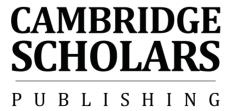# Ethics and the Philosophy of Culture

Ethics and the Philosophy of Culture: Wittgensteinian Approaches

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INTRODUCTION

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The Personal and the Common-place

Suppose we ask someone "Is morality personal?" Suppose further that we ask the same person "Is morality dependent on social norms?" There is a great chance that the person would reply yes to both questions without thinking that either statement contradicts the other. These two notions easily co-exist in someone's thinking. Nevertheless, we will suggest that this kind of co-existence is ridden with more conflict than one may think of at first glance, when one tries to spell out the implications of either position. It is, for one thing, not so that my personal commitment to an idea guarantees that what I think is right is really so. However, it is also not so that the appeal to a common norm gives us any more of a guarantee to think that the norm necessarily tells us what is right. We do not solve this by saying that morality is a matter of taking personal responsibility for a common use of moral language, for then we have still not clarified to ourselves the relevant sense in which morality is personal or related to something we have in common with others.

In the following discussion we will take on the questions this raises by addressing the interrelations between the concepts "culture", "ethics" and "language" in the light of the different kinds of distinction between what is, in one or another sense common, and what is, again in one or another sense, personal. This allows us to follow up certain patterns in Wittgenstein's thinking as well as in the contributions of this anthology. Part of our concern is to point out that it is far from clear how the concepts "common" and "personal" should be understood and that attending to the roles they have in different conversations shed light on the way in which philosophy, and especially moral philosophy, engages us as individuals, yet go beyond the clarification of what one particular individual thinks on a matter.

The Ordinary and the Ethical in Wittgenstein's Thought

In one of his slogan-like aphorisms, found in the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein writes,

> When philosophers use a word—"knowledge", "being", "object", "I", "proposition", "name"—and try to grasp the *essence* of the thing, one must always ask oneself: is the word ever actually used in this way in the language which is its original home?—What *we* do is bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use. (PI, §116)

It is possible to view this quote, and similar ones in Wittgenstein's philosophy, as an effort to show that we cannot go beyond ordinary language. On such a view, what we should do if we want to understand what morals and other cultural phenomena are, is simply to look at the way we use the relevant concepts in our ordinary life and reflect upon the role different cultural practices actually have for us. Philosophical confusion arises out of our tendency to lose ourselves in abstract theorising about issues that are best understood in the light of our actual ways of living. When we start to theorise in abstract terms, we lose contact with the way our words have their meaning, i.e. by having a place in our actual life. This also entails a lost contact with the ways the very forms of our language can mislead us. The activity of philosophy is then designated at detecting misleading forms of language. It is here often suggested that our ordinary ways of thinking provide us with sufficient criteria for exposing meaningful from meaningless forms of language and judging what our concepts mean. The radical nature of Wittgenstein's thought is considered to lie in his going against the scientific spirit of modernity. The ethical dimension of this activity has been variously emphasized. For some the moral demeanour considered to accompany his thought has been taken to be somehow integral to his rejection of modernity. How this moral demeanour should more particularly be understood has remained vague.

Despite possible points of agreement between this description of Wittgenstein and the views held by the authors in this volume, we think this understanding of Wittgenstein can be misleading. The description seems to involve the thought that words like "common", "ordinary" or "everyday", point to a framework which is in some sense constitutive of language. Presumably most writers that have a sympathy for this way of reading Wittgenstein think that this framework should not be understood in a sociological but, rather, in a logical way. The problem with this way of seeing it is that it opens up a philosophical dichotomy between pure grammar and actual meaning; between form and content. The pure

grammar is then nevertheless taken to be dependent on the society where "we" live, so that the form of life, in some sense that is to be further specified, determines the boundaries of intelligibility. But is not the kind of thought where this constellation—this dichotomy between philosophy and anthropology—arises what Wittgenstein rejected?

Wittgenstein's idea that concepts like "certainty", "justification", "truth", etc., acquire their meaning within a form of life is certainly not a logical remark in any traditionally philosophical sense of the word. Someone might here be inclined to say: "Yes, it is not about traditional logic! What is at stake is instead the grammar of these words; the way in which we actually use them in our lives." Such a remark, however, does not take us anywhere, for these "ordinary" uses are equally much a source of our perplexity as philosophical ones. Pointing at actual uses does not by itself dissolve any philosophical problems for, as Wittgenstein himself notes, "[p]hilosophy is not a description of language usage, and yet one can learn it by constantly attending to all the expressions of life in the language." (LWPP I, § 121.)

The impression that language for Wittgenstein is expressive of various cultural conventions and norms can often be seen as a response to his discussions of the private language argument. This argument can be taken to imply that Wittgenstein thought that in order for words to have meaning, this meaning must be established by public standards, since meaning cannot be established by private sensations. However, it is also possible to think that Wittgenstein's critique of the idea of a private language is not aimed at showing a "general" use of our words or a standard use in a sociological sense. In this view, no reference to the concept of "public" in the sociological sense of a "community of people" is needed. One could speak about logic here in the sense that in order for my words to have meaning it must be possible for someone else to find them intelligible. But this still leaves the question of sociality open for it is quite sufficient for meaning if one can explain what one means to *one* other person. Also, this possibility is not "purely grammatical" in any sense that could be easily connected with "logic" in the way the concept is usually used. It seems to be justified to connect this way of understanding Wittgenstein with the following remark:

> This is important: I might know from certain signs and from my knowledge of a person that he is glad, etc. But I cannot describe my observations to a third person and—even if he trusts them—thereby convince him of the genuineness of that gladness, etc. (LWPP II, p. 86e.)

Here, Wittgenstein points to a way of understanding a particular person where understanding itself is expressive of a close relation. This understanding cannot be passed on to a third person, at least not simply by way of description. Thus, there seems to be reason to think that Wittgenstein did not identify the way we speak to particular other persons either with the first person or with the third person perspectives. One could also say that there is something about the understanding between two persons that cannot be *represented* by language. This is of course not to say that it cannot be talked about. Is this one of his ways of emphasising the ethical?

The sensitivity to the ethical character of the concept of understanding also shows in Wittgenstein's discussion of the thought that pain refers to an inner sensation. He notes that we comfort a person in pain by looking into his eyes. In doing this, Wittgenstein does not only refute the thought of our understanding of sensations as based on inner private first person impressions, in order to argue for a "shared practice". Rather he illuminates the question of understanding from a personal and ethical perspective. If Wittgenstein's intention was to "bring words back to their everyday use" by pointing to ways of speaking that gain their meaning through our standing in close relationships to each other, then this is very different from speaking about life forms in general cultural terms.

Accounting for the relation between the common and the personal in ethics often seems to be a difficulty within philosophy. This extends more generally to a failure to properly address the conflict between the common and the personal in explicating the meaning of words. Wittgenstein wrote very little explicitly on ethics. However, this does not mean that there was nothing relevant for ethics in his thought. For Wittgenstein ethics was not a separate sphere of life but something that could show in all parts of human life. In this sense he had an understanding of ethics that does not follow traditional conceptions. If we want to find ethics in his philosophy, we have to look for something that cannot be accounted for by using traditional philosophical ethical vocabulary such as "duty", "utility", "virtue", "value", "normativity", etc. Rather than taking such concepts as the starting point for philosophical reflections on ethics, Wittgenstein consistently brought in ethical perspectives in his philosophical discussions on problems that do not on the surface appear ethical. This is the case with much of Wittgenstein's thoughts on psychology, anthropology, religion etc. As we have suggested above, it also shows in his discussion of the idea of a private language. His example of comforting another, in its highly personal and bodily character of presence for the other, is not an ordinary philosophical example of an ethical attitude. Because his ethical

reflections in this sense are intertwined in discussions of various subjects his perspective on ethics is not as clearly discernible as among philosophers who define their philosophy as moral philosophy. But it is also because of this that his ethical thinking shows an unusual sensitivity to the personal.

Wittgenstein's ethical thinking also shows in the kind of engagement with which he addresses philosophical questions. Wittgenstein regarded philosophical problems as, in some significant respects, personal problems that require work on oneself. "Work on philosophy—like work in architecture in many respects—is really more a working on oneself. On one's own interpretation. On one's way of seeing things. (And what one expects of them.)" (CV, 16e).

Philosophical problems do not simply take the form of intellectual puzzles, where the key is to reveal mistaken perceptions of the standards against which to determine correct language use, without requiring any form of personal commitment of the investigating subject. For Wittgenstein honesty towards philosophical questions was essential when philosophising, but it was also something he himself thought of as truly difficult. Our tendencies to deceive ourselves in philosophy are constantly there. This is an issue addressed by **Joel Backström** in this anthology. We do not only deceive ourselves by relying on abstract theorising. We also deceive ourselves by having a too one-sided diet of examples of language in use. This makes it hard for us to see what the philosophical problems we are dealing with really look like. Then again such an outcome is of course part of this self-deception.

Along these lines, we think that Wittgenstein's sensitivity to human life opens up a new possibility for understanding ethics; a possibility where the philosophical opposition between the common and the personal does not arise. This possibility throws light on what Wittgenstein might have meant by the word "ordinary". In rejecting idle metaphysical issues, his philosophy, rather than affirming any particular form of life, establishes a truly critical perspective on it.

The idea that philosophy should merely affirm ordinary ways of speaking can also be questioned in the light of the limited number of remarks by Wittgenstein specifically on ethics. In particular, his Lecture on Ethics (discussed by **Sergio Benvenuto** and **Duncan Richter** in this anthology), creates grave problems for the thought that Wittgenstein saw morality as dependent on social norms. There he suggests that moral language is spoken in an absolute sense that is not relative to anything we commonly think of as normative. It can even be said that attending to the particularities of moral discourse suggests that the way to find out whether

something is good or bad, just or unjust, is not by recourse to what people may ordinarily think. In fact, in many cases moral integrity shows in a person acting in *contrast* to how people would ordinarily act. This means that what we ordinarily take to be good must also be critically questioned.

Our aim here has been to hint at a pattern of thinking and philosophising that to us pervades Wittgenstein's philosophical work and the papers in this anthology. An attempt to clarify these questions extends the scope of this introduction. What is more, it feels appropriate to come up with the suggestion that Wittgenstein's view on ethics is radically different from traditional, philosophical views on ethics. The ethics we find in his philosophy cannot be accounted for by using traditional philosophical concepts of ethics. Further we have suggested that in his ethical thought we can find resources that help us see why the personal and the common, the first person and the third person perspective, do not exhaust the possibilities of moral understanding.

The division of chapters into three parts allows us to explore the three basic concepts that concern us here—*language*, *ethics* and *culture*—in three pairs. The chapters in the first part "Language in Culture", urge us in different ways to remember how language is always immersed in cultural forms of life. The chapters of the second part "Ethics, Culture and the Personal" inquire more into how we should understand the relation between such cultural forms of life and ethics as personal. Why is it that ethics cannot be reduced to the description of cultural forms of life? These reflections bring us back to the question of the relation between ethics and language in the third part "Ethics in Language". Neither language nor morality can be meaningfully explained with reference to a common objectively definable norm. This also brings to the fore that language, when we do not primarily perceive it as a means of description—but more centrally as gaining its meaning through our engaging with each other—has a moral character.

1. Language in Culture

The emphasis on an everyday use of language within Wittgensteinian philosophy is often invoked as a criticism of various conceptions that regard language as referring to an objective reality. By looking at everyday use of language we see how the words employed to make sense of reality are themselves intertwined and have their meaning in different practices. Words such as reality, rationality and nature do not derive their meaning from an objectively discernible reality that natural science seeks to

discover. Rather they gain meaning in our life. This kind of move is central to the discussions of our first group of papers.

Olli Lagerspetz points out that physics and chemistry have had a powerful influence on our understanding of the material world. This has led to a tendency to talk about the material world in metaphysical terms. A similar view is found in the Freudian conception of the world as a disenchanted world where emotions "stand in the way of clear perception." Contrary to this metaphysical view, Lagerspetz emphasises that concepts such as reality, objectivity and truth gain their meaning in their specific contexts in the lives we live; "nothing is objective or subjective on its own, regardless of why that question is raised" (p. 32). This is the context in which Lagerspetz comes to consider dirt. He suggests that "the concepts of the dirty and the clean illustrate how questions framed in terms of ontology (supposedly dealing with what really exists) may sometimes more helpfully be seen as, in a broad sense, ethical ones: as questions about how we live." (p. 26). To Lagerspetz a world with dirty and clean objects is "a world of *things,* things that in some sense have a teleology". Further, "[o]ur ideas of 'dirty' and 'clean' are only intelligible against the background of what we *do* with dirty objects." (p. 32). This brings in the concepts of care, since dirt must be understood as expressive of the ways we are *responsible* for the world we live in. As Lagerspetz writes "The world is our home. It is placed in our charge, for us to take care of." (p. 40).

As Lagerspetz, **Alice Crary** criticises the idea that there is a disengaged position from which we attain knowledge of the world. She introduces her discussion with a sympathetic reading of Michael Thompson's view of *vital descriptions.* Thompson claims that "the vital constitutions of organisms need to be understood as essentially functions of facts external to the organisms' individual makeups." (p. 46). Our conception of a living organism is dependent on our being able to consider this organism as belonging to a whole life form. Thompson's ideas about what the nature of an animal is, allows Crary to develop Philippa Foot's ethical naturalism. In Foot's version of naturalism, moral judgements about human nature are not reducible to natural scientific facts, but are based on objective facts at the same time as they are normative in character. Crary writes, "The beginning of wisdom, for Foot, is the banal observation that human beings are as such 'rational creatures,' specifically 'in being able to act on reasons.'" (p. 54). The kind of rationality that engages Foot, however, has important connections with ethics. It is a rationality that needs to pass the test of morality and not the other way around. This moral aspect of rationality makes Foot draw the conclusion

that human natural history cannot be understood in a similar sense as the natural history of other species. For human beings the natural form of our life entails that we strive to work on ourselves as moral beings. This, however, requires personal work, and is not something that can be taught objectively by ethical experts.

The papers by Mikel Burley and Don Levi both serve to place religious expressions in a lived context. **Mikel Burley** addresses two ways in which Wittgenstein's philosophy of religion has been received. The first, represented by Severin Schroeder, suggests that Wittgenstein's remarks on belief in God and the resurrection are committed to the idea that belief in these involves "'a belief in religious metaphysics'" (p.77). This is so since it implies that religious expressions can be taken to be literally true in the same sense "that propositions concerning empirical phenomena can be taken to be true (or false)". The second view is represented by John Haldane in response to D.Z. Phillips' elaborations of Wittgenstein's remarks on religious language. Haldane regards Phillips as endorsing expressivism concerning religious beliefs. According to Haldane, this ends up being a form of naturalism where everything can either be described from a natural scientific perspective or as the result of psychological subjective emotional states. Burley is critical to both conceptions. As he notes, we do not understand what is meant by an expression being literally true without looking closer at the life context where the expression is used. To Burley, this is also why Wittgenstein thought that an investigation into religious belief must be an investigation in grammar, "[...] within, that is, the lives of a language-using community." (p. 80). Burley also suggests that the Wittgensteinian approach methodologically differs starkly from a naturalistic approach to religious expressions. (p. 82).

Don Levi discusses what it might mean to say that someone is an omniscient being. If there is a God who knows everything, then can there be some such thing as a free will? By reflecting on various real life examples of situations where a person might talk about knowledge, Levi shows the philosophical conflict between omniscience and free will to be an illusion. Levi discusses omniscience through, among other things, such examples as prediction and prophecy. He shows that the assumption that every action could always be predictable is unintelligible. One reason for his questioning this assumption is that many of our actions take place in a way where it is not comprehensible to conclude that it is *true* that the event took place. When we say that something is true or false this involves that the issue is of some importance to us. It also involves that what we state could be questioned. However, philosophers typically think of prediction and truth as something that can be shown in propositions. Levi suggests

that this philosophical tendency is connected with a tendency to ignore *why* something is said. To Levi, the difference between metaphysical statements about God and religious ones is that the metaphysical ones are made *outside* a meaningful religious context. From such an outside perspective the questions come to look like empirical statements. If one, on the other hand looks at how theologians talk about God's premonitions or God's will or God as knowing, the talking has a certain *purpose.*

All four writers show how scientistic and psychologising perspectives obscure the meanings involved in different practices. In this they acknowledge the importance of looking at actual uses of language if we are to understand what words mean. The tendency not to do so is a big source of philosophical confusion. This does not mean that we get rid of philosophical problems by looking at actual uses of words. Rather, by doing so we often make contact with real problems. For the present purpose, however, we again want to emphasise how attending to a cultural context also brings forth ethical and personal dimensions of concepts that on the surface appear not to have to do with ethics or the personal, such as "rationality", "thing", "reality" and "belief". The primary interest of Lagerspetz', Crary's, Levi's and Burley's discussions is not to discuss ethics. Rather through careful reflection on the various human practices ethical dimensions are also revealed.

We say this aware that such a way of speaking about ethics may be contested. There does not seem to be any obviously compelling reason for characterising them in that way. Certainly the ethics revealed is not one that can be accounted for if only we think of morality as based on action derived from moral principles. More interestingly, there are also philosophers who make similar points as the ones mentioned above but who refuse to characterise them as ethical. One example is Heidegger. Thus, it might be fruitful to reflect on how such differences in perspective should be understood.

A further complication is that various images of ethics seem to grow out of these discussions if we agree to characterize them as relevant to ethics. At times it may even seem that there are tensions or conflicts between the ethical perspectives that the authors can be read to imply. In the "Lecture on Ethics" Wittgenstein likens certain moral expressions to religious expressions that, as he say, are spoken in an absolute sense. Leaning on this idea, Burley also suggest that it is wrong to think that Wittgenstein would have endorsed the attempt to explain religious beliefs with recourse to our natural history. How does this idea fare against Foot's ethical naturalism or Lagerspetz's suggestion that we have an ethical relationship with the world of things? Furthermore, are those ideas

reconcilable with Levi's suggestion that a person's belief in God takes a personal ethical form?

One way to relieve the pressure of this question is to say that the conflict one perceives is not there. The suggestion that these discussions offer conflicting accounts of morality assumes that they are answering the same general question; e.g. are moral judgements concerned with describing our rational nature or are they expressive of an understanding of something that goes beyond our being naturally rational creatures? However, these philosophers speak about naturalism and supernaturalism in response to different philosophical questions. Their aim, then, is not to answer such a general question. Furthermore, the demand that there *ought* to be a description of moral life that is free of such tensions is expressive of the kind of generalising or disengaged position that these authors are criticising. On such a view, the different discussions point to real tensions in our moral lives. These tensions cannot be avoided because we are different kinds of persons faced with different difficulties and challenges in life.

It is worth reflecting on whether the possibility of different meaningful approaches to ethics is reflected in Wittgenstein's thinking. His remarks on "very general facts of nature" (PI §365, 366) and "natural history" (PI §25, 415, 365) together with his remarks on the extraordinary character of ethical or religious reactions ("Lecture on Ethics", CV, 3e, 31-34e, 64e) seem not only to deal with different philosophical questions but also to point in different ethical directions. The suggestion that there is a coherent set of ethical ideas that either underlies Wittgenstein's thinking or that his philosophy commits us to, might then itself be misleading. Nonetheless, Wittgenstein rejects the idea that ethics could be about whatever anyone might want it to be. Here we must consider the possibility that it is equally misleading to characterize ethics as a coherent set of ideas as it is to characterise it as various personal ways of understanding moral action. The concepts we employ here—unity and multiplicity—carry with them epistemological connotations that morally speaking are misleading. On such a view both the craving for unity and coherence and the wish for the freedom of a personal moral outlook express a moral difficulty and a possible self-deception. Finding such confusion in our moral life is not ruled out by the fact that an ethical outlook, as Wittgenstein characterises it, is not founded on argument and cannot be changed by way of argument.

By seeing how philosophy engages us as speakers, we are able to resist simplified picture of the difference between the ordinary on the one hand and the metaphysical on the other. This also rejects the suggestion that attending to everyday ways of speaking in Wittgensteinian philosophy is

merely a matter of describing linguistic conventions.[1] Wittgenstein's remark that "philosophical problems arise when language *goes on holiday*" (PI 38) may give us the idea that metaphysics rest in unusual ways of speaking.[2] This picture is misleading if it blinds us to the fact that metaphysics is often quite at home in everyday discourse. The important distinction needed to determine whether a certain expression is meaningful, or what meaning it has, is not one between common ways of speaking *or* metaphysical ones. What makes metaphysics problematic is not that words are used in uncommon ways but the attitude towards the sense words can have in a person's life. As Levi for instance notes, an important aspect of how religious language has meaning is in being used by a person who is standing in a *personal relation* with God where talk about God as infallible can be an expression of personal trust and faith. If, however, in philosophical discussions, one automatically assumes that God is omniscient and that omniscience ought to be understood in line with factual statements, then what happens is that one creates a philosophical, metaphysical concept that is unintelligible and irrelevant to the religious person. Similarly but also differently, in his discussion on the meaning of things Lagerspetz brings forth personal ethical dimensions in contrast to objectivist accounts of the world of things.

This way of bringing in the personal meaning of our ways of being and talking, is an important contrast to the thought that looking at the form of life simply would be a matter of observing social conventions. To even get sight of moral practices the observer must herself be morally engaged. To continue on the theme of religious language, it can be said that a philosopher describing religious language does not simply record what people who call themselves religious say. Religious discourse itself harbours distinctions between what is a true expression of religion and what is of depth or significance in life. Philosophers need to be responsive to such reasoning in order to be able to consider what is a meaningful perspective on religion and what is metaphysical. If they are not sensitive to the kind of distinctions made within a practice they are unable to distinguish meaningful expressions from shallow (cf. Winch 1990, p. 23) or chauvinist ones.

Even if these papers show the need to relate philosophical discussions to our lived practices, none of them suggest that the things that *are* said in the context of life would therefore be philosophically unproblematic. The fact that our words are embedded in the context of our life does not—and certainly not on Wittgenstein's account—prevent them from being either unintelligible or evil. As we said, ordinary language is not free from metaphysics. Therefore, utterances that are rejected as metaphysical in a

philosophical discussion can reappear in a more troubling way in personal life. Through history, war, oppression and discrimination have been motivated by belief in God. These acts have all been embedded in systems of thought that have served to provide justification for them. The kind of intelligibility we are prepared to give to this kind of speech—whether we view it as unintelligible as an expression of belief in God, or as intelligible but corrupt—will reflect our own attitude towards religion and what is being done in the name of religion. Thus, considering actual uses of words can help us realise what the real philosophical problems are about, in contrast to metaphysical speculations. However, it does not by itself steer us clear of the problems that engage us as persons.

2. Ethics, Culture and the Personal

Wittgenstein is sometimes considered to have a mystical or transcendental side in his reflections on ethics. This side is thought to show especially in his "Lecture on Ethics". This transcendental perspective on ethics also goes against a conception of ethics understood as a matter of following cultural norms. Instead the ethical becomes personal. Several of the contributions address this thought.

Sergio Benvenuto attempts to show that, or rather why, Wittgenstein did not change his view on ethics in his later thought. This kind of move places Benvenuto in the line of philosophers who see continuity between his earlier and later thought (Cavell, Diamond, Conant and Krebs). According to Benvenuto, Wittgenstein belongs to the so called continental tradition of transcendental thinking where the subjective point of view is not a part of the world and hence cannot be an object of inquiry. While the early Wittgenstein focused on ontology and what is non-representable, the later Wittgenstein focused on language as expressive of a form of life. Benvenuto suggests that Wittgenstein, in his "Lecture on Ethics", introduces the concept of wonder in order to show that ethics is a perspective on the whole, on the absolute, which therefore cannot be captured in language. At this stage Wittgenstein still thought that language is tied to the way things are in the world, to relations in the world; facts. Ethics, on the other hand, is absolute and beyond language because it views the world as a whole, as non-relational. Still, it is only through language that it is possible to articulate the holistic ethical perspective. Wittgenstein's remark that the existence of language is connected to the wonder that anything at all exists, Benvenuto suggests, reflects this fact.

In Benvenuto's reading the distinction between saying and showing is important also in the later Wittgenstein. In the early Wittgenstein, what

cannot be said but only shows itself is the mystical while in the later Wittgenstein it is the life form. The ethical is something that cannot be said in the later as well as in the early Wittgenstein. The ethical shows itself in the different forms of life, i.e. shows that there are things, such as the other, that matter absolutely. In the later Wittgenstein there is no longer *a* language but many languages and language games and it is only within these that an individual can express her own views. Still, even within a particular language, an individual's ethical understanding is personal in the sense that it cannot be described and known; it only shows itself.

Duncan Richter's exploration of ethics in Wittgenstein's philosophy suggests that Wittgenstein changed his conception of ethics considerably in his later philosophy. This change in ethical perspective must be understood in relation to Wittgenstein's changed conception of language. His views on nonsense are particularly important here, as well as what Wittgenstein came to speak of as secondary sense. In the *Tractatus*, the question whether a certain combination of words had sense or was nonsensical was assessed by way of logic. In the later Wittgenstein, on the other hand, determining what is sense and nonsense is an *action*: to remove a word from the use is to treat it as senseless. In the later Wittgenstein there is also no *singular* distinction between sense and nonsense, for one may draw boundaries for many reasons. The senses of words that Wittgenstein calls secondary are not private, but do not say anything commonly assessable about the world. Still, they cannot be said to be nonsensical, confused or merely metaphorical. On this later view there are no restrictions on what one "can" sensibly say about ethics. What is nonsense for one person in one respect need not be so for another person in another respect. Yet, Richter suggests that one cannot simply say what one wants about, say, the role of words such as "ought" and "obligation" in ethics. Confronted with disagreements about what meaning they might have, we are asked to take a stand on what sense we can find in using them in dialogue.

In line with Richter, **Lars Hertzberg** also establishes that there is no independent way of determining what one should say in a particular case of moral ignorance. The case he has in mind is the one of P. G. Wodehouse. Because of a lack of political awareness Wodehouse let himself be exploited for Nazi propaganda. Hertzberg rejects the idea that Wodehouse did what he did because he did not know that betrayal is wrong as a "philosopher's fantasy" (p. 163). One cannot distinguish between knowing what betrayal is and knowing that it is morally wrong.

He then asks whether one could excuse Wodehouse by saying that he did not understand politics at all.

Hertzberg shows, that any such assessment is already part of a particular, moral outlook. There is no piece of information that could decide the issue. This, according to Hertzberg, also characterises moral teaching. Moral teaching is not about conveying new facts about the subject matter of morals the way teaching in, say, medicine is about conveying new facts. One does not become "better in morals" by attending to ethics courses while in medicine one will hopefully become better at curing people if one attends to courses in medicine. In the end, taking a stance on cases like that of Wodehouse, Hertzberg holds, is part of our everyday moral responsibility that we cannot, in the name of morality itself, delegate to anyone else.

A common thread throughout these three papers is the focus on ethics as personal as well as a critical stance towards an objectivist conception of ethical understanding. This, according to Benvenuto and Richter, is a central feature in Wittgenstein's reflections on ethics. Benvenuto's suggestion that ethics in Wittgenstein's later writings is something that shows itself in our different forms of life, can be seen as connected with our earlier reflections on the way the different articles in this anthology seem to bring out differing perspectives on ethics by looking at various forms of our human life; perspectives that often bring in the character of ethics as expressive of a personal response to life and others.

In a comment on the lecture on ethics that Richter discusses, Wittgenstein emphasises the need to personally take a stand in moral discourse. How should we spell out this need? As Richter points out, Wittgenstein suggests that the personal character of the ethical is connected with what it can mean to say something and thus what it can mean to be involved in a dialogue. The personal is not merely a matter of subjective preferences. Although taking a moral stand is personal, this does not go against the claim that morality should be impartial. This is also reflected in the fact that we can talk of thoughtful, honest or sincere views in moral matters, as well as of thoughtless, conniving, shallow and indulgent views.

What is more, as Hertzberg says in relation to betrayal, although we may disagree about particular uses of the word, we do, in one sense or another, share an understanding of what it would mean to use the word in the context we are in. If I, for instance, really have betrayed a friend my realising it shows in my feeling remorse. My reluctance to admit what I have done, or ask for forgiveness, may even show in my unwillingness to accept "betrayal" as the most honest description of what I did. This further

illuminates Richter's remark that we cannot say just anything. Some of the things we say amount to saying nothing at all, not because what we say is grammatically incorrect or in other ways incomprehensible, but because our words fail to convey anything of depth or significance to the relevant situation.

One way of describing moral disagreement, then, is to say that there is often disagreement about the application of more or less moral words, whereas disagreement presupposes agreement about what it would mean to use a particular word. In many cases, such as in Hertzberg's discussion of Wodehouse, such a description is helpful. Yet, if we agree with Richter that "we cannot expect to find nothing but philosophy in philosophy journals" since philosophers are "people with religious, political, and ethical beliefs", we also need to be open to the possibility of disagreement as to what philosophical questions amount to. This is especially true of ethical perspectives in philosophy.

If ethics is personal as well as normative, then how should the relation between the personal and the common be understood? One could begin to reflect on this question by raising a connected question, namely: How should one understand communal requirements to loyalty in relation to personal moral convictions? What is it that allows us to distinguish between cases where going against a community is morally commendable, cases where it is morally neutral and cases where it is morally blameworthy? It might be worth considering that these questions in themselves might be a way of not seeing the relevance of what is said above. The relation between the personal and the common that the previous papers address is not the moral question whether one should follow one's personal convictions or follow the rules of a society.

Nevertheless, these questions alert us to important moral tensions that are not necessarily philosophical confusions. Yet, philosophical confusion also arises from not acknowledging these tensions. These tensions are not merely personal difficulties unrelated to language, but difficulties that we have in common with others. This means that we give expression to them in our common language. Racism e.g. is always a personal problem but this problem together with racist ways of speaking are common to certain people and form an important aspect of both the personal and the societal problem of racism. Racist ways of speaking can be deeply entrenched in language so that in order to become clear about racism one must be prepared to "regroup one's whole language" (to paraphrase Wittgenstein PO, p. 185). One then needs to realize that not only choices of words can be morally corrupt but that some ways of speaking that one has taken to be moral can also be so. Here it is useful to consider how, in cultures where

revenge receives a central role in thinking of one's place in society, what appears to be moral language gives expression to ideas about honour that are corrupt. They are corrupt in such a way that it is impossible to detect this without distancing oneself radically from the central values of the culture. And then one can ask whether not it is part of this insight to see how "(a)n entire mythology is laid down in our language." (PO p. 199.) In our concluding discussion we will return to these concerns.

3. Ethics in Language

The final group of papers in different ways problematise how we are to think of the relation between us as individuals and a community of language users, and in particular how we are to think of language as growing out of our personal relationships with each other.

Pär Segerdahl discusses Judith Butler's influential work in feminist philosophy and queer theory. He questions the metaphysical commitments to an essentialist view of language use which surfaces in Butler's suggestion that when speaking about gender our language is expressive of a binding heterosexualising law. If Butler had pointed out that certain uses of the nouns "male" and "female" are narrow-minded and even oppressive then that would not have been problematic. It is rather irrefutable. What Segerdahl questions, however, is the intelligibility of understanding this as an aspect of *language as a whole*. He does this by reminding us of the different criteria of gender we may lean on in saying that someone is a man or woman, within one conversation, sometimes even within the same sentence. He suggests that this "*dissonant play of gender attributes does not challenge "man" and "woman" as nouns as much as it challenges a certain rigid picture of how nouns function*" (p. 188). Thus, where Butler sees language as expressive of a metaphysics that needs to be destabilised, Segerdahl sees metaphysics as primarily residing in an unforgiving attitude towards language. Metaphysical thinking arises when we force language to live up to the stubborn demands our intellects place on it.

Segerdahl asks who is the patient in the kind of therapy that philosophy after Wittgenstein wants us to engage in. Against the view that it is the philosophers who are being discussed that stand in need of therapy, he suggests that as philosophers we need to engage in reconciliatory work on ourselves, changing not language, but our "philosophical outlook on language" (p. 203). **Joel Backström** continues on this thread, and emphasises the personal character of many philosophical questions, and the difficulty of facing oneself in philosophical reflection. How, in particular, are we to understand Wittgenstein's characterization of himself

as a disciple or follower of Freud, despite the forceful criticism he also directed at the founder of psychoanalysis? Backström's intent in answering the question is twofold. First, he wants to clarify how Wittgenstein, himself regarded this link. Second, he wants to bring out what we as readers can make of this kinship, in particular with regard to Wittgenstein's philosophical therapy, and the ways, like psychoanalysis, it is aimed at changing us. Especially important is the need to recognise that philosophical difficulties for Wittgenstein are not primarily concerned with fixations and confusions of the intellect but have "their root in a (broadly speaking) moral-existential unwillingness to understand ourselves aright" (p. 213)

Segerdahl and Backström both emphasise the sense in which philosophical problems are always personal problems, in that they involve me as a speaker myself. Reflecting on the meaning of words belonging to our moral vocabulary cannot be separated from becoming clear about and taking a stand on what it means for me to use them as a speaker. This question, however, does not confront us as lone individuals but ultimately in relation to other people. Reflecting on our language, and our concepts, necessarily invokes a dimension of something that is shared with other people. Even more, the perspective we take on our philosophical engagement raises moral questions on the role other people take in our understanding of the world. Our struggles to use language in non-metaphysical ways or our difficulties with self-understanding cannot merely be articulated in terms of clarifying forms of language use or forms of self-understanding.

To understand the lure of scepticism, the sense in which I may philosophically be in doubt about the inner lives of other people, and be inclined to turn this doubt into a metaphysical position, it is, as Backström's discussion allows us to see, important to see what such a position has "in it for me". The belief that our inner lives are hidden from others, may be a way of avoiding the difficult questions my relationships with others may well pose about myself. As, in Segerdahl's case, thinking of language as a system of norms responsible for meaning, and as therefore oppressive, involves an evasion of responsibility on our own part, not seeing how we might be oppressive through our own choice of expression.

Anniken Greve and **Tove Österman** address questions of what it is to understand other people. **Greve** discusses, in relation to literature, what significance it has for us to perceive another human being as an individual, and precisely for being that individual in time. She takes up a recurrent theme in Wittgensteinian moral philosophy: how "the moral force of a

work of literature is in many cases connected with the mode of attention it embodies, more specifically its sensitivity, perceptiveness and responsiveness to people and environments, and to what is good, bad or intolerable in life" (p. 264). Against this emphasis on the need to consider the interrelation between form and context in a work of literature, she criticises formalist accounts of the relation for not having a sufficient grasp of what goes on in an individual text. She suggests that we rather "conceive of form as the way the text is organised as an act of communication, or as *this particular* act of communication" (p. 266). The particular text Greve discusses is Espen Søbye's source-based biography of a young Jewish Norwegian girl deported to Germany during the Holocaust. She argues that this book takes its particular form as an act of remembrance, where we are asked to remember Kathe Lasnik, *her*, as an individual. The difficulty of this act of remembrance is accentuated by the difficulty of understanding that each of the 6 million Jewish victims was an individual. The invitation to remember *her* is accentuated by the form of Søbye's book. In the source-based biography, the author makes a point of not adding anything to the little information he found out about her.

Österman discusses what it is to understand the schizophrenic, who in some works of philosophy is presented as the incomprehensible, the irrational or even arational. She rejects the tendency to regard delusion as erroneous beliefs that may be corrected or given up by entering into a reasoning process with the one deluded. Such a view holds on to a rationalistic view on understanding that does not sufficiently, and less than its psychiatric counterparts, attend to the cultural and contextual contexts for what can be seen as reasonable. She is also critical of the suggestion that the deluded mind is not merely mistaken, but incomprehensible. Against the thought that there is nothing for us to understand in schizophrenia, she reminds us that there is *someone* to understand, the schizophrenic, and that more thus can be said about understanding in this case. In relation to *whom* we are here asked to understand, the philosophical preoccupation with *what* we fail to understand when we do not understand the schizophrenic, clearly involves a failure to apprehend what it means to meet and approach the schizophrenic as someone we care for, a family member, a partner, a human individual in distress.

Both contributions offer important insights into the difference of understanding *someone,* as opposed to understanding *something*. The earlier quoted remark by Wittgenstein, in which he speaks of the impossibility of conveying the genuineness of a person's gladness in a description, suggests that there are even situations in which it does not make sense to distinguish what someone says or feels from understanding

of the particular individual. In another remark he notes that in many cases attitudes of scepticism concerning another person's feelings, could amount to nothing else but to morally deserting the other or to being "queer and crazy" (PO 383).

The distinction between *someone* and *something* is also of moral relevance. We could even say that the reduction of *someone* to a *something* is a defining feature of any kind of moral violation. Such kind of de-individualisation of human beings was exemplified by the Nazi regime that sent Kathe Lasnik and millions of others to their death. It is also found in words such as, "How I hate those *bastards*!" where the epithet "bastard" is part of the hatred. Similarly, in relation to the gender issues Segerdahl discusses, it is clear that in hateful uses of "He's gay!" a similar violation of the humanity of the one the words are directed to is revealed. These cases exemplify a focus on the individual where the other is limited or defined by a set of features. This is clearly different from the kind of attention to the individual that comes to live in love, friendship and compassion. However, as Greve's discussion alerts us to, there are also benevolent ways of attending to a human being that can be morally problematic. As she shows there can be a temptation in biographical writing to try to fill in all the gaps in a person's life history in order to make her life more comprehensible or more exciting as a narrative. Such forms of narrative can also make us blind to the futility and lack of meaning in the death of all these human beings; an inability to see them as real people with their own reasons for fear, sorrow and joy. Therefore, as Greve suggests, it is crucial to appreciate the *form* of attention that an individual is given in moral discourse.

These reflections on how our understanding each other's lives is internal to the kind of personal relation in which we stand to each other, also connects with Österman's article. By suggesting that our ability to understand each other is largely dependent on our personal relation to each other, Österman does not mean that we have immediate or absolute knowledge of our close ones. The point is rather to appreciate the significance standing in personal relationships has for how questions about understanding or inabilities to understand can come to have meaning. The fact that our standing in a close relationship can make us understand a person who is mentally ill, does not exclude the fact that there can also be a particular difficulty for family members to understand, and importantly accept, that someone they love is mentally ill. Rather the emphasis on being asked to understand *someone* here reminds us of the sense in which we sometimes fail a person *morally* by failing to understand him or her.

This also opens for the question whether there are forms of speaking that are expressive of our reluctance to address someone in a personal way. In conclusion we will continue to reflect on the themes of gender and sexuality raised by Segerdahl's discussion to bring together the discussions on the relations between the individual and his or her linguistic community that we have raised in relation to many contributions to this volume. Focusing on this set of questions is helpful because it provides us with a clear example of a case where our form of life appears to be changing. There is today in many Western countries considerable disagreement about what it means to say, for instance, that a woman and a woman can marry, or a man be the husband of another man. They also tie back to questions about what we can make of the suggestions that there is something such as a natural form of human life. Furthermore, the problem that Segerdahl deals with high-lights in a striking way the character of the difficulty we have with becoming clear about ways of using language. The problem is to find a way of expressing the tension between the fact that we are free to use language in non-metaphysical ways and the fact that it can be extremely hard to make use of that freedom.

The reconciliatory work that Segerdahl engages us in is helpful in relieving the pressure certain ways of thinking about language has on our mind. As he points out, it is true that we are free to use words in a non-metaphysical way. We do not, as Judith Butler thinks, need to treat language as a "metaphysical enemy" (p. 181) that can be countered by replacing one intellectual rhetoric with another. Yet, it may be felt that Butler's writings speak to a different kind of experience that needs to be addressed even after unmasking the metaphysical assumptions that mystify her concern. This is the sense in which someone may fail to feel at home in certain ways of speaking. Rather than thinking that what someone says is simply false, or ungrounded, e.g. "It is not so that boys prefer to play with cars!", one reacts to treating being a boy as a reason for anything in the first place. The suggestion that we could answer such a concern by reminding ourselves that this is one way we make sense of boys and girls in our life is far from reassuring. What tears someone is exactly *that* we should make sense of life in these terms. This feeling is nourished even more by the realisation of just how pervasive this way of thinking is in our life. It unconsciously enters into what someone, and this someone may easily be myself, thinks of as an appropriate gift, and in a surprised tone of voice or a disdainful look when it becomes obvious that one boy prefers something different, a pink ballet dress instead of a cowboy outfit. It is experiences such as these, and of how difficult it is to change such attitudes that make speaking of a binding norm sound intelligible to us.

Such experiences are also fuelled by how feverishly people hold on to statements such as "marriage is an institution for man and woman". In many countries this is a historical fact, but it is an expression of the firm convictions held in debates regarding same sex-marriages that few people who oppose it would be prepared to regard it as a mere historical fact. Rather one emphasises how this fact in different ways is grounded in our nature. These claims about what is in our nature may certainly be connected with metaphysical confusions. It is a mistake, however, to think that we could dissolve the firmness of such beliefs by showing that they rest on metaphysical assumptions. As Backström has shown, this would be to regard these debates as expressive of merely intellectual problems.

Thus, although language is shifting with our life, and we often unproblematically adopt new ways of speaking when certain areas of our life is concerned, there is in other areas something like a pressure not to change but rather to conform to certain ways of speaking. There is even something like a collective hostility towards new ways of speaking. On an individual level, it takes courage to go against these hostile attitudes. On a philosophical level, much work is needed to disentangle them. There also seems to be features in Wittgenstein's philosophy that point in this direction—for instance when he thinks that philosophical understanding presupposes that one regroups one's whole language in order to free oneself of collective thinking. (PO 185.)

Although addressing such experiences extends the scope of Segerdahl's paper, his discussion nonetheless provides means for contemplating this matter. His reminder of the different criteria of gender we appeal to in different situations is a reminder that the use of language is not something static. Even though we can become blinded to others by certain ways of talking, as language-users we are not committed to an unquestionable rule for usage. We can change our ways of talking, and in fact we often do so, for better and for worse, as we grow older and come to think of life differently. This again brings us back to the importance of dialogue and conversation. Several of the contributions to this volume bring out our personal responsibility for the words we use. Language is not constituted by a bundle of common social norms that we re-enact, but presents us with the task of clarifying to ourselves what it is that we say to particular persons in particular cases. Language does not speak. It is by saying things to each other that it is meaningful to speak of language in the first place. We constantly need to remind ourselves of this. Otherwise, we easily end up saying only things that just anybody or nobody would say.

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Notes

[1] Stanley Cavell has done much work to dispel this idea. His seminal article "Must We Mean What We Say?" (originally published in 1958 in the volume with the same name) provides one of his first formulations of the criticism.

[2] This is of course something that Wittgenstein in other remarks stresses. Cf. his remarks on the character of philosophical problems (CV, 16e) as well as in his treatment of forms of expression that may tempt us to metaphysical ways of speaking In §253 in *PI* e.g. Wittgenstein writes: "I have seen a person in a discussion on this subject strike himself on the breast and say: 'But surely another person can't have THIS pain!'—The answer to this is that one does not define a criterion of identity by emphatic stressing of the word 'this'. Rather, the emphasis merely creates the illusion of a case in which we are conversant with such a criterion of identity, but have to be reminded of it."