

Wittgenstein: on Aesthetics

‘When philosophizing you have to descend into the chaos & feel at home there.’ (CV p.74e)

‘Scientific questions may interest me, but they never really grip me. Only conceptual & aesthetic questions have that effect on me. At bottom it leaves me cold whether scientific problems are solved; but not those other questions.’ (CV p.91e)

‘In art it is hard to say anything, that is as good as: saying nothing.’ (CV p.26e)



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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 happens as it does happen. In it there is no value—and if there were, it would be of no value.

If there is a value which is of value, it must lie outside all happening and being-so. For all happening and being-so is accidental.

What makes it non-accidental cannot lie in the world, for otherwise this would again be accidental. It must lie outside the world.

6.42 Hence also there can be no ethical propositions.
Propositions cannot express anything higher.

6.421 It is clear that ethics cannot be expressed.
Ethics are transcendental.
(Ethics and æsthetics are one.)

6.52 We feel that even if all *possible* scientific questions be answered, the problems of life have still not been touched at all. Of course there is then no question left, and just this is the answer.

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

7. What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence.

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“The starting point for all systems of aesthetics must be the personal experience of a peculiar emotion. The objects that provoke this emotion we call works of art and if we can discover some quality common and peculiar to all the objects that provoke it, we shall have solved what I take to be the central problem of aesthetics.” (Clive Bell, *Art*, p. 21-2)

‘The beauty of a star-shaped figure – of a hexagonal star perhaps – is spoiled if we see it as symmetrical relative to a given axis.’ (CV p.81e)

'Philosophers constantly see the method of science before their eyes, and are irresistibly tempted to ask and answer questions in the way science does. This tendency is the real source of Metaphysics and leads philosophers into complete darkness.' (BB, p.18)

"on the enormously complicated situation in which the aesthetic expression has a place", the entire field "is very big and entirely misunderstood", "an immensely complicated family of cases" (Wittgenstein 1966)

'For what is hidden... is of no interest to us.' (PI 126)

"A man may sing a song with expression and without expression. Then why not leave out the song—could you have the expression then?" (Wittgenstein 1966, 32 editorial note and footnote)

'There is *much* that could be learned from Tolstoy's false theorising that the work of art conveys 'a feeling'. - And you really might call it, if not the expression of a feeling, an expression of feeling, or a felt expression. And you might say too that people who understand it to that extent 'resonate' with it, respond to it. You might say: The work of art does not seek to convey *something else*, just itself. As, if I pay someone a visit, I don't wish simply to produce such & such feelings in him, but above all to pay him a visit, & naturally I also want to be well received.

And it does start to be really absurd, to say, the artist wishes that, what he feels when writing, the other should feel when reading. Presumably I can think I understand a poem (e.g.), understand it in the way its author would wish, - but what *he* may have felt in writing it, that doesn't concern me *at all*.' (CV p.67e)

Artistic appreciation: "to describe what it consists in we would have to describe the whole environment". (Wittgenstein 1966, 7)

"To describe their use or to describe what you mean by a cultured taste, you have to describe a culture" (Wittgenstein 1966, 8). "What belongs to a language game is a whole culture" (Wittgenstein 1966, 8). "To describe a set of aesthetic rules fully means really to describe the culture of a period". (Wittgenstein 1966, 8, n. 3).

"An entirely different game is played in different ages". (Wittgenstein 1966, p. 8).

"In order to get clear about aesthetic words you have to describe ways of living. We think we have to talk about aesthetic judgments like 'This is beautiful', but we find that if we have to talk about aesthetic judgments we don't find these words at all, but a word used something like a gesture, accompanying a complicated activity". (Wittgenstein 1966, 11).

'Appreciating music is a manifestation of human life. How could it be described to someone? Well, I suppose we should have to describe *music*. Then we could describe the relation human beings have to it. But is that all that is necessary, or is it also part of the process to teach him to appreciate it for himself? Well, developing his appreciation will teach him what appreciation is in a *different* sense. And again, teaching him to appreciate poetry or painting can be part of an explanation of what music is.' (CV pp. 80e/81e)

'The melodies of different composers can be approached by applying the principle: every species of tree is a 'tree' in a different sense of the word.... But if you look at the field of force in which they stand (and hence their significance), you will be inclined to say: Here melody is something quite different than there (here it has a different origin, plays a different role...) (CV p.54e)

'Suppose I had said: "the gardener raises very beautiful plants in this greenhouse". I want to communicate something to my hearer with this & the question arises: for this does he have to know what is common to everything we call "plant"? No. I could quite well have given him the explanation for the case in hand by means of a few examples or a few pictures.' (CV p.28e)

On the idea of a science of aesthetics, "almost too ridiculous for words". [Wittgenstein 1966, 11].

"The idea is that once we are more advanced, everything-all the mysteries of Art-will be understood by psychological experiments." (LC 17; cf 11, 19) "The existence of the experimental method makes us think we have the means of solving the problems which trouble us; though problem and method pass one another by". (Wittgenstein 1958, II, iv, 232)

"Aesthetic questions have nothing to do with psychological experiments, but are answered in an entirely different way". (Wittgenstein 1966, 17)

"it can never be our job to reduce anything to anything". (He cites the example of boiling Redpath, one of his auditors, down to ashes, etc., and then saying "This is all Redpath really is", adding the remark "Saying this might have a certain charm, but would be misleading to say the least". (Wittgenstein 1966, 24)

W: listening to a minuet: "to get this and that effect... Doesn't the minuet itself matter? - hearing this: would another have done as well." (LC 29)

"I feel discomfort and know the cause" makes it sound as if there were two things going on in my soul—discomfort and knowing the cause." (Wittgenstein 1966, 14). "In these cases the word 'cause' is hardly ever used at all". [Wittgenstein 1966, 14] "An aesthetic explanation is not a causal explanation". (LC 18)

"The sort of explanation one is looking for when one is puzzled by an aesthetic impression is not a causal explanation, not one corroborated by experience or by statistics as to how people react.... This is not what one means or what one is driving at by an investigation into aesthetics". (Wittgenstein 1966, 21)

To be *affected* "It is a reaction analogous to my taking my hand away from a hot plate". (Wittgenstein 1966)

'Understanding & explaining a musical phrase. – The simplest explanation is sometimes a gesture; another might be a dance step or words describing a dance. - But isn't our understanding of the phrase an experience we have while hearing it? & what function, in that case, has the explanation? Are we supposed to think of it while we hear the music? Are we supposed to imagine the dance, or whatever it may be, as we listen? And supposing we do, - why should that be called

hearing the music with understanding?? If seeing the dance is what matters, it would be better that, rather than the music, were performed. But that is all a misunderstanding.' (CV p.79e)

"What we really want, to solve aesthetic puzzlements, is certain comparisons—grouping together of certain cases". (Wittgenstein 1966, 29)

What we do: "to draw one's attention to certain features, to place things side by side so as to exhibit these features."

Abbreviations and Bibliography

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