Frege, Carnap, and the Limits of Asserting

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Abstract

This paper applies the contemporary idea of the constitutive features of assertions to the texts of Gottlob Frege, Rudolf Carnap, and Ludwig Wittgenstein. The focus is in Frege and Carnap, but a connection to Wittgenstein's remarks on philosophy is indicated at the end of the paper. I intend to study and compare the three philosophers' views on philosophical asserting and philosophical assertions. The question about the limits of language is thus posed in pragmatic terms, because it is formulated as a question about the limits set to linguistic acts labelled as assertings. I focus on Frege's *Begriffsschrift* (1879) and his *Grundlagen der Arithmetik* (1884), and on Carnap's article titled "Empiricism, Semantics, and Ontology" (1950/1956); I then make a few remarks on Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* and *On Certainty*. I argue that there are important connections between Frege's and Carnap's views on the limits of asserting. Their otherwise diverging positions are connected in that, as they show, it is not easy for philosophers themselves to comply with the norms they give for judging and asserting. I argue that while Frege does not make his attitude towards philosophical assertions explicit, the common core in Carnap's and Wittgenstein's texts is that the epistemic norms they give to assertions lead both to deny the possibility of philosophical assertions.

1. Introduction

In contemporary philosophy, there is much discussion on what assertions are and how they can be distinguished from sayings. The distinction between thoughts or propositions, judgments, and assertions has a long history. I will not go through its various phases in this paper. However, I take Gottlob Frege's distinction between thoughts, judgments, and assertions into account, because it is an important background for a number of contemporary theories of assertion. This paper applies the debate on assertions to the texts of three late nineteenth century and twentieth century classics, namely, Frege, Rudolf Carnap, and Ludwig Wittgenstein. The focus is in Frege and Carnap, but a few comments on the similarities between their views and Wittgenstein's remarks are made in the last section. This paper is not a study of asserting and assertions in general; instead, it seeks to analyze the three philosophers' views on philosophers' assertings and philosophical assertions. Those assertions can be – and have been – compared with scientific theses and arguments and the limits set by scientific assertions. For example, if one claims that philosophy is a branch of science, one proposes the metaphilosophical view that the requirements set to scientific asserting also apply to philosophical asserting. This paper neither defends nor challenges that view.

Like the discussion about the distinction between thoughts, judgments, and assertions, the discussion about limits has a long history in philosophy. Kant sought to draw the limits of knowledge and experience, and Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* is a study of the limits of language, as a number of philosophers, especially those starting from Erik Stenius' work on Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, have emphasized.[1] In this paper I pose the question about limits in more pragmatic terms, precisely because I discuss the limits set to linguistic acts labelled as assertings. In the second section, I will give a short overview of contemporary theories of assertion, which provides important background for my argument. I will then move to Frege's views, primarily to two aspects in his philosophy. The first is his idea of universal language, the second is his view of permissible

ways of justifying propositions. A peculiar feature of Frege's distinction between various ways of justifying propositions presented in his *Grundlagen der Arithmetik* (1884) is the lack of an explicit view on philosophical assertions. Frege's requirements for the justification of various types of judgments provide an illuminating point of comparison with the requirements that Carnap sets for assertions and the limits he draws for asserting. I will discuss Carnap's view on metaphysical and other philosophical assertions and pay special attention to his distinction between internal and external assertions as presented in his "Empiricism, Semantics, and Ontology" (1950/1956).

At the end of the paper, I will compare Carnap's distinction between internal and external assertions with Wittgenstein's views on philosophy in the *Philosophical Investigations* and on philosophy, knowledge, and certainty in *On Certainty*. I will suggest that there is a connection between Frege, Carnap, and Wittgenstein in that the three philosophers give norms for assertion and those norms set limits to philosophers' assertings. This is not to say that Wittgenstein developed theories, such as a theory of assertion or a theory of what philosophy is. Nor do I wish to argue that there is a particular epistemic norm of assertion that Frege, Carnap, and Wittgenstein propose and defend. The main idea is rather to read Carnap's papers on metaphysics and linguistic frameworks in terms of contemporary theories of assertion and to suggest a point of view from which one can find connections between Carnap's "Empiricism, Semantics, and Ontology" and Wittgenstein's thoughts about knowledge and certainty around 1950. This paper is not an effort to make the historical context and possible factual connections explicit or to show that one philosopher has actually been influenced by an earlier one, although that is precisely what could be done in case of the three philosophers. For example, there is the debate between various interpretations of Wittgenstein that is visible in P. M. S. Hacker's criticism of James Conant's study of the relations between Carnap and Wittgenstein (Conant 2001; Hacker 2003). I will not choose a side in these debates. Instead, I start with the contemporary debate on assertions, which arguably has its roots in the three classics, and try to reveal a few aspects of Frege's, Carnap's, and Wittgenstein's positions

that, perhaps, would go unnoticed if we did not look at their texts in terms of later developments in philosophy.

2. Contemporary theories of assertion

Much of contemporary theorizing on assertions begins with Frege's distinctions made in his *Begriffsschrift* (1879). There Frege distinguishes between a thought (*Gedanke*) and a judgment (*Urteil*), which is an acknowledgment of the truth of a thought (BS, § 2). The distinction is also shown in his conceptual notation by means of two different strokes, the horizontal content stroke and the vertical judgment stroke. In his later writings, for example, in his "Einleitung in die Logik" (1906), Frege pays attention to the distinction he made in 1879. He emphasizes the fact that he gave a sign to the assertoric force that is hidden in the word "is", when we make an assertion (NS, 211; PW, 194). In his "Meine grundlegenden logischen Einsichten" (1915) he writes: "In language assertoric force is bound up with the predicate" (NS, 272; PW, 252). The word "assertoric force" is a translation for Frege's "Behauptungskraft". For Frege, the judgment stroke or the assertion sign is the sign for "it is the case that … " or "it is true that … ". It is something that makes an utterance into an assertion. Assertions (*Behauptungen*) are overt expressions of judgments. When we judge or assert, when we use assertoric force, we intend to take the step from the mere thought or the sense (*Sinn*) of a sentence to its truth-value, which we thus claim to be the True.

Contemporary theories of assertion start with the distinction between a proposition and asserting a proposition and thus assume that the distinction can be made by giving the specific features of assertions that distinguish assertions from mere sayings. Jessica Brown and Herman Cappelen, who give an overview of various theories of assertion, point out that much of contemporary discussion "focuses on the idea that assertion is governed by a norm that imposes epistemic requirements on appropriate assertion" (Brown and Cappelen 2011, 1). A prime example

is Timothy Williamson's theory (1996, 2000), which argues that assertion is governed by the knowledge norm, which says that "one must: assert p only if one knows that p".[2]

Apart from Williamson's theory, which proposes the knowledge norm, there are other normative theories, of which some propose the norm that "p" would be true, others the norm that there would be warrant for "p", and still others the norm that the speaker would believe that p, for the constitutive norm for the assertion "p". There are also theories that do not evoke any norms, but rather refer to the causes of sayings, such as the speaker's intentions and beliefs concerning the hearer's beliefs. Moreover, there are theories that distinguish assertions from mere sayings by reference to the effects that assertions have on what is presupposed in conversation or on background assumptions. There is also a theory close to the normative theories, proposed by Robert B. Brandom (1994). Brandom argues that assertions are individuated by commitments and entitlements and that asserting brings in rights, permissions, and obligations. John MacFarlane (2011) has identified four main accounts of assertion, which are called the constitutive rule account, the attitudinal account, the common ground account, and the commitment account.[3] These correspond to the types of theories that were listed above. Herman Cappelen (2011) has proposed a debunking view, according to which "assertion" is primarily a philosophical term that can be used to pick up many kinds of things, but that such picking is always conventional. His view is perhaps close to what Wittgenstein would propose at least in his later writings (see, e.g., PI §§22, 112–116).

Whether the distinction between mere sayings and assertions can be made in everyday discourse, it is something that philosophers have tried to preserve in scientific as well as in philosophical discourse. The topic of this paper is whether philosophical assertions survive the test of normative theories of assertion. The theories in which I am interested here are precisely normative ones, primarily those that propose epistemic norms for assertion. They include various versions of knowledge norms as well as norms that require the speaker to have justified or warranted beliefs that what is said is true. Brandom's view can also be included in normative

theories because of its deontic vocabulary. Breaking the norm of assertion does not mean that one fails to assert. Instead, one who breaks the norm exposes oneself to blame, because one is under the norm when one asserts. However, if speakers never succeeded in following the norm when making certain kinds of assertions, for example because following the given norm is impossible in the case of those assertions, then I would say that they do not even succeed in making those assertions. My question in this paper is what kinds of norms philosophers have set for their own assertions and whether those norms can ever be fulfilled.

3. Frege and transcendental philosophy

As noted above, Frege distinguishes between thoughts, judgments, and assertions. His conceptual notation is meant to be a universal language, in which thoughts – in fact, all that can be thought – can be expressed. In the "Preface" of his *Begriffsschrift*, Frege emphasizes that he wants to put forward both a *calculus ratiocinator*, that is, the rules of logical inference, and a *lingua characterica*, which is the term that he uses for Leibniz's *lingua characteristica* and which was also used by Adolf Trendelenburg. Frege refers to his article on Leibniz's idea of universal language and its developments before and after Leibniz in his *Begriffsschrift*.[4] The universal language Frege presents is a genuine language, which carries contents. It is also meant to be a calculus, a tool that could be applied to various purposes, to arithmetic and to the sciences, for example, to make thoughts and the chains of inference explicit. Still, the conceptual notation is also a genuine language, as Jean van Heijenoort (1967), Warren Goldfarb (1979), and Jaakko Hintikka (1979, 1981) have argued in their seminal articles. These interpreters and the interpretational tradition building on their work have given a detailed exposition of the division between calculus and language and construed it as a means for distinguishing two traditions in modern logic and in the philosophy of language during the last 150 years.

The basic idea proposed by van Heijenoort and others is that Frege's conceptual notation is meant to be universal in the sense that it speaks about all that there is and does not allow any metaperspective from which one could give a semantic theory to the language or compare language and the world. Frege does criticize the correspondence theory of truth, precisely because in his view the theory requires that we should be able to step beyond the limits of language to compare language and the world ("Der Gedanke", KS, 344). Moreover, he does not have any systematic semantic theory, even if he has views on meaning, most prominently his distinction between sense (*Sinn*) and reference (*Bedeutung*). The structure of conceptual notation mirrors the structure of what is not language, such as the categories of objects and functions.[5] In these respects, Frege's work may be seen as preceding some of the ideas developed in Wittgenstein's Tractatus (see TLP, 3; TLP 2.174, 6.13). The distinctions that Frege makes on the level of senses mediate between language and the objects and functions to which linguistic expressions refer. Still, the items that mediate cannot be named as senses; if we talk about them in language they turn into objects. That also happens to functions; if we talk about functions, including concepts, they lose their role as functions and become objects.[6]

Van Heijenoort and others argue that, in addition to the view of logic as language, there is another line in the history of logic, namely, the view of logic as calculus, supported for example by Boole, Peirce, Schröder, and Tarski, which considers logic as a reinterpretable calculus and which allows a metaperspective from which one can develop a systematic theory of meaning and truth. The division between the two traditions, that of logic as language and that of logic as calculus, has turned out to be a fruitful interpretational model. However, in Frege's own terms, his conceptual notation is intended as both language and calculus, but calculus in a different sense from what the above interpreters have proposed. Nevertheless, the division that is made from the point of view of later developments in the twentieth century helps us see in the classics of modern logic features that could not have seen clearly by Frege's contemporaries. Still, the way in which the distinction

between language and calculus is understood varies if we, say, start from Leibniz's ideas and then move to Frege and his contemporaries and further to the logicians and philosophers in the twentieth century. No matter how we evaluate these interpretational debates, we may say that Frege's conceptual notation is meant to be a formula language of pure thought, an intuitive representation of the forms of thought, and a presentation of the limits of thought. The way in which he describes it in the *Grundgesetze* (1893) is as follows:

> Any law that states what is can be conceived as prescribing that one should think in accordance with it, and is therefore in that sense a law of thought. This holds for geometrical and physical laws no less than for logical laws. The latter then only deserve the name "law of thought" with more right if it should be meant by this that they are the most general laws, which prescribe universally how one should think if one is to think at all. ("Vorwort" in GGA I, in Künne 2010, 68–69; "Preface," GGA I, in Beaney 1997, 202–203.)

The same question concerning the interpretational approaches and methods of interpretation arises if we try to evaluate Frege scholarship more generally. Many philosophers, perhaps most notably Michael Dummett (1973, 1981), have taken Frege to be primarily a philosopher of language and a major contributor to the linguistic turn in philosophy. Ignacio Angelelli (1967) linked Frege to the Aristotelian or Scholastic tradition, and Eike-Henner W. Kluge (1980) regarded Frege as a metaphysician who proposed a list of general metaphysical categories. Especially in the 1980's, Hans Sluga (1980) and a few others considered Frege as an epistemologist. Sluga argued that one must pay special attention to Frege's German, particularly his Kantian background. What I have emphasized, but will not argue here, is that in order to understand the philosophy of Frege's conceptual notation, one should consider the links between Leibniz, Kant, and Adolf Trendelenburg, particularly his notes on

Ludwig Benedict Trede's "Sprachlehre" (1811), and consider the views of Frege as well as Wittgenstein against that historical background.[7] After metaphysics returned to the analytic tradition as what we now know as analytic metaphysics, a pressing interpretational question has been whether Frege contributed to metaphysics, and if he did, what kind of contribution he made. A. W. Moore (2012) has argued that Frege's philosophy was not "making sense of things", but was "making sense of sense", which became a focal topic in the analytic tradition after Frege. Still, Moore includes Frege in his work on metaphysics, because he regards Frege's contribution as an important preparation for analytic metaphysics. I have argued elsewhere that Frege's analysis of the concept of being was, if not a contribution to metaphysics, then at least a contribution to metametaphysics (Haaparanta, forthcoming).

This paper poses the problem somewhat differently. My question is what Frege thought about philosophical, including metaphysical, assertions. Frege's conceptual notation is transcendental at least in the minimal sense that it contributes to defining the limits of what can be thought, as argued above. Frege does not make direct metaphysical assertions in his texts. However, he criticizes those who do not acknowledge the independence of numbers and other abstract objects from the human mind. It seems as if he were a Platonist, but he nowhere makes the direct claim that numbers exist independently of the human mind. What he does argue it that the whole mathematical practice loses its meaning if we do not acknowledge the realm of numbers. This is the argument presented in the *Grundlagen*, and later extended to cover other abstract objects such as thoughts, namely, an argument about the acknowledgment or the recognition, as Michael Beaney translated the word "Anerkennung", of a "third realm". Frege writes:

A third realm must be recognized. Anything belonging to this realm has it in common with ideas that it cannot be perceived by the senses, but has in common with things that it does

not need an owner so as to belong to the contents of his consciousness. ("Der Gedanke," in Künne 2010, 101; "Thought," in Beaney 1997, 336–337.)

Whether we consider Frege as a Platonist or a transcendental philosopher, his universal language aims at defining the limits of what can be thought and further of what can be judged and asserted, that is, judged in overt language.

4. Frege on justification

Further limits for judging and asserting are proposed by Frege in the *Grundlagen*, where he considers the distinctions between syntheticity, analyticity, apriority, and aposteriority. For Frege, these distinctions concern the justification for making a judgment (*die Berechtigung zur Urteilsfällung*), not the thought or the content of the judgment (*Inhalt des Urteils*). According to Frege, when we use these concepts, we speak about different ways of justifying the taking to be true of a proposition (*Satz*). Instead of the word "Urteil", Frege begins to use the word "Satz" and characterizes the four concepts by means of different ways of justifying and even proving propositions. On his characterization, a proposition is analytic if we only rely on general logical laws and definitions in its proof. If we have to make use of truths which are not general logical truths but belong to a special field of knowledge (*ein besonderes Wissensgebiet*) in proving a proposition, the proposition is synthetic. For Frege, a truth is a posteriori, if it is not possible to give a proof for it without referring to facts (*Tatsachen*); for him, facts are truths which cannot be proved and which are not general, because they contain claims about particular objects. In Frege's view, a truth is a priori, if in its derivation nothing else is needed than general laws that do not need a proof and that cannot be proved (GLA §3).

Besides stating that the distinctions between analyticity, syntheticity, apriority, and aposteriority concern the ways of justifying a judgment, Frege points out that if there is no

justification, it is not possible to draw those distinctions. What Frege means seems to be the requirement that, while we do not need to have the justification ready at hand, it has to be in principle possible to give a justification and we need to know how that would be done. Hence, on his view, we can determine into which of the four categories a judgment falls if we know the way in which the judgment can be justified. The alternatives are logical laws and definitions, general laws which belong to a special field of knowledge, and sense perception. Frege does not tell us into which category or categories of justification metaphysical or other philosophical judgments and assertions belong. If he thinks that philosophical judgments and assertions can be characterized by reference to the four concepts, he would probably take them to be analytic a priori and hence comparable to the judgments of arithmetic, or synthetic a priori, comparable to judgments of geometry. His own philosophy of mathematics is antipsychologistic, and therefore it is very likely that he would not vote for the alternative that philosophical judgments and assertions are synthetic a posteriori. However, we may only speculate on the alternatives; Frege himself does not help us here. He emphasizes the need to clarify language as one and indeed the first task of philosophy, but what else he would count as philosophy is not clear on the basis of his writings. However, he regards it as important to distinguish between different ways of justifying judgments or give proofs, which give the speaker the permission to judge and assert. If there is no justification, the judgment cannot be classified in terms of the four concepts, but in view of philosophy the very fact that there is no justification is more worrying. For if there is no justification, we should not make the judgment in the first place. That is, however, something that Frege does not claim; he does not argue that there are no metaphysical or other philosophical judgments or assertions.

In his writings in 1924 and 1925, Frege returns to different sources of knowledge, mentioning sense perception, the logical source of knowledge, and the geometric or spatio-temporal source of knowledge (NS, 294 and 298). He approves of logical knowledge, which is knowledge of a specific realm of logical objects, such as thoughts. Arithmetical knowledge is not logical

knowledge for him anymore; instead, it has its origin in the spatio-temporal source of knowledge. These later writings raise the same problem as his earlier writings, but in that context the only source for philosophical knowledge could be the logical source of knowledge. What naturally remains as an alternative is that there is no such thing as philosophical knowledge that could be traced back to any of the sources of knowledge Frege mentions. But this would entail that there are no such things as philosophical judgments or assertions which would be as it were on the same level with logical, mathematical, or scientific assertions.

5. Carnap on metaphysics

In recent years, after the rise of analytic metaphysics, there has been much discussion on Rudolf Carnap's critical attitude towards metaphysics or what can be called his overcoming of metaphysics. Matti Eklund (2013), for example, describes the current debate on Carnap by distinguishing between pluralist and relativist approaches. According to the pluralist view, there are many different possible languages, and one and the same sentence may have different meanings and get different truth-values in different languages (Eklund 2013, 231). Hence, if Carnap were a language pluralist, then what he called frameworks are languages or fragments of languages (ibid., 232). Carnap himself points out in the footnote of the 1956 version of "Empiricism, Semantics, and Ontology" that the term "framework" is in the 1950 version used for the system of entities, while in the 1956 paper it is used for the system of linguistic expressions only (Carnap 1956, 205). The relativists, for their part, argue that Carnap's frameworks are like perspectives or outlooks (Eklund 2013, 233). What that means is that the propositions that sentences express are true or false only relative to frameworks.

Vera Flocke (2018) does not regard relativism as a serious interpretational alternative, but she also raises critical arguments against the pluralist interpretation (Flocke 2018, 15–18). She proposes that Carnap's frameworks are systems of rules for the assessment of statements. She

argues further that the pragmatic external statements that Carnap discusses in his paper, namely, statements about which framework one should adopt to be contrasted with internal statements within that framework, express dispositions to follow particular rules of assessment. On her view, pragmatic external statements are noncognitive, because they merely express those dispositions. She argues that this feature makes it possible to compare Carnapian noncognitivism about ontology with norm-expressivism in metaethics (Flocke 2018, 2). Giuseppina D'Oro (2015) compares Carnap and Collingwood and argues that Collingwood's distinction between propositions and presuppositions resembles Carnap's distinction between internal and external assertions. Darren Bradley (2018) emphasizes the connection between Carnap's criticism of metaphysics in the late 1920's and in the 1950's. He defends the thesis that Carnap's "Empiricism, Semantics, and Ontology" does not bring anything new to Carnap's criticism of metaphysics, because the argument against metaphysics was presented already in 1928, both in *Der logische Aufbau der Welt* and in the short article titled "Pseudo-Problems in Philosophy". Bradley claims that Carnap takes the problem of metaphysics to lie in the fact that there is no evidence that could support metaphysical assertions. Therefore, what Carnap later calls external assertions and which are made by metaphysicians, are not genuine assertions.

The terminology varies in Carnap's texts and translations. As noted, Frege used the terms "Urteil", "Satz", and "Behauptung", the latter of which has been translated as "assertion", and "behauptende Kraft", which has been translated as "the assertive or assertoric force". Carnap uses the word "assertion" in the 1950 and 1956 papers. When I discuss metaphysical and other philosophical assertions, I will use the word "assertion" in connection with both Frege and Carnap, because the requirement of giving grounds or justification is present in both cases. For Frege, asserting is more than forming a meaningful content, whereas for Carnap, meaning and assertability are more closely connected. That is at least the case in his criticism of metaphysics in 1920's and in the 1930's.

Carnap presents his arguments against metaphysics and accordingly against metaphysical assertions in his papers "Scheinprobleme in der Philosophie" (1928), "Von Gott und Seele, Scheinfragen in Metaphysik und Theologie" (1929), "Die alte und die neue Logik" (1930), "Überwindung der Metaphysik durch logische Analyse der Sprache" (1931), and "On the Character of Philosophic Problems" (1934), published in *Scheinprobleme in der Philosophie und andere metaphysikkritische Schriften* (2004). Moreover, as mentioned above, he discusses metaphysics, especially metaphysical assertions, in "Empiricism, Semantics, and Ontology", which is an important article in view of the topic of this paper. The fate of metaphysics in logical empiricism is well known.[8] In his "Überwindung der Metaphysik durch logische Analyse der Sprache" (1931) Carnap seeks to show that there are serious problems already in metaphysical language, hence, also in the claims that metaphysicians make. In his papers in the late 1920's and in the early 1930's, Carnap is concerned about the meaningfulness of philosophers' assertions, but in the 1950 paper he presents the problem as a problem of justification. However, there is no radical difference between the papers of the two periods; while the tolerance towards various languages is a key idea in the later article, the criticism against metaphysical language, problems, and assertions is basically the same. Like the earlier articles, the 1950 and 1956 papers take the possibility of giving evidence as the guarantee for meaningfulness: if it is impossible to give evidence in order to solve a problem, the problem is a pseudo-problem and the suggested answers are not assertions. The problem Carnap sees in what are regarded as metaphysical assertions is that they are not constituted by the norms that assertions ought to be constituted. Therefore, they are not assertions.

In his articles in 1929 and 1931, Carnap gives examples of pseudoproblems. One of them is the question "Does God exist?" Carnap argues that because the question has no link to what can be experienced in perception, there is no way of meaningfully talking about God. He writes: "Alles, von dem man überhaupt sprechen kann, muss sich auf von mir Erlebtes zurückführen lassen.", and argues that every statement ("*Aussage*") must be connected to perceptions; otherwise it lacks sense

("*ist sinnlos*") (Carnap, 2004, 58–59). On Carnap's view, the question "Does a human being have a soul in addition to her body?" contains meaningful words, but the question as a whole lacks sense. Examples of sentences that lack sense because of problems in the combination of words include the sentence "Caesar is a prime number" and the sentence "Caesar is and", which fail as combinations, although for different reasons, because the former, unlike the latter, is syntactically correct. A famous example is naturally Martin Heidegger's sentence "Das Nichts nichtet" (Carnap 1931). Carnap points out that such statements as "God exists" or "There is a god" would be false to earlier antimetaphysicians, because there is no such object of possible sensuous perception; Carnap himself sees precisely the same problem in the statements, but for that reason he further argues that the statements are meaningless (Carnap 1931, 232).

In his "Empiricism, Semantics, and Ontology" Carnap considers philosophers who ask the question "Are there numbers?" He writes: "They might try to explain what they mean by saying that it is a question of the ontological status of numbers; the question whether or not numbers have a certain metaphysical characteristic called reality … or subsistence or status of "independent entities" (Carnap 1956, 209). The problem Carnap sees in the philosophers' question is that they have not given a formulation of their question in terms of common scientific language and thus have not given their question or to the possible answers any cognitive content. Given that there is no cognitive content in the questions or in the proposed answers given by metaphysicians Carnap argues that there are no metaphysical beliefs, assumptions, or assertions (ibid., 208). The criticism of metaphysics in "Empiricism, Semantics, and Ontology" is based on the distinction between internal and external assertions. Carnap states: "Whoever makes an internal assertion is certainly obliged to justify it by providing evidence, empirical evidence in the case of electrons, logical proof in the case of prime numbers" (ibid., 218). Hence, to use the terminology of contemporary theories of assertion, one who asserts is under an epistemic norm; that is, assertion is governed by a specific warrant rule, which requires that one should be able to bring in evidence, either empirical evidence

or logical proofs. The two types of justifying judgments are also mentioned in Frege's *Grundlagen*, as we noted above, but Frege also includes synthetic judgments a priori in his list. Carnap also advises his reader to be cautious in making assertions, but tolerant in permitting linguistic forms (ibid., 221).

In his article of 1956, Carnap distinguishes between questions that are internal to the linguistic framework and questions that are external to that framework (ibid., 206). The assertions made within the framework have cognitive content. In everyday language, for example, the spatio-temporally ordered system of observable things and events is accepted, and we are permitted to make assertions about those things; such assertions can be given cognitive content by referring to perceivable evidence (ibid., 206–207). By contrast, the question concerning the reality of the thing or world itself is a metaphysical and an external question, which cannot be given the required cognitive content. Therefore, metaphysical assertions never follow the epistemic norm of assertion. Because they never follow that norm, there cannot be such assertions.

Carnap's distinctions are even more complex than the basic distinction between internal and external questions. He argues that we choose a framework for practical reasons. Therefore, the question like "A there (really) space-time points?" can be read as an internal question, although the answer to it is analytic and trivial. Alternatively, it can be read as an external question, but as such it is a practical question and asks for a choice instead of an answer which would be an assertion (ibid., 213). Hence, what this means is that instead of normal internal assertions and external philosophical assertions, which are not assertions at all in Carnap's analysis, there are external choices made on the basis of practical considerations concerning, for example, the usefulness or fruitfulness of the framework. If, say, the number language of mathematics or the space-time point language of physics is chosen, the external practical question demanding a choice, such as "Should we choose the space-time point language?" turns into an internal question, to which there is a trivial answer once the choice is made. For Carnap, the frameworks are something that are accepted or rejected,

not something that could be theoretically justified. Instead, once a framework is accepted, its "furniture" can be described, but those descriptions do not require justification as their support in the way normal internal assertions do. Moreover, Carnap allows what he calls extrasystematic explanations, marginal notes, and hints that help us to learn the linguistic framework which is constituted by a system of rules (ibid., 211).

Carnap's external assertions – if there were such assertions – would be such as "There is a world outside language", "There are universals", or "Numbers exist". The concept of reality may be used as an internal concept, but then it is an empirical and scientific, not a metaphysical concept. If the description of a chosen framework consists of assertions, it does not consist of assertions in the demanding sense of introducing new information to the discussion that has not been there already. Still, we might think that it reveals something that has been hidden or gone unnoticed for those who live within the chosen framework. As a set of internal assertions, the description of the linguistic framework with its entities is given justification in the peculiar sense that it is the mutually accepted framework.

In the terminology used in contemporary theories of assertion, norms of assertion can be broken and one may be blamed for doing that. This is also what can happen in the case of Carnap's internal, but not in the case of his external assertions. One who makes an internal assertion may defend her thesis by referring to evidence, either perceptual evidence or logical rules and definitions, or even by referring to the linguistic, hence also ontological, frameworks that are mutually accepted, such as the existence of numbers in arithmetic. But external assertions arising from nowhere, outside all frameworks, have no grounds to which the asserter could refer in making her assertion. They are not constituted by any norms and they do not bring in any obligations to give justifying evidence for one's assertions.

6. Wittgenstein and the limits of asserting: a few remarks

In the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein remarks:

> Philosophy must not interfere in any way with the actual use of language, so it can in the
> end only describe it (PI §124).

He also states:

> The name "philosophy" might also be given to what is possible *before* all new discoveries
> and inventions (PI §126).

His view of philosophical theses is captured by the following remark:

> If someone were to advance *theses* in philosophy, it would never be possible to debate
> them, because everyone would agree to them (PI 128).

It would certainly not make justice to Wittgenstein or Carnap to argue that there is close affinity
with Carnap's "Empiricism, Semantics, and Ontology" and Wittgenstein's statements in what is
called his later philosophy. Still, there are a number of well-known connections between
Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* and Carnap's early philosophy, as well as several similarities between
Carnap's 1956 article and Wittgenstein's earlier as well as later work. I do not wish to make any
strong claims about these connections. However, what Wittgenstein writes above can be expressed
in Carnap's terms by saying that if philosophy has any task, it is to describe our linguistic
framework. In some cases, Carnap would say that we choose the framework; as for everyday thing
language, that would not be a correct characterization.

I argued above that Carnap is concerned about the lack of cognitive content of metaphysical assertions; for that reason, he cannot even allow them the status of assertions. In *On Certainty*, Wittgenstein is interested in how the expression "I know" is used in language (OC §90). That interest also reveals his concern about epistemological questions and about the traditional problem of skepticism. It is not only the late period, but his earlier philosophical work as well, that is relevant in view of epistemology, even if he does not propose any epistemological theories.[9] What is also important in his remarks in *On Certainty* is that he considers the epistemic grounds for assertings, particularly for philosophical assertings.

In *On Certainty* Wittgenstein discusses the so called Moore sentences like "I know that this is my hand" or "I know that the world has existed before my birth". For him, the correct use of "I know" presupposes the possibility to justify the presented claim in one way or other, by bringing in evidence, perceptions, reasons, and the like. It also presupposes the possibility to doubt whether the claim is true, and to be mistaken about what is argued. We cannot use the word "to know" correctly where doubt and error are excluded; on the other hand, "the game of doubting" presupposes certainty (OC §§115, 116, 360, 446). What this also means is that, on his view, we can *assert* that p only if we can meaningfully assert that we know that p. For Wittgenstein, there are what Carnap would call internal assertions, and to use the terminology of normative theories of assertion, they are constituted by epistemic norms. There are no norms for what Carnap would call external assertions, such as metaphysical assertions. On that point, Wittgenstein would agree. He writes:

> I am sitting with a philosopher in the garden; he says again and again "I know that that's a tree", pointing to a tree that is near us. Someone else arrives and hears this, and I tell him: This fellow isn't insane. We are only doing philosophy. (OC §467.)

If we read the remark in Carnap's terms, we may say that there is no assertion, because the philosopher's saying has no cognitive content, that is, there is no way of justifying it within the language-game. We can also read the passage in terms of contemporary discussion on assertions, and conclude that the speaker fails to comply with the epistemic norm of assertion. For Wittgenstein, this is the fate of all philosophical sayings, insofar as they seek to be more than descriptions of the language-game that is being played. Wittgenstein writes:

> All testing, all confirmation and disconfirmation of a hypothesis takes place already within a system (OC §105).

7. Conclusions

I argued above that Frege's language is language with conceptual contents.[10] The step from sense to reference is the step from conceptual content to truth, and that is precisely the step from mere thoughts to judgments. In order to take that step, one must have a justification for what is judged to be true, hence, also to what is asserted. Frege gives a list of acceptable ways of justifying contents, but he does not tell us how to deal with philosophical assertions. Carnap argues in the 1920's and the 1930's that metaphysical assertions lack sense, because they do not have cognitive content, and for that reason they are not assertions at all. In the 1950's, he takes a more tolerant attitude towards various linguistic frameworks, but again argues that there is no role for philosophers who wish to make assertions about what the world is really like. However, once a linguistic framework is chosen on pragmatic grounds, it can be described within the framework. I suggested above that there is a link between Carnap and Wittgenstein. On Wittgenstein's view, what philosophers take to be topics for their debates, such as the existence of the external world, is something that is certain, not something that can be known. Hence, it is not possible to make the assertion that the external world exists, because such a saying is not governed by what contemporary theorists call the epistemic

norm of assertion. For Carnap, assertions are possible only within a linguistic framework; for Wittgenstein, they are possible only within a language-game. I argued that Wittgenstein rejects traditional philosophical assertions for the same reason as Carnap. The reason is that they are not constituted by the given, restrictive epistemic norms.[11]

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Notes

1 See, for example, Stenius 1960, Kannisto 1986, Pihlström 2004, 2006, and Appelqvist 2016.

2 Williamson 2000, 238–269.

3 MacFarlane 2011, 80; Goldberg 2015, 9–10.

4 Frege, BS, "Vorwort", and "Über den Zweck der Begriffsschrift", BS (1964), 98. Also see

Trendelenburg 1867. Cf. Haaparanta 1985, 11.

5 See Frege 1982a.

6 See Frege 1892a, 1892b. I have argued earlier that these features give support for the thesis that

Frege fits in with the universalist tradition. See Haaparanta 1985, 35 – 44.

7 See Haaparanta 1985 and 2012.

8 See Carus 2007 and Uebel 2004.

9 See, for example, Kober 1996.

10 For the inferentialist interpretation of Frege's conceptual content, see Brandom 1994 and 2000.

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