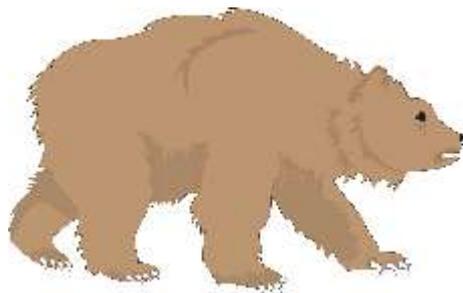


Ursus Philosophicus

Essays dedicated to Björn Haglund on his sixtieth birthday



“...darüber muß man schweigen”

Mats Furberg

Abstract

Why does Wittgenstein hold in his first book that there are, or even must be, unsayables that nevertheless are possible to point to? And why is ethics ineffable? Several interpretations are given and rejected. The upshot is that the logical atomism set forth in the first five tenets of the book isn't a necessary condition of the unsayability thesis.

Wittgenstein seems to think that his ethics is tied to the idea of shifts of aspect, illustrated by the Necker cube. That shift is phenomenological and the phenomenology is “physicalistic”. I argue that in his considerations the cube has to enter in an uninterpreted form, as part of two brute facts. Is their logical *Bild* a thought (3) and a thought “der sinnvolle Satz” (4)?

In a letter to a possible publisher of *Logisch-Philosophische Abhandlung*,¹ hence-forward *LPA*, Wittgenstein famously wrote,²

mein Werk bestehe aus zwei Teilen: aus dem, was hier vorliegt, und aus alledem, was ich *nicht* geschrieben habe. Und gerade dieser zweiten Teil ist der Wichtige. Es wird nämlich das Ethische durch mein Buch gleichsam von Innen her begrenzt; und ich bin überzeugt, daß es, *streng, nur*³ so zu begrenzen ist. Kurz, ich glaube: Alles das, was viele heute *schwefeln*, habe ich in meinem Buch festgelegt, in dem ich darüber schweige.

¹ G.E. Moore suggested the title *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* for the English translation. The allusions to Spinoza and obliquely to Moore's *Principia Ethica* suited Wittgenstein's taste.

² Wittgenstein: *Briefe an Ludwig von Ficker*, p. 35.

³ Two underlinings.

If Wittgenstein didn't have his tongue in his cheek, it's bizarre to claim with Russell that his "attitude to this [the mystical, *alias* the unsayable, *alias* das Ethische] grows naturally out of his doctrine in pure logic"⁴. The major part of the book is, no doubt correctly, read as a succinct presentation of logical atomism. But in what sense do the propositions 1 - 6.373 prepare a hot-bed for *das Ethische*? In no sense at all, or so it seems to me.

Wittgenstein wrote the shocking lines to a possible publisher when *LPA* was only a manuscript. He had ample time to cut it into two, one on logical atomism, another in praise of silence. He insisted on joining them. The gigantic disproportion of space – roughly nine pages to "ethics" (according to him the most important part of his work!) and one hundred and thirty-six to the rest – may have pleased him as a sort of graphic illustration of how little that can usefully be said about the important things in life.

1. On sigetics⁵

The silence *LPA* ends up in is not, or not just, a disbelief in the power and efficacy of words. There is nothing sensational in the observation that our spoken language is interfoliated with tones of voice, gestures, and different ways of pointing – interfoliations that can't be removed without damage to the intelligibility of what we say. They have little to do with the final silence of *LPA*.

More to the point are reminders of a variety of topics that, we "feel", can't profitably be spoken or written about without a dash of elements that are not linguistic but at most paralinguistic like gestures and glances. Such topics are for example love and hate and the meaning of life and of death. Presumably most adults share some pertinent experiences, but it is far from clear that you and I take them in the same way. Speaking on such topics we find our words next to empty; they don't catch what we want. Our acquaintance with *das Ethische* is hard-won and may have to be extracted from what we "can't bear" to think

⁴ Bertrand Russell in his Introduction to the first English translation of *LPA*, p xx. He writes "the mystical" but fairly obviously intends what Wittgenstein himself calls *das Unaussprechliches*.

⁵ I borrow the term from Heidegger. Its root is the Greek *sige*, silence.

about. The “unbearability” – which we do bear – gives the experiences a phenomenological but sometimes spurious character of depth.

Still more to the point is that when we try to think and speak of these difficult and embarrassing things we often find ourselves doing so in metaphors. We seem unable to get rid of that rhetorical figure, perhaps for the simple reason that the realm of possibilities and impossibilities goes beyond the realm of facts. We are as it were forced to think and speak of certain realms in ways a radical empiricist rejects.⁶ The new non-empiricist or trans-empiricist ways of thinking and speaking appear to need metaphors, not very surprising if empiricists are right in holding that our basic vocabulary from childhood on is confined to the realm of “facts”, though with notorious exceptions as e.g. ‘not’. Metaphors often start in common perception and land in things we don’t set our eyes on.

Good metaphors “transcend themselves” in the sense that they suggest something they don’t say. Better: they show “between the lines” something unsaid “on the lines”, something that perhaps can’t be said. The lines with the words are, however, necessary to make the between-the-lines come about.⁷ This transcendence is connected with silence only in the minimal sense that somebody who isn’t perplexed by the words on the line isn’t likely to dig for a metaphor.

Good metaphors not only “transcend themselves”. They are also irreducible⁸: no non-metaphorical expression can replace them. “The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want” doesn’t say that the lyrical subject is a sheep, turned out to fresh grass. Attempts at literal translations fail. Deal with the rest of Psalm 23 in the same literal vein, and you are unlikely to understand how its six verses manage to bring consolation to generations of believers. You fail to understand because you pay attention only to what is said on the

⁶ Are there empiricists radical enough to do away with the notions of *possibility* and *impossibility*? Hume notoriously failed.

⁷ Consider *LPA* on the waxing and waning of the world in 6.43 or on death in 6.431 and 6.4311.

⁸ ‘Absolutely?’ A lack of ins-and-betweens would be surprising. The noun ‘meaning’ is fairly often one of degree: A has more meaning or sense than B. The Bible has been translated into innumerable languages, sometimes with a considerable loss of meaning. New translations are accused of being poorer than the older ones. The poverty is often that they sound as trite as the old ones did before their words had gone archaic. Compare “Yea, though I walk through the shadow of death, I will fear no evil” to “Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil”.

lines. You miss that the psalm expresses and moulds what trusting in God is like, an expression and a moulding remotely understandable also to us unbelievers.

I'm inclined to think that metaphors proper are interplays between what is said on the lines and what is shown but not said, interplays that don't come about unless the "receiver" rebounds from the naked literal meaning and successfully casts about for a supplement deeper down.⁹ We may now be at the silence of *LPA* 7, an irreducible silence that not even other metaphors catch. Such a metaphor is "ineffable"; and towards ineffability Wittgenstein's first book steers. The distance to logical atomism is immense, even to the *LPA* form of logical atomism.

1 - 6.37 stay deliberately with sayables. The remaining propositions go beyond them. Foremost are those of "das Ethische", being not merely transcendent but transcendental. I hope to bring out why Wittgenstinian ethics can't be spoken of, though it can be communicated by keeping silent as to what it is *about*.

2. Language pessimism?

Wittgenstein summarizes his message thus: "Was sich überhaupt sagen läßt, läßt sich klar sagen; und wovon man nicht reden kann, darüber muß man schweigen". Proposition 7 ends a work the truth of which is "unantastbar und definitiv". He adds, "Ich bin [...] der Meinung, die Probleme im Wesentlichen endgültig gelöst zu haben" (p 4). Not *some* problems but *all* are solved – in principle. Sayables are trifles; yet a thought, when expressed [ausgedrückt], is better "[je] mehr der Nagel auf den Kopf getroffen ist" (p. 3f).

With fellow-country men as von Hoffmansthal and Karl Kraus he holds that attempts to *speak* of important things are in vain. An idea in Toulmin's contribution to *Wittgenstein's Vienna* (pp 132 -150) is that this "pessimism" is partly explicable by the alleged fact that in Kakania [Poo-poo Land], i.e., Austria before the First World War,¹⁰ the language of morals was too corrupt to permit serious discussions of matters of value.

⁹ The abundance of metaphors in this explanation may bear witness to the insufficiency of literalness. My belief is that "literal meaning" is a distillation of less distinct *sinnvollnesses* and in that sense artificial.

¹⁰ Cf Robert Musil's *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, Pt.I, Ch. 8.

Is this causal and to my mind unconvincing¹¹ explanation a reason to despair of our capacity to talk about serious matters? Only if Kakania is everywhere and all chats and discussions are Kakanian – which would take the sting out of the satire. Can't a so-called pessimist see and recognize that belles-lettres sometimes bring about an understanding deeper than any brought about by other wordings? Can't he think that different art-genres are engaged in something essentially communicative but “beyond” words?

When working on *LPA*, Wittgenstein received a letter from Paul Engelmann with a poem by the Romanticist Ludwig Uhland. He answers¹² that the poem is great and goes on,

Wenn man sich nicht bemüht das Unaussprechliche auszusprechen, so geht *nichts* verloren. Sondern das Unaussprechliche ist – unaussprechlich – in dem Ausgesprochenen *enthalten!*

The idea was a common-place in German literary tradition, in the form that unsayables are *transcendent*. But the letter to Engelmann suggests that some unsayables are *immanent*. The poem's words are in their surroundings filled with new meaning, perhaps in the vein of Gricean implicature, or perhaps with music, a suggestion which would take this essay too far afield. This is vague but hardly mystic. How foreign it was to Cambridge of the 1920ies can be gauged from Russell's introduction and from Ramsey's nasty but silly aphorism that what can't be said can't be whistled either.¹³

3. Speaking, writing, schweigen...

The language of *LPA* is written. *Philosophische Untersuchungen* (from now on *PU*) is closer to spoken language, and its examples are usually fragments of situated oral dialogues. *LPA* is what it gives itself out to be, an *Abhandlung* (dissertation). *PU* works in other genres, for instance that of confession, appealing to its listeners to examine them-

¹¹ Unconvincing because it neglects that any language of morals has, *qua* moral, an irrevocably illocutionary dimension.

¹² Paul Engelmann: *Letters from Ludwig Wittgenstein with a Memoir*, p.6.

¹³ Wittgenstein was known as a virtuoso whistler.

selves and try to find out how and why they agree or disagree with *PU*. *LPA* sets a distance to its reader; but the readers of *PU* participate in a discussion with the author.

The contrast is exaggerated. The silence *LPA* ends in is, I think, best thought of as the silence in a concert hall after the last chord, a silence for reflection more perceptible in speech than in language. The *dicta* are aphoristic and, as aphoristic, decontextualised to a degree *PU* never approaches. *LPA* is aggressive and declarative. *PU* is less than peaceful. It doesn't, however, bully its readers but attempts to open their eyes to insidious assumptions that most of us share. It harbours a hope that the eye-opener will make *us* sit up and do away, all on our own, with weak and confused assumptions and arguments. An aggressive stance would counteract the self-consideration Wittgenstein now wants to foster. This is a respect in which silence may be more effective than words.

Such a reading of *LPA 7* would hardly do for the young Wittgenstein. His "muß schweigen" is stronger than 'had better keep quiet'. The modal "muß"-sentence isn't a piece of advice, nor a droll way of saying 'There! And that's the end of it!' The silence is a part of the book in the sense that if you read it without hearing its last sentence reverberating in your ears and in your mind you miss an important part of the book.¹⁴ It is not, like a full stop, a non-extended limit of the sentence it puts a stop to; it goes *inside* the sentence.

"... darüber muß man schweigen" is not quite "thereof one must be silent" nor quite "... we must consign to silence". There seems to be no good one-word English equivalent to 'schweigen' signifying an action. When we *schweigen* we act, combatting our inclination to speak.¹⁵ In the same way as it makes doubtful sense to say that you speak or write (full stop), it makes doubtful sense to say 'Du schweigst' (full stop). There has to be something, often merely presupposed, to *schweigen von* or *über*. Paradoxically, *schweigen* is a speech-act, concerned both with doings and with speech.

What do you keep mum *von* or *über*? It isn't laid down. What we *schweigen* about is got out of the silence, with the important qualification that you, the *Schweiger*, are taken to be the arbiter: *you* decide what interpretation is the right one. The assumption seems to be

¹⁴ So far as I can see we can't avoid the rhetorical figure called oxymoron (with 'clever fool' as a paradigm).

¹⁵ An exaggeration but counteracting the passivity of 'being silent' and, to less extent, of 'keeping silent'.

that a silence is an act of keeping a secret from unauthorized persons, a secret you are in a privileged position to know.

4. ... and meaning

What is right with *LPA*, I guess the author of *PU* would say, is the attention it pays to silence and, possibly with Plato, to silent demonstrations changing the meaning of what is demonstrated. Wittgenstein's late philosophy shows next to no tendency to take meaning for granted, a something we just grasp or fail to grasp. It becomes more and more like a living thing, growing and decaying in ways none of us can do much about individually, although we as a collective can and do much about it. By fits and starts, meaning also ceases to be something we *have* and turns into something we *do*. From a noun, 'meaning' is on its Gricean way to the present participle of the verb 'mean'.

An ideal language has settled meanings, a distressing plural of a distressing noun. A living language is ever changing, mostly so slowly that we see its alterations only in a long retrospect. New meanings grow out of old ones. The growth metaphor points to a collective process, foreign to protagonists of ideal languages, impervious to improvement and reform as well as to deterioration and degeneration. Daily life is full of unexpected circumstances demanding our attention. We can and do deal with them in our woolly vernacular but would have been helpless had we spoken only an *ideal* language, precise and unambiguous. The world being what it is, we would most of the time be speechless but not dumb¹⁶. We would have the gift of speech but seldom an opportunity to use it, for empirical phenomena are usually blurry, ambiguous, without sharp definitions.¹⁷

Even if I invented new words whenever a new type of phenomena cropped up, they would be of little avail until the people I spoke with caught the new-fangled meaning. How often do you understand *exactly* what I say and *vice versa*? How often do we understand *exactly* what we ourselves mean? If a misunderstanding crops up, *must* there be something

¹⁶ The criticism recurs in *PU*. It picks out another strand of thought than the one leading up to the impossibility of a private language.

¹⁷ Suggestions of ideal languages often presuppose a sharp distinction between language and world – here the labels, there the objects to glue them to. When the parable is abandoned, the charm of ideal languages starts fading away.

we miss, a something escaping us? Can't the truth be that there is *as yet* nothing to understand linguistically? Meaning and understanding, countable¹⁸ nominalizations of verbs, seem made for each other. Their "mechanism" (the *-ing* form of *verbs*), is for collective use and collective assessment. New words for new phenomena are foggy, inpalpable, undisciplined. The implicatures of such words and sentences are even less docile. A perfect language cutting up what we empirically perceive into atoms of meaning, thus making our perceived world clearer – such a language is a pipe-dream.

5. "Laß uns menschlich sein"¹⁹

LPA doesn't even flirt with perfect languages²⁰ – that's why Wittgenstein got furious and disappointed with Russell's introduction. A letter in May 1920 says,

Deine Einleitung wird nicht gedruckt and infolgedessen wahrscheinlich auch mein Buch nicht. – Als ich nämlich die deutsche Übersetzung der Einleitung vor mir hatte, da konnte ich mich doch nicht entschließen sie mit meiner Arbeit drucken zu lassen. Die Feinheit Deines englischen Stils war nämlich in der Übersetzung – selbverständlich – verloren gegangen und was übrig blieb war Oberflächlichkeit und Mißverständnis.²¹

Misunderstanding is the obverse of understanding; you can't have the one without an inkling of the other. As little as there is a plural to 'meaning', as little is there a plural to 'understanding' and 'misunderstanding'. This "linguistic" turn of philosophical issues took a long time in coming. With the benefit of hindsight we can, however, find its embryo already in *LPA* though seen through a glass, darkly. Let's take three examples.

¹⁸ A common noun is countable if it (a) has a plural, (b) in the singular allows the indefinite article, and (c) can be preceded by words as 'every', 'each', 'either'. To say that meaning and understanding are countable is to say that it makes sense to speak of (say) two meanings and three understandings.

¹⁹ *Vermischte Bemerkungen*, revised edition, p 36.

²⁰ 'If its first part expounds logical atomism, it expounds a perfect language, doesn't it?' Yes, as long as it stays with mathematics and logic. But are mathematics and logic languages in their own right? Are they more than regimentations of parts of a living language?

²¹ *Letters to Russell, Keynes and Moore*, p 87.

(i) The letter to Russell doesn't support a communicative pessimism. Poetry communicates between the lines but can't initially dispense with the lines. Later on it can leave them behind but in the beginning it needs them to get off the ground. To my mind this is optimism, a belief in the possibilities of spoken or written language to get across – but not a belief that the possibilities are used or, if used, are reducible to sentences. We take or fail to take care of words, a remark less about language than about us language-users.

Suppose Wittgenstein took Uhland's poem as immanent *and* transcendent, the words on the lines helping us to see words between the lines²², see them and start working up a whole of speech and language. A “good Gestalt” combines situation, immanence, and transcendence, where immanence precedes transcendence. Wittgenstein may have tried to make the text of *LPA* carry a cargo impossible to word²³ but intelligible enough. *Prima facie*, the attempt isn't self-stultifying, whatever we may think of its plausibility.

(ii) I don't hear much regret in “Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muß man schweigen”. It is more a fanfare to a philosophically neglected phenomenon, that of silence, and to a philosophically neglected art, that of keeping quiet.²⁴

What can't be said or written is by no means necessarily unthinkable. If it were, *LPA* would have failed. For its aim is, according to p 2 of the preface,

dem Denken eine Grenze ziehen, oder vielmehr – nicht dem Denken, sondern dem Ausdruck der Gedanken: Denn um dem Denken eine Grenze zu ziehen, müßten wir beide Seiten dieser Grenzen denken können (wir müßten also denken können, was sich nicht denken läßt).²⁵

The project of setting a limit to thought is, in the few words within the parentheses, rejected as absurd. It is replaced by a wish to set a limit to “the expression of the thought”. Exchange the definite singular articles with indefinite plural ones, and you have a leitmotif

²² The poem gives no good example of the importance of silence, e.g. in the form of pauses, a phenomenon of which Wittgenstein the music-lover must have been well aware. Cf Ch 3 of my *Den första stenen*.

²³ Where ‘word’ is a *verb*.

²⁴ ‘Neglected by whom? By Heidegger the sigetic?’ Philosophy is often parochial.

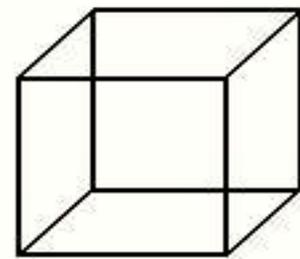
²⁵ Dr Frank Lorentzon has suggested to me that Wittgenstein (who was obviously influenced by Kant) uses ‘Grenze’ as an opposite to ‘Schranke’. This may well be so, but at present I can't make much of the difference.

of *PU* and a possible explanation of Wittgenstein's wish to have his two books published in the same volume – an illustration of the tenet that small differences may cause big philosophical mutations.

(iii) Hintikka & Hintikka claim that Wittgenstein abruptly switched from “phenomenological language” to “everyday physicalist language” (*Investigating Wittgenstein*, p 168) in October 1928 (p 138), many years after *LPA*. I agree that *LPA* is phenomenological and non-Husserlian. But its phenomenology is “physicalistic”. A wish to think up a limit to thought is inconsistent. A wish to *show* what we can't say is not. That's a lesson of 5.5423 on the Necker cube.

6. The Necker cube

The Necker cube can be seen in two ways²⁶. We can tell each other how to turn from one aspect to the other, but the instruction can't replace the picture. You can help me to see differences, for we live in the same world and see much of each other.²⁷ But you can't describe or draw a picture of one of the aspects which isn't true also of the other.



The Necker cube

Pointing isn't saying, nor is saying pointing. A (shallow) reason why we can't always say what we think is that we often think *referringly*, the thought including an act of physicalist or mental gesturing towards something. In such acts I don't watch myself pointing, not in the way I see you point with your hand or your glance. Nevertheless I am apperceptively aware of myself and my act of reference. I believe that much thinking can't be moral without a good measure of referentiality.²⁸

²⁶ Wittgenstein holds that “wahrnehmen, daß sich seine [the cube's] Bestandteile so und so zu einander verhalten” is seeing a *fact*: to see a black cross on a white bottom is to see another fact than that of a white cross on a black bottom. The author of *LPA* is, indeed, a phenomenologist with a physicalist background.

²⁷ The cube's surroundings are disregarded. So do also Gestalt psychologists.

²⁸ To insist on this indexical aspect of moral thinking is to stir up a hornets' nest. At least from Kant universality or, as a minimum, universalizability has been considered a necessary condition of morality.

We may show what we can't say. *Being* silent is a state. *Keeping* silent is an action. So is showing and displaying what we keep silent of. Referring actions are less *signs* of thinking than themselves pieces of thinking. Such thoughts enter most ponderings, however commonplace. They don't enter all by themselves. An agent guides them.

Keeping silent is an action, taking an agent. *Being* tongue-tied is a state with no conceptual link to agents. A stutterer stays a stutterer even when he doesn't stutter. As we normally think of being tongue-tied, a person who starts speaking fluently is no longer tongue-tied even if he later on relapses. This asymmetry between agential and "static" concepts is employed in Biblical accounts of the wonders Jesus worked – see for instance Mark 7:32 – 36.

The last word of *LPA* is *schweigen*. There is more to *keeping* mum than not talking. It is the *act* and sometimes the *art* of not talking. The author doesn't just perform an act of being (actively) silent; he is silent *about* [über] something, X. However loquacious, he keeps his oath of silence as long as he says nothing about X. In everyday life he hasn't taken an oath to keep quiet, but the language of oaths makes a telling gesture to the quality and even standard [*Gehalt*] of his silence.

7. Encircling ethics

According to the Ficker letter, *LPA* is essentially ethical. 6.421 and 6.432 broaden "ethisch" to include aesthetic and religious phenomena. Even so, only a few pages are ethical in this broad sense. What Wittgenstein thinks sayable, as opposed to showable, of²⁹ broad ethics is squeezed in between 6.3 and 7 and is fairly free from a *language* of ethics, in Hare's and also Nowell-Smith's sense.

6 - 6.24, i.e., right up to 7, attempt to show, first, that a good number of propositions that *prima facie* don't touch ethics are bogus; secondly, that no genuine proposition is ethical in Wittgenstein's sense; and, thirdly, that *Scheinsätze* (pseudo-propositions) may be in good working order but have no truth-value. 6 and its subordinate propositions 6.001 – 6.54 form a threshold between "alles was der Fall ist" on the one hand and, on the other

²⁹ Or in. The distinction between Wittgenstein's ethics and metaethics is not a sharp one.

hand, everything valuable. “Die allgemeine Form der Wahrheitsfunktion” is given in 6. It is “die allgemeine Form des Satzes”³⁰, were the *Sätze* as both truth-functional and fact-stating.

6.1 deals with propositions of logic, claiming that they are tautologies or contradictions and therefore say nothing. The message of 6.2 is that mathematics is a logical method and its propositions “Gleichungen, also Scheinsätze”. 6.3 tells us that the “Erforschung der Logik bedeutet die Erforschung *aller Gesetzmäßigkeit*” and that “außerhalb der Logik ist alles Zufall”.³¹ 6.4 states that all propositions are of equal value, a statement that in *LPA* doesn’t imply that all proposition have value but on the contrary that they have *no* value: otherwise they weren’t propositions. 6.5 holds that alleged questions of values, norms, and the meaning of life are perplexities about what one can’t say [*aussprechen*]: there are no ethical and religious *questions*, nor, 6.51 adds, any ethical or religious *doubts*.

Wittgensteinian ethics is, then, encircled by other types of *Sätze*. This shows the artificiality of his form of ethics. Neither everyday ethics nor everyday aesthetics is, I daresay, fundamentally *Sätze*. If anything, the two are *Einstellungen* (outlooks more than attitudes) with entailed actions or inclinations to action. His propositionalization is to my mind a step in a wrong direction and isn’t repeated in *PU*.

There is a watershed between on the one hand profane *Sätze* and on the other hand allegedly ethical judgments; the latter are *Scheinsätze*. The watershed is to be found somewhere between 6.3 and 6.4. 6.3 is concerned with laws of induction, laws of mechanics, laws of physics, and laws of “the will” (\approx the psychic?).³² None of them is what it seems to be, viz, a picture of a fact or a possible fact; they are all *Scheinsätze*. So are also

³⁰ A preliminary title of his book, revealing Wittgenstein’s focus of interest, was *Der Satz*.

³¹ The implicit contrast between *Zufall* and (I suppose) necessity suggests that 6 and its sidekicks try to illuminate a gap between logical and non-logical necessity. The former necessity is dealt with in terms of tautology and contradiction. The latter necessity can’t be so handled. Kant tried to tell the difference by crossing the *semantic* distinction synthetic / analytic with the *epistemic* distinction a priori / a posteriori. Accepting neither the semantic distinction nor Hume’s reduction of factual necessity to perpetual regularity, Wittgenstein has to attempt another tack: the necessity at issue can be shown but not described.

³² What is said of “the will” is poorer than and incompatible with what is said in *Notebooks 1914 – 1916* out of which he took many a remark in *LPA*. There his view of the will is mostly an agent’s; in *LPA* it is mostly a spectator’s, in the spirit of Spinoza.

the “propositions” of ethics and aesthetics. Their closest relatives are, I suppose, those on the will, the home of Tractarian “ethics”.

8. “The transcendental”, immanence and transcendence

My survey may be taken to show that the “ethical” part of *LPA* has shrunk from six pages into one, the one embracing 6.5 – 7. The suggestion is awry. Wittgensteinian ethics permeates the whole book, “transzendental” as ethics is and identical with aesthetics (6.421). The term ‘transzendental’ as opposed to ‘transzendent’ is Kantian, signifying a condition of the POSSIBILITY of syntheticity *a priori*. Syntheticity *a priori* is hardly Wittgenstein’s cup of tea. But he may have used ‘transzendental’ to signify a condition of the POSSIBILITY of human EXPERIENCE. Then it makes some kind of sense³³ to claim that aesthetics in the old sense of *aisthesis* [perception] is one and the same as ethics – a concern with how we look at and act in a world we are acquainted with primarily through our senses.

The trouble is that ‘transcendental’ occurs also in 6.13 where it is tied to *logic*. If my interpretation of ‘transcendental’ is plausible, logic seems confined to the realm of human experience, a contra-intuitive restriction. But let Wittgenstein’s point be, phenomenologically, that human experience is impossible without logic as well as without ethics / aesthetics: wherever human experience is possible there is and must be room for ethics *and* aesthetics *and* logic.

5.5423 is Wittgenstein’s first discussion of an ambiguous figure, the Necker cube. He gives an account of its shifting aspects and comments that we really see two distinct facts, a comment again bearing out that *LPA* is phenomenological.

The immanence idea does not by itself give a good sense to the idea of *absolute* un-sayables, for instance those of value. It gives no guarantee that different poems, melodies, paintings... can lodge one and the same X or, much weaker, list criteria for counting what this sonnet shows up as the same X as that shown up by another sonnet. Without such criteria, immanent unsayability does not meet an important demand on “das Mystische”,

³³ Remember that what you say may make more or less sense than what I say. That is, there is a gradual transition from sense to nonsense and from being meaningful to being meaningless.

that of intersubjectivity. In theory, intersubjectivity is a more lenient demand than that of objectivity. In practice objectivity boils down to ‘what can’t be effectively gainsaid’, where ‘can’t’ only amounts to ‘isn’t ever’. Intersubjectivity does, like objectivity, stand against pure subjectivity, the tenet that there isn’t more to truth, or goodness, or duty, than strictly personal likings. However psychologically interesting, a purely subjective mysticism is not worth a philosopher’s while.

A note on p 6 says that “[the] Decimalzahlen als Nummern der einzelnen Sätze [in *LPA*] deuten das logische Gewicht der Sätze an, den Nachdruck, der auf ihnen in meiner Darstellung liegt”. So he asserts or stipulates that 6 is more important than³⁴ 6.1, 6.2 and so on. The suite 6 - 6.54 is immediately followed by 7. Does 7 *follow* from it? No. There is no entailment, nor does the suite together with 1 - 5.641 make 7 inevitable or almost inevitable. But isn’t that what the title *Logisch-philosophische Abhandlung* promises?

6.54 suggests that it is wrong to treat the numbered propositions as premisses in an inference, presumably with 7 as its conclusion. They are more like the rungs of a ladder. In any ladder worth its name, rungs have an order but not in a logician’s sense; to think of the whole as inductive or deductive or abductive is amiss. Wittgenstein raises his metaphorical ladder against something we have to overcome. Though odd, the metaphor isn’t more difficult than most metaphors – until we add that a climber who has reached the coping *has to* [muß] kick the ladder away. The ladder has done its duty when he steps on to the top of the wall. Why “muß [er] diese Sätze [1 – 6.53] überwinden” in any other sense than that of climbing past them? Why “muß [er] sozusagen die Leiter wegwerfen, nachdem er auf ihr hinaufgestiegen ist”? Why *must* he do so to see the world aright?

I have no answer. Wittgenstein’s position is far from commonsensical. Value-judgments as well as religious judgments diverge from factual statements in a number of important ways. The very fact that we call the former ‘judgments’ and the latter ‘statements’ indicates that the judge is not supposed to report but to *form an opinion*, sound or unsound rather than true or false. Are such judgments not proposition? Sometimes I think

³⁴ This isn’t readily reconcilable with 6.4 (“Alle Sätze sind gleichwertig”) even if we take him to mean that no *Satz* harbours a value

they are, with a “constative” illocutionary force³⁵. But equally often their dissimilarities to ordinary statements make me hesitate

9. Aspect switches and brute facts

5.5423, the Necker cube passage, is tied to 6.43, *LPA*'s first clearly moral enunciation:

Wenn das gute oder böse Willen die Welt ändert, so kann es nur die Grenzen der Welt ändern, nicht die Tatsachen; nicht das, was durch die Sprache ausgedrückt werden kann.

Kurz, die Welt muß dann dadurch überhaupt eine andere werden. Sie muß sozusagen als Ganzes abnehmen oder zunehmen.

Die Welt des Glücklichen is eine andere als die des Unglücklichen.

The most plausible reading I know of is categorical: whenever [wenn] the good or bad will changes the world, then... and so on. In 5.5423, an “inside” perceiver sees another fact than an “outside” perceiver. In 6.43 no facts are changed, “only” the limits of the world. If the analogy with the Necker cube holds, *internal* relations between the facts change the configuration of *alles, was der Fall ist*, that is, the very nature of the world waxes or wanes. The change is not due to my efforts; the world “ist unabhängig von meinem Willen”. But the world of a happy man does indeed differ from that of an unhappy man. The difference is *prima facie* ego-related and perspectival.

A common reading is that “was der Fall ist”, i.e., “eine Tatsache”, is a brute fact, for instance the uninterpreted drawing in 5.5423. The reading can't be true, for “wir sehen eben wirklich zwei verschiedene Tatsachen”. But Wittgenstein's comment won't do either. For what is die Figur (definite form singular), die Figur we see as two different facts? The basic assumption is after all that we see *it* – the one and only Figur, involved in two different facts. What is the status of that assumption? The world of a happy man is, *ex hypothesi*, the same as that of an unhappy man, even if the happy man's view of the world differs from that of the unhappy man (6.43).

³⁵ J.L. Austin: *How to do Things with Words*, the last lectures.

LPA needs brute facts. Without them its ideas of perspectival changes and aspects become unintelligible or hopelessly subjective. The relations between brute and perspectival facts cry out for an elucidation that they are not given by Wittgenstein.³⁶

The facts he thinks of are, I repeat, perspectival and ego-related. That this is so explains his excursion to a non-psychological ego entering [the truth of?] the assertion that the world is mine, where the ego is neither a human being nor his body nor his soul but “das metaphysische Subject, die Grenze – nicht ein Teil – der Welt” (5.641).

10. Perspectives and the metaphysical subject

Now we have reached proposition 5.633:

Wo *in* der Welt ist ein metaphysisches Subjekt zu merken?

Du sagst, es verhält sich hier ganz wie mit Auge und Gesichtsfeld. Aber das Auge siehst du wirklich *nicht*.

Und nichts *am Gesichtsfeld* läßt darauf schließen, daß es von einem Auge gesehen wird.

What is said in 5.633 is only that IF the analogy holds, THEN the ego appears as little as the eye appears in *its* visual field. But Wittgenstein seems to *accept* the analogy, turning the paragraph phenomenological, like those of the Necker cube and the happy or unhappy man.

If the ego doesn't show up in *alles, was der Fall ist*, it is inconceivable. For, says 3, that a state of affairs [Sachverhalt] is thinkable means that we can picture it to ourselves: what isn't depictable is unthinkable.³⁷ Nor can anything be said of it, since a thought is defined as a sinnvoller Satz (4) and a language defined as “die Gesamtheit der Sätze” (4.001). “Was wir nicht denken können, das können wir nicht denken; wir können also

³⁶ Many long and intense discussions with Frank Lorentzon have helped me to a clearer view of many problems in the last four paragraphs.

³⁷ So in an awkward sense *eine Figur*, gloomy or brilliant, is necessary to morality, to aesthetics, and (I daresay) to religion.

auch nicht *sagen*, was wir nicht denken können” (5.61). Nevertheless we can sometimes show it.

11. Summing up

To my mind, the crux is neither unsayability nor the seeing of aspects; the crux is the implication that important truths may be less ineffable than unthinkable. The letter to von Ficker indicates, however, that Wittgenstein saw his book as a long argument to the effect that many unsayables *are* thinkable. If he did, then proposition 3, “Das logische Bild der Tatsachen ist der Gedanke”, goes by the board as well as proposition 4, “Der Gedanke ist der sinnvolle Satz”.³⁸ And if two of the seven main propositions have to be removed...

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³⁸ It looks as if the fact that we can't say that *p* proves that we can't think that *p*. ‘The fallacy is so blatant that Wittgenstein can't have committed it’, many of us protest. Those who take a dimmer view of his gifts may laugh and believe their eyes, without even Othello's “But yet the pity of it, Iago: oh Iago, the pity of it Iago”.

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