

## WITTGENSTEIN'S IDEALISM: FROM KANT THROUGH HEGEL

### EL IDEALISMO DE WITTGENSTEIN: DESDE KANT A TRAVÉS DE HEGEL

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Recibido: 19/07/2022  
Revisado: 01/09/2022  
Aceptado: 12/09/2022

*Abstract:* The following contribution aims at presenting a reading of Wittgenstein's later philosophy as a kind of idealism within the Kantian and post-Kantian tradition. The goal is to argue that Wittgenstein's position shares substantial theoretical and methodological grounds with Hegel's idealism. The main concepts pertaining to the later Wittgenstein's position are analyzed and understood as a form of idealism. After defending the reading against anti-idealist interpretations we argue that the kind of idealism presented clashes with central tenets of the Kantian position. These points of departure are then shown to cover in substantial manner the same kind of criticism Hegel raised against Kant. In the last section, an interpretation of central concepts of the Hegelian position is offered in order to dissolve any fundamental incompatibility with Wittgenstein's idealism.

*Keywords:* Agency – Hegel – Idealism – Language – Normativity – Reason – Wittgenstein.

*Resumen:* El objeto de este artículo es el de proponer una lectura de la segunda filosofía de Wittgenstein de acuerdo a la cual se trata de una variedad de idealismo inserta en la tradición kantiana y post-kantiana. Nuestro propósito es el de defender que la posición de Wittgenstein comparte fundamentos teóricos y metodológicos con el idealismo de Hegel. Se analizan y comprenden los principales conceptos de la última posición de Wittgenstein en tanto que constituyen una forma de idealismo. Tras sostener esta lectura frente a interpretaciones anti-idealistas, mostraremos cómo el idealismo de Wittgenstein es incompatible con aspectos centrales de la posición de Kant. Se mostrará cómo estos elementos diferenciadores coinciden en gran medida con la crítica de Hegel a Kant. En la última sección, se ofrecerá una interpretación de los conceptos centrales de la posición de Hegel con el objeto de disolver cualquier incompatibilidad fundamental entre su idealismo y el de Wittgenstein.

*Palabras Clave:* Agencia – Hegel – Idealismo – Lenguaje – Normatividad – Razón – Wittgenstein.

## INTRODUCTION

The goal of this contribution is to assess and defend the idea that Wittgenstein's philosophy, especially his later thought, can be adequately described as a kind of epistemological idealism. More specifically Wittgenstein's idealism finds its home in the idealist tradition inaugurated by Kant<sup>1</sup> and post-Kantian idealism. Wittgenstein's philosophy, considered by the general spirit of analytic philosophy to be one of its grounding moments, has long been described as being in peril of endorsing idealism, whose status as a viable option in analytic philosophy has always been firmly contested. In fact, Wittgenstein's proximity to idealist themes and concerns has always been lived with a fair amount of discomfort.

We aim at defending the thesis that a consistent interpretation of the later Wittgenstein can be reached by showing his convergence with classical German Idealism, notwithstanding its perceived distance from the ethos of early analytic philosophy. Additionally, we will argue that crucial features of Wittgenstein's philosophy place it at odds with fundamental tenets of Kantian idealism. The second part of the essay has therefore the aim of arguing for an essential convergence of Wittgenstein's idealism with Hegel's.

Comparing two figures of the history of philosophy in order to spot a convergence can at times be understood as a merely academic exercise. The situation is worsened by the fact that the two figures we aim to compare are routinely held to inhabit antipodal and incompatible meta-philosophical stances. Wittgenstein the anti-philosophical quietist seems to have little in common with Hegel, the ambitious and speculative system builder analytic philosophy was born as a reaction against.<sup>2</sup> The distance is made even starker by the fact that Wittgenstein never read Hegel; therefore, no influence of the latter can be assumed on his philosophy.<sup>3</sup> However, we will argue here that in their going

1 Even though we will outline that ultimately Wittgenstein's Idealism is in contrast with crucial tenets of the Kantian position, this does not disqualify his philosophy from its having a place within the German idealist tradition.

2 Some attempts at a rapprochement have been carried out recently, as in the edited volume by Mâcha and Berg (2019) or Alexander Berg's monography on Wittgenstein and Hegel (2020). The philosopher most influenced by Wittgenstein that devoted much of his recent research to Hegel's philosophy is undoubtedly Robert Brandom. For the Wittgensteinian influence on the current analytic interest in Hegel, cf. Corti 2014, pp.82-7, 137-41.

3 But see Alexander Berg's analysis (2019, pp.356-8) of how Hegelian influences were still alive in the philosophical environment Wittgenstein inhabited at Cambridge, especially in the figure of Charlie Dunbar Broad and his conception of Hegelian dialectic being akin to *playing* a game. This does not mean that Wittgenstein actually read Hegel. As Maurice O'Drury reported, Wittgenstein said in a 1948 conversation that Hegel appeared to him as 'wanting to say that things which look different are the same', and that his own perspective was diametrically opposed. It is reasonable to believe that this assessment of Hegel belonged more to the received view he inherited from Cambridge's anti-idealist environment. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for urging me to clarify this point.

beyond the limitations of Kantian idealism, Hegel and Wittgenstein share substantial methodological grounds and philosophical insights. Both attack the ideas of philosophy as a matter of definitions and principles, they reject reductions to finite or formal dimensions of experience and endorse a holistic picture of meaning and knowledge. Even more importantly, they both defend the idea that our normative and conceptual engagement with the world integrates what we'd ordinarily consider external reality within our practices as human agents. Meaning, truth, and knowledge are *actualized* by our activity *in the world*. The reality of this world cannot be understood apart from this actualization.<sup>4</sup>

This comparison has a two-fold goal. On one side it helps understanding better and recover the relevance of certain Wittgensteinian insights that appear initially too far removed from our common-sense picture of the world. Secondly, the proposed reading will offer a mediation of the traditional images of Hegel and Wittgenstein that still hold sway in contemporary philosophy. Wittgenstein is not merely an anti-philosophical quietist, and Hegel is not a speculative theologian under philosophical garments.

The contribution is structured as follows. The next section introduces the theme of idealism in Wittgenstein's work, with particular focus on his later thought. Section three investigates what kind of Idealism Wittgenstein can be understood to uphold. After defending our reading from anti-idealist objections, we will argue that Wittgenstein goes beyond the strict Kantian framework. The features of his thought that place him in opposition to Kant's idealism are then investigated and compared with Hegel's thought. Section four then establishes a convergence between Hegel and Wittgenstein focusing on some of Hegel's apparently intractable notions such as Reason and *der Begriff*, arguing that they do not describe a philosophical horizon foreign to the later Wittgenstein.

## 2. WITTGENSTEIN AND IDEALISM

Wittgenstein's place as one of the inspirations for logical neo-positivism and founding figures of early analytic philosophy has tied his name to a certain approach to philosophical theorizing and questions. Rejecting metaphysical speculation and defending a broadly realist, mathematico-scientific attitude are connotations that have exerted a tangible influence, not just on the tradition itself, but on understanding the work of its precursors. It appears therefore natural to view idealism, often discredited for its anti-scientific ethos and for its

4 It might be wondered whether this is enough for establishing *idealism*. It is true that this thesis might be understood primarily as a form of, but this would render the understanding of idealism as overtly narrow, in the sense of a strictly Berkeleyan kind of idealism. We will say something more about this in section two.

supposedly untenable, unverifiable claims, as incompatible with it. However, concerning the relationship between Wittgenstein and Idealism, things are not as clear-cut as they might appear at first.

Wittgenstein's perspective, both early and late, might be initially understood as incompatible with idealism in virtue of its distinct anti-metaphysical slant. Wittgenstein's aim to understand and elucidate how language relates to the world in a way that sweeps away and dissolves traditional philosophical questions, might seem intrinsically contrary to an idealist perspective. Idealism, in its various forms throughout the history of philosophy from Plato to Hegel, is connected to substantial metaphysical commitments constituting the very questions and topics Wittgenstein wants to undermine. Nevertheless, due to the overarching topic of Wittgenstein's oeuvre, namely the relationship between language, logic, and the world,<sup>5</sup> it might not come as a surprise to discover that Wittgenstein's philosophy has been recurrently linked to a kind of *linguistic idealism*.

In the contemporary analytic tradition idealism often carries with it some kind of immaterialist connotation via an ontological reading of Berkeley's *esse est percipi* idea. Idealism is understood as the conception that reality is reducible to a manifestation or even worse a *production* of a specifically mental realm. This appears intuitively at odds with current scientific consensus. Idealism has therefore been understood as implausible, acting more like a *reductio ad absurdum* than an actual philosophical stance. We can see this clearly in G.E. Moore's writings. Engaging with the idealism he found in his British predecessors, Moore understands it as upholding the idea that *what* is experienced is identical with our having experience of it (1903, p.36). According to Moore, idealism holds what we consider the world to be spiritual in nature, conscious, and purposeful in itself (ibid, p.23). This perspective is closely tied to the problem of skepticism; it is considered to arise as a reaction from the supposed skeptical outcome that realism supposedly leads to (Dilman 2002, p.18). Given that proving *the existence* of external objects is seemingly out of our reach due to Cartesian doubt, idealism emerges as the more consistent option by tying what we experience to our mental inner realm.

However, this *existential* or *ontological* determination of idealism is clearly not the same idealism defended by Kant and his post-Kantian successors. This

5 It might be contested that this is not the overarching focus of the later Wittgenstein as well, cf. for example PI, §§96-7. These passages concern the idea that there is some unique correlate between world, language, and logic, and this perspective is something the later Wittgenstein clearly rejects. However, it does appear that the ways in which we interact with the world and others through language and logic remains a crucial point of inquiry for the later Wittgenstein as well. A possible exception could be *On Certainty*, where a more traditional epistemological perspective takes priority. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for pressing this point.

latter variety is of a distinct *epistemological kind*.<sup>6</sup> Idealism not as a denial of the material nature of external objects, nor as the presumption that existence depends on our mind. Rather, it is the recognition that experience and knowledge of the world is the outcome of our normative, synthesizing activity *within the world*, and is unintelligible if considered apart from it.<sup>7</sup> This does not merely signify that for knowledge to be had some subject needs to be present in the environment; this is a point a metaphysical realist could readily concede. The deeper point is that the *formal* features of what appears to us as empirical reality have their source in the cognitive subject. Understood as such, idealism ceases to be as immediately contentious as its ontological counterpart. More importantly, it allows us to understand how Wittgenstein can be thought of as inhabiting a conceptual space adjacent to Kantian and post-Kantian idealism.<sup>8</sup>

Already in the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein's remarks about propositions and their logical function place him in dialogue with a distinctively Kantian problematic. Logic is understood as coming before any possible experience, concerning itself with the *how* of experience, not the *what*, the experienced object (TLP 5.552).<sup>9</sup> The limits of the world make manifest the limits of logic expressed in, but not said by, our language (ibid, 5.6, 5.61-2). Logical propositions show the formal properties of both language and world, presenting the *Gerüst*,<sup>10</sup> the scaffolding of the world (ibid, 6.124). Logic provides a mirror image of the world because it has a *transcendental* function (ibid, 6.13).<sup>11</sup> These are all insights that belong to the kind of perspective that Kant identified as constitutive of our relationship with the world and as instituting the possibility of human knowledge. 'Transcendental' means the kind of knowledge which does not concern itself with the particular object of experience, but instead with what institutes the *mode*

6 This can be a point of debate, and we cannot offer a thorough defense of it due to space constraints. We are however reasonably confident that the presentation of Idealism we offer in this section should at least establish the epistemological component of (post-)Kantian idealism as essential to it.

7 Analytic philosophy tends to talk of *anti-realism* instead of epistemological idealism. This led some (cf. Dilman 2002, pp.35-7) to argue that Wittgensteinian anti-realism is not idealism. On the distinction between ontological and epistemological idealism, cf. Guyer&Horstmann 2020, and Lagerspetz 2021, pp.38-9.

8 Assigning to Wittgenstein the idea that the mind creates reality would be at best a 'caricature' (Dilman 2004, p.163). Taking up the non-Berkeleyan form of idealism also allows to sidestep Moore's refutation, as against Kantian idealism it is easily shown as wholly irrelevant (Lagerspetz 2021, p.41)

9 See TLP 6.1222, a logical proposition cannot be either empirically disconfirmed or confirmed.

10 Cf. also RFM VI, §21, VII, §2; OC, §§83, 211. Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus* uses 'stellt', so *presentation* appears to be more apt in terms of terminology. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for this suggestion.

11 Logical syntax and the 'syntax of the world' are one and the same (TLP 5.4711, cf. Bartmann 2021, p.208).

of cognition of objects understood as *a priori* (KrV, B25). Wittgenstein's understanding of propositional logic in his early philosophy treads on the same grounds as Kant's transcendental stance.<sup>12</sup>

Kantian idealism holds that our understanding and knowledge of reality is made possible by a priori norms of synthesis, which allow us to subsume what is given to us in experience in a judgment. This is because human cognition is *discursive* and *intuitive* (KrV B93). We need to produce beliefs and judgments to have objective knowledge of the world, we do not simply intuit things as they are independently of our conceptual, judgmental, and normative activity. Our intellect is our faculty for judging, and cognition [*Erkenntnis*] requires concepts understood as predicates of *possible judgments* (B94) It is impossible for a human agent to cognize things in complete independence of sensibility (B333), therefore cognition is constrained to objects of phenomenal experience. The thing-in-itself does not enter the epistemic domain, there couldn't be a possible judgment about it that is *ours*.<sup>13</sup> The validity and content of such judgments is a function of what we synthesize in accordance with our concepts and a priori norms, the categories. These categories establish the boundaries of what can be made intelligible to us as finite human cognizers, delimiting what can be a possible judgment for us in general. Kant's transcendental idealism is the doctrine that what we have experience of cannot be understood or known in independence of its engagement with human cognition. We do not simply receive determinations of things as they are in-themselves (A369).

In Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* there is less talk of concepts and normative activity. However, we can see similar ideas emerge. For example how the logical form of propositions is the same form characterizing the world language is about.<sup>14</sup> The proposition's sense is its agreement and disagreement with possible *Sachverhalten* (TLP 4.2). It represents what can be the case and what cannot be the case (ibid 4.1). These propositions are those we utter as linguistic beings (ibid 4.002).<sup>15</sup> This entails that our activity as linguistic beings is what allows us to inhabit and delimit (ibid, 5.632) the logical space given by propositions

12 Kant's own idea of a transcendental critique is aimed not at gaining *new* knowledge, but at *correcting it*, in the sense of clarifying our reason and keeping it free from error (B 25-6). Both in Wittgenstein and Kant what matters is the rectification of certain mistakes belonging to how philosophy understands our relationship to the world. In Wittgenstein what needs correction is one's philosophical way of seeing things (CV, pp.16-8). Of course, the fact that Wittgenstein puts forth a transcendental philosophy in the *Tractatus* is not on its own enough to argue that he is proposing a kind of transcendental idealism. The question is debated in recent scholarship, especially by A. W. Moore and Peter Sullivan. Thanks to Simone Nota for this remark.

13 It is true that for Kant we can *think* things-in-themselves in hypothetical fashion, and pass judgment upon them, but these judgments won't have epistemic/objective capacity because we are not given their object in experience.

14 Cf. TLP 4.26. Elementary propositions plus the indications of which are true exhaust the description of the world.

15 The totality of propositions is language (TLP 4.001).

endowed with sense (ibid, 3.4). Propositions, judgments for Kant, are images of reality insofar as they formalize what we can and do think about (ibid 4.01). The logical form of the proposition acts as the transcendental condition for the possibility of experiencing reality. It allows us to express judgments and beliefs about the world. It is epistemically meaningless to conceive one independently of the other (ibid 5.5521). Wittgenstein holds that the limits of intelligibility, of what we would characterize as our world, is the subject itself (ibid, 5.632). Reality can be investigated only insofar as it is construed as belonging to the subject. It is only within this epistemic or inquiring activity that the world can be then understood as existing independently of this very activity, and without which cannot be thought.<sup>16</sup>

## 2.1 WITTGENSTEIN'S LATER THOUGHT

Wittgenstein's early nearness to varieties of idealism, whether Kantian or linguistic, is nevertheless limited in comparison to his later thought. The 'second Wittgenstein' can be understood as revolving around the following main concepts: language-games, meaning as use, grammar, and forms of life. These concepts not only distinctively characterize his later approach, but they also represent a clear development of his thought towards idealist shores.

The idea of Language-game expresses clearly The Kantian idea that the subject's contribution is crucial for understanding reality. This contribution is our activity via the meaningful use of words. Wittgenstein presents language games as the kind of linguistic practice children are involved with when learning to use words (PI, §8; BB, p.17). Via this training the child understands how to interact with other subjects, and in turn other subjects can understand the child's own interaction. These practices are a kind of initiation into normative agency, whereas by adhering to certain patterns and regularities, a logical sphere of intelligibility is instituted. The reason why we ought to investigate language-games is because by doing so we can clear away the mental fog layered over more complex uses of language (ibid, p.26).<sup>17</sup> Language-games represent ways of our operating with language in various everyday contexts, models to help us study and understand our linguistic life (PI, II §119; cf. Ritter 2020, p.37). For Wittgenstein, the meaning of a word belongs to a specific language-game (Z, §397).

16 See Bernard Williams' idea that it is in language that the limits of the world are revealed, in terms of what can be intelligibly apprehended in our thought (1973, p.78). Cf. also Ritter 2020, pp.21-3.

17 Primitive language-games are not radically different from more elaborate ones. They are complete languages (BB, p.81). More elaborate games arise out of them (OC §673, BB, p.17). and no a priori boundary between them can be established (PG §73). Cf. Schulte 1989, p.104.

Wittgenstein does not provide a definition of language-games. His preferred methodology is to present instances, both actual and fictitious ones (PI, §§23, 249, 363; Kober 1996, p.417). Some of their features can be individuated in their simplicity, and indeterminacy.<sup>18</sup> Their crucial function within Wittgenstein's philosophy is to undermine the idea of meaning and language defended in the *Tractatus*.<sup>19</sup> In the *Investigations* Wittgenstein rejects the idea that the logic of language must be non-ambiguously determined (PI, §§97-107). Accordingly, this means discarding with it an abstract, formal approach to how language operates.<sup>20</sup> What is rejected is the idea that "words stand for things and sentences picture how objects are combined" (Fogelin 1976, p.107). This is the role of the inaugural criticism of the ostensive picture of language at the beginning of the *Investigations*.<sup>21</sup> In ostensive definitions we have a single explicit rule that purportedly fully characterizes the meaning of a word. However, this intuitively clashes with our ordinary linguistic life. We routinely use words beyond their initial definition and have no issues understanding their meaning (PG §26). This means that ostensive definitions cannot fix a word's meaning (Fogelin 1976, p.116). Language-games show us instead meaning's open-ended and creative nature (cf. PI §68ff).

A possible problem arises: if no formal definition of the meaning of words is given and must be instead retrieved from language-games, couldn't the meaning of words be determined by providing a formal definition of language-games? For Wittgenstein this cannot be. The very attempt of discovering the ultimate essence of language-games is an abstract and barren enterprise. Nothing can be gained from it (Schulte 1989, p.110). What instead can be sought as a unifying trait are *family resemblances* (PI §§65-7), the way the various language-games resemble each other even while possessing no invariant commonality. A game is any human activity where certain moves have a function, serving different purposes and aims. Ditching the search for a common invariant essence of language-games to focus instead on how they resemble each other is grounded in the recognition that words have different functions, hence meaning, depending on the language-game's context and circumstances (PI §11).<sup>22</sup>

18 Cf. PI §§71, 76-7, 83, and PG §73 "I reserve the right to decide in every new case whether I will count something as a game or not". Cf. Andronico 1997, p.245.

19 Pace some varieties of Monowittgensteinianism which we won't engage with here. However, even adopting a discontinuous view of Wittgenstein's philosophy does not entail that his early and later accounts of meaning cannot show remarkable traits of continuity, cf. Ishiguro 1969. Thanks to Simone Nota for this suggestion.

20 See Schulte 1989, p.107; Bloor 1996, p.363.

21 Wittgenstein's is a caricature of Augustine's real picture (Fogelin 1976, pp.108-9)

22 See on this Schulte 1989, p.122 and Andronico 1997, p.242. In focusing on family resemblances there is a distinct anti-essentialist move in Wittgenstein (ibid, p.243), undercutting strictly referential theories of meaning (Hacker 2010, p.33). Language-games themselves possess fuzzy borders (PG §73). What's not a language-game can easily become one given the right conditions or purposes.



Crucially, language-games are *normative* activities. They are played according to rules, delimiting which moves are intelligible or possible. Semantic rules are like the rules of a game (BB, p.12, RFM I, §169). They are *constitutive* rules because they constitute the possibility of playing the game in general (Kober 1996, p.424). Making moves in accordance with the rules of the game provides one with *logical justification* (Bartmann, 2021, p.232), because correct moves within the game adhere to its internal logic. Something as common as engaging in inferential reasoning consists of a specific procedure within the practice of the language. Inferring means to proceed according to specific linguistic norms which determine the activity as one of inferring (RFM I, §18). Someone not engaging in the same normative activity cannot be understood as making inferences. They would instead be doing something else (Z, §320).<sup>23</sup> The aura of necessity and logical compulsion that meaning exerts on us is a function of the role played by the associated word in our practices. However, it would be a mistake to think that these rules must be explicit or foresee every possible move within the language-game.<sup>24</sup> This would mean reverting back to an analogue of the idea Wittgenstein attacks.<sup>25</sup> Not every aspect of the game must already have a rule for it; in playing the game we may continuously create new rules (PI §68, 83-4).

What constitutes the context of significance is for Wittgenstein our linguistic activity. It is our *use* of words that which establishes and constitutes their *meaning* (PI, §10, 43; BB, p.69).<sup>26</sup> Our actions as linguistic beings institute and develop the logic of intelligibility and the compulsory character of our words' meaning. When we participate in a language-game we seamlessly understand what must be done and why. Speaking a language is a normative activity (PI, §23; Z, §173; RFM V, §47). Only in such practices can language-games occur and words obtain their meaning. Our practices are normative techniques, and without a mastery of such techniques nothing is meant when uttering a sentence (cf. LFM, pp.25, 69). It is only via mastering a technique that the normative regularity required for meaning to be determined can be instituted (RFM VI, §2). This aspect is again a tool against the finite, formal conception of significance

23 Charles Travis (2011, p.192) reads this injunction as *implausible* if applied to the whole of language, because not every mistake is a change of topic. Wittgenstein's idea here is that for something to be conceived as a mistake, the subject needs to be already judging in *general conformity* with others playing the game.

24 Cf. Williams 2004a, pp.84-5: "Understanding involves mastering concepts; possessing a concept involves learning the use of a word; and what is acquired, ... , is at bottom a practical ability" cf. OC §29.

25 While Wittgenstein initially conceived language-games as akin to a calculus (cf. PG §140), by the Blue Book he rejects this idea as incompatible with ordinary life (p.25; cf. PI §81; Z, §347).

26 Notice how not even in this case Wittgenstein is offering an actual definition, as he makes clear that this is what happens "For a large class of cases" (PI, §43). Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for this remark.

provided by ostensive definition.<sup>27</sup> Even when the definition is given, if the person has no clue how she is to *actually* use the words in the various language-games she participates in, then in what sense can her utterances be considered meaningful?<sup>28</sup> This understanding needn't be an explicit mental *act* (Hacker 2010, p.39; BB, pp.4-6, OC §38).<sup>29</sup> It is her activity in the world the mark of her utterances being meaningful. Understanding a norm can take place implicitly (PI, §54).

What matters for Wittgenstein is how we actually put our words to use, not merely their utility or purpose.<sup>30</sup> Meaning as use can comprise various different concepts or ideas – endorsing of a rule for action, the adoption of a command, or a disposition (RFM V, §13, 17; VI, §29-30; VII, §72; cf. Horwich 2012, pp.117-8). The normativity of meaning construed as use is flexible and tied to our earthly activities, instead of being abstract formalizations (cf. Hacker 2010, p.39). Meaning as use also attacks the main idea behind referential approaches, the existence of a world-word causal correlation instituting meaning strictly as *the object* a name stands for.<sup>31</sup>

We can see this in Wittgenstein's treatment of colors. Colors are on a naïve realist or referentialist view usually intended as something that belongs to the object itself. When in paradigmatic conditions I see a red table, it just is red. Yet, for Wittgenstein, what counts as 'red' isn't individuated by mere experience of seeing a red object, but by what we can and cannot say in the wider language-game concerning colors (Z, §345). For our utterance 'this table is red' to have meaning, one must already be partaking to a normative and conceptual horizon where establishing something as red entails that something is not white, blue, etc. If a subject were to continuously violate the rules of the color language-game in her utterance and activities – for example by treating a red object as if it were a blue one depending on the weather –, her color-statements would mean nothing color-related.

The question concerns now what constitutes the rules which make possible our activity-based language-games. For Wittgenstein, the rules governing our practices establish the *grammar*, the internal logic of our words and concepts. The grammar of a word expresses its *essence*, determining what a particular thing is in a particular setting (PI, §§371-3). In using a word, we express its content, its normative properties. Grammar allows us to meaningfully categorize

27 Cf. PI, §§27, 30-1, 49; Fogelin 1976, p.117; Hacker 2010, p.31.

28 Wittgenstein's interest is more towards the *behavioral* aspect of language and words, not their mere semantic aspect (Horwich 2010, p.19; 2012, pp.110-1).

29 Cf. OC§ 42, cf. Williams 2004a, p.93.

30 Cf. Horwich 2012, p.113; 2010, p.19. For a dissenting view cf. Hacker 2010, pp.36, 40. Of course, focusing on the activity does not automatically exclude words having a point or a purpose in the language-game.

31 Cf. Horwich, 2012, p.108; 2010, p.17; Hacker 2010, pp.28, 34).

objects, determining what we can meaningfully say about them (Bartmann 2021, p.216). The transcendental role logic appeared to possess in the *Tractatus* broadens its range, while losing its distinctively *a priori* character. It is not a merely formal structure of language and world considered *in abstracto*. Rather, grammar ties the determination of sense and meaning to our actual linguistic practices. These institute the area of language where certain moves are possible and endowed with intelligibility.<sup>32</sup> The limits of what can be uttered, known, and learned are now a function of what we do in our linguistic practice. Grammar is *arbitrary* or *autonomous*, because it does not answer to reality as if the meaning of grammar of words were imposed by blankly external or causal events standing over and above us.<sup>33</sup> Grammar institutes the content of our language-games, and does not really answer to traditional truth-functional evaluation (cf. PI, §497; PG §133; Bartmann 2021, p.243, Forster 2004).<sup>34</sup> A change in Grammar is a change concerning which moves are possible or intelligible to us. It is a transition to a different *game* (PG §68).

This concept of grammar underlies Wittgenstein's anti-essentialism. However, the autonomy and arbitrariness of the grammar constituting our language games does not indicate that these have nothing to do with the world, the actual environment we play these games in. Grammar expresses instead how the correspondence between a word or concept and its object is to be understood. Only via grammar can experience be authoritative for us, providing us with a constraint upon how we judge, think and believe (Travis 2011, p.187; Hacker 2010, p.41).<sup>35</sup> Instituting this nexus between word and world via grammar also indicates that grammar is not entirely arbitrary, something that can be decided, dictated, or changed at will. Grammar is autonomous in the sense that it is not determined by an external given. This doesn't mean doing away with objective judgments. Thinking that this must be so is a mistaken conflation of anti-realist and unbridled subjectivism. The latter never really enters the picture of Wittgenstein's later philosophy.<sup>36</sup> However, it does leave open the question of what institutes determinate meaning, the normative compulsion we experience as rational agents, and the objective purport of our judgments and beliefs.

To answer this question, we must look at the final defining concept of the later Wittgenstein, the idea of *Forms of Life*. One of the main properties of language-games for Wittgenstein is the fact that they allow us to imagine and

32 Cf. on this Bartmann 2021, p.224; Forster 2004, pp.7-8; Travis 2011, p.190

33 This is not the same as saying that the moves *within* a language game are arbitrary cf. PI § 289; RFM VII, §40; Bartmann 2021, p.232.

34 It is only *within* grammar that harmony between thought and reality can be found or established. Cf. PG §122.

35 On this cf. Z, §358; PI, §520, II p.230; RFM I, §§116, 131; OC § 358, and Forster 2004, pp.66-7.

36 See on this Wittgenstein's Private Language Argument (cf. PI § 258).

invent new things to think and do (PI, §492; RFM IV, §22, VII, §12). The grammar of a particular concept can be revised or uprooted, depending on changes in our practices. This reinforces the idea that the internal logic and content of our language-games are not external givens we passively receive. Our practices being determined in a specific way does not entail they possess some ultimately invariant character. But then how can they become *determined* at all? The way out is the realization that all of our linguistic and epistemic practices can only be understood together with the fabric of our life. In order to grasp the objective meaning and purports of our words, judgments, and beliefs we need to look at how our language-games institute our life. For Wittgenstein, speaking a language means partaking in an activity which takes place within our lives as embodied agents. The ways we use words is an integral part of our lives, they are facts of our natural history (PG §29, PI, §§18-9, 23). The plurality of our language games, with their overlapping similarities, their medley-like character institute the practices we participate in, our customs, uses, habits that provide meaning to our words (Z, §173; PI, §§66; 199; RFM VI, §§32, 42; Kober 1996, p.418). They form the life human beings, speakers, participate in.

These shapes our life assumes in its being embodied and enacted are what is the 'given' for Wittgenstein (PI, ix §345; Garver 1996, p.164). They represent something we cannot simply reject or suspend judgment about. We cannot really suspend participating to our forms of life; doing so will make the world itself lifeless, unintelligible (Z §233). The grammar of our forms of life belongs to us as that in which we have been trained first and foremost as human beings.<sup>37</sup> The way we are trained to use concepts, the way we are taught to understand something as having a specific role (RFM I, §17; Z, §110), is pervasive down to the point where even something as immediate and natural as a sensation of pain has the meaning and function it has only in connection with the role it plays in our life, surrounded by certain manifestations in it (Z, §§533-4).<sup>38</sup>

Forms of life constitute the horizon of intelligibility in which we are brought up as human subjects, the starting point for behaving, talking, and thinking as human beings. They offer the necessary friction against the possibility that grammar might be completely *willkürlich*, arbitrary in the negative sense of being completely fictional and empty wheel-spinning. Forms of life offer the required friction due to their intrinsically intersubjective nature. There is no form of life of the kind Wittgenstein envisions without a link to a community, a social setting where being trained into a custom is possible (PI, §198, RFM VI, §43, Z, §587).

<sup>37</sup> The idea is that via training we institute a natural history of performances, skills, and capacities which grounds our usage of words, cf. PI, §320; McGinn 2011, p.663. Training is how we manage to feel compelled in abiding by a certain procedure or norms as something natural, cf. RFM III, §30.

<sup>38</sup> See Z, §380 for the case of a tribe having a concept of pain where similarities between pain-tokens are not as relevant as they are for us. Cf. RFM VII, §28 concerning normative compulsion as a result of our *education*.

Language-games would possess no internal logic if they were not practiced by a community. A language-game considered apart from the form of life embodied by the community it is played in is no language-game at all. Without the possibility of agreeing in judgments with others, of recognizing a consensus concerning what it means to play a specific language-game, the significance of what we say and do would be a pipe-dream.

Grammar is constrained by its externality, the publicity instituted by its associated practices. This externality is such because it involves other subjects. Recognizing what constitutes a normal circumstance of judgment is crucial to the possibility of meaning (PI, §242, OC, §§27, 150). What defines the normal circumstance of judgment is established via our agreeing *in der Tat* with other subjects. This does not mean that an agreement *must* be reached; Wittgenstein's thesis is not prescriptive.<sup>39</sup> What matters is *the fact* that we agree with each other. Without this agreement there would be no technique to learn and use (PI, ix, §347),<sup>40</sup> no custom upholding the practice. Ultimately there would not be language-games to be played, no common form of life to inhabit. Without this agreement, language would stop (RFM III, §70), something like science would be impossible (ibid, §72). Without this agreement, our roads part, we are simply not engaging in the same activity (I, §66).<sup>41</sup> This agreement does not happen on the level of mere opinion, of what it merely seems us to be the case. It rather concerns those judgments and normative behaviors where an alternative is unintelligible. It is an agreement in forms of life (PI, §241, cf. RFM VI, §30). It belongs to our judging in accord with others. It is shown in disagreement being an oddity, something bizarre (ibid, §21). Language, meaning, and normativity can only be contentful and objective in their being related to a way of living (ibid, §34), and the human way of living involves by necessity the linguistic and normative activities we engage in with other subjects.

### 3. WHAT KIND OF IDEALISM?

The previous section should be sufficient in providing a point of reference to characterize Wittgenstein's later thought as a form of idealism. Little of what we analyzed seems in agreement with what we would ordinarily identify as philosophical realism. The determination of meaning is tied to our linguistic

<sup>39</sup> Although he at times refers to the fact that we agree in our calculations as providing *justification* for the technique of calculating, cf. LFM, p.102. See also RFM VII, §9.

<sup>40</sup> See his remarks that a rule cannot be followed only once in the history of the world, RFM, VI, §43; PI, §119.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Hacker 2010, p.35. Agreement in judgments is a criterion of shared understanding. Lack of agreement in a calculation is enough to give grounds for suspecting the calculation as mistaken (RFM I, §112).

practices; what constitutes their essence,<sup>42</sup> their grammar, is established within the language-games played by members of a form of life. These determinations involve aspects that on a common-sense picture of the world, with its implicit endorsement of naïve empiricism and realism, appear impossible to ascribe to our normative and epistemic agency. We already mentioned that something as basic as *pain* can have the meaning and content it has only by playing a larger role within our life. Even something as seeing a colored object as such is determined by this (Z, §629). In *Zettel*, we can see clearly how the analyzed concept of color comprises a philosophical stance that is not inappropriate to identify as idealism. Wittgenstein considers the possibility that it is grammar as he envisions it that which defines how reality is. He rejects the idea that one obtains the concept of a particular color merely in virtue of looking at a colored object. To determine which specific color ‘red’ is, one must mean the concept of ‘red’ that already belongs to us in our shared, active usage of the term (Z, §§331-34). The proposition ‘there cannot be something red-green all over’ works like a mathematical axiom (Z, §346). It has a normative and grammatical function in describing how to use the concept of color.

Apprehending the concept of color is a matter of training, via acquiring the relevant technique associated with ‘color’ in our language games (ibid, §418-9). We learn to establish a connection between a certain sensation and our words. We posit what the difference is between the object and the corresponding sensation of the object (§§426-7). Crucially however, learning this technique also entails judging in the same way other subjects would judge concerning the color of that object (§420). Our usage of color concepts requires ordinary agreement with other subjects on how to determine the color of objects (ibid, §351). The agreement also means that normally disputes about objects being of a particular color do not arise, and this belongs to the framework of our language, its grammar, the way it works (RFM VI, §21).

In this sense, Wittgenstein recovers a Kantian concept developed in the *Kritik der Urteilskraft* concerning reflective aesthetic judgments (Borutti 2005, pp.98-9). For Kant, there is a notion of *sensus communis* in such judgments, not to be confused with the naïve realist common-sense perspective that Mooreanism endorses. This *sensus communis* works as the backdrop for our endorsement of a kind of necessity in our judgements of taste. This necessity does not concern the ultimate *truth* of the judgment, but the idea that in uttering that judgment we establish the possibility in principle that other subjects ought to agree with us (KU, §§18-9). Without this necessity the judgment could not even be communicated to others, it would in fact not be a judgment at all. Only by presupposing this possibility can our judgment be intelligible as a judgment, even

42 Wittgenstein’s talk of essence should not lead us into mistaking him for a covert essentialist. There is no metaphysical substance to be extracted from grammar, only the contingent character given to the word by its use.

if universal agreement is not achieved (ibid, §§20-21). This possibility is not grounded in experience; it is an *ideal* norm. it demands universal assent even if this universal assent is absent (§22). We achieve this by putting ourselves in the position of everyone else (§40); other subjects in uttering their judgments do the same. Normativity is essentially intersubjective. It treads on an agreement that we reach together (RFM VII, §26).

The overall stance we analyzed thus far establishes a form of idealism; what determines the objectivity of our judgments and the content of our concepts has truth-conditions which rely on the normative conditions established by our communal practices (Kober 1996, p.429). Without this background of shared practices, there can be no truth-functional evaluation (cf. PG, §79, OC §94). Necessary features of experience cannot be understood apart from what we mean and do (Forster 2004, p.15, Z, §357). What human subjects can understand as a fact is determined by grammar, providing the logical form to the putative fact (RFM VII, §18). By doing so we integrate reality within our language-games (Mächa 2012, p.121-2), and we cannot understand reality as something to be investigated if we conceive it apart from language-games. The motley of language-games and activities in which we always already find ourselves in constitutes our form of life, our being 'minded', *geistig*, in a certain manner (Lear 1982, p.385): certain things appear to us as obvious and necessary, and other possibilities do not really appear as real alternatives.

The idea that the thought of the later Wittgenstein can be coherently understood as providing a form of idealism has created a certain uneasiness in many commentators. Elizabeth Anscombe recognized that the idea of grammar determining essences together with the associated possibility different grammars, makes it difficult to steer a middle-way between "the falsehoods of idealism and the stupidities of empiricist realism" (1981, p.115). Truth appears to depend upon human linguistic practice (ibid, p.116). Reality itself, understood along its more traditional conception, appears to depend on us, like the kind of ontological idealism we wanted to steer clear of. This conclusion appears to be untenable and even *embarrassing*; it should be quite obvious to everyone that the existence of a horse does not depend on the human possibility of conceptualizing it as a horse (ibid, p.114). Of the same advice are other anti-idealist perspectives on Wittgenstein. Ilham Dilman argues against Wittgenstein's linguistic idealism on the grounds that before we start to classify things we need to have come a long way. Grammar does not happen in a vacuum (2004, p.167). Trying to attach to Wittgenstein a fundamentally nominalist position to support linguistic idealism is futile. While Wittgenstein does reject standard realism, he does not see the use of language as unrelated to anything external to it. It is instead rooted in one's embodied life (ibid, p.169; cf. Anscombe 1981, p.117; Moyal-Sharrock 2016, p.125), as we ourselves presented in the previous section. The fact that we cannot think outside of language does not by itself

indicate that there is nothing *outside* of language (Dilman 2002, p.34; Moyal-Sharrock 2016, p.120).

The general line is that while concepts and norms are indeed language-dependent, the facts of reality expressed in our concepts are not.<sup>43</sup> Simply saying this is not idealism; it only means recognizing a seemingly trivial aspect that *human reality* is *linguistic reality*, because we are linguistic and normative beings (ibid, p. 127). This perspective finds some support in certain Wittgensteinian remarks. The notion that within grammar harmony is realized between language and word (Z, §55; PI, §429) purportedly indicates that there is an *outside* of language which is reality. This would directly tame the idealistic shadow cast upon the concept of grammar. Additionally, Wittgenstein mentions repeatedly that our language-games are conditioned by certain facts (OC, §617), and that we alter our concepts and norms based on discovering new facts (Z, §352, §364; RFM VI, §28). Our conceptual system does not *reside* in the nature of things (Z, §357).

However, this argument against Wittgenstein's idealism is doubly defective. Firstly, these readers understand idealism as ontological.<sup>44</sup> This thesis was never really in contention. Wittgenstein does not offer an ontological theory, and Berkeleyan idealism does carry with it a substantial theoretical luggage. It is quite clear that when Wittgenstein mentions and rejects idealism (PI, §402; OC, §19, 24, 37) he understands it as the counterpart to realism. In fact, the two do not differ much in practice if not for their battle-cry (Z, §§413-14). Once one endorses a realist picture, the idealist counterpart is all of a sudden intelligible. However, Wittgenstein's philosophy is supposed to be clearly directed against such dichotomies. Arguing that Wittgenstein does not endorse subjective/ontological idealism tells us nothing new.

A more poignant objection against the anti-idealist reading ought to be raised here. If the anti-idealist readings were right, and our linguistic arsenal is to be harmonized with an external world that is to be conceived as originally external to it, this leads us straight back into representationalism and associated skepticism. We might conceive ourselves as ontologically confined within the sphere of linguistic intelligibility with the outside world potentially escaping our cognitive grasp. This produces an untenable phenomenal/ noumenal split. A guiding impulse in Wittgenstein's philosophy is to get rid of such categorizations. Acknowledging that our access to reality is fundamentally linguistic and

43 This line is defended by Anscombe 1981, p.121, Ritter 2020, p.29, Moyal-Sharrock 2016, p.121. For Anscombe, this is still a *partial* idealism concerning norms (p.118). For criticisms of this reading cf. Dilman 2002, p.110-6 and Bartmann 2021, p.256.

44 The Berkeleyan target is explicit in Dilman (2002, pp.37-9; 2004, p.163). Moyal-Sharrock appears to conflate the ontological form with the Kantian variety (2016, p.118). Lagerspetz (2021, p.47) argues that Anscombe's reading of grammar already endorses a realist standpoint and its associated understanding of idealism.



normative also means acknowledging that the relationship between reality and subject is instituted within our linguistic and conceptual capacities and possibilities.<sup>45</sup> However, it would be a mistake to think that this is merely the effect of a one-sided imposition of the internal side of cognition upon reality. Reality is integrated in our activities via our grammar, our uses, and our agreements. This means that reality itself has a linguistic and conceptual form. To still query whether reality is ultimately independent of this 'internalization'<sup>46</sup> means undoing the kind of work that Wittgenstein's reflections have brought to the fore. We would head straight back into the dichotomies that Wittgenstein's philosophical impetus was meant to dissolve.

To characterize better Wittgenstein's idealism, we can use to our advantage a further objection. Bartmann (2021, p.246) argues that Wittgenstein's own anti-idealistic tendency can be found in the following sentence: "From its *seeming* to me – or to everyone – to be so, it doesn't follow that it is so" (OC, §2). This injunction targets the incumbent subjectivism within idealism that, even if shared, says nothing about reality. However, Bartmann takes this sentence out of context. The main point of this sentence is directed against Moore's naïve realism. A mere experiential seeming of the kind Moore defended does not tell us much about how things are *per se*. Not even if this seeming appears to be shared by others. It is a mistake in general to read Wittgenstein's purported idealism as a kind of crude conventionalism. Language and rules did not arise out of ratiocination (OC § 475; Z, §391); it is not mere appeal to the majority what determines what counts as what (ibid, §429-31). Most of our practices escape explicit agreement (§620). The kind of friction that our forms of life provide us and allow grammar not to be entirely 'made-up' on a whim is lacking in the purely conventionalist picture. While it is true that many aspects of our everyday life function as conventions, it is also true that in countless normative endeavors we do not understand what we do as a possibility among other choices.<sup>47</sup>

A better way of understanding Wittgenstein's position is the interpretation offered by Bernard Williams and Jonathan Lear. They propose to understand Wittgenstein's perspective focusing on investigating how our language works from within. This means an analysis of how we are *minded* (Williams 1973,

45 Dilman (2002, pp.11, 28) defends this understanding, making his professed anti-idealism at least hazy (Lagerspetz 2021, p.39).

46 As an anonymous reviewer rightly points out, internalization here might seem to assume that there is some metaphysically relevant external realm that is brought within the sphere of the internal. As it should be clear at this point, we are rejecting this idea. However, internalization would be the term someone held captive by traditional dualist pictures would employ.

47 Cf. Forster 2004, pp.66-9 for a criticism against conventionalism based on the lack of *social* constraint that this picture provides. For anti-conventionalist passages in Wittgenstein, cf. OC, §243, 599, 609; Z, §348. Elsewhere, Wittgenstein does view rules of grammar as stipulations (PG §138; PI, §§354-5).

pp.84-5; Lear 1982, p.401). *Mindedness* idealism elects as its proper field of inquiry our form of life, specifically the fact that imagining an alternative to it is simply to trespass into incoherence (Williams 1973, p.90; Lear 1982, p.389; Bartmann 2021, p.221). This is a decidedly Kantian perspective. The human form of life hard-wires us into playing us specific games and describes a horizon of intelligibility that allows for no intelligible comparisons with any other.<sup>48</sup> As in the Kantian idea of a discursive intellect, the a priori categories instituted the very possibility of intelligible experience, and there is nothing resembling an object of judgment or belief outside of this conceptual framework. In Wittgenstein our intersubjective form of life acts as a kind of transcendental limit on logic, meaning, and intelligibility, with the main difference being a transition from the solipsistic subject of the *Tractatus* to a kind of ideal 'we' constituted by the human community (Lear 1984, p.229). Grammar determines meaning and objectivity because grammar is instituted by the transcendental function of our form of life.

However, this understanding is itself limited. An investigation of its inadequacies can help us understand how Wittgenstein's idealism brings him to inhabit a post-Kantian space that converges with Hegel's own critique of transcendental idealism. The first thing to notice concerning the narrowness of mindedness idealism is that it clashes with Wittgenstein's overt focus on cases where a certain normative behavior that initially appears compulsory to us cannot justify this very compulsion as *necessary*. Wittgenstein often investigates cases where something that appears trivially natural to us is not so to a community or a subject whose training and education has been different. Most of the famous rule-following sections in both the *Philosophical Investigations* and the *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics* have this issue at their core. The case of the wood-sellers is another obvious instance of such an approach (Bartmann 2021, p.222, cf. Forster 2004 pp.25-6).

This begs the question: if the way we are minded is the only game in town, i.e. we are cognitively hard-wired to proceed in a specific compulsory manner, why should a comparison with different kinds of grammar that lends credence to their possible instantiation be helpful? Wittgenstein is quite explicit in endorsing the idea that we agree with others upon a certain normative route, but there may easily be different routes to the chosen one (RFM V, §8). This idea seems difficult to square with the contention that our present mindedness is something invariant, the only game in town available at least for human subjects. Wittgenstein keeps reminding us of the possibility that our game might be one among many.

48 In this sense, Garver's (1990) idea that there is only one form of human life belongs to this interpretative line. As an anonymous reviewer points out, this is not so for Kant, who allows at least the logical conceivability of beings having different forms of mindedness altogether, cf. KrV, A27/B43.

### 3.1 WITTGENSTEIN CONTRA KANT

It appears that for Wittgenstein, even if we admit that the human form of life is more or less unitary, this does not entail that there cannot be a plurality of *Lebensformen*, grammars, and conditions of intelligibility. Our education and training seem contingent products of our socio-historical development. Nothing in principle forbids a radical change to occur over time, even in a way that would make our form or life unrecognizable from our present standpoint. This idea should advert to a post-Kantian development of Wittgenstein's linguistic idealism. Let us recall Kant's definition of discursive intellect:<sup>49</sup> a discursive intellect relies on concepts in such a way that concepts are to be understood as rules for articulate representations, as predicates of possible judgments (KrV, B93-4). For these concepts to be about an object, this object must be *given* in intuition to the subject, and this is accomplished via sensibility, not intellectual spontaneity (B33). What the intellect does is merely provide the categories, the form for synthesis. It intuits nothing of its own (B145).

The first trait constituting human discursive intellect is its reliance on something *given* to its sensible faculty. The second aspect is that its normative synthesis can only take place when governed by necessary laws and principles (B673). The variety of things we are presented with in our sensible intuition should not deceive us into neglecting that "behind this variety there is a unity of fundamental properties" (B680). This is not mere regularity of customs or habits. It is a unity necessary to the possibility of experience and knowledge. It does not pertain merely to the possibility of empirical generalizations, but is instead essential for having empirical concepts and experience *überhaupt* (B681-2; cf. Sedgwick 2012, pp.25-6). It is crucially a product of the synthetic unity of apperception (KrV, A104-5), involving the dimension of sensible intuition as well. The subjective conditions of sensible intuition must be universal and a priori to have anything resembling an empirical judgment (B65-6; cf. Guyer 2000, p.56).

To shelter this crucial aspect from the threat of subjectivism, the synthesis of representations under the categories must not be determined arbitrarily. This objectual synthesis has a necessary character so that its product can be shared between human cognizers, whose representations must agree (Bristow 2007, p.33). This second point might appear to be in line with Wittgenstein's idea that in our grammar we realize agreement with each other by playing the same language-games. However, Kant's idea is different than Wittgenstein's. For Kant, there is no possibility of disagreement on the basic constituents of human cognition. We are as human agents bound by universal and necessary basic rules of cognition, constituting the objective purport of our judgments (Sedgwick

49 On this see Sedgwick (2012, pp.17-19)

2012, p.87).<sup>50</sup> While there might be a plurality of higher-level language-games, the very building-blocks of human cognition are necessary and universal. This element is absent in Wittgenstein's perspective.

In fact, two essential marks of Kantian idealism we highlighted are in conflict with certain features of Wittgenstein's later philosophy we analyzed. The idea that something must be given in the faculty of sensibility in order for the subject to have anything to synthesize *at all* clashes with some of the features of grammar. Wittgenstein is quite clear in saying that grammar does not have to account to a reality conceived apart from our 'faculty of spontaneity' (PG §133). This is one of the main points of departure from the perspective of the *Tractatus*. Our propositions have no obligation to picture reality as something standing opposite and over them (Travis 2011, p.188). The world alone does not determine the norms and grammar of our language games (OC, §139). Grammar creates the possibility of the object being available in experience (RFM VII, §18), and this seems in stark contrast with Kant's idea that the object is provided by sensible and not intellectual intuition. Grammar, far from being limited by our sensible faculties, involves *expressing* what the correspondence with reality is (LFM, p.248), integrating it within our language-games. This is not passive reception of an external given or a channeling of content into form. Our activities and our language-games have a constitutive and creative capacity (Forster 2004, p.15). While experience does play a role, it is not what grounds our judging (OC, §130).

It could be replied that in Kantian idealism experience too does not ground our judgments, but in Kant's perspective sensibility does provide us with the material to be synthesized in a judgment according to rules. In Wittgenstein, rules and associated linguistic practices have a self-creating character (Bloor 1995, p.370), and they are not grounded in reality as a priori synthetic judgments are for Kant.<sup>51</sup> Language-games have priority (PI, §§654-5). Wittgenstein's anti-empiricist and anti-reductionist points are clear in the idea of the *limits* of empiricism being *concept*-formation (RFM IV, §29). The value an experience has is due to the technique which made it possible, and this technique is itself a fact of *our* natural history (VII, §17).<sup>52</sup> What experience tells us is that we *change* our concepts depending on whatever new fact we learn via this linguistic integration,<sup>53</sup> facts that modify what is essential or non-essential for us (Z, §352). Wittgenstein's rejection of an empiricist standpoint does not entail rationalism or

50 See also Bristow 2007, p.96: "The highest norms or principles that emerge in the course of Kantian criticism ... are themselves pure principles: they are a priori, timeless, and formal with the respect to the content derived from the 'ongoing' concerns of developing culture and tradition".

51 Cf. Bloor 1996, p.357; Brenner 2005, p.124. See also RFM I, §125, what constitutes the possibility of a linguistic move is not given by experience. Explication of concepts doesn't require appeal to facts (PI, ix §365)

52 Concerning mathematics, cf. RFM II, §71; III, §§4, 30; VI, §26; VII § 18

53 Changing thereby the object as well, in a clear Hegelian fashion, cf. PhG, §§82-5.

rampant Platonism. Even mathematics is dethroned from its towering universality and necessity. The mathematician creates essences and forms concepts in her activity (RFM I, §35, 166; VII, §67).

The integration of reality within language-games, its becoming a matter *internal* to language, is an unsettling idea. Now it seems that nothing coming from outside the sphere of language can settle the truth of our assertions (cf. Travis 2011, pp.189-90). This can only be unsettling if we adopt a realist picture of truth. There is enough evidence to believe that for Wittgenstein the propositional concept of truth is not that fundamental in his approach to reality as internal to language and grammar (Williams 2004b, p.268). We need language to delimit a realm of discourse for something to be called true or false in the first place (PG, §79). What allows for truth-functional evaluation comes only after we determine the norms for deciding 'for and against a proposition' (OC, §198). What it means for something to correspond with reality is not settled in advance based on the idea of a reality that is blankly external to our normative activities (OC, §§199-200).<sup>54</sup>

This suggests the idea that there is a crucial element of decision in determining what counts as what. When we say that we see or understand something in a specific manner, this shows an adoption of a concept whereby we *decide* to see things and act in such-and-such ways (RFM VI, §§7-8). In following rules we are partaking in *spontaneous* decisions concerning which techniques to use.<sup>55</sup> When we feel compelled to go in a certain way, we decide to follow the rule according to this compulsion. We accept something as certain, as a proof of something else, we decide what to see and recognize as being identical or consequence of what we assumed (cf. RFM I, §63, VII, §§48, 66; LFM, p.73; OC, §§196, 399). This means that our grammar, which does not merely synthesize and formalize what we receive in experience, but contributes to it and institutes its content, is liable to alteration. We can play new, different language games, whose stability and necessity is only temporary<sup>56</sup> (RFM VI, §24; OC, §256). This strikes at the heart of the other Kantian tenet, the supposed universal and necessary character of categorial synthesis. Granted that engagement with the world cannot happen outside a normative/linguistic framework, the concepts, norms, and categories we employ are not hard-wired in us as some kind of universal grammar. We change language-games, concepts and meaning, as certain language-games lose their relevance (OC, §§61-3, 65). What counts as a criterion and what as a symptom depends on the circumstances (§98). There is a fluidity between norms and propositions (§§82,

54 Michael Williams argues (2004b, p.272) that Wittgenstein doesn't defend an epistemic conception of truth. Wittgenstein does not provide a conception of what it is to have a ground for judgments; he defends a minimalist and non-evidentialist conception of truth (ibid, p.278).

55 Cf. on this RFM VI, §24, LFM, p.285.

56 Hence, this necessity is little more than psychological compulsion.

97).<sup>57</sup> These determinations are rooted in our form of life,<sup>58</sup> and this is valid for anything that we would at any given moment consider a necessary element of cognition and intelligibility.

What places Wittgenstein against strictly Kantian idealism and towards a post-Kantian endeavor, is Wittgenstein's rejection of the formal aspects of Kant's system. Specifically, the ideas that normative concepts only organize and structure a given or assumed content, and that transcendental categories are a given whose authority is invariant, a priori, and universal in a way that completely separates necessary norms from our life as human agents.

### 3.2 A HEGELIAN CONVERGENCE

We argued above that Wittgenstein's philosophy, while moving on a terrain within the Kantian realm, possesses distinctive features that make it go beyond the Kantian standpoint. It is on such elements that a convergence with Hegelian idealism can be drawn. In Hegel's analysis of Kantian idealism one can find the same kind of impulse and criticism against the Kantian picture that allowed Wittgenstein to overcome his *tractarian* stance. Here we focus on those aspects of Hegel's philosophy that attack the formal and finite element of the Kantian picture, drawing out how in Hegel too there is a two-fold aim. Overcoming the representationalist stance that understands the world as placed over and above our concepts, and endorsing the idea that meaningful, intelligible engagement with reality can only be understood together with the practical, dynamic, and processual aspects of our lives as human beings.

Hegel's standpoint doesn't stand in complete opposition to Kantian idealism. He philosophizes clearly within the grooves traced by Kant's Copernican Revolution, especially in the idea that the metaphysics inherited from modern philosophy must undergo a thorough analysis and investigation (Enz, §41Z; Houlgate 2015, p.21). Hegel follows Kant in viewing thought as free, autonomous, and spontaneous activity of the subject (Enz, §§23, 60).<sup>59</sup> To experience objects one needs both conceptual spontaneity and sensible experience (VGP III, 355; cf. Houlgate 2015, p.23). Traditional empiricism for Hegel arises to provide a concrete content retrieved from experience, "the inwardly and outwardly present" (Enz, §37). This raises the particular sensation, feeling, intuition to "the *form of universal representations, sentences, laws*"

57 This fluctuation can be seen in our scientific hypotheses, cf. Z, §348; PI, §354; Hacker 2010, p.31; Forster 2004, p.9.

58 Cf. on this Mächa 2012, pp.127-8, against reading Wittgenstein as a conventionalist.

59 See VGP III, 372 "... freedom is the ultimate hinge on which the human being turns, the ultimate pinnacle which allows nothing further to be imposed upon it, so that humanity recognizes nothing, no authority, insofar as it contravenes its freedom", cf. Bristow 2007, pp.88-9.

(§38). In doing so it limits itself to the *finite*. Finite cognition means for Hegel an atomistic, one-sided understanding of what grounds knowledge of reality, a form of reductionism. Empiricism understands the given as the true in-itself, the here and now, the determinateness we seek in the world as merely sensory world, particular, individual form (§38Z). This yields a kind of materialism allowing no supersensible or intellectual contribution. This reveals itself to be an abstraction. Matter cannot be sensed or perceived *as such*, in the sense of being *just matter*. This standpoint is revealed as insufficient for reaching the kind of necessity and universality that Hegel agrees with Kant is necessary for knowledge (§39). Hegel's anti-empiricism argues that experience, if left in this completely material and passive conception, is incapable of disclosing its own justificatory purport.<sup>60</sup> This insight is one Wittgenstein clearly endorses (cf. OC, §§83, 130; RFM VI, §23).

In Kantian philosophy we see the overcoming of empirical limitations. What determines necessity and universality belongs to us, as thinking agents. The objectivity of experiential knowledge is instituted by the concepts of Understanding, *Verstand* (Enz, §40). For Hegel, one of the truest insights of Kantian idealism is that what constitutes the essence of these concepts, the categories, is the original synthetic unity of apperception, self-consciousness (SL, p.515; cf. Moser 2019, pp.280-1; Quante 2011, p.163).<sup>61</sup> Hegel however argues that this is not achievable within Kantian idealism. Kant retains a picture where the unity between concept and the world, the application of the categories to the manifold of sensible experience, is external, a combination of terms whose roots are ultimately separate. For Hegel, Kantian idealism represents a clear case of a 'philosophy of reflection', a stance that establishes and relies on dualities and formal oppositions between mind and world (Ng 2020, p.69).

In what sense is Kantian idealism a 'philosophy of reflection'? We said that Kant denies that humans are endowed with an intuitive intellect. Human cognition of the world is essentially discursive; we must encounter objects in our sensible faculties to have judgments possessing objective purport. This entails that *Erkenntnis* is a prerogative of our *Verstand*, our faculty of applying concepts to the sensible given. Reason, *Vernunft*, is the faculty of principles which underlies the unity of our rules of synthesis (KrV B356). *Vernunft* provides transcendental ideas which are independent from our synthetic activity (B355, 368). It supplies principles of unity acting as regulative principles, but these cannot be considered as having any objective purport. (B694). They cannot be applied to objects of phenomenal experience because this would amount to *constituting* their object, and this is not possible. We cannot have experience of

<sup>60</sup> Hegel attacks Hume's empiricism as destroying the objectivity of thought-determinations, VGP III, 277.

<sup>61</sup> Hegel's starting point is Kant's understanding of reason, i.e. demanding unity and totality, cf. Siep 2000, p.34.

the kind of normative unity they prescribe. This unity is something we provide only as a regulative ideal. *Vernunft* is therefore excluded from epistemic cognition. Cognition is to be had exclusively via application of the a priori rules of synthesis provided by *Verstand*, the faculty of subsuming under norms the manifold of experience. We can at most assume principles of reason as ideas of things that however belongs entirely to us, our *maxims of reason*. Accordingly, the application of the intellect's categories to things considered in themselves would be plain non-sense; this application could produce no objective determination (B166, B306). The two realms are to be kept distinctly separate. *Vernunft* and its principles of unity play no genuinely epistemic role.

However, this means Kantian idealism endorses a clear representationalist tenet. This is the essential dualism between conceptual scheme and empirical given. We receive the given in experience and we apply our rules of synthesis to this manifold, unifying it. This is our intellectual activity, a distinct attribution from our spontaneity. It establishes a clear distinction between the sensible and the conceptual realms. Something is given in experience, but its form as an intelligible object for possible judgment is the doing of our *Verstand*. Endorsing such a duality is for Hegel the essential downfall of the Kantian project. Firstly, as with all instances of representationalism, this ends up being a form of *instrumental* cognition. Instrumental cognition cuts us off from reality even if its role is supposedly to get us at how things actually are (PhG, §73). Understanding how the instrument of intellection works won't improve our standing with regard to reality, because by subtracting it from the thing, we'd be left with how things were before we applied the instrument to it. In Wittgensteinian terms, our understanding of how our language works is not conducive to an understanding of reality *considered apart* from our language. Without language, there is no intelligible and knowable reality in the first place. Representationalism requires the idea that there is a fundamental separation, a chasm between how things are and the standpoint of cognition (ibid, §74).

*Verstand*-based cognition remains stuck into positing of opposites: conceptual category against sensible given (DS, pp.94, 109; cf. Ng 2020, p.281). Subjective element of cognition against objective element that *affects* sensibility (KrV B36). There does not seem to be any way for this absolute givenness to be overcome. This could be achieved only by showing that the concepts apply necessarily to their objects with the latter intended not merely as what is provided in phenomenal experience but as the objects themselves. However, this is obviously not possible for Kant. It would undercut his own idea that we can rescue knowledge from skepticism only by letting this assumption lapse (Sedgwick 2012, p.84).

The consequence is that the real object is lost as an absolute beyond (SL, pp.698, 729). The thing-in-itself becomes a sheer beyond-thought, inaccessible



by human cognition.<sup>62</sup> Reality becomes something without properties, an outside which has an empty ground, empty abstraction (ibid, pp.427, 554). Here we find another element where Hegel's critique of Kant inhabits the same space as the later Wittgenstein. Much of his work in the *Philosophical Investigations* act as an indictment of the tractarian conception of language and associated picture of the world. The intentional image, the representation, raises by itself the question of how can one extract from it how things are (PI, §388): "However similar I make the picture to what is supposed to represent it may still be the picture of something else" (§389). There is in Wittgenstein a thorough rejection of the idea that our representations, conceptual syntheses, and normative images are merely *pictures* of the world, standing over and against the real thing. In Wittgenstein, language is not a way of representing experience. It *just is experience*:

So if someone has not learned a language, is he unable to have certain memories? Of course – he cannot have linguistic memories, linguistic wishes or fears, and so on. And memories and suchlike in language are not mere threadbare representations of the real experiences; for is what is linguistic not an experience? (§649)

Wittgenstein rejects the idea that we represent reality with our language as if the two items were separate, with reality beyond the representation, as the rock under the snow.<sup>63</sup> When we say so-and-so we do not stop short of the fact (§95).<sup>64</sup>

A Kantian might reply that these perceived insufficiencies are only due to a mistaken and unsalvageable conception of human cognition, whose only outcome is skepticism. To think that the products of our normative synthesis via the categories belong to the objects themselves is to think a non-entity, an *Unding* (KrV B274), something conceptually abominable, that has no place within knowledge. However, such an answer would be unsatisfactory. There is the legitimate feeling that Kantianism only offers here a retreat from the skeptical menace. Notwithstanding the fact that Kantian transcendental idealism is not Berkeleyan ontological idealism, Berkeley's own system was proposed as a coherent development of the problem of Cartesian skepticism. If, in order to escape skeptical conclusions, what Kant offers is a retreat into the phenomenal sphere of human experience, the assurance that this is nevertheless objective

62 Cf. SL, pp.45, 62; Houlgate 2015, p.31.

63 The metaphor Hegel used in his *Skeptizismusaufsatz* against Gottlob Schulze's Humeanism, cf. VSP, p.318.

64 It can be argued that in Wittgenstein the whole category of 'knowing something as it really is' makes no sense, cf. Cavell 1969, p.65. See Ritter 2020, p.49 for a criticism of this idea. Already thinking of something 'as it really is' implies a separation between experience and reality.

cognition appears a vain attempt to avoid recognizing a thoroughly skeptical conclusion.

The Kantian ought to show that the categories of the intellect are more than subjective determinations but Hegel's criticism precisely argues that this cannot be done by Kant. For Hegel, the most Kantian idealism achieves is a *Metaphysics* of subjectivity, expressing nothing about the reality of nature and making the world a formal realm of appearances (FK, p.189; DS, p.103).<sup>65</sup> Hegel spots a thread that connects classically empiricist reflection to the kind of transcendentalism made possible by Kant and developed by Fichte and Jacobi (FK, pp.63, 69).<sup>66</sup> Both cannot show how what they hold to be the ultimate core of cognition – be it empirical experience or normative synthesis – can obtain justification and genuine authority. Hegel contends that Kantian transcendentalism endorses the principle of modernity established by the Cartesian Cogito, the idea that via inward scrutiny thought could understand freely by itself what is valid and what is not (VGP III, p.120).<sup>67</sup> Normative and epistemic authority are granted validity by thought itself. However, this conception is doubly problematic. Firstly, it requires a scrutiny and validation of our cognitive and intellectual faculties before we actually begin to have cognition of things. This would be akin to learning to swim before entering in water (Enz, §§10, 41), revealing this methodology as formal. This is due to the fact that now, by requiring to subject one's own critical method to scrutiny, the method becomes empty, mere abstract determination (Enz, §54),<sup>68</sup> Secondly, in virtue of the limitations that Kant imposes on human cognition, there seems to be no way for this validation to be more than subjective imposition, a kind of assurance of immediate self-certainty whose worth is at best tentative and at worst dogmatic (PhG §76; cf. Bristow 2007, p.166).<sup>69</sup>

Why are the categories mere subjective determinations? Hegel's general idea is that the philosophies of reflection endorse the complete heterogeneity of spontaneity and sensibility, the *Thesis of Absolute Opposition*.<sup>70</sup> On one side we find the given content of sensibility, which has no form in itself. This form, its unity, cannot be experienced by discursive beings. We instead provide the form

<sup>65</sup> Hegel doesn't hesitate in calling it *Psychological Idealism* (FK, p.76).

<sup>66</sup> For a defense of this interpretation cf. Sedgwick 2012, pp.75-8. Cf. Pinkard 2008, pp.112-13 for the idea that the shape of consciousness belonging to modernity is at the root of the subject/object dichotomy.

<sup>67</sup> As an anonymous reviewer correctly signals me, this is debatable insofar as Kant's *Refutation of Idealism* targets precisely the Cartesian possibility of inner awareness without outer awareness.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. Bristow 2007, p.70. This approach suffers from the fear of error, which is error itself (PhG, §74).

<sup>69</sup> This presupposes that worldly knowledge can only be obtained via evidence accessible to self-certain knowledge, making the position a dogmatism of self-certainty, cf. PhG, §§24, 40, 54, cf. Heidemann 2008, p.11.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. Sedgwick 2012, pp.71, 94, Houlgate 2015, pp.27-8.

of the object. On one side there is the *necessity* of (empirical) being and on the other the freedom of conceptual spontaneity (FK p.85). Categories are revealed empty forms that derive their content from sensory givenness;<sup>71</sup> the *Verstand*-based cognition Kant endorses separates form and content right away (SL, pp.36-9; Houlgate 2015, p.25). Thoughts are separated from nature by an unbridgeable gulf (FK, p.77; Sedgwick 2012, p.72). The world is reduced to a realm of mere appearances whereas phenomena cannot be shown to be more than a reflection of what we assume as correct (Enz, §§41, 43, 52; FK, pp.56, 62). If we provide form to the phenomenal objects but we cannot at the same time assign it to the object themselves, our judgments will simply reflect the forms we assumed as valid from the start. Kant does not examine how the categories should be understood in themselves,<sup>72</sup> what their relationship to each other is (SL, p.63). He accepts them and their authority without question.<sup>73</sup>

Given the lack of investigation on the proper content of the categories, the judgments they synthesize will tell us nothing about nature itself.<sup>74</sup> Nature remains a mere formal representation which presents us at most the maxims that our reason endorses, but remains inaccessible. Categories end-up being dead static pigeonholes (DS, p.80). Their a priori status is formal because merely expressed in terms of an assumed universality and necessity (FK, p.73), which Kant offers no account of. By having a self-consciousness whose spontaneity remains opposite to the empirical manifold, the knowledge of the world Kantian transcendentalism provides us is merely formal and subjective, mechanical application of one-sided and finite determinations (ibid, p.92).

#### 4. THE HEGELIAN CHARACTER OF WITTGENSTEIN'S IDEALISM

Hegel's critique of formalism against the Kantian perspective reappears more than a hundred years later in the spirit of Wittgenstein's later philosophy. The determination of names and objects offered by definitions are as formal and empty as the determinations of form offered by the categories. Neither approach tells us anything about reality. Together with a common anti-empiricist impetus, and the rejection of representationalist stances, we can clearly spot a shared element in their respective philosophical stances. The idea that Wittgenstein, in developing his philosophy from the *Tractatus* to the *Investigations*, undertook a kind of Hegelian transformation has been already noticed by various

71 On the fact that the categories appear to have a sensible genesis, diminishing even more Kant's distance from ordinary empiricism, cf. Enz, §42; Ferrarin 2019, p.149; Sedgwick 2012, p.73.

72 It is arguable that for Kant this investigation is impossible in principle. This only goes toward showing the limit of the Kantian perspective.

73 Cf. Enz, §43; SL, p.45; Houlgate 2015, pp.24, 35. The same is valid for Kant's threefold distinction between cognition, reality, and the subject, cf. PhG §76, Siep 2000, p.75.

74 See DS, p.105 on how this impedes scientific theorizing in general.

commentators and interpreters, and the above traits we analyzed should provide a methodological ground in defense of such readings.<sup>75</sup>

Particularly interesting is the convergence we can record concerning the limits of cognition. Both react to the Kantian idea that the limits of thoughts are invariably fixed, objecting to the contention that their logical features cannot be trespassed (Pinkard 2019, p.181). This can be clearly seen in their shared rejection of the idea of a Ding-an-sich, an object absolutely beyond possible cognition.<sup>76</sup> Where there is a limit, this works as a negation only for a third, external comparison between subject and object (Enz, §359). The idea that there is an absolutely transcendent realm ontologically distinct from our actual employment of reasons, language, concepts, is nothing more than a fancy of inadequate conceptions of mind and world.<sup>77</sup> In a series of paragraphs where Wittgenstein develops his therapeutic stance, these elements clearly appear. Endorsing a picture of the world as something pure and ‘clear-cut’ leads us to search for *real* objects. This guides us being dissatisfied with the present use of our words (PI, §105). There is a conflict between ‘*actual language*’ and the requirements that such an idea imposes on us, so much that the requirements themselves become vacuous. We search for friction only to find no way of investigating at all (§107).

This clearly connects with Hegel’s criticism of the purely self-reflective method. For both, inquiry has to start with our actual engagement with the world. The method of purely self-critical reflection aims at a presuppositionless beginning. By having no presuppositions at all, no criterion can be endorsed to

75 Especially on the social, and normative direction of Wittgenstein’s later philosophy, cf. Lear 1984, p.239; Bloor 1996, p.358; Brandom 2001, p.167; 2007, p.137. See Lagerspetz 2021, p.52 on the historical development of consciousness as present in both. On their presenting an anti-foundationalist, anti-empiricist, and anti-mentalist picture of knowledge cf. Quante 2011, p.137; Berto 2003, p.554; Forster 1989, pp.109-110; Perissinotto 1991, p.160-1. A well-recognized area of convergence is Wittgenstein’s reflection on rule following and the private language argument, cf. Forster 1998, pp.207-9; Rentsch 2019, pp.54-5; Brandom 2019, pp.653-4; Pinkard 2007, p.206.

76 This might seem a grandiose claim if fed to Wittgenstein’s later philosophy, namely that we can cognize *everything*. However, if we understand it as a point of *principle*, this need not be understood as some programmatic thesis that nothing but complete transparency of the world awaits us. It rather signals the more modest statement that what belongs to the world cannot be placed *beyond* the world in which we carry out our linguistic and epistemic practices. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for raising this point.

77 And the corresponding idea that there might be a *transcendent* use of reason independent of common reality is for Hegel a consequence of the metaphysics of subjectivity, cf. Enz, §60, FK., p.63. As Sedgwick observes (2012, p.95), this is also the root of the skeptical consequences of Hume and Kant’s philosophies. What Kant treated only as a figment of truth is just truth for Hegel, as is for Wittgenstein (Moser 2019, p.282). This is obviously a strongly metaphysical interpretation of Kant, which however can be reasonably attributed to Hegel.

start with (PhG, §81).<sup>78</sup> We realize that “what we call ‘proposition’, ‘language’, has not the formal unity that [we] imagined, but is a family of structures more or less akin to one another ... The *preconception* of crystalline purity can only be removed by turning our whole inquiry around ... on the pivot of our real need” (PI, §108). The later Wittgenstein rejects inquiring based on Fregean definitions and associated conceptual purity. Hegel’s own dialectical approach avoids the mistake that Wittgenstein dodges and Kant clearly commits: understanding philosophy in terms of principles and a priori definitions that instantiate supposedly authoritative requirements on human agency (Ng 2020, p.96).

The convergence we defend can be contested because for Wittgenstein, the stance described above has a clear therapeutic role whose aim is to halt in their tracks any substantive or systematic philosophical theorizing. Wittgenstein’s remarks have a quite far-reaching anti-essentialist component.<sup>79</sup> The attack against merely finite forms of cognition has a clearly different aim in Hegel. For him, this ought to bring us to a higher-level of philosophical understanding and truth. For Wittgenstein, this ought to simply show that our philosophical theorizing is misguided *ab initio*, without any need for higher level views to understand what we already always understand.<sup>80</sup>

Leaving aside the question of therapy, which in both Hegel and Wittgenstein is not a trivial matter,<sup>81</sup> this objection revolves around matters of essentialism and truth. What we want to argue for here is that this conflict is more illusory than thus far assumed. The apparent divergence is the result of neglecting the fact that Wittgenstein’s anti-essentialism and apparent disregard for truth are directed against the realist and Platonist conceptions of meaning. He does not do away with such categories entirely; how could he? Both the idea of something having an essential determination as well as the idea that our statements are liable to truth-functional evaluation are concepts deeply ingrained within our form of life and associated language-games.<sup>82</sup> Essence being expressed by grammar (PI, §371; PG, 22) is crucial for the later Wittgenstein. What he rejects is the idea that the essence so expressed captures something transcendent.

78 Cf. PhG, §84 on the impossibility of beginning with a clean slate, and the need for consciousness to provide the criterion to itself. We cannot be properly receptive to how our cognitive capacities emerge *if* we have to bracket them all to begin with (Hrachovec 2019, p.78).

79 Cf. PI, §104, Fogelin 1976, pp.110-1; McGinn 2011, p.653.

80 But for Hegel, already at the level of basic forms of finite cognition, the truth of the whole is already present (PhG, §73).

81 Philosophical therapy in Hegel is mostly directed against the dogmatic assumptions of common-sense, cf. VSP, p.332; SL, pp.25, 124; Enz, §389. See on this Quante 2011, pp. 73-6. Giladi (2015, pp.253-4) argues that Wittgenstein and Hegel diverge precisely on the topic of philosophical therapy. Giladi reads Wittgenstein strictly as a quietist. Although this reading is quite widespread it can be contested as flawed, cf. on this Annalisa Coliva’s (2021) recent rejection of it.

82 Cf. on the latter PI, §136, PG, I, Appendix, §5. Cf. Forster 2004, p.109.

We already remarked that the very concept of the transcendent is foreign to Hegel. However, the classical understanding of Hegel's absolute idealism conceives him as defending some variety of essentialism, conceptually incompatible with Wittgenstein's deflationist approach. Our goal here is to show that this interpretation is not a given. Crucial tenets of Hegelian idealism – the ideas that Reason goes beyond the dichotomies instituted by the intellect and that knowledge and truth can only be understood as the development of *der Begriff* – instantiate features we encountered in assessing Wittgenstein's position.

To accomplish this goal, we complete the exposition of the Hegelian standpoint against the perceived insufficiencies of Kantian idealism. Kant's mistake for Hegel is conceptual, in his assumption that our cognition can only be discursive in the sense of requiring being affected by external things to be had at all (FK p.77). The way out of this self-imposed limitation is to reject the idea that concepts and sensible intuitions must be completely heterogeneous (ibid, p.89, Sedgwick 2012, p.46). For Hegel, the very essence of idealism is to eliminate the idea that subjectivity and objectivity belong to intrinsically different ontological categories. Such a view entails that each opposite can be determined in abstracto. Idealism strives instead to understand their original unity, their being in a relationship of reciprocal determination (FK, p.68). Wittgenstein's conception of language-games endorses all of the above: they do not stand opposite reality nor they possess intrinsic natures excluded from each other. Reality is integrated in our language-games, in our activities, in our shared understanding. The concept of reality itself can only occur within such constitutive practices. The determinations we experience in uttering a word or in expressing a judgment with objective purport aim at how things are. Hegel's insight is that there is no ground for believing our conceptual categories as constrained on the subjective side, as if they pertained only to us. If reality enters our normative, conceptual and linguistic practices, conceptual categories pertain to nature as well (Enz, 42§Z3).<sup>83</sup> The only alternative to this is to endorse again the dichotomies and dualisms of scheme and content, harbingers of skepticism, arbitrariness, dogmatic self-assurance. The idea that linguistic determinations are not merely ours is shared by Wittgenstein, and this is visible in his therapeutic aim of dissolving dichotomies between reality and thought (Lagerspetz 2021, p.52). To believe that concepts are merely representations is to endorse the idea that there is a world out there our thoughts can only *approximate*.

The chosen faculty for Hegel to overcome intellectual dichotomies is reason. This shouldn't be surprising. Kant's mistrust in the laws of reason, the prohibition of constitutively – and not merely as a regulative ideal – assigning to nature their unity, laid the seeds for the absolute opposition of sensibility and spontaneity. A proper appreciation of reason is key for Hegel's aims. Reason's capacity is

83 Cf. on this aspect Houlgate 2015, p.29; Quante 2011, pp.41-3; Cammi 2019, p.123.

precisely to sublimate the antithesis of subject and object (DS, p.90), providing this unity by freeing consciousness from its limitations (ibid, p.93). This is possible because reason can engage in speculative thinking, the mode of knowledge which reveals the identity and function of opposing terms within a wider whole. Speculation, far from being a homonym for 'free invention', is the activity of human reason in surveying the conceptual connections and inferential relations of a term (Siep 2000, p.38). The opposition between subjective judgment and object arises as a perspective of knowledge whose interest is to understand an object conceived as a physical entity. However, this distinction is an abstraction determined by our engaging with the object in a specific, finite way. It cannot be how things are from the start. Concept and object already pertain to each other for determinate, objective judgment to be possible. The activity of reason determines the object as having a specific autonomous determination, but these determinations, these distinctions into empirical particularity and contingency do not reflect blankly external ontological determinations borrowed from outside the activity of reason. Speculative thinking allows human reason to understand how they arise by outlining their unity (FK, pp.90-1). The understanding holds the determinations fixed. Reason dissolves the determinations of the understanding and generates the universal with the particular comprehended in it (SL, p.10).

These are pathways that might appear to make us lose the connection with Wittgenstein's approach, even more so if we consider that for the early Hegel, speculation could only be achieved via transcendental intuition of self-activity at work in nature (DS, p.174). Additionally, Hegel says that conceiving the determinations in itself means conceiving them in their concept (SL, pp.94, 671). This kind of talk is surely alien to Wittgenstein's perspective. Even when Hegel transitions away from his more Schelling-influenced conception of intuition and towards a more holistic standpoint,<sup>84</sup> this residue of pre-critical metaphysics does not simply vanish. What could it mean for example that the *concept* is the ground of all finite determinateness (ibid, p.520) to a sympathizer of Wittgenstein?

The answer lies in the fact that human self-consciousness intended as *Vernunft*, in its negative and speculative elements, is first and foremost something actual as an *activity*. What is real, *wirklich*, for Hegel is what exists in a concrete and not merely formal fashion, i.e. it is something that can act (SL, p.482, Cammi 2019, p.120). This activity is crucially conceptual, but these

<sup>84</sup> This shift also moved Hegel from the idea that the absolute standpoint of philosophy can be already assumed as established (cf. DS, p.94; FK, p.94) to the idea that it requires justification (Bristow 2007, pp.117-8, 167-8). Here there is a clear difference from Wittgenstein, who does not think that our standpoint needs justification and is suspicious of philosophy being that which brings us the adequate standpoint. There is an element of skepticism about philosophy in Wittgenstein which is absent in Hegel (Rockmore 2019, p.70).

concepts are not applied merely as subjective impositions on merely external content. The activity of reason is its actuality, its being real in manifesting itself as a self-differentiating and self-determining conceptual movement (SL, p.478).<sup>85</sup> Reason actualizes itself in experience, establishing relations between concept and object, testing, developing, revising them as a historical and concrete process. Via this actualization, it allows reality to become *wirklich*, being actualized by the concept. The concept, *der Begriff*, is reason as a self-conscious subject which is part of the world, conscious both of what she encounters in experience and of her access to things (ibid, p.254). The concept is the process of thinking in its self-comprehension. The understanding collided with the realization that its claims fell short of their intended target; they ended up being claims about the understanding's own conceptual activity, being therefore cut off from the reality they sought (Pinkard 1994, pp.42-3). Reason's standpoint entails that this self-determination as conceptual activity is always already engaged with reality, as neither pole can be determined in isolation from the other. The world is neither in-itself nor mere subjective imposition. It is relation between its appearance and its essence made *actual* by the activity of human self-consciousness (SL, p.419). The activity of reason is nothing else than the expression of the concept, its shaping and making actual the relation between appearance and essence via normative determinations understood as producing their content and form (Cammi, 2019, p.122). The truth of our judgments is realized when the object of our judgment corresponds to its concept, realizing agreement of cognition with its subject matter (Enz, §213; Moser 2019, p.282).

How does this converge with Wittgenstein's later thought? The essence Hegel talks about does not suggest a realist conception of essence. Essence is manifested and developed by the concept, made actual by the activity of the concept, which belongs to us but it's not finite reflection or subjective imposition. What manifests itself via our activity is essentially *creative* power (SL, p.491). The universal medium which operates via conceptual determinations, distinctions, disassociations, and comparisons, is self-consciousness and its faculty of *Vernunft* (PhG, §§118-9). Whereas *Verstand* reduced the object to mere appearance turning it into something merely subjective, *Vernunft* discovers its own self as essential to the object, becoming object to itself, self-consciousness (Enz, §418Z). Self-consciousness does not abandon the idea of an external world; its concept is integrated within the process and development of conceptual activity.<sup>86</sup> The world is always already mediated by self-consciousness, by our own productive, conceptualizing, normative activity. It is not the mere object that gives us its essential content. What constitutes the essence of a thing is its concept, and the reasons we recognize as valid for that

85 Cf. Cammi 2019, p.124.

86 Consciousness of the world presupposes self-consciousness (PhG, §86; Ng 2020, p.98).



concept to correspond to that thing.<sup>87</sup> It is the concrete use of words, concepts, language, determinations and reflection. Knowledge manifests itself as self-corrective activity of knowing subjects, overcoming the Kantian separation between knowledge and truth (PhG, §37, Siep 2000, p.73).

All of this is essentially isomorphic to Wittgenstein's injunction that only in our actual uses and practices can our words have meaning, and our beliefs endowed with objective purport.<sup>88</sup> If we stopped at this observation, this might be nothing more than a passing resemblance between the two positions. What really does the heavy lifting in establishing a common horizon between the two is Hegel's own concept of *Begriff*. The idea, the concept as something normatively active determining the essence of things and integrating reality within itself – the accord between object and its concept – possesses the same function, capacity, and possibilities of Wittgensteinian grammar. Grammar determined the essence of things in connection with our actual practices and uses, our activities, in a way that does not envision an *outer* providing immediate content. Grammar is autonomous, in the sense of its free development and progress, making the essence of what it determines *dynamic*, not static as the Kantian understanding would have it. Grammar establishes a realm of necessity because the determinations it expresses provide the internal logic of our words and concepts. Grammar integrates world and language; it expresses the concept to which an object corresponds, the possibility of expressing true judgments upon this object, but itself it is not evaluable on the same score. This is valid for Hegel's idea of truth as well. Hegel, as much as Wittgenstein, is not really concerned with *propositional* truth, mere correspondence of judgments and words to external facts. The kind of truth Hegel and Wittgenstein seek is *material* truth, accordance of the thing with its essence (Stern 1993, p.645). Essence is expressed by the concept, thought determining and self-comprehending the internal logic of its norms, i.e. their grammar. In both Hegel and Wittgenstein, the world is within our reach as it manifests itself in the actualization of our self-consciousness. Mind and world ultimately coincide in their content (Pinkard 2019, pp.195-6). For Hegel and Wittgenstein the meaning of our words are tied to their progress, dynamism, the possibility of comprehending their instantiations and further actualizations (Kolman 2019, p.232).<sup>89</sup>

87 See on this Quante 2011, p.24; Pinkard 1994, pp.48-50. The concrete world before actualization via reason is nothing, pure being, immediacy understood apart from any determination (SL, p.59; Enz, §124Z). Siep (2000, pp.46-7, 66-7) calls this a kind of *holistic* essentialism. There is an obvious difference between Hegel and Wittgenstein if we adopt to read the former as proposing a metaphysically strong conception of essence, but it should be at this point quite clear that here we are favoring a more deflationist reading.

88 Cf. Rentsch 2019, p.53; Kolman 2019, p.233.

89 In this sense, both allow for *true infinity*. Every object is both finite, in its particular actualization, and infinite, because it can be further actualized and freely developed (SL, p.109).

For Hegel, this process does not belong to an idealized subject or reason. One could be easily fooled into understanding Hegelian Reason narrowly as some kind of supernatural entity, or even theological being that determines the world immanently, necessarily guiding us towards a specific *Zweck*. Instead, reason is nothing else than our natural history, our historical processes in their development (Houlgate 1999, p.27). As such, as for Wittgenstein, to fully comprehend how knowledge is possible we must take into account the socially situated dimension of reason-giving activities (Pinkard 1994, p.44). Our conceptual actions and determinations are not the product of private internal intentions<sup>90</sup> (Quante 2011, p.203). Human reason is *in the world*, and because of this it expresses itself as life (PhG, §168; SL, p.676). Self-consciousness is activity of life itself within nature, which is not lifeless and opposing human cognition anymore (DS, pp.139-40).<sup>91</sup> Cognition is a matter of the form our natural life takes and develops, a matter of education, training, *Bildung* (PhG, §68; cf. Enz, §296Z), leading human reason into the form of *Geist*, spirit's insight into what knowing is, the epistemic process from our natural consciousness to true knowledge by becoming self-conscious life (PhG, §§29, 77). When self-consciousness distinguishes something from itself as existing, this moment does not merely involve empirical certainty, but becomes object for a living thing. In Hegel as much as in Wittgenstein, what shapes the world is not the immediacy of sheer givenness. The given that shapes reality is our form of life, in accordance with its self-determined ends and goals (Ng 2020, pp.280-5, SL, pp.696-7).<sup>92</sup> Living self-consciousness externalizes itself in order not to be stuck on the subjective side of an illusory dichotomy. For both Hegel and Wittgenstein, this externalization is unavoidably social. What is authoritative as a reason for self-consciousness it is only insofar as this is so for the "I that is We, the We that is I" (PhG, §177).

## 5. CONCLUSION

We argued in this analysis for the following theses. Firstly, while a strong idealist undercurrent traverses the whole of Wittgenstein's work, it is particularly visible in his later writings. The character of Wittgenstein's anti-realist position can be adequately described as belonging to the tradition of epistemological idealism associated with Kant and classical German philosophy. We argued that Wittgenstein's later position represents a development beyond Kant's variety of transcendental idealism. This development allows an unlikely figure to emerge as an interlocutor, and not a philosophical foe, to the kind of anti-

90 Cf. Quante 2011, p.203. On Hegel's anti-individualism cf. Heidemann 2008, p.17.

91 Cf. Kern 2018, pp.98-9; Ng 2020, pp.88-9.

92 See Ng 2020, p.199; Kern 2018, p.103. This is also in agreement with Wittgenstein's idea of being compelled to act and follow norms in an almost blind, way, cf. Pinkard 2008, pp.114-5.

foundationalist, socially externalist picture of knowledge and cognition that Wittgenstein offers. Essential tenets of Hegelian philosophy that at first sight might appear to be simply incompatible with the Wittgensteinian ethos have been revealed to cover similar grounds, so much that the endpoint for both philosophers is to inhabit the same horizon. Knowledge, truth, and meaning are tied to the socially enacted practices that we develop without leaving reality outside as something external and immediately determinate. The work of the concept is an integral part of both thinkers, and we should have cleared enough methodological and conceptual ground to allow for less suspicion to arise between the two.

This does not mean that all differences amidst their stances are to be erased or sublated. There remain strong divergences on how the two thinkers understand their own philosophical aims. Wittgenstein remains distrustful of systematic and elaborate philosophical theorizing. The same cannot be said of Hegel. This has consequences on the former offering no transcendental method,<sup>93</sup> something which is clearly present in the latter (Moser 2019, p.289). Additionally, there is undoubtedly a difference in how the two thinkers understand the process and the succession of the various shapes that constitute the history of the human form of life, with Hegel endorsing far more substantial aims on such matters. However, a direct consequence of our analysis is that we have no reason anymore to keep the determinations we attach to Wittgenstein and Hegel as antipodally fixed. Wittgenstein is much more than an anti-philosophical quietist. We have no necessary reason to understand Hegel as a pre-critical speculative theologian. Both can provide conceptual and argumentative resources to escape a certain idea of philosophizing, a positivist, empiricist, finite idea of comprehending the world. On this score we can only end with a sketch of possible new avenues to further the investigation of this convergence. A clear topic appears to be the relation of both Hegel and Wittgenstein to skepticism. They share a certain impatience with traditional Cartesian/Humean doubt. However, neither thinker provides a straightforward refutation of skepticism tout court. In fact, both have been read as instantiating crucial Pyrrhonian insights. These are for both integral to a certain kind of philosophical therapy they develop, against finite and one-sided ways of thinking. For both, skeptical reflection is the viaticum to a better understanding of reason in the world, and of how the norms we endorse and follow with other

93 It could be contested that by offering no transcendental method, the idea that Wittgenstein offers a variety of transcendental idealism cannot be defended. However, this would be an overtly narrow understanding of the *transcendental* aspect of Wittgenstein's position. To talk about a transcendental element in Wittgenstein's philosophy means referring to the constitutive character of our linguistic and inter-subjective practices that allow everyday propositional attitudes, beliefs, desires, judgments, intentions, to be intelligible. This can be so even if no metaepistemological transcendental method is offered. Of course, this could also be understood as a weakness in Wittgenstein's position. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for raising this question.

subjects can nevertheless retain the objectivity we experience of them as living self-consciousness. This will however need to wait for further research we cannot provide here.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> The origins of this work lie in my Master degree dissertation written as a DAAD Graduate fellow at the Freie Universität Berlin and defended at the University of Pavia in 2014. I thank Silvana Borutti and Georg Bertram for their supervision during its original conception. I heartily thank Modesto Gomez Alonso for countless illuminating conversations on such topics. I thank Simone Nota and Silvia Locatelli for their feedback and constructive comments on the manuscript. Mauro Minervini and Lorenzo Bergamelli have provided further opportunities to clarify the ideas expressed above. Any faults that remain lie squarely with the author. Finally, I thank Jeanne Gorisse for her unwavering support and nearness during writing, and for having seen both the inception of these ideas and, many years later, their tentative conclusion.

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