

WITTGENSTEIN TODAY

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problems are unresolvable; be concluded by saying: "If all these questions are senseless, why can we not dismiss them or what must we do in order finally to silence them?"⁵⁵. Wittgenstein takes up this theme of Boltzmann's in the *Tractatus*, where he says: "When the answer cannot be put into the words, neither can the question be put into words [...]. If a question can be framed at all, it is also *possible* to answer it"⁵⁶. According to Boltzmann, "metaphysics seems to cast an irresistible spell on the human mind"⁵⁷. It is superfluous to emphasise the strong affinity between this thesis of Boltzmann and Wittgenstein's theme of the so-called "grammatical illusions" (*grammatische Täuschungen*)⁵⁸, which are born of an incorrect understanding of the use of our language. This indeed is the sense of Wittgenstein's statement that "philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language"⁵⁹. Faced by the spread of aprioristic and logicising schemes Boltzmann declared that "it is not logic, philosophy or metaphysics that decide whether something is true or false, but deeds", quoting Goethe's *Faust*: "In the beginning was the deed"⁶⁰. Wittgenstein also was to refer back to resolving and defining action for the solution of our philosophical problems, and he too cites Goethe's motto: "In the beginning was the deed"⁶¹.

⁵⁵ *Ivi*, 196 and 157.

⁵⁶ TLP 6.5.

⁵⁷ Boltzmann 1974, 156.

⁵⁸ PI, § 110.

⁵⁹ *Ivi*, § 109.

⁶⁰ Boltzmann 1974, 192.

⁶¹ OC, § 402.

WITTGENSTEIN, ETHICS AND RELIGION: EARLIER AND LATER

Piergiorgio Donatelli

I. In the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein is interested in marking the contrast between how things are in the world and their significance from the ethical point of view or, as he also says, from the point of view of the higher or *sub specie aeterni*. I think that an important problem for Wittgenstein was to be able to render the contrast deep enough and see that it wouldn't vanish or be eluded in different ways. He says explicitly that a fundamental way to elude it is to conceive it as a contrast between different sorts of predication of properties. First of all he writes in 6.41 that the ethical sense does not put us in contact with one or another aspect of reality, but that it inhabits a dimension which is entirely different.

The sense of the world must lie outside the world. In the world everything is as it is and happens as it does happen. *In* it there is no value – and if there were, it would be of no value.

If there is a value which is of value, it must lie outside all happening and being-so. [...]

It must lie outside the world. (6.41)

Furthermore, he tries to exemplify what it means to be touched ethically by something by saying that that thing now appears to us as a world in itself. In different contexts he talks about our ethical attitude to things as a relationship which does not connect us with single things and happenings in the world but with the very limits of the world that now appears to us as transformed.

The contemplation of the world *sub specie aeterni* is its contemplation as a limited whole. (6.45)

If good or bad willing [conceived as “the subject of the ethical” (6.423)] changes the world, it can only change the limits of the world, not the facts; not the things that can be expressed in language.

In brief, the world must thereby become quite another. It must so to speak wax and wane as a whole.

The world of the happy is quite another than that of the unhappy. (6.43)

In the *Notebooks*, in the entry dated 7.10.16, he spends some time to elaborate this picture. He explains the contrast as one between “the usual way of looking at things”, which sees them “from the midst of them”, whereas the view of them *sub specie aeternitatis* sees them, as it were, “from outside”, “in such a way that they have the whole world as background”. And he adds, in the entry 8.10.16: “As a thing among things, each thing is equally insignificant; as a world each one [is] equally significant”. I take these different remarks to be concerned with a fundamental confusion, according to which finding an object ethically interesting is like discovering a peculiar property that belongs to it. But Wittgenstein says that in these cases what appears into view is not a property of things; it is the very notion of our seeing them that is transformed. Therefore, a way to avoid the contrast between the usual way of seeing things and their ethical or mystical sense is to think that it is a contrast between the different kinds of properties of those things.

It is important though that we understand how easily we may evade the depth of such a contrast. I think that a typical way would go along the following lines. You take the *Tractatus* as a work which has as its main goal that of legislating upon correct or legitimate uses of language and uses which are incorrect or illegitimate. And this involves either things which we may say when we try to describe how things are or those peculiar expressions that we pronounce when we are touched by an ethical sense of things. At this point you might want to say that when Wittgenstein writes that ethics is inexpressible (“It is clear that ethics cannot be expressed”, 6.421), that there “can be no ethical propositions” (6.42), he is rejecting the legitimacy of such propositions. Yet at the same time he speaks quite intensely of such an ethical sense and he seems to attribute great importance to it. Thus, one is drawn to conclude that the ethical sense, even though it is not anything legitimate, and therefore nothing we can really conceive, has a peculiar nature of its own which we can reach perhaps in some

indirect or oblique way. Through this sort of argument one concludes that the ethical sense indicates a peculiar property of things, a *sui generis* property. But this way the contrast is entirely eluded.

We reach this conclusion because we suppose that when Wittgenstein makes a number of statements concerning the nature of language, and of ethical expressions, he is legislating upon uses of language which are legitimate or illegitimate. But we should try to see what Wittgenstein is doing in a different way. If we follow the reading that James Conant and Cora Diamond have elaborated, we should want to think that Wittgenstein’s goal in the *Tractatus* is not that of establishing the legitimacy of language but one of clarifying conceptual confusions, of elucidating our linguistic uses¹. I suggest, therefore, that we understand Wittgenstein’s approach to philosophical problems in the following manner. There are different uses of language and among them ethical uses. We can think to bring the *Tractatus* in contact with these uses, to use it as an instrument of illumination when those uses generate uneasiness or seem to bring us to dead ends². I suggest thinking of the *Tractatus* not as a work which establishes the foundations of the logic of language, but instead as a work which moves from the assumption that there is something like language, and more generally things that human beings do with language, inclinations and intentions of meaning that are not always successful or are, at times, as such necessarily unsuccessful, which philosophy can approach as a tool of elucidation and illumination. If we take the idea seriously, expressed in several places, according to which philosophy is an activity of clarification³, we cannot accept the picture of the *Tractatus* as a work which establishes limits and foundations.

¹ See e.g. Diamond 1991a; Conant 2000.

² For the idea of the *Tractatus* as an instrument of illumination see Diamond 1996, 249.

³ “The Object of philosophy is the logical clarification of thoughts. Philosophy is not a theory but an activity. A philosophical work consists essentially of elucidations. The result of philosophy is not a number of ‘philosophical propositions’, but to make propositions clear. Philosophy should make clear and delimit sharply the thoughts which otherwise are, as it were, opaque and blurred” (TLP 4.112); “My propositions are elucidatory in this way: he who understands me finally recognizes them as senseless, when he has climbed out through them, on them, over them. (He must so to speak throw away the ladder, after he has climbed up on it). He must surmount these propositions; then he sees the world rightly” (TLP 6.54).

For example, Wittgenstein writes in proposition 4.003: "Most questions and propositions of the philosophers result from the fact that we do not understand the logic of our language". Wittgenstein here seems to place the problem in *our* incapacity to understand language and not in any failure intrinsic to language itself.

If we apply this kind of reading of the *Tractatus* to ethics, we reach a very different conclusion from that which is forced to postulate a sphere of hidden and indirect sense. We should think instead that Wittgenstein is interested in illuminating this area of activity with linguistic signs, an area which he considers as highly important. He even goes as far as saying, in the famous letter to Ludwig von Ficker, that the point of the whole *Tractatus* is an ethical one⁴. And almost ten years later, in his *Lecture on Ethics*, he will say that this area is "a document of a tendency in the human mind which I personally cannot help respecting deeply and I would not for my life ridicule it"⁵. In this area we are touched by the sense of things and Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus* is interested in freeing us from possible confusions concerning what we are doing when we entertain this sort of attention to things.

II. As I have said before, Wittgenstein marks this contrast by using a number of expressions which are recurrent in the different remarks in the *Notebooks* and in the *Tractatus*. These expressions point to a relationship between the ethical aspect of a thing and the fact of that thing becoming a world in itself. I am going to try to make this phraseology a bit clearer. As we have seen already, in *Tractatus* 6.43 an ethical involvement with the world, marked by the operation of the ethical will, is connected to the changing of the limits of the world: "If good or bad willing changes the world, it can only change the limits of the world [...]". But we should remember that the limits of the world are also the limits of logic. In 5.61 he had written: "Logic fills the world: the limits of the world are also its limits". The point of 5.61 and of the propositions on solipsism was to show that logic pervades the world and that it is illusory to think that we can get

⁴ FL, 35.

⁵ LE in PO, 44.

hold of an external point of view. Wittgenstein employs here the same picture of the world and its limits in order to suggest that the kind of change involved in the contrast he is exploring in ethics appears as if it were a change in the way the world comes to be expressive to us. When we are ethically involved with something it seems to us that the limits of the world change, that something like a new mode of expression is introduced.

Wittgenstein works with the same picture in the *Notebooks*. In the entry 8.10.16 he mentions the example of concentrating on an object, like a stove. The example seems dull but it proves to be very illuminating.

If I have been contemplating the stove, and then am told: but now all you know is the stove, my result does indeed seem trivial. For this represents the matter as if I had studied the stove as one among the many things in the world. But if I was contemplating the stove *it* was my world, and everything else colourless by contrast with it.

And he adds the following poignant though slightly mysterious remark:

For it is equally possible to take the bare present image as the worthless momentary picture in the whole temporary world, and as the true world among shadows.

When we are touched by a sense of things in what Wittgenstein would count as an ethical way, it is as if those things inhabited a different dimension where the ordinary connections that surround them vanish. So it is really as if the mode of expression is radically changed and the ordinary context of expression were annihilated. Things seen *sub specie aeternitatis* seem, as it were, to escape the context where they are placed and mark such a deep contrast with it that things surrounding them become colourless in comparison, they seem to lose their presence, their solidity as objects. And each thing seen in such a light acquires an importance which renders it absolute, makes it appear as the sole occupier of the world, as Wittgenstein writes, "as the true world among shadows".

There is something by the poet Wislawa Szymborska which has a connection with this point. In speaking about the language and the perception of the poet she says that each thing is tied to a sense of

wonder that does not come from any comparison: in the language of poetry, where each word has weight, nothing is ordinary or normal. No day or cloud. No day or night which follows it. And above all no single existence in this world⁶. Wittgenstein wants to illuminate the contrast between how things ordinarily appear to us and the possibility that they transform in this way: that people and things appear to us filled with mystery and fascination in a way which seems to refuse any comparison and simile. But we might recall that this is the way in which Wittgenstein expresses himself in the *Lecture on Ethics*. Wittgenstein mentions this kind of wonder as an example of an absolute sense of things, and he writes: "it is nonsense to say that I wonder at the existence of the world, because I cannot imagine it not existing"⁷. Wittgenstein describes the following phenomenon, the impression that what we see can be freed, as it were, from the connections that contribute in determining whatever it is. In the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein writes in the same manner that the solution to the problem of life does not lie in trying to give an answer to *that* problem (6.521)⁸, for example by extending the temporal duration of life, perceived as limited and contingent, endlessly until immortality, but in changing our way of seeing life (6.4311-6.4312)⁹. The solution lies in our being able to see the world and our life at the same time as *our life*, in the midst of those causal, temporal and spatial connections which confer a meaning to that notion – which allow us to mean something by the notion of our life – and as a dimension dominated by the present. Therefore, our notions of world and life are put under tension between their ordinary

⁶ See her Nobel prize acceptance speech held on December 7, 1996, published in Szymborska, 2000.

⁷ LE, 41-42.

⁸ "The solution of the problem of life is seen in the vanishing of this problem [...]" (TLP 6.521).

⁹ "[...] If by eternity is understood not endless temporal duration but timeless, then he lives eternally who lives in the present. Our life is endless in the way that our visual field is without limit" (TLP 6.4311); "The temporal immortality of the human soul, that is to say, its eternal survival after death, is not only in no way guaranteed, but this assumption in the first place will not do for us what we always tried to make it do. Is a riddle solved by the fact that I survive for ever? Is this eternal life not as enigmatic as our present one? The solution of the riddle of life in space and time lies *outside* space and time" (TLP 6.4312).

meaning and the feeling that such ordinary context is abolished and that there is a world and a life freed from such causal and temporal connections¹⁰.

But we should notice at this point that what Wittgenstein describes in such illustrations of the ethical sense of things belongs to the same sort of phenomenon through which we generate the illusory impression that we perceive a meaning where there is not any, that is, the process through which we take nonsense for something which appears to us as meaningful. This shouldn't be a surprise, because Wittgenstein had written precisely that there can be no ethical propositions (6.42), and that when we try to express something ethical we end up necessarily uttering some nonsense¹¹. I am referring here once again to a certain reading of the notion of nonsense, a reading Cora Diamond has once called *austere*¹² and that both Diamond and Conant have developed in a number of essays, according to which there are no alternatives to the fact that either we are involved with some proposition which has a sense or there is not really anything to recognize there, and *that* is nonsense. Wittgenstein seems to defend explicitly this conception of nonsense when he writes in 5.473 and 5.4733 that the expression "Socrates is identical" is nonsensical not because the expression is illegitimate but because we haven't determined its meaning, that is, we do not have a place for "identical" in our talks about Socrates. Therefore, a nonsense does not consist

¹⁰ In the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein works on sort of ethical imagination as the achievement of a view of things (see the world rightly) which amounts to a liberation from a sense of necessity, a sense of having no possibility in life, a fatalism, which he calls unhappiness. The same theme comes up again much later in the *Denkbewegungen*, 96: "If you want to quarrel with God, it means that you have a false *concept of God*. You hold a superstition. You have an incorrect concept when you are angry with fate. You should arrange your concepts differently. The first command of wisdom should be being in peace with your fate" (18.3.1937). Here Wittgenstein seems to be saying that an attitude of anger at God's will shows that we are oppressed by a view of ourselves in which we image to see our life as if from the outside as the object of someone's will. So we should regain a sense of our life and of possibility that comes from overcoming this sort of imagination. The rearrangement of concepts would imply therefore a transformation of the self which takes place at the ethical level in the *Tractatus* sense.

¹¹ See on this Diamond 2000, 163.

¹² *Ivi*, 153.

in having a symbol which is in a way illegitimate or nonsensical but in the fact that we do not have anything in front of us where we can discern a meaning. But there is something that *might* happen which deserves our greatest attention according to Wittgenstein, and that is the fact that we might confuse ourselves. In 5.4733 Wittgenstein clearly says that, if a proposition is lacking a sense, it is because “we have given no *meaning* to some of its constituent parts. (*Even if we believe that we have done so*)” (emphasis added). We can have the impression that we have done that and entertain this illusion.

(I only want to mention now the fact that Wittgenstein thinks that the illusion of sense is very important in order to understand the kind of work, of method, proper to philosophy. Wittgenstein thinks that the task of philosophy is precisely that of freeing us from confusions of this kind, that is, by a dialectic through which we come to realize that something to which we were attributing a sense is really only nonsense: something in which we can no longer discern a meaning (4.003, 4.112). And if we think of the *Tractatus* as a whole, as Conant has explained in a striking way, the work has this form. Its author asks us to be involved in its propositions to be able in the end to discard them as nonsensical: not to throw them away as the response to a request that someone makes to us, but because we cannot read any meaning in them anymore. Yet Wittgenstein also establishes a connection between the task of the *Tractatus* and ethics. In the letter to von Ficker he writes that “The book’s point is an ethical one”¹³. And at the end of the Preface he writes: “The value of this work [...] consists in the fact that it shows how little has been done when these problems have been solved”, which is an invitation to redescribe the task of the *Tractatus* under a different light. So Wittgenstein is suggesting that the kind of self-clarification the *Tractatus* aims at is an example of an ethical transformation of the self)¹⁴.

What happens in the examples of ethical expressions that we have mentioned is precisely this. The sense of beauty or wonder toward a certain thing or a person as it is described by Szymborska, the

¹³ FL, 35.

¹⁴ I explore some implications of this idea in Donatelli 2004a.

sense of one’s life as being freed from the temporal ties that contribute in viewing it as our life, are examples in which we leave the meaning of some component undetermined. We have a number of talks which allow us to fix the meaning of a certain thing, our life or our idea of the world. The wonder and the happiness rise from the fact that the things we contemplate appear to us at the same time as cut off from their ordinary context and seen alone as the true world among shadows, to use the picture from the *Notebooks*. There is a sort of hesitation of the mind which wants to refer to that thing, our life, or the world as it ordinarily appears to us and as it enters our talks, and yet imagine to abolish the context of such talks retaining the aura, the atmosphere of its meaning.

The sense of beauty and wonder comes from the hesitation between attributing to a certain thing the role it plays in the practices in which it is involved *and* imagining that we can cut it off from those practices and be able to retain enough of its meaning to imagine that *that* very thing is the sole occupier of the world, that it has a quality of presence among other things which makes it unique in a way in which that thing *is not* actually. When Wittgenstein writes that ethics is inexpressible (6.421) he makes precisely this point: that the sort of inexpressibility which belongs to ethics is that which belongs to the expression “Socrates is identical”. In both cases we are dealing with the same sort of hesitation in our intention of meaning. The *Tractatus* can become an instrument of illumination in the following way: if we bring the philosophical analysis of “Socrates is identical” in contact with our ethical expressions we can come to see what we are doing with them, we can render perspicuous to us what happens when we are touched by the ethical significance of things.

We can see now that the inexpressibility of ethics is not a doctrine we should somehow try to avoid, in order to be able to square it up with the thesis concerning the existence of this important tendency in the human mind. On the contrary, an ethical involvement with things, as Wittgenstein intends it, can be illuminated only if put into contact with a philosophical understanding of the inexpressibility of ethics. This understanding can show the contrast which marks the ordinary way of contemplating a thing, as one among many, and the view of it as if it could escape that dimension and be the sole occupier

of the world. The nonsensicality is thus constitutive of the ethical intention which finds expression in that peculiar kind of vocalization, in that string of signs. For if our ethical intention were successful and we were able to *mean* what we intended – determine the meaning of what we are trying to say – then it wouldn't be ethical anymore, because we would lose that aura of meaning which is produced precisely by wanting to keep our intention of meaning oscillating.

For this reason the idea Wittgenstein refers here to a contrast between different modes of expression misses entirely the depth of the contrast. The absolute wonder and the sense of respect and mystery conveyed by a person mentioned by Szyborska do not denote a property of that person. We are not trying to perceive a hidden sense behind the apparent nonsensicality of our words but we are trying to make a use of those words which allows us to speak of that person imagining that we can abolish the ordinary context where those words have a life.

(We should notice how this sort of ethical involvement with things has an important emotive aspect, in that in our attraction to a meaning we are affectively involved and we may also entertain it with an energy which engages with our will. (In this sense Wittgenstein speaks of philosophy as a battle against the will and not against the intellect)¹⁵. At the same time though it is also clear that this ethical involvement appears into view not as an emotive accompaniment to some expression but as the impression of being struck by a meaning, that is, from the point of view of a speaker's intentional use of nonsense. This might also suggest why an emotivist reading of the *Tractatus*, as was given by Carnap in the "Elimination of metaphysics through logical analysis of language"¹⁶ would not work. It would elude the depth of the contrast, which is not between mere observations of things and emotive reactions, for this way of marking the contrast would appeal once again to the idea that there were some property upon which we convey a certain emotion. Wittgenstein wants

¹⁵ "What has to be overcome is not a difficulty of the intellect, but of the will". "Philosophy", in PO 161.

¹⁶ See Carnap 1959.

to show that something entirely different takes place, and that the contrast concerns the impression that what counts as the predication of a property, the talks which contribute in fixing the attribution of such a property, are, as it were, abolished)¹⁷.

III. I now want to add a few considerations concerning Wittgenstein's later philosophy. I should like to suggest some thoughts in response to a problem that one would commonly face when thinking of ethics in connection to his later philosophy. The problem is the following: does Wittgenstein's later philosophy give us the instruments to be able to mark the contrast in the way in which this is done in the *Tractatus* or does it render it invisible? Some have argued in fact that the later philosophy does make that contrast no longer visible¹⁸. This is a rather intricate matter because (1) Wittgenstein radically changes many of his positions concerning the task of philosophy and what its instruments are. In particular, he offers instruments in order to show how many of the ways in which we talk about ethics and God, for example, which are two central illustrations of what in the *Tractatus* is accounted as the point of view of the higher, belong to the expressive powers of language. (2) But I think he also furnishes instruments which allow us to mark the kind of contrast we have found in the *Tractatus* between the ordinary view and the point of view of the higher. More specifically, (A) he continues to think that the phenomenon of nonsense is a central one and he also seems to give a diagnosis of it which lies in continuity with what he had said in the *Tractatus*. In *Philosophical Investigations* 500 he writes: "When a sentence is called senseless, it is not as it were its sense that is senseless. But a combination of words is being excluded from the language, withdrawn from circulation" (see *Tractatus* 5.473). (B) But the *Investigations* complicate Wittgenstein's understanding of what it means

¹⁷ See on this Donatelli 1998, chapter 2; and Donatelli 2004b.

¹⁸ See S. Lovibond: "[j]ust as the early Wittgenstein considers all *propositions* to be of equal value [...], so the later Wittgenstein – who has, however, abandoned his previous normative notion of what counts as a proposition – regards all *language-games* as being of 'equal value' in the transcendental sense of the *Tractatus*". Lovibond 1983, 25. See also Rhees 1990, 187.

to engage in the activity of philosophy, even though we should notice that the several approaches which are introduced are all tied to the notion of nonsense. One method in philosophy Wittgenstein mentions seems to go back to the method described in 6.54. We find it expressed in *Philosophical Investigations* 464: "My aim is: to teach you to pass from a piece of disguised nonsense to something that is patent nonsense". Another important approach is mentioned in 116: "What *we* do is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use". (C) Therefore, we still find in the *Investigations* a philosophical usage of the notion of nonsense which develops the *Tractatus'* use of the notion. (And we should remember that in the *Tractatus* the philosophical work was an example of the ethical work).

One intricate question which comes up at this point is the following. Wittgenstein becomes more and more aware of what it means to say that there is not an area of ethics as such, independently from its being illuminated each time by that kind of contrast. We need to attend to the use we make of language each time. Now this problem was already present in the *Tractatus* and was marked by the idea that ethics has no content. Therefore, we may bring the *Tractatus* in contact with certain expressions and see that some may be illuminated by that sort of contrast and others may not and might show in the end to be internal to the expressive powers of the proposition. But we need to see how the *Tractatus* made it difficult to see this. (This is connected to the fact that in the *Tractatus* we find a lack of that attention to ordinary language which is central to the method expressed in *Investigations* 116, even though an anticipation of that piecemeal method can be found in *Tractatus* 6.53)¹⁹. Therefore when Wittgenstein writes in *Philosophical Investigations* 77, "In such a difficulty always ask yourself: How did we *learn* the meaning of this word ("good" for

¹⁹ *Tractatus* 6.53: "The right method of philosophy would be this. To say nothing except what can be said, *i.e.* the propositions of natural science, *i.e.* something that has nothing to do with philosophy; and then always, when, someone else wished to say something metaphysical, to demonstrate to him that he had given no meaning to certain signs in his propositions. This method would be unsatisfying to the other – he would not have the feeling that we were teaching him philosophy – but it would be the only strictly correct method".

instance)? From what sort of examples? in what language-games? Then it will be easier for you to see that the word must have a family of meanings", he seems to discover areas that are internal to the expressive powers of the proposition, which the *Tractatus* had not clearly illustrated. We see the first steps of this discovery in the early Thirties, in Moore's "Lectures", for example. Wittgenstein introduces the notion of reason, and he holds that the way in which we can convince someone that something is good by giving reasons fixes the meaning in which 'good' is used in that discussion – it fixes "the grammar of that discussion"²⁰. And he holds similar theses in connection to aesthetics.

But this leaves the question open of whether we can make an ethical use of language which does not fall under that notion of reason. As we know, in the *Lecture on Ethics* Wittgenstein expresses a contrast which is similar to the one we have found in the *Tractatus*. But there are texts in which he seems to be struggling precisely with this sort of problem: what philosophical instruments can illuminate certain expressions, that is, with what sort of contrast are we dealing there? I want to mention a difficult text I wouldn't be able to comment with enough understanding, which can furnish us with an example of this struggle. In the diaries which were published under the title *Denkbewegungen* Wittgenstein goes back many times to the following problem: what is the character of religious expressions? In different places he writes that religious language introduces special phraseologies such as the picture of God's eye – God looking at us – or his hands – we are in the hands of God – or his mouth – God speaks to us – but it wouldn't make sense to wonder about other parts of God's body. In the entry dated 23.2.1937 he writes:

One kneels and looks up and folds one's hands and speaks, and says one is speaking with God, one says God sees everything I do; one says God speaks to me in my *heart*: one speaks of the eyes, the hand, the mouth of God, but not of the other parts of the body: Learn from this the grammar of the word "God"! [I read somewhere, Luther had written that theology is the "grammar of the word God", of the Holy Writings].²¹

²⁰ M in PO, 104.

²¹ L. Wittgenstein, *Denkbewegungen. Tagebücher 1930-1932, 1936-1937*, Innsbruck, Haymon-Verlag, 1997, 90.

In these contexts Wittgenstein holds that we may overcome the problem we have with the apparent absurdity of these expressions if we learn the grammar of the word God. We might wish to gloss Wittgenstein's notion of grammar in this context on the lines that he explores in Moore's "Lectures". Moore reports:

About "God" his main point seemed to be that this word is used in many *grammatically* different senses. He said, for instance, that many controversies about God could be settled by saying "I'm not using the word in such a sense that you can say...", and that different religions "treat things as making sense which others treat as nonsense, and do not merely deny some proposition which another religion affirms"; and he illustrated this by saying that if people use "god" to mean something like a human being, then "God has four arms" and "God has two arms" will both have sense, but that others so use "God" that "God has arms" is nonsense – would say "God *can't* have arms".²²

So there are cases when controversies and misunderstandings might be settled by clearing what use we are making of the word "God" in our discourses. Wittgenstein seems to be saying that there are talks which concern God that fix the meaning of what we want to say when we use that word, when we do things, when we are involved in activities which refer to the concept of God. The task of philosophical elucidation, and therefore spiritual improvement, would require attending to those uses, bringing our religious expressions back to the context of uses and activities where they have a life. So in these places, like Moore's "Lectures" and the *Denkbewegungen*, Wittgenstein says that there are religious practices which are illuminated by their being treated, say, as language games, that is, as practices which involve pictures and concepts the meaning of which is fixed by the application they have in the lives of certain people, in their discourses and activities.

At this point I also want to say that we shouldn't be ready to draw any determinate conclusion from the fact that religious expressions are to be treated as language games. When Wittgenstein

²² M in PO, 103-104. A similar point is raised in AWL, 32: "Luther said that theology is the grammar of the word 'God'. I interpret this to mean that an investigation of the word would be a grammatical one. For example, people might dispute about how many arms God had, and someone might enter the dispute by denying that one could talk about arms of God. This would throw light on the use of the word. What is ridiculous or blasphemous also shows the grammar of the word".

makes this point he often has in mind a certain philosophical preoccupation, and especially the tendency to treat these expressions, and certain single words, like "good" and "beautiful", as denoting a special property. This is clear, for example, if we take his "Lectures on Aesthetics", where he is reported as saying that "the main mistake made by philosophers of the present generation, including Moore, [...] is that when language is looked at, what is looked at is a form of words and not the use made of the form of words". So instead of concentrating on the single words, like "good" and "beautiful", we should attend at "the occasions on which they are said – on the enormously complicated situation in which the [...] expression has a place"²³.

So, once we have said that religious, or ethical expressions, should be taken as language games, the philosophical work of elucidation is still to be carried out. The suggestion that we look at the different grammars and practical situations in which such expressions have a life is an indication of where to look. It is the beginning of the work and certainly it does not settle the question in any way. In particular, we shouldn't be led to think that conditions of use fix the meaning of such expressions in a way which prevents understanding to reach different language games or grammars. We do not know in advance what we will be able to do with our conceptual resources. We cannot limit in advance our capacity to recognize logical connections between our ways of talking about God, say, and their ways. We do not know whether we might be able to find enough shared understanding which would allow us to take their ways of talking about God (and allow them to take our way of talking about God) as the same subject-matter. So the point I find that Wittgenstein is making here is only that religious expressions can be clarified *at times* by attending to the complicate conceptual life where they belong.

Therefore, we may trace the following connection between the sort of treatment we have found in Moore's "Lectures" and the *Denkbewegungen* and that of the *Tractatus*. (1) In one sense the new perspective introduces new aspects in Wittgenstein's view, because it shows that talks about God and ethics may be seen as internal to the

²³ LC, 2.

expressive powers of the proposition, to what it means to express a *Satz*. We are now introduced to a different sense according to which we can say, with the *Tractatus*, that context fixes the meaning of the constituents. (2) Once we have enlarged our understanding of what counts as a *Satz*, as expressive language, the work of elucidation takes the form of commanding a clear view of our language in which we overcome misunderstandings and confusion. (3) But I have tried to show that the *Tractatus* illuminates another kind of phenomenon, where the work of elucidation consists in showing how it could be that certain talks about God or ethics are necessarily nonsensical, that is to say, that the intention with which we express them would be frustrated if we succeeded in fixing their meaning.

In the *Denkbewegungen* Wittgenstein is struggling with this sort of problem, what is the most appropriate way of illuminating religious expressions. At times he says that what is required is to command a clear view of the uses and applications of such expressions in the lives of the people. But at other times he wants to say that there are expressions and pictures which impose themselves in a way which refuses any paraphrase or explanation. These are cases in which mentioning the use of those words, to mean such and such, does not give us their meaning²⁴. Their meaning is not exhausted by mentioning the use alone. We should recall now that this is the sort of case which belongs to the ethical and religious expressions that Wittgenstein examines in the *Lecture on Ethics*. He argues there that the nature of such expressions is precisely that of being irreplaceable with other expressions.

Thus in ethical and religious language we seem constantly to be using similes. But a simile must be the simile for *something*. And if I can describe a fact by means of a simile I must also be able to drop the simile and to describe the facts without it. Now in our case as soon as we try to drop the simile and simply to state the facts which stand behind it, we find that there are no such facts.²⁵

²⁴ See PI § 43: "For a *large* class – though not for all – in which we employ the word 'meaning' it can be defined thus: the meaning of a word is its use in the language". And see Diamond 1991a, 240: "when we talk about meaning, we do not always mean use [...]; the meaning of an expression given a secondary use cannot be understood by considering *that* use alone".

²⁵ LE in PO, 42-43.

There is a passage from *Denkbewegungen* (15.2.1937) where Wittgenstein examines the idea that the life of the truly just person deserves glorification and discusses this religious picture, how it is possible to use the expressions that religion suggests to us. He goes on adding the following remarks:

These images thus impose themselves upon me. And yet I am hesitant in using these images and expressions. Above all they are of course no similes. For what can be said through a simile can also be said without it. These images and expressions have a life rather only in a *high* sphere of life, they can be rightfully used only in that sphere.²⁶

This elevated sphere of life does not seem to be the dimension where concepts have their ordinary life but one where what is requested is a personal use of those concepts which transform them. So I think that we have here a treatment of religious expressions which is similar to the one found in the *Lecture on Ethics* and which appeals to the same sort of understanding of ethics which is expressed in the *Tractatus*.

In another passage (18.3.1937) Wittgenstein reflects whether his gratitude to God at the beauty of the rising of the sun is deep enough. He writes:

Today I saw the sun from my window at the time when it started rising behind the Western mountain. God be thanked. *But I believe now, to my shame, that this word²⁷ didn't come sufficiently from the heart.* For I was certainly happy when I *actually* noticed the sun but my joy was not deep enough, too cheerful, not truly religious. *Oh if I only were deeper!*²⁸

I think that these remarks on the depth of his exclamation of joy and gratitude have a place in the elevated sphere of personal transformation of concepts. Wittgenstein is asking himself here whether his having seen the sun, that image of the sun that has cut it off from the context of causal relations and has placed it in a dimension of beauty

²⁶ Wittgenstein, *Denkbewegungen...*, cit., 80.

²⁷ In the manuscript Wittgenstein draws an arrow to indicate the word "God" in the line above.

²⁸ *Ivi*, 96.

and joy, if such a sense of wonder and gratitude wasn't too superficial. But such an order of questions has an entry in a use of the word "sun" and the word "gratitude" which cannot be accounted simply by showing their application in the talks where those words are involved – which contribute to fix their ordinary meaning. We need those talks, where such words have a meaning, in order to mark a contrast of a different kind, where it seems that those talks are, as it were, abolished and that the happiness which springs from the view of the sun or the sense of gratitude to God shows a quality of experience which is entirely different – because it seems a wonder of which we cannot make sense through comparisons, nor a gratitude we can explain from what we know of the gratitude that human beings show to God. It is something entirely new and unexpected, a sort of depth and freshness in one's view of things which refuses comparison. When Wittgenstein writes that these expressions have a place in an elevated sphere of life, I believe he alludes to this sort of failure or success in our perception and in our use of words, to this understanding of what is truth or falsity in our lives.

So I would want to suggest in conclusion that the kind of contrast that we have found in the *Tractatus* still finds a place as an instrument of illumination in Wittgenstein's later treatment of ethical and religious language.

THE LATER WITTGENSTEIN AND HIS READERS

Andrea Birk

I. "The results of philosophy are the uncovering of one or another piece of plain nonsense..." (PU 119), is one of the most provocative remarks in the *Philosophical Investigations*. It outlines Wittgenstein's fundamental conviction that philosophical problems are linguistic nonsense, provoked by a failed use of language. Destruction or dissolution of philosophical systems is the consequence, because these systems are, as Wittgenstein thinks, the results of the thought of linguistically confused philosophers, who want to look with metaphysical eyes beyond the (physical) reality of everyday practice. They, the philosophers, must be brought back from that metaphysical level to the meaningful use of words, to ordinary language and practice, where, according to Wittgenstein, every explanation of the world must have its base.

This conviction causes a deep problem: if ordinary language is the base of our thoughts, of our meaningful way of speaking and therefore of all our arguments, then there can be no argument and no proof which justifies ordinary language and practice as the base – because every argument and every proof is founded in that practice. So, Wittgenstein's fundamental conviction itself does not have a rational foundation.

II. The problem mentioned here is well known in philosophy. It is similar to the problem of causality and of the inductive inferential nexus from the past to the future exposed by Hume. While Hume ends up a sceptic, Kant tries to give a transcendental solution considering causality as a category which cannot be justified by experience because it is the condition of it, we are in our experience always implicitly referring to it. Similar to Kant, Wittgenstein considers ordinary