

Wittgenstein on value and what cannot be said

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To his publisher, Wittgenstein described his book as follows:

“my work consists of two parts: the one which is here, and of everything which I have *not* written. And precisely this second part is the important one. For the ethical is delimited from within, as it were by my book; and I’m convinced that, *strictly* speaking, it can only be delimited in this way. In brief, I think: all of that which *many* are babbling today, I have defined in my book by being silent about it.”

Wittgenstein thought that the ethical could not just be a matter of the existence and non-existence of independent states of affairs; as he put it,

6.4 All propositions are of equal value.

Since propositions about states of affairs exhaust the realm of what can be said, ethics and aesthetics must, like philosophy, be shown rather than be said. All that we can do is display these realms by delimiting ‘from within’ the limits of the world. Outside this,

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

In the end, even the philosophical attempt to show this by delimiting the realm of what can be said transgresses the limits that it sets, as Wittgenstein realizes:

6.54 My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical, when he has used them — as steps — to climb up beyond them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it.) ...