

Wittgenstein as a Kantian Philosopher

Tim Klaassen

Introduction

Few books in the tradition of analytic philosophy have been as controversial as Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophico*. One of the main reasons for this, is that the work is very obscure. Another reason is that some of the work's conclusions are highly paradoxical. According to the book's last remarks, those who truly understand the import of the *Tractatus*, will come to see that it is essentially a work of *nonsense*. Still, there is one thing that Wittgenstein is very clear about in the *Tractatus*. And that is the work's *purpose*: "the aim of the book is to draw a *limit* to thought, or rather not to thought, but to the *expression* of thoughts".¹ But consider now something else: Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. In it, Kant writes that his purpose is to set upon an inquiry into the limits of human reason, i.e., to come to a "determination of the rules and boundaries of its use".² It seems, then, that Wittgenstein's philosophical motivations with the *Tractatus* seem rather similar to those that Kant had with the first *Critique*.

¹See (Wittgenstein; 1921, p. 3) (my emphasis). In my references to the *Tractatus* I have made use of the English translation by D.F. Pears and B.F. McGuinness. However, when citing passages from the *Tractatus*, I will usually just mention the numbers of the propositions in which they figure.

²See (Kant; 2000, p. 103). I will make use of the English translation by Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood.

In this paper, I want to elaborate on the idea of treating Wittgenstein as a Kantian philosopher. Of course, I do not mean to say that Wittgenstein was actually a follower of Kant. In fact, there are many philosophical differences between the two thinkers. Rather, what I want to propose is that the Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus* was Kantian *in spirit*. First of all, Wittgenstein's overall conclusions seem in many ways to resemble, at least in their outward appearance, those of Kant. Second, Wittgenstein can be said to resemble Kant in his essentially *transcendental outlook*, in particular his transcendental conclusions about the limits of language.³

This paper consists of two parts. In the first part, I will give a summary of the philosophical ideas behind Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, and the intellectual context out of which it arose. Because there are so many interpretations of the *Tractatus*, I believe it is important to do this. In this way, I hope to establish some common ground. Moreover, it is my opinion that, in many of the discussions on Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, too little attention is given to the actual philosophical problems that seem to have motivated Wittgenstein. Although my characterization of the *Tractatus* will be, given the confines of this paper, relatively brief, I hope that I will nevertheless be able to provide some insight into this. In the second part, I will go into the issue of treating Wittgenstein as a Kantian philosopher. I will be mostly concerned with the particularly transcendental, or "critical", outlook that characterizes the philosophical thoughts behind the *Tractatus*. However, I will also take a brief look at the similarities between Wittgenstein and Kant when it comes to their "ethical" conclusions.

One of the reasons that I want to elaborate on this topic, is that I have always vaguely understood Wittgenstein as a kind of Kantian philosopher; a proposition that, as far as I can discern, has not been much elaborated on in the literature. The present paper gave me an opportunity to give some more articulation to my own intuitions about the matter. Moreover, this paper

³As shall become more clear shortly, the term 'transcendental' needs to be understood as having to do with so-called "conditions of possibility".

was written for an undergraduate course on anti-metaphysical thinkers of the 20th century (Heidegger, Carnap, and Wittgenstein). Given the topic of the course, the idea of showing that Wittgenstein’s thought is in many ways similar to that of Kant (a thinker whose philosophy can also be labeled as ‘anti-metaphysical’) seemed to me of significance.

I The *Tractatus Logico-Philosophico*

Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus Logico-Philosophico* was published in the year 1922. The work is difficult to understand. This is in part due to the work’s highly idiosyncratic style and make-up. The work is composed as a collection of numbered propositions. To be more precise; the work consists of seven main propositions, each of which gets commented on by further sub-propositions. For example, the work starts with proposition 1 “The world is all that is the case”, and is followed by sub-proposition 1.1 “The world is the totality of facts, not of things”, and proposition 1.11 “The world is determined by the facts, and their being *all* the facts”.⁴ As Wittgenstein makes clear in a footnote, the number of decimals that is assigned to a proposition indicates the “logical importance” of the proposition – the more decimals, the less importance.⁵ The seven main propositions are listed below.

1. The world is all that is the case.
2. What is the case – the fact – is the existence of states of affairs.
3. A logical picture of facts is a thought.
4. A thought is a proposition with sense.
5. A proposition is a truth-function of elementary propositions.
(An elementary proposition is a truth-function of itself.)

⁴Emphasis from original text.

⁵Interestingly, Erik Stenius compares the structure of the *Tractatus* to a musical composition (Stenius; 1960, p. 1-17).

6. The general form of a truth-function is $[\bar{p}, \bar{\xi}, N, (\bar{\xi})]$.

This is the general form of the proposition.

7. What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence.

Another reason why the *Tractatus* is such a difficult work of philosophy, is that Wittgenstein nowhere clearly states what exactly the philosophical problems are that he is trying to solve. To illustrate, although Wittgenstein states in the *Preface* "...the truth of the thoughts that are here communicated seems to me unassailable and definitive. I therefore believe myself to have found, on all essential points, the final solution of the problems", he nowhere explicitly states what these problems are.

According to G.E.M. Anscombe, however (one of Wittgenstein's students) the key to the *Tractatus* is to consider it against the background of the philosophical project of Bertrand Russell, and especially, Gottlob Frege (something which, according to Anscombe, many have failed to do).⁶ Wittgenstein also hints at this himself, when he says in the *Preface* "...I am indebted to Frege's great work and to the writings of my friend Mr Bertrand Russell for much of the stimulation of my thoughts".⁷ But what *are* the problems that motivated Frege and Russell?

Both Frege and Russell were concerned with two things.⁸ First, both Frege and Russell were concerned with the *foundations of mathematics*. More specifically, they wanted to show that mathematics in fact rests on principles that are *purely logical*. Such a conception of mathematics was at the time rather unorthodox. The neo-Kantians of Frege's 19th century Germany, and the British Idealists that were working at the British Universities during Russell's earlier years as an academic philosopher, all adhered to some form of the Kantian view that the reality of mathematics is ultimately based in the

⁶(Anscombe; 1965, p. 12-13)

⁷(Wittgenstein; 1921, p. 4)

⁸I have based much of my account here on Chapter 2 and 3 of (Kenny; 2006b). Additional sources are referred to in the text.

faculty of human intuition.⁹ Frege's anti-psychologism, and Russell's "revolt against idealism", must be seen in connection with their attempts to give a foundation of mathematics that is based on pure logic, rather than human subjectivity. Second (and this is related to their preoccupations with the foundations of mathematics), both Frege and Russell were concerned with developing an adequate theory of *logic itself*. In formulating their theories about the nature of logic, Frege adopted an essentially formal-axiomatic approach, while Russell also adopted, in addition, an approach that was more epistemological. In addition, Russell was also, much more than Frege, interested in the power of logic to solve traditional philosophical problems.

Something of interest here is Frege's attempt of giving a logical definition of the natural numbers. Frege's motivation behind this was that, if such a definition can be given, the mathematical concept of number can be defined entirely in non-mathematical terms. Frege thought that he could succeed in doing this by defining the natural numbers in terms of classes of classes that have a similar number of members. On the face of it, such a way of defining the numbers seems circular. However, Frege came up with the insight that, for example, a waiter can observe that each plate on a table has a knife lying next to it *without* knowing how many plates there on the table. Similarly, Frege thought that we can simply define, say, the number 5, as the class of all classes that have the same amount of members as, say, the class of Aristotelean elements. A similar thing would be possible for the other natural numbers.

However, the fact that there was a philosopher named Aristotle, whose metaphysics happened to contain five elements, is merely a contingent fact. It would seem, then, that if we define the natural numbers in this way, that the possibility of defining a natural number is dependent on a contingent fact, and consequently, that the natural numbers themselves are contingent entities. This, however, runs counter to Frege's contention that a number is

⁹For an historical overview of the intellectual climate in which Frege and Russell found themselves, see (Friedman; 2000) and (Hylton; 1990).

a self-subsistent object.¹⁰ Again, what is needed is a definition of number that is purely logical. Only in this way are numbers prevented from being merely contingently defined entities.

Frege's solution is ingenious. His suggestion is that we should first begin with the definition of the natural number zero, and define it as the class of classes that have as many members as the class whose members are not identical to themselves. The only class whose members are not identical with themselves is the empty set \emptyset , and is so purely of necessity. Thus, $0 = \{\emptyset\}$. The rest of the natural numbers can be defined by means of the definition of zero: the number one can be defined as the class of classes that have as many members as the class of the null-class, and the number two can be defined as the class of classes with the same amount of members as the null-class or the amount of members of the class of null-classes (i.e. $1 = \{\{\emptyset\}\}$ and $2 = \{\{\emptyset\}, \{\{\emptyset\}\}\}$) etc. In this way, Frege seems able to derive all the natural numbers by using only concepts that are exclusively logical. In effect, the prospect of reducing mathematics to logic seemed to have been greatly enhanced by Frege.

Russell was deeply impressed by Frege's work. However, he famously pointed out a fatal flaw with Frege's way of defining the natural numbers. On Frege's account, it seems that there are no restrictions when it comes to forming classes of classes, and classes of classes of classes...etc. But Russell showed that when we construct a certain very special class, namely, the class of classes that are not a member of themselves, an inevitable paradox arises. The paradox arises when we try to determine whether this class is a member of itself. For it seems that if we say that it is *not* a member of itself then, by definition, it seems that it *is* a member of itself. But if it *is* a member of itself, then it follows by definition that it *can't* in fact be a member of itself, and so on *ad infinitum*. The conclusion: there is something logically suspicious about the unrestricted formation of new classes.

¹⁰(Kenny; 2006a, p. 355-366)

In response to these problems, Russell set out to develop a “theory of types”; a theory about the proper application of concepts or “types”. The basic idea behind such a theory is that what can be meaningfully said about individuals, cannot necessarily be meaningfully said about *classes* of individuals. The same goes for classes of classes, and classes of classes of classes, and so forth. A theory of types, then, is a theory which states the rules that determine which concept applications are allowed and which ones are not. According to Russell, if only we have an adequate theory of this sort, paradoxes of the aforementioned kind will not arise anymore.

Let us now turn to Wittgenstein, for he gives a very interesting criticism of Russell’s conception of a theory of types. For according to Wittgenstein, the problem with a theory of types is that it actually *cannot be stated in language*. A theory of types can be seen as a set of rules that prescribe syntactical rules of meaningful propositions. However, in *stating* these rules, we would already have to *make use* of these very rules. And hence, a theory of types would essentially be superfluous. According to Wittgenstein, the only way in which you could set out the syntactical rules of a language without presupposing them, would be to express them in a language that is itself illogical. But the problem with such a language is that it cannot possibly have any expressive power.

According to Wittgenstein, Russell’s mistake is to make use of *semantics* in constructing a theory of syntax (3.331). Yet, Wittgenstein thinks that the proper syntactical use of symbols is something that is evident on the basis of the symbols alone. In other words, if two symbols are not allowed to combine in a certain way, this must be clear from the symbols themselves, independent of what the symbols mean. In connection to this, Wittgenstein says “Logic must look after itself” (5.473), and “Logic is transcendental” (6.13).

This brings us to one of the main ideas of the *Tractatus*. Wittgenstein thinks that a theory of logic, in the way Frege and Russell envisaged it, is impossible. Logic is not something about which we can say something, such

that we can develop a meaningful theory about it. Rather, the nature of logic can only show itself. Thus, Wittgenstein states “my fundamental idea is that the logical constants are not representatives; *that there can be no representatives of the logic of facts*” (4.0321).¹¹ Without going into all the technical difficulties, the point that Wittgenstein wants to make is that, in order to say something meaningful, one has to express what one wants to say by means of a representation. However, logic is precisely what makes representation possible in the first place. Logic is what is doing the representing – logic is *the very medium* of representation. There can be no theory of logic, because logic is what makes theories possible in the first place.¹²

I believe that it is against this background that we ought to understand Wittgenstein’s statement, in the *Preface* of the *Tractatus*, that the problems of philosophy are simply the result of a misunderstanding of the logic of language.¹³ And when he says “the truth of the thoughts that are here communicated seems to me unassailable and definitive. I therefore believe myself to have found, on all essential points, the final solution of the problems”¹⁴, I take him to mean that he thought to have solved the kind of philosophical problems that especially occupied Frege and Russell. Or perhaps we should say that he did not so much solve their problems as *dissolve* them.¹⁵ But how does Wittgenstein’s rejection of a theory of logic relates to the seven main theses of the *Tractatus*; i.e., how does it relate to the work’s actual contents?

Recall that Wittgenstein states in the *Preface*, that his aim is to draw the limits of the expression of thoughts in language. Wittgenstein clearly thought that theories such as those of Frege and Russell about the nature of logic, violate these limits. The *Tractatus* can be seen as a more general account of how it is that things can be said at all, and with that, an insight into why it is that some things *cannot* in fact be said. Wittgenstein’s ‘picture

¹¹My emphasis.

¹²(Stokhof; 2009, p. 217)

¹³(Wittgenstein; 1921, p. 3)

¹⁴(Wittgenstein; 1921, p. 4)

¹⁵(McGinn; 2009, p. 31)

theory of meaning' plays a key role here: only if an expression (a proposition) actually *depicts*, does it *say* something. Clearly, Wittgenstein thought that the propositions that constitute theories of logic such as those of Frege and Russell do not depict anything.

The picture theory of meaning is a thesis about how it is possible for propositions to link up to the world, such that propositions can actually say something *about* the world.¹⁶ According to the picture theory of meaning, a proposition says something to the extent that it is a picture of a fact. This picturing relationship is possible, according to Wittgenstein, because there exists a structural similarity between world and language. This structure is inherently logical: “What any picture, of whatever form, must have in common with reality, in order to be able to depict it correctly or incorrectly in any way at all, is logical form, i.e. the form of reality” (2.18). To see how this works, we need to take a look at Wittgenstein’s ontological theses about the structure of the world, and how he thinks this structure is mirrored in language.

Proposition 1 of the *Tractatus* famously says “The world is all that is the case”, proposition 2 reads “What is the case - the fact - is the existence of states of affairs”. Thus, according to Wittgenstein the world is basically a totality of states of affairs. A state of affairs has a particular structure, and it is in virtue of this structure that propositions can latch on to them.¹⁷ Simply put, a state of affairs is a contingently existing complex of simple objects (2.03) (2.032). The objects themselves, however (Wittgenstein calls them the “substance of the world” (2.021)), exist necessarily. Wittgenstein

¹⁶(Black; 1970, p. 11)

¹⁷There is some difficulty here, however. Wittgenstein made a distinction between a *Tatsache* and a *Sachverhalt*, and it is not entirely clear what Wittgenstein had in mind with this distinction. For example, in (Stenius; 1960) we read that a *Sachverhalt* is a merely *possible* state of affairs, while a *Tatsache* is an *actual* state of affairs. But in (Black; 1970) we read that both *Tatsache* and *Sachverhalt* should be understood as terms for state of affairs that are actual. To keep things simple, I will go with Black, and treat *Tatsache* and *Sachverhalt* as actual states of affairs, and I will only use the one term ‘state of affairs’.

furthermore points out that it is in the nature of objects that they *must* enter into one complex or another; each object being defined by several of such possibilities. Although it is contingent into *which* possible complex they enter; *that* they enter into complex is necessary. Thus, as Max Black has pointed out, we may regard Wittgenstein's ontology as both atomistic and organic at the same time.¹⁸

Just as states of affairs are complexes of objects that are related to each other in a certain determinate way, Wittgenstein takes language to consist of elementary propositions whose internal structure consists of a set of names that syntactically relate to each other in a specific way. In this way, the names in an elementary proposition refer to the simple objects of reality, and their syntactical composition is structurally similar to the way in which these objects contingently happen to be related to one another. It is in virtue of this structural similarity, that propositions can stand in a depictive relation to the world.

To be sure, in many instances, we are misled into thinking that our expressions are genuine depictive propositions, while in fact, this is not actually the case. As we have seen, this is especially so with the kind of propositions that constitute the theories of logic *à la* Frege and Russell. But what should also be noted, is that the fact that a proposition *is* depictive, does not imply that the proposition is also *true*. This has to do with the fact that much more possible states of affairs can be pictured in a proposition, in comparison to the collection of states of affairs that are actually the case. Or better, propositions are only contingently true, and their truth can only be determined through a comparison with reality. In other words, "there are no pictures that are true a priori" (2.225).

What is important to note is that, although Wittgenstein thinks that no depictive propositions are true *a priori*, he *does* think that propositions of logic are true *a priori*. However, according to Wittgenstein, all propositions of logic are tautological in nature, and do not actually *say* anything.

¹⁸(Black; 1970, p. 28)

Instead; proposition of logic *show* their truth (just as contradictions *show* their falsehood). In connection to this, Wittgenstein states that propositions of logic are not so much nonsensical (such as the nonsensical proposition ‘The Good is more or less Identical to the Beautiful’ (4.003), as they are *senseless*. Nevertheless, propositions *about* logic, such as those that make up the kind of Fregean and Russelian theories of logic, *are* nonsensical.

To conclude this brief exposition of Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*, something needs to be said about the *Tractatus*’ final remarks concerning ethics (and aesthetics).¹⁹ According to Wittgenstein, nothing can be genuinely *said* about ethics (6.421). Everything that we attempt to say about ethics is necessarily nonsensical. However, Wittgenstein nevertheless seems to think that there is more to life than logic and contingency. He states “There are, indeed, things that cannot be put into words. *They make themselves manifest*. They are what is mystical” (6.522). Elsewhere, in *I: A lecture on Ethics*, he says about ethics “it is a document of a tendency in the human mind which I personally cannot help respecting deeply and I would not for my life ridicule it”.²⁰ He also famously stated that the *Tractatus* contains two parts: the written part and the part that was not written. And that this latter part was in fact the most important.²¹ Concerning the things that are most important to us, it is impossible to really say something. Hence, the final conclusion of the *Tractatus*: “What we cannot speak about we must pass over into silence” (7).

II The Kantian Elements of the *Tractatus*

There is much to say for the idea that there is something inherently Kantian about the kind of philosophy that is expounded in Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*. I believe that this resemblance has two components. First, it can be argued

¹⁹Wittgenstein thought that the ethics and aesthetics are one the same (6.421). So his claims about ethics can be taken to concern aesthetics as well.

²⁰(Wittgenstein; 1965, p. 12)

²¹(Wittgenstein; 1971, p. 16)

that Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* presents us with an essentially *transcendental* approach to philosophical problems. In other words, just like Kant's first *Critique*, the *Tractatus* presents us with a theory about certain *conditions of possibility*. Second, the place of "ethics" in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* is very similar to the place that "morality" takes in the critical philosophy of Kant. That is, just as the moral dimension of human existence lies outside the bounds of theoretical knowledge, the ethical is essentially outside the realm of what can be meaningfully said. Of course, there are also important differences between Wittgenstein and Kant. In what follows, I shall attempt to make the comparison more thoroughly.

Now I assume that the reader will be familiar with Kant's critical philosophy. However, just to be sure, I shall give a brief characterization of it.

Kant's intention with the *Critique of Pure Reason* is to set upon an inquiry into the limits of human reason so as to come to a "determination of the rules and boundaries of its use".²² One of the main problems that motivated Kant, was to account for the possibility of geometry, mathematics, and the natural sciences. Kant thought that a proper account of these sciences depends on showing how synthetic a priori judgments are possible.²³ A synthetic a priori judgment can be defined as a judgment whose truth is logically *contingent* (its negation does not imply a contradiction) but which nevertheless *must* be universally true. The famous example that Kant himself gives is the relation of causality; that there should be a causal relation between two empirical phenomena is not logically necessary, yet it is a universal truth that the empirical world behaves according to causal laws. Kant's challenge in the *Critique* is to give an account of such truths, and how it is that we can come to know them.

Kant's solution to these problems was to hold that the truths of geometry, mathematics, and the natural sciences, are basically a *function* of our

²²(Kant; 2000, p. 103)

²³(Kant; 2000, p. 146)

cognitive apparatus. It is on account of the way in which our minds work that, *necessarily*, we experience the world as a chain of causal events in space and time. Also, it is because space and time have a certain structure, that the truths of mathematics and geometry are as they are. In short, for the human mind to cognize something at all, *just is*, at least in part, the act of imposing a causal-spatiotemporal structure on something. Synthetic a priori judgments are possible because what they exclusively concern the way our minds work. They stipulate the necessary conditions that make it possible for us to experience anything at all. Of course, we all know Kant's conclusion: the world as it is in itself, outside of human experience, cannot be known. For *to know* is to think in terms of causality, space, and time. But these categories only apply to the forms of human cognition. The upside to this is, Kant thought, that human freedom and morality are saved from the iron grip of Newtonian determinism.

Wittgenstein states in the *Tractatus* that “all philosophy is a ‘critique of language’” (4.0031). I agree with Alfred Nordmann that we should interpret this in a Kantian fashion.²⁴ This leads to the following. Just as Kant defined the limits of knowledge by means of a transcendental investigation into its conditions of possibility, Wittgenstein determines the limits of what can be meaningfully said, by means of an account of the conditions of possibility of meaningful expression. Thus, we might say that thought's confinement to the constraint of depiction, when it comes to the limit of meaningful expression, is in fact analogous to the intellect's confinement to possible experience in Kant's critical philosophy.

Wittgenstein's investigation into the limits of language is also entirely *a priori*. Wittgenstein is not concerned with how languages actually *happen* to express themselves in our actual world. Instead, Wittgenstein is concerned with how the essential structure of any language *must* be, if it is to be able to express anything *at all*. The distinction between the meaningful and the meaningless is drawn entirely on a *transcendental* and *a priori* basis. This

²⁴(Nordmann; 2005, p. 14)

is similar to the way Kant approached the problem of synthetic a priori judgments: if synthetic a priori judgments are to be possible at all, they must be merely indicative of the universal structure of human cognition. Just as Kant's account of human reason, Wittgenstein's approach to language is "universalistic through and through".²⁵

Wittgenstein's claims about the impossibility of a theory of logic also bears much resemblance to Kant's contention that the pure concepts of the understanding, taken by themselves, do not really add to our knowledge. Kant thought that much of metaphysics erroneously tries to develop theories about concepts such as causality, substance, totality, etc., in order to arrive at a substantial theory of reality. However, Kant argued that only if these concepts are applied to the world of experience do such concepts assist us in the growth of our knowledge. Wittgenstein says the same about logic. No theory of logic, especially those of the likes of Frege and Russell, can ever add anything substantial. If one is to say anything substantial at all, logic must already be presupposed and in perfect order. Therefore, we might say that the attempt to say something about logic is basically what Kant calls a "transcendental illusion".²⁶

Recall that Wittgenstein states in the *Tractatus* that there can be no representatives of the logic of facts (4.0312). In other words, truths about logic cannot be represented. In connection to this, Wittgenstein also makes the statement that a picture cannot depict its own form, but that it can only *show* it (2.172). Again, we are reminded here of Kant. After all, Kant seems to say something very similar about the form of our intuitions, when he says that, although phenomena are always represented in space and time, space and time cannot themselves be represented.²⁷ Perhaps, then, Wittgenstein took inspiration from Kant when he states "each thing is, as it were, in a space of possible states of affairs. This space I can imagine empty, but I cannot imagine the thing without the space" (2.013). In any case, Wittgenstein's

²⁵(Stokhof; 2009, p. 5)

²⁶(Kant; 2000, p. 384ff)

²⁷(Kant; 2000, p. 172-192)

thesis that logic, being transcendental, cannot be itself represented, but is rather the very medium of representation, has certainly a very Kantian ring to it.

To get a better view on the relation between Wittgenstein and Kant, we should also take into account the differences between what they give transcendental accounts *of*. The important difference here is that, whereas Kant's concerns are importantly *epistemological*, Wittgenstein is exclusively concerned with *semantics*. As G.E.M. Anscombe explains, Wittgenstein is of the opinion that epistemological considerations are in fact irrelevant to semantics.²⁸ In addition, Wittgenstein also himself states that philosophy, conceived of as the critique of language, should not be confused with the theory of knowledge (4.1121). So how does the semantic in Wittgenstein compares to the epistemological in Kant? This question is not only of relevance to our present purpose; the relation between epistemology and semantics is also of philosophical significance more generally.

However, I shall not argue for anything substantial here about the relation between epistemology and semantics. Instead, my concern is more specifically how (and if) Wittgenstein's theory of meaning has influenced Wittgenstein's metaphysical view of reality. For Kant's transcendental investigation into the conditions that make knowledge possible, led Kant to substantial metaphysical conclusions about reality: empirical phenomena are essentially *mental constructs* created by our minds, and reality as it is in itself is unknowable. And thus the question is, does Wittgenstein's conception of the transcendental structure of language lead him to conclusions of a similar metaphysical order?

To suggest that Wittgenstein should be considered s a Kantian philosopher can easily give the impression that what is being suggested is that Wittgenstein is some kind of idealist or anti-realist. However, such a view of Wittgenstein seems, initially at least, very unlikely. For it seems that the ontological theses at the beginning of the *Tractatus*, and their relation to the

²⁸(Wittgenstein; 1921, p. 27-28)

picture theory of meaning, amount to a metaphysical view that is thoroughly realist. One important feature of realism is the thesis that statements are characterized by *bivalence*; i.e. statements about reality are either true or false independent from what we think about them.²⁹ I believe few theses are more typical of Wittgenstein than the thesis of bivalence. Wittgenstein explicitly states that any meaningful statement is either true or false, and that whether it is true or false is entirely dependent on how things in the world stand. Moreover, according to Wittgenstein, no meaningful proposition can be known *a priori* (2.21 - 2.225). This means that we need to look at the world to determine if what we say is true, and that the truth or falsehood of a statement must be independent from what we think.

Although Wittgenstein's realism may seem un-Kantian at first, the important thing to ask, is how Wittgenstein *arrives* at this metaphysical realism. According to several authors, the fact that the seemingly ontological theses of the *Tractatus* are placed at the *beginning* of the work is rather misleading.³⁰ In fact, we should understand the ontological theses as *consequences*, rather than prerequisites, of Wittgenstein's transcendental conception of logic and language. For example, Max Black explains concerning the way that Wittgenstein came to his own views "If I am not mistaken, then, the order of investigation from the nature of logic to the nature of language and thence to the nature of the world was roughly the reverse of the order or presentation in the final text".³¹ In a sense then, the *Tractatus* is similar to Kant's transcendental deduction: meaningful expression transcendently necessitates that the names of the elementary propositions of language apply to objects in reality.³² Again, it is clear that the Kantian element of the *Tractatus* consists especially in its transcendental perspective.

If Wittgenstein is right, then the possibility of meaningful language tran-

²⁹(Dummett; 1978)

³⁰(Black; 1970), (Kenny; 2006b), & (McGinn; 2009)

³¹(Black; 1970, p. 8)

³²Erik Stenius and Martin Stokhof make similar points. Stenius and Stokhof make similar points. See (Stenius; 1960, p. 218) and (Stokhof; 2009, p. 217).

scendentially requires metaphysical realism. A philosophically interesting question, then, is to what extent a transcendental account of semantics has precedence over a transcendental account of knowledge. If it turns out that the limits of semantics have a decisive influence on which kind of epistemological questions are even legitimate to ask, then, of course, this would have important consequences. For example, transcendental truths about semantics may preclude certain forms skepticism. Again, I shall not deal with this very intricate issue here. To conclude I would like instead to look at another point of contact between Wittgenstein and Kant.

Not only is Wittgenstein very similar to Kant in his transcendental perspective, his conclusions about ethics also appear very similar to those of Kant. To be sure, Kant acknowledged the reality of human freedom and morality. However, he thought that no theoretical knowledge is possible of them. This is because, according to Kant, human freedom and morality can never be objects of possible experience. And because theoretical knowledge only extends as far as possible experience extends, no knowledge of human freedom and morality is possible.³³ However, Kant believes that our "consciousness of the moral law", and the fact that we cannot help but to consider ourselves as free agents, provide sufficient grounds for supposing the reality of morality.³⁴

Admittedly, Wittgenstein's views on ethics are a lot more obscure. But what is clear, is that he likewise puts ethics outside the reach of certain transcendental limits. In *I: A Lecture on Ethics* Wittgenstein gives an explicit account of why this is so.³⁵ Briefly put, Wittgenstein believes that everything that can be meaningfully expressed is inherently *contingent*. However, ethics deals with values that are *absolute*, and thus, necessarily, it cannot be captured in contingent statements, whose truth essentially depend on the randomness that constitutes the state of affairs that make up the world. Hence, every attempt to say something meaningful about ethics is futile.

³³(Kant; 2002, p. 69-77).

³⁴(Kant; 2002, p. 152-155).

³⁵(Wittgenstein; 1965).

However, as we have seen, although ethics does not belong to the realm of what can be meaningfully put into words, Wittgenstein *does* clearly think that there is a reality to ethics. However, it is a reality that can only be *shown*: “There are, indeed, things that cannot be put into words. *They make themselves manifest*. They are what is mystical” (6.522). Where Kant had to “deny knowledge in order to make room for faith”³⁶, Wittgenstein feels the need to set limits to the meaningful, in order to ward off the ethical (and the aesthetical) from the pointlessness of contingency. As Martin Stokhof states: “What Wittgenstein wants to do is to safeguard ethics from all kinds of theorizing, from logical analysis, metaphysical speculation, and theological dogma.. Ethics is about action...and it should be dealt with in that sphere”.³⁷

Lastly, it should perhaps be noted that although Wittgenstein’s conclusions about ethics appear to be very similar to those of Kant, there might nevertheless be substantial differences. Julian Young makes several comments about this.³⁸ For example, Young explains that although Kant was deeply concerned with protecting religion and morality from the threat of natural science, Wittgenstein’s concern with ethics is very different. According to him, Wittgenstein’s concern with ethics is more Schopenhauerian than Kantian. Wittgenstein is not at all concerned with moral duty, and whether or not an action is right or wrong. Instead, Wittgenstein concerns go out to the problem of how to live a happy life that is free of suffering. If this is a correct way of understanding Wittgenstein, then his view on the ethical stands in stark contrast with Kant’s ethical views, according to which the question of happiness seems of only minor concern to what is ethical or moral. In any case, the fact that Wittgenstein was of the opinion that the ethical and aesthetical are identical surely speaks in favor of the view that Wittgenstein’s approach to ethics had at least a more sensual dimension to it compared to that of Kant.

³⁶(Kant; 2000, p. 115)

³⁷(Stokhof; 2009, p. 3)

³⁸(Young; 1984)

Conclusion

There are many interesting points of contact between Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophico* and Kant's critical philosophy. Wittgenstein's similarity to Kant primarily manifests itself in his transcendental perspective on philosophical problems. First, Wittgenstein's transcendental account of logic very much resembles Kant's transcendental theory of human cognition. In connection to this, I have pointed out the link between Wittgenstein's rejection of the possibility of theories of logic of the kind that Frege and Russell tried to develop, and Kant's notion of transcendental illusion. Wittgenstein's thesis that every meaningful expression must be logically structured, but that logic cannot itself be represented, is also of significance here. For it is in several ways similar to Kant's contention that, although all possible objects of experience are necessarily represented in space and time, both space and time themselves cannot be represented. Second, although Wittgenstein's realism is radically opposed to Kant's transcendental idealism, in both cases these metaphysical views are essentially transcendently motivated. Finally, I have showed that the place that ethics takes in Wittgenstein's thinking is very similar to the place of morality in Kant's thinking. Both philosophers postulate the reality of something beyond transcendental limits. Yet, as I have also hinted at, there may nevertheless be subtle differences between Wittgenstein and Kant on this point. In any case, there are significant and interesting parallels between Wittgenstein's attempts to draw the limits of language, and Kant's critical view of the limits of what can be humanly known.

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