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WITTGENSTEIN ON HAPPINESS: HARMONY, DISHARMONY, AND ANTITHEODICY

Abstract

This paper investigates Wittgenstein's early remarks on happiness and harmony in the context of what may be called Wittgensteinian antitheodicy. Philosophers of religion inspired by Wittgenstein's (mostly later) philosophy often heavily criticize theodicies that seek to make sense of apparently meaningless and absurd evil and suffering within God's overall allegedly harmonious plan. The paper analyzes Wittgenstein's early views on happiness as harmony with the world, as spelled out in the *Tractatus* and the *Notebooks*, in particular, examining whether those ideas are incompatible with a Wittgensteinian antitheodicy approach abandoning the very project of theodicy. Antitheodicy clearly requires an acknowledgment of a certain kind of disharmony. However, at the transcendental meta-level level it may also be seen as a "harmonious" way of "seeing the world aright", which raises a reflexive problem for any Wittgenstein-inspired transcendental antitheodicy.

1. Introduction: Wittgensteinian antitheodicy

Philosophers of religion inspired by Ludwig Wittgenstein typically focus on the "grammatical" methodology emerging from Wittgenstein's later work. When examining the *problem of evil and suffering* – one of the most pregnant and serious issues in the philosophy of religion and theology – they often suggest that the very formulation of this problem, in the traditional form calling for a *theodicy*, is deeply confused, as it violates the grammar of (genuinely) religious language-use.

Philosophers starting from such Wittgensteinian grammatical considerations may even more strongly argue that, religiously speaking, theodicies can be criticized as superstitious or blasphemous (cf. Phillips 1977, 2004). Thus, several Wittgensteinian philosophers maintain that theodicies allegedly justifying "the ways of God to man" – that is, arguments seeking to make sense of apparently meaningless and absurd evil and suffering within God's overall harmonious plan – amount not only to ethically insensitive use of language disregarding or misrecognizing others' suffering in its pointlessness but also to conceptual confusion and pseudo-religious use of language. It is not only ethically wrong but also *meaningless and conceptually confused*, i.e., a violation of the meaning-constitutive grammar of religious language-games, to claim that others' suffering has a metaphysical or theological meaning, function, or explanation. This "conceptual oddness" of theodicies has been noted not only by D.Z. Phillips (1977, 2004) but also by Ben Tilghman (1994, 192) – who uses this very phrase – and by Stephen Mulhall

(1994, 18-19), who explicitly suggests that theodicies end up with blasphemy. In a similar vein, Andrew Gleeson (2012, especially chapter 1), also writing in a broadly Wittgensteinian tradition, notes that theodicies should be criticized on both moral and conceptual grounds, while Mikel Burley (2012, §5) points out that the theodocist is “so confused as to be unaware of the degree of their own insensitivity” to pain and suffering – with moral as well as logical and conceptual dimensions pertaining to this confusion.

According to these and many other Wittgensteinian philosophers of religion, theodicies thus presuppose a confused and immoral kind of *harmony* in the world and in our attitude to other human beings’ sufferings. Such a harmony is allegedly ethical in postulating not only a perfectly just God but also a balance between moral (or immoral) actions and their reward or punishment, but according to critics of theodicies it is in reality unethical in its disregard for individual human beings’ experiences of meaningless suffering.¹ What may be called *Wittgensteinian antitheodicy* resists such a temptation to embrace a metaphysically and theologically harmonious world-picture (or a harmonious view of God, for that matter) as a pseudo-religious tendency (see Pihlström 2007), insisting on the need to take seriously the profound *disharmony* of human lives and sufferings. Here I cannot examine any detailed arguments for Wittgensteinian antitheodicism (cf. Kivistö and Pihlström 2016), but let me by way of introduction offer a few observations on Phillips’s approach, setting the stage for the main concerns of this paper.

The Wittgensteinian method Phillips (along with many other Wittgensteinians) subscribes to carefully looks at the actual use of language in concrete human situations and practices, instead of any a priori rules or principles establishing linguistic meanings. Yet, he also emphasizes the general Wittgensteinian ideas that “it is only in the context of [religious] language games that belief in God has any meaning” and “concepts have their life” “only in practice, in what we do” (Phillips 1993, xi, xiii). In his criticism of theodicies, in particular, Phillips focuses on what goes wrong in the very form of the allegedly moral reasoning the theodocist engages in; he interestingly cites the Book of Job here: “Job cannot make *sense* of his afflictions in terms of the [theodocist] arguments of his would-be comforters.” (Ibid., 157.) While those defending theodicies try to calculate what kinds of goods or benefits might outweigh or compensate for the evils and sufferings there are, thus thinking in terms of a kind of divine harmony, the Phillipsian-cum-Wittgensteinian antitheodocist objects to “the *concept* of calculation in this context, because it excludes *moral* concepts” (ibid., 158).²

¹ A paradigm case of such insensitive disregard for the sufferer’s own perspective is manifested by the “friends” in the Book of Job, as they come to deliver their allegedly comforting (theodocist) speeches.

² For an extended discussion of how the Book of Job can be read in the context of Kant’s 1791 Theodicy Essay as a criticism of Job’s “friends” theodocist arguments, see Kivistö and Pihlström 2016, especially chapter 2.

Phillips argues that the truly religious reaction to the contingencies and adversities of human life does not seek to “tidy up” messy human reality or to find explanations and understandings of suffering (see *ibid.*, 166-168). Rather, properly (genuinely, truly) religious uses of language, when addressing the problem of evil and suffering, recognize the limits of understanding and linguistic expression – not as contingent limitations that could in principle be transcended yet *de facto* cannot be overcome by us, but rather as necessary limits defining the relevant language-game and therefore playing a *quasi-transcendental*³ role in constituting what is meaningful and possible for us (see *ibid.*, 168), albeit in the end only contextually necessary limits that could in principle be redrawn as our lives change. A “transcendental” critique of theodicies, when formulated from a Wittgensteinian perspective along Phillipsian lines, thus crucially focuses on the grammar constitutive of moral and religious language, that is, on the meaning-structuring rules of the relevant language-games – rules that might, however, themselves be historically transformed (cf. also Phillips 1986). If we take seriously the late-Wittgensteinian view that there can be no meaning without practice-laden, habitual, world-engaging use of expressions within public human ways of acting, or language-games – i.e., that “meaning is use” in the sense of the *Investigations* (cf. PI, I, §23) – then we should also acknowledge the fact that the meanings of such expressions as “evil”, “suffering”, “God”, “meaning”, “harmony”, etc., are inextricably entangled with their use in religious (and other) language-games and thus in our forms of life. If we do take this seriously, then it is conceptually, morally, and religiously misguided to seek to provide a theodicy – or to require one.

Wittgenstein himself had little to say about this particular topic, even though he famously commented on various other issues in the philosophy of religion on several occasions – to the extent that the entire paradigm of “Wittgensteinian” philosophy of religion has been based on such remarks. The few references to anything like the problem of evil and suffering in Wittgenstein’s own work (as available in diary notes, or as documented by his friends and pupils) include the remarks against any “moral meaning of suffering” and against any moralistic understanding of God in conversations with Malcolm Drury (cited in Klagge 2011, 210n26), and the well-known comments on the “highest despair” (“*die höchste Not*”) in *Vermischte Bemerkungen* (CV, c. 1944). However, while the material is scarce in this regard, the more general tone of Wittgenstein’s way of thinking about religion arguably makes it clear that he would have been harshly critical of contemporary analytic philosophers’ of religion preoccupation with explanatory and justificatory theodistic discourse (see further Kivistö and Pihlström 2016, chapter 3).

The so-called Wittgensteinian philosophers of religion who (rightly, in my view) reject both theodicies and the theodistically framed problem of evil and suffering to which theodicies are offered as responses only rarely discuss Wittgenstein’s *early* work, however. There is, thus, a gap to be filled. The

³ Note that this is my rephrasing of Phillips’s view. Wittgensteinian philosophers of religion, including Phillips, usually avoid the Kantian vocabulary of transcendental philosophy.

early Wittgenstein – the author of *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1921), “A Lecture of Ethics” (1929), and of course the early pre-Tractarian *Notebooks 1914-1916* – does have things to say about topics such as happiness and harmony that are worth considering in relation to the late-Wittgensteinian antitheodist recognition of the ethical need to take seriously a certain kind of disharmony. It is to this task that this essay is devoted. I will begin by going through some (mostly relatively familiar) Wittgensteinian passages on happiness and harmony (section 2) before moving on to an interpretation of (Wittgensteinian) antitheodicy as an acknowledgment of disharmony (section 3). I will then show how this discussion needs to be examined from a *transcendental* point of view – viewing Wittgenstein himself as a Kantian thinker as well as the entire antitheodicy approach as an essentially Kantian undertaking – thus finally raising a reflexive problem that needs attention by way of conclusion (sections 4-5).⁴

An important caveat is in order here. The (anti)theodicy discourse primarily focuses on the acknowledgment of *others'* suffering. Famously, the early Wittgenstein is mostly silent about other subjects and is preoccupied with the first-personal point of view (cf. also Pihlström 2016). In this sense, the (anti)theodicy issue seems to be rather far removed from any early-Wittgensteinian considerations. Nevertheless, this hardly prevents us from trying to learn something from the complex interplay of harmony and disharmony we may approach via Wittgenstein's cryptic writings, even if our primary concern is (as it is here) to make a contribution to the antitheodicy discussion rather than historical Wittgenstein scholarship.

We then of course also have to be extremely careful about which views to actually attribute to Wittgenstein – and, indeed, about the question of whether *any* philosophical views or theses can be attributed to him at all. I am of course fully aware of the fact that there is no obvious sense in which any of the early Wittgenstein's pronouncements on harmony or happiness (or related topics) could actually make sense in his own terms. We will briefly revisit this issue in due course, though the focus of the paper is not on interpreting Wittgenstein's comments on sense and nonsense but on the use some of his ideas may be put into – whether they make sense or not – in the explorations of theodicy and antitheodicy that some “Wittgensteinians” have been busily contributing to.

2. Happiness and harmony

⁴ The basic point of the examination of Kantian antitheodicy in Kivistö and Pihlström 2016 is that antitheodicy is required for transcendental reasons as a necessary condition for the possibility of adopting a moral point of view on the world and other human beings. Apart from this specific “Kantian” feature of (Wittgensteinian) antitheodicy thought, there is of course the more general question concerning the degree to which Wittgenstein's philosophy, early or late, should be approached from a Kantian transcendental standpoint. My discussion here falls into the Kantian tradition of reading the *Tractatus*, as developed by Stenius (1960), Kannisto (1986), and Appelqvist (2016), among others, but I am also willing to view the later Wittgenstein along analogous lines as well (cf. also Pihlström 2003).

Wittgenstein's fragmentary remarks on happiness⁵ fall into a peculiar place in the development of philosophical reflections on happiness and the good life in Western philosophy. We may recall that Socrates and Plato maintained, as a corollary of the Platonic rationalistic theory of the good life as life guided by reason, that in a sense the good person is necessarily happy – virtue and happiness (the good life) are inextricably entangled – whereas Aristotle, holding a more realistic and commonsensical view, acknowledged the possibility that even the most virtuous person can be unhappy due to various misfortunes, i.e., virtue fails to guarantee happiness.⁶ It is a more general classical Greek idea that happiness and unhappiness concern a person's life as a totality and that, therefore, strictly speaking, a person can really be considered happy or unhappy only after her/his life is over. At any rate, for classical philosophers like Plato and Aristotle, it would have been strange or perhaps even incomprehensible to set the demands of morality and the pursuit of happiness against each other. However, this is exactly what happens two millennia later in Immanuel Kant's moral philosophy: happiness is irrelevant to moral duty; moreover, our tendency to pursue our own happiness as empirical natural creatures is often in contrast with, and needs to be overcome by, the moral law. Indeed, this is why we human beings (rational yet finite and empirical beings) need the moral law in the first place – unlike, say, angels, whose will would necessarily conform to the demands of morality. We can, according to Kant, seek to be *worthy of happiness* by doing our moral duty out of pure respect for the moral law. However, whether or not our virtuous actions actually make anyone happy is completely irrelevant to the moral status of those actions.

A new chapter in this story of the development of moral thought on happiness is written when Wittgenstein states in *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (6.43): "*Die Welt des Glücklichen ist eine andere als die des Unglücklichen.*" ("The world of the happy man is a different one from the world of the unhappy man.") This peculiar view is based on Wittgenstein's conception of ethics as (only) concerning the subject's (my) relation or attitude to the world as a totality. There is no good or evil (or God, or happiness) *in* the world. Living a right kind of life – with "life" identifiable with the "world" – is the fundamental ethical

⁵ While these remarks are indeed fragmentary and in many ways difficult to interpret, I believe it makes sense to focus on this specific concept (along with related ones, especially harmony) rather than the elusive overall picture of Wittgenstein's (early) ethics, invoking notions such as the metaphysical subject (as a "limit" of the world), God, the mystical, the limits of language, etc. All these notions belong to the same family of related concepts in terms of which we may try to express the inexpressible – i.e., the ethical – but it is helpful to restrict the discussion to a relatively narrow set of remarks explicitly dealing with happiness in order to highlight the main concern of this paper, the relation between harmony and theodicy.

⁶ Aristotle also famously maintains that only happiness (*eudaimonia*) is pursued only as a goal in itself and never as a means for something else: "Now such a thing happiness, above all else, is held to be; for this we choose always for self and never for the sake of something else, but honour, pleasure, reason, and every virtue we choose indeed for themselves (for if nothing resulted from them we should still choose each of them), but we choose them also for the sake of happiness, judging that by means of them we shall be happy. Happiness, on the other hand, no one chooses for the sake of these, nor, in general, for anything other than itself." (*Nicomachean Ethics*, I, 7.)

task ultimately identical to the pursuit of happiness. But this, of course, cannot be put to words. There is no way in which any philosophical or ethical theory could advise us how to achieve such happiness.

As far as I can see, the overall picture is roughly the following. Socrates and Plato maintained that goodness entails happiness, i.e, that nothing can really harm the good person. (There are variations of this idea in Christianity, but on the other hand the idea of martyrdom, for instance, does require a sacrifice of this-worldly, empirical happiness; if death were no loss at all, then there would hardly be any significant value in martyrdom.) The history of Western moral philosophy then seems to gradually give up the idea that “nothing can harm the good man”, starting with Aristotle but most strikingly in Kant’s account of the irrelevance of happiness to moral duty. However, the original Socratic idea makes a kind of return in Wittgenstein (and philosophers influenced by him), for whom neither goodness nor happiness is anything “in the world” but a matter of my inner relation to the world: if *I* am happy – if my world is the world of a “happy man” – then indeed nothing *in* the world can harm me.⁷

This return of the Socratic idea comes with a twist, however. Wittgenstein is clearly interested in *transcendental* happiness, not *empirical* happiness. Even for Kant, happiness remains an empirical concept.⁸ The Wittgensteinian move is thus crucial in transforming our picture of the very nature of (morally relevant) happiness. We do not have to force Wittgenstein into the brief historical narrative starting with Plato, but we may see his transcendental remarks on happiness as fundamentally changing that narrative.

Let us now take a somewhat closer look at how Wittgenstein elaborates on his idea of the world of the “happy man”. The world of the happy person is, the *Notebooks* tell us, a “*happy world*” (“eine glückliche Welt”) (NB, July 29, 1916).⁹ This requires seeing the world as a *harmonious* totality; as Newton Garver

⁷ Peter Winch, one of the best-known Wittgenstein-inspired moral philosophers, writes: “For to accept [the absolute demand of the moral ‘ought’] is to think that, compared with the importance of acting honourably and justly (for instance), nothing else matters. And this *is* to bear the afflictions that life brings patiently – i.e., not to be deflected from acting decently even under the pressure of misfortune. A man who has such an attitude to life sees that as long as afflictions do not thus deflect him, they do not harm him – not in relation to what he regards as really important in his life.” (Winch 1972, 206-207; for a comparable discussion, interestingly citing *Antigone*, see Dilman 1974, 182.) This is, obviously, also a (qualified) return to Kant’s view that there is nothing higher than the moral law or duty itself. What is at issue here is the “pointlessness” of morality and moral virtue: asking “why be moral?” (as if there could be some good reason for that) amounts to moving out of morality. The “point” of morality is not to pursue happiness. The “point” of morality is that morality doesn’t have any “point” beyond itself. To take this seriously is to take seriously the view that it is not happiness (especially not one’s own happiness) but, rather, others’ suffering that should be in the focus of our moral thought and deliberation (cf. again Kivistö and Pihlström 2016). How exactly such a conception of the fundamental significance of the moral point of view can be tied up with Wittgensteinian considerations of happiness needs to be examined in some detail.

⁸ It may also be noted that while Kant disconnects moral duty and virtue from happiness in his ethical theory he in a way reconnects happiness and virtue in the concept of the *summum bonum* employed in his argumentation for the postulates of practical reason. As this is not a study on Kant, I will set aside here the question of whether this leads to a theodicy by other means.

⁹ A variant of this phrase is available early in the entry on July 29, 1916: “*Und dass die Welt des Glücklichen eine andere ist als die Welt des Unglücklichen, ist auch klar.*” (Cf. TLP 6.43.) However, at the end of the entry, Wittgenstein also rhetorically asks whether there can be a world that is neither happy nor unhappy: “*Kann es also eine Welt geben, die weder glücklich nor unglücklich ist?*” (July 29, 1916.)

(1994, 89) observes, happiness consists in “being in harmony with the world” – and thus, in the context of the Tractarian account of the world as a totality of facts (cf. TLP 1.1), not “with the *substance* of the world, since the substance of this world is the same as the substance of any possible world” (Garver 1994, 89), but precisely with the *facts* constituting this world, i.e., facts that are independent of my will (cf. TLP 6.373).

The *Notebooks* remarks on happiness are richer than the very few ones remaining in the *Tractatus*.¹⁰ Beginning his reflections on this topic in July 1916, Wittgenstein finds Dostoevsky to be right in saying that “the man who is happy is fulfilling the purpose of existence” (“*dass der, welcher glücklich ist, den Zweck des Daseins erfüllt*”) (NB, July 6, 1916). Wittgenstein also writes: “I am either happy or unhappy, that is all. It can be said: good or evil do not exist. // A man who is happy must have no fear. Not even in the face of death. // Only a man who lives not in time but in the present is happy.” (“*Ich bin entweder glücklich oder unglücklich, das ist alles. Man kann sagen: gut oder böse gibt es nicht. // Wer glücklich ist, der darf keine Furcht haben. Auch nicht vor dem Tode. // Nur wer nicht in Zeit, sondern in der Gegenwart lebt, ist glücklich.*”) (July 8, 1916.)¹¹ The association of happiness with harmony becomes clear in the entry on the same day when Wittgenstein suggests that I must be “in agreement” (“*in Übereinstimmung*”) with the world in order to live happily; this is what being happy “*means*” (“*heisst*”) (July 8, 1916). Being in agreement with the world can, furthermore, be regarded as doing God’s will (“*ich tue den Willen Gottes*”) (July 8, 1916; cf. Bearn 1997, 71) – to the extent that Wittgenstein asks whether one is only happy when one(self) wants or wills nothing (“*Oder ist nur der glücklich, der nicht will?*”) (July 29, 1916).¹²

¹⁰ See especially NB 73-87, i.e., the series of entries starting around July 6, 1916. (My references to NB in the text will provide the dates of the entries; I will mostly cite the original German text.) For relevant discussions of the enigmatic passages on happiness in the *Notebooks* and the *Tractatus*, see, e.g., Mounce 1981, 96-97; Suter 1989; Brockhaus 1991, 327-331; Garver 1994, 99-101; Bearn 1997, 71-73; Klagge 2011, 8-10 (with an emphasis on the Schopenhauerian influences of Wittgenstein); and Balaska 2014 (rightly emphasizing the “non-contentful” character of happiness yet unfortunately neglecting the transcendental aspects of Wittgenstein’s view). For an extended treatment, with plenty of references to secondary literature, of the peculiar (transcendentally) *solipsistic* character of Wittgenstein’s conception of ethics and the self in the *Tractatus*, see Pihlström 2004, especially chapters 3 and 5.

¹¹ Cf. also NB, July 14, 1916. In addition to being happy (in a sense comparable to the *carpe diem* tradition), the one who lives “in the present” also, according to Wittgenstein, lives eternally (“*ewig*”), insofar as eternity (“*Ewigkeit*”) is understood not as infinite temporal duration but as timelessness or non-temporality (“*Unzeitlichkeit*”) (NB, July 8, 1916; cf. TLP 6.4311). On the relevance of the *Tractatus* and Wittgenstein’s views generally to the philosophy of death, dying, and mortality, see, e.g., Pihlström 2016.

¹² All emphases in the original. At this point, it is natural to read Wittgenstein’s references to God, or God’s will, as somewhat Stoic articulations of the interdependence of the notions of the world, fate, and God. To be happy is to be in agreement with the world that is independent of my will, which is the same thing as to be in agreement with God’s will – or, equivalently, one’s ultimate fate – without ever complaining about it or trying to resist it. (Compare, however, also: “*Der Mensch kann sich nicht ohne weiteres glücklich machen.*” NB, July 14, 1916.) In later diary entries, published as *Denkbewegungen*, Wittgenstein tends to associate this kind of happiness as being joyous about one’s work (“*fröhlich zu sein in meiner Arbeit*”): “*Das Höchste aber, das ich zu erfüllen bereit bin, ist: ‘fröhlich zu sein in meiner Arbeit’. D.h.: nicht unbescheiden, gutmütig, nicht direkt lügnersch, im Unglück nicht ungeduldig.*” (D 167-168, February 13, 1937). The link to the (anti)theodic discussion is critical here: recall how Job resists and complains about his fate, refusing to accept either the sufferings that he must go through or his friends’ theodist explanations and justifications postulating a kind of divine harmony (cf. Kivistö and Pihlström 2016, chapter 2).

Given the identification of happiness with harmony or agreement at such a highest possible (cosmic and even divine) level, it is no surprise that “Live happily!” (“*Lebe glücklich!*”) is in a sense the highest moral command to which nothing can be added (NB, July 29, 1916). If one asks *why* one should live happily, that seems like a tautological question: “the happy life seems to be justified of itself, it seems that it *is* the only right life” (“*es scheint, dass sich das glückliche Leben von selbst rechtfertigt, dass es das einzig richtige Leben ist*”) (July 30, 1916). As Gordon Bearn (1997, 66) explains, the ethical life, or the happy life, is “the existential analog of the tautology”: “Violate logical laws and your marks will *make no sense*, violate ethical laws and your life will *make no sense*.” (Ibid., 68; cf. *ibid.*, 71-72; see also Suter 1989.) No wonder then that Wittgenstein finds both ethics and logic “transcendental” (TLP 6.421) and having to do with the meaning or sense (*Sinn*) of the world – either of the world conceived as life, or of the world conceived as a structure of possible facts isomorphic to the structure of language.¹³

Accordingly, there can be no objective criterion for the happy and harmonious life – nothing that could be described in language – but only, so to speak, a metaphysical or transcendental criterion (NB, July 30, 1916), as happiness and unhappiness cannot belong to the world (“*Glück und Unglück können nicht zur Welt gehören*”) (August 2, 1916).¹⁴ It is for this reason that, as Richard Brockhaus (1991, 329) aptly notes, happiness is not an intellectual achievement based on arguments but needs the kind of first-personal experiences Wittgenstein tries to describe in “A Lecture on Ethics” (to which we will shortly turn).¹⁵ The lack of any objective or “outward” criterion of happiness in Wittgenstein’s transcendental sense can also be expressed by saying, as Ilham Dilman (1974, 179-180) does, that happiness in this sense is an “inward” attitude belonging to one’s “inner life” – such as a “genuine love of the good” which would be better described as something like the state of one’s “soul” rather than as (for example) mere conformity to some objective moral standards.

¹³ Bearn (1997, 72) helpfully explains: “The propositions of logic are not fully propositions. The actions that make up a happy life are not fully actions, for they do not serve the interests of the psychological will. Thus the happy life has no particular satisfaction-conditions in much the way that a tautology has no particular truth-conditions. The actions of the happy man are no more easily called actions than the propositions of logic are called propositions. They may be discerned by their differences.” See also *ibid.*, 176.

¹⁴ Here it is important to perceive (as has been emphasized by Hanne Appelqvist, among others, on several occasions) that while Wittgenstein in the *Notebooks* passage (at the end of the entry on July 30, 1916) claims ethics to be *transcendent*, he says, in the corresponding *locus* of the *Tractatus*, that ethics is *transcendental* (TLP 6.421). While even some highly recognized scholars occasionally tend to confuse transcendence and transcendentality in this context (see, e.g., Dilman 1974, 188-189), this cannot be a mere slip of pen on Wittgenstein’s part, given that Wittgenstein was very well familiar with this Kantian vocabulary especially through his well-documented reading of Schopenhauer. Happiness and the related ethico-metaphysical notions (e.g., the metaphysical subject, the world, and life) are, precisely, transcendental in the sense that they do not lie anywhere beyond the world of facts but in a way at the limit of the world, structuring the world into a totality to which we (or I) can have an ethical attitude. See here also Garver 1994, 99-101. At this point, it seems slightly puzzling to me that Wittgenstein speaks about the happy life as in a sense “*more harmonious*” (“*harmonischer*”) than the unhappy life (NB, July 30, 1916); one might suppose harmony in this profound transcendental sense to be an all-or-nothing affair with no comparativity.

¹⁵ Thus, it could be suggested that the mere intellectual acceptance of “harmony” in a metaphysical or theological sense is only a necessary, not a sufficient condition for happiness, just like living in the present is (see Brockhaus 1991, 327-328).

The conception of happiness as harmony¹⁶ can, hence, be rather interestingly compared to the feeling of “absolute safety” describe in Wittgenstein’s 1929 text, “A Lecture on Ethics” (available in PO 37-44) – just like the view that happiness is fundamentally or absolutely “justified of itself” is readily comparable to the idea of there being nothing more fundamental to ground the ethical demand of living or behaving well, as also elaborated on in “A Lecture on Ethics”. Both views are important examples highlighting the peculiar character of ethical judgments in the “Lecture”. Wittgenstein articulates the latter point by comparing moral behavior to playing tennis (PO 38-39). If someone tells me that I play tennis badly, I may answer that I know but I don’t want to play any better, in which case my critic can only accept my answer. Playing tennis well, or better, is, then, optional. But ethics is radically different:

But suppose I had told one of you a preposterous lie and he came up to me and said “You’re behaving like a beast” and then I were to say “I know I behave badly, but then I don’t want to behave any better,” could he then say “Ah, then that’s all right”? Certainly not; he would say “Well, you *ought* to want to behave better.” Here you have an absolute judgment of value, whereas the first instance was one of a relative judgment. (PO 39.)

In the vocabulary of the *Notebooks* and the *Tractatus*, we might say that it simply makes no sense at all to claim that one does not want to live rightly or be happy (in the transcendental sense sketched in Wittgenstein’s remarks). The command, “Live happily!”, is absolute and categorical – or even comparable to a divine command. One’s not wanting to do as that command says is simply out of the question – and the sense in which it makes no sense to say that one does not want to be happy is to be distinguished from the nonsensical propositions of the *Tractatus* not making sense in the terms of the *Tractatus* itself, because in those terms ethical judgments or propositions do not make sense anyway (or are not actually judgments or propositions at all). One may certainly utter the sounds (or write down the letters), “I don’t want to be happy”, but by so doing one makes no significant gesture toward anything; one does not even lead a life about which it could be asked whether it is happy or unhappy. Or so, I suppose, we may try to read those remarks in the terms provided in “A Lecture on Ethics”.¹⁷

¹⁶ One aspect of the Wittgensteinian conception of harmony is that it is not merely metaphysico-theological (relating to God or fate) and ethical (relating to our duty of living rightly) but also *aesthetic*; beauty, as the aim of art, Wittgenstein tells us, is what makes one happy (“*Und das Schöne ist eben das, was glücklich macht*”) (NB, October 21, 1916). He also asks whether the world is from an artistic perspective seen “with a happy eye”: “*Ist das das Wesen der künstlerischen Betrachtungsweise, dass sie die Welt mit glücklichem Auge betrachtet?*” (October 20, 1916). This is only natural given the famous identification of ethics with aesthetics (see TLP 6.421; NB, July 24, 1916). On the aesthetic dimensions of happiness and harmony in Wittgenstein, see, e.g., Tilghman 1991, 75-77 (and chapter 4 *passim*), and Balaska 2014; on the Kantian aspects of Wittgenstein’s views on aesthetics, see especially Appelqvist 2013.

¹⁷ A more general treatment of the vast issue of nonsensicality in (early) Wittgenstein is beyond the concerns of this paper (though I am grateful to an anonymous referee for raising this issue, along with many others). In an obvious way this entire discussion fails to make sense by the Tractarian standards. Wittgenstein’s transcendental pronouncements – about not only mystical ethical matters but of course also about logic and the conditions for the possibility of linguistic meaning –

The experience of *feeling absolutely safe* is the other point of contact between the “Lecture” and the early remarks on happiness I have cited. Wittgenstein’s account of “the experience of feeling *absolutely safe*”, by which he means “the state of mind in which one is inclined to say ‘I am safe, nothing can injure me whatever happens’” (PO 41), emphasizes the way in which such expressions breach the boundaries of language:

We all know what it means in ordinary life to be safe. I am safe in my room, when I cannot be run over by an omnibus. I am safe if I have had whooping cough and cannot therefore get it again. To be safe essentially means that it is physically impossible that certain things should happen to me and therefore it’s nonsense to say that I am safe *whatever* happens. [...] Now I want to impress on you that a certain characteristic misuse of our language runs through *all* ethical and religious expressions. (PO 42.)

This complements the picture of there being no ordinary, outward, or objective criterion for (transcendentally) happy life. There is no more such a criterion than there is any physical, natural, or “worldly” criterion for absolute safety. There *is* no absolute safety – or God, or happiness, or ethical harmony – to be found *in* the world of facts that can be stated in language. *Qua* transcendental, happiness is something quite different, as far from being a mere worldly state of affairs as the (imagined) state of absolute safety. It is, rather, a mystical kind of harmony with the world and God, inexpressible and ineffable.

Let me offer one more excursus into Wittgenstein’s ethical and existential writings before moving on to a more explicit consideration of the relations between these views and the Wittgensteinian antitheodicy project described in the introduction. In the slightly later diary notes from 1930-1932 and 1936-1937, available as *Denkbewegungen*, Wittgenstein interestingly sets madness (*Wahnsinn*) and happiness (*Glück*) against each other. If madness doesn’t come, he maintains, that is certainly happy (or, perhaps better, “lucky”), but if it does, he says, I must not flee it. This is because madness, *Wahnsinn*, is the highest judge (*Richter*) of whether my life is right or wrong. While these remarks are considerably later than the *Notebooks*, they can be interestingly read along with the early Tractarian view on happiness.¹⁸ Insofar as

themselves remain nonsensical in their own terms. In the “Lecture on Ethics” Wittgenstein also emphasizes the “cage” of language we run against when trying to put ethics into words. In the famous metaphor, a book on ethics would blow up all other books. Now this lack of self-consistency is a fair worry in any Wittgensteinian investigation, but here we must simply help ourselves to some (admittedly self-referentially inconsistent) Wittgensteinian ideas and look and see how they may figure in the theodicy vs. antitheodicy discussion the paper primarily contributes to. I am happy to leave more detailed treatments of Wittgenstein’s views on *Unsinn* to, e.g., those who want to continue the controversy regarding the “New Wittgenstein” and more traditional (e.g., Kantian) interpretations.

¹⁸ It is also worth emphasizing that whenever Wittgenstein has anything to say about happiness, or about life being right or wrong, he is not just making general philosophical remarks but is also deeply concerned about the fate of *his own* soul, so to speak. According to many, his own life must have been “fiercely unhappy” – as one of his early biographers, Norman Malcolm, puts it (Malcolm 1984, 81). However, as Malcolm and many others remind us, Wittgenstein’s last words in April

only the happy life (or world) is “right”, it is ultimately madness that judges whether I am happy at a transcendental level. This is what Wittgenstein says:

Du sollst so leben, dass Du vor dem Wahnsinn bestehen kannst, wenn er kommt. Und den Wahnsinn sollst du nicht fliehen. Es ist ein Glück, wenn er nicht da ist, aber fliehen sollst Du ihn nicht, so glaube ich mir sagen zu müssen. Denn er ist der strengste Richter (das strengste Gericht) darüber ob mein Leben recht oder unrecht ist; er ist fürchterlich, aber Du sollst ihn dennoch nicht fliehen. Denn Du weisst ja doch nicht, wie Du ihm entkommen kannst, & während Du vor ihm fliehst, benimmst Du Dich ja unwürdig. (D 185-186, July 20, 1937; original emphasis.)

Many of the themes found in the early texts cited above can be seen at work here again, in a somewhat different context. There is again the fundamental ethico-existential concern with living “rightly” – this being an absolute ethical matter for Wittgenstein. Whether or not madness “comes” is, furthermore, somehow absolutely independent of me or my will. It either comes or does not come, depending on whether I have been able to live harmoniously and rightly. If my world is a “happy” world, I (presumably) won’t become mad, but if I do, then this matter is ultimately not up to me but in a way my fate. And the worst thing to do would be to run away from one’s life and fate; such a desperate attempt to escape would amount to a disgraceful, “wrong”, and thus deeply unhappy life. One might be left wondering which one is the worst kind of unhappiness: madness itself (assuming it is happy, or lucky, not to be mad) or the wrongful attempt to flee madness if it does come? It would seem to me that the Wittgensteinian answer would be latter one.

3. Antitheodicy and disharmony

After this sketch of a Wittgensteinian picture of happiness as a kind of metaphysical and theological harmony, it is vitally important to keep in mind that Wittgensteinian antitheodacists, in contrast, emphasize a kind of *disharmony* as a constitutive feature of genuinely religious language-use and of the moral point of view that does not overlook others’ suffering. Religious life, according to thinkers like Phillips, acknowledges that catastrophes may strike us “without rhyme or reason” (Phillips 1977, 119). There is, and can be, no overall harmonious reconciliation with the evil and suffering that characterize human lives in this world. The theodacist search for such metaphysical and theological harmony is immoral – or even itself evil – because it fails to recognize others’ meaningless suffering and the profoundly, irreparably disharmonious world it yields. It is the acknowledgment of disharmony rather

1951 indicated that he had had a “wonderful” life – whatever that ultimately means, or meant. See also Klagge 2011, 153-154.

than harmony that is a necessary feature of the ethical task of living “rightly”. In this sense, truly ethical life, and therefore truly religious life, requires antitheodicy rather than theodicy.¹⁹

It could be protested that this link between theodicy and harmony is not as clear as it seems.²⁰ The antitheodicy need not simply be opposed to the theodicy’s tendency to view the world as “harmonious” in the sense of some easy (e.g., utilitarian or more generally consequentialist) moral structure. Rather, the antitheodicy criticism of theodicies charges the theodicy for viewing the world as if it could be evaluated in moral terms at all (at a general metaphysical or theological level). Moreover, the antitheodicy position can itself be claimed to be committed to a kind of harmony precisely in the denial that the world is pre-structured in moral terms independently of the individual’s own perspective. It is precisely by rejecting any simple harmonious solution that the antitheodicy implicitly if not explicitly claims to be able to find a more genuinely harmonious meta-level position. We should definitely acknowledge this possibility of rephrasing the antitheodicy approach in terms of harmony. Even so, I believe there is – precisely due to this availability of a harmony-postulating interpretation of antitheodicy – a tension right at the heart of the antitheodicy argument, and I want to take some steps toward analyzing this tension.

Now, the Wittgensteinian antitheodicy may reason as follows. Insofar as Wittgenstein’s transcendental view of happiness – of the world of the “happy man” – in its deepest sense pertains to the Kantian question of whether I am *worthy or unworthy of happiness*, it looks like the truly happy person, or the person whose happiness has a truly moral character, must not rest satisfied with a harmonious theodicy picture of the world but must take seriously the disharmony that the irresolvable problem of evil and suffering creates. In brief, others’ sufferings and the metaphysical disharmony they bring along with them to the world (to my world) are inevitably a challenge to *my* being able to be happy – a challenge that, presumably, can never be fully and completely resolved. Let us therefore take a look at what Wittgenstein writes in his notebook entry on August 13, 1916:

Angenommen, der Mensch könnte seinen Willen nicht betätigen, müsste aber alle Not dieser Welt leiden, was könnte ihn dann glücklich machen?

Wie kann der Mensch überhaupt glücklich sein, da er doch die Not dieser Welt nicht abwehren kann?

Eben durch das Leben der Erkenntnis.

¹⁹ On moral antitheodicy protesting against the illusion of harmony, see, in addition to the Wittgensteinian philosophers’ contributions already cited, e.g., Sachs 2011; Betenson 2016; as well as (again) Kivistö and Pihlström 2016. (The latter work also contains numerous references to mainstream theodicy discussions that antitheodicy protests against.)

²⁰ I am again indebted to an anonymous referee in developing and responding to this objection.

Das gute Gewissen ist das Glück, welches das Leben der Erkenntnis gewährt.

Das Leben der Erkenntnis ist das Leben, welches glücklich ist, der Not der Welt zum Trotz.

Nur das Leben ist glücklich, welches auf die Annehmlichkeiten der Welt verzichten kann.

Ihm sind die Annehmlichkeiten der Welt nur so viele Gnaden des Schicksals.

This is, admittedly, puzzling. The “life of knowledge” (or “life of cognition”) *could* be seen in a theodist light as a life based on some kind of theoretical knowledge explaining and justifying the fact that there is evil and suffering, or (for religious believers) explaining and justifying the fact that God allows the world he created to contain so much evil and suffering. But it could also, alternatively, be seen in an antitheodist light as a life acknowledging (that is, “*anerkennen*” rather than “*erkennen*”)²¹ the irreducibility of (others’) sufferings that have no meaning, function, or justification – sufferings that could “educate” one to believe in God (CV 86, an entry in 1950), but on the other hand might also equally well educate one out of one’s belief in God.

Only *such* knowledge (or, rather, acknowledgment) could then bring true happiness with itself – but then such happiness, though transcendental, would only be limited or temporary, available only with the dramatic qualification that there is so much unhappiness around us. Such genuine happiness would therefore, so it seems, immediately have to cancel itself out. One could only be (transcendentally) happy by being (empirically) deeply unhappy about the unhappiness of others. As we might paraphrase Martin Luther King’s famous remark on justice and injustice, unhappiness (or suffering) anywhere is a threat to happiness everywhere. The more philosophical variant of this thought is Emmanuel Levinas’s (2006) insistence on the idea that the only ethically acceptable “meaning” or “sense” of suffering lies in my suffering for the suffering of the other; suffering has a sense only in my suffering because the other suffers. And even a single instance of such meaningless suffering would have to make *me* – the only moral subject according to Wittgenstein’s demanding first-personal picture of ethics – suffer enormously.²²

Ilham Dilman suggests a plausible reading of the *Notebooks* passage just quoted. It is, we saw Wittgenstein claiming, only “through the life of knowledge” that even a person who cannot ward off the misery of the world can be happy. Here, Dilman (1974, 180) says, “knowledge” is close to what

²¹ The crucial distinction between *knowing* and *acknowledging* has been emphasized by Cavell (1979), in particular. See also, e.g., Sachs 2011. *Anerkennung* is usually translated as “recognition”, which is conceptually close to, though not identical with, “acknowledgment”.

²² Accordingly, when Wittgenstein in the oft-cited remark in *Culture and Value* (c. 1944) speaks about the “greatest despair” (“*die höchste Not*”) an individual can experience, maintaining that even the whole world cannot be in a greater despair than an individual soul, a person who feels her-/himself to be “lost”, this could be read as his personal reflection on his own despair but also as a detached reflection on the way in which we should always recognize others’ despair.

Plato meant by “knowledge” or “wisdom”, a necessary condition of which is “detachment”, “renouncing [*verzichten*] the amenities [*Annehmlichkeiten*] of the world”. He continues, in a manner highly relevant to the theodicy vs. antitheodicy discussion:

This [detachment] does not mean indifference to the pain of others. Quite the contrary. For a man who is immersed in a life of worldliness will be relatively deaf to other people’s cries of pain.²³ Detachment is a positive renunciation of such a life which allows the soul to turn to the good, to become sensitive to moral considerations. [...] The condition of such renunciation is love – the kind of love that is present in pity for the afflicted, forgiveness of those who wrong one, gratitude for those who help one, and remorse for the wrong one has done to others. It is this love which both Plato and Wittgenstein see as a form of knowledge – this love which for Wittgenstein is an attitude of the will towards the world as a whole.

It may be called love of the good, and the kind of pity which Dostoyevsky portrays in Sonia is a concrete manifestation of it. In that form it is what usually goes under the name ‘love of one’s neighbour’. The relation between such selfless love and the kind of knowledge in question is internal. (*Ibid.*, 180-181.)

Therefore, Dilman tells us, the kind of happiness Wittgenstein is thinking of in the *Notebooks* is not “indifferent to the misery of the world, though it is one which that misery need not and even, perhaps, cannot destroy” (*ibid.*, 182). It is clear, in any case, that Wittgenstein’s enigmatic remarks on happiness and harmony should make us reflect on the ways in which, or the degree to which, the antitheodicy perspective is available to the one following the compelling ethical line of thought of Wittgenstein’s early philosophy. Is too much emphasis laid on happiness and harmony there? Is the solipsistic detachment of the moral subject too severe, despite Dilman’s admittedly consoling interpretation? What kind of antitheodicy can still be maintained if we follow Wittgenstein in regarding “Live happily!” as the highest ethical command?

Things are not simple, as the basic demand of living “rightly” or of seeing the world “aright” should, arguably, itself be linked to antitheodicy rather than theodicy (as suggested in Kivistö and Pihlström 2016, chapter 6). It is, above all, the task of recognizing and being attentive to others’ suffering that is necessary for living rightly – and thus for happiness – but it is this same task that, when taken seriously, deprives us from happiness. We may perhaps join Dilman (1974, 182) in concluding that the view of

²³ Incidentally, this may be compared to William James’s (1891) memorable phrase, “the cries of the wounded”, arguably highly central in James’s pragmatist antitheodicy (cf. Kivistö and Pihlström 2016, chapter 5).

happiness of Wittgenstein's *Notebooks* invokes "a state of soul which contains its own reward".²⁴ There is nothing external or "outward" in this transcendental happiness – whether or not it is available to the one pursuing antitheodicy. Such a "reward" may, however, be a complex one.

Dilman is right, I believe, in perceiving an important link with the internal happiness of a morally engaged soul and the concept of *love*; after all, Wittgenstein himself (CV, remark in 1948) declares love to be the greatest happiness of a human being. This "love", however, must presumably be the kind of love that is usually denoted by the Greek word *agape*, instead of *eros*, although Wittgenstein's own words may be deliberately ambiguous here. In any event, this kind of Wittgensteinian transcendental picture of happiness and love (of the good) is in striking contrast with the various banalizing treatments of these notions that surround us in contemporary popular culture. Dostoevsky's Sonia (in *Crime and Punishment*) may indeed be full of love, but she does not boast about her love, or her moral character, in the way our narcissistic culture today may encourage us to do, and hence her love (unlike, perhaps, most real-life individuals') remains genuine and uncorrupted.²⁵

4. The transcendental perspective – and a reflexive problem

Wittgenstein's transcendental happiness is, of course, very different from Kant's conception of empirical (pursuit of) happiness, which from the Kantian point of view is morally irrelevant.²⁶ It is, as we have seen, much closer to what Kant calls our worthiness of being happy, because the basic idea of our relation to our (the) world being "right" or "wrong" is built into the notion of the world of the happy (or unhappy) person. This clearly requires a transcendental perspective for the development of any Wittgensteinian account of these matters. Only from a properly transcendental standpoint does the question of how to live "rightly" or how to see the world "aright" arise in the sense in which Wittgenstein seeks to deal with these questions in the early writings and the later diary entries, and it is this very standpoint that the later Wittgensteinian paradigm in antitheodicy invokes, even though it often seems that Wittgenstein-inspired antitheodicy philosophers of religion like Phillips are either unaware of their own transcendental tendencies or actively resist any Kantian readings of Wittgenstein.

Now, it should be clear (on the basis of the materials quoted in the two previous sections) that from a transcendental perspective, Wittgensteinian harmony – or happiness – cannot be found *in* the world,

²⁴ Dilman (1974, 183-184) thus also sees Wittgenstein (as well as, among others, Simone Weil) as returning to the Socratic view that the evil person is necessarily unhappy, while the one who "dedicates his life to justice" is by necessity happy, "no matter how the world treats him". See the quotation from Peter Winch above in a footnote to section 2.

²⁵ Wittgenstein is known for his high appreciation of Dostoevsky (as well as Tolstoy). *The Brothers Karamazov* is, of course, a standard reference in moral antitheodicy protesting against any allegedly harmonious reconciliation with pain and suffering. See, e.g., Gleeson 2012.

²⁶ Also recall, however, Kant's concept of the *summum bonum* (see above).

any more than the metaphysical (transcendental) subject, or God, or value can. Nor, however, can it be found anywhere outside the world, either, as there *is* no such “outside” anywhere; we might say that Wittgenstein’s philosophy, even his ethics and mystical thought, remains thoroughly this-worldly (cf. Brockhaus 1991). The theodist confusion, based on a kind of metaphysical (non-transcendental) realism, is to look for these “higher” values either in the world or in some imagined supernatural realm beyond the world. As the Wittgensteinian antitheodist may articulate her/his criticism of theodicy in terms of the kind of early-Wittgensteinian transcendental picture in addition to the (more typical) late-Wittgensteinian account emphasizing the “grammar” of religious language-use, a crucial element of this Wittgenstein-inspired criticism of theodicies should be a criticism of the realistic assumptions that do not take seriously the need to consider these issues transcendently.²⁷

However, we now have to face the further worry already acknowledged above in section 3. The antitheodist her-/himself may at the transcendental meta-level view the world in a “harmonious” light, thus “seeing the world aright” (cf. TLP 6.54) precisely when seeing it disharmoniously in its irreducible plurality of meaningless suffering. In this sense, antitheodicism may lead to transcendental (not empirical) happiness. It is precisely the perception that (to paraphrase Martin Luther King again) suffering and unhappiness anywhere are threats to happiness everywhere that may eventually lead us to the *meta-level harmony and happiness* of seeing the world rightly, of taking others’ suffering seriously wherever and whenever it occurs. Or at least this is a line of argument we might imagine a Wittgensteinian antitheodist thinker developing. But then we might become “too happy” while remaining at the detached meta-level. We might, indeed, be detached in such transcendental happiness without ever really attending to the empirical, first-hand experiences of suffering that we were hoping to acknowledge. Dilman’s morally serious detachment associated with a “love of the good” might just be an ideal we will never achieve.

It is suggested in Kivistö and Pihlström (2016, 282-283) that the antitheodist world is *not* the world of the Wittgensteinian “happy man” but closer to the world as experienced by the “sick soul” William James (1902) invokes in his *Varieties of Religious Experience*.²⁸ This suggestion can be backed up by appreciating what Leszek Kolakowski says on happiness:

In short, the word ‘happiness’ does not seem applicable to divine life. But nor is it applicable to human beings. This is not just because we experience suffering. It is also

²⁷ The realism issue is considered in relation to theodicies in, e.g., Kivistö and Pihlström 2017.

²⁸ Wittgenstein’s high regard for James is also well known and documented (see, e.g., Goodman 2002). It is generally known that Wittgenstein read James’s *Varieties* carefully. The ways in which Jamesian ideas may have reached Wittgensteinian philosophers’ antitheodist thought via Wittgenstein himself would still require further historical investigation, however. Again, this paper is obviously not a study of James.

because, even if we are not suffering at a given moment, even if we are able to experience physical and spiritual pleasure and moments beyond time, in the 'eternal present' of love, we can never forget the existence of evil and the misery of the human condition. We participate in the suffering of others; we cannot eliminate the anticipation of death or the sorrows of life. (Kolakowski 2012, 213-214.)

One can hardly find a more straightforward and appropriate account of the antitheodist denial of eventual harmony and happiness – a denial that, however, itself takes place at the transcendental level (though this is not Kolakowski's own way of putting the matter). Kolakowski concludes:

Happiness is something we can imagine but not experience. If we imagine that hell and purgatory are no longer in operation and that all human beings, every single one without exception, have been saved by God and are now enjoying celestial bliss, lacking nothing, perfectly satisfied, without pain or death, then we can imagine that their happiness is real and that the sorrows and suffering of the past have been forgotten. Such a condition can be imagined, but it has never been seen. It has never been seen. (Ibid., 214-215.)

Now, as compelling as this is, the worry raised above is the following (cf. also Kivistö and Pihlström 2016, 283-284). Insofar as theodicies operate with the idea of a harmonious total world picture – an imagined condition of happiness in which all sufferings will finally be eliminated, at least post mortem – isn't the antitheodist who reminds us that disharmony will be with us to stay also still attempting to offer a meta-level harmonious total picture, albeit an antitheodist one, that is, her/his own (only different) version of how to see the world aright and how to live rightly and to be happy in the transcendental Wittgensteinian sense? Doesn't antitheodicy, thus, lead to the very same predicament it found theodicism guilty of, the pretension of happiness and harmony, only at the meta-level?²⁹

There is no easy or straightforward answer to such a self-reflective worry. We just have to keep asking ourselves these questions. *This* is part of our concern with living rightly – with happiness. A world in which we were able to resolve this matter would indeed be too harmonious for us.

5. Conclusion

²⁹ Admittedly, theodicies typically seek harmony *in* the world. A Wittgensteinian refusal to find harmony *in* the world while still seeking to find it in one's transcendental attitude to the world as a whole might thus, despite its pursuit of harmony, be compatible with antitheodicy and its insistence on recognizing worldly disharmony. However, the worry here is that even the meta-level pursuit of harmony might in the end indirectly contribute to the theodist project – or at least the antitheodist ought to be aware of this potential risk.

Our final problem is, then, the following. Is the transcendental move we have taken a betrayal of the antitheodist pursuit of taking evil and meaningless suffering ethically seriously and of recognizing the suffering other (who may never be able to reach happiness)? This question returns, preventing any full, complete harmony – even transcendental.

Let us close with a somewhat disturbing thought. Wittgenstein, who in the *Tractatus* had maintained that the “solution” to the problem of life (“*Problem des Lebens*”) can only be seen in the disappearance of the problem – something that could be seen as a variant of transcendental happiness, of living in harmony – later remarks that the one who lives rightly does not experience the problem of life as hopelessness or even as really problematic but as a kind of joy, as if a halo were surrounding one’s life (CV, remark in 1937). If our problem of life has something (anything) to do with our inability to reconcile ourselves with the suffering there is in the world – especially others’ suffering – how can we possibly say that, even at a transcendental meta-level, this irreconcilability would take the form of a *joy*? This would be a version of the claim that our seeing the world aright – even when this means seeing it in the full irreducibility of suffering it incorporates – would amount to transcendental happiness. Wittgensteinian antitheodicism would then collapse back to immoral theodicism.

I have not raised these issues in order to resolve them. Rather, I think they are irresolvable. I also believe that appreciating Wittgenstein’s remarks – the ones cited and analyzed here, as well as many others – may help us recognize their irresolvability. But this requires that we do not merely seek to interpret Wittgenstein himself but actually attempt to do something with what he wrote, to work on our own problems of life, to engage in philosophy as the kind of “work with oneself”, on “how one sees things”, that Wittgenstein himself valued. There is no guarantee we can do this. One’s reading of Wittgenstein may bring one to the point he expressed about his attitude to Shakespeare: “I could only stare in wonder [...] never do anything with him” (CV 84).

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