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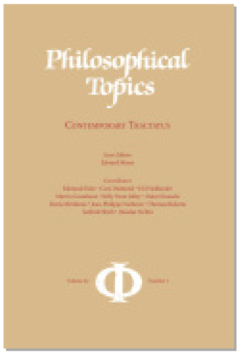

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Missing a Step Up the Ladder

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ABSTRACT. In this paper I want to argue that a unified set of concerns constituting a new dimension—a realignment of our sense of language, self, and world—emerges in the progress of the *Tractatus* as we turn to inquire into the inner connection between language and such notions as world, limits, life, and ipseity. The most elusive step in that progress, and the one most necessary to recognize as part of the argument of the *Tractatus,* is the transition from an understanding of language in terms of logic, sense, and meaning to a perspective in which language becomes the primary locus of significance or meaningfulness (that is, meaning that has value or importance). It is also the pivot from the logical to the ethical concerns of the book. An ethics that appeals to the notion of meaningfulness is elaborated in terms of the dimension of existence, namely in terms of the very possibility of agreement of disagreement with what has ultimate reality.

> *One must persevere there, where destiny more than choice places us. Among a people, in a city, with a prince, a friend, a wife to hold fast, relate everything to it; therefore to do everything, renounce everything, and endure everything that is valuable.*
>
> *—Goethe "On Winckleman,"*
> *quoted in Benjamin, SWI, 308*

INTRODUCTION

Is it possible to read the *Tractatus* as leading to an affirmation of everyday language? Making a convincing case for such a position would demand first of all to perspicuously present a continuous advance toward it in the book. Secondly, it would be necessary to explain of what importance is that recognition of the order of our everyday language, or what does it, in turn, lead to. The most elusive step in that progress, and the one most necessary to recognize as part of the argument of the *Tractatus,* is the transition from an understanding of language in terms of logic, sense, and meaning to a perspective in which language becomes the primary locus of significance or meaningfulness (that is, meaning that has value or importance). It is also the pivot from the logical to the ethical concerns of the book.

The title of my paper is supposed to raise the question whether the specificity of that step has been sufficiently brought out. I want to argue that a unified set of concerns constituting a new dimension—a realignment of our sense of language, self, and world—emerges in the progress of the book as we turn to inquire into the inner connection between language and such notions as world, limits, life, and ipseity.

1. LANGUAGE IN USE

I start by considering the relation between the logic of language and 'everyday language' in TLP 4.002:

> Man possesses the ability to construct languages capable of expressing every sense, without having any idea how each word has meaning (Bedeutung) or what its meaning is—just as people speak without knowing how the individual sounds are produced.
>
> Everyday language is a part of the human organism and is no less complicated than it.
>
> It is not humanly possible to gather immediately from it what the logic of language is.
>
> Language disguises thought. So much so, that from the outward form of the clothing it is impossible to infer the form of the thought beneath it, because the outward form of the clothing is not designed to reveal the form of the body, but for entirely different purposes.
>
> The tacit conventions on which the understanding of everyday language depends are enormously complicated.[1]

This proposition introduces in a concentrated albeit schematic fashion the relation between logical form, everyday language, and some notion of the living body of language that Wittgenstein calls "the human organism." At first it would seem that Wittgenstein asserts the *logical* inadequacy of everyday language, claiming as he does that everyday language disguises thought or that is not humanly possible to gather immediately from it, the logic of language. Yet, the emphasis in 4.002 is precisely that nothing goes wrong with language, even though we have no knowledge of the meaning or 'control' of the *way* of meaning (just as we can utter sounds without knowing how our body produces them, or what goes on with our vocal chords). Logic takes care of itself. As Cora Diamond has so convincingly shown, much confusion is involved in conceiving of the possibility of making logical mistakes in language. We can make sense in language, construct, as Wittgenstein puts it, languages capable of expressing every sense, but we are not responsible for the proper logical functioning of language.[2]

What does Wittgenstein mean then by the claim that everyday language "disguises thought." The emphasis, I take it, is not on the impossibility of recognizing at all the logic of language from everyday language, but rather on the impossibility of *immediately* recognizing it. That is, we might have to inquire by what *means,* and in what ways, is the logic of language gathered. But, that the logic of everyday language cannot be gathered without further ado does not necessarily imply that we need to go beyond what is at our disposal in everyday language itself, or beyond the distinctions we can draw in language as we use it. In other words, I take 4.002 to be a first formulation of an important theme of Wittgenstein's, namely the lack of perspicuity of our language.[3]

The nature of this deficency of ordinary language can be clarified by introducing Wittgenstein's distinction between sign and symbol. A sign is what can be perceived of the symbol. The symbol involves all that is logically required for signification, for the word to have a meaning. Lack of perspicuity in language is a problem that is to be formulated at the level of signs. As Wittgenstein writes: "In everyday language it very frequently happens that the same word has different modes of signification—and so belong to different symbols—or that two words that have different modes of signification are employed in propositions in what is superficially the same way" (3.323).[4] But, at the same time as he warns of the misleading similar employment *(Verwendung)* of words in everyday language, say the way in which so many different logical forms are projected onto the subject-predicate structure, Wittgenstein also suggests that a consideration of the sign "in use" can give us insight into the symbolic form whose sensible appearance it is: "In order to recognize a symbol by its sign we must observe how it is used with a sense [we must observe its sensical use *(Gebrauch)*]" (3.326). Similarly Wittgenstein writes in the *Notebooks*: "The way in which language signifies is mirrored in its use" (N, 82). And he also speaks of the necessity to consider the application (Anwendung) of signs to recognize the symbol: "What signs fail to express, their application shows. What signs slur over, their application says clearly" (3.262).

2. THE COMPLICATION OF THE HUMAN FORMS OF MEANING

Attending to the use in language brings out the complicated character of our forms of meaning. Thus considering the different uses of "is" (say the kinds of substitutions we are willing to make in inferences with the propositions containing the sign) would make us aware of the presence of three distinct logical forms sharing the same sign (the "is" of identity, of predication, and of existence). A more perspicuous notation would replace the one sign by three different signs and better reflect the difference in use.

But, suppose we inquire similarly about the form of color space by considering the different uses of color words. Wouldn't it be possible for us to realize that there are in fact different forms encompassed in the employment of our color words? A simple example that Wittgenstein gives in his conversations with the Vienna Circle might help to make the point: "On the face of it I may say 'This chair is brown' and 'The surface of this chair is brown.' But if I replace 'brown' by 'heavy', I can utter only the first proposition and not the second. This proves that the word 'brown', too, had two different meanings" (WVC, 46).

Do we have any ground, then, to assume that all that we *call* color in everyday language belongs to the same formal space? And if not, does that mean that what we referred to as color up till now really contains different, distinct kinds of beings? Could we realize that the employment of the same everyday word to speak of the colors of surfaces of things, transparent colors, and colors of after-images was based on a superficial analogy and has no justification in the logical form of reality itself? Could we, say, find out that these forms are no more similar than colors are to sounds or smells?

Viewed from this perspective, attending to use would not lead to an affirmation of everyday language but rather might very well be an opening to skepticism regarding our ordinary sense of the world. We might find out that superficial features of reality have led us to categorize it the way we did, without any deeper justification. In order to avoid that predicament, we need to justify retaining our ordinary concepts while recognizing *within them* interrelated logical forms. That is, we need to be able to distinguish such a case as the ambiguity of "is" where, apparently, three different logical forms merely happen to share the same sign, from the case of colors where apparently different meanings are still kept together under the same everyday concept.

If we do want to hold to the intuition that we have in the use of, say, color terms, various inflections of what we call color in everyday language, rather than merely distinct categories or objects, then our judgments must reflect our sense of the systematic holding together of such different logical forms under the same name. In other words we need to take into account how the recognition of meaning is cued to a systematic unity that might be best described as an *environment* of meaning composed of related logical forms. I take this to be what Wittgenstein suggests by using the notion of the "human organism" in 4.002.

It is surprising to find the term "the human organism" in the conceptual landscape of the *Tractatus.* The expression suggestively points ahead to the notion of a form of life central to Wittgenstein's later work. But precisely because it must be understood in the framework of the *Tractatus,* there is nothing in it that can as yet be elaborated in terms of the social or the communal. This restriction of the scope of our considerations might actually be instructive, given the tendency to identify the later notion of a form of life too much with social practices and conventions. That is, we have to explicate the notion of the human organism, embodied language, and the related notion of life, initially at least, in terms of what the complication of a space of logical forms come to.

The *Tractatus* is often read as a quest for the simple, for simple objects as they combine in elementary propositions. It is all the more striking that the main characteristic of the human organism is complication. Complication is characteristic of the field of logical forms, as it is revealed in living language. The attention to everyday language as a field of life would thereby be contrasted with the oversimplifications and preconceptions that we tend to adopt (say about what the space of colors *must* be like). That is to say, complication is a characterization of the field of logical forms brought out in attending to use.[5] For it is what is involved in *recognizing meaning* in everyday language that is enormously complicated. It is not as though everyday language functions only due to an extremely complicated logical infrastructure underlying it, which itself has nothing familiar to it. Rather, it is what we mean, our language as we use it, thus our meaningful life that is complicated. It is when we wish to express clearly what we mean in what we say that we bring out systematically the complicated character of everyday language.

This might indeed be the reason Wittgenstein chooses the term "organism" to characterize the environment of everyday language. The inherently complicated unity of the heterogeneous has traditionally been a characterization of the purposive organization or order of life, called the organism.[6] While Wittgenstein's use of the term organism in relation to the field of language differs from the traditional understanding of this notion, I do want to inquire whether it points to the register of life as an original ground of language, making life in language manifest in everyday language a standard of meaningfulness. Everyday language would not merely be characterized by its variety (as opposed to say, a more rigid, artificial language), but could be the ground in which is sought the unity of life in meaning.[7]

This last articulation of a space of the life of language in Tractarian terms raises the further question whether the notion of finality or purposiveness, apparently foreign to the issues of the *Tractatus,* can itself be seen as integral to the progress up the ladder? How would it be a dimension of language, of meaning, manifest in the judgments we make? I want to suggest that we start looking for such an understanding in the way everyday language allows the realization of an agreement with the world, distinct from the idea of correctness or even from the identity of form presupposed in making picturing possible. Making our way to this standpoint requires inquiring about the place of the subject in language.

3. "THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS THE SOUL, THE SUBJECT"

As we open the *Tractatus* with the world dividing into facts, the unity of a subject is nowhere to be found. We have, if anything, something of an external perspective on the world as a sum-total of facts as it were laid out before us (or so we imagine). The further consideration of the world in terms of its states of affairs that consist of objects in immediate combination seems to provide us with a more contentful notion of the possible, arising from fundamental forms or categories of experience. But it is no more helpful in characterizing a subject. Nor is the subject introduced for the sake of the account of picturing and language. When Wittgenstein writes that "we make to ourselves pictures of the world," he uses the first-person plural, precisely so as to deflate any essential reference to a metaphysical subject in his account.[8]

The initial discussion of the subject in the *Tractatus* develops out of the question of the analysis of so-called propositional attitudes. Indeed, we might be tempted to understand such contexts as "A believes that p," "A thinks that p" as consisting of propositional contents toward which an independent entity, a subject, can have different intentional stances or attitudes. Wittgenstein's objection to such a construal of these contexts is instructive for he takes it to show that "there is no such thing as the soul-the subject, etc.—as it is conceived in the superficial psychology of the present day. Indeed a composite soul would no longer be a soul" (5.5421). Rather than addressing directly the vanishing of the subject by way of Wittgenstein's alternative analysis of propositional attitudes, I begin by considering the remark that follows on a well-known optical phenomenon.

> To perceive a complex means to perceive that its constituents are related to one another in such-and-such a way. This no doubt explains why there are two possible ways of seeing the figure
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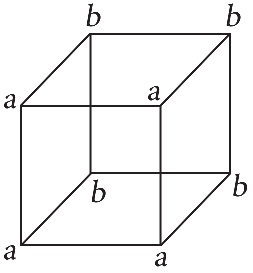
> 
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>
> as a cube; and all similar phenomena. For we really see two different facts. (5.5423)

One way of explaining the Necker cube effect is to assume that since the object itself (that is, the diagram) does not change, we need to appeal to a shift in the mode of perception of a subject, to a change in the subjective attitude. Thus such phenomena would involve an essential reference to a subject and to subjective attitudes without which one could not account for the effect. The subject would then become a component in experience, standing in various relations to its objects.

Wittgenstein aims to re-describe the phenomenon in such a way that no appeal to a subject is necessary: A picture is a fact in a space of form, and it can depict any fact that has the same form. So in our example, if the reality we want to depict is that of objects in three-dimensional space—that is, complexes characterized completely by the relation of their elements in a space whose form is three dimensional—this latter form must somehow be part of the pictorial space, even though the diagram is laid out in two dimensions. Now of course we can take the diagram to be merely a fact in two-dimensional space, a certain arrangement of lines, or even think of it as a given object rather than a fact of a certain space of form. This is how we view it when we are tempted to say that "it" did not change, and therefore there must be a shift in the attitude of the subject. But, if we use the diagram to represent three-dimensional space, it is itself a fact in *that* representational space that is its form is not merely the surface of the page, but must include the method of projection from three- to two-dimensional space. If we take *that* form into account, there really are *two* facts, *two* pictures, here. The pictorial fact depicting the facing-up cube is a different one than the pictorial fact depicting the facing-down cube. The case is no different in principle than having one picture of a cube and another of a pyramid. Each picture is a different fact in the same space of representation. Since in the latter case, I assume that it is obvious that we need no subject to account for the difference between the two pictures, neither is the subject necessary for the proper understanding of the Necker cube effect.

We are now in a position to consider Wittgenstein's objection to the construal of propositional attitudes he attributes to the theory of knowledge of Russell and Moore: "It is clear, however, that 'A believes that p', 'A has the thought p' and 'A says p' are of the form '"p" says p'; and this does not involve a correlation of a fact with an object but rather the correlation of facts by means of the correlation of their objects" (5.542). Take the case of belief, of a context such as "A believes that p." Assuming that a belief can be false we cannot analyze the belief context only by reference to the truth conditions of the proposition p. Therefore, we are tempted to say that belief is not explained in terms of the relation of the proposition to reality, but must rather concern the relation of a subject to the content of the proposition.

But Wittgenstein suggests that all that is logically necessary for the context of belief is to properly account for the way the propositional sign (the picture) can express that which is believed, or as he puts it, the way "p" says p.[9] To clarify consider an example: Suppose we have an object, call it "a," that is red, we can use the fact that a is red in order to express the belief that another object, call it "b," is red. This is possible, even if, in fact b is yellow. We can use the one to be a picture of the other. All that is needed for such depiction is first, to establish an arbitrary correlation between a and b (Let a stand for b or be its representative), and secondly, to consider the fact that a is red as a fact of the form of that reality which I want to picture, that is, a fact in the space of color. This is what is required for the fact that a is red to be a picture that *says* that b is red (to have something of the form "p" says p). Importantly, we do not need to invoke a relation of correspondence of the picture to the actual color of b, namely to the fact that b is yellow (for that latter would characterize not belief, but knowledge). Rather, we need only a to be a representative of b and further relate the two by way of the common form of color space they share. It is that form which provides the internal possibility of fulfilling or disappointing the supposed expectation involved in the belief. No need then for a subject or for an attitude toward a propositional content. This is not Wittgenstein's last word concerning the subject, but in order to return to it, he has to address first the question whether the forms of elementary propositions can be given a priori.

4. ELEMENTARY PROPOSITIONS AND APPLICATION

One might be tempted to suggest that Wittgenstein's position concerning the subject is really a form of transcendental idealism in which the form of representation determines the form of objects of experience. The question then arises whether we cannot identify the subject after all by accounting for the different forms of unity brought to representation in judgment. Yet, in the *Tractatus* one cannot think of the subject on the model of a transcendental subjectivity that is reflected by the conditions of experience, that is, by correlating the unity of the subject with the unified form of experience given a priori. For, as opposed to the systematic unity of the forms of judgment and categories in the Kantian philosophy, the constitution of elementary propositions cannot be given a priori.

Indeed, one must pay particular attention to the contrast Wittgenstein establishes between the investigation of logic and its application. It is possible to characterize completely and a priori the form of logical terms such as negation, or conjunction (what belongs to our means of representing any reality whatsoever), but the form of objects that appear in elementary propositions can only be recognized in application, in the actual use of language (5.557).[10] Indeed, the possibility of giving a priori all that goes into, say, the constitution of the logical space of negation just goes to show that negation has no ultimate reality, it stands for no object.

The account of the application of logic is mainly concentrated in 5.55–5.5571. It begins with the proposition stating the impossibility to give a priori the forms of elementary propositions and ends with the claim that it is only the application of logic that gives us the elementary propositions. It is hard to underestimate the importance of this moment, and yet it has not drawn enough attention in interpretations of the book. It is sometimes read as asserting that the application of logic determines, out of the range of possible candidates for elementary propositions, which are the ones that hold true. That is, it would assume that we can list all possible propositions belonging to the same object space, and then the world would tell us which of them in fact holds. (Suppose for instance that "the ball is blue," "the ball is red," "the ball is green," etc., are possible elementary propositions of the color form, and that the ball is in fact green. The latter we can obviously find out only by looking at the world.)

But by interpreting the proposition in this way, we would lose the force of Wittgenstein's claim completely. For what is given in application is something like the *form* of, for example, color space, not just which elementary structure in this space in fact holds true. Then, is Wittgenstein holding something like the positivist distinction between, for instance, pure geometry and applied geometry? The first would be a calculus empty of content, a mere syntactic structure, thus something about which no question of truth can be raised; the latter would be generally yet, contingently true, a matter to be established by empirical investigation. This indeed would be consistent with the claim that the form of elementary propositions cannot be given a priori, yet Wittgenstein also denies that we can envisage in the abstract so to speak, all possible forms, that might conceivably be required to depict reality, and then empirically establish which in fact holds: "It would be completely arbitrary to give any specific form" (5.554), he writes and adds, "Can we set up a form of sign without knowing whether anything can correspond to it? Does it make sense to ask what there must *be* in order that something can be the case?" (5.5542).

5. LOGIC AND EXISTENCE

In order to further elaborate the significance of the moment of application, I would like to introduce a crucial term that appears in Wittgenstein's account, namely, "existence." Its connection to the problem of elementary propositions can be introduced through the following question: How could we know, if logic does not determine what there is, that no matter what, there would be an elementary ground to what we say? Or as Wittgenstein puts it in the stretch of propositions we are considering: "If we know on purely logical grounds that there must be elementary propositions, then everyone who understands propositions in their unanalyzed form must know it" (5.5562).

What is it that we know on purely logical grounds and how could it be equivalent to what is understood by everyone, that is, to what is given with the very use of language? What goes into our understanding of logic? Wittgenstein's answer, I take it, is next to nothing. This might appear surprising, but it was in fact already hinted at in spelling out the tautological character of supposed logical laws, in the understanding that the logical constants stand for no object, as well as in the claim that logic takes care of itself. This simple insight is further expressed, in 5.552, in the claim that "the 'experience' that we need in order to understand logic is not that something or other is the state of things, but that something *is*: that, however is *not* an experience. Logic is *prior* to every experience—that something *is so.* It is prior to the question 'How?', not prior to the question 'What?'" (5.552).

What exactly is expressed here about the relation of existence to essence, to the what, or the form of objects, and to the how, the structure of facts? One might wish to sum up this moment by the familiar claim that the applicability of logic to the world cannot have any factual presuppositions. This is, for sure, part of what is asserted, but it is not strong enough, for it does not suggest the relation of the, albeit impossible, experience that something is, to the form of *objects,* to *what* there is. Why is it that even though we need not know anything about what there is, for the understanding of logic, the application of logic nevertheless gives us the 'what' in elementary propositions? How does logic make contact with its application? How does existence touch upon essence?

The relation of existence to application is at issue in the propositions that follow: "And if this were not so," Wittgenstein writes, "how could we apply logic? We might put it this way: if there would be a logic even if there were no world, how then could there be a logic given that there is a world?" Again, we might wish to interpret this as the more familiar claim that logic *always* applies, that is, holds of any world we could conceive. There cannot be a logically "disordered" world (as though even God is *bound* by the laws of logic, or could not create an illogical world). Frege, for example, could say that logic would apply no matter what, meaning it to be the most general science and its application would thus just amount to the instantiation of quantifiers in its basic laws. Application is also not at issue if we construe logic merely syntactically. It is an empirical matter which, of the infinite variety of syntactical systems that can be constructed, is the one for which the structure of reality is a model. But Wittgenstein's formulation carefully distinguishes itself from these possible positions. Logic is not the most general science, yet elementary propositions recognized in application give us the form of the possible.

Existence, as the term appears here, is not to be conceived as instantiation in a given framework of form. It is not to be identified by way of the existential quantifier for the latter is an operation in a given space of form. The force of this peculiar notion of existence was already implicit in the understanding, early on in the *Tractatus,* that the logical space of facts amounts to the *existence* of state of affairs. There too, existence could not be identified with what is given by existential quantification. In the *Notebooks* Wittgenstein further suggests the ontological difference between existence and the existing by using a term we would usually associate with another tradition of philosophy, namely "Being." "My *whole* task," he writes, "consists in . . . giving the nature of all being." And he adds so as to draw the distinction from existence claims falling within the scope of logic: "(And here Being does not mean existing—in that case it would be nonsensical)."

Existence is not articulated, or it is not a matter of what and how. Waving our hands we might wish to say: There is a world, the world is one, and it is *this* one, in its existence. And maybe hand-waving is all we can do with this impossible experience of existence. But we can also say that the consideration of the application of logic does not open onto surveying a totality of possible languages, nor to the most general standpoint on reality, but rather to the space in which language is a medium of the affirmation of that which uniquely and concretely is, irrespectively of what and how it is. This is why Wittgenstein writes a bit further in that same group of propositions in which he discusses the problem of application, that: "Everyday language is in perfect logical order." He does not mean to say that *even* everyday language is in logical order. That is, he does not argue that because it is one of an infinite number of possible languages, and, since no language can be illogical, therefore everyday language is in perfect logical order. The point and force of the claim is different. Everyday language is language in use, language that has a life, and only thereby is it the medium of affirming what has ultimate reality, the world.

5. WORLD, LIMITS, AND IPSEITY

Since the recognition of the existence of state of affairs, of elementary propositions in language, is a matter of analysis, our understanding of what analysis and its endpoint come to must be inflected by this turn to the dimension of existence. A wrong way of looking at things would be for instance to ask oneself what must we know about the character of the ultimate reality, so as to have a guarantee that there is an end to analysis. (Does it consist of sense data? Or maybe physical objects?) When we get into this frame of mind it is as though we ask ourselves about something wholly external to us, as though we still need to make a discovery about the world, so as to make sure that logic applies to it. (A stretch of remarks early in the *Notebooks* are devoted to this issue. A reworked version of them follows the proposition on the relation of logic and existence in the *Tractatus*).

It is in thinking of the above problematic model of analysis, call it the chemical figure of analysis, that elementary propositions are sometimes called atomic propositions. Such a term would imply that their importance is in being building blocks for more contentful propositions, a basis for explaining the endless variety of the world of meaning, constructed out of them by way of the scaffolding of logic. But, when we seek to conceive of elementary propositions in terms of existence, we as it were go in the opposite direction, and ask ourselves what is the reality value of what we say, what does it ultimately amount to. Rather than speculating about the possible ultimate constituents of analysis we need to ask ourselves how is everyday language the medium for recognizing that which is most concrete, this unique world in existence.

Existence is unique. Put differently, existence and nonexistence are not positions in a contentful space. As Wittgenstein emphasizes in 5.61, I cannot say "this" exists but "that" does not exist in the world. This bears on the proper understanding of the term "limit," which, I take it, receives a new inflection at this stage of the argument. To reach a limit in language is to recognize in it the uniqueness of the world. Existence is not a brute given but rather recognized as the origin of form, of the possible, in the uniquely concrete. Utterly concrete content is the limit of form. That limit is where forms converge or hang together in the complicated field of embodied meaning which Wittgenstein calls in 4.002 "the human organism."

This limit is not something that can be inquired about in general. Forms, one might say, come together and delimit one another only in the concrete particularity of existence. Particularity is not to be taken as the instantiation of given concepts or categories that can be given in advance of the recognition of that limit of language in use. Moreover, it can only be recognized insofar as I am in language. Only in my use of language can I seek what in the world my language comes to. In other words, the dimension of existence we are seeking, and whose uniqueness and concreteness I would call pure content, cannot be separated from the recognition or acknowledgment of a subject. That limit sought is internal not to language in general, not even to everyday language in general, but only appears as a limit internal to my being in language. Without the first person, the uniqueness of the world is wholly inconspicuous. Seeking it would indeed be like trying to say what the experience of existence is in general.

And, it is because of that relation of language to the first person that this moment in the discussion of application involves a simple truth of the most concrete significance, why it is the key that properly directs us to the ethics of the *Tractatus.* It is why Wittgenstein introduces an ethical pathos precisely at this moment, long before the so-called propositions on the ethical: "That utterly simple thing, which we have to formulate here, is not a likeness of the truth, but the truth itself in its entirety. (Our problems are not abstract, but perhaps the most concrete that there are.)"

Put in terms of the progress of the book, we try to explore and explain how the issue of use or application leads to the introduction of ipseity into the argument of the *Tractatus.* We must explain why and how Wittgenstein moves from the proposition that "The application of logic decides what elementary propositions there are" (5.557) to the claim: "*The limits of my language* mean the limits of my world" (5.6). This latter proposition seems to establish meaning on a subjective ground. In the stretch of propositions on solipsism that follows, Wittgenstein further uses the expression "the language which I alone understand," which even sounds like holding to the idea of a private language. But, can we seriously attribute that position to Wittgenstein? That is, to *Wittgenstein,* of all philosophers?

The subject is not in meaning by deciding about its ultimate constitution. Indeed, wherever the consideration of language allows room for choosing, for an activity of the subject within a space of possibilities, we would not be at a fundamental enough level, we would not be considering the dimension of existence: "[I]s it really possible that in logic I should have to deal with forms that I can invent?" Wittgenstein writes. "What I have to deal with must be that which makes it possible for me to invent them" (5.555).

Moreover, the characterization of the subject as a limit of the world is not to be viewed in idealistic terms, as the subject gives the most general form to experience (the problem is not just with such simplistic figure of limits given in the diagram of the eye and the visual field). Indeed, in denying that elementary propositions can be deduced a priori, Wittgenstein precisely denies that one can have a characterization of a transcendental form of experience, that would provide us with the unity, or oneness we seek for the subject ("a composite soul would no longer be a soul" (5.5421). The subject is inherently one, not by being an agency of formal synthesis, but in its capacity to agree with the concreteness of what exists, to be in agreement with the unique world. To speak of limit in this context is to point to something I must recognize, not to something I constitute.

It is the recognition of unique content in what I say which makes language mine or reveals the subject position in the world being my world. Wittgenstein refers to this peculiar identity with oneself, in submitting to the world, as the truth of solipsism. In other words, we need to understand how a peculiar realism is the truth of solipsism, or solipsism thought through is realism.

6. THE TRUTH IN SOLIPSISM

Solipsism becomes an issue for Wittgenstein as a misfired attempt at essentially involving a unique self, myself, in the very nature of experience. Yet, Wittgenstein nevertheless finds some truth in solipsism as he surprisingly states that "what the solipsist *means* is quite correct; only it cannot be *said,* but makes itself manifest." An objection might be raised in advance of any attempt to take this moment seriously, that is, as anything more than the nonsense which in any case, the *Tractatus* will turn out to be.[11] For Wittgenstein's account leads to the claim that "solipsism, when its implications are followed out strictly, coincides with pure realism." If solipsism, a metaphysical view, is shown to lead to realism, the diametrically opposed metaphysical view, then it appears to follow that both views come to nothing, that is, that they are both meaningless? Yet, one should note that Wittgenstein chooses to assert the truth of solipsism, expressed as "The world is my world," even *after* the proposition asserting that solipsism and realism come to the same; I would even say that it is asserted as a consequence of this understanding. If, indeed, he merely means to show the nonsensicality of solipsism, why would the statement of its identity with realism be followed by a striking realization that "there is *after all* a way to speak of the subject." (In the *Notebooks* this is even put more strongly: "So there really is a way in which there can and must be mention of the I in a *non-psychological sense* in philosophy" [N, 80].)

I want to elaborate and clarify the intuition concerning the truth of the solipsistic position, starting from the famous proposition on "The World as I Found It." For it brings out particularly well what I would like to call the dialectic in the solipsistic position, resolved in the formulation that "the world is my world":

> There is no such thing as the subject that thinks or entertains ideas.
>
> If I wrote a book called *The World as I Found It,* it should have to include a report on my body, and should have to say which parts were subordinate to my will, and which were not, etc. . . . this being a method of isolating the subject, or rather of showing that in an important sense there is no subject; for it alone could *not* be mentioned in the book. (5.631)

In the classical statement of a solipsistic position, all relation to the world is essentially a relation I have to myself, to contents of my own consciousness. I am, in that sense, in all experience of the world. Yet, experience as such does not bear any recognizable mark of its being uniquely mine. So as to retain a hold on the claim of uniqueness, i.e. on the distinction between solipsism and idealism, 'I' (the solipsist) need to anchor this all-encompassing consciousness in a specific distinguishable part of the world that is privileged over others. My body would be the best candidate for such a place in which I would, so to speak, uniquely identify myself at the same time as, in another sense, I would be present everywhere in the field of experience. The problem of the solipsist, the inherent tension in the position that Wittgenstein diagnoses, is that he cannot make the assertion of uniqueness and that of all-encompassing presence meet.

The imagined book, *The World as I Found It,* would allegorize the problem of finding the subject from the all-encompassing presence of the 'I' in experience. It brings out the inherent difficulty the solipsist would have to find a place in the world in which to identify himself as that unique subject of experience as a whole. The solipsist could try, for instance, to find in the world the correlate of his will by listing the parts of the body that are moved in willing. But this procedure would not single a willing subject (that is, it would not satisfy the demand to locate the essential unity of a subject). It would at most form what would be an external inessential delimitation of certain kinds of facts in the field of experience.

One might insist that when I decide to raise my hand, the act of will does in fact relate immediately to a preeminent object, namely my body, which I can then call the locus of the metaphysical subject. But in the *Notebooks* Wittgenstein suggests the following thought experiment to recognize the problematic nature of this picture: "At any rate I can imagine carrying out the act of will for raising my arm, but that my arm does not move. (E.g. a sinew is torn.) True, but, it will be said, the sinew surely moves and that just shows that the act of will related to the sinew and not to the arm. But let us go further and suppose that even the sinew did not move, and so on. We should then arrive at the position that the act of will does not relate to a body at all, and so that in the ordinary sense of the word there is no such thing as the act of will" (N, 86).

Still, even if we can't quite picture what it is for the act of will to fasten onto a part of the body, this would not preclude characterizing the reach of the act of will negatively. Isn't it clear that there are things that *essentially* cannot be direct correlates of the act of will. For instance, I can will to move my hand, but I cannot *in the same sense* will the chair to move. My act of will, I would like to say, cannot connect directly to the chair. I can only move my body which is the one to move the chair. But Wittgenstein asks himself what would it be like to find out that something is *essentially* not in the scope of my will. For this negation to make sense, one must be able to conceive of the possibility of trying to will such-and-such and not being able to do so. Someone asked, for instance, to try to will the chair to move, might concentrate on the chair intensely, fasten his gaze on it, narrow his eyes, and express determination. But would this count as trying to will the chair to move and finding out that it is the kind of thing that does not obey the will? There is no *trying* and discovering that the chair is out of the range of my will. It would be as nonsensical as trying to find out whether sounds can be colored. So really it is not as if the world can be meaningfully divided into that which the metaphysical will can attach to and what it cannot attach to. There are no parts of the world that are metaphysically speaking closer to the subject than others.

It is important to be clear about the aim of Wittgenstein's strange examples: He challenges the possibility of identifying *in* the world specific states which are the correlate of the unity of a metaphysical subject. Willing is not a stance of a metaphysical subject connected to some privileged object in the world, as though a transcendent gear is engaged in the material world that then causes the action to occur: "The act of the will is not the cause of the action but is the action itself. One cannot will without acting" (N, 87), Wittgenstein writes, and he adds: "The fact that I will an action consists in my performing the action, not in my doing something else which causes the action. When I move something I move. When I perform an action I am in action" (N, 88). For sure, the solipsist can recognize that there are bodily movements that count as voluntary and which he calls actions. They have conditions or criteria which distinguish them from involuntary movements. But this would not help the solipsist to recognize the unique metaphysical subject, but only establish certain forms in the field of experience, characteristic to the encounter with human beings.[12]

In the *Notebooks,* Wittgenstein elaborates an interesting variant of the attempt to single out my body as the dwelling place of the metaphysical subject: What if the solipsist seeks the unique embodiment of the self, not by way of the identification of the act of will, but rather in terms of a broader notion of manifestation of character, namely in terms of what we would call the expressive nature of the body, which would make it "my own." Can one characterize an internal connection between the physiognomy and my spirit, metaphysically speaking? Would that be a way to single a part of the world which the solipsist would recognize as home to "his own" spirit?

The solipsist of course would not wish to attribute spirit to other beings in the field of experience in the same way as he would recognize his own spirit in the expressive manifestations of his own body. The solipsist would have to hold that whenever he experiences the spirit of another being it is really by analogy with the immediate sense of parallelism between his own spirit and what he recognizes as his body. His is the only spirit and it would be him who *gives* such-and-such a spirit to other beings. The solipsist would hold that his body is immediately expressive of his spirit, but other bodies have spirit only because of a circuitous detour which would have something like the following form: "If I were to look like the snake and to do what it does then I should be such-and-such. The same with the elephant, with the fly, with the wasp" (85).

But then if such an indirect inference is possible, why wouldn't it go the other way around? That is, wouldn't there be a question, from the detached perspective of the solipsist, what is the "origin" of these inferences or identifications? Ultimately of course we would recognize spirit everywhere, which one would also call one's own spirit: "Only remember," Wittgenstein writes, "that the spirit of the snake, of the lion, is *your* spirit. For it is only from yourself that you are acquainted with spirit at all" (85). Why choose one "center" of the world rather than another, if ultimately identification would allow the attribution of a specific spirit to each being? Why not locate your spirit in the wasp and conceive of the recognition of spirit in other beings to be based on the wasp's identification? Couldn't we think of a "primitive society" in which the activity of the wasp would embody the quintessence of spirit through which every member of that society recognizes what is essential about himself.[13]

As Wittgenstein sums up the attempt: "the question arises whether even here, my body is not on the same level with that of the wasp and of the snake (and surely it is so), so that I have neither inferred from that of the wasp to mine nor from mine to that of the wasp" (85). Ultimately, there is no ground, from the detached perspective assumed by the solipsist, to conceive of a *part* of the field of experience, a part of the world, as more immediately expressive of what is metaphysically his own spirit than the rest: "Is it true," Wittgenstein asks in the *Notebooks,* ". . . that my character is expressed only in the build of *my* body or brain and not equally in the build of the whole of the rest of the world?" And he adds, "This contains a salient point" (N, 160).

Assuming the detachment implied in formulating the solipsist's relation to experience as a whole, there would be no way to "reconnect" that metaphysical subject to a part of the world. It is not possible to observe the world and *find* the subject as one among many objects in the world. It is impossible to discover a part of the world to be "mine," metaphysically speaking. The solipsist's attempt to refer to a body as "mine" could be compared to what happens when one is tempted to utter something like "this is *my* pain." The latter is nonsensical insofar as we try to give expression to what is internal to pain, its being essentially painful; that is, involving. It is not as though we have first a sensation, and then a question of what it is for someone to recognize such sensation as his own, as affecting him. Pain is involving and only on this background we can speak of someone trying to forget his pain, ignoring it, fighting against it, detaching himself from it, etc. The same should be said about experience: The meaning of experience is not neutrally laid out and parts of it are then recognized as closer to the subject. I do not find myself as a part of the world, I find myself in a world, in already meaningful surroundings, already responsive to meaning.

Concluding the discussion of solipsism in the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein writes: "The philosophical I is not the human being, not the human body, or the human soul, with which psychology deals, but rather the metaphysical subject, the limit of the world—not a part of it" (5.641). This is expanded in the *Notebooks* by the following: "The human body, however, my body in particular, is a part of the world among others, among beasts, plants, stones, etc., etc. . . . Whoever realizes this will not want to procure a preeminent place for his own body or for the human body.

He will regard humans and beasts quite naively as objects which are similar and which belong together" (N, 82).

I note Wittgenstein's striking use of the term "naïve." The naïve can be taken to mean the non-sophisticated or refer to the ordinary view of things. It also carries another association that, I assume, was known to Wittgenstein, in Schiller's elaboration of the concept.[14] The naïve is nature insofar as he recognizes it to be one with itself. Importantly in Schiller's elaboration of the concept of naïve poetry, there is a strong emphasis on the avoidance of the subjective dimension, of specific expression of subjective states. It is a poetry that will have a certain objective detachment to it and would be devoid of the turmoil characteristic of the complications of the inner life, or of the knots of psychology.

The naïve standpoint in philosophy is a peculiar realism, which Wittgenstein calls "pure realism." It is not being 'realistic' by saying that I am just a small part in the world, that there was a world before me, as history teaches me, and that there will still be the world even when I am gone. Indeed, this supposed antidote to solipsistic tendencies ignores the realism that is its truth. This is why Wittgenstein states emphatically in the *Notebooks*: "What has history to do with me? Mine is the first and only world! I want to report how *I* found the world. What others in the world have told me about the world is a very small and incidental part of my experience of the world . . . I have to judge the world, to measure things" (N, 82).

"The world as I found it" would thus be the opening of a more natural perspective on one's relation to the world, that avoids pictures of the localization of the mind or soul, whether mine or that of others. But, and this is equally important, it is a recognition that soulfulness is correlative with having a world altogether.[15] The pure realism which results from the shrinking of the subject to an extensionless point leaves us with the world being uniquely and equally involving, or significant. The sense of uniqueness of the solipsist problematically localized in a part of the world is transposed onto recognizing the world to be unique. This recognition of uniqueness is not the sense of how different I am from others. Rather the dimension of uniqueness is opened in the realization that no essential division of significance can be established *within* the field of experience.

Solipsism thought through leads to a *pure* realism (5.64). It would be a realism that involves the recognition of the uniqueness of the world, as the truth of that uniqueness of the I, which solipsism is after. The *identity* of solipsism and realism means that I am most uniquely myself in partaking of the uniqueness of the world. As Wittgenstein puts it in the *Notebooks*: "This is the way I have travelled: Idealism singles men out from the world as unique, solipsism singles me alone out and at last I see that I too belong with the rest of the world, and so, on the one side *nothing* is left over, and on the other side, as unique, *the world.* In this way idealism leads to realism if it is strictly thought out" (N, 85, my emphasis).

Idealism leads to solipsism, the individual version of the idealistic identity of the limits of language and the limits of world. But it in turn eventuates in a pure realism, a higher realism. The realism that ensues, when the dialectic is followed allows me to take my body, to be part of the world (just like animals and plants are parts of it). But precisely thereby the locus of recognition of a subject is given as agreement with the world as such. The unique world is the concrete limit with which I can be in agreement, or which I avoid at the price of avoiding myself.

The last consideration suggests that while Wittgenstein's treatment of solipsism might be an antidote to certain fantasized ways of holding to my sense of uniqueness, it is nevertheless not a way of giving up on individuation, on a way to speak of the self in philosophy. It rather sets the task of realizing the self as the capacity to agree with the world expressed as "the world is my world." Thus Wittgenstein ends the stretch of reflections devoted to this issue in his *Notebooks* by asking; "Is not *my world* adequate for individuation?" (N, 89).

Sounding this moment of uniqueness is a recurring theme throughout the *Notebooks,* as Wittgenstein asks himself: In what sense is language unique? In what sense is the world unique? In what sense is my life unique? To quote one of those instances: "Only from the consciousness of the *uniqueness of my life* arises religion—science—and art. And this consciousness is life itself" (N, 79). Uniqueness is not to be sought in our usual ways of articulating creativity, genius, or whatever one might place at the source of religion, science, and art. Uniqueness is not my having something that is unlike anything else or anyone else. Almost the contrary: it is another name for sober realism. Uniqueness is realized in the recognition of a limit internal to my existence in meaning. This is why it is realism that can only be expressed in the first person. Actualizing yourself is submitting yourself to the highest actuality. Self-realization is at the same time the complete submission to the concrete uniqueness of the world and is expressed in the claim "the world is my world." This is of course what shows the difficulty of expressing this insight correctly, for we tend to conceive of realism precisely through its dissociation from the subject.

7. FINDING VALUE IN AGREEMENT WITH THE WORLD

The characterization of the truth of solipsism as "The world is my world" points to the relation between uniqueness or essential individuation of a subject and the recognition of what is uniquely real. The propositions on ethics in the *Tractatus* are devoted to flesh out this understanding of the ethical will as correlative with agreement with the world as such.

The impasse of the solipsist was manifest in the demand to single out a place in the world that would be intrinsically more valuable or significant than any other, the place in which he would recognize himself as that unique subject whose consciousness is at the same time co-extensive with the world. I took the imagined book, *The World as I Found It,* to be an allegory of this problem. The following passage from Wittgenstein's "Lecture on Ethics" bears some resemblance to this articulation of the difficulty of solipsism, not only because it problematizes finding a place in the world that is inherently more valuable than another but also because it figures this search in terms of the writing of a book, as it were from a wholly detached standpoint:

> Suppose one of you were an omniscient person and therefore knew all the movements of all the bodies in the world dead or alive and that he also knew all the states of minds of all human beings that ever lived, and suppose this man wrote all he knew in a big book, then this book would contain the whole description of the world; and what I want to say is, that this book would contain nothing that we would call an *ethical* judgment or anything that would logically imply such a judgment. . . . all the facts described would, as it were stand at the same level and in the same way all propositions stand on the same level. There are no propositions which, in any absolute sense, are sublime, important, or trivial. (LE in PO 39)

I want to follow up this parallel between the problem of finding the unique subject and that of finding value, and use it as an entry point to the propositions on ethics in the *Tractatus.* In particular, just as taking solipsism to an extreme led to the recognition that soulfulness equally belongs to the world, I would like to work toward the understanding that the valuable, or as Wittgenstein also refers to it in the *Notebooks,* the significant, meaning that has value, just is the dimension of agreement with the world, of recognizing the world as mine.

An objection nevertheless immediately suggests itself: Why doesn't the term "significance" appear in the propositions on ethics. Wittgenstein writes of "sense" (Sinn), or "meaning" (bedeutung), the same terms used to discuss issues of language and logic earlier in the book. I take it that Wittgenstein is reluctant to characterize this new dimension by a specific term insofar as that would tempt us to attribute certain distinguishable characteristics to certain phenomena *in* experience, whereas it points to another way to be turned in language to the world. Significance is that which characterizes the agreement with the world as such, not a specifiable state in the world. It will be necessary therefore to bring out this dimension by going over the final steps in the unfolding of the account of meaning in relation to terms such as world, will, life, agreement, happiness, and existence.

Wittgenstein begins the consideration of ethics by claiming that "All propositions are of equal value. 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: *in* it no value exists—and if it did exist, it would have no value. If there is any value that does have value, it must lie outside the whole sphere of what happens and is the case. For all that happens and is the case is accidental. What makes it non-accidental cannot lie *within* the world, since if it did it would itself be accidental. It must lie outside the world" (6.4–6.41). Note that from the outset Wittgenstein speaks of "the sense of the world" (here *Sinn*). That is, the question of value is from the very beginning formulated as what I call an issue of significance. Or as Wittgenstein puts it in the *Notebooks,* "good and evil are somehow connected with the meaning of the world" (N, 73).[16]

It would be tempting to take the distinction between what is *in* or *within* the world and what lies outside the world as a division between a field of neutral facts and an external source which projects, as it were, value. But this would immediately raise the question how such an external ground could ever infuse with value an indifferent experience of the world. Of what help is the appeal to transcendence if we don't have a clue how to apply that origin of value to the facts of the world. Wanting to refrain from saddling Wittgenstein from the start with the ethics of an unhappy consciousness which can never find in the world satisfaction for its longing to what essentially lies beyond it, I want to suggest a very minimal understanding of 6.41, taking it to be an initial articulation of the 'grammar' of significance, that would be more in line with the tautological tone of the proposition. When something is seen *in* or *within* the world, there is a comparison between it and other things and it cannot appear as intrinsically higher or uniquely valuable. Value is incomparable: It is not of the form this is valuable, rather than that. In other words, we seek a dimension of meaning that is not *partitioning* the world into contentful possibilities that are deemed significant and other equally present contentful possibilities that are rejected as insignificant. Significance points to the dimension of existence, to what pertains to having a world at all and to the capacity to be in agreement with it.

But don't we find particular things significant? How can significance pertain to the world, while being at the same time concretized? A proper understanding of this tension takes us a further step in elaborating the relationship of "world" and "significance." For Wittgenstein "world" is not, at least at this late stage in the progress of the *Tractatus,* an extensional characterization (such as "all that is the case," not to speak of identifying it with the universe). As I understand it, Wittgenstein does not preclude finding significance in an individual thing. But this would mean that in such a case, that thing is my world, that with which I can come to agree so that the rest fades out of the picture. Such a monadic understanding of the relation of thing and world is indeed expressed in the *Notebooks*: "As a thing among things, each thing is equally insignificant; as a world each one equally significant" (N, 156; I note that the German for "significant" is simply "Bedeutend," yet in the context Wittgenstein uses it, it is opposed to "trivial," "kleinlich").

To dramatize or allegorize this possibility of finding significance in what, among other things, may well appear trivial, Wittgenstein writes: "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 many things in the world. But if I was contemplating the stove *it* was my world, and everything else colourless by contrast with it" (N, 83). From the impossibility of giving a mark of what is worthy of contemplation, it does not follow that one can just arbitrarily choose to focus on anything one wishes and block out all the rest. There is no choice, whether reasoned or arbitrary involved in being *in* significance. For choice always picks one thing in the space in which there are others. Significance is recognized from within one's meaningful engagement in coming to agree with the world.

Do we have some example of this experience of the particular thing as significant in itself? I take Wittgenstein's claim in 6.421 that "Ethics and Aesthetics are one and the same" to suggest that works of art readily provide us a model of this dimension of experience. Let me briefly suggest features of the aesthetic that echo our attempt to clarify the dimension of agreement as such. We tend to speak of beauty as a field of significant *experience,* or experience that in itself presents a face of value. It gives us a way to conceive of the experience of significance as pertaining to a particular (or as concentrated in a particular place), while at the same time all-encompassing. Even if there are many paintings I appreciate, I do not appreciate a painting as one among many. My aesthetic judgment does not involve choice or comparison to other objects under a common concept. Rather, a work demands my undivided attentiveness. Arguably also, the field of aesthetic experience is not partitioned by a contrast between the valuable and the valueless. Weak aspects of a painting will make *it* weak and would not coexist in our experience with what is valuable. And a judgment which appreciates a work does not do so by setting the positive in it against the negative in that very work. We do not judge a work by eventually recognizing that, all in all, it has more of the good in it than of the bad.[17] Finally the activity of judging is not preparatory to enjoyment of the work. In it we come to agree with the work. Such atunement is its own reward and one's obtuseness to the work is in itself punishment.

In the *Notebooks* Wittgenstein pursues the connection between ethics and aesthetics in the following terms: "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" (N, 83). The expression "seeing something *sub specie aeternitatis,*" is notoriously mysterious, and tempts us to various pictures of a God's eye view of things. But, Wittgenstein really rehearses the distinction between seeing something in the midst of others, and seeing it as a unique, i.e. as a world: "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" (N, 83). When we consider objects from the midst of them, we conceive of them as comparable to one another, thus as things among others. But seeing something with "the whole world as background" is agreeing with it as such, whatever or however it is. Thus, to think of the work of art as the object seen *sub specie aeternitatis* would mean that the identity of the work does not consist in adding up various judgments about it, as though gradually corroborating that different parts of it have value. In beauty light dawns on the whole and everything you judge partakes in your sense of the value of the whole.

The comparison Wittgenstein makes between the work of art and the good life would suggest that the ethical act is referred to one's life as that in terms of which agreement with the world is recognized. How does an action relate to the expanse of life? We can conceive of a bad act as affecting everything in one's life, or transforming one's sense of the world. We find it meaningful to say that someone is suffering from a bad deed with undiminished intensity all of his life, that, someone's life is made tasteless by what he has done. This does not point to a causal connection *in space and time.* It does not mean that the action has innumerable effects or consequences extending to the rest of one's life. It is also not because the deed has left such a strong impression that the call of conscience is un-affected by the passage of time. (The call of conscience does not depend on how good a memory you have. And its being unforgettable does not imply that it is not possible to repress or ignore it.)[18]

But even though the bad action can affect all of life, it is only the good act for which there is the sense of the world *sub specie aeternitatis.* In what way does the bad will veil the inner relation of life and world, and how does the good will open it to view? Why does the bad action preclude agreement with the world? I want to try to understand that by thinking of the good action as one which disappears in the unity of agreement with the world. The good life is uneventful (or one might say ordinary). Think of it in terms of the understanding of significance sketched earlier. The space of significance is unitary; there is, so to speak, no contrast in it. But the bad action forces an event to remain isolated and obtrude in the life of a person. It so to speak sticks out in the expanse of life. It is because of its isolation *in* the world that the bad deed is essentially countering the possibility of significance pertaining to agreement with the world. In disagreement with the world, one loses the sense of a world.

For the good will, action belongs to the whole life of the person, that is, to character. The person of bad will lacks character in that sense. The bad will is that which forces the person that lacks character to deal or respond to the variety of events. It leaves the person be at the mercy of the variety of events, or, as Wittgenstein is also willing to say, it leaves him dependent on fate.

9. WILL, AGREEMENT, AND CONSCIENCE

It is at this level that we must understand Wittgenstein's claim that ethics is not a realm of practical laws, but rather the good action is a form of being in agreement with oneself. Nor is ethics a matter of reward and punishment assessed in terms of consequences of the action. For it is the action itself that is rewarding and its agreeable nature has to do with how it allows agreeing with the world (see 6.422). Such considerations are also at the basis of one of the famous remarks of the *Tractatus*:

> 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. In short the effect must be that it becomes an altogether different world. It must, so to speak, wax and wane as a whole. The world of the happy man is a different one from that of the unhappy man. (6.43)

The world of the happy is that of a person having a world altogether (by agreeing with it). It is having the dimension of uniqueness or significance in one's life. Indeed, an important variation of this statement appears in the *Notebooks* where Wittgenstein writes: "The world must, so to speak, wax or wane as a whole. As if by accession or loss of meaning (Sinnes)." The waxing and waning of the world is to be understood as its acquiring or losing *significance,* depending on the nature of one's will. For the good will has a world and the bad will is lost in what is *in* the world. It is in that specific sense that the limits of the world are changed without this change being reflected in any way in the space of facts, or objects.

That significance constitutes a world means there is no simple way to enter it. One has to recognize it from within one's engagement in meaning. It is only 'from within' that life can be that which involves me uniquely, that the world can be "my world." This 'within' is not my private inner, mental space (although it is always a temptation to turn that way to look for uniqueness). It is the internal limit of form, which is pure content, the sober recognition and submission to the concrete *realities* of my existence. One thing I do not choose is my life. Or, to put it slightly differently, conceiving of life as a matter of choice opens man to the mythical figuration of existence. (This is part of what interests Wittgenstein in his "Remarks on Frazer.")

It is because of this fundamental agreement that the happy life does away with justification: "if I *now* ask myself: But why should I live *happily,* then this of itself seems to me to be a tautological question; the happy life seems to be justified of itself, it seems that it *is* the only right life" (N, 78). The tautological nature of the demand for justification underscores that there is no mark of the happy life. The happy life does not have any contentful characterization, and cannot even be justified by appeal to say perfection, a special balance or harmonious ordering of purposes. "What is the objective mark of the happy, harmonious life? Here it is again clear that there cannot be any such mark, that can be *described.* This mark cannot be a physical one but only a metaphysical one, a transcendent(al) *(transcendentes)* one" (N, 78). That metaphyiscal or transcendental mark which is the only characterization of the happy life as "in some sense more harmonious" is that it agrees with the world. "In order to live happily I must be in agreement with the world. And that is what 'being happy' *means*" (N, 75).

For sure, agreement with the world involves a dimension of acceptance. But acceptance should not be construed as a choice or decision (as though saying to oneself, the world is what it is, and I *just* have to accept it). If acceptance is understood in terms of what is agreeable or makes for a happy world, a decision will not do. Moreover, we fail to properly position the subject if we think that such acceptance is tantamount to not willing, to passivity. Willing is unavoidable in bringing about agreement with the world. Thinking otherwise would be one more way of taking oneself out of the picture. As Wittgenstein puts it, "Man cannot make himself happy without more ado" (N, 76). The original condition of being in the world is one of dependence. This is not a matter of luck or circumstances, but

I would argue an ontological characterization. It is the original position out of which agreement can be realized: “The world is *given* me, i.e. my will enters into the world completely from outside as into something that is already there. . . . That is why we have the feeling of being dependent on an alien will.”[19] We see ourselves as dependent on an alien will (which, as Wittgenstein notes, can be called God, Fate, or just the world). But it is possible to realize one’s independence by bringing oneself to agree with the world. Or as Wittgenstein puts it: “I can *make* myself independent of fate” (N, 74, my emphasis). Let the world be what it is, I can always *bring myself* to be in agreement with it.

The primacy that is attributed to bringing oneself to be in agreement with the world implies that will is not the fundamental notion of ethics.[20] Willing arises only in response to the sense of disagreement in its concreteness. Wittgenstein gives a fundamental place, one could say, to conscience: “when my conscience upsets my equilibrium then I am not in agreement with something. But what is this? Is it *the world*?” (N, 75). The experiential manifestation of dependence, of being in disagreement with the world is the call of conscience: That is, good action is not willed according to laws or principles, but called for by conscience insofar as I seek agreement with the world. As Wittgenstein puts it: “Can one say: ‘Act according to your conscience whatever it may be’? Live happy!” (75).

The ethical will is the actualization of the capacity for being in agreement with the world. This is not an agreement with what you represent to yourself to be essential to life. For such an agreement is understood through the primacy of ends, and the highest reality cannot be represented as an end I strive for—it is manifest as a limit I recognize. One could then say that “seeing the world aright” or simple and sober clarity of vision is the ethical imperative. Acting right is being in agreement with what has the highest reality, acting wrongly is letting yourself remain unclear, one might say unrealistic. What Wittgenstein calls in the *Notebooks* the voice of “conscience” arises out of a sense of non-being in my existence in meaning. This is also why ethics is so closely related to the question of nonsense in language.

10. AGREEMENT AND EXISTENCE

There is a further series of elaborations of the notion of agreement with the world one can find in the *Tractatus* and related texts: For Wittgenstein the ever-present possibility of bringing oneself to be in agreement with the world is tantamount to holding that no event in life should be taken to be, in itself, absolutely unacceptable. He expresses this thought in different ways. For instance, it is behind the last remark in the *Notebooks*: “If suicide is allowed then everything is allowed. If anything is not allowed then suicide is not allowed. This throws a light on the nature of ethics, for suicide is, so to speak, the elementary sin” (N, 91). Suicide would be justified if something in one’s life could be absolutely unacceptable, if it would make life not worth living. It would be as if an event is made to stand for a limit condition, for life as a whole. But, a limit condition, that is agreement or disagreement with the world as such, cannot be decided by something having happened or such-and-such being the case. This does not mean that one could change the course of the world so that the event be avoided, but rather that the contingencies of life cannot affect the ultimate capacity to bring oneself in agreement with the world. It is always possible to find ways to "dissolve" the sense of tragic necessity that appears to attach to certain events.

This view of the dimension of world in language is also behind a stretch of remarks from 1931 gathered in *Culture and Value*: "When I 'have done with the world' I shall have created an amorphous (transparent) mass and the world in all its variety will be left on one side like an uninteresting lumber room . . . In the world (mine) there is no tragedy . . . It is as though everything were soluble in the aether of the world; there are no hard surfaces" (CV, 9). Tragedy would be the condition in which something happening makes it essentially impossible to be in agreement with the world. In another remark from the same period he writes: "Every tragedy could really start with the words: 'Nothing would have happened had it not been that . . .' (Had he not got caught in the machine by the tip of his clothing?) But surely this is a one-sided view of tragedy, to think of it merely as showing that an encounter can decide one's whole life" (CV, 12). It is not the mere event, the encounter, that provides the form of the tragic, but rather taking it to embody in life the very limit of life and thus bearing on one's being as a subject. Tragedy would, so to speak, turn death into an event in life; that is, make possible living through the absolute disappearance of any possibility whatsoever. It is this identification of an event as a limit condition that one can avoid. To echo proposition 6.4311 life can always be regarded as endless, or limitless.

The following passage of the "Lecture on Ethics" which describes a paradigmatic experience of the ethical would be another way to formulate the world in which there is no tragedy: "I will mention another experience straight away which I also know and which others of you might be acquainted with: it is, what one might call, the experience of feeling *absolutely safe.* I mean the state of mind in which one is inclined to say 'I am safe, nothing can injure me whatever happens'" (LE in PO, 41). This sense of utter safety is the conviction that no event, however injuring, can decide my life, can annul the very capacity of agreeing with the world, of the world being *my* world.

A last variant of the formulation of this ever-present possibility of bringing oneself to be in agreement with the world would be expressed in identifying ethics as the affirmation of the dimension of existence as such. So for instance Wittgenstein writes: "we could say that the man is fulfilling the purpose of existence who no longer needs to have any purpose except to live. That is to say who is content." In the "Lecture on Ethics," this affirmation of the dimension of existence is more exactly related not to the existence of the person, but to the existence of the world: "I believe the best way of describing it is to say that when I have it *I wonder at the existence of the world.* And I am then inclined to use such phrases as ‘how extraordinary that anything should exist’ or ‘how extraordinary that the world should exist’” (LE in PO, 41).

What matters for ethics is that there is a world, not what happens in it. Whatever happens I can bring myself to be in agreement with the world. In the *Tractatus* this perspective characterizes the identity of ethics, not only with aesthetics but also with religion. It echoes very closely proposition 5.552 concerning the relation of logic and existence.

> *How* things are in the world is a matter of complete indifference for what is higher. God does not reveal himself *in* the world. The facts all contribute only to setting the problem, not to its solution. It is not *how* things are in the world that is mystical, but *that* it exists. (6.432–6.44)[21]

Having reached the propositions on ethics in the *Tractatus* through the broader set of concerns laid out in this paper, it becomes at least plausible to argue that the proper expression of the ethical is precisely the recognition that there is no value *in* the world (Even if there is an overwhelming impulse to take that latter claim as denying the possibility of the ethical). The question for Wittgenstein is how is ethics expressed by one’s commitment that no matter of fact can be ultimately decisive for the capacity to agree with the world. How can I face everything that “happens” to me, if not with equanimity, then with the commitment not to let it carry the necessity that determines whether my life can be in agreement with the world? Instead of drawing the implication that finding no value in the world excludes the ethical, this might be the expression of the most demanding of all ethical views.

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NOTES

1. All references to Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus* will be given by the proposition number immediately after the quote. Reference to Wittgenstein’s other writings are similarly given immediately after the quote according to the following abbreviations followed by a page number: N, *Notebooks 1914–1916*; PO, *Philosophical Occasions*; WVC, *Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle*; VW, *Voices of Wittgenstein*; PI, *Philosophical Investigations.*
2. If we take 4.002 to express the recognition of the incoherence of the idea of causing a logical “accident” in language, of the idea that we can incorrectly combine logical elements of language, it would be possible to read that proposition as prefiguring a later moment in the book articulating

the relation of ordinary language and logical form: "In fact, all the propositions of our everyday language, just as they stand, are in perfect logical order" (5.5563).

3. As Wittgenstein puts it in the *Philosophical Investigations,* "A main source of our failure to understand is that we do not *command a clear view* of the use of our words. —Our grammar is lacking in this sort of perspicuity" (PI, 49).
4. "Employment" is a term Wittgenstein uses when his emphasis is on distinguishing the superficial appearance of the sign from the symbolic form. Employment might even be clear from a single proposition. For example, we employ the word 'sweet' as a predicate in 'Sugar is sweet'. But, to mirror the mode of signification in the use requires gathering in the plane of signs all that contributes to the term having meaning (presenting in the plane of signs, what Wittgenstein calls, the pictorial form). Use is not apparent in one proposition, but rather only in bringing together systematically different propositions in which the word appears. So, to take an example from Wittgenstein's late twenties conversations with the Vienna Circle: "At first blush, 'right' looks like other adjectives, e.g. 'sweet'. 'Right-left' corresponds to 'sweet-bitter'. I can say 'farther-right', just as I can say 'sweeter'. But I can only say ' . . . is to the right of . . . ' and not ' . . . is to the sweet of . . . '. Their syntax is thus really different." We employ 'right' and 'sweet' both as adjectives, but the consideration of the use of the sign in different propositions brings out both the complication in logical form and the essential difference between the forms of the two symbols.

   Thus Wittgenstein follows the example with the claim: "If I consider not only one proposition in which a certain word occurs, but all possible propositions, then they specify its syntax completely, much more completely than the symbol 'jx'." But in order to bring out fully the form of each of the terms and the difference between them, we need further to consider the use of other terms that belong to the same space: Here, for instance, we realize that we can only substitute 'left' to 'right' in propositions, but that we have more possibilities with respect to taste such as opposing 'bitter' or 'sour' to 'sweet'. In other words the form pertaining to the symbol for which the sign stands is brought out by considering the use of terms as a whole space of possibilities with a certain inner schematic ordering.
5. A similar moment appears in the second part of *Philosophical Investigations*: "We remain unconscious of the prodigious diversity of all the everyday language-games because the clothing of our language makes everything alike" (PI, 224) Note that Wittgenstein uses the figure of the clothing that hides the diversity both in the *Tractatus* and in the *Investigations.*
6. The fundamental metaphor for the relation of objects in states of affairs in the *Tractatus* is that of links in a chain. But, when we want to extend the consideration to an environment of language, to the complicated human organism we might avail ourselves of, the figure Wittgenstein chooses to refer to that dimension of life in the *Philosophical Investigations*: the weave or carpet. Just as with links in a chain, we can also say that each strand of the carpet or weave is completely independent, yet they hold together by their interweaving. Wittgenstein sometimes refers to a judgment of experience as the recognition of a certain "pattern in the weave of our lives" (PI, 362).
7. Hence, it might also be something recognizable in scientific or mathematical language rightly conceived. Wittgenstein is very careful not to think of the distinction between everyday language and scientific language hierarchically. In particular, logic equally applies to both, i.e. they both raise the issue of recognizing elementary propositions in application.
8. Some interpreters would argue that there is a need to introduce a metaphysical subject, once Wittgenstein moves from the discussion of language, in order to account for the projective relation of the proposition to the world (as though it is the subject that projects the logical schemata onto reality). This seems to me to be based on a misreading of what projection comes to in the discussion of signs and symbols. Indeed, the validity of an interpretation of the *Tractatus,* to my mind, depends on avoiding the introduction of the subject too early in the progress of the book.
9. A propositional sign, a picture, is a fact: What represents for instance in the sign "Ra" is that "a" is to the right of "R." But considering facts along the linear axis of writing in one-dimensional space is like considering the diagram of the Necker cube as if it were merely an arrangement of lines in two-dimensional space. For "Ra" to express the proposition Ra we must see it as a fact projected in the space of form that is common to the proposition and the reality it depicts. But having the propositional sign be a fact in *that* space of form, while relating to the form of reality depicted, leaves room for another fact of the same space to be actually the case. In the position of belief we relate to the possibility of that other fact via the propositional sign; that is, only by way of the form they have in common.

10. To clarify this contrast, consider how the symbolic form of a purely logical term, for instance negation, is revealed in the space of signs. We tend to reify negation and think of it as something signified immediately by the simple sign, the '~'. But to recognize what negation comes to as a form we must express it as part of a space having a certain multiplicity. It belongs to the space spanned by the logical operations, such as conjunction and disjunction. To be given negation as a symbol, we must at the same time be given all the element of the space to which it belongs. Thus, the form of negation would be reflected in signs by bringing together the equivalent ways of expressing what we call the negation of 'p': '~~~p', '~pv~p', '~p.~p', etc. Importantly, we can characterize a priori the series of propositional signs that would reflect for us what the symbol of negation comes to.
11. The traditional formulation of the solipsistic position assumes one's access to the world to be essentially sensory. But Wittgenstein's concern is language. Insofar as we take meaning to be characterized by logical form, which is essentially shared, this in itself might seem to preclude any possibility of a unique access to the world in the medium of language. Incorporating solipsism into the Wittgensteinian framework would seem to require a private ground of language in sensory experience, maybe taking the objects of the *Tractatus* to be, after all, sense data. This position seems hardly attributable to Wittgenstein, yet, he speaks of the limits of *my* language, as well as of the language which alone I understand.
12. If considerations of the specificity of the action are introduced, such as considering that only I raised my hand at a certain moment, we could always further imagine strange cases such as when one person's hand is raised, another person's hand simultaneously moves in the same way (see in this context Wittgenstein's discussion in *Philosophical Remarks,* ed. R. Rhees [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975], part VI).
13. Here it would be instructive to turn to Wittgenstein's remark on Frazer, for instance: "If a man were given the choice to be born in one tree of a forest, there would be some who would seek out the most beautiful or the highest tree, some who would choose the smallest, and some who would choose an average or below average tree, and I certainly do not mean out of philistinism, but rather for exactly the same reason, or kind of reason, that the other had chosen the highest. That the feeling which we have for our lives is comparable to that of such a being who could choose for himself his viewpoint in the world underlies, I believe the myth—or the belief—that we had chosen our bodies before birth" (PO, 137). For sure I do not want to attribute to Wittgenstein an affirmation of mythical thinking, but rather that at the end of the day, to recognize that no localization of spirit in some part of the world can be priviledged from the position of choice of the solipsist.
14. See Friedrich Schiller, *"On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry" and "On the Sublime": Two Essays,* trans. with an introduction by J. Elias (New York: F. Ungar Pub. Co., 1967).
15. In the *Notebooks,* Wittgenstein formulates the remark which, as he puts it, "gives the key for deciding the way in which solipsism is a truth" as follows: "There really is one world soul, which I for preference call *my* soul and as which alone I conceive what I call the souls of others" (49).
16. It is necessary to distinguish significance in having a world from a specification of "the meaning" of the world. The latter would assume a contentful answer, a solution, to the riddle of meaning. The line of interpretation I present takes meaningfulness itself, there being meaning, to be what we realize we are content with or what makes us content. Indeed, Wittgenstein explicitly rejects any contentful answer to what he calls the riddle of the meaning of the world, by leading to a realization that: "The solution of the problems of life is seen in the vanishing of the problem. (Is not this the reason," Wittgenstein adds, "why those who have found after a long period of doubt that the sense of life became clear to them have been unable to say what constituted that sense?)" (6.521). Usually this proposition is read stressing the nonsensicality of metaphysical questioning. But I would like to focus on the other side, so to speak, on how dissolving the specificity of questioning, laying questioning to rest, lets you rest content with there being meaning. This vanishing of the need to question is precisely what being in significance is. To be unable to say what that sense of the world is, means that significance is not localizable, but has to do with the way one experiences the world altogether.
17. I note that Wittgenstein does write in parenthesis after the passages I quoted, as though reminding himself of something we say that could be a possible counterexample to think about: ("Something good about the whole, but bad in details") (N, 83).

18. This would be tantamount to recognizing an internal connection between the will that manifests itself in action and what Kant would call the timeless choice of intelligible character. That latter is either wholly good or wholly bad but never lukewarm (as though an average of all actions up to a certain point).
19. This entering into the "already there" can be compared to Heidegger's way of speaking of "thrownness" as a dimension of Dasein's being-in-the-world.
20. I am indebted here to an insightful comment that Tarek Dika made to the presentation of this material, that further brought together Wittgenstein's understanding of ethics and Heidegger's attempt to understand value without giving fundamental place to the will.
21. The articulation of the ethico-religious standpoint in terms of coming to agreement with the world, that is, in making concrete uniqueness manifest in life, is also that which is at the basis of the proper understanding of the mystical as pure receptivity in language: "Es gibt allerdings Unaussprechliches. Dies zeigt sich, es ist das Mystische" (6.522). It is not what we say, nor what *we* show, but what manifests itself that constitutes the limit of language. This is in no way beyond language, but rather is the highest concretization of meaning *in language,* that is, the possibility in language to encounter that limit, which is the world. Similarly, we realize that seeing the world as a limited whole (6.45) is precisely realizing the unique concreteness of the world conceived as limit. One can also understand why there is a sense in which nothing has changed when the problems of life have been resolved. When what is utterly contentful serves as the standard with which I come to agree, there is no place for further questions.