Nordic Wittgenstein Review Special Issue 2026 | DOI 10.15845/nwr.si2026.3753
(prepublication for open review)

The Peculiar Hiddenness of Keeping a Secret: Some Remarks on the Role of Indeterminacy as a Feature of Living our Life With Language

Göran Torrkulla
goran.torrkulla(at)abo.fi

> Philosophy is essentially a dialogical practice, and disagreement the breath of life for it. To understand this is to welcome disagreements. Disagreements compel philosophers to look deep into things, and the deeper the better.
>
> —Lars Hertzberg

> "I have frequently detected myself," said Elinor, "in a total misapprehension of character in some point or other: fancying people so much more gay or grave, or ingenious or stupid than they really are, and I can hardly tell why or in what the deception originated. Sometimes one is guided by what they say of themselves, and very frequently by what other people say of them, without giving oneself time to deliberate and judge."
>
> —Jane Austen

> The concept of a living being has the same indeterminacy as that of language.
>
> —Ludwig Wittgenstein [1]

Abstract:

With the guidance of Lars Herzberg's view on living our life with language in his three essays "The indeterminacy of the mental" (1983), "The Kind of Certainty is the Kind of Language Game" (1985) and "On the attitude of Trust" (1988), this paper discusses Jane Austen's narration in her novel *Sense and Sensibility* of the existential and moral concerns involved in confidential conversations. The attempt is to consider confidentiality as a form of hiddenness in the sense that the confidant

[1] The epigraphs are as follows: Hertzberg 1999: 11; Austen 2010: 91; Z: § 326.

is trusted to keep silent about the secret, but also the workings of the indeterminacy or uncertainty of our judgements about other persons. Since we take up different attitudes and make different demands in different situations, different kinds of judgements play different roles, and thus no common paradigm for all our judgements can be laid down once and for all. There is accordingly no neutral position from which others can be judged, thus giving our judgements about each other a kinship with moral and aesthetic judgements. I want to draw attention to the fact that our moral sensibility is an aspect of our understanding of each other and our common world – a sensibility also needed within philosophy.

The following remarks are written in the light of Lars Hertzberg's two rather early contributions to the clarification of what living our lives with language means: "The Indeterminacy of the Mental" (Hertzberg 1983) and ""The Kind of Certainty is the Kind of Language Game"" (Hertzberg 1989). In note 6 on page 109 to the first-mentioned essay, Lars writes: "Also, Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* is a revealing study of the nature of psychological judgement, good and bad". Having read the offprint Lars gave me after the publication of the essay, I immediately read the novel, and then somewhat later returned to it a second time, making notes for a paper that was never written. For the occasion of celebrating his 80th birthday, I finally decided to write that paper, and while rereading the novel, I suddenly found myself thinking about the peculiar hiddenness of keeping a secret. My remarks in this paper therefore revolve around Jane Austen's elaborated description of a confidential conversation (here limited to the first encounter, that later on is renewed) as a peculiar form of hiddenness in living our life with language. But my remarks also serve as a tentative attempt to investigate the workings of the indeterminacy or indefiniteness of our judgements about each other, how attributions of feelings, thoughts, motives and so on enter the context of our human life and its various relations and circumstances.

In the following I will look at promising to keeping silent about a secret, not expressing it in any way to anybody and in that sense hiding it from others – something we for different reasons *do* as part of our human relations and interactions. (Without being able to talk, we cannot keep silent, and without keeping silent, we cannot keep a secret.) Since the confidant is simply asked to conceal a secret by *keeping silent* about what he or she was told, we need to ask what kind of relation the confidential "between the two of us"-relation is, and

what kind of consequences it has for the relation between the involved ones, as well as for their relations to other people around them. In his essay "'The Kind of Certainty is the Kind of Language Game'", Lars writes that

> the expressions we use in attributing feelings, motives, character traits and so on to others are not reserved for any particular position. It is not a rule of this language game that the engaged look must defer to the cool, or the fresh look to the familiar; nor the other way around (Hertzberg 1989: 104)

and in the essay "The Indeterminacy of the Mental", he reminds us in the same vein that "the limits to their application cannot be laid down once and for all; in using them we are answerable to no other standard than that of making ourselves understood" (Hertzberg 1983: 98). In contrast both to the classical metaphysical picture of the mind as in principle a hidden inner realm and the empirical idea of a still lacking scientific knowledge, I think that the question about secrets, to cut it short, confronts us with personal, existential and moral concerns that cannot be reduced to a general formula nor judged from a neutral position. In that sense we are confronted with a moral task that only each one of us as individuals can assume responsibility for.

1. To be committed to one's words

To say something and intentionally not mean what one says is to lie. Accordingly, someone who believes another's lie has *not* failed to understand what the other said, since he can believe a lie only if he has understood it. Instead, as Peter Winch (1972: 64) quite rightly writes,

> he has failed to understand the *speaker,* in the sense that he has failed to understand what the speaker has *done,* or where the speaker stands. And this understanding of the role played by the speaker is an essential part of language.

To understand that the said was a lie is thus to understand that the liar did *not* commit himself to his own words – that the speaker broke his promise already when he was uttering it. (Here one could add Wittgenstein's remarks (PI: §§ I:249, II: I (p. 229)): "Lying is a language-game that needs to be learned like any other", and "A child has much to learn before it can pretend".) Here I want to emphasise the importance of keeping in mind that we do *not* only commit ourselves by promises, but almost by all our words and deeds. The practice of promising have many varying roles and forms, and many of them are neither regulated by prescriptions or conventions, nor motivated by favours in return

or sanctions. This shows the constitutive importance of the context for what we consider as a promise (or a breach of a promise), including whom it concerns, what it consists in and how it is expressed in a concrete situation. In that sense – as Lars reminds us – "there *can* be nothing beyond human practice for correctness of use to be determined by: after all, this is *our* language, not a language made by gods" (Hertzberg 1989: 97).

In *The Human Condition*, Hannah Arendt (1998: 237) points out that promising concerns relations *between* people, and emphasizes that:

> Without being bound to the fulfilment of promises [...] through the presence of others, who confirm the identity between the one who promises and the one who fulfils, [...] no one can feel bound by a promise made only to himself. [...] Thus the extent and modes of being promised [...] determine the extent and modes in which one may be able to [...] keep promises concerned only with himself.

In other words, Arendt invites us to consider the question about promising as a question concerning responsibility in our relations to each other – thus acknowledging the reality of other human beings, and our interdependent human desire and need of each other. We do not learn the meaning or role of what it means to promise by taking our own promises to ourselves as a model, because when I promise something to myself, "I" and "myself" refer to the same person. Since promises to ourselves are not addressed to *another* person, they are not the primary form of promising. Furthermore, the verbally expressed "I promise!" is not a necessary condition for making a promise, since for instance a nod in a certain situation, or between specific persons, can be a promise, and we may also disagree about what and when something can be counted as a promise. The decisive difference between a prediction and a promise is that by promising a future action we are committed to exert an influence on the future. In that sense a promise as "a modus of acting" (Arendt) has an impact not only on the future, but the very moment of promising is the beginning of its fulfilment, and in that sense "it is in language that a promise and its fulfilment make contact" (PI: § 446). To keep a promise is thus the task of acting in a way that carries out the promise, but that is a task that cannot be resolved beforehand or once and for all.

On the other hand, there is no sharp difference between expressing a wish to do something, telling someone what one intends to do and making a promise. Even if this may seem to indicate that there is some common feature or function in promising that we still are ignorant of, the search for a common

paradigm that would solve the supposed lack of knowledge is rather "due to forms of our language that we tend to misrepresent when we think *philosophically* [my italics] about them" (Hertzberg 1989: 95). Thus for instance "the metaphysical demand for completeness, which has connections with the ideal of determinacy of sense" (Holland 1989: 57) may tacitly tempt us to assume a reductive or distorted account of the fact that our judgements about each other belong to different practices and have different roles in the life we share. I agree with Lars that "only the practice determines the nature of the relevant feature" in the sense that

> this does not refer to a relation between the practice and something outside it, but to something internal, as it were, to the practice itself: it is within and only within this practice that the question about the correct application of the word is raised. In other words: to discuss the question is not to talk about the question from outside, *but to take part in it* [my italics]. (Hertzberg 1989: 100–101)

In this context, I also want to add Wittgenstein's remark in *On Certainty* (§ 139): "Not only rules, but also examples are needed for establishing a practice. Our rules leave loop-holes open, and the practice has to speak for itself". To sum up, it is not our words as such that give meaning to our lives, but our ways of living our lives that give meaning to our words, even if we tend to overlook "the prodigious diversity of all the everyday language-games, because the clothing of our language makes everything alike" (PI II: xi, p. 224). The challenge in this context is that this clothing can tempt us to shun the ethical dimension of the difficulties involved in the practice of keeping secrets as part of our human relations and interactions.

2. To take a person into one's confidence

Since our lives are inextricably intertwined with each other, confiding to someone has an impact not only on the confidant but also on his or her relations to *other* persons. In her novel *Sense and Sensibility* (the plot of which turns around things told or gossiped about, as well as implied things and secrets), Jane Austen offers a lucid description of the complex circumstances involved in confidentiality – this peculiar "pattern which recurs, with different variations, in the weave of our life" (PI: § II: i, p. 174). With an attentive and detailed sensitivity, and without moralizing, Austen lays open how we can be mistaken in our judgements about each other, and highlights our various and often hasty conjectures, as well as our tensions and existential shortcomings in

confronting our human conditions. With this example I want to turn attention to the *dynamic* feature in our ways of talking about secrets as an "inner hiddenness", namely that we on one hand aspire from within openly to express ourselves, but on the other hand may conceal or hide our feelings and thoughts from others – a tension that is mirrored in the indeterminacy of our judgements about our responses to each other.

Without going into all intricacies of the plot, I will take her narration of the existential and moral dynamics of the confidential conversation between Miss Lucy Steele and the main character Elinor Dashwood. It is quite evident that Elinor is in love with Mr. Edward Ferrars – the oldest son of Mrs. Ferrars, the brother of Fanny Dashwood who is the wife of Elinor's half-brother Mr. John Dashwood and thus Elinor's sister-in-law. It is also evident that she believes that her feeling for him is returned, even if neither of them has said anything about this matter to each other. Her conviction that Edward is truly in love with her is of outmost significance for her, but she seems prepared to allow Edward to take his time before telling her. Interestingly enough, she does not seem to think that his love is hidden, but rather reads his behaviour in the light of her own feelings for him. Her sister Marianne is surprised "to find how much the imagination of her mother and herself had outstripped the truth" (2006: 25), when Elinor tells her that she and Edward are not engaged, since they both had taken it for granted that Elinor and Edward had found each other and in a foreseeable future would marry. A crucial feature of the situation is that Elinor does not know that Lucy is secretly engaged with Mr. Edward Ferrars, while Lucy in her turn does not know that Elinor believes her love being returned by Edward.

One day, as Lucy and Elinor are walking together from Barton Park, the residence of Sir John Middleton who had invited the Miss Steeles to keep Lady Middleton company, to the Barton Cottage where Elinor lives with her mother and two sisters, Lucy tentatively opens the conversation by saying: "You will think my question an odd one, I dare say […] but pray, are you personally acquainted with your sister-in-law's mother, Mrs. Ferrars?"[2] Elinor conceives the question as an "impertinent curiosity" and answering that she does not know Mrs. Ferrars she is "cautious of giving her real opinion of Edward's

[2] The quotations here and in the following are unless otherwise stated from Austen 2006: 146–155 (volume 1, chapter 22). All italics are in the original.

mother". Because Lucy had thought that Elinor knew Mrs. Ferrars, she adds attentively looking at Elinor:

> "I am sure you think me very strange, for inquiring about her in such a way [...] but perhaps there may be reasons – I wish I may venture; but however I hope you will do me the justice of believing that I do not mean to be impertinent."

For a while they walk on in silence, until Lucy with some hesitation returns to the subject by saying:

> "I cannot bear have you think me impertinently curious. I am sure I would rather do any thing in the world than be thought so by a person whose good opinion is so well having as yours. And I am sure I should not have the smallest fear of trusting *you;* indeed I should be very glad of your advice how to manage in such an uncomfortable situation as I am; but however there is no occasion to trouble *you*. I am sorry that you don't happen to know Mrs. Ferrars."

Politely Elinor answers:

> "I am sorry I do not, […] if it could be of any use to you to know my opinion of her. But really, I never understood that you were at all connected with that family, and therefore I am a little surprised, I confess, at so serious an inquiry into her character."

Lucy admits that this does not astonish her at all, and adds that

> "[…] if I dared tell you all, you would not be so much surprised. Mrs. Ferrars is certainly nothing to me at present, – but the time *may* come – how soon it will come must depend upon herself – when we will be very intimately connected."

Saying this she looks down, with only one side-glance to observe its effect on Elinor. "Good heavens!" Elinor cries, "what do you mean? Are you acquainted with Mr. Robert Ferrars?". Fixing her eyes on Elinor, Lucy answers: "No; […] not to Mr. *Robert* Ferrars [but] to his elder brother."

Unable to believe such a declaration, Elinor is struck dumb with astonishment "that would have been as painful as it was strong, had not an immediate disbelief of the assertion attended it." To dispel Elinor's speechless doubt, Lucy continues by saying

> "[…] it was always meant to be a great secret, and I am sure has been faithfully kept so by me to this hour. Not a soul of all my relations know of it but Anne [her sister], and I never should have mentioned it to you, if I had not felt the greatest dependence in the world upon your secrecy; and I really thought my behaviour in asking so many questions about Mrs. Ferrars, must seem so odd, that it ought to

> be explained. And I do not think Mr. Ferrars [that is, Edward] can be displeased, when he knows I have trusted you, because I know he has the highest opinion in the world of all your family, and looks upon yourself and the other Miss Dashwoods, quite as his own sisters."

Utterly shocked Elinor remains silent, but at length she gets herself "to speak cautiously, […] with a calmness of manner, which tolerably well concealed her surprise and solicitude – 'May I ask if your engagement is of long standing?'". As Elinor feels unable to believe that they have been engaged the last four years, she exclaims:

> "Engaged to Mr. Edward Ferrars! – I confess myself so totally surprised at what you tell me, that really – I beg your pardon; but surely there must be some mistake of person or name. We cannot mean the same Mr. Ferrars."

Lucy answers with a smile:

> "We can mean no other […] Mr. Edward Ferrars, the eldest son of Mrs. Ferrars of Park-street, and brother of your sister-in-law, Mrs. John Dashwood, is the person I mean; you must allow that *I* am not likely to be deceived, as to the name of the man on who all my happiness depends."

To this Elinor replies: "It is strange […] that I should never have heard him even mention your name", to which Lucy answers that it was not strange considering their situation, because "[o]ur first care have been to keep the matter secret."

When Elinor becomes convinced that they both mean the same Mr. Ferrars, and that Lucy and Edward are engaged, a struggle with herself follows to overcome her speechless bewilderment. They then proceed in silence until Lucy breaks the silence by repeating that she has

> "[…] no doubt in the world of your faithfully keeping this secret, because you must know of what importance it is to us, not to have it reach his mother; for she would never approve of it, I dare say. I shall have no fortune, and I fancy she is an exceeding proud woman."

(Here could be added that in Britain at the time of the novel match-making with wealthy partners was a topic often discussed and a common concern among better or well-off people.)

To this Elinor answers with forced calmness:

> "I certainly did not seek your confidence […] but you do me no more than justice in imagining that I may be depended on. Your secret is safe with me; but pardon

> me if I express some surprise at so unnecessary a communication. You must at least have felt that my being acquainted with it could not add to its safety."

Saying this Elinor looks earnestly at Lucy, who without any change in her composure admits that she feared

> "[…] you would think I was taking a great liberty with you […] in telling you all this. I have not known you long to be sure, personally at least, but I have known you and all your family by description a great while; and as soon as I saw you, I felt almost as if you was an old acquaintance."

Elinor's first reaction when Lucy revealed her secret was disbelief – she could not believe that her love for Edward was not returned by him, and thus she wished to detect falsehood in Lucy's statement. Only after having been shown a miniature of and a letter from Edward (recognizing his handwriting), and further asked by Lucy if she had noticed his ring with a lock of her hair that she had given him, a lock that Elinor had believed to be her own, which he covertly had got into his possession, Elinor admits that she had seen the ring "with a composure of voice, under which was concealed an emotion and distress beyond any thing she had ever felt before." But no one would have supposed from her appearance that she "was mourning in secret over obstacles which must divide her for ever from the object of her love" (Austen 2006: 161). Furthermore, Elinor finds it necessary to conceal also from her mother and sister what she had been entrusted in confidence, to spare them from what would cause affliction to them since they too believed (or rather hoped) that Elinor and Edward were engaged, and to spare herself from their condemnation of Edward that would flow from their partial affection for herself. However, Elinor remains "so well assured within herself of being really beloved by Edward", that she thinks that the reason for Lucy's disclosure of the secret engagement is to inform her of "Lucy's superior claims on Edward" in order to get her to avoid him in the future (Austen 2006: 162). Thinking this way of "her rival's intentions", Elinor is

> firmly resolved to act by her as every principle of honour and honesty directed, to combat her own affection for Edward and to see him as little as possible; she could not deny herself the comfort of endeavouring to convince Lucy that her heart was unwounded. (Austen 2006: 163)

Within the societal conventions and norms of her time, Elinor makes every endeavour to unite truthfulness to herself with an honest concern for the reality

of others – that is, she does not judge other persons according to her own wishes, but as persons with their own feelings and thoughts, as well as conjectures, preconceptions and prejudices. It is – to my mind – precisely by *not* leaving out the dynamic indeterminacy in judging our responses to each other that Austen captures our human vulnerability and exposure to risks and disappointments, which are part of our human condition. In her way of describing the practice of confidential conversations within the web of interpersonal relations and actions, and the complex interconnections between what the persons feel, think, say and do, I want to stress her lucid sensibility in describing this peculiar feature of living our lives with language, a sensibility needed also within philosophy, as Wittgenstein calls attention to when writing:

> How could human behaviour be described? Surely only by sketching the actions of a variety of humans, as they are all mixed up together. What determines our judgment, our concepts and reactions, is not what *one* man is doing *now*, an individual action, but the whole hurly-burly of human actions, the background against which we see any action. (Z: § 567)

Alluding to the title of the novel by Jane Austen, I want to end this section by quoting the last sentence in Peter Winch's essay "Who is my Neighbour?":

> My central point is that in questions concerning our understanding of each other our *moral* sensibility is indeed an aspect of our *sensibility*, of the way we see things, of what we make of the world we are living in. (Winch 1987: 166)

3. "Said only between the two of us", or about the indeterminacy of confidentiality

For the sake of clarity, I want to emphasize that I will *not* be discussing the professional secrecy or formal duty that goes with the profession of priests, physicians or different officials, but limit myself to the example of a confidential conversation, where the confiding one *cannot* invoke or plead to any formal duty of the confidant. Thus the confidential conversation "between the two of us" does not impose any juridical claims (which does not make the promise less committed). Both of them rather act on their own accord, and the confidant cannot enter as a witness without revealing the secret – both of them have only their own conscience to consult.

Confiding as self-disclosure in a personal conversation differs from a formal legal contract that is voluntarily made as a mutual agreement, limited in time and by conditions, and which both parties can cancel if the requirements

are not fulfilled. Contractual relations are thus relative and conditional. Beside these differences confiding has an asymmetrical feature, in the sense that the confiding one as a matter of fact *does* what the confidant is asked *not* to do, namely *not to tell* the secret to anybody, and furthermore the confiding one can take others into the secret (of course with the risk of disclosing it). Another difference to a formal contract is that it is not always clear whether the confidant was given any idea of the nature of the secret or was at all asked to consent to share the secret – often the confiding person is asked to promise to keep silent before being told about the secret. We all know the difficulties and precautions that are needed to arrange – for instance – a birthday-surprise, and we know how easily children just out of sheer thoughtlessness may reveal a secret.

A promise to keep silent about a confided secret could perhaps at first glance just seem to be a particular case of the general form of keeping a promise, only that as a secret it has the peculiar feature of not to be mentioned to anybody. In that sense confidentiality, unlike openly expressed promises (as for instance the wedding-promise, where the couple proclaim their promise to each other in front of other people), works as it were "undercover". Since we are talking and social beings, confidentiality confronts us with what could be called the reverse side of language, in the sense that we, if we are to conceal a secret, have to keep silent, and thus inadvertently may lead others astray in our very avoidance of revealing the secret. It should, however, at once be said that much of what goes on in our minds never get expressed, and that keeping something to ourselves must not as such involve concealing or hiding anything. There are thus many different motives and ways of approaching each other that at times – even in personal conversations *without* any request or appeal to keep silent – may make us unsure whether what we have been told should be judged as something that can or cannot be shared with others. (In an important sense, this concerns all genuine conversations.)

But there may also be other reasons for holding back one's expressive responses, for instance because of shyness or fear, changing topic to avoid getting involved in discussions that would reveal one's anger or envy, or to use some insidious form of concealing one's aims as a liar or seducer, etc. Thus, we may hold back our feelings and thoughts as best we can – even if only because we are uncertain about our *own* feelings and thoughts – and in different ways conceal ourselves from or avoid each other, and in that sense hide

ourselves from others by creating a distance between us, that tends to put us out of reach of each other. On the other hand, we should also remember that in gossiping there is the jargon "to be honest, but ~~don't~~ not to tell anybody that I told you", or the phrase "to keep it between the two us", that has nothing to do with confiding – but even in the case of gossiping it is up to each one of us to decide whether to spread the gossip or not. However, confiding has no sharp borders to the above-mentioned ways of conduct, and thus the reticence of a confidant can prompt questions and guesses that tend to entangle the confidant in a muddle of conjectures. With Wittgenstein one could say that the difficulty of keeping a secret confronts us with the demand "to put this indefiniteness, correctly and unfalsified, into words" (PI II: xi, p. 227). And putting it into words is a difficulty with many different and often overlapping sources, which existentially and morally may be bewildering – in a way that neither philosophy nor any other forms of investigation can do away with once and for all.

The fact that keeping silent about a secret brings about a demand to be on one's guard both in words and behaviour, or rather with one's *whole being*, may – as already mentioned – have unforeseen impacts that interfere with or even distort the relations to *other* people. By being entrusted a secret, the confidant may also become perplexed or dismayed, or at some point even be confronted with circumstances that question the binding force of the promise and thus change the very situation and its demands. In that sense the ethical challenge to keep a secret may tempt us to create self-deceptive views in order to avoid our own responsibility.

In this context, we should remember that confiding cannot be the primary form of keeping a promise but a modification of "our complicated form of life" and as such "a pattern which recurs, with different variations, in the weave of our life" (PI II: i, p. 174). In many contexts – but not in all of them and not always – entrusting someone with a secret concern both important and difficult matters, which we feel the need to share with someone we trust. Sometimes it nevertheless also happens that a complete stranger, for instance someone sitting beside us on the train, reveals very personal problems concerning his wife, children, old parents etc., perhaps induced by our not knowing each other and most probably not even meeting again. The fact that the stranger tells things that he would hesitate to tell the person concerned or people who know him puts me in the role of some kind of stand-in for someone else, or perhaps

just someone to talk to. Of course, this does not necessarily mean that I as a listener cannot get anything out of what the stranger tells me, but rather that I cannot do justice to what the stranger tells me because I have only his view to go by. But taking into account that Lars calls attention to the fact that

> what ultimately makes something an expression of a certain way of feeling is a matter of what one person can get across to another, and of what the other can make out (Hertzberg 1983: 102–103)

such an occasion could on the other hand turn into a meeting between the stranger and me.

Often this kind of behaviour is connected with existential difficulties in confronting face-to-face the responses of the person (or persons) concerned, and thus displays a lack of courage to encounter the ethical demand to shoulder one's responsibility, and also because of an illusory expectation "that it will be possible to arrive at some position free of difficulties which everyone will be able to accept", neglecting that in taking up a position "one *ipso facto* assumes responsibility for the difficulties in which that may involve one" (Winch 1987: 178). Lars rightly accentuates the fact that

> when I express my feeling [...] I place myself in a special relation to those concerned by them, and at the same time expose myself to the judgements and reactions of others. A *responsibility* [my italics] is involved in making a declaration of love, in displaying one's anger or contempt, in confessing one's fears or desires, and there are many different ways of bearing oneself in relation to that responsibility. This is why the question of the sincerity of what a person says or shows becomes a matter of such crucial importance where judgements about feelings are concerned. (Hertzberg 1983: 106–107)

Instead of measuring human experience and conduct against "a common paradigm for *all* [my italics] judging", we need thus to consider "the different roles that different kinds of judgements play in human intercourse" (Hertzberg 1983: 93).

To understand "how other than, and *other* to, oneself another human being can be" (Gaita 1989: 144), or in other words what it means to see the unique reality of another human being, is not a matter to be construed in terms of what one knows or believes about the other, but of attending with an appropriate kind of attitude to *him* or *her* in a particular and concrete situation. The unpredictability or open-endedness of how confiding may affect our relations to each other should thus mainly be connected with the fact that

human expressions move and affect us because they are linked to judgements of character, in ways that are woven into different patterns of significance that according to Lars "in a sense, is what *constitutes* our mental concepts" (Hertzberg 1983: 106). Thus the meaning of our dealings with each other should "not be sought in the features of the situation of which we judge but in our readiness to judge of it as we do" (Hertzberg 1983: 101), or as he formulates it in his essay "On the Attitude of Trust":

> Being prepared to go along with what another intimates – to comfort him if he expresses pain or grief, to return a smile, to approach if he beckons, to follow the direction of his eyes, to stop short if he frowns – is what basically constitutes understanding these human forms of expression, and is accordingly part of what it means to see another as a human being. (Hertzberg 1994: 125)

The importance of Lars's approach is that he brings to our attention that

> the indeterminacy of attributions of feelings and motives is a logical characteristic setting them apart from the attribution of physical properties to objects, and giving them a kinship with moral and aesthetic judgements. (Hertzberg 1983: 92)

I thus agree with Lars that we need to give up the philosophical prejudice of reducing all judging to a common paradigm, and

> realize that, in actual life, we make different demands, take up different attitudes, with respect to judgements of different sorts. Where judgements about feelings and motives are concerned, we simply reserve a place for error and disagreement: we prepare for them. (Hertzberg 1983: 93)

In that sense our judgments about each other do not form a homogenous paradigm of general agreement but rather "an interlocking network of mutual dependencies, contrasts and affinities, applicable in all kinds of circumstances to all kinds of human lives (and many to animals too)" (Hertzberg 1983: 98). To find a foothold in the indeterminacy of our judgments about each other – as Lars writes in another context – "we need to find the way back from reflection, to the unreflective daily acting, and that is a much more difficult task than we at a first glance would believe" (Hertzberg 2002: 26). To pay attention to the different ways we in everyday life use our judgements is a form of acknowledging the manifoldness of life, and as such part of assuming our responsibility in facing each other and our human condition.

In that sense we are confronted with a continual existential and moral task to acknowledge that we are all born to a shared world not of our own making,

that we get our names and our language from others, and that learning to understand ourselves goes hand in hand with learning to understand others. The task thus consists in our readiness to acknowledge our interdependent human desire and need of each other, as well as in our readiness to accept not only that we always have something to learn from each other, but also that each one of us, both for good and bad, can become a human being only among other human beings – a lifelong task that we, step by step, can assume responsibility for only as individuals, by allowing our conscience to show the way.

References

Arendt, H., 1998. *The Human Condition*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
Austen, J., 2006. *Sense and Sensibility*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Gaita, R., 1989. "The Personal in Ethics". In: D.Z. Phillips and P. Winch, eds., *Wittgenstein: Attention to Particulars*. London: Macmillan, 124–150.
Hertzberg, L., 1983. "The Indeterminacy of the Mental". *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volume* 57, 91–109.
Hertzberg, L., 1989. "'The Kind of Certainty is the Kind of Language Game'". In: D.Z. Phillips and P. Winch, eds., *Wittgenstein: Attention to Particulars*. London: Macmillan, 92–111.
Hertzberg, L., 1997. *The Limits of Experience*. Helsinki: Acta Philosophica Fennica.
Hertzberg, L., 1999. "Osakligt och tendentiöst". *Filosofisk tidskrift*, no. 4, 11–13.
Hertzberg, L., 2002. "Om inlevelsens roll i filosofin och humaniora". In: R. Gothóni, ed., *Att förstå inom humaniora*. Helsinki: Finska Vetenskaps-Societeten, 25–40.
Holland, R., 1989. "Lusus Naturae". In: D.Z. Phillips and P. Winch, eds., *Wittgenstein: Attention to Particulars*. London: Macmillan, 45–60.
Winch, P., 1972. *Ethics and Action*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
Winch, P., 1987. *Trying to Make Sense*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
Wittgenstein, L., 1958. *Philosophical Investigations*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell. [PI]
Wittgenstein, L., 1958. *On Certainty*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell. [OC]
Wittgenstein, L., 1967. *Zettel*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell. [Z]

Biographical Note

Göran Torrkulla is artist and philosopher, based in Turku, Finland. He has taught philosophy at Åbo Akademi University and philosophy of art at several art schools. Among other things, he is the author of *Stiglöshet* (2014).