

BETWEEN GOSSIP AND SILENCE HEIDEGGER AND WITTGENSTEIN ON ETHICS

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Heidegger and Wittgenstein are key figures in 20th century philosophical thought. They have long represented two antagonistic schools of philosophy, on the one hand the attempt to formulate an "ideal language" and then so called "ordinary language" philosophy, and on the other hand phenomenology, hermeneutics and existential philosophy. These are usually regarded as completely opposed to one another.

What is anyway surprising is the fact, that both of them kept silence in a field that we regard nowadays as to be one of the most important challenges towards philosophy. Ethics is booming at present time and this has different and multiple reasons: especially the development of technics, of science and its influence on everyday's life has created a lot of problems arising ethical or moral questions. "Applied ethics" has shown up in the last years dealing with fields like medicine, technics, computing, environment, not to mention biological fields like genetics or cloning.

Then: we are living all over the world mostly in pluralistic societies where different standpoints are not only possible but sometimes are clashing: think of questions like abortion, euthanasia, research of embryos, but also of political, religious or ideological differences.

Ethics is challenged to give us answers to provide, help in our orientation — within a rapidly changing world.

Briefly: the booming of ethics is well understandable, even if we should beware of overestimating its possibilities.

It was Ludwig Wittgenstein, who expressed in a note from 1929:

I can very well imagine what Heidegger means by Being and Anxiety. Man has the the desire to run against the limits of language. Think for instance of the astonishment that something exists. Astonishment cannot be expressed in form of a question, and there is no answer. All we may say can only be nonsense a priori. Nonetheless we run against the limits of language. This running against was also seen by Kierkegaard, and he even called it "running against the paradox". This running against the limits of language is ethics. I deem it very necessary that one puts an end to the prattle on ethics — whether there is cognition, values; whether the Good can be defined etc.

In ethics one always makes the attempt to say something that does not and cannot concern the essence of the matter. It is a priori certain; whatever defi-

inition of the Good one man give, it is always a misunderstanding that what one really means corresponds in the expression. But the tendency, this running against, points to something. (Wittgenstein und der Wiener Kreis, 30. 12. 1929)

There are nonetheless interesting similarities between Wittgenstein's and Heidegger's philosophising. If we refer the remark of Wittgenstein stated above, we could add a quotation of Heidegger in his "Letter of Humanism" where he states that the desire, if not to say the urgency, for ethics is well understandable. But it cannot be answered in the simple way of elaborating norms, principles, rules for our individual and our social behaviour.

Heidegger reminds us that "ethics" derives from "ethos" dwelling and that we have to look how the relationship of the human being to being as such can be described and not to give moral statements or descriptions.

To understand this refrain from ethical statements, this silence on ethics, we have to look closer at the fundamental positions of Wittgenstein and Heidegger.

What I want to do above all is to show similarities in their way of dealing with topics which seem to me to be derived from their shared *negative* aim in philosophy.

What is of the greatest importance is the difficult and problematic task of a destruction of metaphysics which is of essential importance in a philosophical climate in which there is more and more talk of "post-metaphysical century".

Wittgenstein's and Heidegger's criticism of civilisation, technology, and the understanding of science is another point that seems to me to be important for current discussions in philosophy. Not because philosophy nowadays is especially concerned with these topics, but rather because it continues to treat questions about practical reasoning, how to find agreement in judgements, and how to evaluate developments in politics and technology, in a way that is subject to the criticism formulated by these two philosophers.

It seems to me remarkable that Wittgenstein and Heidegger both exclude the subject of ethics from their reasoning. They keep silent and resist the desire to formulate ethical assertions. And they do this in the face of what seems, in the course of the last century, to be a growing desire for practical philosophy and for ethical consideration which are supposed to show themselves useful in medicine, ecology and technology.

1. *Destruction of Metaphysics*

a) Wittgenstein's Critique of Metaphysics in the *Tractatus*

Wittgenstein's critique of language in the *Tractatus* left no doubt that metaphysical propositions cannot be said. Like most philosophical questions and assertions, they are based on misunderstandings of the logic of our language. Beginning with the view that philosophy is not a set of truths but an activity, namely critique of language, Wittgenstein comes to the conclusion that the aim of philosophy can only be that of logical clarification of thought.

Philosophy aims at the end the logical clarification of thoughts. [...] Philosophy does not result in 'philosophical propositions', but rather in the clarification of propositions. (TLP 4. 112)

It [philosophy] must set limits to what can be thought; and, in doing so, to what cannot be thought. [...] It will signify what cannot be said by presenting clearly what can be said. (TLP 4. 114f.)

A metaphysical conception of philosophy is put into question right from the beginning. Since the *Tractatus* understands itself as an investigation into the logical structure of our language — and at the same time is based on the view, that language offers a picture of reality whereby it is possible to uncover linguistic misunderstandings — metaphysical sentences cannot be allowed. This depends on the correspondence in logical form that Wittgenstein claims holds between meaningful propositions and reality.

But at the same time it is true that propositions can express only something what they share in virtue of the pictorial relation with facts and states of affairs. The logical form itself which is the condition of meaningful speech cannot be said but only be shown. Because if the language of facts could contain an analysis of the conditions of its own application, the question would arise what this analysis in turn depends on. Factual propositions, like pictures, are therefore said to present a view of the world but they cannot present a view of what made the original view possible, because that would inevitably lead us into an infinite regress. And that is precisely the important point in Wittgenstein's considerations because here we find, as it were, a metaphysical rest which Wittgenstein forbids us to pronounce but which nonetheless accompanies the whole *Tractatus* from the beginning. That's why Wittgenstein also said as a conclusion in 6. 54: "My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognises them as nonsensical, when he has used them — as steps — to climb up beyond them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it.)"

Thus at the end of the *Tractatus* we are left with the paradox that the only way of showing that certain propositions transcend the limits of meaningful

speech in itself consists in going beyond those limits. Therefore even with his famous distinction between “showing” and “saying” Wittgenstein remains in a realm that could be called metaphysical despite his critique of metaphysics. In fact all the propositions of the *Tractatus* lack semantic content since they are all concerned with the conditions of the agreement between language and reality. And as Wittgenstein says in 4. 12:

Propositions can represent the whole of reality but they cannot represent what they must have in common with reality in order to be able to represent it — the logical form. In order to be able to represent the logical form we should have to be able to station ourselves with propositions somewhere outside logic, that is to say outside the world.

Metaphysics on the contrary tries exactly to by-pass these “instructions” and to present as a fact of reality something that cannot be. Or to put it differently: Metaphysics takes what is *outside* the factual world to be a fact *inside* that world. For that reason one could also understand Wittgenstein’s critique of metaphysics as a criticism of our tendency to think of what is important to us as certain kinds of objects in the world. Viewed in that way many of Wittgenstein’s remarks can be understood in a way that doesn’t at all imply that he thought little of or despised the realm of metaphysics but rather that he sought to secure that realm by remaining silent about it. That is also entailed in the famous conclusion of the *Tractatus*: “What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence.” (TLP 7)

It is clear that this critique of metaphysics is very different from that of the Vienna Circle. For Wittgenstein metaphysics is by no means something that simply falls in the realm of senselessness as a result of our being seduced by a mistaken understanding of language. In a letter to Paul Engelmann (9. 4. 1917) Wittgenstein wrote the following: “If one does not endeavor to say the unsayable nothing gets lost but the unsayable is contained in the said in an unsayable manner.” And I also want to remind you here of the famous letter Wittgenstein wrote Ludwig von Ficker: “My work consists of two parts: the one presented here plus all I have not written. And it is precisely this second part that is the important one.”

As I pointed out before: From this perspective Wittgenstein’s destruction of metaphysics could even be given a positive sense, namely that of granting metaphysics an autonomous realm. It is left in its own right by our remaining silent about it. This also puts Wittgenstein’s remarks about philosophical and metaphysical propositions in a different light:

The correct method in philosophy would really be the following: to say nothing except what can be said, i. e. propositions of natural science — i. e. something that has nothing to do with philosophy — and then, whenever someone else wanted to say something metaphysical, to demonstrate to him that he had failed to give a meaning to certain signs in his propositions. (TLP 6. 53)

b) Heidegger's Critique of Metaphysics

Heidegger pursues his critique of metaphysics on a different level. His "fundamental-ontology" — as it is worked out in "Being and Time" — is in fact a de(con)struction of what can be called ontology of the "objective presence" (Vorhandenheit). In the course of reviving the question of the "sense of being" Heidegger accuses metaphysics of having forgotten its true sense by having always thought of "being" (Sein) as "a being" (Seiendes). Metaphysics thereby supported the tendency towards an "objectification" (Verdinglichung) of the structure of presentness of being and therefore has infected our whole conception of the world and ourselves within it with misunderstanding. Metaphysics is therefore said not only to have forgotten the true sense of being, but is also blamed for the "forgetfulness of being" in neglecting the crucial difference of being and beings. The reason for this is to be found in metaphysics itself and in the way it has proceeded and has become even intensified in the modern tendency of metaphysics to fasten on the principle of subjectivity. Thus Heidegger considered it as one of the most important tasks to engage in a "fundamental-ontology" in order to challenge this understanding of "being" as tied to "a being". Reawaking in us the necessity of rethinking this long-forgotten question was essentially connected for Heidegger with overcoming the dominance of technology and science. The criticism of modern civilisation therefore stands, according to Heidegger, in need of a critique of metaphysics. Heidegger's conception of an existential analytic of Dasein attempts to gain access to the question of being by starting from what is ontologically closest but therefore at the same time farthest away. Here too the point of his investigation is not primarily destruction but is a positive disclosure. In "Being and Time" Heidegger held that uncovering what obscures the question of being is also meant as something positive and in his book "What is philosophy?" it is said that "destruction means: open our ears to make us free for that which expresses itself to us in tradition as the being of beings." The real failure of metaphysics was in fact to have asked only the penultimate question, "what is 'a being'" (das Seiende). "Fundamental-ontology" seeks from within an analytic of Dasein — to raise once again the question of "being" as such. Only then, according to Heidegger, can we get the right approach to a destruction of metaphysics. In his late thought Heidegger talks not only of overcoming metaphysics but also of recovering from it. In "Being and time" Heidegger's concern was to indicate the ways in which metaphysics has approached the question of being. That is above all what brought into focus the problem of time for Heidegger: metaphysics thinks of "being" (Sein) as presence of what is present, and it is this way of thinking that, according to Heidegger, has to be replaced by a way of thinking that seeks to think from the "clearing of being". The problem of time can only be sketched here, but I want to empha-

size how important the relation between being and time seems to me for an appropriate understanding of Heidegger's critique of metaphysics. In his analytic of Dasein Heidegger attempted to take the first step towards the new program of disclosing the ground of the question of being. The metaphysical question is thereby assigned to the categories "objective presence" and "handiness" which are derived — so to say — from within the world and to which the "existentials" which are assigned to the being of human beings are opposed.¹ Since from a metaphysical point of view "man" is also conceived as something present among what is present, the question of being is blocked from being asked in the proper way.

As long as one remains on the level of objective temporality, "being" can only be thought in the sense of presence and thus within time. What Heidegger finally wanted to illuminate was that time "is", not in that sense just mentioned but that it "temporalises" and that this is in an essential relationship to the "ecstasis" of the "existentials" of human Dasein. What was most important for Heidegger within this temporality was the view of what will happen in the future and thus the end of this future, namely death. And also here, Heidegger leaves behind the metaphysical interpretation of death according to which death "is a separation of body and mind". It is here — by the way — that Heidegger comes closest to Wittgenstein even though Wittgenstein's rare remarks on that subject cannot be said to represent a systematic doctrine. In *Tractatus* 6. 4311 Wittgenstein says: "So too at death the world does not alter but comes to an end." This almost trivial thought, well known in philosophy since Epicurus, doesn't mean in the context of Wittgenstein's thinking that I can never experience death empirically — as *my* death. It means that death is a part of my form of life and therefore the limit of my life. Similarly Heidegger played down the understanding of death as an event that happens as something that we are empirically certain of in favor of an ontological understanding of death. Heidegger's "definition" of death: "Death, as the end of Dasein, is the ownmost nonrelational, certain and as such indefinit possibility of Dasein" (BaT, 239) shows that death cannot simply be conceived as the end of the Dasein of human beings but that this Dasein has to be understood as "being towards death". Death thereby shows itself to be the limit of all possibilities and the fundamental form of life, even though Heidegger always resisted using the term "life". In the possibility of anticipating one's own dying Heidegger

1 "Being-present, in' something which is likewise present, and being-present-along-with in the sense of a definite location-relationship [...] are ontological characteristics which we call categorical: they are of such a sort as to belong to beings whose kind of being is not of the character of Dasein." (M. Heidegger, *Being and time*)
 "Because Dasein's characters of being are defined in terms of existentiality we call them 'existentials'. These are to be sharply distinguished from what we call 'categories' — characteristics of being for beings whose character is not that of Dasein." (l. c.)

clearly saw the possibility of Dasein's ability to grasp itself as a whole. Something similar can be found in Wittgenstein. Death cannot be understood as event in life but only as the form of life as a whole, essentially because it is a phenomenon at the limit.

But Heidegger's conception of "freedom towards death" cannot be regarded as license to suicide any more than Wittgenstein's conception of suicide. The good, happy and harmonious life cannot be determined objective features but only by something within the sphere of will. It can be determined only by the attitude of the willing subject. This is why for Wittgenstein, as for Schopenhauer, committing suicide must be rejected — not because it represents negation but because it expresses the highest act of will. The true subject remains saved from death because as a temporal end it could only be a sort of punishment for the individualising of the empirical subject. Such a conception changes for Wittgenstein the perspective of finitude and time. In *Tractatus* 6. 4312 he says: "The solution of the riddle of life in space and time lies *outside* space and time." By that, he does not mean the common scheme of time and eternity derived from the metaphysical tradition, as if eternity were a negation of time, but something similar to what Heidegger thought: The importance of the present from which the structure of temporality has to be approached. Just as Heidegger tried to approach the ecstasis of temporality out of a dimension of the future, Wittgenstein — with his view that the world can only be perceived "sub specie aeternitatis" — chose a way that emphasised the "ecstasis" of temporality. Only for Wittgenstein this way of looking at it, this transformation remained inexpressible. Ethics and aesthetics, as Wittgenstein always stressed, cannot be *expressed* as views sub specie aeternitatis. He expressed that in his diary-notes as follows:

The work of art is the object seen sub specie aeternitatis; and the good life is the world seen sub specie aeternitatis. This is the connection between art and ethics. The usual way of looking at things sees objects as it were from the midst of them, the view sub specie aeternitatis from outside. In such a way that they have the whole world as background. (NB 7. 10. 1916)

Is it this perhaps — in this view the object is seen together with space and time instead of in space and time? (NB 7. 10. 1916)

But is it possible for one so to live that life stops being problematic? That one is living in eternity and not in time? (NB 6. 7. 1916)

2. Critique of Science and Technology

I have already indicated that for Heidegger the task of criticising science and technology is closely related to a critique of metaphysics because it is the

metaphysical way of looking at ourselves and our relation to the world that provides the bottom ground for the development of science and technology.

I want to remind you of Heidegger's provocative claim: "Science doesn't think." In a different place Heidegger also pointed out that our century in contrast to others has been characterised through a "barrierless dominance of manipulations" (*Machenschaften*) that expresses blindness and the forgetfulness of being. Heidegger holds that only by exposing the derivative character of the detached knowledge of science and technology, we can see the limits and dangers of the metaphysical account of "subjectivity". Thus it should be amply clear that Heidegger's point in his critical considerations upon science and technology intended to be more than a culture-critical analysis.

Ultimately this proves itself to Heidegger by the fact that metaphysics as basis of the domination of the world by technology and science, exercises at the same time dominance over us human beings. Metaphysics, understood here as a thinking of domination, fulfills itself in the fact that technology serves as an instrument do dominate us. Thus the essence of technology can in itself not be understood as something technical but metaphysical, i. e. as determinate way to think of "being" and "beings".

In his small text "The Task of Thinking" Heidegger explains: "The end of philosophy shows itself as the triumph of cybernetic institutions of a scientific-technological world and of its social order. The end of philosophy means the beginning of a world civilisation founded in Western European thought."

Technology for Heidegger is nothing external, not merely a skill, but a way of thinking about the relationship to "being", a way in which the relationship of man to "being" is disguised (*verstellt*). In his later thought Heidegger also calls this concealment of the relation towards being by technology the domination of "Gestell" ("inframing"). But we would misunderstand Heidegger if we assumed that by seeing through these occurrences mankind would be able to change the current situation because technology as an event in the history of being is not something that is at our disposal or simply a matter of free will. On the contrary. In his essay "The Question Concerning Technology" Heidegger stated: "Technology whose essence is being itself can never be dominated by man. That would mean that man himself is the master of being."

In other words: We are faced with an event, a happening, that cannot be undone. Here again Heidegger refers to the necessity that this happening fulfills itself. Fulfillment, so to say, completion of metaphysical thinking, means at the same time a turning away from the thinking of "being" and the total installation of a realm of human beings that are dominated by technology.

Not only the humanity of human beings but also the "thing-likeness" of things is dissolved, used as and brought under the domination of technology. In his late philosophy Heidegger does suggest the possibility of finding an

alternative to the "Gestell" and the inherent supremacy of technology by the structure of "fourfold" ("Geviert"), as entailing the divine and the mortal, sky and earth. But this all remains integrated in the mode of occurrences. The only alternative Heidegger offers is the hope for a contemplative thinking that does not act against technology but lets it be and fulfills itself in releasement (Gelassenheit).

I will refrain from interfering into the controversy whether this position should be called post-metaphysical or post-modern. But I do want to stress the fact that Heidegger's influence on post-modern thought is not open to doubt. So-called post-modern philosophers derive many of their basic concepts from his writings. Above all the Italian philosopher Giovanni Vattimo has developed Heidegger's thoughts further — in his concept of "weak thought". Here Heidegger appears as a thinker who considers the dissolution of an objective reality not as a loss but as a chance which must be acknowledged in order to reestablish contact with "being". It is this point of view that has influenced a whole generation of philosophers who together with Heidegger think of the "event of technology" as something that cannot be resisted but that has to be brought to an end in its whole eventfulness. Not crisis-management but "letting things be" in a mood of releasement (Gelassenheit) is the supreme possibility.

Wittgenstein holds a similar attitude against technology, civilisation, and science, but without declaring this an essential motivation for his development of thinking. And with Heidegger he differs from traditional philosophers in taking seriously the problem of our being in the world. In his late philosophy Wittgenstein seems to affirm that human beings' basis in the world, their "relation" to the world, is not that of knowing but of acknowledging. The pluralism of language-games and forms of life that Wittgenstein exposes in the "Philosophical Investigations" undermines a "hard" view of the world, of reality, that is related to logic and technology. But then we must admit that these are only marginal remarks.

All his life Wittgenstein remained sceptical against the idea of progress that has its sources in science and technology and while writing the *Tractatus* he never shared the Vienna Circle's euphoria for science. In "Culture and Value" he states: "It is for example not nonsensical to believe that the scientific and technical century is the beginning of the end of mankind [...]."

Wittgenstein's thought, especially in the period of the *Tractatus*, might give us the impression of being derived from an ideal of scientific method that carries within itself a kind of reductionism. But at the same time Wittgenstein repeatedly insisted that nothing important would be gained even if all scientific problems were to be solved. Because the real and true problems would remain unaffected.

3. *The rendering silent of ethics*

From what has been said so far emerges that both Heidegger and Wittgenstein not only refrained from working out an ethical theory but also distrusted systematic treatments of ethics.

a) Wittgenstein

Wittgenstein excluded systematic considerations of this topic from his philosophical writings and rarely said anything about this subject in his lectures in Cambridge. But it is well known that Wittgenstein struggled all his life with ethical questions, and one cannot fail to recognise that he held strong moral convictions. From passages in his writings, including the typescript of a paper he read to the Cambridge Society in 1929, the so-called "Lecture on Ethics", it is clear enough that he considered the nature of ethics a very important subject. Strangely enough it seems to be just this "general importance" that made Wittgenstein reluctant to formulate "ethical proposition" and to think of them as inexpressible. So he says in *Tractatus* 6. 4 "All propositions are of equal value" and in consequence in 6. 42 "So too it is impossible for there to be propositions of ethics. Propositions can express nothing that is higher." What Wittgenstein calls the "higher" are all areas of value which like the logical structure of language cannot be said.

Thus for Wittgenstein ethics is ineffable, and, as he tells us in the "Lecture on Ethics" "if it is anything at all, [it] is supernatural and our words will only express facts; as a teacup will only hold a teacupful of water even if I were to pour out a gallon over it."

Ethics is regarded as something transcendental. It "cannot be put into words" (TLP 6.421) because it is something that is not within the world but can only be placed outside and beyond the world. Therefore he also says in the "Lecture on Ethics" that "a book on ethics which was really a book on ethics" cannot really be imagined. Since such an undertaking clearly could not be understood as scientific or as stating mere facts — as an attempt to say something which is outside the realm of facts it would "with an explosion destroy all other books in the world".

Nevertheless Wittgenstein maintained in a letter to Ludwig von Ficker (10. 11. 1919)

The book's point is an ethical one. I once meant to include in the preface a sentence which is not in fact there now but which I will write out for you here because it will perhaps be a key to the work for you. What I meant to write, then, was this: My work consists of two parts: the one presented here plus all I have not written. And it is precisely this second part that is the important one. My book draws limits to the sphere of the ethical from the

inside, as it were, and I am convinced that this is the only rigorous way of drawing those limits. In short, I believe that where many others today are just gassing I have managed to put everything firmly into place by being silent about it.

Already in the wartime-manuscripts from which Wittgenstein extracted the *Tractatus* reflections on the problem of the ethical, about good and bad, the purpose of life, God and the nature of man, repeatedly occur. And it has been confirmed in the meantime through many documents that Wittgenstein not only showed himself affected by moral issues but also expressed the desire for purity, perfection and improving his life while continuing to suffer from feelings of guilt and self-doubts. And his special liking for Dostojewski and Tolstoi can doubtless be seen to have its sources in his ethical interests. In his diary he notes at the 26. 7. 1914 the following: "leading a good life and purifying myself".

This personal desire for purity and cleansing can also be seen in his attempts to clarify the structure of our language. This idea seems to have served for Wittgenstein as general orientation. His biographer Brian McGuinness writes "that there exists a connection between both, that the understanding of the essence of sentences or the concept of operation hangs together somehow with the right attitude in life".² This remark by McGuinness is very important insofar as it reveals the inner connections between the critique of language and ethical requirements.

Wittgenstein repeatedly emphasised that logic and ethics present something that is not about this world, but are only directed towards the preconditions of the world. There is another note in his diary at the 24. 7. 1916: "Ethics does not treat of facts within the world. Ethics must be a condition of the world, like logic."

"Leading a good life" which Wittgenstein was longing for and kept mentioning in the context of thinking about the aim of ethics can be regarded as one of the traditional aims and tasks of ethics. Aristotle's definition of ethics as philosophy of human beings draws our attention to the point that what is of primary importance is not to know what "good" or "the Good" means but to become a good human being. That is the point or goal of ethical thought. It is just this longing for a good life that, according to Wittgenstein, is essential to ethics. That is what accounts for his separation of ethics as a precondition of the world from the world as something that is the case.

For Wittgenstein the point of ethics is not that our conduct in the world is to be seen as justified or not. And his interests as far as ethics is concerned do not lie either in the special reasons people offer as justifications for their

2 Brian McGuinness, *Wittgensteins frühe Jahre*, Frankfurt, 1988, 191

actions. For the Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus* ethics is the “whole” and is thereby located beyond the boundaries of our world. Since the form of the world can only be shown by the form of the proposition it seems that in the world as Wittgenstein describes it, everything is the way it is accidentally. (TLP 6.41: “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.”) Thus *in* such a world there are no values, no Good, or Bad, nothing higher or God, because nothing is within the world in an absolute sense.

This explains why Wittgenstein connects questions of ethics with questions of life or death and even with God. Since the “basic experience of the mystical”, a view of the world *sub specie aeternitatis*, which at the same time also represents a view of the world as a limited whole, also makes sense, death or God break or are revealed open. It is no longer surprising that the point of these questions is after all what could be called the eternal aim of metaphysics. Wittgenstein emphasised this in his diaries in a special way. In a especially illuminating diary-note of the 11th June 1916 he says:

I know that this world exists.
 That I am placed in it like my eye in its visual field.
 That something about it is problematic which we call its meaning.
 That this meaning does not lie in it but outside it.
 That life is the world.
 That my will penetrates the world.
 That my will is good or evil.
 Therefore that good and evil are somehow connected with the meaning of the world.
 To pray is to think about the meaning of life.

There is a very significant report of a conversation with Friedrich Waismann (17. 12. 1930):

Schlick says that in theological ethics there used to be two conceptions of the essence of the good: according to the shallower interpretation the good is good because it is what God wants. According to the profounder interpretation God wants the good because it is good. I think that the first interpretation is the profounder one: what God commands is good. For it cuts off the way to any explanation “why” it is good, while the second interpretation is the shallow, rationalist, one which proceeds ‘as if you could give reasons for what is good. The first conception says clearly that the essence of the good has nothing to do with facts and hence cannot be explained by any proposition. If there is any proposition expressing precisely what I think it is the proposition “What God commands, that is good”.

Wittgenstein’s concept of God is therefore a long way from any philosophical conception of God and also far away from any positive or negative theology. It offers almost an existential dimension. So he emphasises in “Culture and Value” that all philosophy about Christianity and its truth has been

false so far. In the face of all these considerations one nevertheless should not forget that Wittgenstein always showed great scepticism about the pure execution of faith.

What is important in this context is his connecting God and Ethics with respect to what can be said. In the "Lecture on Ethics" Wittgenstein appealed to the fact that the "running against the limits of language", against the "cage" within we are caught, as is done in ethics, metaphysics or religion, is "perfectly, absolutely hopeless". But it seems to be a necessary or natural inclination of human beings. Thus Wittgenstein emphasised at the end of the "Lecture on Ethics" that however hopeless this "running against the limits of language" might be, it does not deserve to be regarded with derision:

Ethics, so far as it springs from the desire to say something about the ultimate meaning of life, the absolute good, the absolute valuable, cannot be a science. What it says does not add to our knowledge in any sense. But it 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.

The final experience is that of dependency on what cannot be influenced by our will, for which Wittgenstein used the picture of believing in God. So he wrote in his diary on the 8th of July 1916:

To believe in God means to understand the question of the meaning of life.
 To believe in God means to see that the facts of the world are not the end of matter.
 To believe in God means to see that life has a meaning.

This did not change in Wittgenstein's late philosophy. There remains no place there for "ethics". Wittgenstein repeatedly draws our attention to the fact that a language game never gives a final explanation but only puts us in a position from where we can no longer question our ways of acting, our form of life.

b) Heidegger on Ethics

It was in his "Letter on Humanism" that Heidegger tried to raise the question of ethics from another point of view. Heidegger's response to the question of ethics there represents an attempt to integrate considerations about the relationship between thinking and acting into his account of thinking and "being". The "primacy of being" expels for Heidegger any question of the ought and any question of values, and thus raises them up onto a level which comes very close to Wittgenstein's reasoning for a distinction between the world of facts and what goes beyond these facts. It becomes evident that Heidegger in carrying out the question of how the relationship of human beings to "being" has to be perceived, wants to understand ethics and ethos in a more original

and fundamental way. This also circumspans his interpretation of the word "ethos" as becomes place of our dwelling. In doing so a fundamental feature of the relationship towards "being" becomes visible: it is true that Heidegger admits that the desire for ethics in regard to the pressing problems caused by scientific and technological progress is without any question understandable. But nevertheless it cannot offer anything more than a "provisional moral" which, according to Heidegger, would only help to preserve the current situation. Even if there were to be found a series of misunderstandings concerning terms like authenticity, care, resoluteness, guilt, in "Being and Time" it should at least be clear that Heidegger meant to have understood all these concepts in a strict ontological way and so decided — similar as Wittgenstein did — to achieve a strict distinction between ontology and ethics, i. e. moral. It might sound almost inappropriate to equate Heidegger's view of the primacy of "being" and of thinking as directed towards being with Wittgenstein's view of ethics as world-transcending. But especially Heidegger's strict and almost polemic reluctance to say anything about the problem of values leads into a different direction of interpretation. It is well known that Heidegger marked in the "Letter on Humanism" the value-thinking as "greatest blasphemy" against "being" that can be thought of. Heidegger rejected the assumption of something good which would in the metaphysical sense be "beyond" "being" as determining authority. The calculating thinking — that finally arises out of the metaphysics of subjectivity that declares man to be the master of the earth and "beings" objects of his use (*Vernutzung*) — is the one to that Heidegger opposes his "contemplative thinking".

At the same time Heidegger draws our attention to the fact that a thinking that reaches the truth of "being" can itself be regarded as originary ethics. Heidegger refers here to the original meaning of the word "ethos" as place of dwelling. And this leads in consequence to the distinction between "Gestell" and "Geviert", whereby the word-construction "Geviert" hints at the possibility of dwelling for human mankind. The pressing question "What should we do?" is resituated as to what for Heidegger represents the more fundamental question, namely "How do we have to think?" In order to grasp the significance of the prevailing situation Heidegger outlined the essence of science and technology as "Gestell" that determines the special relationship between man and "being" as one of mutual "setting". As a sort of countermodel to "Gestell" he refers to the concept of "Geviert" as a different mode of the approach of "being". "Geviert" is presented by Heidegger as a place where human beings as mortals reside in the neighborhood to the divine, to earth and to sky. Heidegger also points out here that the construction of anthropocentric ethics that supports the idea of man as a measure of things is inadequate. But Heidegger's concept of releasement (*Gelassenheit*) and the famous sentence from his last interview in the German magazine "Spiegel" in 1966 actually seems to

express a certain fatalism or even derision towards our desire for orientation. To the interviewer's question "What should we do in face of the current world-situation?" Heidegger answered "Nothing at all, only wait", and his reply to the question of possibilities to overcome this situation was: "Only a God can save us." Nonetheless one has to keep in mind that Heidegger at least leaves open the possibility of constructing a new and original ethics. This doesn't release us from exposing necessary criticism to Heidegger's answers as well as to Wittgenstein's. And one has already very early raised the accusation that these points of view are characterised by decisionism, indifference and excessive subjectivity.

The view that philosophy doesn't consist in offering anything that satisfies our desire to know how we should act seems indeed to lead into complete subjectivism. It seems that it would be up only to the individual to decide what should be done and how to justify her actions. So at first glance both Heidegger and Wittgenstein seem to be defenceless against the accusation of decisionism. The debate on the relationship between philosophy and politics which mainly focussed on Heidegger's political involvement in 1933 in the nationalsocialism showed that philosophical reflection cannot be separated from political conditions. Whether Heidegger's philosophy, however, can be judged as one which serves in general totalitarian regimes is still a question which has not been answered yet. It is the idea of what philosophy is supposed to consist in — i. e. the scepticism about the possibility to express a systematic account of ethics that leaves us without the possibility to formulate our criticism on a basis of theoretical agreement and that leads in consequence to "accepting" — from a practical point of view — political decisions. Freeing Dasein from its determination by the presence, and laying open Dasein's approach to "being" cannot count as satisfactory answer. And neither can Wittgenstein's view according to which the realm of ethics is ineffable: "Wherever two principles really do meet which cannot be reconciled with one another, then each man declares the other to be a fool and heretic." (On Certainty, 611)

But even if it is true that one has to be careful about requiring general instructions and advice, it seems necessary to ask whether Wittgenstein's and Heidegger's position of keeping silent about this subject is more than a mere consequence of postmetaphysical thinking. Certainly, one can emphasise that in Heidegger's fundamental-ontology there lies the ground for an ethical account which raises the question for the essence of acting in a different way. Equally, one can regard in Wittgenstein's account of language-games and "forms of life" the beginning of a new practical philosophy. Nevertheless it remains evident that it is impossible for both to rejoin ethics with metaphysics.

Even Wittgenstein's late philosophy doesn't change much with regard to the strict separation between what can be said from what can only be shown, between the world of facts and what goes beyond this world. The picture theory of the *Tractatus* as well as the concept of language-games in the *Philosophical Investigations* demonstrate Wittgenstein's view that philosophy has to respect limits in which its activity alone can be said to remain meaningful. Wittgenstein's remarks on language-games and forms of life show clearly that he thought of these as something given which has to be accepted. "What has to be accepted, the given is — so one could say — forms of life." (PI II, p. 572) Thus we should just accept and not try to explain the language-games we find, because they are as features of life susceptible to explanation and further questioning. The view that we have acknowledge and to resist to explain human forms of life seems to correspond with Heidegger's account of thinking of being. For Heidegger too nothing is deducible so as to give or acting its justification and all we can do is "wait".

Heidegger's insistence on a contemplative thinking and Wittgenstein's pointing out that ethics can be seen as fundamental ground of philosophy both repudiate the dominance of an ideal of rationality in the realm of ethics. Even though one should not go too far in constructing identities or similarities between Heidegger and Wittgenstein and erase their specific approaches to what is, it is undeniable that their positions meet in this elementary point. There can be no doubt that the *Tractatus* is committed to the fundamental questions of metaphysics in as much as it attempts to keep a distance to them. And there can also be no doubt that it is only in his account of language-games that Wittgenstein is able to detach himself from a metaphysical-logical basis. The same can be said of Heidegger's fundamental-ontology: Namely that it is only in Heidegger's late philosophy that he initiates a decisive overcoming of metaphysics. We can therefore by no means be mistaken in ascertaining a path of thought or at least an ascent that leads far beyond all so-called post-modern positions in circulation nowadays.

The inclusion of ethics into the tacit proceeding of the individual's life is in any case an alternative to popular tendencies in philosophy. This insight, however, cannot relieve us from the challenge that Heidegger's statement of "Questioning as a piety of thinking" and Wittgenstein's dictum "No transcendental prattle when everything is as clear as a box on the ears!" bestow upon us.