Von Wright and Wittgenstein on Ethics and Logic: Deontic Logic Against Ethical Mysticism

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Abstract

Von Wright's philosophy is seldom seen as original when compared to that of his master, Ludwig Wittgenstein. Contrary to that orientation, this work seeks to establish the opposition of von Wright to Wittgenstein in relation to the question of whether ethics is an area where logic can legitimately extend. For Wittgenstein, logic deals with what is necessarily true. On the basis of this characterization of logic, Wittgenstein thinks that logic cannot legitimately help to capture ethics for the reason that the referents of ethical discourse are not in the world. Only the referents of scientific discourse are there. For Wittgenstein, therefore, we must adopt a mystical position in ethics both by giving it the greatest importance but also by applying the greatest silence. Von Wright admits, following Wittgenstein, the varieties of goodness. However, he stresses that the varieties of goodness do not leave room for absolute relativism. Norms have both a prescriptive dimension that can be relative to a culture, and a descriptive dimension that makes them assessable to logical standards.

Introduction

Von Wright's (1916–2003) philosophy is seldom seen as original when compared to that of his master, Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951). In a recent article for instance, Lassi Jakola[1] outlines three specific points that show how von Wright's theory of values (as theorized in *The Varieties of Goodness*[2]) stems from Wittgenstein's later philosophy[3]. These include: 1) a "*descriptive and non-reductive approach to conceptual analysis*" (since the

[1] L. Jakola, "Wittgenstein and G. H. von Wright's path to *The Varieties of Goodness* (1963)" *Nordic Wittgenstein Review* 9 (2020), pp. 1–41.

[2] G. H. von Wright, *The Varieties of Goodness*, London: Routledge, 1963.

[3] Jakola does not clearly identify the period falling under this "later philosophy". I think he has in mind the *Philosophical Investigations* (1945–49) and *The Blue and Brown books* (1933–35). However, I consider that "later philosophy" simply means "after the *Tractatus* (1921)".

book offers different uses of the word "good" and refrains "*from attempts at reducing the varieties to one single variety or to some kind of generic goodness*", 2) "*The use of specific Wittgensteinian concepts and techniques*" such as the use of the concept of "criteria of goodness", the contrast between symptom and criteria-tests and the use of primitive language games as objects of comparison, 3) "*the aim for a perspicuous overview of ethically relevant concepts*", following Wittgenstein's "ideal of providing a 'perspicuous (re)presentation' (Germ. *Übersichtliche Darstellung*) of grammar".

While I am not in complete disagreement with Jakola, my thesis will be that von Wright's theory of values extends beyond *The Varieties of Goodness* and specifically includes his deontic logic and his logic of change. Once this extension is established, von Wright's conception of ethics clearly contradicts Wittgenstein's conception of ethics. Thus, this work seeks to establish the opposition of von Wright to Wittgenstein in relation to the question of whether ethics is an area where logic can legitimately extend. For Wittgenstein, logic deals with the necessarily true and is therefore *a priori*[4]. By its necessity, logic avoids the contradictory and helps to say what is in the world. Von Wright admits, following Wittgenstein, the varieties of goodness. However, he stresses that the varieties of goodness do not leave room for absolute relativism. Norms have both a prescriptive dimension that can be relative to a culture, and a descriptive dimension that makes them analysable by logic. In the first section (§1), I explore the difficulty of an ethical discourse both in Wittgenstein's and in von Wright's ethical theories. In the second and third sections, I show that while Wittgenstein proposes a shift from the given difficulty to silence (§2), von Wright suggests overcoming the difficulty by building a logic of normative propositions (§3).

1. Wittgenstein and von Wright on the difficulty of a discourse on ethics

1.1. The contingent character of meaningful propositions and the absolute character of ethics in Wittgenstein

Wittgenstein expresses the difficulty of a discourse on ethics at several points in his work. Of these, two points deserve special attention[5]; these are paragraph 5.525 of the *Tractatus* and the "Lecture on Ethics"[6].

[4] L. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus,* D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness (trans.) London and New York: Routledge, 2001 (hereafter *TLP).* §§5.473–5.4731; 5.552; 5. 557; 6.1–6.1203.

[5] The reader might wonder why I don't mention the *Philosophical Investigations* here (*Philosophical Investigations* [1953], G. E. M. Anscombe (trans.) Oxford: Basil Blackwell,

In paragraph 5.525 of the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein makes a tripartite distinction: "The certainty, possibility, or impossibility of a situation is not expressed by a proposition, but by an expression's being a tautology, a proposition with sense, or a contradiction." Tautologies, Wittgenstein says, are nonsense, but not absurd; they are part of symbolism, just as '0' is part of the symbolism of arithmetic[7]. Since a meaningful proposition is neither necessary nor contradictory, it is contingent. This means that both it and its negation are possible. To put it otherwise, the negation of a meaningful sentence is also a meaningful sentence. It is important to note that, from the point of view of *Tractatus, meaningful* propositions are contingent.

A meaningful proposition has a *bipolar* relationship to truth. It can be true or it can be false. Tautologies and contradictions have a *unipolar* relationship to truth. A tautology is unconditionally true and cannot be false, and contradiction is false and cannot be true[8]. If a sentence has a unipolar relation to the truth, it is nonsense, but it is also true if it is a tautology, and false if it is a contradiction.

Finally, there are propositions that have a *zeropolar*[9] relationship with the truth. These are sentences that are neither true nor false (without truth value). For example, moral, aesthetic, religious and other evaluations, as well as normative or deontic sentences such as orders, permissions and prohibitions.

The "Lecture on Ethics" begins with a specification of the domain of ethics. In *Principia Ethica* G. E. Moore defined ethics as the general inquiry into what is good. Wittgenstein adopts Moore's formulation as a summary explanation of the term; but he intends to use the term 'ethics' in a broader sense than usual, in a sense that actually includes what he believes to be the

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1958.) The reason is simply that I don't think that Wittgenstein's pragmatic turn in the *Investigations* extends to his ethics.

[6] The Lecture (hereafter *LE*) was prepared by Wittgenstein to be given at Cambridge between September 1929 and December 1930. It was first published in *The Philosophical Review, vol. LXXIV,* n. 1, in January 1965 under the title of *Lectures on Ethics*. Here however, I am using the *MS 139b Normalized* version. See L. Wittgenstein, *Lecture on Ethics*, Edoardo Zamuner et al. (eds.), Malden: Wiley Blackwell, 2014.

[7] *TLP,* § 4.4611.

[8] *Ibid.*, § 4.461.

[9] We borrow this terminology to G. H. von Wright. See G. H. von Wright, "Remarks on Wittgenstein's use of the terms 'Sinn', 'sinnlos', 'unsinnig', 'wahr' and 'Gedanke' in the *Tractatus*" in *Wittgenstein: The Philosopher and his Works,* Alois Pichler and Simo Säätelä (eds.), Bergen: The Wittgenstein Archives at the University of Bergen, 2005, pp. 90–98.

most essential part of what is generally called aesthetics[10]. In order to indicate this broader meaning, he proposes to present his audience with a series of more or less synonymous expressions, each of which could be substituted for Moore's definition[11].

The synonyms he provides are as follows: 1) ethics is the search for "what is valuable", or 2) "what is really important", or 3) "the meaning of life", or 4) "what makes life worth living", or 5) "the right way to live"[12]. It is important to note that only the last of these sentences indicates a direct link between ethics and conduct[13]. As in the *Notebooks*[14] and the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein does not conceive of ethics as primarily concerned with problems of conduct or reward; rather, the real ethical focus lies in discovering the permanent meaning of human life so that life is then understood as 'worth living'. In the *Notebooks,* Wittgenstein says that it is revealing of the nature of ethics to see that "suicide is the elemental sin"[15]. Suicide is the elemental sin, that is, the ultimate ethical failure, because suicide represents an admission of an inability to find the meaning of life that makes it worth living. And if that meaning is not found, then anything goes. In other words, until the meaning of life is established, questions of conduct are irrelevant. The fundamental task of ethics is therefore to discover the meaning of life.

Having thus clarified the domain of ethics, Wittgenstein immediately draws attention to a fundamental difference in the way ethical expressions are used. They are sometimes used in a "trivial" or "relative" sense. If, for example, I say that "this is a *good* chair", this means that the chair *serves*[16] a certain predetermined purpose and that the word "good" here has meaning only insofar as that purpose has been set previously. In fact, the word "good"

[10] *LE*, p. 43.
[11] *Id.*
[12] *Ibid.*, p. 44.
[13] Unfortunately, this is a remark that has not been made much by the commentators of this text. The consequence is that Wittgenstein's ethics, as with many other conceptions, is reduced to its social dimension.
[14] L. Wittgenstein, (1998). *Notebooks 1914–1916* [1961] (2nd ed.), edited by G. H. von Wright and translated by G. E. Anscombe, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998. Hereafter *NB*.
[15] *NB*, p. 91.
[16] The emphasis here is worthwhile because these are markers that may have made it possible to see in Wittgenstein's ethics a pragmatic ethics.

in the relative sense of the word simply means that a certain predetermined standard must be met[17].

The use of a value expression in the "relative" sense is quite common, and the logical form of such "relative" value judgments is easily revealed. Wittgenstein indicates that any relative value judgment is merely a statement of fact and can therefore be put in such a form that it loses all appearance of value judgment. For example, "This man is a good runner" simply means that he runs a certain number of miles in a certain number of minutes[18], etc. This is not a value judgment.

While relative value judgments do not present the philosopher with any difficulty, there is another use of expressions of value that does. Wittgenstein calls this the use of such expressions in an "absolute" sense, and it is in this sense that such expressions are relevant to ethics. He introduces "absolute" value judgements by contrasting two situations. In the first, a person, after observing another person playing tennis, says: "Well, you play pretty badly". Suppose, says Wittgenstein, the tennis player responds. "I know, I'm playing pretty badly but I don't want to play any better." This is a perfectly intelligible answer, and it is not absurd to imagine that the critic would reply, "Ah, then that's all right[19]."

Consider, another situation, in a way similar to the first: One person observes another telling a lie and says: "You're behaving like a beast." What if the liar replies, "I know I behave badly, but then I don't want to behave any better"? Could the critic respond intelligibly, as he did in the tennis case, "Ah, then that's all right"? Certainly not," said Wittgenstein; he would say something like, "Well, you ought to want to behave better[20]" Wittgenstein regards this last judgment as an *absolute* value judgment. The expression of value ("ought to" in this case) is used in an absolute rather than a relative sense. And the difference between the two meanings lies in their different connections with statements of fact.

Imagine, he suggests, an omniscient person who keeps a complete record of everything that happens in the world. In that record would be every movement of everybody, every state of mind, in short, every *fact*. Would there be value judgments in this omniscient record? There would certainly be *relative* value judgments. For example, it would state that human beings of a

[17] *Ibid.*, p. 44.
[18] *Ibid.*, p. 45.
[19] *Ibid.*, p. 44.
[20] *Id.*

certain time and culture tend to choose and maintain chairs of a certain size, material, shape, etc. and, since (*hypothetically)* chair *C* meets these specifications, one could therefore say that *C* is a *good* chair. Relative value judgements would only be an abbreviated way of surveying facts about the preferences of a certain group of human beings. But could the omniscient descriptor survey *absolute* value judgments? No, says Wittgenstein, for all the facts described would be on the same level, so to speak, and in the same way all the propositions would be on the same level. There are no propositions which are, in an absolute sense, sublime, important or trivial[21].

Propositions describe facts, things as they are; therefore, propositions can only express value judgments if these judgments are in some way descriptions of facts. Relative value judgements are of course only descriptions of sociological facts; they can therefore be expressed perfectly well in propositions. But absolute value judgments go beyond the facts of a situation. When the critic says to the liar, "you *should* want to behave better", he is not (simply) drawing the liar's attention to a general preference in their society.

Wittgenstein believes that the key to seeing that absolute value judgments are in no way descriptions is their modality. Statements of fact are always conditional, or better, contingent; they may be true or false, depending on the circumstances. A relative value judgment, since it is reducible to statements of fact, is also contingent[22]. But an absolute value judgment does not present itself as a contingent true judgment; rather, it attempts to express a *necessary* requirement or insight. As Wittgenstein says, if one could speak of the *absolute* right way, it would be a way such that *anyone* should follow it, or be ashamed not to follow it[23]. In the same way, to speak of the *absolute* good is to speak of a state of affairs such that everyone, whatever his preferences, would *necessarily be* obliged to seek it, or would feel guilty if he did not do so[24]. The hold of a relative value judgment on me is conditional; it binds me only if a fact is true. But an absolute value judgment is not just an absolute judgment; it binds us whether or not we have particular preferences or goals.

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[21] *LE*, p. 45.

[22] It should be emphasized here that we are dealing with a kind of contextualism that is reminiscent of pragmatist theories and may well lead to Wittgenstein being placed in the same category.

[23] *LE*, p. 46.

[24] *Id*.

It seems that Wittgenstein is here reformulating the Kantian idea that moral law consists of categorical rather than hypothetical imperatives.

Having recognized the categorical need for absolute value judgements, it is now easy to see that ethics must be "supernatural"[25]. The natural world consists of concatenations of objects containing facts. The truth and falsity of the propositions that describe these facts are also contingent. But absolute value judgments claim to present the *necessarily* true; they seem to describe states of affairs that *necessarily* hold.

1.2. The Difficulty of a discourse on ethics in von Wright

Von Wright expresses the difficulty of a discourse on ethics mainly by taking up the dichotomy established by Hume between descriptive and imperative statements. Hume notes that many people reason by moving almost imperceptibly from empirically based statements to the formulation of obligations[26]. He observes that our reading of these arguments is influenced by elements of our culture that we have integrated without any reflection.

Von Wright looks at Hume's problem through the prism of the difference between description and prescription[27]. If there is a clear difference between descriptions and prescriptions, then Hume's thesis is correct, but if such a difference is not clear-cut, then Hume's thesis can at least be amended. It is within this framework that one must understand the semantic solution that von Wright gives to Hume's problem. This solution essentially consists in showing the semantic ambiguity of norms that are often formulated prescriptively but also put forward descriptions.

Thus, von Wright's solution to Hume's problem is based on the following two remarks:

– The first is that a statement containing the copula *to be* (is) may well be considered to express not a fact but a standard, which would make statements that at first glance are thought to be descriptive, prescriptive statements.[28]

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[25] *Id*.

[26] D. Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature [1739]*. David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton (eds.), Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007, p. 177.

[27] G. H. von Wright, "Is and Ought [1985]" In *Normativity and norms, Critical Perspectives on Kelsenian Themes,* Paulson Stanley & Paulson Bonnie Litschewski (eds.), Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998, p. 371.

[28] *Ibid*, p. 370.

– The second is that a statement containing the word "shall" may well be considered to express not an obligation but a fact, which would make statements that at first glance are thought to be prescriptive descriptive statements[29].

In this vein, von Wright points to an ambiguity of deontic statements, which he also discusses in *Norm and Action*, *Is there a Logic of Norms?, Valuations*, etc. This ambiguity stems from the fact that a normative statement can both be a prescription and a description. A statement in a legal code not only prescribes a certain behaviour to agents, but also describes the fact that the prescription in question exists[30].

On the question of whether norms can be true or false, there are two theses: according to cognitivists, norms can be true or false. And within cognitivism, we distinguish between naturalist cognitivism and non-naturalist cognitivism. The first one advocates that norms are empirical facts, that is to say, contingent facts, while the second argues that norms are either abstract realities or social realities born from reflection on the nature of law and morality. According to prescriptivists, norms cannot be true or false. They only express what must be done. Norms are formulated by normative authorities and addressed to normative agents on the pattern of a master giving orders to his servants.

It is clear that for von Wright norms cannot be true and, therefore a positive answer cannot be given to Hume's problem. The reason, he points out, is that any logical inference presupposes a preservation of truth, from premises to conclusion. Since prescriptions are neither true nor false, they cannot preserve any truth value[31]. Von Wright states his position unambiguously by indicating that the norms declare certain things (actions or states) to be obligatory, permitted or prohibited. Such declarations, he says, are neither true nor false and there can be no logical relationships, for example, relationships of contradiction or implication, either between norms mutually or between norms and facts. In this sense, there is an "unbridgeable gap" between indicative and imperative statements[32].

At the heart of von Wright's demonstration is an important concept, the concept of assent, which we have so far made little mention of but which is important to say a word about. The concept of assent is developed in the

[29] *Id*.

[30] *Ibid*, p. 371.

[31] G. H. von Wright, "Is and Ought [1985]", ar. cit. pp. 365–382, pp. 371, 375, 379.

[32] *Ibid.*, p. 379.

wake of von Wright's demonstration of the impossibility of inferring norms from facts. Assent is von Wright's substitute for truth when it comes to normative issues. According to von Wright, when a person says of a certain norm that it is true, he is basically showing that, taking into account a number of parameters, he has accepted that norm, moving it from heteronomy (a law set by an external normative authority) to autonomy (a law set by oneself). And it is only on this condition that the law thus fixed is rational, i.e. does not ask people to do things that are possible but contradictory, nor to do things that are beyond the capacity of the agents.

Another point on which von Wright relies to show the logical/ethical dichotomy is the necessary subjectivity of ethics. In "Valuations, or How to Say the Unsayable"[33], he takes up the value theory developed by Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus* and updates it. According to this theory which we presented in §1.1 above, meaningful propositions are either true or false; if a proposition is not true then it is false and conversely, if a proposition is true then it is not false. The *Tractatus* then distinguishes between propositions that express a necessity and those that express a contingency. A necessarily true proposition is a tautology and a necessarily false proposition is a contradiction. A proposition that is either false or true is a contingent proposition. This bipolarity of meaningful propositions does not apply, according to the theory of the *Tractatus,* to propositions used in ethics, aesthetics and religion. At most, therefore, the propositions of these last three fields only try to show something important; but they never succeed in saying it. In "Valuations", von Wright's aim is to extend this view proposed by Wittgenstein[34].

It should first be noted that von Wright prefers to use the term "valuation" instead of value. Valuation differs from value, he says, in that it is primarily a construct. Valuation presupposes a valuing subject (it can also be a collective subject) and a valued object. Second, valuation presupposes the subject's acceptance or rejection of a certain state of affairs or attitudes. Finally, valuation presupposes that the subject believes that a certain attitude is close to the standards of excellence. This set of presuppositions leads von Wright

[33] G. H. von Wright, "Valuations, or How to Say the Unsayable" *Ratio Juris* 13, n°. 4 (2000), pp. 347–357.

[34] It should be noted that von Wright, however, only partly agrees with Wittgenstein's thesis insofar as he indicates that values cannot be the subject of theories, but this does not mean that normative propositions are senseless. We shall return to this in §3 below.

to conclude that valuations are emotional attitudes[35]. Since the norm is a valued thing, the norm is *representative* of emotional attitudes expressed by members of a given society. The thing valued does not attest to the relevance of that thing, it is merely the disapproval or approval of a thing by an individual or individuals collectively as members of a society. On the basis of this observation, von Wright insists that a distinction should be made between the value judgment "this is good" and the proposition "x is y"[36]. In "this is good", one can believe that the predicate "good" is attributed to the subject "this" as if it were a judgment that does not depend on the subject's emotion. Basically, this judgment is synonymous with "I like this". This is the reason why von Wright says that valuations are inevitably subjective and relative[37].

There is, we should say, some proximity here between von Wright and the Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus*. Von Wright is also interested in linguistic difficulties, especially in the way they manifest themselves in the expression of values. He speaks precisely of the linguistic ambiguities that must be got rid of, the confusions he says are consecrated by the philosophers themselves, when the latter, for example, come to indicate that the statements "*I like this"* and "*this is good" are* value judgements. When philosophers treat these two statements as propositions, for example, they act in the first case as if "I like this" is a proposition that could be verified without resorting to the mental states of the person making the statement, and in the second case, they act as if the predicate "good" could be attributed to "this", without even knowing what the predicate "good" or "this" are.

The idea of clarification as developed by von Wright is therefore to distinguish a realm containing entities that he calls "fictitious", a realm to which we have no access, from the very action of giving value to something, which is situated within the framework of a practice. This situation in the practical context justifies the choice of the title of the article. He says:

> It is on purpose that I have called it "Valuations" and not "Values". The former term refers to something we do, and which I think can be given a relatively univocal description. The term "values" again seems to refer to a realm of entities of which it is difficult or maybe even

[35] G. H. von Wright, "Valuations, or How to Say the Unsayable", art. cit., p.350.
[36] *Ibid.*, p. 352.
[37] *Ibid.*, p. 349.

> impossible to get a clear grasp. Perhaps there is no such realm, properly speaking, at all![38]

It is only in the context of this pragmatism, he says, that one can have an unambiguous description of values. He thus takes it upon himself to show that the theory of meaning developed by Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus* is convincing, even if, he says, he will demonstrate this with his own arguments. He puts forward an emotional theory of ethics. Again, following Wittgenstein in this regard, von Wright states that valuations are neither true nor false. As emotions, they are only strong or attenuated. And it is clear that it is such an emotional theory of ethics that he also develops in *Practical Reason*[39] where he makes the ultimate foundation of ethics the individual agent's interest. But one has to go through the detour of the very foundation of norms to understand his position.

One can in fact consider that a norm is founded by the fact that it exists[40]. For a norm to exist, there must be a normative authority, agents to whom the norm applies, a formulation of the norm (a text, a law, etc.). However, von Wright hastens to recall that a norm is not the meaning of the formulated norm, that it is not a statement. Thus, only normative statements (what he calls norm propositions) are true or false, norms themselves are neither true nor false. Unfortunately, von Wright remains evasive on the relationship between the norm and the formulation of the norm. Since standards are neither true nor false, understanding their consistency requires an extension of traditional logic:

> Sometimes the truth-ground of a normative statement is deduced from (the existence of) one or several norms. For example: Let there be a norm to the effect that it is obligatory to do p and another to the effect that whoever does *p* ought also to do *q*. From these two norms we can deduce an obligation to do *q*, i.e. an (actual) truth-ground of the normative statement that *q* ought to be done. This is obviously a valid inference. Yet it is not an inference according to the "laws" of

[38] *Ibid.*, p. 347.

[39] G. H. von Wright, *Philosophical papers*, Vol. I: *Practical reason,* Oxford: Basil Blackwell Publisher Limited, 1983. Hereafter *PR*.

[40] *PR,* p. 62.

> traditional logic. In order to account for the nature and validity of this inference an extension of the province of logic is required.[41]

It is precisely through this extension of the province of logic that von Wright will propose a solution to the dichotomy between logic and ethics, thus clearly moving away from Wittgenstein's ethical mysticism.

2. From Difficulty to Impossibility: Wittgenstein's Ethical Mysticism

We saw at the end of our brief commentary on the "Lecture on Ethics" that ethics, which is always formulated using absolute statements, is supernatural. But in what sense is ethics supernatural? It is the answer to this question that can help us understand Wittgenstein's ethical mysticism.

There are undoubtedly situations in which we would use expressions of value in an absolute sense. Wittgenstein gives two examples from his own experience: the questioning of the existence of the world and the absolute sense of security[42]. Here he takes up again in the "Lecture" something he had already stressed in the *Notebooks,* that "the miracle is that the world exists"[43]. Similarly, in the *Tractatus,* the miracle was identified with the advent of the mystic:

> 6.44- It is not how things are in the world that is mystical, but that it exists.
>
> 6.45- To view the world *sub specie aeterni* is to view it as a whole—a limited whole. Feeling the world as a limited whole—it is this that is mystical.

And to become aware of the limited world as a whole is necessarily at the same time to become aware of the limits of this world, namely the metaphysical self. The experience of the mystic is thus essentially linked to a certain form of divine self-realization. It can be assumed that it is this sense of self-realization that connects, in Wittgenstein's view, the two experiences recounted in the "Lecture on Ethics". Having a greater sense of the existence of the world, and thus of oneself, could easily produce a sense of security.

Even if the experiences Wittgenstein recounts are linked to each other by the sense of divine self-realization present in both, one can still ask what

[41] *Ibid.,* p. 69.
[42] *LE*, pp. 47–48.
[43] *NB*, p. 86.

connects them to *ethics*. Remembering that he considers that the true ethical focus is the discovery of the meaning of life may help to make the sense of absolute security appear as an ethical experience, since this sense of security seems to depend on a secure conception of the meaning of life; but what about wonder at the existence of the world? Why would Wittgenstein have thought that this had anything to do with discovering what is really valuable?

The *Tractatus* may be of help at this level. The key to the solution of life's problems lies in the "good exercise of the will"[44]. Now, the will cannot alter the world in itself, since the world is independent of my will,[45] but it can change the limits of the world[46]. Goodwill is therefore a change within oneself, a change that alters the whole meaning of the world in relation to itself, and makes the unhappy world happy. But what makes goodwill possible for oneself? Here, as we have seen, *mysticism* is the crucial notion:

> 6.521- The solution of the problem of life is seen in the vanishing of the problem.
>
> (Is not this the reason why those who have found after a long period of doubt that the sense of life became clear to them have then been unable to say what constituted that sense?)
>
> 6.522- There are, indeed, things that cannot be put into words. They *make themselves manifest*. They are what is mystical

There is, moreover, another significant element of this mysticism which has been little mentioned so far; it is what might be called the thesis of renunciation. Although not negligible, it is to be regretted that this aspect of Wittgenstein's mysticism has been little noticed by many people interested in his ethics. Wittgenstein emphasizes that "*It is clear, however, that ethics has nothing to do with punishment and reward in the usual sense of the terms. So our question about the consequences of an action must be unimportant*".[47] This renunciation to reward, coupled with the disregard for consequences is indeed a significant indicator of the disagreement between Wittgenstein and von Wright. One could say of Wittgenstein's ethics that it is based on the observation of a rigid necessity of the order of nature and therefore of the

[44] *TLP*, § 6.43.
[45] *Ibid.*, § 6.373.
[46] *Ibid.*, § 6.43.
[47] *Ibid.*, § 6.422.

impossibility of the will to change this order except by changing oneself to agree with it. On the contrary, one will observe in von Wright's work that ethics is above all determined by the observation of an ineffective rigidity encompassing nature and therefore of the possibility of the will to change this order[48]. Moreover, the patterns of practical inferences that will be put forward by von Wright are entirely based on the idea of an end considered on the basis of *sufficient* means to achieve it.

Conclusively, what do we learn from this notion of mysticism? It simply teaches us, as Wittgenstein also pointed out in his conversation with Schlick, that ethics is situated in the moment of the struggle with language. This struggle must find an end, not for itself. Thus, to understand the Wittgensteinian thesis on the non-existence of ethical propositions, one must read the paragraph of the *Tractatus* that precedes the one in which this thesis is clearly expressed:

> 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.[49]

It is only after this paragraph that Wittgenstein formulates his thesis, which is moreover stated as a consequence ("*so too*"): "*So too it is impossible for there to be propositions of ethics. Propositions can express nothing that is higher*."[50]

These paragraphs come after a long development on induction and the necessity it would imply[51]. Now, what does Wittgenstein do in this part of the text except to distinguish between necessary and contingent propositions? There are, moreover, several occurrences of the terms connected to induction (accident, law, connection, causality). The non-existence of ethical propositions thus expressed seems to be an attack on the determinism expressed by some modernists (unidentified by Wittgenstein) and against which Wittgenstein effectively wants to stand out: "*The whole modern*

[48] G. H. von Wright, *Causality and Determinism*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1974.
[49] *TLP,* §6.41.
[50] *Ibid*., §6.42.
[51] *Ibid*., §§6.3 ff.

conception of the world is founded, says Wittgenstein, on the illusion that the so-called laws of nature are the explanations of natural phenomena."[52]

Putting all these elements together, one can understand why the meaning we are talking about here is less about meaning than it is about purpose. Otherwise, one would not understand why, in broadening the semantic base from the *Tractatus* to the *Investigations,* Wittgenstein's position on the existence of ethical propositions has not changed at all. This is because, basically, this is not a purely linguistic matter, linked to reference or practice, as some people thought.

An ethical discourse cannot therefore be legitimate because it deals with the meaning of the world which, far from being a factual necessity, is a contingency, whose seeming necessity itself arises from a psychological connection that we establish between different states of affairs. The necessity thus established being only superficial, it is therefore linked to our representation of the world. We can also notice that on this point, Wittgenstein has remained fairly constant between the *Tractatus* and the *Investigations* since these two texts are paradigms of representation, representation in logical space for the first and representation in the social space for the second.

To conclude on this point, we can say that Wittgenstein has a rather reductive view of ethics since it does not encompass our daily actions or rather adjusts them to an evaluation of the goal not of the specific action, but of the ultimate one, that is the meaning of life. This distinction between the immediate goal and the ultimate goal is important because it allows us to eliminate part of the logic that von Wright will develop on the relationship between the end and the means and whose development he sees as a solution to the difficulty raised by the author of the *Tractatus*.

Another characterization of Wittgenstein's ethical mysticism can be derived from his metaphilosophy. In one of the reports of the meetings of the Cambridge Moral Science Club, dated November 14, 1946, Wittgenstein compares philosophy to tragedy and explains that both cannot be intelligible to anyone without prior knowledge[53].

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[52] *Ibid.,* §6.371.

[53] Here are his words: "*Philosophy can be compared to tragedy and comedy as far as giving a definition is concerned. The definitions of philosophy are inadequate for they would not mean a thing to people who knew no philosophy at all. Compare with a definition of tragedy as given to someone who has never seen a tragedy*" (*Public and Private Occasions*, p. 399).

There would be an innate dimension of ethics that would prevent its complete communication to anyone who has not sought it within himself. This innate dimension explains the ineffability of ethics from a completely different angle than that of the inability of logical symbolism to translate it or the inability of our words to find a reference to the ethical predicates. Ethics is addressed to the individual who wishes to experience it himself and not to wait for it to be experienced by another. Let's recall that Wittgenstein opens the preface of the *Tractatus* with these words: "*Perhaps this book will be understood only by someone who has himself already had the thoughts that are expressed in it—or at least similar thoughts*".[54]

From this we can understand Wittgenstein's assertion that ethics is transcendental. Many readers have seen in this transcendentality of ethics a transgression of the limits of discourse. This reading is due, as we have already pointed out, to the equation language=world established by Wittgenstein, an equation that can be understood, given the Russellian legacy which Wittgenstein partially accepts. But it is now necessary to replace this transcendentality by transgression with a transcendentality by anteriority, the main idea of which is that ethics cannot be talked about because it is anterior to the world.

It should also be noted that a genetic conception of ethics immediately leaves out the question of evil and makes ethics a practical tautology. According to our theory of practical tautology, which, by the way, makes it possible to account for the fact that Wittgenstein considers that ethics and logic are of the same order, all men are good and therefore evil does not exist. There is no such thing as fundamentally bad manners, it's all about how one proceeds to separate the good way from the chaff. And this elimination of evil already anticipates a position that will then be assumed by Wittgenstein, but which he nevertheless presents as a novelty, that of ethical relativism which many readers have placed at the centre of Wittgenstein's ethics, even though it is only a consequence of it.

One objection to our reading of the ineffability of ethics could be that Wittgenstein said it was impossible to have a private language, a language that only one person would understand[55]. This objection would show once again that the theme of the inexistence of ethical propositions goes across all phases of Wittgenstein's philosophy. If he does develop an ethics of virtue in the perspective that we suggest, thinking that ethics is innate, does it not

[54] *TLP*, p. 3.

[55] L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, *op. cit.*, I, §243.

follow that he legitimizes at the same time a language within us and that we would thus be unable to communicate to others? Doesn't our reading force a contradiction at the heart of Wittgenstein's thinking?

This objection is not legitimate since, far from confirming the possibility of a private language, Wittgenstein precisely defines its impossibility. It is precisely because it is deep in us that ethics does not translate into language. Trying to make a discourse on ethics is an attempt to introduce it into a sphere in which it doesn't fit. Ethics, if it were to be translated into a language, would only be translated into that kind of private language. Precisely because Wittgenstein rejects this possibility, he prefers to silence ethics.

Our understanding of Wittgenstein's ethics is not completely new, since an author like Ulrich Arnswald has clearly highlighted this transcendentality of ethics in Wittgenstein in a collective work dating from 2009 *In Search of Meaning, Ludwig Wittgenstein on Ethics, Mysticism and Religion.*[56] According to Arnswald, the theme of the transcendentality of ethics as elaborated by Wittgenstein rests on two pillars, namely the remark in *Culture and Value* that ethics and religion are of the same order: "*What is good is also divine.*" and the proposition 6.421 of the *Tractatus* "*It is clear that ethics cannot be put into words. Ethics is transcendental*". The general idea thus developed by Arnswald is that Wittgenstein has an aversion to ethical theory, since for him ethics is purely personal. Through Arnswald's work the emphasis is placed on the subjective dimension of Wittgensteinian ethics and precisely the difficulty that this ethics has in creating a bridge between these individual values and the world. The subjectivity of ethics implies the impossibility of translating it to other people, and it is at this level that the thesis of transcendentality gives rise to an appeal to mysticism.

How does von Wright adress this mysticism challenge?

3. Overcoming mysticism: von Wright's Deontic Logic

3.1. The concept of norm propositions

We have seen earlier (§1.2) that for von Wright, it is impossible to derive obligations from facts. But it should be noted here that the derivation of values from facts is impossible only in a certain sense. As we will soon see, such an absence of truth in normative discourse does not imply an exclusion of logic from this field. Indeed, von Wright introduces logic into normative

[56] U. Arnswald (ed.), *In Search of Meaning, Ludwig Wittgenstein on Ethics, Mysticism and Religion,* Karlsruhe: Universitätsverlag Karlsruhe, 2009.

discourse through two mechanisms: on the one hand, the idea of contradiction of normative contents and, on the other hand, the latent idea of description present in every norm.

With regard to the first point, the authority that prescribes a certain behaviour through the formulation of a norm must ensure that there is no normative conflict between norms, otherwise the contradictory norms would become irrational, ordering contradictory norms which cannot all be satisfied[57]. It is the very purpose of a normative system, if it wants to be *coherent,* to avoid this irrationality in order to aim at what von Wright calls the "normative ideal"; an ideal obtained when there are no contradictory norms, when everything that is allowed is also sometimes achieved and when what is forbidden does not happen. When an inconsistency is observed in a normative system, it must be corrected by amending the existing legal codes, otherwise the justice system of the whole society will collapse[58].

Moreover, the contradiction must also be avoided between what is logically possible and what is physically possible. Theoretical rationality or logic is not the only requirement for a normative system that wants to be coherent. Such a system must also ensure that it does not place too much demand on agents since not everything that is logically possible is physically possible. In other words, the normative authority must ask what is within the individual agent's capacity. Thus, a normative framework must also take into consideration a general theory of human action. This last remark is important because it gives the *raison d'être* of the logic of action within von Wright's overall project.

With regard to the second point, the author indicates that the norm is generally formulated in such a way as to allow an ideal to emerge, which, even if it is not present in our present world precisely because of its ideality, can still be the object of a logic. This ideal is the content of the norm and not the norm itself, which is most often formulated prescriptively. Only if one focuses on the content of the norm, which then indicates the existence of a fact, is it possible to reconcile the realms of the descriptive and the normative. By seeking to attain the ideal expressed through the content of the norm, the agent gradually fills the chasm between what is and what ought to be and reduces the imperfection of this world by moving closer to a perfect world. Von Wright emphasizes in this connection that the function of norms, one might say, is to incite people to realize the ideal, to make them act in

[57] G. H. von Wright, *Logical Studies*, Oxford: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1957, p. 374.
[58] *Id*.

such a way that the description of the real comes closer to that of the ideal. In an important sense, we could say that the purpose of norms is to bridge the gap between what is and what ought to be[59].

However, it is through the conception of logic as dynamic that illustrates the best the opposition between von Wright and Wittgenstein. This dynamic character of logic is the key to von Wright's symbolism; it is only by taking into account this fundamental difference between both thinkers that one will understand their divergence on the link that can exist between the fields of ethics and logic. If we consider logic as *a priori,* it is difficult to see how to include change in it without destroying its analyticity or *a priori* nature. This *a priori* status of logic was at the heart of the *Tractatus*, and it also informed the Wittgensteinian conception of ethics, which considered it, like logic, as transcendental. It should also be pointed out that Wittgenstein did not see ethics as a mere collection of value judgements. On the contrary, as we have already noted above, his primary concern was to discover the meaning of life, that is God.

Von Wright is far from making this first moment of Wittgenstein's philosophy the centre of his reflection on ethics. Rather, he is more willing to consider action as it takes place on a daily basis for the individual and in a specific community. And the difficulty lies precisely in what seems to be a renunciation of the universality of ethical discourse. Von Wright and Wittgenstein agree on the non-universality of value judgements as Jakola suggests, but unlike Wittgenstein who considers this fact as a sufficient argument to keep silent on value issues, von Wright asks himself and tries to answer the question of how it is possible to reconcile the non-universality of ethical discourse with truth. And it is through deontic logic, of which the logics of change and action are the most important moments, that he highlights his answer.

Norms vary from one society to another and cannot claim to be absolute. In this context, can there be a logic of norms? It is to this question that von Wright answers through a series of texts, the first of which appeared in 1951. It was in this year that both a book, *An Essay in Modal Logic*[60] and an article, "Deontic Logic[61]", were published. The author notes that the book starts from the conviction that there is an unmistakable similarity between the

[59] *Ibid.*, p. 375.

[60] G. H. von Wright, *An Essay in Modal Logic*, Amsterdam: North-Holland publishing company, 1951. (Hereafter *EML*)

[61] G. H. von Wright, "Deontic logic", *Mind* 69 (237), 1951, pp. 1–15.

'normal' symbolic logic (what he calls propositional logic or truth logic) and modal logic, on the one hand, and between the branches of modal logic, on the other hand. The rest of the book is an elaboration of this kinship, which he takes up again at the opening of the above-mentioned article and which he summarizes in the following terms: *"One should, however, not fail to observe that there are essential similarities between alethic, epistemic, and deontic modalities on the one hand and quantifiers on the other hand.*[62]*"*

Here is the categorisation[63]:

Alethic	**Epistemic**	**Deontic**	**Existential**
Necessary	Verified	Obligatory	Universal
Possible		Permitted	Existing
Contingent	Undecided	Indifferent	
Impossible	Falsified	Forbidden	Empty

The passage from one modality to another is made through the principle of reduction, similar in propositional logic to the replacement rules. Indeed, it should be noted that von Wright's original observation was that the use of truth tables in general can be transferred to modal logic. He then set himself the task of constructing a hierarchy of modal systems on the basis of these truth tables. The construction of such systems would, he thought, make it possible to test the validity of modal syllogisms, by slightly modifying the way truth tables are used to test categorical syllogisms. According to the principle of reduction, it is possible to switch from one modal concept to another first within the same category and then between different categories. This principle of reduction makes it possible to reduce the set of modal concepts to a small number. In the book, von Wright identifies the following principles:

- First principle: If it is possible for a certain proposition to be possible, then the given proposition is possible[64].

- Second principle: If a certain proposition is possible, then the proposition in question must be possible[65].

[62] *EML*, p. 2.
[63] *Id*.
[64] *Ibid.*, p. 67.
[65] *Ibid.*, p. 71.

The principle of reduction not only allows us to see the possible combinations between different symbols in order to eliminate some of them. It also allows us to identify the impossible combinations and thus eliminate them from the discourse and the calculation to be performed in the truth table.[66]

Since von Wright's goal is to show that some ethical problems can be solved using the instruments of symbolic logic, his main task is to find a bridge between modal logic and propositional logic in order to ultimately succeed in constructing deontic truth tables. To carry out this task, he draws parallels between modal logic and truth logic or propositional logic. Here are the main ones:

1) The concept of performance function is strictly analogous to the concept of truth function in propositional logic[67];

2) If a molecular complex of P and O sentences expresses logical truth for reasons independent of the specific nature of deontic concepts, then its truth can be established or proven in a truth table of propositional logic[68] ;

3) If, however, a molecular complex of P and O sentences expresses logical truth for reasons that depend on the specific nature of the deontic concepts, then its truth cannot be established by propositional logic alone[69];

4) Since the constituents P do not represent all the deontic units of the deontic realm of the acts named by A and by B, the Permission Principle here does not impose any restriction on combinations of truth values. The calculation of truth values depends only on the Principle of Deontic Distribution (and the principles of propositional logic)[70].

[66] *Ibid.*, p. 70.
[67] G. H. von Wright, "Deontic Logic", art. cit. p. 2.
[68] *Ibid.*, p. 5.
[69] *Ibid.*, pp. 5–6.
[70] *Ibid.*, p. 12.

It should also be pointed out that von Wright sets out to define the terms of this logic starting with the basic operators as defined in propositional logic (negation, conjunction, disjunction, implication and equivalence)[71].

Further on, the Finnish philosopher indicates that if deontic logic were to content itself with rewriting propositional logic in other words, it would be a trivial logic. To show that deontic logic is worthwhile, he will therefore point out some fundamental differences between the two types of logic. He then introduces the six deontic concepts: permitted, prohibited, obligatory, indifferent, compatible and incompatible. The permitted is, in Wright's words, primitive[72]. It is the concept from which all others are defined. He goes on to say:

> If an act is not permitted, it is said to be forbidden. For example: Theft is not allowed, so it is prohibited. We are not allowed to steal, therefore we must not steal. If the denial of an act is forbidden, the act itself is said to be obligatory. For example: It is forbidden to disobey the law, therefore it is obligatory to obey the law. We should do what we are not allowed not to do. If an act and its negation are both allowed, the act is called indifferent (morally)[73].

And a little further on, he adds that "*Two acts are morally incompatible if their conjunction is prohibited (and compatible if it is permitted). For example, making a promise and breaking it are (morally) incompatible acts*[74]."

Von Wright goes on to say that the obligation can sometimes be determined by asking whether a necessary consequence follows the commission of the act that is about to be taken. If one cannot do one act without doing another, then the two acts are compatible. On the other hand, an act may be determined not to be obligatory if it is seen to be incompatible with another obligatory act. Here is how he expresses it:

> The proposition that the performance of the act named by A commits us to perform the act named by B can be symbolized by OA → B. But OA → B means the same as ~(P~(A→B)), and this means the same as

[71] *Ibid.*, p. 2.

[72] *Ibid.*, p. 3. The situation would later change to include the obligatory (See G. H. von Wright, "Deontic Logics" *American Philosophical Quarterly* 4, n° 2,1967, pp. 136–143.)

[73] G. H. von Wright, "Deontic Logic", art. cit. pp. 3–4.

[74] *Ibid.*, p. 4.

> ~(PA&~B). commitment can thus be explained in terms of compatibility[75].

There is a difficulty here that must be overcome. Obligation is a deontic concept that applies to an isolated act. If this is the case, why should it be necessary, in order to know whether an act is obligatory, to resort to another act? This difficulty is not avoided by von Wright, but he indicates that it is a trivial difficulty which is easily overcome if one considers that there are truths which apply to all areas of logic. And among these truths is the law of *modus tollens*[76].

From the end of the fourth section of the article, von Wright takes an even more important step for deontic logic by noting that while certain logical truths invariably apply to deontic logic as we have just noted, it does not follow that there is no purely deontic truth. He thus devotes the rest of the article to determining which of these logical truths are purely deontic.

Starting from the fifth section, he introduces the idea of deontic function, which he defines in an analogous way to the truth function of modern[77] logic. This idea is based on what we could call the principle of deontic uncertainty according to which the determination of the deontic value of an act (permitted/prohibited) does not make certain the deontic value of the opposite of this act. To support this point, von Wright shows there is a difference between a proposition and its negation, depending on whether one is in propositional or deontic logic. We know, for example, that if A is true, then ~A is false, or that if A is true, then ~A is not true. But von Wright states that "*because A is permitted, we can conclude nothing about whether ~A is permitted or prohibited. Sometimes ~A is permitted. Sometimes not*.[78]"

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[75] *Ibid*., p. 4. Note that the deontic operators have "wide scope" according to von Wright. So, when von Wright writes "OA→B", we would write "O(A→B)". I thank an anonymous reviewer from *Filosofiska Notiser* for pointing out that there is a notational problem here. In standard deontic logic (which is very similar to von Wright's first deontic system), ~(PA&~B) is logically equivalent with PA→B, which is not logically equivalent with OA→B. OA→B is logically equivalent with ~P~A→B, which does not say the same thing as ~P~(A→B). ~P~(A→B) is not logically equivalent with ~(PA&~B) according to standard deontic logic (even though it is logically equivalent with ~P(A&~B)).

[76] *Ibid.*, p. 5.

[77] *Ibid*., p. 6. "*An act will be called a deontic function of certain other acts, if the deontic value of the former uniquely depends upon the deontic values of the latter*."

[78] *Id*. This is sometimes called the "deontic principle of indifference".

It would be possible to explore von Wright's deontic logic in relation to propositional logic much more deeply. But I suggest that we pause there and turn to another dimension of his opposition to Wittgenstein.

3.2. The logic of change

The logic of change is an important point in the von Wrightian conception of logic. The only source that seems to have inspired von Wright here is Hegel[79]. One can thus notice that the logic of change is a surpassing of the static logic that can be found in Wittgenstein, for example, through his idea of the state of affairs. A state of affairs, as a state, has a certain truth value at a certain time. The aim of the logic of change is to capture the change from one state of affairs to another within a certain interval. Von Wright points out in the preface to *Norm and Action*[80] that it came to him to see the difficulties posed by his first conception of deontic logic. As he puts it:

> I have since come to entertain doubts on practically all issues of importance in my first publication on deontic logic. These doubts have been of two kinds. Some concern the *validity* of certain logical principles of obligation-concepts, which I had originally accepted. Others concern the *interpretation* of the symbols and expressions of the calculus[81].

He had in fact presented the concept of permission as a primitive concept without saying a word about it. Now he feels that it was a too easily accepted postulate and that it is now important to return to it. But the problems of definition are, he says, less destructive than the problems of symbolization that gradually led him to believe that the old system as a whole was untenable. By way of illustration, if A denotes some act and ~A its opposite, does this opposite consist in avoiding doing A or doing A in such a way as to have effects contrary to the effects produced by A's performance? If A denotes an act, what does ~A mean? Does it mean not doing the thing, the fact of which is symbolized by A? Or does it mean the annulment of that thing, i.e. the doing of something that leads to the opposite state of affairs?[82]

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[79] G. H. Von Wright, *Philosophical Papers*. Vol. III: *Truth, Knowledge and Modality*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984, p.37.

[80] G. H. von Wright, *Norm and Action: A logical enquiry,* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963. Hereafter *NA*.

[81] *NA*, p. vi.

[82] *Id*.

However, he does not see the failure of this symbolization as a reason to despair. It had not occurred to him, he says, to realize that the essential symbols of classical symbolic logic serve exclusively to represent a static world. In classical symbolic logic, judgments are never considered to be occasionally true or false, but are definitely true or false. This is the reason why, von Wright concludes, these symbols have proven ineffective in symbolizing human actions that are essentially dynamic. He explains:

> Acts, however, are essentially connected with changes. A state which is not there may come into being as a result of human interference with the world; or a state which is there may be made to vanish. Action can also continue states of affairs which would otherwise disappear, or suppress states which would otherwise come into being[83].

In order to overcome this difficulty, von Wright constructs, on the basis of propositional logic, a logic of change capable of adequately symbolizing human actions; this is the task he accomplishes in Chapter II of *Norm and Action*.

The symbol *p*

After making a few reminders about propositional logic, von Wright introduces the notion of temporal logic and the occasional relativity of truth value. He says:

> These observations give us a reason for making a distinction between generic and individual propositions. The individual proposition has a uniquely determined truth-value; it is either true or false, but not both. The generic proposition has, by itself, no truth-value. It has a truth-value only when coupled with an occasion for its truth or falsehood; that is, when it becomes 'instantiated' in an individual proposition.[84]

According to the principle of occasional relativity of truth value, one should no longer consider a proposition as true or false but as true on occasion O_1 and possibly false on occasion O_2. This view of state of affairs is important because it makes the violation of the principle of non-contradiction intelligible. It would indeed be counter-intuitive to say that it is true that it rains, and true that it does not rain at the same time. What we really mean in

[83] *Ibid.*, p. vii.
[84] *Ibid.*, p. 23.

this case is that it is not true that it rains and true that it does not rain at the same time and in the same place. It is true that the example seems trivial, but it is, according to von Wright, a simple observation which has not attracted much attention from logicians. One would be tempted to see here a geometrization of logic, but that would be wrong. Indeed, far from considering the occasion as a combination of time and space, von Wright aims first of all at considering a possible spatiotemporal asymmetry in logic.

On the other hand, it is clear that the idea behind the concept of opportunity is to show that some things might not happen once but many times and each time have a different truth value. This is how the above distinction between individual propositions and generic propositions should be understood, the former being characterized by their unique truth value and the latter by their changing truth value. This difference between individual and generic propositions is at the heart of the logic of change as defined by von Wright, and therefore requires further explanation. He makes this point:

> It should be observed that it is not the occurrence of individuals among its constituents which decides whether a proposition is generic or individual. That Brutus killed Caesar is an individual proposition. But this is not so because of the fact that the proposition is about the individuals Brutus and Caesar; it is due to the logical nature of the concept (universal) of being killed. A person can be killed only once, on one occasion. That Brutus kissed Caesar is not an individual proposition. This is so because a person can be kissed by another on more than one occasion[85].

It is difficult to imagine the same person being murdered on different occasions. When the judgment stated in a proposition is not reproducible, then it is an individual proposition because its truth value is unique, precisely because it is impossible to obtain another truth value after the same judgment at a different time and in a different space. But if a judgment can be repeated, then there is no guarantee that its truth value will be identical. This is precisely the reason why the temporal dimension of the proposition and the repetitiveness of the judgment stated therein must be taken into account in order to classify it as individual or generic. The immediate consequence of this distinction is that von Wright proposes to exclude propositions of the type "Brutus murdered Caesar" from the logic of change, that is, to exclude propositions whose truth value does not include a consideration of their

[85] *Ibid.*, pp. 23–24.

spatiotemporal dimension. The propositions retained, the generic propositions, are those that von Wright designates with the symbol *p*.

The symbol *T*

Von Wright identifies three types of facts: states of affairs, processes and events[86]. He excludes the last two types of facts from the logic of change for the reason that, for them to be otherwise, we would have to consider a time and space other than those in which they take place or have taken place, and that, in lending ourselves to such a game, the result will not be different in any case. But even if he rejects them, he nevertheless thinks that they can be taken as moments of a special kind of description of states of affairs. Consider a simple gesture such as opening a window. This opening can be described as a transition or process of change that took place between two business states, an initial state (or event) in which the window was closed and a final state in which the window is open. Demonstrating the interdependence between these three types of events will allow von Wright to introduce an important symbol of the logic of change, the symbol of transformation/ transition or *T*.

The use of T is done by inserting it between two states of affairs, each representing a generic proposition, the initial and the final, and to show the passage from one state to another. Suppose for example that f means the window is closed and ~f the window is open (or not closed). We can then symbolise the opening of the window by fT~f (the transition of the states from the closed window to the unclosed window) or the closing of the window by ~fTf. Likewise, "the window has remained open" may be represented by ~fT~f and "the window has remained closed" by fTf. The four symbols we have just presented, fT~f, ~fTf, ~fT~f and fTf, represent the four elementary and exhaustive transformations of the logic of change. Von Wright gives the reason for this in these terms:

> On a given occasion the world either has the feature described by p or it lacks it; if it has this feature it will on the next occasion either have retained or lost it; if again it lacks this feature it will on the next occasion either have acquired it or still lack it. [87]

[86] *Ibid.*, p. 26.

[87] *Ibid.*, pp. 29–30.

What is important to remember about the logic of change is that, by going beyond static logic, it marks an important insight in von Wright's conception of logic which is not found in Wittgenstein's logical works.

Conclusion

There is no way we can contest von Wright's indebtedness to Wittgenstein. However, there are reasons to affirm that von Wright later stood on his own feet, and in some respects, contradicted the views of his master.

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