

# ***Bedeutungserlebnis* and *Lebensgefühl* in Kant and Wittgenstein: Responsibility and the Future.**

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Wittgenstein keeps drawing our attention to the fact that inner mental states are something very different from what is happening outside, in the visible world of time and space, and that we should be most careful when talking about both the inner and the outer in grammatically similar ways. He finds it peculiar and "remarkable" that we do in fact talk this way: "Don't look at it as a matter of course, but as a most remarkable thing [*etwas sehr Merkwürdiges*], that the verbs 'believe', 'wish', 'will' display all the inflexions [*alle die grammatischen Formen*] possessed by 'cut', 'chew', 'run'" (PI IIx 190). Cutting, chewing, and running are events happening in physical, measurable time and space. They have parts, such as your hand, a knife, and a piece of wood with its peculiar shape and grain; or your legs, feet, shoes, and the path you run on. Events such as running and cutting can be described in terms of their parts and their relative positions and changes of position, similar to the way we describe, and thereby explain, the workings of a sewing machine. But believing, wishing, and willing (*wollen*) cannot be described in this way, because mental states are not processes like that. Although we talk of "workings" of the mind (*innere Vorgänge*), those workings don't have parts the way cutting, chewing, and running do. Usual "surface grammar" does not distinguish between these two groups of verbs, and we should therefore pay attention to "depth grammar" (*Tiefengrammatik*, PI 664), which is sensitive to uses and situations. Linguistic "surface grammar" can be misleading. It can suggest wrong parallels of understanding. "No wonder we find it difficult to find our way about" (PI 664). Wittgenstein therefore points out fine differences in our everyday use of words. He wants to dissuade us, and himself, from making overgeneralizations and drawing false parallels. This is the therapeutic aspect of his philosophy.

But I do not think that this is all. It is not only therapy. Wittgenstein keeps returning to our inner mental states, sensations, hopes, wishes, beliefs, thoughts, fears, feelings, attitudes, opinions, memories, expectations, and intentions, and he looks closely at the ways we express them in words and gestures. He describes and (together with the psychologist, PI 571) "observes" them. And he does more than that. He also introduces speculative notions of his own, such as "meaning blindness" and "aspect blindness" (PI IIxi 213-4). Someone who cannot see something as something, who cannot make and suddenly feel the duck-rabbit switch, and who has no feeling for words, is called "aspect blind" or "meaning blind". Such a person lacks something, and Wittgenstein wonders whether we can really imagine such a "person", or if it must not be a soulless machine. These are idiosyncratic Wittgensteinian conceptions, not wrong ideas other philosophers have and that he, Wittgenstein, wants to cure them of. You might say that he wants to cure himself. But I think he makes these considerations in order to say something positive that goes beyond mere therapy. Wittgenstein, especially the late Wittgenstein, is not just a therapist.

But what exactly is he after when he thinks about the experience we have when uttering a word (*Bedeutungserlebnis*), or, even more strangely, when he thinks about the experience we have when trying to have the

wrong experience when uttering a word in a sentence? What is the point of such introspective mental gymnastics? (Kripke and Rees think that Wittgenstein's investigation is introspective here and that the issue whether a meaning-blind person is possible or not is not entirely resolved. Schulte argues against this reading: It is not introspection that is going on, and a meaning-blind person is no doubt impossible for Wittgenstein (Schulte 66-74). See also Wenzel (to appear).)

It is ethical and aesthetic aspects that come into play here and that matter to Wittgenstein. The inner and the outer, our inner feelings and outer expressions, are intertwined. You can *immediately* see someone's feeling on his or her face and you react to this. The word "Schubert" and the ring and atmosphere it has for us, are *interlaced* with his work and our ideas of it. Our feeling and reaction is not mediated through some inner representation or picture that we might somehow have, floating in front of our inner eye. Rather, the reaction is immediate. It is for this reason, I think, that the fine aesthetic differences matter to Wittgenstein, and that he thinks they should matter to us as well. The words and expressions we use are carried and sustained by society, and we are part of this society by using them. Those words, gestures, and facial expressions live in that society, and our using them comes with a certain responsibility, namely that of keeping and maintaining their use in a meaningful way. This, I suggest, is a positive aspect in Wittgenstein's work. I will come back to this.

The interwovenness of feeling and expression and the immediacy of our reaction are reflected in our attitudes towards others. Wittgenstein writes: "I always presuppose that the one who smiles is a human being and not just that what smiles is a human body. ... I react immediately to someone else's behavior. I presuppose the *inner* in so far as I presuppose a *human* being" (LW II 84). Even pretense of feeling is possible only on this basis, and, as John Canfield rightly suggests, instead of worrying that we might never know another person's mind, we could as well realize that we usually do, and that "the other's soul is, often, just plain visible" (Canfield 157).

Wittgenstein is skeptical of introspection and the explanations given by philosophers – and not only philosophers – about the inner states and workings of the mind. Many of the explanations Freud gave, for instance, Wittgenstein thinks are completely wrong. But he does not speak disrespectfully of the soul and our mental states and feelings themselves. He does not try to explain them away, and I don't think he wants to objectify everything. His is not a behaviorist. Thus I do not fully agree with Goldstein's reading, that Wittgenstein "had just what he needed" when he "got hold of the concepts of *seeing-as* and *aspect-blindness*" to explain things in *objective* terms. Goldstein writes: "For, when looking at a picture of a duck-rabbit, although different subjects may flip at different times, they flip only between duck and rabbit; this is the objective phenomenon which is quite distinct from any 'mood, fragrance, illumination'" (Goldstein 115). On the one hand, I agree that this gives some objective ground to the experience.

On the other, I do not think Wittgenstein wanted to explain away the subjective side. Of course this depends on what exactly we mean by "subjective".

Just before introducing the notion of aspect blindness, Wittgenstein talks of spatial perception, mental representation (*Vorstellung*), imagination (*Phantasie*), and will (*Wille*) (PI IIxi 213). These involve creative human abilities, and I think there will always be a subjective side to what perception, representation, imagination, and the will are. (For a detailed discussion of these passages and the subjective and objective aspects involved, see Wenzel (to appear).) Wittgenstein does not avoid talking of such subjective aspects and experiences. To the contrary, he introduces them in preparation for his introducing the notions of aspect blindness and meaning blindness. Many of his examples even have aesthetic aspects to them: a variation of a theme, absolute pitch, a musical ear, the sound (*Klang*) of a word, intonation, illustration, imagination, a painting in words (*Wortgemälde*), and Schubert (PI IIxi). I would therefore like to contrast his views with Kant's on aesthetics. And there is a further reason for doing this. The English translation of "*Bedeutungserlebnis*" as "meaning experience" loses some of the flavor of the German original. The word "*Erlebnis*" does not just mean "experience". It also means life: *Leben*. An *Erlebnis* is something you "live" and go through, something that touches your inner feelings and emotions. Kant's aesthetics also involves the notions of feelings and life, as we shall see.

Kant does not operate with the notions of the inner and the outer. He does not look closely at individual cases, nor does he observe fine differences in the "deep grammar" of words. He does not make any empirical statements about the inner workings of the mind, and this, one might say, saves him from Wittgenstein's criticisms. But, from another perspective, he makes a distinction that we cannot find in Wittgenstein, namely between "subject" and "object", and he makes much use of this distinction. Thus he begins his aesthetics by saying: "In order to decide whether or not something is beautiful, we do not relate [*beziehen*] the representation by means of understanding to the *object* for cognition, but rather relate it by means of the imagination (perhaps combined with the understanding) to the *subject* and its feeling of pleasure or displeasure." (CJ par. 1, italics mine)

We can contrast Kant's explicit and transcendental subject-object distinction with Wittgenstein's worry about our overlooking the inner-outer differences in empirical phenomena and in deep grammar. Kant is very simple here: Transcendentally, there is only one subject and only one object. His "faculty talk", which could be seen as a way of explaining what is going on in the mind, involving imagination, understanding, and the categories, is not meant to explain any particular empirical features, but only general ones – even universal ones, as Kant would insist from his transcendental idealist perspective. Nevertheless, there are some aspects in Kant that we can, by way of contrast, bring to our reading and understanding of Wittgenstein's fine-tuned analyses.

According to Kant, in judgments of taste, we "relate" the representation not to the object but to the judging subject. The representation "does not serve for any cognition at all, not even that by which the subject cognizes itself" (CJ par. 3). This might please Wittgenstein and appease his worries that we look at the mental too much in a physicalist way. Kant's radical distinction between subject and object thus invites a Kantian therapy of Wittgenstein. But this makes use only of the negative side of Kant, that we do *not* cognize ourselves in judgments of taste. There is a

positive side to him as well. According to Kant, we claim a certain subjective universality in our judgments of taste that can only be justified by our cognitive abilities being involved in the "free play of our cognitive faculties". We can apply this to Wittgenstein's observing "fine aesthetic differences" (PI IIxi 219) and his notion of "experiences of meaning": We have learned from Wittgenstein that our subjective feelings are interwoven with the objective and inter-subjective linguistic meanings of the words that we have learned to use. From Kant we learn how the subjective "free play of imagination and understanding" involves those very cognitive faculties that are also applied in objective judgments (see Wenzel 2005, 27-53). We see the duck and the rabbit objectively, but play with possibilities subjectively. A word has an objective meaning, but a subjective ring. In each case, the free play leaves its traces regarding cognition, in our choice of what to focus on and what to associate it with. This is more than mere connotation. Imagination is always more or less free from conceptual constraints. It creates and recalls memories and expectations that we experience anew, thereby affecting ourselves in aesthetic reflection. In both views, Kant's and Wittgenstein's, there are thin lines between the subjective aesthetic and the objective epistemic.

Returning to the notion of *Bedeutungserlebnis*, we can contrast it with Kant's claim that the subject "feels itself" (*sich selbst fühlt*) when making a judgment of taste, and that the subject relates a given representation to the "entire faculty of representation" (*das ganze Vermögen der Vorstellungen*) and that it experiences a "feeling of life" (*Lebensgefühl*) (CJ par. 1). It is no coincidence that Kant follows his aesthetics with his discussion of teleology in biology, and it is also no coincidence that Wittgenstein refers to organic life. He talks of the view that it is the "mental act of meaning that gives the sentence life [*den Satz belebt*]" (this is his interlocutor's voice, PI 592) and he says that words are germs (*Keime*) (PI IIxi 217).

In this context, inter-subjectivity is relevant in both Kant and Wittgenstein. In judgments of taste we claim inter-subjective universality (Kant), and in the experience of meaning we rely on others who have taught us the words we use and made it possible for us to develop our feelings for them by their recognizing our expressions (Wittgenstein). But Kant has more to offer than this. His theory of *a priori* purposiveness for judgments of taste and his theory of symbolism, relating beauty to morality, open new perspectives towards the future. It seems to me that such a move and motivation is missing in Wittgenstein. Kant addresses himself to our hopes for a better future. He develops his ideas of freedom and humanity under moral laws in his works such as his *Metaphysics of Morals* and *Towards Perpetual Peace*. Kant had a vision, and in response to it he wrote. Wittgenstein did not. Although he had a fine-tuned aesthetic concern for the actual use of particular words, and, as I have explained, there is a certain sense of responsibility that might come with this, there is, at least as far as I can see, less of a vision for a future (if at all) in Wittgenstein than in Kant.

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