

Wittgenstein's ethics

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- ego-centric, contemplative
- Influenced by:
 - A. Schopenhauer: the willing subject outside space and time
 - O. Weininger: ethics is a duty to oneself
- Influenced/inspired:
 - **emotivism**: Ethical judgments are expressions of feelings/attitudes.
 - **prescriptivism**: Ethical judgments have a force of prescriptions/imperatives.
 - **cognitivism**: Ethical judgments make claims to truth.
- Ethics does not provide any standards, rules, laws, principles we ought to approve.
- To living ethically resides in the very attitude to do so.
- Ethics overlaps with aesthetics, religion, mystics.

Ethics in the *Tractatus*

- 6.4 All propositions are of equal value. **[Propositions/facts have no value.]**
- 6.41 The sense of the world must lie outside the world. **[Ethics is transcendent.]**
- 6.421 It is clear that ethics cannot be put into words. **[Ethics cannot be expressed in language.]**
Ethics is transcendental. **[Ethics is a condition of the possibility of the willing subject.]**
(Ethics and aesthetics are one and the same.) **[... in their being transcendental]**
- 6.422 There must indeed be some kind of ethical reward and ethical punishment, but they must reside in the action itself. **[No consequences matter. They cannot do any harm.]**
- 6.43 If the good or bad exercise of the will does alter the world, it can alter only the limits of the world, not the facts—not what can be expressed by means of language. **[The will is causally impotent; it cannot change any fact, but only the limit of the world, i.e. one's attitude to the world.]**
- 6.4312 The solution of the riddle of life in space and time lies *outside* space and time.
- 6.44 It is not *how* things are in the world that is mystical, but *that* it exists.
- 6.45 To view the world sub specie aeterni is to view it as a whole—a limited whole.
Feeling the world as a limited whole—it is this that is mystical. **[Such a mystical feeling is the basis of ethics.]**
- 6.521 The solution of the problem of life is seen in the vanishing of the problem.
- “meaning of life” ≈ “God”

A Lecture on Ethics

- 1929, delivered/written in English.
- Main question: What is good?
 - Cf. What is valuable/important in life?
- “Good” has two senses:
 - **trivial/relative**: What action/means will lead to a certain goal. Factual/causal/no value. E.g., What is to be a good tennis player?
 - **absolute**: How ought one behave? What to do (with my life)?
- What is the meaning of expressions as “absolute value/good/right”?
 - Expression of feelings

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- a wonder at the existence of the world (that the world exists)
- feeling of absolute safety (nothing can harm me)
- These expressions are non-sense – they lie beyond the world/limit of sense.

Later philosophy

- Ethics is contextualist/relativistic/autonomous.
- “Good” is a family-resemblance concept.
- Ethical judgements express the **reasons**/grounds and attitudes on which we act (in contrast to external natural causes).
- There are **conceptual restraints**/limits on what we call “ethics”.
 - One’s reasons of acting must be intelligible for others.
 - “Right is whatever we like” (H. Göring) is also a kind of ethics (or a paradigm of immorality?).
- “To know oneself is horrible.”
 - We necessarily fail to meet the living ethical demand: To be (like) the **perfect one**.
 - inherent in one’s life
 - God/Jesus Christ
- Moral discourse isn’t less objective than scientific discourse.
 - Cognitivism: moral sentences make claims to truth.

Assigned reading

- *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*, 6.4–6.522
- A Lecture on Ethics

Further reading

- H.-J. Glock, “Ethics”, *A Wittgenstein Dictionary*, Blackwell, 1996.
- A. M. S. Christensen, “Wittgenstein and Ethics”, in: O. Kuusela and M. McGinn (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Wittgenstein*, Oxford, 2011.
- R. L. Arrington, “Wittgenstein and Ethics”, in: H. J. Glock and J. Hyman (eds.), *A Companion to Wittgenstein*, Blackwell, 2017.