize that it will never be complete, but by refusing to accept these limitations, the speculative philosopher excludes herself from the possibility of doing constructive work in this area. As Kierkegaard teasingly notes, even if “a man his whole life through occupies himself exclusively with

logic, he still does not become logic; he himself therefore exists in other categories” (CUP 93).<sup>2</sup> If a philosophical theory is meant to describe the lives of human beings, it will have to trace the changes and developments in human lives, or, to put the point in more Kierkegaardian terms, it will have to establish a theory or system that is itself in “a continual process of becoming” (EO II 173).<sup>3</sup>

The epistemological critique of Climacus is supported when Kierkegaard in *Either/Or* diagnoses the cause of the speculative tendency in philosophical thinking as a lack of attention towards the different nature of the questions investigated by philosophy. Philosophy has an ambition to describe the totality of life, but this ambition clouds its vision, blinding it to the fact that not all questions can be treated in the same way. Any investigation of human subjectivity meets difficulties that are essentially different from the ones raised in an investigation of the foundation of the sciences, and by neglecting this, the speculative philosopher forces a pseudo-scientific formula on what really are *ethical* questions. However, Kierkegaard not only identifies a lack of awareness in Hegel’s philosophy, he also presents Climacus as an example of a philosopher who has integrated this awareness into his philosophical activity.

“Whereas the Hegelian in absentmindedness goes ahead and becomes a system of existence, and what is more, is finished – without having an ethics (the very home of existence), that *other simpler philosophy*, presented by an existing individual for existing individuals, is especially intent upon advancing the ethical.” (CUP 121; my italics)<sup>4</sup>

Climacus writings become an attempt at that ‘other simpler philosophy’ because he insists that any fruitful philosophy about human existence includes ethics in the ‘system’. In the *Postscript*, Kierkegaard thus uses the concept of ethics to embrace all that falls outside the reach of objective thinking. Moreover, he claims that any knowledge of existence depends upon the unconditional acceptance of ethics as a condition of philosophy.

In addition to the epistemological criticism of speculative philosophy, we are in *Either/Or* also presented with an *ethical* critique. Kierkegaard here

distinguishes between the ethical and the objective as a difference between questions concerning thought and freedom, respectively. When we investigate thought, we disclose rational connections that are possible independently of us, while we in ethics look at connections that we have the freedom to establish. This means that in thought, we may consider contradictions preliminary, something to be overcome when we reach a more general level that may enable us to show the unity behind apparent differences. However, this method will not do when we are looking at freedom, for freedom is exactly being free to exclude some possibilities from the possible range of one's life (EO II 173/EE II 163). That this difference between the area of thought and that of freedom is of essentially importance to Kierkegaard in *Either/Or* furthermore shows in the fact that he structures that very work around two very different ways of approaching this difference. In the first part, we meet a number of voices, amongst others Johannes the Seducer, who all reject this difference and try to *live* within the sphere of rationality. This means that they avoid establishing any stable bonds or obligations, but instead try to keep all their possibilities open, as they would be open in the flight of thought. Even though this first set of characters strive to succeed in their endeavour with both elegance and energy, the first part of *Either/Or* is still permeated with the frustration that arises as they become gradually more and more aware of the inherent futility of their life-approach. One cannot live in objectivity, because here all ways of living seems equally possible – and equally uncertain: “Marry, and you will regret it. Do not marry, and you will also regret it. Marry or do not marry, and you will regret it either way” (EO I 38), as one of the anonymous aesthetes puts it.<sup>5</sup> In the second part of *Either/Or*, we meet Judge Wilhelm as a representative of the realisation that in life we must transcend the categories of thought. Wilhelm is the one that presents the abovementioned critique of ‘the speculation’ and he furthermore argues with his friend A for making the same mistake as the Hegelians by comparing the barren character of speculative philosophy with the barrenness of the view of life of the aesthete.

“[Y]ou are strikingly similar to the philosopher, even if his actual or assumed earnestness forbids him to participate in the obligatory flight in which you delight. If someone asks you whether you will sign a petition to the king, or whether you desire a constitution or the right to impose taxes, or whether you want to join this or that charitable cause, you answer, “My esteemed contemporaries, you misunderstand me. I am not a participant at all; I am outside; like a little Spanish ‘s’ I am outside.” So it is also with the philosopher. He is outside; he is not a participant. He sits and grows old listening to the songs of the past; he has an ear for the harmonies of meditation.” (EO II 171-172)<sup>6</sup>

Against the aesthete, Wilhelm objects that his attempt to stay neutral in all questions of life simply amounts to wasting that very life. Against the philosopher, Wilhelm objects that he acts as if there are only such wasted forms of life to consider. The aesthete and the philosopher are united in their failure to see how life is a process, an activity. Instead, both act as if life has stopped, as Wilhelm remarks (EO II 171/EE II 161).

When Wilhelm criticises philosophy’s particular way of distancing and disengaging it from the world, he does so on moral grounds. The aspiration for objectivity manifests an ethical defect or *sin* in the aesthete, just as it is a sign of ethical defect in philosophy. Philosophy claims to talk of the world and from such a claim follows a demand on philosophy, namely that it should strive to put itself in a position where it is capable of investigating the entire world, including questions that lies outside the domain of the sciences. In making his claim, Wilhelm addresses us, the philosophers, directly:

“I have a valid claim against philosophy, as does anyone whom it does not dare to dismiss on the ground of total incompetence. I am a married man, I have children. What if I now ask in their name what a human being has to do in life. You will perhaps smile at the family man, and yet I think it is truly an enormous argument against philosophy, if it has nothing to answer.” (EO II 172)<sup>7</sup>

We have already seen Climacus argue for philosophy's ability to go beyond a purely scientific investigation. To this, Wilhelm now adds the further assertion that philosophy is *obligated* to go beyond such an investigation, and he founds this on the claim that certain forms of potential are not ethically neutral. It is because the aesthete as a human being has the potential to take full responsibility of his life that he meets an ethical obligation to do so, and it is because the philosopher has a potential to describe such responsibilities that she in turn ought to. Philosophers should know better than trying to distance themselves from their fundamental humanity. In this way, Kierkegaard criticises philosophy not just for being unconstructive, but also for being outright demoralising. In its quest for objective knowledge, it all too easily undermines the most important part of knowledge, namely, that which concerns what it is to be a human being. We also find this criticism summarised in an almost resigned outcry from Climacus: "Now, should we not agree to be human beings!" (CUP 51)<sup>8</sup>

### 3. *The ethics of philosophy*

By insisting that any philosophical investigation of human existence must take its starting point in the fact that the philosopher is a particular human being, Kierkegaard places ethics at the centre of philosophical activity. However, the fact that ethics occupies such a central role in his thinking is often overlooked. One of the reasons for this is the strong emphasis that interpreters often place on the theory of stages, as this emphasis favours a tendency to view ethics – in Kierkegaard's universe – as an attitude to life that should be transcended in favour of the religious. However, as we have already seen, Kierkegaard insists that it is a necessary condition of any philosophical description of human existence that it accepts the irreducible ethical character of this existence. Moreover, he does not think that the impossibility of objective thinking in this area excludes all possibilities of knowledge; it is simply a question of seeking knowledge of the right kind. What we should strive for is the knowledge that we find when we relate our thinking to our own, personal existence. "In order to study the ethical, every human being is assigned to himself [...] indeed, he is the only place where *he* can with certainty study it" (CUP 141-142).<sup>9</sup>

The existence of a subject, of a person, of me, raises a question that is essentially practical and ethical, namely the question of ‘How should I live my life’, and it is the attempt to answer this question objectively that is truly irrational in Kierkegaard’s eyes. Ethics is a necessary category for the philosophical investigation of human life because ethics honours the way life always involves questions of action. In order to know how to live, we cannot settle for theoretical knowledge, and ethics reflects this because it is “not only a knowing; it is also a doing that is related to a knowing” (CUP 160).<sup>10</sup> Moreover, we now begin to see why Kierkegaard uses the concept of *ethics* for the thinking that is concerned with existence – rather than for example that of ‘subjectivity’. The very existence of the subject raises the question ‘How should I live my life’, but this question is essentially an *ethical* question that asks for the categories on which I base my life-choices. The same reason reappears, if we take a closer look at the view of the subject in Kierkegaard’s writings. The classical analysis of the nature of the subject can be found in *The Sickness Unto Death*, where the subject is described as a “... a synthesis of the infinite and the finite, of the temporal and the eternal, of freedom and necessity, in short a synthesis” (SUD 13).<sup>11</sup> In the *Postscript*, we find a similar analysis: “what is existence? It is that child of the infinite and the finite, the eternal and temporal, and is therefore continually striving” (CUP 92).<sup>12</sup> Kierkegaard thereby describes the subject as the attempt to reach a synthesis between its given place in life and its freedom, an endeavour to reconcile what the subject *is* with what it may *become*. The very structure of subjectivity raises the question of an ethical ideal

Furthermore, what a human is, includes not just the individual herself, but also all those people with whom she has some form of relationship, and by introducing the concept of ethics, Kierkegaard thus also draws on more traditional conceptions of ethics as an inter-subjective category. One might say, that the necessary synthesis of the subject may only be realised in so far as she acknowledges how her fate is already bound up with the fate of others, which means that she has to depend on them. As any exercise of freedom, any choice will have some significance for that person’s life *with* others the subjective thus also involves the ethical. The reality of the subject already

involves an entanglement with the reality of other people; an entanglement that shapes her what she is, and her ethical determination means that she must relate to this entanglement, accepting and developing it.<sup>13</sup>

In *Either/Or* Kierkegaard shows the necessity of this interdependence between subjectivity and ethics by showing that the aesthete's attempt at 'objective living' first and foremost results in a lack of ability to relate to other human beings. A's life is unstable because he clings to the idea that humans may lead completely independent lives, and the same problem is exemplified in the description of Johannes' treatment of (not his relationship with) Cordelia. On the other hand, Wilhelm, Kierkegaard's arch-ethicist, primarily chooses to describe himself through his many relationships with other people and his general place in society: Wilhelm is a father, a husband, a judge and a friend of A's. By choosing the concept of ethics as the central concept in his criticism of philosophy, Kierkegaard is trying to show that any true form of subjectivity, any true relationship with oneself (*selvforhold*), may only be realised through a realization of one's life *with* the other. Moreover, this is why any sound philosophical investigation of subjectivity; the type of investigation that Kierkegaard tries to exemplify through the philosophical writings of Johannes Climacus in the *Postscript*, is an ethical investigation.

#### 4. *Beyond philosophy*

In Kierkegaard's writings, Climacus thus represents the philosopher that is aware of the limitations inherent in objective thinking. That is, Kierkegaard does not dismiss the possibility of philosophy by any standards; instead, he uses Climacus to exemplify the intimate connection between ethics and any sound philosophical investigation of subjectivity. Nonetheless, I still want to argue that Kierkegaard himself wants to move beyond even such sound philosophy. We get a hint of this if we look at the so-called *revocation* of the *Postscript*. In an appendix to the work, Climacus says that "what I write contains the notice that everything is to be understood in such a way that it is revoked, that the book has not only an end but a revocation to boot" (CUP 619).<sup>14</sup> The debate about the point of this revocation has sprung to life because of the interpretation put forward by James Conant in "Kierkegaard,

Wittgenstein and Nonsense”. According to Conant, Kierkegaard’s reasons for revoking his work are *philosophical* reasons: Kierkegaard thinks that the philosophical project of Climacus leads to a number of contradictions, which eventually exposes the project as meaningless. According to Conant, when Climacus asks us to disregard the absurdities of speculative philosophy and instead turn to the absurdities of the Christian faith he uses philosophy to create a distinction that we under no circumstances would want to uphold.<sup>15</sup> In this way, the revocation of the *Postscript* comes to express Kierkegaard’s general rejection of the possibility of philosophy.<sup>16</sup> This reading of the *Postscript* mirrors Conant’s interpretation of Ludwig Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus logico-philosophicus* where Conant claims that when the early Wittgenstein calls the sentences of the *Tractatus* for *meaningless*, he wants to use his own work to show the futility of metaphysics as such.<sup>17</sup>

Leaving that discussion aside, I have already argued that Climacus only considers a particular version of philosophy to be pointless without directing his at philosophy *as such*. However, if this is the correct interpretation, then we must be able to locate the reason for his revocation of the *Postscript* elsewhere.<sup>18</sup> A likely candidate is Climacus’ growing realisation that there is one project, with which even the philosophy that remembers ethics cannot help him, namely the project of changing himself. In writing the *Postscript* and doing philosophy, Climacus hopes to achieve another goal, namely to move closer to a religious form of life. For him, the philosophical activity thus has an external purpose.

“In the isolation of the imaginary construction, the whole book is about myself, simply and solely about myself. [...] I now ask: How do I become a Christian? I ask solely for my own sake. Indeed, that is certainly what I am doing or, rather, I have asked about it, for that is indeed the content of the book.” (CUP 617-618)<sup>19</sup>

In the introduction to the *Postscript*, he expresses the same question: “How can I, Johannes Climacus, share in the happiness that Christianity promises?” (CUP 15-16).<sup>20</sup> Climacus thus wants to change as a person, but nowhere in

the progress of his work do we witness any such change in him, he remains stubbornly the same, ironic character. That is, none of Climacus general reflections on subjectivity and specific reflections on Christianity and its significance for human life makes him religious. I thus find it more reasonable to assume that the *Postscript* is revoked because Climacus – and with him Kierkegaard – realises that even though philosophy can offer us a perspicuous presentation of the structure of human life, it cannot help us in changing that life, for example in becoming Christians.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, Kierkegaard himself considers this project of changing one's life infinitely more important than any philosophical project one may have. That is, even if the *Postscript* exemplifies true philosophical activity, this is not what Climacus really needs and what Kierkegaard really wants.<sup>22</sup>

However, there is nothing controversial in the conclusion that one may sometimes have subordinate philosophy in favour of other projects in one's life. Is this the only conclusion Kierkegaard wants to reach? No, his goal is somewhat more ambitious, as he wants to present a *philosophical* argument for this submission of philosophy. He has already shown that fruitful philosophy is one that remembers the ethical, but to remember the ethical is to see that your life as a whole raises a pressing demand that philosophical activity is unable to meet.

“Therefore, the ethical wants to prevent every attempt at confusion, such as, for example, wanting *to observe* the world and human beings ethically. That is, to observe ethically cannot be done, because there is only one ethical observing – it is self-observation. *The ethical immediately embraces the single individual with its requirement that he shall exist ethically.*” (CUP 320; my italics)<sup>23</sup>

According to Kierkegaard, any philosophical investigation of the subject will lead me to the ethical and self-investigation. And any such investigation will in turn lead me to the realisation that my life presents me with a task I cannot refuse, a task that must take priority in my life – even when compared to philosophy. What sound philosophy enables me to see is that my primary obligation is to *live*. That Kierkegaard accepts this fundamental insight shows

in the fact that the major part of his non-pseudonymous works are writings that finds their *raison d'être* outside philosophical questions, in something far more important for Kierkegaard, namely the task of *edification* ('opbyggelse'). In his collected oeuvre, he thus subordinates philosophy in favour of another, strictly religious project. Kierkegaard does just point out the difference between a true Christianity and version of Christianity that is dominant in Denmark at his time, no, in many of the writings that bear his name, he engages in a discussion with the latter in the hope of changing the current. As an author, Kierkegaard is by no means the philosopher that he presents in the shape of Climacus, but this 'sound philosophy' still has a special position in Kierkegaard's writing, as it is able to state the problem – even if it cannot solve it. "*Concluding Postscript* forms [...] the turning point in the whole authorship. It poses the *issue*: becoming a Christian" (PV 55), as the author Kierkegaard put it.<sup>24</sup>

##### 5. *Kierkegaard versus Wittgenstein on ethics and philosophy*

As noted in the beginning, Ludwig Wittgenstein also emphasises the essentially ethical dimension of philosophy. However, contrary to most interpreters I want to argue that his view of the relationship between ethics and philosophy differs substantially from the one presented by Kierkegaard.<sup>25</sup> To Wittgenstein, philosophy should diagnose and dissolve linguistic misunderstandings and thereby free us from flawed pictures of the world and our experience of it. That is, any philosophical investigation must start from the realisation that philosophy is descriptive, having no special normative status towards the given. "Philosophy may in no way interfere with the actual use of language; it can in the end only describe it. [...] It leaves everything as it is".<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, Wittgenstein considers it an important part of philosophical activity that we work to keep these own limitations in view, and in this way, he thinks that philosophy is an activity, which in itself raises ethical demands on its practitioners. In order for philosophy to reach its goal, the untarnished description of reality, it is necessary that we, as a part of philosophy itself, try to identify and eliminate our prejudices – common or personal as they may be. However, this means that for Wittgenstein,

philosophy does not present any answers as to what we should *do*. Even though philosophy as an activity has essentially ethical implications, it is not an activity, which necessarily leads us to practical conclusions – for example that we should turn our attention towards our own ethical change. One could put the same point differently by saying that according to Wittgenstein philosophy does not lead us *anywhere*. Instead, philosophy obligates us to push any such practical concerns aside because this is a necessary condition for achieving a true openness towards the world. Our personal projects will all too easily stand in the way of an unbiased investigation.

It is thus possible to argue that Wittgenstein in a certain sense would refuse to call the guiding project of Kierkegaard's writings a *philosophical* one, because Kierkegaard lets his own personal goal determine the direction of his philosophical investigations. Maybe this is what Wittgenstein had in mind when he once remarked that 'Kierkegaard was a saint' – meaning that even though Kierkegaard was an outstanding person he was in fact not a philosopher. Any which way, this may not even pose a problem for Kierkegaard, as I do not think he primarily considers *himself* a philosopher. Both Wittgenstein and Kierkegaard agree that for Kierkegaard philosophy leads us out of philosophy – we ought to use it in order to do something else, namely to become Christians.

Here we find the core of the difference between Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein simply does not think that we can stay true to the character of philosophy if we simply use it as a means to something else. In a draft for the preface to *Philosophische Bemerkungen*, he writes:

“Our civilization is characterized by the word progress. Progress is its form, it is not one of its properties that it makes progress. Typically it constructs. Its activity is to construct a more and more complicated structure. And even clarity is only a means to this end & not an end in itself.

For me on the contrary clarity, transparency, is an end in itself.

I am not interested in erecting a building but in having the foundations of possible buildings transparently before me.”<sup>27</sup>

Wittgenstein here says that what we use philosophy to do, that lies outside of scope of philosophy itself. The only goal of philosophy is a philosophical one, namely clarity, nothing else. Wittgenstein thereby rejects Kierkegaard’s *philosophical* argument for turning to ethical and religious concerns – and for that matter any other argument to a similar effect. Kierkegaard, on the contrary, thinks that the clarity philosophy provides only has importance when it is directed towards something else, namely the attempt to be better human beings. What philosophy shows us what is, and what is demand of us that we move beyond philosophy, as Kierkegaard notes in *Works of Love*: “But Christian love abides, and for that very reason it *is* [... ], but something that *is* cannot be sung about – it must be believed and it must be lived” (WL 8).<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “Den uendelige Overvægt, som det Logiske ved at være det Objektive har over al tænkning, limiteres igjen derved, at det subjektivt seet er en Hypothese, netop fordi det i Virkelighedens Forstand er ligegyldigt mod Tilværelsen” (AUE 107).

See also the following quote:

“But this positive is precisely the untrue. Sensate certainty is a delusion [...]; historical knowledge is an illusion (since it is approximation-knowledge); and the speculative result is a phantom. That is, all of this positive fails to express the state of the knowing subject in existence; hence it pertains to a fictive objective subject, and to mistake oneself for such a subject is to be fooled and to remain fooled. (CUP 81)

Men dette Positive er netop det Usande. Den sandelige Vished er svig (cfr. den græske skepsis ...); den historiske Viden er Sandsebedrag (da den er Approximationsviden); og det speculative Resultat er Blendværk. Alt dette Positive udtrykker nemlig ikke det erkjendende Subjekts Tilstand i Existensen, det angaar derfor et fingeret objektivt Subjekt, og at forvexle sig selv med et saadant er at blive og at være narret.” (AUE 81)

<sup>2</sup> “Om en Mand hele sit liv igjennem kun beskæftiger sig med Logikken, saa bliver han derfor dog ikke Logikken, eksisterer derfor selv i andre Categorier” (AUE 92).

<sup>3</sup> “Systemet er i en bestandig Vorden” (EE 164).

<sup>4</sup>

“Medens da det hegelske system i Distraction gaar hen og bliver et Tilværelsens-System, ja, hvad mere er, bliver færdigt, uden at have en Ethik (hvor da Tilværelsen netop har hjemme), saa vil *hiin enfoldigere Philosophie*, der af en Existerende foredrages for Existerende, især fremdrage det Ethiske.” (AUE 116; my italics)

Compare this to another remark about Hegel, namely that “...through Hegel a system, the absolute system, was brought to completion – without having an ethics” (CUP 119) / “...man ved ham fik et System, det absolutte System færdigt – uden at have en Ethik” (AUE 115).

<sup>5</sup> “Gift dig, Du vil fortryde det; gift Dig ikke, Du vil ogsaa fortryde det; gift Du eller gift Dig ikke, du vil fortryde begge Dele” (EE I 40).

<sup>6</sup>

“... Du ... har en paafaldende Lighed med Philosophen, om end hans virkelige eller paatagne alvor ville forbyde ham at deeltage i det obligate Opsving, hvori Du forlyster Dig. Spørger man Dig, om Du vil underskrive en Adresse til Kongen, eller om Du vil forene Dig til dette eller hiint goddægtige Øiemed, saa svarer du: ‘Høistærede Samtidig! I maa misforstaae mig, jeg er slet ikke med, jeg er ude, jeg er ude som et lille bitte spansk s.’ Saaledes gaar det ogsaa Philosophen, han er ude, han er ikke med, han sidder og ældes ved at høre paa fortidens Sange, han lytter til Meditationens harmonier.” (EE II 161-162)

<sup>7</sup>

“Jeg har en gyldig fordring ligeoverfor Philosophien, saaledes som Enhver har den... Jeg er Ægtemand, jeg har Børn. Hvad om jeg nu i deres navn spurgte den om, hvad et Menneske har at gjøre i Livet. Du vil maaske smile, i hvert tilfælde vil den philosophiske Ungdom smile ad en Familiefader, og dog mener jeg, at det i Sandhed er et forfærdeligt Argument mod den, hvis den Intet har at svare.” (EE II 163)

<sup>8</sup> “[...] skulde vi dog ikke være enige om, at være Mennesker!” (AUE 56).

<sup>9</sup> “For at studere det Ethiske, er ethvert Menneske anvist til sig selv. Han selv er i denne Henseende mere end nok, ja, han er det eneste Sted, hvor *han* med Sikkerhed kan studere det” (AUE 132).

<sup>10</sup> “... det Ethiske er jo ikke blot en Viden, det er tillige en Gjøren, der forholder sig til en Viden” (AUE 149)

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<sup>11</sup> "... a Synthese af Uendelighed og Endelighed, af det Timelige og det Evige, af Frihed og Nødvendighed, kort en Synthese" (SD 73).

<sup>12</sup> "... hvad er Existents? Det er hiint barn, som er avlet af det Uendelige og det Endelige, det Evige og det Timelige, og derfor er bestandigt stræbende" (AUE 91).

<sup>13</sup> See Søtoft: *Svimmelhedens Etik* (Copenhagen: Gads Publishers 2000) p. 273 and Rudd: *Kierkegaard and the Limits of the Ethical* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1993) p. 24.

<sup>14</sup> "[...] Alt skal forstaas saaledes, at det er tilbagekaldt; at Bogen ikke blot har en Slutning, men ovenikjøbet en Tilbagekaldelse" (AUE 562).

<sup>15</sup> Conant: "Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein and Nonsense" p. 215 and CUP 495-496.

<sup>16</sup> In "Making Sense of Nonsense: Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein", Hutto and Lippett present a convincing criticism of Conant's interpretation of both Wittgenstein and Kierkegaard.

<sup>17</sup> Conant develops his interpretation in a number of articles on the *Tractatus*, for example "The Method of the *Tractatus*".

<sup>18</sup> My interpretation is deeply indebted to the interpretation found in Phillips' *Philosophy's Cool Place* (London: Cornell University Press 1999) chapter two.

<sup>19</sup>

"Hele Skriftet drejer sig om i Experimentets afsideshed om mig selv [...] jeg spørger nu, hvorledes bliver jeg kristen. Jeg spørger alene for min egen skyld, ja saa vist gjør jeg saa, eller rettere jeg har spurgt derom, thi det er jo Skriftets indhold." (AUE 560)

<sup>20</sup> "Ganske simpelt: hvorledes jeg, Johannes Climacus, kan blive deelagtig I den salighed som Christendommen forjætter" (AUE 26).

<sup>21</sup> Bernard Williams notes a similar limitation in philosophical activity: "How truthfulness to an existing self or society is to be combined with reflection, self-understanding and criticism is a question that philosophy, itself, cannot answer. It is a question that has to be answered through reflective living", *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* p. 200.

<sup>22</sup> That even sound philosophy in Kierkegaard's eyes lacks a certain seriousness is for example seen g. in Climacus' rather funny, but also not very somewhat parodical description of how he got the idea to write *Philosophical Fragments* and the *Postscript*:

"It is now about four years since the idea came to me of wanting to try my hand as an author. I remember it very clearly. It was on Sunday; yes, correct, it was a Sunday afternoon. As usual, I was sitting outside the café in Frederiksberg gardens, that wonderful garden which for the child was the enchanted land where the king lived with the queen, that lovely garden which for the youth was a pleasant diversion in the happy gaiety of the populace, that friendly garden which for the adult is so cozy in its wistful elevation above the world and what belongs to the world, that garden where even the envied glory of royalty is what it indeed is out there – a queen's recollection of her late lord. There as usual I sat and smoked my cigar." (CUP 185)

"Det er vel nu en fire Aar siden, at jeg fik det Indfald at ville forsøge mig som Forfatter. Jeg husker det ganske tydeligt, det var en Søndag, ganske rigtig, ja, det var en Søndag-Eftermiddag, jeg sad som sædvanlig ude hos Conditoren i Frederiksberg Have, hiin vidunderlige Have, der for Barnet var Trylleriets Land, hvor Kongen boede med Dronningen, hiin dejlige Have, der for Yndlingen var den lykkelige Adspredelse i Folkets glade Lystighed; hiin venlige Have, der nu for den Ældre er saa hjemligt i veemodig Opløftelse over Verden og hvad Verdens er, hvor selv Kongeværdighedens misundte Herlighed er hvad den jo er derude, en Dronnings Erindring af sin afdøde Herre; der sad jeg, som sædvanlig, og røg min Cigar." (AUE 170-1)

<sup>23</sup>

"Det Ethiske vil derfor forhindre ethvert Confusions-Forsøg, som f. Ex. ethisk at ville *betragte* Verden og Menneskene. Ethisk at betragte lader sig nemlig ikke gjøre, thi der er kun een

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ethisk Betragtning, det er Selvbetragtning. Det Ethiske slutter sig øieblikkeligen om den Enkelte med en Fordring til ham, at han skal existere ethisk [...].” (AUE 291)

<sup>24</sup> “*Afsluttende Efterskrift* danner [...] Vendepunktet i den hele Forfatter-Virksomhed. Den stiller ’*Problemet*’: det at blive Christen” (SFV 77).

<sup>25</sup> Amongst interpreters, that emphasises the similarities between Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein’s views of ethics and philosophy is Creegan in *Wittgenstein and Kierkegaard. Religion, Individuality and Philosophical Method*.

<sup>26</sup> *Philosophical Investigations* §124.

<sup>27</sup> Wittgenstein: *Culture and Value* p. 9e, MS 109 204; 6.-7.11.30 Wittgenstein criticised any idea that his philosophy could or should have any direct effect on the world.

“Nothing seems to me more unlikely than that a scientist or mathematician, who reads me, should be seriously influenced thereby in the way he works. (In that respect my warnings are like the posters at the ticket offices at the English railway stations “Is your journey really necessary?” As if anyone reading that would say to himself “On second thoughts, *no*”). Quite different artillery is needed here from anything I am in a position to muster. [...] I ought always only to hope for the most indirect of influences.” (*Ibid.* pp. 70e-71e, MS 134 143: 13.-14..4.1947)

<sup>28</sup> “Men den Christelige Kjerlighed bliver, og just derfor *er* den; [...] men hvad der *er* kan ikke besynges, det maa troes og det maa leves” (KG 14).