

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF POETRY FOR WITTGENSTEIN'S APPROACH TOWARDS PHILOSOPHY

LA IMPORTANCIA DE LA POESÍA EN LA APROXIMACIÓN DE WITTGENSTEIN A LA FILOSOFÍA

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ABSTRACT

In this article I will discuss the significance of literature, especially poetry, for Wittgenstein. Apart from Leo Tolstoy, Fjodor Dostoevsky and Georg Trakl, I will focus on the Austrian poet Ingeborg Bachmann, whose approach towards language resembles that of Wittgenstein. That is to say, both of them felt obliged to a high ethos concerning writing which is revealed in their treatment of language, in their sensitivity towards every word. Bachmann's remark "The more clearly we express ourselves, the more poetic we will be", corresponds exactly Wittgenstein's style of writing which is striking for its conciseness and clarity. Besides, it is in the spirit of his notion of philosophy which in the *Tractatus* he defined as the clarification of propositions. And his striving for clarity, for transparency can be observed also in later years. Moreover, by restricting himself to what can be said clearly and keeping silent about what can only be *shown*, Wittgenstein meets the essence of poetry. As an example, I will discuss a poem written by Ludwig Uhland in which the unutterable is not uttered but still contained in what is uttered. Instead of detail description, genius poetry distinguishes itself by avoiding superfluous words. Georg Trakl was another poet who had the gift of silently hinting at the deeper meaning of his poems. "Ethics and Aesthetics are One", Wittgenstein emphasized in the *Tractatus* and referred to the limits of language in view of the ethical. This awareness is inherent in Wittgenstein's approach towards philosophy as well as in genius poetry.

KEYWORDS: Clarity, transparency, language, ethics, aesthetics.

RESUMEN

En este artículo analizaré la importancia de la literatura, especialmente la poesía, para Wittgenstein. Además de León Tolstói, Fiódor Dostoievski y Georg Trakl, me

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centraré en la poeta austriaca Ingeborg Bachmann, cuyo enfoque del lenguaje se asemeja al de Wittgenstein. Es decir, ambos se sentían obligados a mantener una elevada ética respecto a la escritura, lo cual se revela en su tratamiento del lenguaje, en su sensibilidad hacia cada palabra. La observación de Bachmann: «Cuanto más claramente nos expresemos, más poéticos seremos», se corresponde exactamente con el estilo de escritura de Wittgenstein, que destaca por su concisión y claridad. Además, se inscribe en el espíritu de su concepción de la filosofía, que en el *Tractatus* definió como la clarificación de proposiciones. Y su afán por la claridad, por la transparencia, puede observarse también en años posteriores. Es más, al limitarse a lo que puede decirse con claridad y guardar silencio sobre lo que solo puede mostrarse, Wittgenstein alcanza la esencia de la poesía. Como ejemplo, analizaré un poema de Ludwig Uhland en el que lo inefable no se expresa explícitamente, pero sí se manifiesta en lo que se dice. En lugar de descripciones detalladas, la poesía genial se distingue por evitar palabras superfluas. Georg Trakl fue otro poeta que poseía el don de insinuar sutilmente el significado profundo de sus poemas. «Ética y estética son una sola», enfatizó Wittgenstein en el *Tractatus*, refiriéndose a los límites del lenguaje desde una perspectiva ética. Esta consciencia es inherente tanto al enfoque filosófico de Wittgenstein como a la poesía genial.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Claridad, transparencia, lenguaje, ética, estética.

Despite the role of a scientific approach in Wittgenstein's philosophy, one must not neglect the significance of a literary viz. poetic feature in his way of thinking and writing. In fact, as early as in the *Tractatus* – a work governed by logical-analytic concerns – Wittgenstein was aware of the limits of science he hinted at (TLP, 6.52), not only in the last few pages but also as early as in the Preface. And, in a letter to Ludwig von Ficker, he remarked that his work was both “strictly philosophical & literary” (Wittgenstein, 1969: 33).

In the following, I will first draw attention to his high appreciation of literature, especially poetry, and, secondly, I will discuss to what extent his way of writing philosophy was shaped by a so-called poetic concern in his very style of writing. This involves referring not only to authors he appreciated, but also to authors who appreciated Wittgenstein, for example Ingeborg Bachmann, with whom he had much in common in their high ethos in their treatment of language and its use. Finally, I will discuss a few aspects I consider important for the connection between aesthetics and Wittgenstein's philosophy.

1

It was in 1910 that Wittgenstein – then a young man of twenty-one – saw a play called “*Die Kreuzelschreiber*”, written by Ludwig Anzengruber. In the Third Act, First Scene of Anzengruber’s play, the Steinklopferhanns (the protagonist) tells how lost and sick he was. Thus, he decided to die outside in the surroundings of nature; after having lain there for a long time and having admired the mountains and the sky above him, he feels refreshed and suddenly totally happy in the feeling that he belonged to everything around him and everything around belonged to him. He was part of all around him (*cf.* Anzengruber [1872]: 278f.)

This mystical experience of the protagonist that no matter what happened in the world, nothing bad could happen to him (he was independent of fate and circumstances) – impressed Wittgenstein deeply and was of decisive influence for his approach to religion. In fact, it was then that Wittgenstein came to realize the significance of religion, as he later reported to Norman Malcolm (Malcolm, 1989: 58).

The mystical experience of feeling absolutely safe in the surroundings of nature and of God seems to have influenced Wittgenstein’s description of the feeling of absolute safety – one of the three examples he mentioned for his personal understanding of ethics in his *Lecture on Ethics*, which he delivered in November 1929. Whereas Wittgenstein avoided treating ethical and religious matters in philosophy by rational and scientific methods, he hinted at the power of “showing” them by means of art, literature, and music.

During the First World War, we have testimony of how sensitively Wittgenstein reacted to poetry – more precisely – to poetry of genius. After Ludwig von Ficker had sent him the poems of Georg Trakl, Wittgenstein replied: “Thank you for sending me the poems of Georg Trakl. I don’t understand them, but their *tone* fills me with happiness. It is the tone of true genius” (Wittgenstein, 1969: 22).

It was Trakl’s poetic genius to hint, silently, at what could not be described by ordinary words – i.e., by so-called normal language. Instead, Trakl’s genius was to “show” what seems to have struck Wittgenstein to the core of his heart. In other words, it was the underlying “tone” in Trakl’s poems that distinguishes true genius.

Apart from Trakl’s poems, Wittgenstein was deeply moved by the poems of Rainer Maria Rilke, which were sent by Ficker. In his attached letter, Rilke expressed his deepest thanks to the “unknown friend out there at the front”, hoping to send him some light in the darkness of those times. Wittgenstein reacted with great joy and wrote that he would wear this “wonderful gift” next to his heart (Wittgenstein, 1969: 27). As was later discovered, Rilke’s poems were a then unpublished version of the *Duineser Elegien*.

It was poetry viz. literature, and philosophy that helped Wittgenstein to sustain the hardship – the cruel experience – of the war, in other words, to lead a life of knowledge, devoted to the spiritual, to the good and to the beautiful (cf. NB, 7.10.1914). During the war, Wittgenstein came across Tolstoy's *Gospel in Brief* – a booklet he found in a small village called Tarnow. This work virtually kept him alive during the war, as he later reported to Ludwig von Ficker (Wittgenstein, 1969: 28). Reading Wittgenstein's coded remarks, one can observe the vast influence of Tolstoy's work on Wittgenstein – both with respect to his personal, especially moral life and his approach to ethics and religion. Above all, Tolstoy influenced Wittgenstein's devotion to the spiritual. Repeatedly, he quoted passages of the book in the coded part of his Wartime Notebooks: "Again and again I tell myself the words of Tolstoy: 'Man is weak in the flesh, but free in the spirit.'" (MS 101, 12.9.1914). His striving for a life in the spirit – not in the 'flesh' (body) – becomes a dominating aspect: "In times of outer well-being we don't think about the weakness of the flesh; however, if we think of times of misery, then we are aware of it. And we turn to the spirit" (MS 101, 5.10.1914) [In den Zeiten des äußeren Wohlergehens denken wir nicht an die Ohnmacht des fleisches; denkt man aber an die zeiten der not, dann kommt sie einem zum Bewusstsein. Und man wendet sich zum Geist].

On October 1913, he notes in MS 101: "I am spirit & therefore I am free". [Ich bin geist & darum bin ich frei]. Disgusted by the rude behaviour of his comrade-soldiers and by the violent atmosphere of war in general, he sees the only salvation by a turning to the spiritual: "May only the spirit live! It is the safe harbour protected away from the desolate endless grey sea of happenings" (MS 102, 13.12.1914) [Lebe nur der Geist! Er ist der sichere Hafen geschützt abseits vom trostlosen unendlichen Meer des Geschehens]. The more threatening he feels the atmosphere surrounding him, the more refuge he finds in his philosophical work, thus in the spiritual. Several times he exclaims: "The blessing of work!" Time and again, he notes: "may the spirit protect me whatever happens" [der Geist beschütze mich, was immer geschehe] (MS 102, 1.12.14; 11.2.15, 13.2.15).

Apart from the emphasis on the spiritual, several aspects of Tolstoy's *Gospel in Brief* – e.g. the importance of a life in the present and the total dependence on fate viz. God – obviously influenced Wittgenstein's philosophizing to an extent that cannot be overlooked in the *Notebooks 1914-1916*.

Also in later years, Wittgenstein emphasized the importance of literary writing in order to present examples of universal problems of human fate. Apart from the tragedies of ancient Greece, Wittgenstein referred to Tolstoy and Dostoevsky,

whom he considered the only authors of the nineteenth century who truly had something important to say about ethics and religion (Drury, 1981: 101). Even before the war, Wittgenstein highly esteemed the works of Dostoevsky, especially *The Brothers Karamazov*, the novel he recommended to many friends of his in the course of his life. I will come back to the significance of Dostoevsky later on.

In 1917, Wittgenstein and his friend Paul Engelmann exchanged their impressions of a poem written by Ludwig Uhland. While the poem appears to be quite a simple, concise one, it can be seen as the report of a whole life – the life of Graf Eberhard – and it is evidently the very simplicity, the renunciation of superfluous words and the reduction of linguistic means that fascinated both Engelmann and Wittgenstein. Engelmann, who had sent the poem to his friend, remarked: “[The poem] is a wonder of objectivity. All the other poems (also the good ones) try to utter the unutterable; here this is not so and this is why it turned out well” (Wittgenstein, 2006: 23). Wittgenstein’s reaction was the following: “The poem of Ludwig Uhland is really magnificent. And it is so: If one does not try to utter the unutterable, then *nothing* gets lost, but the unutterable is – unuttered – contained in what is uttered” (*ibid.* 24). To reduce language to a minimum instead of trying to utter the unutterable – viz. the deeper meaning – would only destroy it. Instead, avoiding the attempt to utter the unutterable is the mark of poetry of genius. The deeper meaning is still contained even if not uttered in words.

As we know from the *Tractatus*, this was exactly what Wittgenstein was striving after in his philosophizing – i.e., this was his aim in philosophy – namely to “limit the unthinkable from within through the thinkable” (TLP, 4.114). Thus, philosophy “will mean the unspeakable by clearly displaying the speakable” (TLP, 4.115).

Wittgenstein respected the limits of language and of science – both in content and in form. In content, he did so by restricting himself to what can be said clearly, while avoiding the discussion of ethical and religious questions – viz. metaphysical problems – within philosophy. In form, his style of writing contains no superfluous words, but is striking for its clarity, conciseness and precision through a radical economization of language. One can observe an almost obsessive search for the best possible, the adequate expression, the right – the “redeeming word”.¹ Besides, Wittgenstein’s aim in philosophy was not to establish a theory, but to make propositions clear (*cf.* TLP, 4.112).

¹ The term “redeeming word” first occurs in the coded part of Wittgenstein’s Wartime Notebooks – in connection with his search for illumination in his philosophical, but also in his search for an answer to his personal, moral struggles. In later years the term occurs

2

Clarity and transparency are what he and the Austrian poet Ingeborg Bachmann had in common. And this is exactly what poetry stands for. “The more clearly we express ourselves, the more poetic we will be”, Bachmann said (Bachmann, 2005: 9).

In this remark I see the connection between writing poetry and writing philosophy in the sense of Wittgenstein. To use as few words as possible, means to aspire to a maximum of clarity of expression. The underlying depth in the omission of superfluous words distinguishes both Wittgenstein’s philosophizing and Bachmann’s poetry. Thus, the parallels between Wittgenstein and Bachmann lie above all in their high ethos of writing, their earnestness in their approach towards language. Both felt obliged to a correct use of language, to a respectful attitude towards every word.

The silence concerning what cannot be said, the subtle boundary between speech and silence, which Kierkegaard saw as a sign of “inwardness” that leads to essential action², meets Wittgenstein’s handling of language – a way of dealing that manifests itself sentence by sentence in a mindful use of the word, in the avoidance of everything superfluous that is condemned as “talkativeness” or “babbling”. This leads to a stylistic intensity that is able to emphasize the essential all the more clearly, whereby Wittgenstein’s concern – the separation of what can be said from what can only be shown – as well as his philosophical goal – the “logical clarification of thoughts” (TLP, 4.112) – become clear. His striving for “clarity”, for “transparency”, is carried out within language (Somavilla, 2025: 174). In all the stages in the course of his philosophizing, he was always concerned with language and ethics, whereby these areas cannot be separated from each other, but, as mentioned, are directly related.

again several times with regard to his search for the adequate word in the process of his philosophizing and his notion of philosophy. E.g.: “The task of philosophy is to find the redeeming word. The redeeming word is the solution to a philosophical problem” (MS 105: 44; cf. also MS 107: 114.); “The redeeming word is the word that finally allows us to grasp what has weighed on our consciousness until now in an intangible way” (MS 110: 17).

² Cf. Kierkegaard, 1962: 69: “What is talkativeness? It is the result of doing away with the vital distinction between talking and keeping silent. Only someone who knows how to remain essentially silent can really talk – and act essentially. Silence is the essence of inwardness, of the inner life.”

The same can be said of Ingeborg Bachmann. Her handling of language is expressed in her poems and stories as an extremely sensitive, reflective one. One senses the same respect and seriousness for language, a seriousness that she admired in Wittgenstein, according to her own statement. She had learnt from him precise thinking and clarity of expression and the sentence “*The limits of my language mean the limits of my world*” (TLP, 5.6) was particularly important to her. In her work, this sentence is extended into the poetic: “The playing field is language, and its boundaries are the boundaries of the world unquestioningly seen, the world that is revealed and precisely thought, the world experienced in pain and praised in happiness” (Bachmann, 2005: 190). However, she did not want to speak of a direct influence by Wittgenstein, as she saw too great a difference between “philosophy and writing”.³

But she may have been wrong about this, because it was Wittgenstein himself, who emphasized in his letter to Ficker that his work was “strictly philosophical & at the same time literary”, as mentioned before (Wittgenstein, 1969: 33). The addendum “but it should not be babbling (geschwefelt) in it”, referred to the avoidance of ethical-religious or metaphysical questions in philosophy. Only by avoiding talking about it, the ethical is, as it were, limited “from Within” (Wittgenstein, 1969: 35).

And here he aligns again with Bachmann, who vehemently opposed German metaphysics and for this very reason also appreciated Wittgenstein, who knew how to separate philosophy as a science from metaphysics. But it was not only the reluctance to discuss metaphysical questions, but above all the underlying depth in the omission of superfluous words – similar to the subtlety of poems – that Bachmann seemed to have felt in Wittgenstein’s language (cf. Somavilla in NWR, 2026: 4).

While for Kant philosophy meant a Critique of Reason, Wittgenstein saw its task as a “Critique of Language” (TLP, 4.0031). Accordingly, he did not see the purpose of philosophy as consisting in philosophical propositions, but in making propositions clear (cf. TLP, 4112) – a clarity in accordance with his claim to truth (cf. TLP, 4112). The proximity to Bachmann’s statement in an interview with Joachim von Bernstorff “We have to find true sentences” is unmistakable (Bachmann, 1983: 19).

This sensitivity in dealing with language is apt to lead to an even more problematic relationship to language. In contrast to ordinary people using

³ Cf. Bachmann’s interview with Karol Sauerland, in Bachmann, 1983: 136.

everyday language without reflecting on it, the author cannot deal with language in an unreflective way, as Bachmann remarked, because she was constantly aware of the “suspicious thing” in every word (Bachmann, 1983: 25). According to Friedrich Hölderlin, language is “the most dangerous commodity” (Hölderlin, 2020: 32). This is not only to be seen in the sense of the dissemination of untruths, insults, injuries, etc. caused by language, but also with regard to philosophical problems that are based on the “misunderstanding of the ‘logic of our language’” (cf. MS 104: 119). Like Bachmann, Wittgenstein, too, constantly found himself in a struggle with language: “We are struggling with language”; “We are engaged in a struggle with language”, he remarked (MS 153a: 35r, 1931: CV: 13e).

Besides, both of them were driven by a personal need – an existential “necessity” – to write rather than by external, ambitious reasons. To feel this inner need is a prerequisite for creative writing and marks the difference from superficiality in literary or philosophical works. When Bachmann felt no inner need to write poems any longer, she stopped working in this genre and turned to writing prose. And Wittgenstein felt depressed when he realized a diminishing of his philosophical urge in later years.

Wittgenstein’s effort in the *Tractatus* to create a kind of abstract ideal language through logical analysis can be compared with Bachmann’s claim that the writing of a poem as a work of art is a “very pure state” in which only language plays a role (cf. Bachmann, 1983: 78). In later years, when Wittgenstein bid farewell to the theory of depiction and concentrated on language in everyday use, he built on experience in a similar way as Bachmann did in prose. But she still distanced herself from stock phrases and was aware of the responsibility of the writer for language as something precious. Instead of using terms such as “war”, “catastrophe” and the like, Bachmann saw the task of her writing as making visible or showing the problems of people and existence through a new, special kind of language. This new language she saw in a “new gait”, and it only had this gait if a new spirit inhabited it. In doing so, the writer must fix the signs within the framework of the boundaries set by language, and give them a gait that they receive nowhere else but in the linguistic work of art.⁴

In later years, Wittgenstein speaks of the danger of the “sublime conception” or an “ethereal region” that leads away from the “concrete case”, so that we get onto “slippery ice” (cf. DB: 163f.). Therefore, we have to turn back to the “rough

⁴ Cf. Ingeborg Bachmann: 1. Frankfurter Vorlesung “Fragen und Scheinfragen” in Bachmann, 2021: 20. Cf. also Somavilla, 2025: 181.

ground” (cf. PI § 106, 107, 108). Apart from Wittgenstein’s respect for language, he approaches every object of his philosophizing with attentiveness. One can speak of a kind of subtlety in approaching and describing it – in other words, a tendency towards a poetic approach: “Oh why do I feel as if I were writing a poem when I write philosophy? It is as if there were something small that has a wonderful meaning. Like a leaf or a flower” (MS 133, 31.10.1946) [“O warum ist mir zumute, als schrieb ich ein Gedicht, wenn ich Philosophie schreibe? Es ist, wie wenn hier etwas Kleines wäre, das eine herrliche Bedeutung hat. Wie ein Blatt oder eine Blume”]. Wittgenstein’s sensitive treatment of language and approach to the objects of his philosophizing has something poetic and seems to confirm his remark: “I believe I summed up where I stand in relation to philosophy when I said: really one should write philosophy only as one *writes a poem*” (MS 146 25v; 1933-1934; CV: 28e).⁵ His following sentence, “I was acknowledging myself, with these words, to be someone who cannot quite do what he would like to be able to do” (CV: 28e), seems to emphasize his high ideal of poetry for which he himself felt he lacked the talent or genius.

Still, I argue that Wittgenstein’s relationship to his philosophizing can indeed be seen as poetic in many ways. In poetry – if it is of high quality – every word has to be carefully chosen and clarity is of utmost importance, while the deeper meaning is left untouched in the sense of avoiding uttering the unutterable, as mentioned before. Wittgenstein’s style of writing can be said to meet these requirements.

3

Besides, his attentive attitude towards the phenomenal world and the world outside the world of facts – his attitude of “wonder at the existence of the world” (Wittgenstein, 1989: 14-18) – resembles the attitude of a poet who sees the world with different eyes than the so-called ordinary person. Wittgenstein – and the poet – see the world *sub specie aeternitatis*, thus in an aesthetic and ethical way in the light of eternity. One might even go further and mention traits of mysticism in the sense of approaching a sphere unattainable by normal language and science. This is not to say that Wittgenstein or a poet is a mystic, however, there are

⁵ According to a discussion with Allan Janik, this remark does not mean that philosophy should be written in the form of poems, but rather be relevant for Wittgenstein’s numerous fictitious examples in his *Philosophical Investigations*.

certain mystical traits in their way of seeing the world. And as he put it, the contemplation of the world sub specie aeterni is the mystical.⁶

In *The Brothers Karamazov* – Wittgenstein’s favourite novel of Dostoevsky – the Elder Zossima, the spiritual father and symbol of mystical reunion with God and the world, also speaks of the “contact with other worlds”, using the same wording while hinting at a “higher heavenly world” hidden from us, but for which “we have been given a precious mystic sense of our living bond with the other world”. And Zossima emphasizes the importance of that feeling for contact with those other mysterious worlds, as without this contact men would become “indifferent to life and even grow to hate it” (Dostoevsky, 2009: 356f. Cf. also Somavilla, 2013: 266).

This “feeling for other worlds” is expressed in the *Tractatus* as the feeling for the mystical (See TLP, 6.432, 6.44, 6.45, 6.522). However, not only the mystical aspect in the *Lecture on Ethics* – as explicitly illustrated in the experience of absolute safety and implicitly in the experience of wonder at the existence of the world –, but also the feeling of guilt can be seen in connection with Dostoevsky’s significance for Wittgenstein – also with respect to the emphasis on striving after a happy life. (cf. Somavilla, 2013: 266).

4

Regarding the significance of aesthetics viz. art for a happy life, it is worthwhile to look closely into the following remarks. On July 5, 1916, Wittgenstein noted: “Even if everything that we want were to happen, this would still only be, so to speak, a grace of fate, for what would guarantee it is not any logical connexion between will and world, and we could not in turn will the supposed physical connexion.” (NB, 5.7.1916; see also TLP, 6.374). He then added: “Good or evil willing can only affect the ‘boundaries of the world, not the facts’; not what can be expressed by language, but only shown in language” (cf. NB, 5.7.1916 and TLP, 6.43). One day later, Wittgenstein emphasizes the importance of striving after a happy life, which, alluding to Dostoevsky, he sees as “the purpose of existence” (NB, 6.7.1916). This does not mean aspiring to worldly goods – viz. a life of wealth – but leading an ethical, moral life, a life of knowledge, for “The good conscience is the happiness that the life of knowledge preserves” [Das gute

⁶ Cf. TLP, 6.45: “The contemplation of the world sub specie aeterni is its contemplation as a limited whole. The feeling of the world as a limited whole is the mystical feeling”.

Gewissen ist das Glück, welches das Leben der Erkenntnis gewährt] (13.8.1916).⁷ Therefore, only a happy life can renounce “the amenities of the world”, which are to it merely “so many graces of fate” (NB, 13.8.1916).

Apart from the ethical component in the pursuit of a happy life, the aspect of aesthetics plays a major role, as well. As Wittgenstein noted in the coded part of his *Notebooks*, this means living in “the good & the beautiful until life ends itself” (NB, 7.10.1914), as mentioned before, which suggests the connection between ethics and aesthetics viz. ethics and art. To live in the good and in the beautiful – in other words, to lead a life according to ethical standards and dedicated to art – guarantees a happy life. Thus Wittgenstein asks: “Is it the essence of an artistic way of looking at things, that it looks at the world with a happy eye?” (NB, 20.10.1916).

His foregoing remark (NB, 20.10.1916), “Artistically, the miracle is that the world exists. That there is what there is”, can be seen in light of his remark in the *Tractatus* that “Not *how* the world is, is the mystical, but *that* it is” (TLP, 6.44). One can speak thereby of a mystical aspect in art – art in the sense of *showing* what cannot be said or explained by science. This is especially relevant in the field of poetry – namely to *show* by restricting language to such an extent that the content is implicitly *shown* by renouncing detailed description, but, instead, using as few words as possible.

On October 7, 1916, Wittgenstein wrote about the connection between art and ethics:

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 connexion between art and ethics.

The usual way of looking at things sees objects as it were from the midst of them, the view *sub specie aeternitatis* from outside.

In such a way that they have the whole world as background.

Is this it perhaps – in this view the object is seen together with space and time instead of in space and time?

Each thing modifies the whole logical world, the whole logical space, so to speak.

(The thought forces itself upon one): The thing seen *sub specie aeternitatis* is the thing seen together with the whole logical space. (NB, 7.10.1916)

⁷ Cf. also: “The mark of the happy life cannot be a physical, but only a metaphysical, a transcendental one” (NB, 30.7.1916).

Immediately after this passage, Wittgenstein describes the difference between seeing an object in the usual way and seeing it *sub specie aeternitatis*. As an example, he chooses an oven, thus an ordinary object which – seen in the usual way – is nothing more than an ordinary object. However, seen *sub specie aeterni*, the oven is a precious object and turns into one's world – as “the true world among shadows” (cf. NB, 8.10.1916). With this example, Wittgenstein aims to train our eyes to view every object in the phenomenal world with attention and respect, if not to say reverence and awe. In other words, to view the world *sub specie aeternitatis* which equals to see it under a light from above. This kind of view characterizes the ethical way of viewing the world as well as the aesthetic view. In fact, in 1930 he compares the work of the artist with that of the philosopher in their way of capturing the world *sub specie aeterni*. As to the philosopher, it is – as he believes – “the way of thought which as it were flies above the world and leaves it the way it is, contemplating it from above in its flight” (cf. MS 109 28: 22.8.1930; CV: 7e). Thus, Wittgenstein explicitly equates the artist's way of meeting the world with the philosopher's way of seeing the world *sub specie aeternitatis* (cf. MS 109 28: 22.8.1930; CV: 7e). Accordingly, Wittgenstein's demand for artists as well as for philosophers is to view the world *sub specie aeternitatis*, that is to elevate themselves above the usual and profane way of seeing the world. Besides, this passage emphasizes the role and method of both the artist and the philosopher in their way of silently contemplating any phenomenon in the world instead of analyzing them in a rational and scientific way. This applies above all to poetry which has the power of silently hinting at what would be destroyed by detailed or rational description, as discussed before with reverence to the poems of Ludwig Uhland and Georg Trakl.

The connection between art and ethics is reminiscent of Schopenhauer, according to whom aesthetic contemplation enables a person to experience the only happy moments in life. This contemplation holds an ethical component insofar as the so-called “will” – the blind and egoistic drive which causes all evil in the world – is brought to silence, dominated by the intellect – viz. the spiritual – when a person is elevated to the state of aesthetic contemplation as “the pure subject of knowledge”. And as Schopenhauer adds, this stage is the first step to an ethical way of life where egoism is replaced by altruism due to the recognition of and insight into the same inner core in all beings.

5

A life devoted to the present:

In connection with a happy life, Wittgenstein emphasizes the importance of living in the present. On July 8, he remarked: "Only a man who lives not in time but in the present, is happy. For life in the present there is no death". And he adds that "if by eternity is understood not temporal duration but non-temporality, then it can be said that a man lives eternally if he lives in the present". In the *Tractatus* 6.4311 we read: "If by eternity is understood not endless temporal duration but timelessness, then he lives eternally who lives in the present". One might refer to Augustine's differentiation between qualitative and quantitative time. To live in the present means to lead a life in a qualitative – viz. precious – way, whereas to live in time means to lead a life focused on egoistic and material issues and interests and thus fear of the future and of death.⁸ To allude again to Schopenhauer, to live in the present means to live outside time and space and this characterizes the man absorbed in aesthetic contemplation. To be absorbed in aesthetic contemplation is the sign of the poet or philosopher. For, only in forgetting oneself by rising above the mundane, we are able to experience moments of happiness, of quality. In reflecting on the problem of life, Wittgenstein argues whether the solution of the problem of life can be seen in the disappearance of this problem, and then he poses the question whether life ceases to be problematic if one *lives* in eternity, and not in time (NB, 6.7.1916).

CONCLUSION

Wittgenstein's way of thinking and writing was distinguished by both a scientific and humanistic view of the world, i.e. by a scientific-analytical as well as by an intuitive-poetic approach to the world. The connection between philosophy and poetry can be seen as a means of escaping a world of superficiality, a life oriented only towards technical and financial progress, which Wittgenstein complained of in his Preface to *Philosophical Remarks*. He thus distanced himself from the spirit of the typical Western philosopher, being aware that the spirit in which he wrote was different from their way of thought and would therefore not be understood (cf. CV: 9e). Similarly to Wittgenstein, Friedrich Hölderlin

⁸ Fear in face of death, Wittgenstein sees as the 'best sign of a false, i.e. a bad, life.' (NB, 8.7.1916). Instead, 'for life in the present there is no death' (NB, 8.7.1916).

observed profanity and irreligiosity among his fellow human beings and dreamt of Ancient Greece where he saw the roots and origin of philosophy, culture and poetry due to a spiritual consciousness. And Hölderlin asked: “What is the use of poets in lean times?” [“Wozu Dichter in dürftiger Zeit?”]⁹

Wittgenstein complained about the decline of culture and spoke of “Unkultur”. In an earlier version of his Preface to the *Philosophical Remarks* we read:

This book is written for those who are in sympathy with the spirit in which it is written. This spirit is, I believe, different from that of the prevailing European civilization. The spirit of this civilization the expression of which is the industry, architecture, music, of present day fascism & socialism, is a spirit that is alien & uncongenial to the author. [...] For in these times genuine & strong characters simply turn away from the field of the arts & towards other things & somehow the value of the individual finds expression. Not, to be sure, in the way it would at a time of Great Culture. Culture is like a great organization which assigns to each of its members his place, at which he can work in the spirit of the whole, and his strength can with a certain justice be measured by his success as understood within that whole. In a time without culture (Unkultur), however, forces are fragmented and the strength of the individual is wasted through the overcoming of frictional resistances. [...]

Even if it is clear to me then that the disappearance of a culture does not signify the disappearance of human value but simply of certain means of expressing this value, still the fact remains that I contemplate the current of European civilization without sympathy, without understanding its aims if any. So I am really writing for friends who are scattered throughout the corners of the globe. (MS 109: 204, 6.-7.11.1930; CV: 8ef.)

Despite acknowledging other means of expressing human value, Wittgenstein, above all, highly esteemed the power of culture in times of “Unkultur” viz. cultural decline. For, in view of the “lean times” [“dürftigen Zeiten”] or, according to Wittgenstein “in the darkness of our times”¹⁰, it is especially important to awaken interest in art and philosophy, to lead people to realize the significance of poetry and philosophy in order to survive in a world dominated by the pursuance of egoistic and materialistic goals, a restless search for progress and a loss of spiritual values.

⁹ Cf. Hölderlin’s poem: ‘Brot und Wein’. In: Hölderlin, 2020: 47.

¹⁰ Cf. Wittgenstein’s preface to the *Philosophical Investigations*.

Likewise, Ingeborg Bachmann spoke about the power of literature – viz. poetry – in order to open people's eyes to what is essential in life and lead them to a better – viz. higher – consciousness. In her speech on the occasion of being awarded the Radio Play Prize of the German Union of the War Blind, she emphasized the courage to transgress our limits, even if the limits recede the nearer we approach them – in other words, our efforts at transgression would appear to be in vain. However, the very attempt to reach the unreachable would help to open our eyes for what is essential in life. Especially in times of suffering, we learn to *see*. Therefore, we must not deny our pain; rather, we should acknowledge it.¹¹ Similarly to Wittgenstein, she was aware of the power of language – more precisely –, of the correct use of language instead of employing mere phrases or “babbling”. This implies an awareness of the limits of language, equally evident in Wittgenstein's renunciation of discussing metaphysical problems in philosophy, a renunciation arising from an ethical obligation, because propositions cannot express anything “higher”, as Wittgenstein proclaimed in the *Tractatus* (TLP, 6.42).

Apart from Paul Engelmann, who referred to the underlying ethical concern in Wittgenstein's work in 1948, it was Bachmann, who wrote that it was not “the negative propositions, confining philosophy to a logical analysis of scientific language [which secure his work the highest rank], but rather his desperate concern for the inexpressible, charging the *Tractatus* with a tension in which it annuls itself”.¹² Insofar, she helped to shed light on essential thoughts of Wittgenstein, for whom the metaphor of light played an important role – not only during the First World War, as a symbol of inspiration and illumination in his philosophizing, but also in later years, when seeking to clarify philosophical problems which had lain in the dark before.

Only by a radical new way of thinking, by grasping the “difficulty *in its depth*”, by pulling out the problems “by the root”, can philosophical confusions be brought to light (cf. MS 131: 48; 15.8.1946; CV: 55e; cf. also Somavilla in NWR, 2026: 7). Clarity, lucidity of expression and thus transparency regarding philosophical confusions brought about by careless and unreflective use of words, were what Wittgenstein was striving for in his philosophizing throughout his life. His goal was a writing style “*simplex sigillum veri*” in the sense of Wilhelm

¹¹ Cf.: “Die Wahrheit ist dem Menschen zumutbar”. Acceptance Speech upon the Conferral of the Radio Play Prize of the German Union of the War Blind (Rede zur Verleihung des Hörspielpreises der Kriegsblinden, Bonn, 17.3.1959, in: Bachmann, 1978: 455.

¹² Cf. Bachmann, 1953: 540; reprinted in Wittgenstein, 1960 and 1972: 8.

von Ockham's words. Moreover, a style of writing *sub specie aeternitatis* which he demanded in a writing or building style – indeed, in any other style – as a “general human necessity” (cf. DB: 28).

Wittgenstein's attitude towards language as a precious commodity that has to be dealt with care, led to his awareness of its limits, and to an awareness of the danger of destroying what has to be kept in silence. As he remarked, silently, between brackets, in Zettel (§ 453):

(As one can sometimes produce music only in one's inward ear, and cannot whistle it, because the whistling drowns out the inner voice, so sometimes the voice of a philosophical thought is so soft that the noise of spoken words is enough to drown it and prevent it from being heard, if one is questioned and has to speak.)

Music, poetry and art may take over the difficult task of expressing the “softness of a philosophical thought” and thus express the inexpressible without the “noise of spoken words”. However, even here lies the danger of saying too much, as Wittgenstein notes: “In art it is hard to say anything, that is as good as: saying nothing” (CV: 26e).

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