TRANSCENDENTALISM IN WITTGENSTEIN'S *TRACTATUS*

MICHAEL POTTER

Abstract. Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* holds (to put the point in Kantian terms) that logic uses no categories and hence requires no transcendental deduction. However, this does not free logic wholly from transcendentalism. Logic depends on language, and the *Tractatus* contains a transcendental argument that the possibility of the expression of complete thoughts presupposes a language of simple names. This latter transcendental argument Wittgenstein abandoned in his middle period, leaving him exposed in his later work to a renewed threat of transcendental idealism.

Keywords: trancendental idealism, transcendental arguments, Kant, Wittgenstein.

INTRODUCTION

I shall here be discussing ways in which Kant may have influenced Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*.[1] 'Influence' may of course be positive or negative. So in addressing this question we should be open to the possibility that Wittgenstein may have been attempting not only to adopt Kant's insights but perhaps also to avoid his mistakes. It is worth distinguishing two ways in which questions of influence can be addressed: if I had to give them labels, I would call them the 'way of ideas' and the 'way of philosophy'. There is, of course, a long and fruitful tradition of mutual interaction between these two ways of approaching questions, a tradition which belies the unfortunate tendency of unsympathetic philosophers to denigrate the history of ideas, absurdly, with the epithet 'mere'.

The way of ideas makes use, of course, of surviving evidence as to the works a philosopher such as Wittgenstein read, who taught him, who he spoke to, etc., but it also looks in his texts for explicit signs of influence. Tell tale signs include uses

Michael Potter ✉
Faculty of Philosophy, Cambridge University

[1] I was honoured to be invited to give the opening address, on Kant's 300th birthday, at the conference from which this volume of essays originates. When I delivered that address, I had just learned of the death of Charles Parson, probably the Kant scholar from whom I have profited most. I dedicate this essay, as I dedicated the address, to his memory.

of the same terminology as the influencer or similar arguments. In Wittgenstein's case we might, for instance, wish to highlight the occurrence in one of his wartime notebooks of the phrase 'sub specie aeternitatis' and debate whether he picked this up from Schopenhauer (an author whom, of course, we know he read) or perhaps (less plausibly, I suspect) from Spinoza. We might then ask whether it is significant that in the *Tractatus* itself he changed the phrase to 'sub specie aeterni', which is not used by Schopenhauer but does occur repeatedly in Kierkegaard's *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*.

In regard to the question to be addressed in this essay, though, we can, I think, be quite quick with the 'way of history of ideas', since there is not very much to say. The rather limited amount that is known about Wittgenstein's pre-Tractarian engagement with Kant's writings is well summarized in McGuinness's biography. We know that he read the first *Critique* along with some other prisoners-of-war in the camp at Monte Casino after the armistice, but we also know that by then the *Tractatus* was in virtually its final form. We do not know for certain how much of Kant he had read before that, but McGuinness reports his friends as recalling his liking for the phrase, 'As the great Kant would say, …'. The most explicit evidence of influence in the surviving texts consists in his explanation of what he calls the 'Kantian problem' about the orientation of three-dimensional space, namely that using Euclidean motions we cannot transform a right-handed glove into a left-handed one in three-dimensional space. 'A right-hand glove,' he notes, 'could be put on a left hand if it could be turned round in four-dimensional space.'[2]

The puzzle Wittgenstein here addresses does not occur in the *Critique* but only in the *Prolegomena*. As Visser[3] pointed out, though, both the puzzle and Wittgenstein's solution to it are mentioned in a book of lectures by Mach that he had almost certainly read. So there is room to doubt whether even here we really have evidence of Wittgenstein's direct engagement with Kant. However, there are other places in his early writings where Wittgenstein makes use of Kant's terminology and addresses distinctively Kantian questions. One of the plainest occurs in the notes dictated to Moore in April 1914:

> From the fact that I *see* that one spot is to the left of another, or that one colour is darker than another, it seems to follow that it *is* so; and if so, this can only be if there is an *internal* relation between the two; and we might express this by saying that the *form* of the latter is part of the *form* of the former. We might thus give a sense to the assertion that logical forms are *forms* of thought and space and time *forms* of intuition.[4]

[2] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1922, 6.36111.

[3] Henk Visser, "Wittgenstein's debt to Mach's Popular Scientific Lectures", in *Mind*, 91(361), 1982, pp. 102–105.

[4] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Notebooks 1914-1916*, G.H. von Wright, G.E.M. Anscombe (eds.), Oxford, Blackwell, 1961, p. 118.

Textual evidence such as this suggests, then, that while he was writing the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein had some more or less direct knowledge of Kant's system, whether from the *Critique* or the *Prolegomena*, but the evidence stops frustratingly short of telling us anything more precise. If the way of ideas supplies us with no smoking gun, then, let us turn instead to the way of philosophy. Within this tradition there has been extensive discussion of Kantian themes in the *Tractatus*. For instance, there has been an extended debate between Sullivan[5] and Moore[6] as to whether the author of that work was a transcendental idealist. Rather than contributing directly to that debate what I want to do in this article is to focus more on how, at the most general level, the argumentative structure of the *Tractatus* might be mapped onto that of the *Critique*.

I have said 'at the most general level'; and in conformity with that my discussion here will prescind from the details of Kant's arguments. In justification of this cavalier approach it is worth making here an observation about Wittgenstein's attitude to the works of other philosophers. He was perhaps not a careful reader, but he was often a perceptive one. He had the ability to see through to the essence of another philosopher's position, sometimes more clearly than the originator had, but he did this by ignoring what he saw as unimportant details. If we are to draw wisdom from Wittgenstein's writings, therefore, we need to learn to do the same. What interest me here are the ways in which Kant may have affected his thinking at this structural level, even if, as seems probable, the details of Kant's arguments left little trace on him.

TRANSCENDENTALISM

I shall here use the term 'transcendental argument' in a broad sense, to include any argument that seeks to identify a necessary condition for the intelligibility of some familiar practice, e.g. experiencing an external world, expressing a proposition, arguing logically, or whatever. The strength of such an argument lies in the fact that its premiss is the mere intelligibility of the practice in question. The premiss does not have to be true but only comprehensible. Its weakness, on the other hand, is that the condition on intelligibility which the argument identifies limits the applicability of the practice in question and hence raises the threat of transcendental idealism.

The most interesting case is that in which a transcendental argument is deployed against a sceptic who, in order to formulate their query against the necessary condition, has to make use of the intelligibility of the very practice

[5] Peter Sullivan, "Ineffability and nonsense", in *Arist. Soc. Supp. Vol*., 2003, pp. 195–223; Peter Sullivan, "Idealism in Wittgenstein: A further reply to Moore", in M. Potter & P. Sullivan (eds.), *Wittgenstein's Tractatus: History and Interpretation*, Oxford University Press, 2013.

[6] Adrian Moore, "Ineffability and nonsense", in *Arist. Soc. Supp. Vol.*, 2003, pp. 169–92; Adrian Moore, "Was the author of the *Tractatus* a transcendental idealist?", in M. Potter & P. Sullivan (eds.), *Wittgenstein's Tractatus: History and Interpretation*, Oxford University Press, 2013.

in question. If the argument succeeds, scepticism turns out to be distinctively self-undermining. (This feature has of course beenused to stymie the sceptic by various more recent philosophers, most notably Hilary Putnam.)

I believe it was Sullivan[7] who introducted into the debate about Kant's influence on the *Tractatus* the terminological distinction between limits and limitations: all participants in the debate agree that our thinking has limits; those limits lead us to transcendental idealism only if we conceive of them as limitations, i.e. as imposing a division between what lies on one side or other of a divide. Expressed in these terms we can say that any transcendental argument is likely to lead us to acknowledge a limit, since it will identify a precondition for the coherence of the practice it seeks to justify. What will need further investigation, though, is whether the limit so identified is a limitation – whether, that is to say, the precondition is one that could intelligibly fail to be satisfied.

KANT'S LOGIC

In brief summary, the architectonic of Kant's conception of logic was as follows.[8] The logic which had been inherited from the ancient Greeks was of two sorts, Stoic and Aristotelian, the former consisting largely of what is now known as propositional calculus, the latter consisting of the syllogism. When Kant used the term 'pure general logic' he principally had the latter in mind, although what he said about it could very largely applied to the former as well. It was central to his conception to emphasize the triviality of pure general logic, which is, he thought, 'brief and dry' (A53=B78). This triviality arises, he thought, from its failure to involve the notion of the object. In order for us to make fully formed judgments about objects, he claimed, we must make use of a number of concepts supplied by the understanding which he called 'categories'.

Kant held that there are twelve categories, conveniently falling into four groups of three which Kant proposed to add to pure general logic in order to arrive at transcendental logic:

Quantity	Unity	Plurality	Totality
Quality	Reality	Negation	Limitation
Relation	Substance	Causality	Community
Modality	Possibility	Existence	Necessity

[7] Peter Sullivan, "Ineffability and nonsense", in *Arist. Soc. Supp. Vol*., 2003, pp. 195–223.

[8] For (a little) more detail, see Michael Potter, *The Rise of Analytic Philosophy 1879–1930*, Routledge, 2020, chapter 1.

Moreover, Kant attempted, in the metaphysical deduction, to exhibit these as precisely the concepts holding the requisite generality to play the role he proposed for them. Modern scholarship has not, I think, been kind to Kant's attempt. Kant may indeed have claimed that the table is systematically generated from a common principle, namely the faculty for judging (which is the same as the faculty for thinking), and has not arisen rhapsodically from a haphazard search for pure concepts, of the completeness of which one could never be certain.[9] But it is surely hard at this distance to see why just these concepts should be the result.

I am strongly inclined to think that Wittgenstein's attitude to the metaphysical deduction would not have been to criticize it but simply to ignore it, and I shall do the same here. What he would have been interested in is not whether Kant had correctly identified the categories but rather what role the categories, whatever they were, were supposed by him to play. For that, Wittgenstein would have looked to the transcendental deduction, Kant's argument purporting to establish the objective validity of judgments that use the categories, but simultaneously demonstrating their limitations. The categories enable our thinking, but impose limitations on it too, since reflection on their nature leads us to recognize the possibility that there might be things that do not conform to the structure they supply.

Seen from this perspective, then, Kant's logic splits into two parts: the first, pure general logic, is wholly general but trivial; the second, transcendental logic, is non-trivial – 'ampliative' is the term Kant used – but limited in its applicability.

FREGE'S LOGIC

Part of the difficulty we modern readers have in making sense of Kant's table of categories, of course, results from the inevitability that we find ourselves viewing logic through Frege's lens. When Frege discovered polyadic logic in his *Begriffsschrift* of 1879, he went to some lengths to impress on his readers the fruitfulness of this new logic. The old logic of the syllogism could only, as he vividly put it, take out of the box what has been put into it. The new method of decomposing predicates allows us to form new concepts and then, by means of the rules of proof Frege identified, to advance to genuinely unexpected results. He thus pulled apart two things which Kant had aligned. On the one hand Kant's analytic judgments follow from definitions so immediately that no appeal to intuition is required to justify them. On the other hand, they are merely explicative. Frege, by contrast, now held that it is possible, by means of the former, to go beyond the latter: his *Begriffsschrift* demonstrates that without any appeal to intuition we can reason ampliatively, arriving at non-trivial conclusions.

Kant's two marks of analyticity, freedom from intuition and non-ampliativity, had thus come apart. Frege memorably described Kant as "a genius to whom we

[9] Imm. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. N. Kemp Smith, Macmillan, 1929, A80-81/B106-7.

must all look up with grateful awe"[10]. Nonetheless, he somewhat casually appropriated Kant's word 'analytic' to label the ampliative notion, not the trivial one. This hijacking of Kant's notion was particularly striking given that the logic which Frege now held to be 'analytic' in this appropriated sense was second-order. Frege chose not to repeat this extended use of the word 'analytic' in his later work. So perhaps he had second thoughts about its appropriateness. Nonetheless, he continued to hold that logic has a special place, requiring no appeal to Kantian intution to justify its foundational principles.

Anyone who has read Kant might wonder what in Frege's account plays the role that the categories play in Kant's, of giving us a grasp of the notion of an object in general. The answer is that for Frege the notion of an object and the complementary notion of a concept emerge by a process of decomposition that begins with any whole judgment. As he explained in *Begriffsschrift* §9,

> If, in an expression (whose content need not be assertible), a simple or complex symbol occurs in one or more places and we imagine it as replaceable by another … then we call the part of the expression that shows itself invariant a function and the replaceable part its argument.[11]

When we decompose a judgment in the manner that Frege here recommends, we split it into two parts: the function Frege called 'unsaturated' the argument he called 'saturated'. The content of the saturated part he called (in the basic case) an 'object', that of the unsaturated part a 'concept'. Frege's purpose in the *Begriffsschrift* was not to build up judgments from previously given components but rather to take a previously given judgment and by decomposition detect the structure which it presupposes. Frege can thus be taken to have held that the general notion of an object is presupposed by the possibility of making judgments that are true or false.

Subsequent to the *Begriffsschrift*, though, Frege's work took a further (and, as it turned out, disastrous) turn. Whereas some objects are given to us in intuition, either empirical or pure, he held that there are also objects that are wholly logical. The most familiar example here is the natural numbers, which he held to be logical objects, but he took these to be a special case of the more general notion of the extensions of concepts, which he again held to logical objects, given to us without appeal to intuition. For this to be possible, he had to find a logical principle that is, as one might put it, 'ontologically generative'. As is now familiar, the ontologically generative principle he proposed (his Basic Law V) turned out to be contradictory because of Russell's paradox, and therefore not to be a logical principle at all.

Whitehead and Russell attempted to repair this defect in *Principia Mathematica*, but they did not succeed there in providing a plausible explanation to ground the logical principles on which their deductive edifice rested. Indeed in the book itself

[10] Gottlob Frege, *Foundations of Arithmetic*, trans. J.L. Austin, 2nd ed., Oxford, Blackwell, 1953, §89.

[11] Gottlob Frege, *Conceptual Notation*, trans. Bynum, Oxford University Press, 1972, §9.

this issue was hardly even addressed. The particular focus of their difficulty lay with the axiom of reducibility, which they found to be needed if their logical system was to be strong enough to generate the truths of arithmetic. The best that Russell could offer was a regressive argument for the truth of this axiom as the best explanation for the truth of the arithmetical theorems that can be proved by its means.[12]

THE LOGIC OF THE *TRACTATUS*

By the time that Wittgenstein began work on what became the *Tractatus*, therefore, the foundations of logic had not been put on a secure basis. Both Frege and Russell had aimed to derive non-trivial mathematical conclusions from logical premises, but neither of them had offered a wholly convincing explanation of how this non-triviality arose.

Wittgenstein's response to this problem was the bold one of claiming that logic is in a certain sense trivial. If the consequence of this was that logic did not suffice to derive the non-trivial mathematical conclusions, so much the worse for mathematics. In order to establish that Fregean polyadic logic is essentially trivial Wittgenstein's strategy had three parts.

The first part concerned truth-functions of a finite number of elementary propositions. Wittgenstein proposed to deal with these by the method of truth tables: a proposition is a logical truth or tautology just in case a calculation of its truth table gives it the value true on every line. This method is nowadays familiar, but it originates in the *Tractatus*. The two points to note about the finite case, therefore, are these. First, a tautology is empty: it says nothing about the world. Second, if we are given a propositional sign in the regimented formal language that Wittgenstein proposed, whether it is a tautology (i.e. empty) can be determined by a purely mechanical calculation.

The second part of Wittgenstein's strategy was to claim that the case in which there are infinitely many elementary propositions can be treated in an analogous manner. The truth tables involved will now be infinite, so cannot be calculated directly as in the finite case. Moreover, the propositional signs that confront us will now involve quantified propositional functions of the sort that Frege had introduced in §9 of the *Begriffsschrift*. However, Wittgenstein regarded these quantified expressions as direct infinite analogues of the finite cases he had already dealt with, so that universal and existential quantifiers were in effect equivalent respectively to infinite conjunctions and disjunctions. He therefore supposed that the complications which the infinite case involved did not affect the essential

[12] It is worth stressing that this should not be assimilated to a transcendental argument. The premise of Russell's regressive argument was that the arithmetical theorems such as 1+1=2 are *true*; for it to count as transcendental, the premise would have to be that these theorems *make sense*.

emptiness of logic: it was, in Kant's terminology, not ampliative but merely explicative.

The third part of Wittgenstein's strategy was to exploit a feature of his atomism. Tractarian objects, being logical atoms, are necessarily distinct, and so the question of their being equal simply does not arise. There is no danger that a Tractarian object might have distinct aspects, so that we might mistake one object for two. We can therefore, Wittgenstein thought, safely insist on a language in which no object has two names. As a consequence the formal language can dispense entirely, at the fully analysed level, with the sign of identity.

The overall aim of Wittgenstein's treatment of logic, then, was in a certain sense to trivialize it. Frege's adoption of the word 'analytic' to cover the whole of polyadic logic was on Wittgenstein's account no longer a hijacking of Kant's word but rather an accurate description. All the truths of polyadic logic were, when properly understood, empty. Polyadic logic should be seen as playing the role of pure general logic, not of transcendental logic. Logic, on Wittgenstein's understanding, requires no Kantian categories for its expression, and so, with no categories, it requires no transcendental deduction of its validity.

What, then, is the justification for the laws of logic? The Tractarian answer is that the question is mistaken: there are no 'laws of logic', since, if correctly understood, a logical truth says nothing, and hence has no content that requires justification. The *Tractatus* recommends towards the whole of logic the same attitude that Kant had taken towards pure general logic, namely that its triviality makes the very notion of error in application to it almost incoherent.

'LOGIC IS TRANSCENDENTAL'

In the *Tractatus*, then, Wittgenstein held that logic makes no use of anything like the Kantian categories, and hence that it is entirely empty. He did not hold, however, that logic is wholly free of presuppositions. Rather, it has the whole of language as its presupposition.

To explain this point, we should distinguish two conceptions, which might be called 'logic first' and 'language first'. The most obvious proponent of the logic-first view was Carnap, who presented a formal treatment in which we specify our logic first. This process then leaves room for our empirical language to express claims about the world. On Carnap's conception, therefore, logic is a precondition for the possibility of linguistic expression. Wittgenstein's conception is the other way about. As he nomically put it,

> 5.552 The 'experience' that we need in order to understand logic is not that something or other is the state of things, but that something is: that, however, is not an experience. Logic is prior to every experience – that something is so. It is prior to the question 'How?' not prior to the question 'What?'

> 5.5521 And if this were not so, how could we apply logic? We might put it in this way: if there would be a logic even if there were no world, how then could there be a logic given that there is a world?

Logic, that is to say, is independent of how things stand, but it is not independent of what things there are. Or, to put the point in the formal rather than the material mode, in order that there should be logic it is necessary that there should be language. It makes no sense, on Wittgenstein's account, to attempt, as Carnap would later do, to set up logic first, and then apply it in talking about the world. The correct conception, he maintained, is the opposite. We construct a sign-language that enables us to express the various ways that things may stand. In the process we inevitably form some signs – tautologies – that end up saying nothing. Logic thus arises as a byproduct of the possibility of expressing contentful propositions about the world.

This dependency of logic on language explains an otherwise puzzling remark of Wittgenstein's about the status of logic:

> 6.131 Logic is trancendental.

If we focussed solely on the fact that Wittgenstein's treatment obviated Kant's need for a transcendental deduction of the categories, this remark might seem puzzling. After all, Kant would surely not have said that pure general logic is transcendental. So if for Wittgenstein all of logic is, when correctly understood, trivial in the same way that pure general logic is for Kant, what room is there for it to be transcendental? The explanation, we now see, is that on Wittgenstein's account logic inherits its transcendental status from that of language.

THE ARGUMENT FOR SUBSTANCE

What we have seen so far is that logic, on the Tractarian conception, appeals to no categories and therefore has on that score no need of a transcendental deduction. But of course the transcendental deduction of the categories is not the only transcendental argument in the *Critique*. I want to turn now to a second transcendental argument on which Kant's account depends, namely his argument that space and time are conditions of our capacity to make true and false judgments about the world, because all our contact with empirical objects is conditioned spatio-temporally. Kant explicitly described this argument as a transcendental deduction (A87/B119-20). Moreover, in his view space and time, like the categories, constrain our ability to make true or false judgments in the way that is distinctive

of transcendental idealism: the possibility of making judgments about objects conditioned by the structure of space and time comes at the price of compelling us to recognize the complementary possibility of things not so conditioned.

The question I want to consider now is whether this second transcendental argument in the *Critique* has any analogue in the *Tractatus*. Earlier I suggested that in viewing Kant's arguments from a Wittgensteinian perspective we should ignore the details of exactly which concepts Kant took the categories to be. Analogously we should, I think, ignore the details of Kant's argument that it is space and time that supply the kinds of objects that our judgments depend on. What we find in the *Tractatus* is not an argument that our thought presupposes spatio-temporal objects, but instead a more general argument that it presupposes necessarily existent objects of some sort or other. This is the so-called 'argument for substance':

> 2.0211 If the world had no substance, then whether a proposition had sense would depend on whether another proposition was true.
> 2.0212 It would then be impossible to form a picture of the world (true or false).
> 2.022 It is clear that however different from the real one an imagined world may be, it must have something – a form – in common with the real world.

To make this argument work we need the premise that we do form pictures of the world (true or false). This is what Wittgenstein meant when he spoke (3.23) of 'determinacy of sense': what is essential to a proposition, on his account, is that it is 'contrastive', i.e. that it draws a contrast, leaving no residue of indeterminate cases, between the way it says the world is and other ways it could have been but is not.

What is noteworthy for our purposes here is that Wittgenstein presents the argument for substance explicitly in transcendental form: the premise is not that something is true, but only that something is possible, namely the forming of pictures of the world (true or false), i.e. what I am here calling 'contrastive propositions'.

After laying out the argument for substance in the *Prototractatus* Wittgenstein went on to note that 'Space and time are forms of objects'. In the final version of the book he amended this to:

> 2.0251 Space, time and colour (colouredness) are forms of objects.

In both versions (but especially in the orginal version) this remark invites us to see a parallel with Kant's (transcendental) argument that space and time are a priori intuitions.

TRANSCENDENTAL IDEALISM

I have suggested that in Kant's hands transcendental arguments lead us to transcendentally idealist conclusions. If the argument for substance is transcendental in form, it is natural to wonder whether it leads Wittgenstein similarly to a transcendentally idealist conclusion. The answer to this question is an instance of Wittgenstein's response to transcendental idealism more generally.

Some time in or after the autumn of 1916 Wittgenstein added the 6s: the 6.1s on Metalogic; the 6.2s on Mathematics; the 6.3s on Science; the 6.4s on Ethics; the 6.5s on Philosophy. As Sullivan[13] has suggested, 'it would be hard not to hear this as a topic list for a Kant seminar.' More precisely, the 6s deal successively with Kant's leading examples of putative synthetic a priori knowledge. In each case Wittgenstein's response was the same: what Kant held to be a synthetic a priori truth is, when correctly understood, mere nonsense (in Wittgenstein's technical sense of that word).

Nonetheless, there is a danger that Sullivan's remark might mislead us, by making Wittgenstein's engagement with Kant's conception of the synthetic a priori seem more systematic than it was. He may have ended up dealing with all five cases, but this was not the result of a single decision. The lateness of his inclusion of *any* positive account even of simple arithmetic is especially striking in this regard. It would plainly be hard to treat the 6s as a serious response to Kant without an account of arithmetic, since he regarded this as one of the central cases which gave his problem, of explaining how synthetic a priori knowledge is possible, its force. Yet Wittgenstein added only the briefest sketch of an account of arithmetic before he had a typescript prepared from the *Prototractatus* manuscript. Moreover, no reader of Kant can fail to notice that Wittgenstein deals only with arithmetic and not geometry or the calculus. The reader is left to guess the status of the proposition that the angles of a triangle add up to two right angles, for instance. As the topic list for a Kant seminar the 6s fall notably short of comprehensive coverage.

Sullivan's remark might also mislead us historically, if it encouraged us simply to assume, as if it were too obvious to require proof, that it was *Kant's* problem of the synthetic a priori that Wittgenstein saw himself as addressing in the 6s, rather than Schopenhauer's, for example. One might see the 6s as echoing instead the *Fourfold Root,* where the four sorts of necessity identified by Schopenhauer – becoming, knowing, being and willing – might with some plausibility be made to correspond to the headings in Wittgenstein's text.[14]

[13] Peter Sullivan, "The truth in solipsism and Wittgenstein's rejection of the a priori", in *European J. Phil.*, 4, 2004, pp. 195–219.

[14] A. Phillips Griffiths, "Wittgenstein and the four-fold root of the principle of sufficient reason", in *Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume,* 50, 1976, pp. 1–20.

It is worth noting, too, that the transformation of the 1916 *Tractatus* into the *Prototractatus* was not the result of a single transformative insight, but of a somewhat more gradual shift in emphasis. The transitional passage on logic may have been added as early as the autumn of 1916, the account of arithmetic as late as the winter of 1917/18. So if we examine Wittgenstein's 1916 notebook, we should not expect to find a single identifiable moment when his conception of the book was transformed. Nonetheless, something did undeniably change during that summer. This was when his work spread out 'from the foundations of logic to the nature of the world'. It is evident from the context that what Wittgenstein meant by the nature of the world was not just its metaphysical structure (about which he had already been expressing views as early as the *Notes on Logic* of 1913) but its significance or value. Our task in this book is to understand the motivation which led him to alter the plan of his book. By extending it beyond its original ending place Wittgenstein declared his intention to mark the way his work had opened out by widening its scope so that it was no longer merely a tract in philosophical logic.

The point in the *Tractatus* at which Wittgenstein's resistance to transcendental idealism comes under greatest strain is surely in relation to identifying the forms of objects. In order for his rejection of the synthetic a priori to work he had to insist that objects are simply given, presupposed by any attempt to express a determinate sense, i.e. say something true or false. He had to insist, therefore, that we cannot meaningfully entertain the thought that there might have been more or fewer (or different) objects than there actually are, because any attempt to entertain such a thought would be strictly unsayable. Russell, for one, did not find this at all plausible.

> When I was discussing the *Tractatus* with him at The Hague in 1919, I had before me a sheet of white paper and I made on it three blobs of ink. I besought him to admit that, since there were these three blobs, there must be at least three things in the world; but he refused, resolutely. He would admit that there were three blobs on the page, because that was a finite assertion, but he would not admit that anything at all could be said about the world as a whole. This was connected with his mysticism, but was justified by his refusal to admit identity.[15]

If Wittgenstein *had* been willing to admit that anything could be said about the world as a whole, he would have been forced to concede that the world could have had other things in it than it in fact has. He would, that is to say, have been forced to concede that language is not just a limit but a limitation on our thinking.

[15] Bertrand Russell, *My Philosophical Development*, Allen & Unwin, 1959, p. 116.

THE LATER WITTGENSTEIN

In the *Tractatus,* then, Wittgenstein's ability to resist transcendental idealism depended crucially on his doctrine of unsayability. Shortly after he returned to philosophy in 1929, he began to question this doctrine. As a consequence, transcendental idealism remained a central theme in his later work. One of the first signs of the re-emergence of this Kantian theme occurs, in Wittgenstein's 1929 article 'Some remarks on logical form'.

In the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein had asserted that elementary propositions are logically independent of one another. He had not there offered any argument for this independence, but it is surely plausible to see it as part of his anti-Kantian strategy. If there were a priori incompatibilities between elementary propositions, these would be synthetic a priori truths which it would not be possible to dismiss as unsayable. To avoid this he simply insisted that there are no such incompatibilities.

Wittgenstein did not deny, though, that there are a priori incompatible *propositions*. E.g. 'This patch in my visual field is green' and 'This patch in my visual field is red' are incompatible with one another. What this shows, he thought, is that these two propositions are not elementary: when they are correctly analysed, their incompatibility with one another will somehow emerge from the analysis. What he did not do, however, was to explain the 'somehow'. This was what changed in 1929. Wittgenstein now addressed, as he had not done in the *Tractatus,* the question of *how* incompatibilties could emerge from a logically independent basis. When he actually attempted to do it, Wittgenstein soon discovered that no analysis of complex propositions into logically independent elementary propositions would deliver the required incompatibilities. And once he realized this, it compelled him to acknowledge the existence of *sayable* synthetic a priori truths.

In the 1929 article itself Wittgenstein presented this as if it is only a minor adjustment to the *Tractatus*.

> If the proposition contains the form of an entity which it is about, then it is possible that two propositions should collide in this very form. The propositions, 'Brown now sits in this chair' and 'Jones now sits in this chair' each, in a sense, try to set their subject term on the chair. But the logical product of these propositions will put them both there at once, and this leads to a collision, a mutual exclusion of these terms.[16]

The insouciant attitude to incompatibilities between elementary propositions that he here exhibited is surely puzzling. The obvious response is that the incompatibility of Brown and Jones both sitting in the same chair is due to features of the structure of *space*. If these features are a priori, then they limit our thinking and hence lead directly to transcendental idealism.

[16] Ludwig Wittgenstein, "Some remarks on logical form", in *Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume* 9, 1929, pp. 162–171, p. 169.

Perhaps Wittgenstein eventually realized that the incompatibility of elementary propositions is not just a minor revision to the *Tractatus* – after all, in a letter to the Editor of *Mind* in 1933 he described his 1929 article as 'weak' – but in any case the doctrine of unsayability was already under attack from another quarter. During 1929 Wittgenstein discussed his work with Ramsey, who had always been sceptical of the doctrine. In his article on 'The foundations of mathematics'[17] Ramsey treated claims about the meaning of terms of the object language not as absolutely inexpressible but as expressible in a metalanguage, in something like the way hinted at by Russell in the final pages of his Introduction to the *Tractatus*. Ramsey then mounted a more direct challenge to unsayability in his discussion of scientific laws, which, he maintained, are not contrastive propositions of the kind that serve as the premise for Wittgenstein's argument for substance. Ramsey's account of scientific laws, which he explored in some late manuscripts, did not reach a definitive form before his death. The essential point, for him, was that a law has no truth conditions in the conventional sense: it is not true as opposed to false, but rather expresses a commitment to judge according to a certain pattern. He therefore envisaged language as having two parts, a 'primary' system of contrastive propositions which make determinate claims, true or false; and a 'secondary' system of what he called 'variable hypotheticals'.

It is hard to be sure how much of Ramsey's view of scientific laws as variable hypotheticals Wittgenstein adopted. At any rate he repeatedly discussed in his notebooks what to say about what he called 'hypotheses' and contrasted what he called the 'primary' and the 'secondary' system. For our current purposes the important point to note is that once we acknowledge the possibility of scientific laws, we disable Wittgenstein's previous strategy for resisting transcendental idealism. Once he conceded that we can in some sense understand a (non-contrastive) variable hypothetical, he would have to grant the intelligibility of the notion that the objects that are presupposed by our thinking could have been different.

This makes pressing the Kantian question of how synthetic a priori knowledge, such as the incompatibility of elementary colour terms, is to be explained. In his middle period Wittgenstein attempted to appeal to 'grammar' to fill the explanatory gap. If we consider matters from the perspective I have been suggesting, however, the flaw in this approach should be evident, namely that Wittgenstein was now asking grammar to play the regulative role that he had previously ascribed to logic, but with no accompanying reassurance that it is empty and hence non-restrictive. If the incompatibility of red and green is purely a matter of the grammar of colour words, is this not a limitation? The more we appeal, as Wittgenstein did in his later work to our 'form of life' as the binding element that underpins our ability to communicate thoughts with one another, the more we find ourselves wondering how the world might seem to a being which does not share it. If a lion could speak, no doubt we could not understand him, but that observation hardly suffices to block off the route to transcendental idealism in Wittgenstein's later work.

[17] Frank P. Ramsey, *Philosophical Papers*, ed. D.H. Mellor, Cambridge University Press, 1990.