**Skepticism in Wittgenstein and Levinas: The Possibility of Ethical Language**

**Abstract**

A comparison between Wittgenstein and Levinas on skepticism focuses on evaluating speech acts that generate skepticism, or speech acts that make it possible to live with skepticism. The most significant common denominator between Wittgenstein and Levinas’s treatment of skepticism is that they both rarely addressed it directly, and both saw it as non-rationally imposing itself on a person’s thoughts. Neither saw skepticism as a deep philosophical concern, but rather as a relatively minor challenge. Levinas’s statement that: “Skepticism is refutable, but it returns,”[[1]](#footnote-1) also reflects Wittgenstein’s position.

Wittgenstein and Levinas differentiated between two levels of human action: linguistic and ethical-transcendental. Both claimed that action on the transcendental level gives meaning to life. However, while both prioritized the transcendental level, in practice, they came to completely different conclusions: Wittgenstein declared that philosophical inquiry should be avoided on this level, while Levinas put it at the center of his philosophical inquiry. Each faced difficulties created by their respective choices.

The purpose of the current discussion is to show how these difficulties are manifestations of skepticism, and how each philosopher dealt with the problem. Each proposed a solution according to the central principle of his philosophical approach. Wittgenstein developed a therapeutic methodology. Levinas developed a linguistic methodology that includes the tension between what can be expressed, and the transcendental which is inexpressible, using ethical language.

Wittgenstein and Levinas both presented a conception of language that makes it necessary to address skepticism. Although ethics are transcendental, and therefore beyond the limits of language, people nevertheless must use language when they think about ethics. Both philosophers recognized the tension between the existence of concepts that are beyond the limits of language (such as internal states of mind) and the need to express them through language. The present discussion looks at how this ongoing tension causes skepticism to return. After clarifying the source of skepticism, the question arises as to how it can be overcome, and why it keeps returning.

Wittgenstein claimed that it is impossible for any concept or expression to overcome the tension between the transcendental and the factual. In contrast, Levinas, in his last book, proposed three linguistic concepts that make it possible to overcome the gap between internal states of mind and ethics, and language: the saying, the said, and ethical language. Below we will examine the ways each philosopher dealt with skepticism.

**Wittgenstein’s limits: What can be shown and what can be said**

In his book *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, published in 1921, Wittgenstein gave the clearest formulation in Western philosophy for the limits of expressing human thoughts: “A logical picture of facts is a thought. In a proposition, a thought finds an expression that can be perceived by the senses.”[[2]](#footnote-2) Wittgenstein also pointed to a second level of meaning found in a sentence, that which can be shown but not verbally expressed.[[3]](#footnote-3) Towards the end of the book, Wittgenstein clarified: “The subject does not belong to the world: rather, it is a limit of the world.”[[4]](#footnote-4) He specified the areas that lie beyond this limit: logical form, ethics, aesthetics, and God.[[5]](#footnote-5) In his diaries, which contain an early draft of the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein equated God and the meaning of life.[[6]](#footnote-6) Therefore, the meaning of life can be included among the things that Wittgenstein placed outside the limits of language and the world of facts. However, despite Wittgenstein’s precise wording, the *Tractatus* raises the question of how to avoid speaking about these important topics, which lie outside the limits of language. An obvious question is whether Wittgenstein’s imperative means that it is actually impossible to communicate about these subjects, whose justification exists outside the boundaries of language and the world. This seems to call into question Wittgenstein’s philosophical method. Therefore, he proposed the following methodical solution:

‟Skepticism is *not* irrefutable, but obviously nonsensical, when it tries to raise doubts where no questions can be asked. For doubt can exist only where a question exists, a question only where an answer exists, and an answer only where something *can be said.*”[[7]](#footnote-7)

According to Wittgenstein, skepticism casts doubt on things about which one cannot inquire, since they cannot be expressed verbally. In other words, questions about how to avoid discussing or communicating about pressing topics such as ethics and aesthetics are meaningless. Wittgenstein clearly understood that it is impossible to avoid feeling the need to at least attempt to describe what is happening in the subjective space. Internal processes that occur in a person’s mind, such as ethical decisions or feeling pain, cannot be verbalized, according to the *Tractatus*. However, in his later works, Wittgenstein described the resulting tension, and its solution:

How can I even attempt to interpose language between the expression of pain and the pain? Only I can know whether I am really in pain; another person can only surmise it.[[8]](#footnote-8)

An ‘inner process’ stands in need of outward criteria.[[9]](#footnote-9)

The question of how one can apparently describe personal pain using language has a simple answer: a person knows his own pain, and there is no need to verbalize it, and no need to presume one can do so. However, later Wittgenstein acknowledged that internal processes do exist[[10]](#footnote-10) and can be represented in language.[[11]](#footnote-11) Furthermore, it is possible to suggest external criteria, i.e., in language that is understood by all, for verbally describing internal-personal processes.

Wittgenstein is credited as coining the concept of the linguistic turn, with his assertion that all human actions, personal and public, involve language.[[12]](#footnote-12) According to this, language is a condition for every thought or action through which people express intention: “It is only in a language that I can mean something by something.”[[13]](#footnote-13) Furthermore, the possibility of repeating a speech act gives it meaning.[[14]](#footnote-14) Concepts serve as instruments that allow people to ascribe meaning to objects and actions.[[15]](#footnote-15) While Wittgenstein claimed thought and language are interdependent, he also noted inherent difficulties, such as the previously cited example of a person in real pain, with no hope of being able to describe the experience in words. There is an unbridgeable gap between the first person and the second or third person. Even first-person descriptions of internal process, such as feelings, must follow linguistic rules. Wittgenstein proposed an apparent solution to this problem, but tension remained, along with the gap between internal processes and the possibility of describing them in words.[[16]](#footnote-16)

The first major difficulty is the gap between the first-person certainty of what an individual knows and how to embody those feelings and emotions in language.[[17]](#footnote-17) Although the speaker knows without a doubt that he is in pain, it is difficult to express this in words. Wittgenstein described the second difficulty this way:

“The results of philosophy are the discovery of some piece of plain nonsense and **the bumps that the understanding has got by running up against the limits of language.** They - these bumps a make us see the value of that discovery.”[[18]](#footnote-18)

Wittgenstein dealt with this gap and tension by describing philosophy as therapy, the purpose of which is to address people’s problems and troubles, without claiming to be able to definitively solve them all, an impossible goal.

We don’t want to refine or complete the system of rules for the use of our words in unheard-of ways. […] This simply means that the philosophical problems should *completely* disappear. The real discovery is the one that enables me to break off philosophizing when I want to. - The one that gives philosophy peace, so that it is no longer tormented by questions which bring *itself* in question. […] There is not a single philosophical method, though there are indeed methods, different therapies, as it were.[[19]](#footnote-19) The philosopher treats a question; like an illness.[[20]](#footnote-20)

Wittgenstein’s parallel between philosophy and therapy can be applied to the context of skepticism, based on his view that skepticism is an emotional problem not a logical one. However, Wittgenstein’s statement about pain shows his awareness that “acceptance” does not provide a satisfactory answer to the problems he formulated. Furthermore, throughout his philosophical inquiries, Wittgenstein proposed accepting and acknowledging the limitations of what can and cannot be conceptualized in language. His classification of skepticism as “nonsense” was controversial in later research and writings on the subject. It is possible to make a sweeping statement:

“The problem of skepticism informs all of Wittgenstein’s writing, from the remarks on solipsism in the *Tractatus*, to the claims about rule-following put forward in the *Philosophical Investigations*, and right up to his final notebooks dealing with G. E. Moore’s (1925; 1939) famous commonsense response to skepticism, published as *On Certainty*.”[[21]](#footnote-21)

However, in factual and quantitative terms, Wittgenstein rarely addressed skepticism directly. He found it difficult to come to terms with the fact that it is not possible for the beliefs on which people’s lives are based to be fully stabilized. Living with uncertainty leads to skepticism, or similar afflictions. The role of philosophy is to deal with this predicament, by preparing people to accept they will not be able to find or create something absolute and final to serve as an anchor. People must accept or formulate “hinges” on which their life will hang, in order to function, while simultaneously being aware of the possibility that these will be challenged.[[22]](#footnote-22)

This proposition is the focus of Wittgenstein’s final book *On Certainty*.[[23]](#footnote-23) It should be noted that Wittgenstein did not edit the book, and that the editors chose the title. They thought its main point was to address skepticism, even though Wittgenstein only referred to skepticism directly one time:

But is it an adequate answer to the skepticism of the idealist, […] to say that “There are physical objects” is nonsense? […] This assertion, or its opposite is a misfiring attempt to express what can’t be expressed like that. And that it does misfire can be shewn; but that isn’t the end of the matter. We need to realize that what presents itself to us as the first expression of a difficulty, or of its solution, may yet not be correctly expressed at all.[[24]](#footnote-24) The difficulty is to realize the groundlessness of our believing.[[25]](#footnote-25)

Although Wittgenstein apparently “only” discussed the physical essence, the statement is actually about everything that can’t be expressed. Wittgenstein described the attempt to express the inexpressible, which causes inexplicable mental anguish. This is another example of “bumps that the understanding has got by running up against the limits of language.” In fact, the problem is recognizing that all beliefs have an imperfect basis. Wittgenstein advocated recognizing that the foundation of one’s life may change: “The mythology may change back into a state of flux, the river-bed of thoughts may shift.”[[26]](#footnote-26)

In conclusion, Wittgenstein’s approach was complex. On the one hand, he saw skepticism as nonsense, since it represents an unwillingness to recognize the limits of thought and language, of what can and cannot be expressed. On the other hand, he said that people must recognize that their beliefs and the hinges on which their lives hang can change and even be dismantled. According to Wittgenstein, for humans, certainty is always ad hoc. However, there are absolutes, whose origin and consistency are transcendental, such as logic, God, ethics, and aesthetics.

Levinas agreed with Wittgenstein about the transcendental nature of ethics and divinity, as well as the impossibility of describing them. However, Levinas proposed a concept of language that makes it possible to express the transcendental in everyday life, without describing its essence.

**The relationships between ethics and language in Levinas’s writings**

The starting point for a comparison between Wittgenstein and Levinas on the subject of skepticism, is that both philosophers described the tension between the idea that ethics are transcendental and therefore cannot be described, and the assertion that every human action is embodied in language. They mainly differ in that Wittgenstein made this assertion from the beginning, whereas Levinas arrived at this conclusion in retrospect, in a somewhat contrived manner. However, both recognized the existence of the tension.

From this fundamental tension, another arises, namely that humans need to express indescribable ideas, and therefore must develop a linguistic system for doing so. Wittgenstein chose the therapeutic method of acceptance, whereas Levinas chose a series of abstract phrases and verbs that do not define the essence of an idea, but are action-oriented.[[27]](#footnote-27)

Levinas only directly referred to Wittgenstein once in his writings, in a criticism that will be discussed later. However, his writings are filled with references to the linguistic system, and the relationship between it and the ethical order. According to Levinas, ethics are the basis for human existence, and he described ethical action and the linguistic system as interdependent. This may be seen as a source for skepticism in Levinas’ approach. However, he described the source of skepticism as independent of this tension.

The current discussion will focus on the answer Levinas offered regarding the tensions Wittgenstein described in his writings. In Levinas’ last book, he shifted his perception from seeing the linguistic system as a problem, to seeing it as a methodological solution. He coined the concepts of the “said” and the “saying” to embody this solution.

While Wittgenstein placed ethical decisions outside the boundaries of language and in the realm of the subject’s actions, Levinas formulated an unequivocal ethical obligation for every person, despite the impossibility of articulating its essence:

The Other becomes my neighbor precisely through the way the face summons me, calls for me, begs for me, and in so doing recalls my responsibility, and calls me into question. Responsibility for the Other, for the naked face of the first individual to come along. A responsibility that goes beyond what I may or may not have done to the Other or whatever acts I may or may not have committed, as if I were devoted to the other man before being devoted to myself. [[28]](#footnote-28)

This ethical obligation includes responsibility, sensitivity, and dedication to the needs of others, as they are presented to him. Levinas left no room for skepticism about the primacy of the ethical responsibility to others. This takes precedence over developing oneself, or any other value. Alongside their differences, there is a clear similarity between Wittgenstein and Levinas.[[29]](#footnote-29)

As mentioned, in the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein listed three areas, aside from logic, that cannot be expressed in language: ethics, aesthetics, and religious belief.[[30]](#footnote-30) Ethics and religious belief are the two central axes in Levinas’s philosophy. As with Wittgenstein, they cannot be fundamentally based on phenomenology, logic, or language.

The current discussion aims to clarify an issue that has not yet been discussed in previous research, regarding a question that Wittgenstein raised in relation to pain, first-person certainty, and the inability to express ethics in language. Wittgenstein’s question was whether the inability to describe the essence of ethics implies that one must avoid any discussion about how an ethical choice can be made.

Levinas disagreed with Wittgenstein and proposed a different question:

A putting in question, in effect, in the demand of the face that lays claim to me. However, I cannot enter this by questioning myself, in the theoretical mode of a proposition within a statement. Rather this is a question where I enter strictly obliged to responsibility for the mortality of the other man […]. This is a putting in question before the death of the other […] This putting in question, comes to me from the face of the other who, in his mortality, tears me from the solid ground on which, as a simple individual, I posit myself […]. This is a question that does not await a theoretical response in the guise of “information.” It is a question more ancient than that which tends toward the response, and thence perhaps toward new questions, themselves **older than the famous questions that, according to Wittgenstein, have no meaning except where responses are possible (as if the death of the other man posed no question). This is, rather, a question that appeals to responsibility.** […] Responsibility is not the privation of knowledge, of comprehension, of grasping and holding, but ethical proximity in its irreducibility to knowledge, in its sociality.[[31]](#footnote-31)

Levinas’ sole mention of Wittgenstein neatly summarized the controversy: the ethical obligation is not formulated in words, yet it presents people with existential questions of primary importance. These questions clearly and definitively exist, although it is not possible to offer a theoretical response to them in words, and their answer does not lie in the realm of knowledge. Each person is presented with a question by the “face” of another. This is not a theoretical question, since the death of the other cannot be ignored.

Levinas claimed that an individual is not put in question with a sentence, verb, or other grammatical-linguistic means. The “I” is put in question when required to respond to the possibility of the death of another. This call for responsibility towards the other undermines a person’s place, and obliges him to act. Levinas mentions Wittgenstein ironically, claiming that this question is more ancient than those posed by Wittgenstein, which are not worth addressing. Levinas’ questions are not answered with new knowledge or a different perception, but by taking responsibility. This is embodied in ethical proximity in the social space, which is larger than the individual space, because it includes the Other.

Levinas rejected Wittgenstein’s claim that one should to avoid posing questions that have no logical basis, because their answer will not be based on factual knowledge. Levinas claimed, in the quote above, that people are faced with existential questions, but neither the questions nor their answers are based on logical knowledge. During the course of this disagreement, the two philosophers agreed that ethics and ethical choices are outside the boundaries of language.

Levinas ignored an important issue. Although Wittgenstein claimed that it is not possible to describe the justification for an ethical choice, he did not deny the existence of ethical choices. On the contrary: in the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein asserted that a person has the option of choosing a bad or good action.[[32]](#footnote-32) Moreover, a person’s choice can shape his world.[[33]](#footnote-33)

Levinas, on the other hand, claimed that ethics takes precedence over the possibility of choice. In my humble opinion, this claim is flawed: it is a transcendental belief, not a factual one. A person is not forced to prioritize ethics over choice. One can choose to either obey or ignore an ethical obligation.

In his book *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein devoted considerable attention to the nature of pain and the possibility of its expression. Although he left ethics out of this discussion, in accordance with his approach in the *Tractatus*, he described in a single sentence how a suffering person should be treated. A person who witnesses suffering is expected to comfort the sufferer, but with a look, not words:

If someone has a pain in his hand, then the *hand* does not say so (unless it writes it), and **one does not comfort the hand, but the sufferer: one looks into his eyes**.[[34]](#footnote-34) The human body is the best picture of the human soul.[[35]](#footnote-35)

Surprisingly, in the second part of *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein placed linguistic study at the center of philosophical activity. He presented a complex relationship between body and mind. While a person cannot be reduced to just a body, nevertheless body language may express what is occurring in the mind more accurately than any verbal description. The common denominator that emerges is skepticism about the possibility of expressing meaning through language, not only for the areas that Wittgenstein declared out of bounds in the *Tractatus*, but also for states of mind in general.

I would like to note that in the works of both Wittgenstein and Levinas, skepticism remains behind the scenes, in terms of the number of direct references to it, and in terms of its place in their philosophies. The primary difference between them pertains to the ability to describe ethics in language. Wittgenstein consistently opposed this possibility. In his last book, Levinas proposed the possibility of ethical language, but avoided ontological language. Some attribute this to Derrida’s critique of the ontologies of language in *Totality and Infinity*.[[36]](#footnote-36) In a 1988 interview, Levinas emphasized that he intentionally changed his perception of language in *Otherwise than Being*.[[37]](#footnote-37) He proposed a linguistic methodology that links speech acts with ethical acts. It has no ontological characteristics, only methodological characteristics. These are consistent with the characteristics proposed by Wittgenstein, although this is unconscious, or at least not explicitly stated. The concept of ethical language, which hints at an ontological aspect of language, appears only twice in the book, while methodological concepts appear many times. Two core concepts are the “said” (*le dit*) and the “saying” (*le dire*):

Saying states and thematizes the said, but signifies it to the other, a neighbor, with a signification that has to be distinguished from that borne by words in the said. This signification to the other occurs in proximity. Proximity is quite distinct from every other relationship and has to be conceived as a responsibility for the other; it might be called humanity, or subjectivity, or self.[[38]](#footnote-38)

The concept of signification functions on two levels: literal and transcendental. On the literal level, there is a transformative relationship between the said and the saying. On the transcendental level, proximity indicates responsibility. Although both terms have a denotative meaning, they also reflect linguistic and ontological meanings. It is therefore possible to understand Simon Critchley’s claim that Levinas’s conception of language remained ontological, even in his last book.[[39]](#footnote-39)

**Coping with skepticism with the “saying” and the “said”**

As the truth of what does not enter into a theme, it is produced out of time or in two times without entering into either of them, as an endless critique, or skepticism, which in a spiraling movement makes possible the boldness of philosophy, destroying the conjunction into which its saying and its said continually enter. […] The unsayable saying lends itself to the said, to the ancillary indiscretion of the abusive language that divulges or profanes the unsayable. […] But one can go back to this signification of the saying, this responsibility and substitution, only from the said and from the question: ‘What is it about,’a question already within the said in which everything shows itself.[[40]](#footnote-40)

Alongside Levinas’ terminology of the saying and the said, his term ethical language indicates tension and raises the question: Can language can be used for an ethical purpose, despite the impossibility of describing the essence of ethics in language? The current discussion points out that the terms the “saying” and the “said” reflect the tension between other pairs of contrasting terms in Levinas’s writings: transcendental and real, sincerity and betrayal, temporal and non-temporal, expressible and inexpressible. This tension is preserved on the verbal level, when ethical language operates through the synergistic and simultaneous speech acts of the saying and the said. As can be seen in Levins’ words quoted at the beginning of this section, the saying is indeed unsayable. But on the literal level, the saying merges with the said. This helps create a back-and-forth relationship of signification of the saying, and of responsibility and substitution.

Methodologically, this recalls other pairs of contrasting terms that de Saussure used to characterize the linguistic system. Levinas applied this to the ethical context, although the “said” refers to the linguistic system. The “saying” is abstract and of transcendent origin, while the “said” is tangible and of human origin. However, Levinas called both concepts ancillary and emphasized the correlation between them.[[41]](#footnote-41)

The said is the concrete embodiment in language that makes the saying accessible. The significant change is that Levins sees the concrete embodiment as a betrayal, while de Saussure thought it was the proper realm for investigation. When Levinas described the action of saying, he used verbs that describe a speech action such as “states,” “thematizes,” and “signifies”:

Saying states and thematizes the said, but signifies it to the other, a neighbor, with a signification that has to be distinguished from that borne by words in the said. This signification to the other occurs in proximity. Proximity is quite distinct from every other relationship, and has to be conceived as a responsibility for the other; it might be called humanity, or subjectivity, or self.[[42]](#footnote-42)

The verbs used in reference to the saying express proximity and responsibility towards the Other. They are the essence of humanity and self-subjectivity, according to Levinas. Just as there is tension and interdependence between the saying and the said, there is also interdependence between the Other and the subjective self at its peak. The contrasts create the sought-after philosophical truth. de Saussure claimed that it is not possible to separate the pairs of contrasting terms that characterize the linguistic system. For Levinas, the contrasting pairs constitute a whole. This tension gives rise to returning skepticism. But the acceptance Wittgenstein proposed may be useful in dealing with the tensions in Levinas’s thought.

Essentially, these tensions can be understood through Wittgenstein’s approach and the claims he made. In the *Tractatus,* Wittgenstein expressed complete confidence in the existence of the transcendental dimension, despite the impossibility of expressing it in language. In his later works, he similarly expressed a firm belief in the existence of internal processes, such as personally experienced physical pain, although these internal processes cannot be expressed in language either.[[43]](#footnote-43)

Several scholars addressed the tension inherent in Levinas’ concept of ethical language. According to Paul Davis, Levinas perceived ethical language as essential to the philosophical process of describing an ethical situation, even though such a situation is ‟irreducibly enigmatic […] as a situation of and for which philosophy can give no account […but also; D.L.] unavoidable.”[[44]](#footnote-44)

Davis also noted that Levinas described the paradoxical nature of ethical language, in both of the contexts in which he applied the concept.[[45]](#footnote-45) He claimed that Levinas’ approach made no connection between ethics and language. He cited as proof Levinas’ claim that: ‟The ethical language we resort to does not proceed from a special moral experience, independent of the description developed until then. It comes from the very meaning of approach, which contrasts with knowledge, of the face which contrasts with phenomena.”[[46]](#footnote-46) Davis described ethical speech acts that apparently require a response to an ethical obligation. He also returned to what preceded that obligation, that is: the transcendental.[[47]](#footnote-47) The interpretive solution is interesting. According to Levinas, an ethical language that simultaneously combines the saying and the said operates on the basis of linguistic characteristics.

In bringing out substitution in the saying which is in responsibility, it will then have to justify, starting with this saying which is in substitution, the order of the said, thought, justice and being, and to understand the conditions in which philosophy, in the said, in ontology, can signify truth. It will do so by linking to the alternating fate of skepticism in philosophical thought - refuted and coming back again - the alternatings or diachrony, resisting assemblage, of the *otherwise than being* or transcendence, and its exposition.[[48]](#footnote-48)

It is precisely the encounter with skepticism that enables the expression of justice and truth through the saying and the said. Philosophy is embodied in the said, which can express truth. However, in order to do this, and to deal with the skepticism that continuously emerges and arises anew, it is necessary to express the transcendence or the “otherwise than being,” which is embodied in the saying. The ability to represent the truth embodied in the said is a basic characteristic of language. The correlation between the said and the saying is also a characteristic of language (the ability to link the tangible and the abstract by using linguistic tools). Finally, although Levinas does not make the following claim explicitly, it can be deduced from his description, which was inspired by Wittgenstein: The existence of language does not limit people’s relationship to what lies beyond its borders, but exactly the opposite: it enables it.

Wittgenstein argued that the possibility of discussing beliefs and ethical choices lies beyond the boundaries of language. They cannot be empirically proven, but rather are dependent on a person’s will. Levinas disagreed with this. He wanted to make ethics an obligation, in order to stabilize humanity after the Holocaust. However, even if we accept his premise that ethics are the foundation of philosophy, Levinasian ethics are enigmatic and indescribable in terms of ontology and phenomenology. Therefore, skepticism will inevitably return and change, as Levinas claimed.[[49]](#footnote-49)

Levinas proposed a new meaning for skepticism: the refusal to synchronize the saying and the said. They have a relationship of **affirmation and negation**. To understand this paradoxical situation, one must distinguish between an action that establishes an ethical relationship and an action that negates it in the present by describing it.

Finally, one of the most beautiful passages in Levinas’ writings clarifies how ethical language functions, through the dynamic between the saying and the said. He described how ethical language makes it possible to navigate between the ethical perspective and its expression, as Wittgenstein suggested:

‟In the approach of a face the flesh becomes word, the caress a saying. The thematization of a face undoes the face and undoes the approach. **The mode in which a face indicates its own absence in my responsibility requires a description that can be formed only in ethical language**.”[[50]](#footnote-50)

1. Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. A. Lingis [Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press], p. 168. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuiness [London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961], &3; &3.1. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. “A proposition shows its sense,” (Wittgenstein, *Tractatus,* &4.022); “What can be shown, cannot be said,” (Wittgenstein, *Tractatus,* &4.1212). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus,* & 5.632. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. “In order to be able to represent logical form, we should have to be able to station ourselves with propositions somewhere outside logic, that is to say outside the world” (Wittgenstein, *Tractatus,* &4.12); ‟Ethics cannot be put into words. Ethics is transcendental (Ethics and aesthetics are one and the same.) There are, indeed, things that cannot be put into words. They make themselves manifest. They are what is mystical (Wittgenstein, *Tractatus,* & 6.421); God does not reveal himself in the world (Wittgenstein, *Tractatus,* & 6.432) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. ‟The meaning of life, the meaning of the world, we can call God. Isn't this the reason why men to whom the meaning of life had become clear after long doubting could not say what this meaning consisted in?” (Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Notebooks 1914–1916*, ed. Georg Henrik von Wright and Gertrude E. M. Anscombe, trans. Gertrude E. M. Anscombe [Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1961], p. 73-74). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus,* & 6.51. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 4th ed., ed. P. M. S. Hacker and J. Schulte, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker, and J. Schulte (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), && 245-246. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, &580. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, & 304 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, & 313. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, &23. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, & 35 [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, & 202. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. “Regard the sentence as an instrument, and its sense as its employment,” (Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, && 421) “Language is an instrument. Its concepts are instruments,” (ibid, & 569). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. It seems that the crux of the problem lies in Wittgenstein's claim that people may perceive everything – even colors – differently; ‟The assumption would thus be possible although unverifiable, that one section of mankind had one visual impression of red, and another section another,” (Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, & 272). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Similarly, philosopher John Austin specified three inner states of mind that are difficult to express through speech: feelings, intentions, and thoughts; see John L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words: The William James Lectures Delivered at Harvard University in 1955* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 40. The speech act is based on specific thoughts or feelings, and if these cannot be accurately expressed, their words may be infelicitous. Austin listed three types of infelicities: insincerities, infractions, and breaches (ibid., p. 39). Austin explicitly said that speakers may be aware of the inconsistency between their thoughts or feelings and what they say. He then acknowledged that the difficulty in ascertaining the reasons for this failure stems from an inherent gap between the speakers’ feelings and the listeners’ feelings. The difficulty in knowing with certainty whether the speaker is really saying what he thinks or feels is similar to Austin’s description of the difficulty in understanding what is in other people’s the minds. See John L. Austin, “Other minds,” in *Philosophical Papers*, ed. J. O. Urmson and G. J. Warnock (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1961):44-84. Interestingly, Stanley Cavell claimed that Austin expressed no skepticism in these writings. See Stanley Cavell, (2005) “The scandal of skepticism,” in: S. Cavell (ed.) Philosophy the Day After Tomorrow (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press): 132–154, p. 134. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, & 119 (emphasis mine; D.L.) [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, & 133. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, & 255. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Duncan Prichard, “Wittgenstein on skepticism,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Wittgenstein,* eds. Oskari Kuusela and Marie McGinn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011): 523-549, p. 523. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Wittgenstein developed the concept “hinges” in his later writings, such as *On Certainty*. Later research has extensively investigated the nature of these hinges; see for example: Danièle Moyal-Sharrock, ‘Wittgenstein on Skepticism’ in *Blackwell Companion to Wittgenstein*, eds. H.-J. Glock & J. Hyman (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2017), pp. 563–575, and Danièle Moyal-Sharrock, *Certainty in Action: Wittgenstein on Language, Mind and Epistemology* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021). [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, eds. Gertrude E. M. Anscombe and Georg Henrik von Wright, trans. Denis Paul and Gertrude E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1969). [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, & 37. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, &166. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, & 97. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. This refers to constructs such as responsibility, sensitivity, and compassion, and to the metaphor of the face, which Levins argued does not refer to an actual face. For more on the subject, see:

Dorit Lemberger, “The function of the 'face' as a conceptual metaphor in Levinas's ethics,” *Judaica Petropolitana* 11, 2019, pp. 104-125. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Emmanuel Levinas, “Ethics as First Philosophy,” in *The Levinas Reader,* ed. Seán Hand (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), p. 83. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. For a comparison between Wittgenstein and Levinas in this context, see Michael Morgan, *Discovering Levinas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. Bettina Bergo, “Levinas and Husserl,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Levinas*, ed. Michael Morgan (New York: Oxford University Press 2019): 71-102, p. 89. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. “There are, indeed, things that cannot be put into words. They make themselves manifest. They are what is mystical.” (Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, & 6.522). [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Emmanuel Levinas, *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, translated by Bettina Bergo (Stanford, CA: University Press, 1998), pp. 164-165. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus,* & 6.423. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, & 6.43. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, & 286. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Wittgenstein, *Philosophy of Psychology—A Fragment,* part 2 of the 2009 edition of *Philosophical Investigations*, henceforth *PPF*, & 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. See for example: Simon Critchley, ‟Introduction,” in *Cambridge Companion to Levinas*, eds. Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi, (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 17. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. ‟*Totality and Infinity* was my first book. I find it very difficult to tell you, in a few words, in what way it is different from what I’ve said afterwards. There is the ontological terminology. I have since tried to get away from that language” (“The Paradox of Morality,” Interview by Tamra Wright Peter Hughes Alison Ainleyin *The Provocation of Levinas: Rethinking the Other,* ed. R Bernasconi and David Wood (NY: Routledge, 2002), 168–180, p. 171. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, p. 46. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. “The great innovation in *Otherwise than Being*, although present in the Preface to *Totality and Infinity* (*TeI* xviii/*TI* 30), is the model of the Saying and the Said as the way of explaining how the ethical signifies within ontological language,” (Simon Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction* [Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 3rd edition 2014], p. 7 (emphasis mine; D.L.). [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, p. 44. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. ‟The correlation of the saying and the said, that is, the subordination of the saying to the said, to the linguistic system and to ontology, is the price that manifestation demands. In language qua said everything is conveyed before us, be it at the price of a betrayal. Language is ancillary and thus indispensable. At this moment language is serving research conducted in view of disengaging the *otherwise than being* or *being's other* outside of the themes in which they already show themselves, unfaithfully, as being's *essence -* but in which they do show themselves. Language permits us to utter, be it by betrayal, this *outside of being,* this *exception* to being, as though being's other were an event of being. Being, its cognition and the said in which it shows itself signify in a saying which, relative to being, forms an exception; but it is in the said that both this exception and the birth of cognition show themselves. But the fact that the exception shows itself and becomes truth in the *said* cannot serve as a pretext to take as an absolute the apophantic variant of the saying, which is ancillary or angelic,” (Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being,* p. 6). [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being,* p. 46. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. John Llewelyn used the concept of the “trace” to refer to the philosophy of language, and to clarify the oxymoronic relationship of the “unpronounceable writing.” See John Llewelyn “Levinas and Language,” in *Cambridge Companion to Levinas*, 2002, pp. 119–138. Llewelyn began with the following quote: ‟The trace – the unpronounceable writing – of what, always already past – always ‘*il*’, Pronoun, does not enter into any present, to which names designating beings or verbs in which their *essence* resounds are no longer suited – but which marks with its seal everything that can be named,” (Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being,* p. 185). He then linked the face with the statement: ‟What the face primarily says, […] is nothing but its saying,” (Llewelyn, Levinas and Language, p. 120). Deep saying is the expression of answerability prior to the expression of questions and answers” (Llewelyn, Levinas and Language, p. 127). The face embodies both the statement and the responsibility, and thus they constitute the essence of language, which is embodied in the “said”: ‟The face as saying and responsibility is the ‘essence’ of language as what is said, of what is, of being and of conceptual essence because the latter require the former” (Llewelyn, Levinas and Language, p. 130). This description is problematic given that in Levinas’ doctrine, the concept of the face is metaphorical and insubstantial. Further, concepts such as responsibility are attributed to language, which is neutral. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Paul Davies, “On Resorting to an Ethical Language,” in *Ethics as First Philosophy*, ed. Adrian Peperzak (London: Routledge, 1996): 95-104, p. 97. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Levinas, Language and proximity, p. 124 and Levinas*, Otherwise Than Being,* p. 120. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Emmanuel Levinas, ‟Language and proximity,” in *Collected Philosophical Papers*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1987): 109-126, p. 124. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Davis, *On Resorting to an Ethical Language*, p. 97. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being,* pp. 19-20 [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. “The periodic return of skepticism and of its refutation signify a temporality in which the instants refuse memory which recuperates and represents. **Skepticism**, which traverses the rationality or logic of knowledge, **is a refusal to synchronize the implicit affirmation contained in saying and the negation which this affirmation states in the said.** The contradiction is visible to reflection, which refutes it, but skepticism is insensitive to the refutation, as though the affirmation and negation did not resound in the same time. […] It is as though skepticism were sensitive to the difference between my exposure without reserve to the other, which is saying, and the exposition or statement of the said in its equilibrium and justice” (Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being,* pp. 167-168). [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being,* p. 94. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)