

‘Ethics is transcendental’ (*Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 6.421)

ABSTRACT: *In this paper I offer a novel interpretation of Wittgenstein’s claim that ‘ethics is transcendental’ (TLP 6.421). Initially, I set out to offer said interpretation by resorting to both Wittgenstein’s understanding of ethics and his understanding of the transcendental of logic—which entails taking Wittgenstein as endorsing a Kantian understanding of the notion ‘transcendental’. This leads to the claim that ethics is transcendental insofar as it is the condition of a certain ethical experience. Nevertheless, this interpretation involves some inadequacies due to certain incompatibilities between the Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus and the aforementioned Kantian understanding of the notion ‘transcendental’. I identify the peculiarities of Wittgenstein’s understanding of the notion ‘transcendental’, and on this basis, I set forth a novel interpretation of 6.421. Specifically, I argue that ethics is transcendental insofar as it is internal to or constitutive of a certain mystical view: viewing the world sub specie aeterni as something valuable.*

KEYWORDS: Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, ethics, logic, transcendental

Introduction

Since the publication of the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (hereinafter, *Tractatus*) Wittgenstein scholars have struggled to explain several of Wittgenstein’s ideas, leading to multiple ongoing exegetical discussions. This has been the case for the ethical propositions that occur at the end of the *Tractatus*, which are some of the most obscure and mystical passages of Wittgenstein’s work. Throughout this paper I want to shed some light on Wittgenstein’s ethics. Specifically, I want to offer a novel interpretation of Wittgenstein’s claim that ‘ethics is transcendental’ (TLP 6.421).

In section 1 I survey some of the existing interpretations that have been offered to account for the transcendental of ethics in the *Tractatus*. First, I examine the possibility of conceiving Wittgenstein’s claim in 6.421 as stating that ethics is transcendent. Second, I focus on the transcendental reading of the *Tractatus*, which is committed to the claim that Wittgenstein endorses the notion of a

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transcendental willing subject as the condition of ethics. Third, I study the possibility of resorting to Wittgenstein's *Notebooks* (2015) in order to claim that ethics is a transcendental condition of the world. Fourth, I analyze the claim that ethics, like logic, is a transcendental condition of the possibility of representation. Simultaneously, I single out the problems that stem from these proposals and suggest a need for an alternative interpretation. In section 2 I set out to offer said alternative interpretation of 6.421 by resorting to both Wittgenstein's understanding of the transcendentality of logic in 6.13 and his understanding of ethics in the 6.4s.

1. Some Existing Interpretations

The topic of transcendentalism in the *Tractatus* has been ever-present among Wittgenstein scholars. Generally, they have focused on the possibility of interpreting Wittgenstein as a transcendental idealist and, by extension, have studied the possible links between the *Tractatus* and Kant's work. In this paper I focus on a slightly different issue. Specifically, I want to study a more puzzling remark made by Wittgenstein on the topic of transcendentalism: 'Ethics is transcendental' (TLP 6.421). Wittgenstein scholars have tried to offer an adequate interpretation of proposition 6.421, but no consensus has been reached. In this section I want to consider some of the existing interpretations in order to point out their shortcomings and suggest the need for an alternative interpretation of 6.421.

1.1 Ethics as Transcendent

There is widespread interpretation (see, e.g., Goodman 1982: 138, 142; Jacquette 1997: 318; Arnswald 2009: 8, 13–14; Mersch 2009: 28; Hughes 2009: 54; Oberdiek 2009: 179; Arrington 2017: 607) that argues that for Wittgenstein ethics is transcendent and not transcendental in the Kantian sense: namely, 'ethics does not consist in synthetic judgments known a priori: ethics for Wittgenstein lies "outside the world" and therefore cannot be expressed in propositions' (Oberdiek 2009: 179). This interpretation generally resorts to Wittgenstein's initial characterization of ethics in the 6.4s, where he states that ethics must lie outside of the world and that no fact or object can inherently possess ethical value (TLP 6.4, 6.41). Ethics, therefore, is just another element that conforms to the transcendentalia of the *Tractatus* alongside 'pictorial, representational, logical-mathematical form, the metaphysical subject or philosophical "I"' (Jacquette 1997: 318). Logic is also generally included among these transcendentalia, albeit some interpreters (see, e.g., Hughes 2009: 54) are inclined to offer a more Kantian approach to the transcendental character of logic.

However, this interpretation is inadequate. While Wittgenstein did write 'Ethics is transcendent' in his *Notebooks*, 'in the corresponding passage of the *Tractatus*, the word "transcendent" has been replaced—and not incidentally, I believe—by "transcendental" (MS 103, 37 [NB 79]; TLP 6.421)' (Appelqvist 2012: 201). This change suggests that Wittgenstein was aware of the fact that 'transcendent' and

'transcendental' have different meanings and intentionally opted to use the latter in the *Tractatus*. Thus, it is unlikely that Wittgenstein is claiming that ethics is transcendent in 6.421. Further arguments would be required to justify that Wittgenstein is stating that ethics is transcendent in 6.421 despite not explicitly using this notion and opting to use the term 'transcendental'. Moreover, why would Wittgenstein not use the notion 'metaphysical' in 6.421 if he intended to claim that ethics is transcendent and not transcendental? He uses the term 'metaphysical' previously in the *Tractatus* (e.g., TLP 5.632, 5.641), and its meaning there seems to be equivalent to that of the term 'transcendent': it applies to things that lie outside of the world (e.g., the metaphysical subject).

My objection here is not that ethics is not transcendent. It is clear that Wittgenstein (TLP 6.4, 6.41) explains that ethics and ethical value lie outside of the world. My point is that employing this characterization of ethics to interpret Wittgenstein's claim that 'ethics is transcendental' (TLP 6.421) is misguided. One may endorse Jacquette's (1997) detailed account of the transcendence of ethics. Nonetheless, this does not get us any closer to comprehending Wittgenstein's remark in 6.421 that 'ethics is not described as *transcendent*, that is, as being beyond the realm of the real, but as *transcendental*, that is, as a part of what conditions our experience of the real' (Christensen 2011: 802).

1.2 The Transcendental Reading of the *Tractatus*

Hacker (1986), Stokhof (2002), Wiggins (2004), Schroeder (2006), Morris (2008) and Churchill (2009) endorse the 'transcendental reading of the *Tractatus*'. This reading argues that 'Wittgenstein, in the *Tractatus*, endorses the notion of a transcendental subject as the condition of genuine religiousness (ethics) and—depending on the reading—representation' (Tejedor 2013: 57). Wittgenstein initially introduces the transcendental willing subject in the *Notebooks*, and he retains it in the *Tractatus* under a different label: the metaphysical subject. 'According to the Transcendental Reading, it is in this light that we should interpret Wittgenstein's claim, in the *Tractatus*, that: Ethics is transcendental' (Tejedor 2013: 57).

This reading, however, seems to be an inadequate interpretation of 6.421. In what follows I am going to outline some of the main objections that can be raised against the transcendental reading (for more on this reading and the problems it encounters see Tejedor 2013, 2015 and Fairhurst 2019). First, it is unclear whether the transcendental reading provides a correct interpretation of the *Notebooks*. The transcendental reading resorts to entry 5.8.16 to argue that Wittgenstein characterizes the willing subject as a transcendental willing subject, which is the condition of ethics. But said entry seems to offer insufficient evidence to substantiate the transcendental reading's claim. In 5.8.16 Wittgenstein affirms that the thinking subject is mere illusion 'but the willing subject exists. If the will did not exist, neither would there be that center of the world, which we call the I, and which is the bearer of ethics' (NB 5.8.16). Stating that the willing subject is the bearer of ethics does not involve or entail the claim that the existence of ethics is dependent on the willing subject. Thus, 5.8.16 does not demonstrate that

Wittgenstein endorses the idea of a transcendental willing subject as the condition of ethics (Fairhurst 2019: 84).

Furthermore, if the willing subject were a transcendental condition of ethics we might encounter some sort of contradiction or circularity. Wittgenstein states that 'if the will did not exist, neither would there be that center of the world, which we call the I, and which is the bearer of ethics' (NB 5.8.16). The will is conceived of as the subject of ethical attributes (TLP 6.423) and a condition of the existence of the I, that is, the subject that possesses will in an ethical sense (NB 2.8.16, 5.8.16, 4.11.16). It is unclear, therefore, how it could be argued that the willing subject, whose existence is dependent upon the will (the subject of ethical attributes), can be simultaneously a transcendental condition of ethics without encompassing some sort of contradiction or circularity. The subject's existence would be dependent upon the subject of ethical attributes (i.e., the will), while simultaneously being the transcendental condition of these ethical attributes. This seems to be the reason why Wittgenstein explicitly states that it is ethics, and not the willing subject, that is transcendental (NB 30.7.16).

Second, even if the transcendental reading were an adequate interpretation of the *Notebooks*, Wittgenstein does not recognize, explicitly or implicitly, the existence of a transcendental willing subject under the label of 'metaphysical subject' in the *Tractatus* (Tejedor 2013: 57–62, 2015: 141–45; Fairhurst 2019: 92–93). He only states that logic is transcendental (TLP 6.13) and that ethics is transcendental (6.421), but there is no suggestion that the metaphysical subject should be regarded as transcendental (see, e.g., TLP 5.633–5.641). This leads us to a further issue regarding how the transcendental reading uses the *Notebooks* when offering an interpretation of the *Tractatus*.

Wittgenstein devoted a series of entries in the *Notebooks* to ethics. Unfortunately, only a small handful of his ethical remarks in the *Notebooks* made it to the final version of the *Tractatus*. The majority of his remarks were no longer present in the *Tractatus*, which suggests that Wittgenstein had abandoned them at some point between 1916 and the publication of the *Tractatus*. The transcendental reading resorts to various of these remarks from the *Notebooks* that are no longer present in the *Tractatus* in order to offer an interpretation of the *Tractatus*, particularly those concerning the willing subject. However, it seems that this use of the *Notebooks* distorts the contents of the *Tractatus* (Tejedor 2013: 56).

The problem here with the transcendental reading is not necessarily the fact that it uses the *Notebooks*, but rather that it resorts to the *Notebooks* in order to make certain claims (e.g., the transcendental willing subject is a condition of ethics) that have no supporting evidence in the *Tractatus*. It fails to explain and justify why we should accept as a valid interpretation of the *Tractatus* certain ideas and claims that have their origins in a series of remarks of the *Notebooks* that are no longer present in the *Tractatus*. Namely, it fails to explain and justify why Wittgenstein's abandonment of certain ideas should be overlooked in favor of invoking said ideas to interpret the *Tractatus*.

I am not arguing or suggesting that all uses of the *Notebooks* should be rejected or avoided when interpreting the *Tractatus*. My point here is this: If one is willing to employ certain remarks of the *Notebooks*, which are no longer present in the

Tractatus, in order to offer an interpretation of the *Tractatus*, then it is necessary to provide a comprehensive presentation and argument explaining why resorting to said remarks is legitimate despite the fact that Wittgenstein seemed to have abandoned them at some point between 1916 and the publication of the *Tractatus*. In other words, it is necessary to offer arguments demonstrating that there is sufficient evidence in the *Tractatus* to retain these remarks of the *Notebooks* that are no longer present in the *Tractatus* and that these remarks do not distort the contents of the *Tractatus*. Unfortunately, the transcendental reading fails to provide said arguments.

My aim here is not to give a comprehensive presentation and argument for how to distinguish between correct and incorrect uses of the *Notebooks*; that is a very intricate issue that exceeds the scope of this paper. I am only stating that any interpretation of the *Tractatus*, whether it resorts to the *Notebooks* or not, must have supporting evidence in the *Tractatus*. Additionally, given that I will not establish what is a correct and incorrect use of the *Notebooks*, I will refrain from using the *Notebooks* when offering my own interpretation of 6.421 in section 2.

1.3. ‘Ethics must be a condition of the world’ (NB 24.7.16)

Other interpreters have opted to turn their attention to entry 24.7.16 of the *Notebooks*, where Wittgenstein seems to offer a precursor to proposition 6.421 of the *Tractatus*:

24.7.16. Ethics does not treat of the world. Ethics must be a condition of the world, like logic.

Previously, I (Fairhurst 2019: 93–98) employed 24.7.16 to argue that ethics is a condition for the existence of the world—just like logic. Without ethics or logic our world would simply not exist. This interpretation seems inadequate for two reasons. First, there is no explanation regarding why we should employ an entry that Wittgenstein explicitly abandoned in the *Tractatus*. Until said explanation is provided, 24.7.16 should be seen as an ‘erratic diary entry from the time of the production of the *Tractatus* records’ (Mersch 2009: 26).

Second, this interpretation is an inadequate explanation of the transcendentalism of both ethics and logic. On the one hand, Wittgenstein claims that logic plays a crucial role in our picturing and representation of reality. All pictures (i.e., thoughts and propositions) must share a logical form with reality: we cannot picture anything outside of logic (TLP 2.2, 4.12). Logic, therefore, precedes any experience of the world (TLP 5.552). Despite the role of logic in how we experience and picture reality, there is no suggestion in the *Tractatus* that logic is a condition for the existence of the world. Rather, Wittgenstein seems to claim that logic is a condition for our experience and picturing of reality and not a condition of reality. On the other hand, the inadequacy of this interpretation becomes apparent when we try and apply it to 6.421. How could ethics be a condition for the existence of the world? What necessary precondition does ethics provide?

There is nothing in the *Tractatus* that motivates or justifies this interpretation: no ethical proposition deals with or hints at this possibility.

Christensen (2011) resorts to 24.7.16 in order to offer a different interpretation of 6.421, an interpretation that avoids the dubious claim that ethics is a condition for the existence of the world. Specifically, Christensen (2011: 802–803) argues that ethics is a condition of the world insofar as it is a condition of the sense of the world. The problem with Christensen's interpretation stems from Wittgenstein's characterization of ethics in the 6.4s. In the opening propositions Wittgenstein seems to explain that ethics is to be understood as the sense or value of the world (TLP 6.4–6.421). Given this understanding of ethics, and following Christensen's interpretation of 6.421, ethics would be a transcendental condition of itself since ethics is understood as the sense of the world. Hence, we are left with an uninformative claim about the transcendental condition of ethics (i.e., ethics is a transcendental condition of ethics), which does not further our understanding of proposition 6.421.

1.4. Ethics as a Transcendental Condition of Representation

Dain (2018: 20–21) turns to the transcendental condition of logic in 6.13 to provide an interpretation of 6.421. He argues that logic, like ethics, does not have a particular subject matter insofar as it does not consist of a set of substantive truths. This does not entail the elimination of logic; instead, logic is the form of all thought. 'Logic is, therefore, for Wittgenstein, a condition of all thought. There is no getting outside it' (Dain 2018: 21).

How can we invoke the transcendental condition of logic in order to interpret 6.421? Dain points out that one possible answer is provided by Diamond (2000). According to Diamond, the point of calling ethics transcendental is that any thought may potentially be an ethical thought. Dain (2018: 22) argues that this interpretation, while attractive, is problematic. First, Diamond's interpretation suggests that ethics is not a condition of all thought, but just some part of it. Hence, ethics would not be genuinely transcendental because it is only a condition of some thoughts. Second, if not all thoughts are ethical, it is possible to define the subject matter of ethics through those thoughts that are ethical.

Against Diamond, Dain suggests the following:

Wittgenstein's view is, I think, that in delimiting thought and the expression of thoughts (from the inside), you thereby delimit the ethical (again *from* the inside): there is no further division among thoughts to be made, whether on the basis of their subject matter or not, and therefore there is no external perspective on ethics. (Dain 2018: 23)

Accordingly, ethics is to be understood as transcendental in exactly the same sense as logic: ethics is a condition of all thought—every thought is an ethical thought (Dain 2018: 23).

Despite offering an interesting account of the transcendentalism of logic, I believe Dain's interpretation of 6.421 is problematic. There is sufficient evidence in the *Tractatus* to substantiate the claim that logic is the condition of all thought. Wittgenstein, throughout the *Tractatus*, points out that logic is crucial for pictures (i.e., thoughts and propositions). He explains that all pictures (i.e., all representations of the world) must be logical pictures (TLP 2.181, 2.182): they share their logical form with the reality they depict (TLP 2.2, 4.12). However, there seems to be no evidence to substantiate Dain's claim that ethics is also a condition of all thought. Wittgenstein only speaks about the connection between ethics and pictures in the following propositions:

- 6.4 All propositions are of equal value.
- 6.41 The sense of the world must lie outside the world. In the world everything is as it is, and everything happens as it does happen: in it no value exists—and if it did exist, it would have no value. If there is any value that does have value, it must lie outside the whole sphere of what happens and is the case. For all that happens and is the case is accidental. What makes it non-accidental cannot lie within the world, since if it did it would itself be accidental. It must lie outside the world.
- 6.42 So too it is impossible for there to be propositions of ethics. Propositions can express nothing that is higher.
- 6.421 It is clear that ethics cannot be put into words. Ethics is transcendental. (Ethics and aesthetics are one and the same.)

Despite speaking about both ethics and pictures, Wittgenstein offers quite a negative view of their connection. He explains that ethics cannot be put into words: there is no such thing as an ethical proposition. This seems to negate the possibility of conceiving ethics as the condition of all thought. Dain might contend, however, that Wittgenstein's rejection of ethical propositions does not differ substantially from his remarks on logic, given that Wittgenstein also states that the propositions of logic say nothing and are an illegitimate use of language (TLP 6.11, 6.111).

Nevertheless, I believe there is a crucial difference in Wittgenstein's treatment of logic and ethics. Throughout the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein argues that all pictures must be logical pictures insofar as they must share their logical form with the reality they depict (TLP 2.181, 2.182, 2.19, 3, 4.03). Meanwhile, his remarks on ethics paint quite a different picture: they suggest a complete separation between ethics and pictures (cf. TLP 6.42, 6.421, 6.423). There is no evidence to substantiate the claim that all pictures are ethical pictures. However, Dain might contend that Wittgenstein does offer said evidence when he states that ethics is transcendental. Nonetheless, Dain's proposal encounters further problems.

First, Dain does not explain in detail how any particular thought could have an ethical dimension. For instance, how can a proposition from a specific field in

physics have an ethical dimension? Dain (2018: 23) attempts to bypass this issue by arguing that Wittgenstein's crucial thought is that all propositions have an ethical dimension because ethics is a condition of all pictures. However, this leads to a second and more serious problem. There is a quite straightforward explanation in the *Tractatus* regarding how logic is a transcendental precondition of all pictures and, by extension, why all pictures are logical pictures: all pictures must necessarily have a logical form in order to picture the world (cf. TLP 2.181, 2.182). There is no escaping logic in any meaningful use of pictures. The issue is that there seems to be no parallel explanation available for ethics.

Let us suppose that Dain is right and that all pictures are ethical pictures because they are preconditioned by ethics. In what way can it be said that ethics is a transcendental precondition of all pictures? What is the necessary component of our pictures that is supplied by ethics? Wittgenstein does not provide an answer to these questions in the *Tractatus* because there is simply no answer to give. Ethics is not a transcendental precondition of all pictures. According to Wittgenstein, the meaning of pictures is dependent on two conditions: (i) they must be logical pictures (i.e., they must have a logical form that they share with reality), and (ii) they must represent the existence and nonexistence of states of affairs. We do not find a third condition that involves ethics.

Consequently, Dain not only fails to explain how all thoughts have an ethical dimension—as he himself recognizes (see Dain 2018: 23)—he also fails to explain how ethics can be a transcendental precondition of representation and pictures. While there are good grounds to claim that ethics is a transcendental precondition of a certain experience, there is no evidence that suggests that ethics is a transcendental precondition of picturing and representation. Ethics is transcendental, but it is not transcendental in exactly the same way as logic.

2. 'Ethics is transcendental' (TLP 6.421)

In the preceding section I have considered various existing interpretations of 6.421, and I have dismissed them due to the fact that they incur certain inadequacies. The shortcomings of these interpretations suggest the need of a new interpretation of 6.421 that avoids the problems outlined in section 1. My aim throughout this section is to offer said new interpretation of 6.421. I believe the most promising starting point has been hinted at in numerous occasions throughout section 1: an adequate understanding of the transcendental of logic may prove useful when attempting to figure out in what way ethics is transcendental.

2.1. 'Logic is transcendental' (TLP 6.13)

As explained above, logic plays a crucial role in Wittgenstein's understanding of pictures and representation. Any picture or representation of the world must share its logical form with the world: all pictures must be logical pictures (TLP 2.181, 2.182, 2.19, 2.2, 3, 4.03, 4.12). We cannot picture the world outside of logical pictures because 'we should have to be able to station ourselves with propositions somewhere outside logic, that is to say outside of the world' (TLP 4.12). There are

no such things as meaningful illogical thoughts or illogical propositions. A picture that does not share its logical form with the reality it depicts fails to abide by one of the constraints imposed on pictures—the other constraint is that pictures must represent the existence and nonexistence of states of affairs. Thus, logic, which is ‘prior to every experience’ (TLP 5.552), structures our experience of the world: it ‘pervades the world’ (TLP 5.61).

The above suggests quite a straightforward (and Kantian) interpretation of Wittgenstein’s claim that ‘logic is transcendental’ (TLP 6.13): logic is a transcendental condition of our picturing or representation of the world. That is, ‘it is a condition of the possibility of the world as the object of thought’ (Kusela 2018: 44). All pictures, which constitute our experience of the world, must be logical pictures: they must share their logical form with the world they depict. Accordingly, ‘logical investigation is not concerned with anything in the world, but rather with the constitution of the world as an object of thought’ (Kusela 2018: 47).

The parallel with Kant’s transcendental philosophy can help us further understand how Wittgenstein may have understood the notion ‘transcendental’ in the *Tractatus*, which in turn can help us provide an adequate interpretation of 6.421. According to Kant, transcendental philosophy

is concerned with the necessary conditions of the possibility of cognitive experience (and in this sense with our mode of cognition of objects), its task being to draw limits to possible knowledge claims on the basis of a transcendental philosophical account of their *a priori* conditions of possibility. Similarly, Wittgenstein’s investigation of the logical laws that govern thought is an investigation of the conditions of the possibility of thought. (Kusela 2018: 44)

That is, Wittgenstein’s logical investigation and Kant’s transcendental philosophy are both concerned with how we constitute the world as an object of thought. It seems reasonable to conclude, therefore, that Wittgenstein and Kant’s understanding of the notion ‘transcendental’ does not differ substantially. Claiming that *x* is transcendental would come to mean something along the lines of:

x is an a priori necessary condition of the possibility of a certain cognitive experience.

For instance, returning to the case of logic, we may conclude that at 6.13 Wittgenstein is stating that logic is an a priori necessary condition of the possibility of a cognitive experience. Specifically, it is an a priori necessary condition of the possibility of picturing and representing the world.

Additionally, this understanding of the notion ‘transcendental’ avoids one of the main problems discussed above in section 1.4: we need not interpret logic and ethics as being transcendental in exactly the same sense. The definition of ‘transcendental’ outlined above allows us to interpret logic and ethics as being a priori necessary conditions of the possibility of different cognitive experiences.

2.2. Kelly and Kertscher

Kelly and Kertscher have both offered interpretations of 6.421 that involve understanding ethics as being an a priori necessary condition of the possibility of a cognitive experience. However, both proposals are problematic.

Kelly (1995: 578) argues that for Wittgenstein both ethics and logic are transcendental: they provide the conditions of the possibility of certain experiences. Logic constitutes the 'logical space which makes it possible for us to picture facts to ourselves in propositions' (Kelly 1995: 578). Meanwhile, ethics is a transcendental condition of the possibility of experiencing the world as a miracle created by God, thus constituting the ethical space that allows us to give meaning and value to our life (Kelly 1995: 578). In other words, ethics provides a unifying perspective on life and the world that constitutes the ethical space that can introduce value and meaning to our life. Without logic there would be no facts, and without ethics there would be only ethically neutral, contingent facts.

The biggest issue with Kelly's interpretation stems from understanding the ethical space as involving an experience tied to viewing the world as a miracle created by God. Wittgenstein openly discusses issues concerning God in the *Notebooks*. The problem is that these remarks are no longer present in the *Tractatus*. Wittgenstein only mentions God in the following four propositions of the *Tractatus*:

- 3.031 It used to be said that God could create anything except what would be contrary to the laws of logic. The truth is that we could not say what an 'illogical' world would look like.
- 5.123 If a god creates a world in which certain propositions are true, then by that very act he also creates a world in which all the propositions that follow from them come true. And similarly he could not create a world in which the proposition 'p' was true without creating all its objects.
- 6.372 Thus people today stop at the laws of nature, treating them as something inviolable just as God and Fate were treated in past ages.
- 6.432 *How* things are in the world is a matter of complete indifference for what is higher. God does not reveal himself *in* the world.

None of these four propositions seem to support Kelly's claim that ethics involves viewing the world as a miracle created by God. The first three propositions discuss the idea of God briefly in order to make a point about an altogether different issue, which is neither theological nor ethical. Wittgenstein is not positing or arguing in favor of the existence of God. Furthermore, 3.031 and 6.372 seem to label the belief in God as a certain ancient tradition.

Meanwhile, 6.432 could be understood loosely as an admission of the existence of God. Nonetheless, this is irrelevant for the issue at hand because the admission of the existence of God does not entail or suggest that ethics involves viewing the world as a miracle created by God. The passages from the *Notebooks* where Wittgenstein openly discusses the role of God in ethics seem to have been abandoned at some point between 1916 and the publication of the *Tractatus*. Thus, further arguments

and evidence are required to justify the claim that God plays a primordial role in the ethics of the *Tractatus*. The issue here is not necessarily the fact that Kelly uses the *Notebooks*, but rather the lack of arguments presented to justify why we should retain certain remarks from the *Notebooks* that do not have supporting evidence in the *Tractatus* (see section 1.2).

Kertscher also argues that ethics is transcendental in a Kantian sense, that is, it is a condition for the possibility of an experience. Specifically, it is the ‘condition for the possibility of responsible action’ (Kertscher 2009: 108). However, this proposal is problematic for two reasons.

First, Kertscher’s interpretation seems to conflict with Wittgenstein’s distinction between fact and value. Wittgenstein explains that in the world no ethical value exists, and if it did exist, it would be of no value (TLP 6.4, 6.41). However, Kertscher is proposing that ethics is concerned with responsible actions, which are part of the world. This runs counter to the distinction between fact and value: no action in the world can inherently possess ethical value because if ethical value did exist in the world, it would be of no value (TLP 6.41). This problem is quite common among interpreters (see, e.g., Hughes 2009: 52; Oberdiek 2009: 177, 185, 190) who argue that Wittgenstein’s ethics has consequences in our empirical actions. Kertscher may be able to solve this problem given that he is aware that ethical value cannot reside in the world (see, e.g., Kertscher 2009: 102, 105). Nevertheless, he must provide a detailed explanation of the idea of ‘responsible action’—which seems to play an important role in his interpretation of 6.421 despite only being mentioned in the quotation supplied above—and prove that it does not run counter to the distinction between fact and value.

Second, Kertscher argues that ethics is to be understood as transcendental in a Kantian sense, that is, as a condition for the possibility of an experience. However, it seems inadequate to state that a responsible action is a certain cognitive experience that is involved in how our mind constitutes objects in order to experience them. Kertscher’s proposal, therefore, seems to be an inadequate interpretation of 6.421.

In what follows I am going to study Wittgenstein’s ethics in the hope of determining what cognitive experience requires ethics as an a priori necessary condition. In the process I will provide an adequate interpretation of 6.421 that avoids the issues that stem from Kelly’s and Kertscher’s proposals. Throughout section 2.3 I will speak about an ethical *experience* in the *Tractatus*, especially when discussing the ethical will and the riddle of life. I am using the notion of experience to abide by the Kantian definition of ‘transcendental’ employed thus far. In section 2.4 I will criticize and reject the possibility of speaking about an ethical *experience* in the *Tractatus* and offer a viable alternative.

2.3. Ethics in the *Tractatus*

As explained above, Wittgenstein states in 6.41 that ethics must lie outside of the world. The world is composed of accidental facts that cannot inherently possess ethical value. Ethical value is characterized as necessarily nonaccidental; thus, if ethical value did exist in the world, it would be itself accidental and cease to have

value (TLP 6.41). The nonexistence of inherent ethical value in the world suggests that Wittgenstein's ethics shies away from what we ordinarily associate with ethics. For instance, ethics does involve a series of ethical laws or precepts that we must abide by when acting *in* the world (TLP 6.422). Wittgenstein does not provide an ethical theory that allows us to classify our actions *in* the world as morally good or morally bad.

Notwithstanding that, he still believes that ethics concerns what is ethically good and ethically bad and that it involves ethical reward, which must be something pleasant, and ethical punishment, which must be something unpleasant (TLP 6.422–6.43). But what is Wittgenstein's ethics about? How can we discern what is ethically good and distinguish it from what is ethically bad? How can we obtain ethical reward and avoid ethical punishment? Wittgenstein's ethics focuses on two main topics that are intertwined.

On the one hand, Wittgenstein introduces the ethical will in 6.423. The ethical will should not be understood as or be confused with the will as a phenomenon, which Wittgenstein discusses briefly in 6.373 and 6.374. The will as a phenomenon amounts to what we ordinarily understand by the will, namely, a certain wish or desire. Meanwhile, the ethical will does not lie *in* the world nor does it alter any specific occurrence in the world. Conversely, the ethical will can only alter the limits of the world, making the world wax and wane as a *whole* (TLP 6.43). Altering the limits of the world makes it become altogether different: the good exercise of the ethical will leads to a happy world, while the bad exercise of the ethical will leads to an unhappy world (TLP 6.43). Despite both worlds being composed of the same facts and objects, the happy world is ethically meaningful and valuable, and the unhappy world is ethically meaningless and valueless—though this difference is not manifested in the facts that compose the world, but rather *shown* in the transformation of the limits of the world (TLP 6.43).

But how does the ethical will alter the limits of the world and allow us to see the world as something valuable and meaningful? And how can we distinguish the good ethical will from the bad ethical will? It is generally accepted that good ethical willing involves a certain attitude of acceptance of the world, whereas bad ethical willing involves being in confrontation with the world (see, e.g., Worthington 1981: 486–89; Diamond 2000: 153–55; Churchill 2009: 113–14, 121–23; Hughes 2009: 52, 56–58; Appelqvist 2013: 47–49, 51, 53; Kuusela 2018: 45–51; Fairhurst 2019: 88–89). I will not delve into all the intricacies of this issue here because it exceeds the scope of this paper. I will only offer a brief characterization to help us with the task at hand: understanding 6.421.

The good ethical will must alter the limits of the world so that it becomes an altogether different world (TLP 6.43). This is accomplished through viewing the world *sub specie aeterni*: feeling the world as a limited whole from *outside* space and time (TLP 6.4312, 6.45). In situating ourselves outside the space and time and changing the way we view and feel the world as a whole, we are able to change its limits. From this view we see that 'no part of the world is privileged or preferred to another' (Hughes 2009: 57). All the facts that compose the world stand at the same level: they are inherently valueless (TLP 6.41). Once we acknowledge that the occurrence of one fact instead of another is not ethically

relevant, the world becomes altogether different, and we are able to accept the world and its occurrences—we will no longer be distraught if fate does not accord with our plans (cf. TLP 6.373, 6.374). Thus, in viewing the world *sub specie aeterni* we see and feel the world as a limited whole, as something meaningful and valuable. In other words, only through a good ethical will can we experience the world *sub specie aeterni* as a limited whole, as something valuable, despite the nonexistence of ethical value *in* the world. In doing so the limits of the world are transformed, and the world becomes altogether different: it becomes a happy world.

Conversely, a bad ethical will involves an inability to view the world *sub specie aeterni* as something valuable and to alter its limits accordingly. As a consequence of having a bad ethical will we are unable to see that facts do not possess inherent ethical value and that no part of the world is privileged. We mistakenly believe that facts are ethically valuable and express frustration and anger when they do not coincide with our wishes and desires—despite there being no necessary connection between our wishes and desires and the occurrence of a fact in the world (TLP 6.373, 6.374). Thus, a bad ethical will involves an inability to alter the world's limits and thus living in confrontation with the world. In doing so, the world becomes an unhappy world.

On the other hand, we have the problem of the meaning of life. Interpreters generally focus on Wittgenstein's remarks in the 6.5s, where he explains that if the answer to this problem cannot be put into words, neither can the question, and therefore, the problem ceases to exist (TLP 6.52–6.522). However, this does not seem to be the end of the matter, given that 'there are, indeed, things that cannot be put into words. They make themselves manifest. They are what is mystical' (TLP 6.522).

Wittgenstein introduces the riddle of life earlier in 6.4312, where he states that contingent facts or the possibility of living eternally will offer no solution to this riddle. This is due to the fact that an eternal life *within* the world only perpetuates the riddle. The meaning and sense of life and the world must lie *outside* of the world (TLP 6.41)—the meaning of life and the world are one and the same because 'the world and life are one' (TLP 5.621). 'The solution of the riddle of life in space and time lies *outside* space and time' (TLP 6.4312): it is to be found in the view of the world *sub specie aeterni* (cf. TLP 6.4312, 6.45)—that is why it cannot be put into words. Thus, viewing the world as a limited whole, as something valuable and meaningful, entails viewing the world *sub specie aeterni*. In other words, giving sense and meaning to our life (and the world) is accomplished through having a good ethical will and experiencing the world *sub specie aeterni* as a limited whole, as something valuable and meaningful.

Having examined Wittgenstein's ethics in the *Tractatus*, we can now return to the issue at hand: in what way can it be said that ethics is transcendental? What cognitive experience is involved in Wittgenstein's ethics? A first possible answer could be that ethics is a transcendental condition of the possibility of the ethical will. However, this seems to be inadequate because Wittgenstein does not seem to conceive of the ethical will as an experience (cf. TLP 6.423, 6.431). Alternatively, we might suggest that ethics is a transcendental condition of the possibility of giving meaning to our life. Nevertheless, such a response seems inadequate given that solving the riddle of life

rests on a more fundamental experience: viewing the world from a perspective that shows the valueless world as valuable—an experience that is also involved in good ethical willing.

Kuusela (2018) and Appelqvist (2012, 2013) have both attempted to provide an answer to these questions and to determine what experience is transcendently conditioned by ethics. Kuusela (2018: 44, 47) argues that while logic is concerned with the world as an object of thought or representation, ethics is concerned with the possibility of a different particular mode of our experience of the world. Ethics deals with 'the experience of the world, which in itself is valueless and meaningless, as valuable and meaningful' (Kuusela 2018: 47). In other words, ethics focuses on the constitution of the world as something valuable. Thus, according to Kuusela, ethics is transcendental insofar as it is a condition of the possibility of valuing the world.

Appelqvist argues that 'the Tractarian notion of transcendental should be seen as indicating a shift of attention from certain factual experiences to their necessary preconditions' (Appelqvist 2012: 203). While logic deals with necessary preconditions of symbolic representation, ethics (and, by extension, aesthetics) deals with necessary preconditions of those experiences that Wittgenstein calls 'mystical' (Appelqvist 2012: 202–203; 2013: 52–53, 55). Specifically, ethics deals with the experience of feeling the world as a limited whole under the aspect of eternity (cf. TLP 6.44, 6.45). Thus, according to Appelqvist (2012: 202–203; 2013: 55), ethics is a transcendental precondition of the possibility of feeling the world as a limited whole under the aspect of eternity (i.e., *sub specie aeterni*).

Both Kuusela and Appelqvist resort to different ethical experiences in order to offer an interpretation of Wittgenstein's claim that ethics is transcendental. It seems, then, that we are faced with a choice: we can claim that ethics is a transcendental condition of the possibility of valuing the world or feeling the world as a limited whole under the aspect of eternity. I want to suggest that both alternatives are insufficient and that, consequently, they are inadequate interpretations of Wittgenstein's claim in 6.421.

Despite abiding by the definition of 'transcendental' outlined in section 2.1, Kuusela and Appelqvist seem to portray an inadequate image of Wittgenstein's ethics. This is due to the fact that valuing the world and feeling the world as a limited whole under the aspect of eternity are not separable experiences. As explained above when examining Wittgenstein's ethics and his understanding of the ethical will and the riddle of life, in solving the riddle of life it is not possible to value the world without viewing the world as a limited whole under the aspect of eternity. By the same token, in having a good ethical will it is not possible to view the world as a limited whole under the aspect of eternity without valuing the world.

Valuing the world entails viewing the world as a limited whole under the aspect of eternity (i.e., *sub specie aeterni*) and vice versa. They are one and the same experience. Both having a good ethical will and solving the riddle of life requires viewing the world *sub specie aeterni* as a limited whole, as something valuable. In other words, they involve valuing the world under the aspect of eternity (i.e., *sub specie aeterni*). Treating this experience as two independent and autonomous

experiences and opting to focus uniquely on one of them (and leaving the other aside) presents an inadequate image of Wittgenstein's ethics and leads to a misguided and distorted interpretation of his claim in 6.421.

Notwithstanding the problems of Kuusela's and Appelqvist's proposals, I believe my characterization of Wittgenstein's ethics and his understanding of the ethical will and the meaning of life in conjunction with the objection presented against Kuusela and Appelqvist can help provide an adequate interpretation of 6.421. When examining Wittgenstein's ethics, I explained that having a good ethical will involves viewing the world *sub specie aeterni* and, thereby, viewing and feeling the world as a limited whole, as something valuable. Meanwhile, solving the riddle of life involves viewing the world, as a limited whole, as something valuable and, thereby, viewing the world *sub specie aeterni*. Viewing the world as something valuable necessarily entails viewing the world *sub specie aeterni* and vice versa.

Consequently, there is one unique experience: viewing the world *sub specie aeterni*, as a limited whole, as something valuable—that is, valuing the world under the aspect of eternity (i.e., *sub specie aeterni*). According to Wittgenstein, it is this experience alone that is required to have a good ethical will, solve the riddle of life, and live a good ethical life. He does not present two distinct ethical experiences (i.e., valuing the world and feeling the world as a limited whole under the aspect of eternity) nor does he suggest that one is more fundamental than the other.

Therefore, I believe it reasonable to conclude that ethics is the transcendental condition of this experience: ethics is the transcendental condition of the possibility of viewing the world *sub specie aeterni* (i.e., under the aspect of eternity) as something valuable. In other words, ethics is the transcendental condition of the possibility of valuing the world under the aspect of eternity.

2.4. Two Amendments

Despite the progress achieved in the interpretation of 6.421, a closer examination of the *Tractatus* suggests that the interpretation I have offered at the end of the preceding section is still problematic. Throughout this section I have employed a Kantian definition of the notion 'transcendental' in order to offer an interpretation of 6.421—a definition that is also endorsed by the interpreters I have discussed so far in section 2. This strategy, however, is partly flawed because it entails certain inadequacies that stem from the existing differences between this Kantian definition and Wittgenstein's particular treatment of transcendentalism in the *Tractatus*. Specifically, there are two inadequacies that must be corrected in order to set forth an adequate interpretation of 6.421.

First, Tejedor (2015: 126–27) has argued in favor of a deflationary understanding of the transcendental character of logic in the *Tractatus*. This proposal arises from the peculiarities of Wittgenstein's understanding of logic and transcendentalism.

When Wittgenstein writes that logic is transcendental, he is not suggesting that it is a condition of either representation or the world. Logic is no more a condition of representation or of the world than

representation or the world could be a condition of each other. (Tejedor 2015: 126)

The idea of condition introduces the idea of a mechanistic and external relation between logic and representation. The claim that logic is a condition of representation suggests that logic is (i) conceptually prior to representation and (ii) can be specified independently of representation, thus allowing logic to be given in advance and in absence of representation (Tejedor 2015: 126–27). Hence, claiming that logic is a condition of representation opens a gap between logic and representation (between logical form and pictures). They are to be treated as two different and separable things.

However, this seems to conflict with several of Wittgenstein's propositions in the *Tractatus*. His treatment of logic, representation, and pictures indicates that they are to be understood as inseparable and closely intertwined (cf. TLP 2.17–2.2, 4.01–4.121). Thus, Wittgenstein's claim that 'logic is transcendental' (TLP 6.12) is not as straightforward or Kantian as it may initially seem. It cannot involve the idea that logic is a condition of representation.

Tejedor proposes an alternative interpretation of 6.13 that allows us to overcome the issues that stem from the idea of condition. She argues that 'logic is transcendental for Wittgenstein in that it is *internal to or constitutive of the correlation of representation and the world*' (Tejedor 2015: 127). Logic is not conceptually prior to representation nor can it be specified independently from representation. Rather, logic is internal to and constitutive of representation. Tejedor's deflationary understanding of the transcendental of logic enables us to maintain the idea that logic is necessary and indispensable for representation and pictures while avoiding the problematic commitments that stem from the idea of condition.

Despite the fact that Tejedor only focuses on interpreting 6.13, her proposal has ramifications for our understanding and interpretation of 6.421. Ethics, like logic, is not to be understood as a transcendental condition of the possibility of viewing the world *sub specie aeterni* as something valuable because ethics is not conceptually prior and cannot be specified independently from the view of the world *sub specie aeterni*. Conversely, ethics is to be understood as internal to or constitutive of viewing the world *sub specie aeterni* as something valuable.

Second, there is another problem that stems from the Kantian definition I employed throughout this section 2. This definition suggests that both logic and ethics are a condition of the possibility of a certain cognitive experience. Leaving aside the inadequacies surrounding the idea of condition, the idea of a cognitive experience also seems problematic. It is clear that logic is internal to or constitutive of a cognitive experience. However, Wittgenstein's characterization of ethics suggests that it is wrong to state that ethics involves a cognitive experience.

On the one hand, it is paradoxical to state (as I have done in section 2.3) that there is an experience that is ethical. According to Wittgenstein, the notion 'experience' is intertwined with an event in space and time, a certain fact (cf. TLP 5.552, 5.634, 6.1222, 6.363, 6.4311). However, as I have explained previously, Wittgenstein endorses a distinction between fact and value: there is no ethical value *in* the facts

that compose the world (TLP 6.4-6.42). Thus, stating that there is an ethical experience is paradoxical and directly contradicts Wittgenstein's distinction between fact and value. If ethical value did exist *in* the world (i.e., in a certain experience) 'it would have no value' (TLP 6.41). Ethical value 'must lie outside the whole sphere of what happens and is the case' (TLP 6.41). This excludes the possibility of an ethical experience. Contrary to the views of Kelly, Kertscher, Appelqvist, and Kuusela, it is not possible to argue that ethics is a condition of a certain *experience*. In order to overcome this issue I believe it is necessary to introduce an amendment that adequately captures how Wittgenstein uses the notion 'transcendental' in 6.421. Specifically, I suggest that ethics, rather than being constitutive or internal to a certain experience, is constitutive of or internal to a certain *view* of the world (cf. TLP 6.45). This amendment is also to be applied to my explanation of Wittgenstein's ethics (i.e., my explanation of the ethical will and riddle of life) in section 2.3 above: the notion 'experience' should be substituted by 'mystical view'.

On the other hand, this view of the world cannot be cognitive. According to Kant, a cognitive experience (i.e., the cognition of an object) is how our mind constitutes objects in order to experience them, which is accomplished through the mental representation of an object (Kant 1998: A320/B376). It is clear that logic is internal to or constitutive of a cognitive experience due to the role it plays in our mental representation of the world. All pictures (i.e., all representations of the world) must be logical pictures (TLP 2.181, 2.182): they share their logical form with the reality they depict (TLP 2.2, 4.12). Nevertheless, it seems farfetched to extend these considerations to ethics and suggest that ethics is a transcendental condition of a cognitive experience. First, our mental representation of the world is accomplished through pictures (cf. TLP 2.1, 2.11, 2.12, 2.13, 2.131, 2.15, 2.201). All mental representations of the world must be meaningful pictures (i.e., thoughts and propositions). However, Wittgenstein later explains that there are no meaningful ethical pictures because we cannot express that which is higher (TLP 6.42, 6.421). Hence, there is no such thing as an ethical picture or an ethical mental representation of the world. Second, according to Wittgenstein, ethical value does not lie in the world (TLP 6.4-6.42). There are no ethical objects, facts, or properties that could be represented by our mind.

It is reasonable to conclude from the above that ethics cannot be constitutive of, or internal to, a certain cognitive experience. Moreover, the notion 'cognitive' is generally tied to other epistemological notions such as 'knowledge' or 'truth', which Wittgenstein excludes from ethics. The nonexistence of ethical pictures and ethical facts leaves no room for ethical truths or ethical knowledge (see Flanagan 2011).

I believe Wittgenstein's remarks on ethics suggest that ethics is better understood as constitutive of, or internal to, a certain *mystical* view. This is due to Wittgenstein's characterization of the view of the world *sub specie aeterni*. Wittgenstein introduces this view in 6.45, where he emphasizes that it is this view 'that is *mystical*' (TLP 6.45, my emphasis). The view of the world *sub specie aeterni* as something valuable pertains to that which cannot be put into words, the inexpressible that 'shows itself; it is the mystical' (TLP 6.522).

The two amendments that have been proposed with regard to the idea of condition and the idea of cognitive experience provide us with a more adequate interpretation of 6.421. Ethics is no longer to be understood in a Kantian sense: ethics is not a condition of the possibility of a certain cognitive experience. Ethics is better understood as being internal to, or constitutive of, a certain mystical view. If we combine this understanding of the notion 'transcendental' with what we have learned in section 2.3 above, we obtain the following interpretation of 6.421:

Ethics is transcendental insofar as it is internal to or constitutive of viewing the world *sub specie aeterni* (i.e., under the aspect of eternity) as something valuable.

I believe this is how we should understand and interpret Wittgenstein's claim that 'ethics is transcendental' (TLP 6.421). I would like to conclude this section by pointing out a notable difference between Wittgenstein's understanding of the transcendental of ethics and his understanding of the transcendental of logic.

Wittgenstein explains that it is not possible to have an experience of the world that is not constrained by logic: there are no meaningful illogical pictures (TLP 5.4731). 'We could not say *what* an 'illogical' world would look like' (TLP 3.031). By contrast Wittgenstein (cf. TLP 6.422, 6.43, 6.4312) seems to allow for the possibility of a certain view of the world that is unethical: a view that does not value the world under the aspect of eternity (i.e., *sub specie aeterni*). Hence, ethics is constitutive of a particular mystical view of the world (i.e., a view that values the world under the aspect of eternity), but it does not exclude the possibility of having an altogether different view of the world. It is possible to have an unethical view of the world and see it as something valueless.

Conclusion

In this paper I have attempted to shed some light on Wittgenstein's claim that 'ethics is transcendental' (TLP 6.421). On the one hand, I have surveyed the existing literature in order to consider some of the existing interpretations and point out their shortcomings. On the other hand, I have set out to offer a novel interpretation that overcomes these shortcomings. Initially, I examined Wittgenstein's claim that 'logic is transcendental' (TLP 6.13) in the hope of providing a definition of the notion 'transcendental' that could be employed to interpret 6.421. This involved taking Wittgenstein as endorsing a Kantian definition of 'transcendental'. Subsequently, I studied Wittgenstein's ethics in order to figure out which cognitive experience is transcendentially conditioned by ethics. I argued that ethics is transcendental insofar as it is the precondition of the possibility of viewing the world *sub specie aeterni* as something valuable. Finally, I pointed out that the proposed interpretation involves certain inadequacies that stem from the existing differences between the Kantian definition of 'transcendental' and Wittgenstein's particular treatment of transcendental. To overcome this problem I introduced two amendments. First, and resorting to

Tejedor's work, I replaced the Kantian idea of 'condition' with the idea of 'being internal to or constitutive of'. Second, I argued that ethics is internal to or constitutive of a certain *mystical view* and not a *cognitive experience*. Combining these two amendments with what we already learned in section 2.3 resulted in what I believe to be the correct interpretation of 6.421: ethics is transcendental insofar as it is internal to or constitutive of viewing the world *sub specie aeterni* (i.e., under the aspect of eternity) as something valuable.

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