

This is a pre-print version. This paper has been published in: Fairhurst, Jordi (2021). "The Ethical Significance of the Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus." Teorema 40 (2): 151-168. Please only cite the published version.

The Ethical Significance of The *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*

Abstract

This paper studies the ethical significance of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. First, I elucidate what Wittgenstein means by the point of the book being ethical. I defend that the ethical point and significance of the *Tractatus* is to delimit the ethical and, thereby, *show* or *make manifest* what it is to live a good ethical life. Second, I study how the correct method of philosophy propounded by the *Tractatus* contributes to ethics and the attainment of the good ethical life. I argue that, although philosophy is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for achieving a good ethical life, it serves as useful tool that can help one undergo the required ethical changes to achieve said life.

Key Words

Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, Ethics, Philosophy.

Introduction

The ethical significance of the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (hereafter, *Tractatus*) remains one of the most understudied aspects of his early philosophy, despite Wittgenstein's insistence on the importance of ethics to both his philosophy and life. In this paper I study the link between the *Tractatus* and ethics in hopes of achieving a greater understanding of the ethical significance of this work. In section 1 I set out to elucidate what is the ethical point of the *Tractatus* which Wittgenstein alludes to in a letter to Von Ficker. In section 2 I briefly outline Wittgenstein's early understanding of the good ethical life. Finally, in section 3 I examine how the correct method of philosophy propounded by the *Tractatus* contributes to ethics and the attainment of the good ethical life.

1. The Ethical Point of the *Tractatus*

Following the publication of the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein wrote a letter to Von Ficker in which he stated the following:

The point of the book is ethical. I once wanted to give a few words in the foreword which now actually are not in it, which, however, I'll write for you now because they might be a key for you: I wanted to write that my work consists of two parts: the one which is here, and of everything which I have *not* written. And precisely this second part is the important one. For the Ethical is delimited from within, as it were, by my book; and I'm convinced that, *strictly* speaking, it can ONLY be delimited this way. (Monk 1990, 178)

But what did Wittgenstein not write in the *Tractatus*? Why didn't he write it? And why is it so important? Answers to these questions are found in Wittgenstein's discussion of ethics in TLP 6.4-6.421.

There Wittgenstein teaches us that ethics is an inquiry into the sense, meaning or value of the world and, by extension, life (TLP, 6.4-6.41), since "the world and life are one" (TLP, 5.621).¹ The sense of the world (and life), in turn, "must lie outside the world. In the world everything is as it is, and everything happens as it does happen: *in* it no value exists -and if it did exist, it would have no value" (TLP, 6.41; cf. TLP, 6.4312). In other words: Non-accidental ethical value must lie outside of the accidental happenings which occur *in* the world (TLP, 6.41). Ethics, accordingly, is transcendent (TLP, 6.421)², i.e., it lies *outside* of the world.

The transcendence of ethics in conjunction with the picture of language propounded or assumed by Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus* entails that it is impossible for there to be propositions of ethics. Meaningful pictures, i.e., propositions and thoughts, must be logical pictures which represent the existence and non-existence of states of affairs (see e.g., TLP, 221, 2.222, 4.01, 4.023, 4.2). Since states of affairs have no ethical value, there are no ethical states of affairs to be represented by meaningful propositions. It is impossible, consequently, for there to be ethical propositions (TLP, 6.42). A book describing the world would contain "facts, facts, and facts but no Ethics" (LE, 6; cf. LE, 5, 11-12). Ethics is that which cannot be put into words, but rather *shows* itself: it is the *mystical* (TLP, 6.522; see section 1.2).

¹ Wittgenstein (TLP, 6.4-6.522; LE, 5) uses the notions 'meaning', 'value' and 'sense' interchangeably when discussing ethics.

² For a discussion on the transcendental of ethics (TLP, 6.421) see Fairhurst (Forthcoming).

The explanation of the inexpressibility of ethics also highlights why Wittgenstein takes it to be of the upmost importance. In the world everything is as it is: *in* it no value exists (TLP, 6.41). Accordingly, no occurrence *in* the world can be regarded as of greater ethical importance than another, insofar as they are all *valueless*. It is only in the realm of the inexpressible where we are to find what is really important: ethics, understood as the “enquiry into what is valuable, or, into what is really important, or [...] into the meaning of life, or into what makes life worth living, or into the right way of living” (LE, 5).

Having detailed what the second part of Wittgenstein’s work is about, why he failed to write about it and why he labels it as the most important, only one question remains: What does Wittgenstein mean by the point of the book being ethical? Despite Wittgenstein’s insistence on emphasizing that the point of his book is ethical, he fails to specify with clarity what this ethical point is. This has led to multiple ongoing exegetical controversies among interpreters who attempt to elucidated what Wittgenstein means in his letter to Von Ficker.

A survey of the existing literature reveals that three main readings have been provided to solve this exegetical puzzle:

1. **The Ethical Reading:** Wittgenstein’s letter purports that the *main* point or objective of the *Tractatus* is ethical. Accordingly, all other ideas contained in the *Tractatus* are to be subordinated to this ethical point, which mainly consists in delimiting the ethical and providing an ethics telling us what it is to be ethically good and live a meaningful life (see e.g., Janik & Toulmin 1973, 169, 195, 198; Cavalier 1980, 63, 137, 185; Edwards 1982, 26-27, 60, 68, 101).
2. **The Austere Reading³:** Wittgenstein does not purport that the main point or objective of the *Tractatus* is ethical. Instead, Wittgenstein explains that the ethical point of the *Tractatus* merely consists in the clarification and/or delimitation of ethics (see e.g., Christensen 2011, 797, 805; Hughes 2009, 54; Dain 2018, 11).
3. **The Middle-Ground Reading:** Wittgenstein does not purport that the main point or objective of the *Tractatus* is ethical. Instead, Wittgenstein explains that the ethical point of the *Tractatus* consists in the clarification and/or delimitation of both ethics and, by contrast to the austere reading, the ethical implications of his work (see e.g., Diamond 2000, 152, 155, 168-169; Cahill 2011, 42, 44, 54-55, 57; Mulhall 2007, 232-233, 243-245; Harcourt Forthcoming, 1, 8-9; Kuusela 2018, 41-42, 50-51).

³ This reading bears no connection to the resolute (or austere) reading of the *Tractatus*.

1.1. The ethical reading

All three readings share the claim that the ethical point of the *Tractatus* consists in, at the very least, delimiting the ethical. This conclusion seems quite uncontroversial and should come as no surprise. On the one hand, Wittgenstein explicitly states in his letter that the Ethical is delimited from within by his book. On the other hand, the 6.4ff are mainly concerned with delimiting the ethical (TLP, 6.4-6.421) and the various topics with which it is intertwined, such as ethical reward and punishment (TLP, 6.422-6.43), the ethical will (TLP, 6.423-6.43), ethical happiness (TLP, 6.43-6.431), the riddle of life (TLP, 6.4312, 6.5-6.522), the nature of ethical problems and their solution (TLP, 6.422, 6.431-6.44), the view from eternity (TLP, 6.44-6.45) or the mystical (TLP, 6.44-6.45, 6.522). These propositions are primarily clarificatory and refrain from explicitly propounding an ethical theory that *says* what it is to live a good and meaningful life. Furthermore, Wittgenstein (TLP, 6.422; NB, 30.7.16; LE, 7, 10; Waismann 1979, 117-118) was critical of the postulation of ethical theories, understood as written doctrines with a series of imperatives telling us what it is to be ethically good.

The controversial further question of interest here is whether the *Tractatus* offers a contribution to ethics that is greater than this delimitation of the ethical. The ethical reading answers affirmatively by arguing that Wittgenstein's letter purports that the main point or objective of the *Tractatus* is ethical. Accordingly, all other ideas contained in the *Tractatus* are to be subordinated to this omnipresent ethical point. It is unclear, however, why Wittgenstein's letter to Von Ficker affords subordinating the contents of the *Tractatus* to a primary ethical aim.

A detailed examination of the *Tractatus* reveals that there is no explicit mention or implicit suggestion that its main point is ethical. Instead, Wittgenstein tells us that "the aim of the book is to draw a limit to thought, or rather -not to thought, but to the expression of thoughts" (TLP, Introduction). Accordingly, the contents of Wittgenstein's work are aligned with this aim and serve to accomplish it. For instance, no inconsistencies arise by interpreting all the propositions of the *Tractatus* as contributing to the clarification of the expression of thoughts. By contrast, the same does not hold if one interprets the main point of the book as being ethical. Namely, not all the propositions of the *Tractatus* are subordinated to a primary ethical goal they serve to accomplish. Take, for instance, the propositions concerning mathematics. How do they comply with or contribute to an omnipresent ethical aim?

I believe the ethical reading overstates the importance of the letter Wittgenstein wrote to Von Ficker, thereby devaluing the *Tractatus* as a complete work of philosophy dealing with a multitude of topics which exceed the ethical. A short letter written privately to Von Ficker about an amendment to the forward of the *Tractatus* should not be regarded as a more reputable source of textual evidence than the actual contents of the *Tractatus*. In other words: Wittgenstein's insights in this letter about his contribution to ethics in the *Tractatus* should be used to complement, not negate or substitute, what is already stated in the *Tractatus*.

Wittgenstein himself makes this point throughout said letter by warning against the danger of overstating the importance of ethics *in* the *Tractatus*. Initially, he reminds von Ficker that he only intended to add some words to the forward of the *Tractatus*, not *replace* the claims he already made about the intents and purposes of his work in the introduction.

Subsequently, he explains that his work consists of two parts: the *Tractatus*, which is primarily concerned with drawing a limit to the expression of thoughts, and the second unwritten part, which is primarily concerned with what he calls the Ethical. Although the first part does have an ethical *point*, its primary *aim* is not ethical. In other words: through the compliance with the main *aim* of the *Tractatus* it is possible to discern a certain *ethical point* which *shows* or *makes manifest* the second (unwritten) part of his work (see section 2). Wittgenstein's distinction, then, does not only differentiate the expressible from the inexpressible: it also differentiates the *Tractatus*, understood as a work of *philosophy*, from the *ethical* (see section 3). The ethical reading mistakenly conflates these two parts, thus blurring Wittgenstein's distinction and (paradoxically) interpreting the *Tractatus* as a work whose primary aim is something Wittgenstein cannot write about.

The inadequacy of the ethical reading is further attested by other textual evidence available to us. If Wittgenstein really intended to amend his work by making it explicit that the main point of the *Tractatus* is ethical, it is puzzling why he failed to correct this omission in his 'Lectures on Ethics' shortly after the publication of the *Tractatus*, his conversations regarding ethics and the *Tractatus* with the Vienna Circle or other letters pertaining to his private correspondence during these years. For that matter, Wittgenstein refrained from acknowledging that ethics was the primary aim of *Tractatus* throughout the preparation of this manuscript in the notes known as the *Notebooks* and *Prototractatus*.

1.2. The purpose of TLP 6.4ff and the ethical significance of the *Tractatus*

The inadequacies that stem from this ethical reading suggest the need for an alternative interpretation of the ethical point and significance of the *Tractatus*. Specifically, it is necessary to determine whether Wittgenstein merely delimits the ethical (as argued by the austere reading) or whether he provides further ethical implications of his work (as argued by the middle-ground reading). The solution to this exegetical puzzle is to be found by examining the purpose of the ethical propositions that occur in the 6.4ff (and part of the 6.5ff) of the *Tractatus* and the role they fulfill within the book.

Tejedor (2013, 76, 78-79) has argued that “the *Tractatus* has an ethical purpose, not because it contains, in the TLP 6.4ff, a series of propositions that express ethical insights in spite of their nonsensicality, but because the book – as a whole – enables us to hone in our mastery of certain formal concepts” (Tejedor 2013, 78). Thus, the 6.4ff do not offer any significant contribution to ethics beyond providing examples of nonsensical propositions which help us put our linguistic abilities to the test, thereby allowing us to comply with the ethical purpose of the *Tractatus*, i.e., achieving conceptual clarity (Tejedor 2013, 78-79). Since the 6.4ff are *nothing more* than examples of nonsensical propositions, they are also *dispensable*: they could easily be replaced by other nonsensical propositions which allow exercising the same linguistic abilities.

There are three main problems with Tejedor’s proposed interpretation of the 6.4ff (further issues will be discussed in 3.1). First, it rests on the assumption that the ethical purpose of the *Tractatus*, i.e., the attainment of conceptual clarity, can be accomplished regardless of the existence of the 6.4ff. Although it is clear that conceptual clarity can be attained without the 6.4ff, it seems misguided to believe that conceptual clarity could be recognized as the ethical purpose of the book without the 6.4ff. Namely, Tejedor could not infer the same exegetical conclusions about the *Tractatus* if it did not contain an explicit discussion about ethics at the end of the book. Furthermore, Wittgenstein scholars would have not sought to develop a link between Wittgenstein’s book and ethics without the presence of the 6.4ff and the *insights* they offer. Thus, the 6.4ff must be something more than just *dispensable* nonsensical propositions.

Second, on Tejedor’s interpretation, the delimitation of the ethical ought to be accomplished regardless of the presence of the 6.4ff, since they are no more than dispensable nonsensical propositions that help us put our linguistic abilities to the test. However, suppose Wittgenstein omitted his discussion about ethics in the *Tractatus*. The conceptual clarity that results from drawing a limit to the expression of thoughts need not

necessarily exclude the possibility of senseful ethical propositions. This is due to fact that Wittgenstein could be a moral realist who embraces the claim that ethical propositions are in the business of representing the existence and non-existence of ethical states of affairs. It is only in the light of the *insights* offered by the 6.4ff that we learn how to delimit the ethical from within and, thereby, recognize the nonsensicality of ethical propositions.

Finally, if the 6.4ff are nonsensical propositions that help us put our linguistic abilities to the test, then Wittgenstein's "Lecture on Ethics" ought to have a similar purpose. However, upon closer inspection, Wittgenstein's (LE, 5-12) lecture provides ethical *insights* which exceed this linguistic exercise: it outlines the subject matter of ethics, draws a distinction between fact and value, describes 'ethical' experiences to clarify Wittgenstein's understanding of ethics and the meaning of life, and so on. Wittgenstein's persistent inquiry into these topics, which he had already brought up in the *Tractatus*, suggests that the ethical purpose of the 6.4ff exceeds the attainment of conceptual clarity through linguistic exercises. By contrast, Wittgenstein is expressing genuine interest in understanding the ethical and getting clear about what it is to live a good ethical life.⁴ Moreover, these issues deeply worried Wittgenstein in his own personal life outside academia (see Rudebush & Berg 1979, 152-153, 155-158; Edwards 1982, 67; John 1988, 507-510; Wiggins 2004, 375, 377, 380; Appelqvist 2013, 56; Harchourt Forthcoming, 2, 4), they are not linguistic exercises that can be disregarded as dispensable nonsense.

To amend the shortcomings of this interpretation of the ethical purpose or significance of the *TLP* 6.4-6.5ff I believe it is necessary to pay attention to their function within the *Tractatus*. On the one hand, and within the general logic and ordering of the *Tractatus*, they serve as a commentary of proposition 6. Proposition 6 describes the general form of the proposition, thus drawing a limit on the expression of thoughts. Thereinafter, Wittgenstein details the consequences of drawing this limit by discussing pseudo-propositions which do not abide by constraints imposed on meaningful propositions. In addition to the cases of logic (e.g., *TLP*, 6.1-6.2ff), mathematics (e.g.,

⁴ Contrary to his discussions on philosophical nonsense, Wittgenstein (LE, 11-12) refrained from being dismissive towards the human tendency to run against the limits of language when writing or talking about Ethics, since it is something "I personally cannot help respecting deeply and I would not for my life ridicule it" (LE, 12).

TLP, 6.2ff) and philosophy (e.g., TLP, 6.5ff), Wittgenstein explores the case of ethics. Specifically, in 6.4-6.423 Wittgenstein delimits the ethical from within in order to teach us that ethics cannot be put into words (see section 1). Thus, these propositions serve both a philosophical purpose, i.e., drawing a limit on the expression of thoughts, and an ethical purpose, i.e., delimiting the ethical.

On the other hand, having clarified the nonsensicality of ethical propositions, Wittgenstein persists in his delimitation of the ethical by focusing on other aspects which do not concern the expression of thoughts. Specifically, he discusses ethical reward/punishment (TLP, 6.422), the ethical will (TLP, 6.423-6.43), the riddle of life (TLP, 6.4312, 6.5-6.522), ethical problems and their solution (TLP, 6.432-6.4321, 6.5-6.521), the mystical (TLP, 6.44-6.45, 6.522) and the view of the world *sub specie aeterni* (TLP, 6.45). These propositions are primarily clarificatory and refrain from explicitly *saying* what it is to live a good and meaningful life. Wittgenstein, for instance, does not *say* how to obtain ethical reward/punishment, how to make the world a happy one, what is a good exercise of the ethical will, what is the meaning of life, *etcetera*. Thus, they serve the ethical purpose of delimiting the ethical.

On the face of it, it seems the austere reading rightfully claims that the ethical point of the *Tractatus* solely consists in the clarification and/or delimitation of the ethical. However, Wittgenstein's (cf. TLP, 6.44-6.45, 6.522; NB, 25.5.15, 30.7.16) characterization of the ethical as something *mystical* can make us second-guess the adequacy of this reading. As he explains in the *Tractatus*:

6.522. There are, indeed, things that cannot be put into words. They *make themselves manifest*. They are what is mystical.

Accordingly, the ethical, understood as the enquiry into the good ethical life which constitutes the second part of Wittgenstein's work, cannot be put into words, but rather it can only *show itself* or *make itself manifest*. Hence why Wittgenstein refrains from discussing the intricacies involved in the attainment of a good ethical life in the *Tractatus* and settles for delimiting the ethical from within.

The characterization of the ethical as mystical is crucial to understanding the purpose of the *TLP* 6.4-6.5ff. On the one hand, as explained above, within the confines of the *Tractatus* the 6.4ff serve the ethical purpose of delimiting the ethical from within. Initially, Wittgenstein (TLP, 6.4-6.421) delimits the ethical in order to clarify the

nonsensicality of ethical pseudo-propositions, thereby drawing a limit to the expression of thoughts. Subsequently, Wittgenstein (TLP, 6.421-6.522) delimits the ethical as a whole by discussing various topics which are central to it.

On the other hand, by delimiting the ethical and the various topics it comprises, the 6.4ff serve an ulterior ethical purpose: *showing* or *making manifest* the second part of Wittgenstein's work which cannot be put into words. It is at this point where *mysticism* comes to the fore. Although Wittgenstein can *say* nothing about what ethics and the good ethical life entail, i.e., it is not part of the written content of the *Tractatus*, he can *show* it or *make it manifest*. This is accomplished through the delimitation of the ethical, which provides sufficient insights as to *show* what it is to be ethically good and live a good ethical life (see sections 2 and 3 for examples). Strictly speaking Wittgenstein can *only* show what it is to be ethically good and live a good ethical life in this way -hence his repudiation of written ethical doctrines. Thus, against the austere reading, there is more to the *Tractatus* than the delimitation of the ethics.

Given this characterization of the purpose of the TLP 6.4-6.5ff, I believe it is reasonable to conclude that the ethical point and significance of the *Tractatus* consist in the delimitation of the ethical and, thereby, *showing* or *making manifest* what it is to be ethically good and live a good ethical life. I believe this proposed interpretation, which can be understood as sympathizing with the middle-ground reading, honors both the *Tractatus* and Wittgenstein's letter to Von Ficker by refraining from over or underestimating the ethical importance of the *Tractatus*. Specifically, it explains, first, how the ethical propositions relate to the main purpose of the *Tractatus*, i.e., drawing a limit to the expressions of thought, through their commentary of proposition 6. Second, how in doing so Wittgenstein provides a delimitation of the ethical that exceeds this commentary. Finally, how the *Tractatus* contains a further ethical point which consists in *showing* or *making manifest* what it is to be ethically good and live a good ethical life, i.e., the second part of Wittgenstein's work which cannot be put into words.⁵

2. The good ethical life

⁵ This proposed interpretation also complies with Wittgenstein's division of his work into two distinct parts: the first *written* part makes manifest the second *unwritten* part through the delimitation of the ethical, which is the only way Wittgenstein can speak about the ethical.

In this section I want to briefly describe how Wittgenstein's delimitation of the ethical in the *Tractatus* provides sufficient insights as to *show* what it is to be ethically good and live a good ethical life. As explained in section 1, ethics must lie *outside* of the world since *in* the world no value exists (TLP, 6.41). But if no act *in* the world has inherent ethical value, how is it possible to be ethically good and live a good ethical life? Wittgenstein's remarks in the *Tractatus* show that ethics is primarily concerned with achieving ethical goodness and a good ethical life by adopting a certain view of the world from which we can carry out a good exercise of the *ethical will* and solve the *riddle of life*.

On the one hand, according to a widely held view, the ethical will is to be understood as a certain attitude to the world that "can alter only the limits of the world, not the facts [...]. It must, so to speak, wax and wane as a whole" (TLP, 6.43), making it either a happy or an unhappy world (see e.g., Diamond 2000, 153-155; Hughes 2009, 52, 56-58; Appelqvist 2013, 47-49, 51, 53; Kuusela 2018, 45-51; Fairhurst 2019, 88-89).

The good exercise of the ethical will involves an attitude of acceptance of the world. This is accomplished through *viewing* the world *sub specie aeterni*, i.e., feeling the world as a limited whole from *outside* space and time (TLP, 6.4312, 6.45). From this view we see, on the one hand, that "no part of the world is privileged or preferred to another" (Hughes 2009, 57; cf. NB, 9.11.16). All facts are of equal value since *in* the world "no value exists -and if it did exist, it would have no value" (TLP, 6.41). On the other hand, we see that the world is independent from our wishes and desires (cf. TLP, 6.373-6.374; NB, 30.7.16). Accordingly, by *seeing* the world correctly, one learns to live in harmony and acceptance with the world and whatever fate may bring, regardless of whether it coincides or not with one's wishes and desires. The world, consequently, becomes a happy one (see NB, 30.7.16, 9.11.16; LE, 5-7).

Conversely, the bad exercise of the ethical will involves an attitude of confrontation with the world. This a consequence of not viewing the world *sub specie aeterni* and, thereby, being unable to see that no part of the world the world is privileged or preferred to another and, on the other hand, that it is independent from our wishes and desires. Consequently, one expresses frustration and anger when the happenings in the world do not coincide with one's wishes and desires. This leads to life of confrontation and war with the world, thus making it an unhappy one (see NB, 30.7.16, 9.11.16).

On the other hand, the riddle of life describes the problem that arises with regards to the meaning of life. "The solution of the riddle of life in space and time lies *outside*

space and time” (TLP, 6.4312) -hence why it cannot be put into words (TLP, 6.5-6.522). Specifically, it is to be found in the *view* of the world *sub specie aeterni*, as it is from this view that the world becomes a happy one and, thereby, a valuable and meaningful one (cf. TLP, 6.4312, 6.45). In other words: giving *meaning* to our life and the world is accomplished through the good exercise of the ethical will and viewing the world *sub specie aeterni*, as a limited whole, as something meaningful and valuable.

3. The Tractarian point about Ethics

Having outlined Wittgenstein’s early conception of the good ethical life, in this section I study how the correct method of philosophy propounded in the *Tractatus* contributes to ethics and, by extension, the attainment of the good ethical life.

Wittgenstein’s conception of the correct method of philosophy emerges from his critique of metaphysical philosophy.⁶ According to Wittgenstein, metaphysical philosophy is a theory or body of doctrine constituted by nonsensical philosophical pseudo-propositions that fail to give meaning to some of their signs because they attempt to say something metaphysical (TLP, 4.112, 6.53).

Against this mistaken conception of philosophy, Wittgenstein defends that philosophy must be understood as an activity that “aims at the logical clarification of thoughts” (TLP, 4.112). Specifically, philosophy must “consist essentially in elucidations” that “contribute to the clarification of thoughts” (TLP, 4.112). This is accomplished by complying with the correct method of philosophy: we must “say nothing except what can be said [...] and then, whenever someone else wanted to say something metaphysical, to demonstrate to him that he had failed to give meaning to certain signs in his propositions” (TLP, 6.53). Thus, philosophy is entrusted with pointing out when propositions fail to abide by the constraints imposed on senseful propositions.

3.1. Surveying the existing literature

A survey of the existing literature shows that Wittgenstein scholars have fleshed out three competing interpretations regarding the contribution of philosophy to ethics and the good ethical life:

⁶ Here I only outline Wittgenstein’s conception of the correct method of philosophy. I refrain from examining if he abides by it or not in the *Tractatus*, thus bypassing the existing debates regarding how to interpret the *Tractatus* and the apparent paradox in 6.54.

1. The correct method of philosophy *only* clarifies ethical pseudo-propositions and delimits the ethical (see e.g., Cavalier 1980, 184-185; Diamond 2000, 152, 155; Hughes 2009, 54; Cahill 2011, 42, 70-71; Christensen 2011, 797; Dain 2018, 11).
2. The correct method of philosophy is necessary, although not sufficient, for the attainment of good ethical life, insofar as it removes certain obstacles that hinder our capacity to live a good ethical life (see e.g., Edwards 1982, 27, 47-48, 101; John 1988, 499, 503, 505).
3. The correct method of philosophy is sufficient for the attainment of a good ethical life. Being ethically good and living a good ethical life amounts to having conceptual clarity, which can be accomplished through the correct method of philosophy (see e.g., Rudebush & Berg 1979, 152-153; Mulhall 2007, 232-233, 236, 243-245; Tejedor 2013, 63, 73-79; Harchourt Forthcoming, 1-5, 8-9).

The two latter proposals seem to me problematic. Both interpretations rest on the assumption that displaying *conceptual clarity* in language-use is a necessary requirement for a good ethical life -their disagreement revolves around whether it is a sufficient condition or not. Thus, it assumed that certain happenings in the world are the mark of ethical goodness and badness. Specifically, displaying conceptual clarity in our language-use is a mark of ethical goodness, while displaying conceptual confusion is a mark of ethical badness. However, there is no indication that the requirements for a good ethical life *must* include the attainment of conceptual clarify through abiding by the correct method of philosophy.

According to Wittgenstein, ethical value “must lie outside the whole sphere of what happens and is the case” (TLP, 6.41). Thus, claiming that certain happenings in the world, i.e., uses of language, are a mark of ethical goodness or badness runs against Wittgenstein’s fact-value distinction. Specifically, it places ethical value *in* the world, thereby making it valueless (cf. TLP, 6.41). The use of language, regardless of whether it displays conceptual clarity or confusion, cannot be the mark of the ethical. As Wittgenstein puts it: “Facts all contribute only to setting the [ethical] problem, not its solution” (TLP, 6.4321 my brackets). Accordingly, displaying conceptual clarity in our use of language cannot be part of the solution to ethical problems. I believe this is the reason why Wittgenstein recognizes, in the introduction of the *Tractatus*, how little is achieved by dissipating conceptual confusion.

Both interpretations, consequently, fail to recognize that the only requirements for a good ethical life are the necessary *ethical* changes described in section 2, not the *factual* or *philosophical* changes required for attaining conceptual clarity. Thus, against Edwards (1982, 27, 47-48, 101) and John (1988, 499, 503, 505), the correct method of philosophy and the resulting conceptual clarity are not necessary for a good ethical life. Meanwhile, against Rudebush and Berg (1979), Edwards (1982, 26, 68), Mulhall (2007), Tejedor (2013) and Harcourt (Forthcoming), the correct method of philosophy and the resulting conceptual clarity are not sufficient for a good ethical life.

On Wittgenstein's view, philosophical and ethical problems (and their respective solutions) are substantially disanalogous (Christensen 2011, 797; Kuusela 2018, 38-39). Philosophy focuses on the logical clarification of thoughts and the expression of thoughts: it seeks to dissipate conceptual confusion through the correct method of philosophy. Ethics, meanwhile, focuses on the meaning of life and how to live correctly: it seeks to achieve a good ethical life through viewing the world *sub specie aeterni* and, thereby, having a good exercise of the ethical will and solving the riddle of life. Accordingly, it is necessary to distinguish the ethical task of living a good ethical life from the philosophical task of attaining conceptual clarity. "Thinking and living are not the same" (Kuusela 2018, 38-39).

3.2. Philosophy as a tool

Notwithstanding the inadequacies that stem from arguing that conceptual clarity is a necessary and/or sufficient requirement for a good ethical life, I believe that the correct method of philosophy offers a contribution to the ethics and the good ethical life which exceeds the clarification of ethical pseudo-propositions and the delimitation of the ethical. Specifically, I want to suggest that the correct method of philosophy serves as a helpful tool for the attainment of a good ethical life.

On the one hand, and in agreement with Cavalier (1980, 184-185), Diamond (2000, 152, 155), Hughes (2009, 54), Cahill (2011, 42, 70-71), Christensen (2011, 797) and Dain (2018, 11), the correct method of philosophy delimits the ethical and, thereby, clarifies ethical pseudo-propositions. However, this task need not be regarded in a negative light. Although delimiting the ethical does not get us any closer to achieving a good ethical life, it can point us in the right direction. For instance, by delimiting the ethical one can learn to avoid that futile and misguided task of providing a rationally justified ethical theory with action-guiding principles.

On the other hand, the correct method of philosophy offers a further contribution to the ethical task of achieving a good ethical life. Notwithstanding the differences described in 3.1 between philosophy and ethics, “philosophy (of a certain kind) *can* change the way one lives, insofar as it changes the way one thinks, changes one’s perspectives on things” (Richter 1996, 249). Specifically, the correct method of philosophy can serve as a helpful tool which contributes to the undergoing of the necessary ethical changes required for a good ethical life. There are two clear-cut examples of this use of philosophy.

First, the correct method of philosophy can serve as a tool which helps us achieve a good exercise of the ethical will by changing our perspective with regards to the connection between the world and our wishes and desires. Attaining conceptual clarity through the correct method of philosophy requires understanding the nature of propositions. Among other things, one becomes aware of the fact that one elementary proposition cannot be deduced from another (TLP, 5.134-5.135). In turn, due to the picturing nature of propositions, one learns that these considerations have ontological implications: they are to be extended to existence and non-existence of states of affairs represented by propositions. Accordingly, one recognizes that “from the existence or non-existence of one state of affairs it is impossible to infer the existence or non-existence of another” (TLP, 2.061-2.062).

Although this realization does not constitute an ethical change in itself, it does contribute to the ethical changes required for a good exercise of the ethical will. Specifically, it helps us see that from our wishes and desires (i.e., the existence of one state of affairs) it is impossible to infer or necessitate certain happenings in the world (i.e., the existence of another state of affairs), hence why we should not be angry or frustrated when fate does not accord with our wishes and desires.

Second, the correct method of philosophy can serve as a tool which helps us dissolve the riddle of life. In 6.5-6.522 Wittgenstein exemplifies how the correct method of philosophy is used to dissolve philosophical pseudo-problems. Specifically, he argues that “whenever the answer cannot be into words, neither can the question be put into words” and, therefore, the riddle does not exist (TLP, 6.5). After discussing how this method dissolves the problem of scepticism in 6.51, Wittgenstein sets out to apply it to the riddle of life.

He explains that “we feel that even when all possible scientific questions have been answered” (TLP, 6.52) the answer to this riddle cannot be put into words. Since the

answer cannot be put into words, neither can the question and, therefore, the riddle ceases to exist. Thus, contrary to what philosophers had previously believed, philosophy cannot meaningfully speak about this problem and its solution. Instead, it must demonstrate to anyone who wanted to say something philosophical about the riddle of life that they have failed to give meaning to certain signs in their propositions (TLP, 6.53).

Unfortunately, the dissolution of the riddle of life tells us nothing about the meaning of life or the difference between living a meaningful or meaningless life (see section 2). This dissolution is no more than a philosophical clarification that results from Wittgenstein's fact-value distinction in the 6.4ff and the picture of language propounded or assumed in the *Tractatus*. Nevertheless, the philosophical clarity one achieves from this dissolution allows them to avoid the futile search for the meaning of life *in* the world or in senseful propositions. Conversely, a lack of philosophical clarity could be detrimental to ethics insofar as it leads one to actively engage in philosophical pseudo-problems about the meaning of life, thus distracting them from the ethical task at hand.

These two examples, additionally, bring out two important ideas regarding how the correct method of philosophy contributes to ethics and the attainment of the good ethical life. On the one hand, abiding by the correct method of philosophy will not result in any ethical change nor force, entice or allow us to live a good ethical life. The correct method of philosophy is *only* a tool that can be employed when undergoing the necessary ethical changes for a good ethical life. It enables us to see the world aright (i.e., without conceptual confusion) and, consequently, make clearer our understanding of ethics and the ethical task (Kuusela 2018, 50-51). However, living a good ethical life is still a matter of *personal ethical responsibility* which *only requires* ethical changes, not philosophical activity. Specifically, it requires viewing the world *sub specie aeterni* and, thereby, having a good exercise of the ethical will and solving riddle of life, none of which falls under the umbrella of the correct method of philosophy.

On the other hand, and relatedly, the correct method of philosophy and the conceptual clarity that results from it are not *necessary* nor *sufficient* for a good ethical life. Although conceptual confusion can be detrimental to ethics insofar as it leads us to nonsense that might distract us from the task of living a good ethical life (see Kuusela 2018, 51), it is not something we must overcome to achieve a good ethical life. Conceptual confusion cannot be the mark of ethical badness because it is a happening *in* the world which lacks ethical value (see section 1 and 3.1). Again, the only requirements

for a good ethical life are the necessary *ethical* changes described in section 2, not the *factual* changes required for the attainment of conceptual clarity.

Conclusion

Concluding, this paper has studied the link between Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* and ethics in hopes of achieving a greater understanding of the ethical significance of this work. On the one hand, I have elucidated what Wittgenstein means by his statement to Von Ficker about the point of the book being ethical. Specifically, I have defended that the ethical point of the *Tractatus* is both to delimit the ethical and, thereby, *show* or *make manifest* what it is to live a good ethical life. On the other hand, I have studied how the correct method of philosophy propounded by the *Tractatus* contributes to ethics and the attainment of the good ethical life. Specifically, I have argued that, although philosophy is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for achieving a good ethical life, it serves as a useful tool that can help one undergo the required ethical changes to achieve said life.

References and abbreviations

- Appelqvist, H. (2013). "Why does Wittgenstein say that ethics and aesthetics are one and the same?" in Peter Sullivan and Michael Porter (eds.) *Wittgenstein's Tractatus: History and Interpretation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 40-58.
- Cahill, Kevin (2011). *The Fate of Wonder*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Cavalier, R.J. (1980) *Ludwig Wittgenstein's Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus: A Transcendental Critique of Ethics*. Washington: University Press of America.
- Christensen, A.S. (2011). "Wittgenstein and Ethics", in: Oskari Kuusela and Marie McGinn (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Wittgenstein*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 796–817.
- Dain, E. (2018): "Wittgenstein's Moral Thought", in: Rashef Agam-Segal and Edmund Dain (eds.) *Wittgenstein's Moral Thought*, New York: Routledge, 9-35.
- Diamond, C. (2000): "Ethics, imagination and method of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*", in: Alice Crary and Rupert Read (eds.) *The New Wittgenstein*, Oxford: Routledge, 149–173.
- Edwards, J.C. (1982): *Ethics Without Philosophy: Wittgenstein and the Moral Life*. Florida: University Presses of Florida.

- Fairhurst, J. (2019). 'The Ethical Subject and the Willing Subject in the *Tractatus*: An Alternative to the Transcendental Reading'. *Philosophia*, 47 (1): 75-95.
- Fairhurst, J. (Forthcoming). "'Ethics is Transcendental' (TLP, 6.421)". *Journal of the American Philosophical Association*.
- Harcourt, E. (Forthcoming). "Wittgenstein, Ethics and Therapy", in: C. Jäger and W. Löffler (eds.) *Epistemology: Contexts, Values, Disagreement, Proceedings of the 34th International Wittgenstein Symposium*, Frankfurt: Ontos
- Hughes, L. (2009). "'If there is any value that does have value, it must lie outside the whole sphere of what happens and is the case. (TLP 6.41)'" in: Ulrich Arnswald (ed.) *In Search of Meaning: Ludwig Wittgenstein on Ethics, Mysticism and Religion*, Karlsruhe: KIT Scientific Publishing, 51-66.
- Janik, A., & Toulmin, S. (1973). *Wittgenstein's Vienna*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- John, P.C. (1988). 'Wittgenstein's 'Wonderful Life'.'. *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 49 (3): 495-510.
- Klagge, J.C. (2011). *Wittgenstein in Exile*. London: MIT Press.
- Kuusela, O. (2018). "Wittgenstein, Ethics and Philosophical Clarification", in: Rashef Agam-Segal and Edmund Dain (eds.) *Wittgenstein's Moral Thought*, New York: Routledge, 37–66.
- Monk, R. (1991). *Ludwig Wittgenstein: the duty of a genius*. New York: Penguin Books.
- Mulhall, S. (2007). "Words, Waxing and Waning: Ethics in/and/of the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*", in: Guy Kahane, Edward Kanterian and Oskari Kuusela (eds.) *Wittgenstein and His Interpreters*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 221-247.
- Richter, D. (1996). 'Nothing to be Said: Wittgenstein and Wittgensteinian Ethics'. *Southern Journal of Philosophy*, 34 (2): 243-256.
- Rudebush, T. and W.M. Berg. (1979). "On Wittgenstein and Ethics: A Reply to Levi". *Télos*, 40: 150-160.
- Tejedor, C. (2013) "The Earlier Wittgenstein on the Notion of Religious Attitude". *Philosophy*, 88: 55–79.
- Waismann, F. (1979). *Ludwig Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle: Conversations Recorded by F. Waismann*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Wittgenstein, L. (1965). "A Lecture on Ethics". *The Philosophical Review*, 74 (1): 3-12.
(LE)
- Wittgenstein, L. (2001). *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. London: Routledge. (TLP)
- Wittgenstein, L. (2015). *Notebooks 1914-1916*. London: Forgotten Books. (NB)