

"Value, Self-Stultification and the World Waxing and Waning:
the Background to Wittgenstein's Early Thought."

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, I discuss the background to some of the shifts in Wittgenstein's early treatment of metaphysics and value, as he transitions from the *Notebooks 1914–1916* to an altogether different approach in the *Tractatus* and "A Lecture on Ethics". During this period, Wittgenstein moves away from the *Notebooks* view that the ethical attitude is emotive in character and conditioned by a transcendental, solipsistic subject and comes to endorse an understanding of it as non-transcendental, dispositional rather than emotive, bound up in language, thinking and action, and yet, at the same time, ineffable. This shift is brought about by a change in his understanding of nonsense as involving self-stultification. It occurs, over the course of six years spanning from 2016 to 2021, through the deepening of Wittgenstein's reflections on the works of Schopenhauer, Russell and Mach, his experiences as a soldier on the front during the World War I and through his wartime discussions with Paul Engelmann.

The talk is divided into two parts. In Part 1, I argue that exposure to the views of Schopenhauer, Russell and Mach shapes the evolution of Wittgenstein's thinking on the self, leading him to reject restrictive solipsism and to endorse a non-restrictive understanding of the subject. In Part 2, I bring out the intimate connection that exists between Wittgenstein's philosophical method and his approach to the self and ethics in the *Tractatus* and in "A Lecture on Ethics". I propose that ultimately, for Wittgenstein, dissolving restrictive solipsism is ethically transforming: dissolving solipsism retunes our dispositions to think, speak and act in a manner that reflects a greater clarity in our understanding of our place in the world – a clarity of understanding that is, in and of itself, ethically valuable.