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The Ethical Character of Philosophy: A Wittgensteinian Case

Abstract

Philosophy has in the last analysis an ethical character. It hints so a practical discipline even though it is generally known as rational or theoretical. It is ethical and accordingly practical even in its most technical or analytical forms exampled by Wittgensteinian philosophy. Wittgenstein's both former and later philosophies services in the final remark to the question of how we should live. That is why even Wittgensteinian philosophy is also ethical and so practical.

Key Terms

Wittgenstein, Philosophy, Ethical.

Felsefenin Etik Karakteri: Wittgenstein Örneği

Özet

Felsefe son çözümlemede etik bir karakter taşır. Her ne kadar kendisi çoğulukla akılsal ve kuramsal olarak bilinse de, o aslında pratik bir disiplini de imler. Wittgensteinci felsefe tarafından örneklenen analitik ve dolayısıyla en teknik formunda bile etiğe ilişkin ve dolayısıyla pratik bir karatker taşır. Wittgenstein'ın hem ilk hem son dönem felsefeleri sonuçta nasıl yaşamalıyız sorusuna hizmet ederler. Bu nedenle Wittgensteinci felsefe bile etiğe dair ve dolayısıyla pratik karakterli felsefedir.

Anahtar Terimler

Wittgenstein, Felsefe, Etik-olmaklık.

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Exposition of the Question

The basic question of philosophy is that of how we should live. Philosophy is a practical discipline even though it itself is known generally as theoretical or rational or conceptual. It is practical even in its other basic sub disciplines i.e. ontology, epistemology besides ethics. Because of the fact that its final question is an ethical one, i.e. how we should live, both epistemological and ontological questions are as functional or sensible as they could support the ethical question. The same claim can even be asserted for the most technical forms or comprehensions of philosophy or at least seems as the most far from ethical or practical spheres of life.

Wittgenstein's both former (logical analysis or construction of the empirical world) and later (grammatical analysis of –everyday/ordinary- language) philosophies can for example be given in order to exemplify such an assertion. It can even be asserted, in other words, Wittgenstein's conception(s) of philosophy is (are) ethical and so practical within the framework of the analytical tradition of which Wittgenstein is a predominant name.

In order to discuss such an assertion one should look first at the analytical tradition to which he belongs. Does analytic philosophy, for example have not really any concern with the ethical sphere of philosophy? One will have to look at for this point the epistemological aspect of philosophy. Does or can philosophy produce any (sort of) knowledge on which one could ground his ethical principles? This is also not the case. Answering this question in some way is not enough too. Without opening or deepening any epistemological dispute, and even though it is seem as including an empiricist implication, when the epistemological question is answered affirmatively, the next question arises from the answer. One should consider the point at this step that if there is any connection between analytical conception of philosophy, i.e. any kind of logical or grammatical analysis of language, and physical or empirical realm, i.e., ontology. It can be asserted here that knowledge could only be produced or abstracted from a realm of objects –even though again the empiricist implication of this statement. Is analytical philosophy, in this context just an activity of logical or grammatical analysis of some propositions or sentences? Or is it more than that?

Wittgensteinian Case

Wittgenstein draws, in this context in his first philosophy, i.e. in his *Tractatus*, a border line between two worlds in which one can speak within the first one and one must be silent within the other. He seems in this separation as if dividing the empirical, that means one can speak of it, and metaphysical sides of the world, about which one must be silent. It seems just as an epistemological separation, knowable clearly and unknowable. An additional question can also be asked here: What may be the reason of such an epistemological separation? Can it be argued for example that he wishes to draw an exact picture of the world in which he lives in some way? "A philosopher"

because for him "resembles a painter who is trying to draw all details" (YD[1]. 10). He draws just as a logical picture of the knowable world in his *Tractatus*.

Such questions or connections could also be read within Wittgenstein's second conception of philosophy. In his later conception, philosophy is a sort of investigation directs its efforts to language, i.e. to the misunderstandings concerning the use of language. Language is yet an instrument whose 'tools' are concepts. Then, according to Wittgenstein the formation or construction of concepts is not just a matter of language, and thus the source of concepts does not concern to philosophy, since concepts are connected with the fact of nature. After that, we have been informed about the relationships between facts, words and concepts in this way: "If the formation of concepts can be explained by facts of nature, should we not be interested, not in grammar, but rather in that in nature which is the basis of grammar? Our interest certainly includes the correspondence between concepts and general facts of nature."[2] Also it is suggested consequently that a change in a language-game, i.e., a change in the use of the words implying concepts, may lead a change into the concepts which are connected with the nature, or the facts: "If you are not certain of any fact, you can not be certain of the meaning of your words either."[3] Accordingly any "grammatical investigation" attempting to be rid of a particular puzzlement concerning the use of language is and/or should be related also to the contents of concepts. That is to say, such an investigation will necessarily drive one to count the material things or facts which consist in the contents of concepts even though one is not doing natural science. Accordingly philosophy will to be related indirectly with ontology. That means philosophy goes beyond just a linguistic or grammatical analysis of (everyday) language. In other words, it concerns with the order of things outside of language in order to analyze or reconstruct the order of outer world. A philosopher, even he is an analytical philosopher, will able to extract an outline in terms of how he would live in such a world or nature. A philosopher is, in terms of Wittgenstein, a person who desires or adopts primarily peace of thought (YD. 55).

As to the question again of whether philosophy produce any (kind of) knowledge, in Wittgenstein's conception, at first, a philosophical inquiry, or a "philosophical investigation", is an inquiry intending not to produce knowledge.[4] Rather, since philosophical problems or questions are the resultant of certain confusions or of "mental discomfort" relating to the use of ordinary language, philosophy contends just to describe some "ill" cases and to dissolve philosophical problems by revealing their sources.[5] So, any philosophical question may have a different source or characteristic in accordance with the grammar of the word or expression resulted in that question. That is why there may be different methods of 'solution' for each question or each sort of questions by means of which one can gain a clear view of the use, or

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[1] "YD" refers to "Yan Değiniler" which is given in Bibliography
[2] Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Investigations*, p. 230
[3] Wittgenstein, L. *On Certainity*, p. 10
[4] Wiitgenstein, L., *The Blue and Brown Books*, p. 17
[5] Wittgenstein, L., *Philosophical Investigations*, p, 48

grammar of that word. Accordingly philosophy bears, Wittgenstein suggests, just upon language rather than the material objects.

Wittgenstein seems, with such a conception to want to be free from all philosophical questions. He suggests for that if we could conceive clearly the grammar of our language then there will remain no philosophical question. However when we consider philosophical questions not just as a matter of language but also a matter of knowledge, i.e., critical examination of the propositions of other sorts of inquiries or of other disciplines of knowledge, then, I think, we cannot speak fairly about a case in which all questions of philosophy disappear. That means, even when we understand clearly the grammar of our language there will still be philosophical questions and so philosophy itself. Therefore philosophy again is or could not be limited just as an activity of analysis. Philosophy exceeds by this way to the world of ontology and accordingly to the world of living.

In this context, even Wittgensteinian conception of philosophy –his both former and later philosophies- is practical though they seem as logical analysis of propositions or grammatical analysis of language. In other words, even in the most technical or logical sense or form, philosophy itself can be fairly reduced into the practical and so ethical sense or form. Any ethical principle or axiom because should bear on an *understanding* about the *world* or the *universe*. Accordingly, any ethical norm or principle could only be abstracted from a certain epistemological background describing how the world or the universe is like.

Such a consideration of Wittgensteinian philosophy within analytical tradition can also be exemplified by another evaluation of Wittgensteinian philosophy.

Soykan begins for example his study on Wittgenstein's first philosophy that means on *Tractatus* with the following sentence: "If a philosopher begins his words with 'the world', then it means that he has some troubles in the world". It could be asked here that what kind of troubles are there and why does such troubles arise form the world as to the subject? According to Soykan, Wittgenstein hopes to explain his own consideration about the world of which he has probably abstracted form his contemplation on it. His world in this sense is a first and unique world standing in front of 'Myself' with the capital 'M'. There are therefore two distinct objects: the world and my independent "Myself". "Myself" is not here a knowable object standing in front of the subject. I can stand on the opposite of any object but not opposite of "Myself". In other words, how the eye does not stand within its field of vision, Wittgenstein himself does not also stand on opposite of the world.[6] Accordingly, Wittgenstein cannot also see the point he touch upon the world and cannot take the world as opposite of himself, just like the case in that an eye cannot see its behind. Because of this reason Wittgenstein cannot say "this is the world". In order to be able to say "this is the world" he must be outside of the world. On the other hand, such a case is at the same time being outside of the language by which he speaks about it. *"The limits of my language* indicate because, at the same time the limits of my own world"* (*Tractatus*, 5.6). Therefore the above proposition "this is the world" cannot be asserted within the limits of neither the actual world nor my own language. Wittgenstein yet, begins his description of his 'logical

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6 Soykan, Ö.N., *Felsefe ve Dil: Wittgenstein Üstüne Bir Araştırma*, p. 19

world' with such a proposition: "The world is everything that is the case" (*Tractatus*, 1). That means he answers in the last analysis the question about how the world is like, whatever the world is like. So, if it will not be a repetition, Wittgenstein has some troubles in the world –even though he seems as drawing 'a logical picture' of the world in his *Tractaus* and this is not so surprise for him.

Soykan gives again some sample expressions from Wittgenstein's second conception of philosophy as to the ethical character of linguistic analysis. "Conceiving a language" means for example "conceiving a style of life" (PI, 23). That means language is not a separate entity from one's living in this or that way. Or in Wittgenstein's words "words have meaning only in terms of a style of life" (PI. 19). Analyzing this or that linguistic phrase or sentence means analysis of this or that form of life, i.e. the question of how one should or should not live. In a similar context "words have a meaning only in a river of life" (BPP II, 687). Such a sentence or an expression as "river of life" finds out a reference neither in *Tractatus* nor in a conception of philosophy assumed as just an analysis of ordinary language. It has a meaning only in poetical realm of meaning. Wittgenstein confesses in the same way his position in philosophy with such words: "I can summarize my position about philosophy in this way: Philosophy *must be* in fact *constructed as poetically...*" (YD. 21) Therefore any consideration related with the technical (logical or linguistic) analysis of language goes beyond its formal limits, i.e. goes into sphere of actual life. For Wittgenstein because "we should not forget: there is an instinctive base of our philosophical sophisticated considerations."(YD. 85) That is why any philosophical attempt touches in the last analysis upon the basic question of how we should live. Such a question is, as a last word an ethical question even though it seems at first sight as other than ethical.

It can also be given some other quotations from his marginal remarks on some topics out of his logical or grammatical conception of philosophy and dated between 1929 and 1951(YD).

1. I think in fact with my pencil, because my mind does not generally know what my hand will write down. (14)

2. The marathon of philosophy is won by the slowest athlete. In other words: by the last athlete who reaches the finish. (33)

3. The language of philosophers is as if the language deformed by a pair of disturbing shoes. (47)

4. Peace of thought: This is the purpose of which a philosopher desires. (55)

5. Book is full of life –not like a human being, but like an ant nest. (72)

6. One could go into the archaic Chaos while he is philosophizing and he could be in a peaceful situation over there. (80)

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