8 Kant, Wittgenstein and the fate of analysis

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Philosophy ... is in fact the science of the relation of all cognition and of all use
of reason to the ultimate end of human reason, to which, as the highest, all
other ends are subordinated, and in which they must all unite to form a unity.
The field of philosophy in this cosmopolitan sense can be brought down to the
hope? 4. What is man? Metaphysics answers the first question, morals the
second, religion the third. Fundamentally, however, we could reckon all of this
as anthropology, because the first three questions relate to the last one.

(JL 9: 24–5)

Philosophy is not a theory but an activity.

(TLP 4.112)

What has to be accepted, the given, is – so one could say – forms of life.

(PI 226e)

In the light of a primary reason, an action is revealed as coherent with certain
traits, long- or short-termed, of the agent, and the agent is shown in his role of
Rational Animal.

(Donald Davidson)

1 Introduction

What is philosophical analysis? According to a highly influential conception
dominant in the writings of Frege, Moore, Russell and Wittgenstein from
the late 1870s to the mid-1920s, and which I will call the logical-decomposi-
tional theory of analysis,

(1) analytic propositions are necessary a priori logical truths, and
(2) analysis is the process of (2.1) logically decomposing analytic proposi-
tions2 into metaphysical simples, which are mind-independently real yet
immediately and infallibly apprehended with self-evidence, and then (2.2)
rigorously logically reconstructing those propositions by formal deduc-
tion from (a) general logical laws and (b) premises that express logical definitional knowledge in terms of the simple constituents.

As I will argue, the logical-decompositional theory of analysis was importantly negatively determined by the combined Fregean, Moorean, Russellian and especially early Wittgensteinian rejection of what I will call Kant’s conceptual-decompositional theory of analysis in the *Critique of Pure Reason* and the Jäschek Logic. At the same time however, the very idea of analysis as the process of logically decomposing an analytic proposition into its constituent parts, followed by a logical reconstruction of the same proposition, is shared by both theories.

But, as I will also argue, the later Wittgenstein’s devastating critique in the *Philosophical Investigations* of the doctrines of his own earlier philosophical self in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* motivates a radically wider and more open-textured conception of analysis. Indeed, Wittgenstein’s radical transformation of analysis returns us full circle to Kant’s notion of philosophy, developed in the second half of the first *Critique* and in the Introduction to his *Logic*, as a logically self-critical rational anthropology. This in turn provides us with a positive intimation of the nature of philosophical analysis in our so-called ‘post-analytic’ era.

2 Conceptual analysis, the first *Critique* and transcendental idealism

Kant’s theory of analysis depends on his theory of ‘concepts’ (*Begriffe*), which in turn depends on his theory of mental ‘representation’ (*Vorstellung*).

A concept is an essentially ‘mediate’ and ‘objective’ conscious mental representation (*CPR A320/376–7*). To say that a concept is *objective* is to say that it intrinsically has object-directedness or ‘aboutness’, and also that it is intersubjectively rationally communicable. So a concept is an abstract mental representation type with intrinsic intentionality, that also is tokened in many different conscious mental states. This is as opposed to merely ‘subjective’ mental representations, which may lack intentionality and which may occur in only one conscious mental state or (in a contingent way) privately.

To say that a concept is a *mediate* representation is to say that it represents objects indirectly by means of intrinsically general descriptive attributes called ‘marks’ or ‘characteristics’ (*Merkmale*) (*JL* 9: 58). This is as opposed to an ‘intuition’ (*Anschauung*), which represents objects directly, singularly, and non-descriptively (*CPR A320/377*).

Otherwise put, a concept is constituted by an ordered set of inherently general or universal marks or characteristics (*CPR A25/B40*) (*JL* 9: 58). This ordered set is an intensional ‘content’ or *Inhalt*, and corresponding to this intensional content is a cross-possible-worlds ‘extension’ or *Umfang* consisting of all the actual and possible objects that fall under that content by satisfying the descriptive criteria of the marks that constitute it (*JL* 9: 91,
Marks or characteristics are sub-concepts of the concept they constitute. The ordering and structuring of the sub-concepts of a given concept is isomorphic to the ordering and structuring of concepts more generally (JL 9: 58–61, 95–9). Hence Kant’s theory of the ordering and structuring of concepts is also a theory of conceptual microstructure.3

Even more precisely however, conceptual ordering on Kant’s scheme is either vertical or horizontal.

First, the vertical ordering. ‘Higher’ or superordinate concepts are determinables4 and have broader extensions. ‘Lower’ or subordinate concepts are determinates of those determinables and have narrower extensions. Higher determinable concepts are contained in their lower determinate concepts, and lower determinate concepts are contained under their higher determinable concepts. Thus the concept MALE is contained in the concept BACHELOR and the concept BACHELOR is contained under the concept MALE.

And second, the horizontal ordering. Two or more concepts are coordinate if they are both lower or determinate concepts of the same higher or determinable concept, but do not have identical extensions. At the limit, coordinate concepts do not share any members of their extensions. Thus MALE and UNMARRIED provide an example of partially overlapping coordinate concepts under HUMAN; and ADULT and NON-ADULT provide an example of exclusive coordinate concepts under HUMAN.

Against this theoretical backdrop, a conceptual analysis for Kant is a ‘decomposition’ (Zergliederung) of that concept in the sense that it displays the internal ordering and structuring of the sub-concepts of a given concept: or otherwise put, it displays that concept’s microstructure. Basically, the idea is to treat the analysed concept or analysandum as the lowest determinate concept, and then find a set of non-exclusive coordinate determinables that has exactly the same extension as the concept itself. Any two concepts, whether simple or complex, that share the same extension, Kant calls ‘convertible’ or ‘reciprocal’ concepts (JL 9: 98). Thus an analysis of BACHELOR yields

< ADULT + UNMARRIED + MALE >

and the concepts BACHELOR and ADULT UNMARRIED MALE are convertible or reciprocal concepts.

Each of the marks or characteristics belonging to the decomposable microstructure of a given concept is a constituent mark or characteristic of that concept, in the sense that it is a proper and intrinsic part of the concept that it partially constitutes. The total set of such constituent marks or characteristics is thus a conceptual essence (JL 9: 60–1). Finding one or more of the constituent marks of a given concept is called giving an ‘exposition’ of that concept that also ‘expounds’ it (CPR A729/B757) (JL 9: 141–3).5 Corresponding to each such expounding exposition is an analytic
judgment in simple categorical form that predicates the constituent mark of its given concept, because

(1) the predicate-concept of the judgment is thereby contained in the subject-concept,
(2) the predicate concept is identical with at least one of the constituents (JL 9: 111), and
(3) the denial of that judgment entails a formal contradiction between the negation of the predicate, and some constituent mark of the given concept (CPR A150–3/B189–93).

Thus ‘Bachelors are adults’, ‘Bachelors are unmarried’, ‘Bachelors are males’, ‘Bachelors are unmarried adults’, ‘Bachelors are adult males’, ‘Bachelors are adult unmarried males’ are all analytic judgments that correspond to different expounding explications of the concept BACHELOR.

A complete decomposition of a given concept yields an analytic definition of that concept (JL 9: 140–5). But Kant is both fully aware and also quite explicit that analytic definitions are very thin on the ground:

Since one cannot become certain through any test whether one has exhausted all the marks of a given concept through a complete decomposition, all analytic definitions are held to be uncertain. (JL 9: 142)

In fact, definitions are in general an ideal goal of analysis rather than a requirement of analysis. All that is required is an exposition or partial analysis of any given concept: that is, all that is required is to find at least some of the constituent marks of any given concept. Indeed, the very supposition that one requires a complete analysis of a concept and therefore a definition of it, in order to be able to deploy it in philosophy or use it in ordinary reasoning and thought, is a fundamental philosophical error:

Philosophy is swarming with mistaken definitions, especially those that actually contain elements for a definition but are not yet complete. If we could not make use of a concept until we had defined it, then all philosophizing would be in a bad way. (CPR A731/B759 n.)

As a consequence, conceptual-decompositional analysis, and along with it, the search for analytically necessary a priori truths – but not the search for definitions – is a crucial part of philosophy. For Kant, the primary goal of philosophy is to find, explain, justify and know principles, that is, fundamental normative necessary a priori laws of nature, metaphysics, logic, morality and aesthetic experience (CPR B19, A50–A64/B74–B88, A148–62/
B188–202, A836/B865) (CPJ 5: 286–7). These laws are normative because they tell us, categorically, how we human animals ought to know scientifically (Wissen), think, will, act and feel if we are also to be rational. Most of these principles are synthetically necessary a priori, and not analytic. Nevertheless analytic truths, and in particular the laws of logic, are also amongst the principles.

This is not to say that conceptual analysis can never be trivial, however. It is trivial if the analysis yields an exposition of a purely arbitrary or stipulative concept. For such concepts might fail to be objectively valid and thereby fail to pick out real objects of actual or possible human experience (CPR A729/B757). And as we have seen, the search for a complete analysis or definition can also lead to theoretical disaster. But assuming that the concept is objectively valid, then a partial conceptual analysis, i.e. the partial decomposition of a concept into its constituent marks, is an important and indeed necessary part of philosophy:

But since, however far the elements (of the decomposition) reach, a good and secure use can always be made of them, even imperfect definitions, i.e., propositions that are not really definitions but are true and thus approximations of them, can be used with great advantage.

(CPR A731/B759 n.)

But why, more precisely, is conceptual analysis philosophically important and necessary? The Kantian answer is that it tells us about the nature of the concepts we can already effectively use but do not fully possess, in that it tells us about the fine-grained details of the microstructures of the several concepts in our existing conceptual repertoire:

A great part, perhaps the greatest part, of the business of our reason consists in decompositions of the concepts we already have of objects. This affords us a multitude of cognitions that, though they are nothing more than illuminations or clarifications of that which is already thought in our concepts (though still in a confused way), are, at least as far as their form is concerned, treasured as if they were new insights, though they do not extend the concepts that we have in either matter or intensional content but only set them apart from each other ... [T]his procedure does yield real a priori cognition, which makes secure and useful progress.

(CPR A5–6/B9–10)

In short, conceptual analysis yields a crucial form of rational self-knowledge. For Kant, the conceptual analysis of objectively valid concepts does indeed tell us about humanly experienceable reality and the empirical world, but only indirectly and derivatively; more directly and originally, conceptual analysis is all about us as rational human animals.
This raises a crucial point about Kant’s conception of analysis. It needs to be emphasized that focusing on conceptual analysis is a somewhat misleading way to present Kant’s Critical philosophy. The basic aim of the Critical philosophy is to establish the doctrine of *transcendental idealism*. Well, what is transcendental idealism? The telegraphically short answer is that it is the doctrine which says that *all knowable reality is anthropocentric*. But here is a slightly less telegraphic answer. Transcendental idealism depends on a pre-theoretical brute fact – the brute fact that there are inherent anthropocentric limitations on our capacity for reason. On the cognitive side of our nature, human reason is sharply constrained by three special conditions of human sensibility: two formal conditions, namely the necessary a priori representations of space and time (*CPR* A38–9/B55–6); and one material condition, namely affection, or the triggering of cognitive processes by the direct givenness of something existing outside the human cognitive faculty (*CPR* A19/B33). Granting that, then Kant’s transcendental idealism, as the name suggests, is the conjunction of two sub-theses: (i) the transcendentalism thesis, and (ii) the idealism thesis.

(i) The transcendentalism thesis says that all the representational contents of cognition are strictly determined in their underlying forms or structures by a set of underived, universal, innate, a priori human cognitive capacities, also known as ‘cognitive faculties’ (*Erkenntnisvermögen*). The whole system of cognitive capacities is constrained in its operations by both ‘pure general logic’ (the topic-neutral or ontically uncommitted, a priori, universal, and categorically normative science of the laws of thought) and also by ‘transcendental analytic’ (which is pure general logic that is semantically and modally restricted by an explicit ontic commitment to the proper objects of human cognition) (*CPR* A50–7/B74–82).

(ii) The idealism thesis says that the proper objects of human cognition are nothing but objects of our sensory experience – appearances or phenomena – and not things-in-themselves or noumena, owing to the fact that space and time are nothing but necessary subjective forms of sensory intuition (Kant calls this the ‘ideality’ of space and time), together with the assumption that space and time are intrinsic structural properties of every object in space and time (*CPR* A19–49/B33–73, A369) (*P 4: 293*).

Appearances, in turn, are token-identical with the intersubjectively communicable contents of sensory or experiential representations (*PC 11: 314*). Correspondingly, the essential forms or structures of the appearances are type-identical with the representational forms or structures that are generated by our universal innate a priori human mental faculties: ‘objects must conform (*richten*) to our cognition’ (*CPR* Bxvi), and ‘the object (as an
object of the senses) conforms to the constitution of our faculty of intuition’ (CPR Bxvii).

Putting transcendentalism and idealism together, we now have the complex conjunctive Kantian metaphysical thesis of transcendental idealism, capturing the fundamental idea that all knowable reality is anthropocentric:

Human beings can cognize and know only either sensory appearances or the forms or structures of those appearances – such that sensory appearances are token-identical with the contents of our objective sensory cognitions, and such that the essential forms and structures of the appearances are type-identical with the representational forms or structures generated by our own cognitive faculties, especially the intuitional representations of space and time – and therefore we can neither cognize, nor scientifically know, nor even meaningfully assert or deny, anything about things-in-themselves. (CPR A369, B310–11)

Now what is the point of transcendental idealism? Kant’s answer to that question, which is worked out in the first Critique, is that transcendental idealism alone adequately explains how synthetic a priori propositions – i.e. non-analytically, non-logically necessary, experience-independent truths – are semantically possible or objectively valid (CPR B19), and also how human freedom of the will, as a foundation of morality (where the other foundation is the Categorical Imperative, which in turn, as we learn in the third section of the Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals and the Critique of Practical Reason, necessarily and reciprocally implies real freedom of the will), is both logically and metaphysically possible (CPR Bxxv–xxx, A530–58/559–86).

It should be clear enough now that whilst conceptual-decompositional analysis has an important and necessary role to play in Kant’s project of transcendental idealism, it is also at best a subsidiary role. Analysis defers to anthropocentric metaphysics.

3 Logical atomism, the Tractatus and solipsistic idealism

My historical hypothesis is that analytic philosophy arose when, when, at the end of the nineteenth century,

(1) Kant’s transcendental idealism and Hegel’s absolute idealism were alike rejected by the early analytic philosophers, who did this by proximally rejecting neo-Kantianism and neo-Hegelianism, and at the same time,

(2) Kant’s conceptual-decompositional theory of analysis was rejected and replaced by the logical-decompositional theory of analysis.
To be sure, logical-decompositional analysis importantly refines the notion of a decomposition by

(a) replacing the psychological notion of a concept with the logico-mathematical notion of a function, and
(b) requiring the translation of natural language sentences into the canonical notation of symbolic logic prior to the decomposition of the propositions expressed by those sentences, in order to avoid logical confusions based on the misleading surface grammar of natural languages.

But even after the rejection of both idealism and Kant’s conception of analysis, the thesis that analysis is fundamentally decompositional remained firmly in place.

The early analytic philosophers who carried out this philosophical revolution were of course Frege, Moore, Russell and the early Wittgenstein. And the revolution happened in stages. Frege created new and explicitly non-Kantian conceptions of the analytic proposition and analysis that were designed to make possible the reduction of arithmetic to Fregean logic, and to show that Kant was wrong that the truths and proofs of arithmetic are synthetic a priori. Moore replaced Kantian concepts and judgments with mind-independent properties and propositions that could be directly intuited with self-evidence. Russell then absorbed and extended both Frege’s logic and Moore’s metaphysics and epistemology, and produced the mature theory of logical-decompositional analysis as the centrepiece of his general epistemological and metaphysical doctrine of logical atomism. Finally, in the *Tractatus*, early Wittgenstein radically refined Russellian logical atomism and also definitively closed it as a philosophical programme.

So how did the early Wittgenstein manage to do that? Answer: by means of the following (rationally reconstructed) basic argument.

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**The basic argument of the Tractatus**

1. The world, or reality, is the totality of facts, not things or objects (*TLP* 1.1).
2. The facts are in logical space (*TLP* 1.13, 2.013).
3. Facts are either molecular (complex) or atomic (*TLP* 2.01, 2.0201).
4. Molecular facts logically reduce to atomic facts, which can be either positive (existent) or negative (non-existent), and which are logically independent of one another (*TLP* 2.034, 2.06, 2.0211).
5. Atomic facts logically reduce to configurations of objects (*TLP* 2.0272).
6. Objects are absolute simples, which intrinsically possess both (i) ‘internal qualities’ that determine all the possible logical configurations of objects with other objects, and
(ii) general logical forms, amongst which are space, time and colour

(*TLP* 2.01231, 2.0124, 2.02, 2.0251).

(7) Objects are represented (directly referred to) by names, and atomic facts are represented (pictured) by propositions, which are bipolar (T/F) truth-bearers and also the vehicles of sense (*TLP* 2.1–2.25).

(8) Propositions are nothing but complex linguistic facts (complex symbols), and thus logically reduce to configurations of simple linguistic objects (simple symbols or names of objects, and logical constants) (*TLP* 3.1–3.3).

(9) Unlike names of objects and atomic propositions, the logical constants do not represent (name or picture) (*TLP* 4.0312); instead they *show* (non-representationally convey) the logical form of reality via propositions (*TLP* 4.12–4.121).

(10) Thought (which includes judging, believing, asserting and statement-making) is nothing but the correct private use of propositional signs by a language-using subject (*TLP* 3.3–4.002).

(11) Therefore the representing-relation between propositions and the facts they represent requires a representing and language-using subject.

(12) There is one and only one thinking and language-using subject, the ego (*TLP* 5.62).

(13) The ego is a non-psychological, metaphysical subject of thought and language – a subject which is not a part of the world, but instead constitutes the limit of the world (*TLP* 5.6–5.62, 5.631–5.641).

(14) The world depends both for its existence and also for the determination of its nature on the metaphysical subject (*TLP* 5.621–5.63).

(15) Logic is the a priori essence of thought, language, and the world (*TLP* 4.121, 5.552, 5.6–5.61, 6.124, 6.13).

(16) Therefore logic explanatorily reduces to the metaphysical subject.

(17) Therefore everything explanatorily reduces to the metaphysical subject.

In other words, if my reconstruction is correct, then the *Tractatus* offers us the most radical possible form of logical atomism, according to which there is a logical reduction of everything to a single entity: a unique metaphysical subject. Logic is how the metaphysical subject cognitively expresses itself towards its world, and ethics is how the metaphysical subject *non*-cognitively expresses itself towards its world (*TLP* 6.4–6.522). This is Wittgenstein’s *solipsistic idealism*. It is of course beautifully ironic that although the analytic tradition arose from the rejection of idealism, and although logical atomism was specifically designed to replace idealism, nevertheless the most radical form of logical atomism – Tractarian logical atomism – is itself a particularly radical form of idealism.¹²

In any case, against this radical metaphysical backdrop, early Wittgenstein also develops a correspondingly radical conception of logical-decom-
positional analysis. The proper targets of logical analysis are propositions. Logical analysis consists in completely and uniquely decomposing proposi-
tional symbols into their constituent simple symbols, whether names of
objects or logical constants (TLP 3.23–3.261). Objects are known by direct
cognitive acquaintance (TLP 2.0123–2.01231), and logical constants are
known ‘transcendently,’ or by means of a priori showing (TLP 4.12–
4.1213). Every proposition has a unique and complete decomposition (TLP 3.25). The way in which those names are configured into a propositional
structure is made manifest through the process of analysis itself. Logical
analysis is thus essentially a series of logical ‘elucidations’ (Erläuterungen).
Again, logical analysis is essentially the activity (Tätigkeit) but not the
theory (Lehre) of decomposing a proposition into its simple constituent
symbols (TLP 4.112).

This ‘activist’ conception of logical analysis has the significant virtue of
avoiding the Paradox of Analysis. According to the Paradox of Analysis, if
an analysis is true then it must be uninformative and trivial, because it is
merely definitional and based on the identity of concepts; yet if an analysis
were non-trivial and informative, then it would also be non-definitional and
entail the non-identity of concepts, hence false; so every analysis is either
trivial or false. But if analysis is essentially a logical activity and not a logi-
cal theory, then strictly speaking an analysis is never true or false, so the
dilemma is avoided. Of course I am going very quickly here, and there is
much more to say about the Paradox of Analysis, its origins in Moore’s
conception of analysis, and the many different attempts that have been
made to solve it by appealing to various epistemic or semantic consider-
tions. But we should note that Wittgenstein’s solution is striking precisely
because it is non-cognitivist and non-semantic. By sharp contrast to both
Wittgenstein’s solution and the other classical epistemic or semantic solu-
tions, Kant’s own theory of conceptual-decompositional analysis contains
the elements of an interesting cognitive-semantic solution to the Paradox.13

In any case and more precisely, the Tractarian activist conception of
logical analysis has two basic parts and correspondingly two basic aims.
First, the activity of analysis is a ‘critique of language’ (TLP 4.0031) in
that it displays the fact that most propositions and questions that have been
written about philosophical matters are not false but nonsensical (unsinnig)
(TLP 4.003), recognizes that the analytic truths of logic are tautologous and
non-pictorial, hence ‘say nothing’ (sagen . . . Nichts) (TLP 6.11), then asserts
as fully significant only the propositions of natural science (TLP 6.53), then
recognizes its own propositions as nonsensical, and finally ends in mystical
silence (TLP 6.54). Thus the first basic aim of Tractarian logical analysis is
to articulate the difference between sense (propositional meaningfulness)
and nonsense (either sheer meaninglessness, or else some essentially non-
propositional form of meaningfulness).

Second, the activity of logical analysis is the process of logically clarifying
thoughts, consisting in a series of propositional elucidations which ‘make
clear and delimit sharply the thoughts which otherwise are ... opaque and blurred’ (TLP 4.112). Thus the second basic aim of Tractarian logical analysis is to reveal the deep or logico-grammatical structure of natural language and thought, as opposed to its merely surface or psychologico-grammatical structure. In order to reveal the deep structure of language, Tractarian philosophers must construct and study symbolic logical systems like those developed in the Begriffsschrift and Principia Mathematica. Such symbolic systems are ‘ideal’ in the sense that the syntax of a Begriffsschrift-type notational system itself displays, encodes, or mirrors the deep structure of natural language and thought, and thereby also the deep structure of the world of facts that language and thought represent. Even so, Tractarian analysis does not aim at the prescriptive reform of natural language or thought. On the contrary, everything in natural language and thought is perfectly in order, just as it is (TLP 5.5563).

But here is the crucial point for our purposes. Kant’s conceptual-decompositional theory of analysis can now be rejected from a Tractarian point of view, by saying that even if ordinary language and thought do not need to be reformed, nevertheless Kantian conceptual-decompositional analysis operates entirely at the level of the surface structure of natural language and thought. Kantian decompositional analysis is therefore at best superficial analysis:

Does not my study of sign-language correspond to the study of thought processes which philosophers [e.g. Kant, Boole, Mill, etc.] held to be so essential to the philosophy of logic? Only they got entangled for the most part in unessential psychological investigations, and there is an analogous danger for my method.

(TLP 4.1121)

In this way, the sub-conceptual simples, or constituent marks that are the basic objects of conceptual-decompositional analysis, are at best relative psychological simples, not absolute real simples. By sharp contrast to Kantian analysis, then, which remains at the level of anthropocentric appearances, Tractarian logical-decompositional analysis is deep or sublime analysis in that it establishes logical and epistemic contact with the objects that ‘form the substance of the world’ (TLP 2.021).14 In Kantian jargon, Tractarian logical-decompositional analysis is noumenal analysis of things-in-themselves. For Kant, of course, these objects are utterly unknowable even if barely thinkable, and the appropriate philosophical attitude towards them is a radical agnosticism, bordering on outright eliminativism (CPR A235–60/B294–315). Wittgenstein himself later came to very much the same conclusion.
4 The *Investigations*, the critique of logical analysis, and logic-as-grammar

The *Tractatus* brings a definitive closure to logical atomism by pushing the reductive project of logical-decompositional analysis to its limits. It explicitly shows why Kant’s conceptual-decompositional theory of analysis is inadequate, but it also implicitly shows the inadequacy of both logical atomism and the very idea of logical-decompositional analysis. Or at least this is how Wittgenstein himself came to regard the *Tractatus* by the time of the *Philosophical Investigations*. Indeed, in the *Investigations* the later Wittgenstein explicitly rejects and radically re-thinks his own Tractarian theory of logical analysis.\(^{15}\)

So how does the later Wittgenstein manage to do that? Answer: he does it by means of the following (again, rationally reconstructed) three-stage argument:

(i) he rejects the direct-referentialist semantics of the *Tractatus*,
(ii) he rejects the picture theory of meaning in the *Tractatus*, and
(iii) he offers reasons for the philosophically liberating proposal that logic is really nothing but ‘grammar’.

Let us now look more closely at the details.

**The rejection of direct-referentialist semantics**

(1) Direct-referentialism says that the meaning of a name (whether a singular term or a general term) is nothing but the referent or bearer of the name, that is, an object of some sort. (Assumption)

(2) The ‘Augustinian’ language game (i.e. the primitive or ‘toy’ language) of the Builders in *PI* §§2, 6, and 8 is a model of a direct-referentialist language.

(3) It is manifest that not everything that is language has meaning in this way (*PI* §3), if only because the referring terms of the Builders’ language also function as orders (*PI* §18). In fact it is more correct to think of words as tools embedded in ‘language-games’ (i.e. rule-governed linguistic practices) and ‘forms of life’ (i.e. modes of individual human action and of social human interaction and transaction) and playing any number of roles relative to different language games and forms of life, than to think of them as playing a single decontextualized semantic role in the language (*PI* §§19–23, 26–7).

(4) In a direct-referentialist semantics, there are two types of names: singular terms (e.g. proper names, demonstratives) and general terms. Individual objects are assigned to singular terms, and concepts or properties or
some other sort of universals are assigned to general terms. (Assumption)

(5) Individual objects are assigned to singular terms by ostension (PI §6). Singular reference is then best understood as ostensively attaching a label to a thing, i.e. dubbing it (PI §37).

(6) But every ostension is open to many distinct possible interpretations (PI §§28–38), and only actual use will uniquely fix an interpretation.

(7) Moreover, if the meaning of a singular term were just the bearer of the name, then whenever the bearer was destroyed, the meaning would be destroyed, which is absurd because it would make true negative existentials with singular terms into nonsense (PI §40).

(8) So direct-referentialism about singular terms is false, and an appeal to use is the best overall way of explaining how singular terms have meaning. (From (1) – (7))

(9) Direct-referentialism as applied to general terms requires the existence of non-vague or definite concepts or properties or other universals. (Assumption)

(10) But there are no non-vague or definite concepts or properties or other universals, but rather only family resemblances or clusters of partially overlapping notions with blurred or vague boundaries: see, e.g., the concept or property or other universal GAME (PI §§66–71). Only the actual use of the general term will disambiguate its meaning as a concept-word or predicate. Indeed, there are no analytic definitions of general terms, but instead only our actual patterns of application of them (PI §§75–78).

(11) So direct-referentialism about general terms is false, and an appeal to use is the best overall way of explaining how general terms have meaning. (From (9) – (10))

(12) Therefore, direct-referentialism more generally is false, and an appeal to use is the best overall way of explaining how names have meaning. (From (8) and (11))

The rejection of the picture theory of meaning

(1) The picture theory of meaning says that the meaning of a sentence is nothing but either a picture of an atomic fact or a truth-functional compound of these. (Tractarian assumption)

(2) Atomic facts are composed of configurations of absolutely simple objects in isomorphic correspondence with the parts of the atomic proposition, which is a configuration of ‘real names’. (Tractarian assumption)

(3) So the picture theory presupposes that ‘real names’ in atomic propositions stand for absolutely simple objects (PI §39). In this respect Russell’s logical atomism, the Tractatus and Plato’s Theaetetus have all captured the same basic idea (PI §46).
(4) But what is an absolutely simple object? The problem is that macroscopic objects apparently have no unique decomposition into simple parts (PI §47). And if we try to imagine a primitive language game that models the Tractarian picture theory, we find the same lack of unique decomposition into simple parts (PI §48).

(5) So there are no absolutely simple objects, and the picture theory is therefore false. (From (1) – (4))

(6) But the language game of using factual propositions implies the constant semantic availability of simple objects of some sort, even across the difference between existence and non-existence (PI §§50, 55).

(7) Contrary to the picture theory, then, it seems to be a much better overall explanation of the semantic of factual propositions to say that the 'simple' objects are in fact systems of paradigms or samples – hence only relatively simple objects – that belong strictly to the 'instruments' or technology of the particular language-game (say, of factual propositions about colours) that is in play (PI §§50–51).

(8) In this way, even though the picture theory is false, relativizing simple objects to language-games gives a better overall explanation of the semantics of factual propositions, and thus an appeal to use is the best overall way of explaining how sentences have meaning. (From (5) – (7))

(9) Therefore, there must be a relativization of the ontology of atomic facts to language games (PI §§59–60), which also undermines the semantic realism of the picture theory. (From (8))

The liberating proposal that logic is really nothing but grammar

(1) Frege, Russell and the author of the Tractatus all hold the thesis that logic is something ‘sublime’: universal, a priori, necessary and essential to everything in the empirical world, as well as essential to language, propositions and thought (PI §§89, 90, 92, 97).

(2) Furthermore, logic is required to carry out a complete decompositional analysis of our forms of language, propositions, and thoughts, which reveals their ‘hidden’ ‘simple’ structures and constituents, that is, their decomposable essences (PI §§91–92).

(3) This in turn implies that language, propositions, thought and the world all possess decomposable essences (PI §§93–96).

(4) But in fact (a) every sentence in our language is in order just as it is, (b) vagueness (via the pervasive family resemblance nature of all concepts) is a constitutive feature of meaning, (c) language is essentially a spatio-temporal phenomenon, not something abstract, and (d) the essence of language, proposition, thought and the world is something that ‘already lies open to view and that becomes surveyable by a rearrangement’ (PI §§92, 98–100, 108–109).
(5) So neither language, nor propositions, nor thought, nor the world have hidden decomposable essences, and therefore the thesis that logic is sublime is false. (From (1) – (4))

(6) Furthermore, the thesis that logic is sublime turns out to be only a methodological assumption we have unintentionally imposed upon the phenomena, indeed nothing but an artifact of an idealized metaphysical ‘picture’ that lay hidden in our language and held us captive (PI §§101–108, 110–115).

(7) On the contrary, however, ‘the philosophy of logic speaks of sentences and words in exactly the sense in which we speak of them in ordinary life when we say, e.g., “Here is a Chinese sentence” or “No, that only looks like writing; it is actually an ornament” and so on’ (PI §108). That is: we can regard logic as purely descriptive or re-descriptive, not essentialist and a priorist; and ‘what we do is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use’ by asking ‘is the word ever actually used in this way in the language which is its original home’ (PI §116).

(8) Therefore we should adopt the thesis that logic is really nothing but ‘grammar’, which ‘sheds light on our problem by clearing misunderstandings away ... misunderstandings concerning the use of words, caused, among other things by certain analogies between the forms of expression in different regions of language ... [and] some of them can be removed by substituting one form of expression for another; this may be called an “analysis” of our forms of expression, for the process is sometimes like one of taking things apart’ (PI §90). For an example of this, see the discussion of negation at PI §§547–557. (From (5) – (7))

(9) Furthermore, the goal of logic or grammar is to produce a ‘perspicuous representation’ of language, proposition, thought, and world, which produces ‘that understanding which consists in “seeing connections”’ (PI §122).

(10) So logic is not sublime, and logical analysis as logical-decompositional analysis is impossible, but logic-as-grammar is possible, and grammar in this sense is the descriptive logic of our language games, as embedded in our forms of life. And to the extent that logic as a theory of valid reasoning still exists in logic-as-grammar, this logic is strongly non-classical.16 (From (8) – (9))

If Wittgenstein’s argument against the sublimity of logic is sound, then logical analysis is impossible. So what, more precisely, does philosophical analysis become after the collapse of logical analysis? Answer: that is a very good question, whose answer we will need to approach in two stages.

First, Wittgenstein’s later conception of philosophical analysis in fact shares some fundamental features in common with his activist conception of analysis in the Tractatus. But this activist conception of analysis is now minus the sublimity of logic, that is to say, minus the comprehensive noumenal metaphysical picture of logic, language, thought and the world that
would justify the logical-decompositional theory of analysis. Here are some relevant texts describing this new form of philosophical analysis:

Philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language.  

*(PI §109)*

The results of philosophy are the uncovering of one or another piece of plain nonsense and of bumps that the understanding has got by running its head up against the limits of language.  

*(PI §119)*

A philosophical problem has the form: ‘I don’t know my way about’.  

*(PI §123)*

Philosophy may in no way interfere with the actual use of language; it can in the end only describe it. For it cannot give it any foundation either. It leaves everything as it is.  

*(PI §124)*

The civil status of a contradiction, or its status in civil life: there is the philosophical problem.  

*(PI §125)*

Philosophy simply puts everything before us, and neither explains nor deduces anything. Since everything lies open to view, there is nothing to explain. For what is hidden, for example, is of no interest to us. One might give the name ‘philosophy’ to what is possible *before* all new discoveries and inventions.  

*(PI §126)*

The work of the philosopher consists in assembling reminders for a particular purpose.  

*(PI §127)*

If one tried to advance *theses* in philosophy, it would never be possible to question them, because everyone would agree to them.  

*(PI §128)*

It is not our aim to refine or complete the system of rules for the use of words in unheard-of ways. For the clarity that we are aiming at is indeed *complete* clarity. But that simply means that the philosophical problems should *completely* disappear. The real discovery is one that makes me capable of stopping doing philosophy when I want to. The one that gives philosophy peace, so that it is no longer tormented by
questions which bring itself into question ... There is not a philosophical method, though there are indeed methods, like different therapies.

\( (PI \textsection 133) \)

We are not analysing a phenomenon (e.g. thought) but a concept (e.g. that of thinking), and therefore the use of a word.

\( (PI \textsection 383) \)

In philosophy we do not draw conclusions. ‘But it must be like this!’ is not a philosophical proposition. Philosophy only states what everyone admits.

\( (PI \textsection 599) \)

With an eye to the next section, I will call this dialectical conceptual analysis, where, as in Kant’s sense, ‘dialectic’ means the logical critique of metaphysical illusion in philosophy, as a form of rational self-knowledge (\( CPR \textsection A61–2/B85–6, A293–8/B349–54 \)). The main idea is that by deploying a strongly non-classical logic, the later Wittgensteinian philosophical analyst or logical grammarian

(a) displays and diagnoses the dialectical structure of philosophical problems,
(b) describes, unpacks, compares and contrasts the concepts implicit in our various ordinary uses of language and states truisms about them, and then
(c) stops.

Second, the other crucial thing about Wittgenstein’s later conception of philosophical analysis is that it is fundamentally non-cognitive, that is, fundamentally normative and practical. On this view, philosophy is neither a science nor indeed in any sense a source of factual knowledge but rather essentially a self-conscious and deliberate act – hence we can call it ‘doing philosophy’ – whose aim is seeing crosswise but not decompositional conceptual connections,\(^{17}\) and finally achieving perspicuous insight into what already is completely there already in front of us: human beings and their linguistic activities in their human world, that is, forms of human life:

So you are saying that human agreement decides what is true and what is false? – It is what human beings say that is true and false; and they agree in the language they use. That is not agreement in opinions but in form of life.

\( (PI \textsection 241) \)

This linguistic agreement in form of life, in turn, is given essentially in the activity of making judgments:
If language is to be a means of communication there must be agreement not only in definitions but also (queer as this may sound) in judgments. This seems to abolish logic, but does not do so. (PI §242)

In other words: our linguistic agreement in form of life consists in our shared capacity for logical and practical reasoning. Thus the aim of philosophical analysis for the later Wittgenstein is to achieve insight into the human agent qua Judging Animal.18

5 Kant, Wittgenstein and analysis as rational anthropology

To summarize the conclusion of the last section: for the later Wittgenstein, philosophical analysis is the logically guided study of human beings inherently constrained in their individual intentional actions and social practices by self-legislated and communally constituted normative rules of judgment and language-use. Here the logical theory, or logic-as-grammar, that guides later Wittgensteinian analysis is not a classical logic but instead a strongly non-classical logic allowing for multiple conclusions, a denial of the principle of excluded middle, a denial of two-valuedness or bivalence, ‘true contradictions’ or paradoxes, vagueness or borderline cases, irreducibly normative inferences, irreducible intensionality and various irreducible intentional propositional attitudes. This does not mean that anything goes: logic-as-grammar is still strictly normatively guided by some conception or another of logical consequence; and not every proposition is both true and false.19

Perhaps even more importantly, later Wittgenstein’s strongly non-classical logic bears an essential similarity to what Kant called ‘transcendental logic’, which includes both transcendental analytic (the logic of truth) and transcendental dialectic (the logic of illusion). The salient difference between Kant and Wittgenstein is that later Wittgenstein’s logic-as-grammar explicitly incorporates the total range of facts encompassing human linguistic competence and linguistic performance within its scope, whereas this incorporation is at best implicit for Kant.20

But the crucial point is that the later Wittgenstein’s conception of philosophical analysis has a fundamental affinity with Kant’s conception of philosophy as it is worked out in the Transcendental Doctrine of Method. There Kant tells us that philosophy is the study of rational human cognition. Rational human cognition, in turn, is cognition from principles, which are the fundamental normative necessary a priori laws of scientific knowing, thought, volition, action and feeling. The fundamental normative necessary a priori laws of scientific knowing are the synthetic a priori laws of nature and the synthetic a priori laws of transcendental metaphysics. The fundamental normative necessary a priori laws of thought are the analytic a priori laws of logic. The fundamental normative necessary a priori normative laws
of volition and action are the laws of human morality. And for Kant there
is even a fundamental normative necessary a priori law of aesthetic experi-
ence, or a ‘principle of taste’ (CPJ 5: 286–7). Thus philosophy for Kant is
rational anthropology: the study of human beings insofar as their scientific
knowing, thought, volition, action and feeling are governed and evaluable
by principles. This does not of course imply that rational human animals
ever actually manage to conform perfectly or even terribly adequately to
these principles. Rationality is the recognition of principles and the capacity
to conform to them freely, not actually conforming to them. Indeed, only a
rational animal who recognizes principles and has the capacity to conform
to them freely would ever be capable of, or even remotely interested in,
trying to rationalize his way out of his responsibility for actually failing to
match up to the principles that strictly obligate him.

In this way, for both Kant and the later Wittgenstein alike, philosophical
analysis construed as either conceptual or logical decomposition is ulti-
mately superseded by a deeper and essentially normative picture of analysis,
as the logic of rational human activity. More precisely, according to this
picture, analysis is the logical reconstruction of what Davidson calls ‘pri-
mary reasons’ for the rationalization of individual human actions and of
social human interactions and transactions, including linguistic competence
and performance. These primary reasons are logical interpretations of what
human agents actually do:

When we ask why someone acted as he did, we want to be provided
with an interpretation ... When we learn his reason, we have an inter-
pretation, a new description of what he did which fits it into a familiar
picture ... To learn, through learning the reason, that the agent con-
ceived his action as a lie, a repayment of a debt, an insult, the fulfilment
of an avuncular obligation, or a knight’s gambit is to grasp the point of
the action in its setting of rules, practices, conventions and expectations.
Remarks like these, inspired by the later Wittgenstein, have been ela-
brorated with subtlety and insight by a numbers of philosophers. And
there is no denying that this is true: when we explain an action, by
giving a reason, we do redescribe the action; redescribing the action
gives the action a place in a pattern, and in this way the action is
explained.21

Now as we have seen the logic guiding this reconstruction or interpretation
of human actions, interactions and transactions is at once Kant’s transcen-
dental logic and also Wittgenstein’s logic-as-grammar. So for Kant and the
later Wittgenstein, philosophical analysis is ultimately rational anthro-
pology in a wide sense that includes the theory of language: the logically
guided universal normative theory of human rationality.22

One last remark. In my opinion, this Kantian and later Wittgensteinian
conception of analysis provides a positive intimation of the nature of phi-
losophical analysis in our so-called ‘post-analytic’ era, by which I mean the philosophical era since W.V.O. Quine’s famous attack on the analytic-synthetic distinction in 1951. The only other serious alternative conception of analysis after Quine, it seems to me, is analysis construed as scientific naturalism: that is, analysis construed as the reductive logical, epistemological and metaphysical underlabourer to the exact sciences. But since, in my view, doing exact science is an irreducibly rational human activity and doing logic is also an irreducibly rational human activity, it also seems to me highly unlikely that analysis construed as scientific or reductive naturalism will ever be able to provide a coherent epistemological or metaphysical account of its own foundations. So if I am correct, then the study of the conditions of the possibility of rational human normativity, not scientific reduction, is the essence of philosophical analysis.

A note on internal references

For convenience I refer to Kant’s works and to Wittgenstein’s Tractatus and Investigations internally, that is, infratextually in parentheses. The citations to Kant include both an abbreviation of the English title and the corresponding volume and page numbers in the standard ‘Akademie’ edition of Kant’s works: Kants gesammelte Schriften, edited by the Königlich Preussischen (now Deutschen) Akademie der Wissenschaften (Berlin: G. Reimer [now de Gruyter], 1902–). For references to the first Critique, I follow the common practice of giving page numbers from the A (1781) and B (1787) German editions only. The citations to Wittgenstein include an abbreviation of the English title and the corresponding paragraph numbers or (in the case of the Investigations) page numbers. I generally follow the standard English translations from the German texts, but have occasionally modified them where appropriate. Here is a list of the abbreviations and English translations of the works cited in the internal references:

Notes

2 Non-analytic propositions can also be analysed. But the goal of a specifically *philosophical* analysis is a priori knowledge of analytically (logically) necessary truths.
5 Some conceptual expositions do not yield constituent or intrinsic (analytic) marks, but instead only supplementary or extrinsic (synthetic) marks. E.g. OVER TWO FEET TALL is a synthetic mark of BACHELOR.
6 On the volitional side of our nature, we are also constrained by the material condition of the givenness of our desires and feelings of pleasure and pain, and the formal condition of our natural pursuit of happiness. See, e.g. *CPrR* 5: 100.
10 Functions, of course, are abstract mappings from arguments (inputs) to values (outputs). There is a fundamental ambiguity in the notion of a function between its extensional aspect (the sets of correlated arguments and values) and its intensional aspect (the abstract mappings, considered as relational properties or rules), and this ambiguity had serious consequences for the development of early analysis – since the intensional aspect stubbornly resists reduction to the extensional aspect, and since confusing the two aspects is apt to lead to contradiction. Functional analysis should be contrasted with mereological (whole–part) analysis, which was also deployed in various ways by the early analytic philosophers.
12 In particular, the idealism of the *Tractatus* is based quite directly on Schopenhauer’s idealism, and more remotely on Kant’s idealism. See R. Brockhaus,


I say a little more about what I mean by a ‘strongly non-classical logic’ in the next section. But for the time being, by the contrastive notion of a ‘classical logic’ I mean either elementary logic (bivalent first-order quantified propositional and polyadic predicate logic with or without identity, and with or without infinite domains) or second-order logic (elementary logic plus quantification over properties, sets, functions, etc.). The logic of the Tractatus is classical, and so are the logics of the Begriffsschrift and Principia Mathematica.

See note 24 below.


Kant has little to say explicitly about the nature of language except for one provocative remark in the Anthropology (A 7: 192), where he seems to endorse the theses (1) that linguistic meanings are thoughts or parts of thoughts, and (2) that thinking is inner speech. This of course is similar to Wittgenstein’s theory of language in the Tractatus


One could argue that another serious alternative to logical-decompositional analysis can be found in Strawson’s notion of ‘connective’ conceptual analysis, i.e. holistic conceptual analysis. See P.F. Strawson, Analysis and Metaphysics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), chs 1–2. But as I am understanding rational anthropology in the wide sense, it would in fact include connective conceptual analysis as a sub-part.

For an exploration of some continuities and parallels between the Kantian and Strawsonian approaches to philosophical method, see H.-J. Glock, ‘Strawson and Analytic Kantianism’ in H.-J. Glock (ed.) Strawson and Kant (Oxford: Clarendon/Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 15–42. The fundamental differences between rational anthropology and connective analysis would be (a) that rational anthropology allows for more than one kind of necessary truth (logical or analytic necessity, and also non-logical or synthetic necessity), and (b) that rational anthropology more explicitly emphasizes the primacy of practical philosophy over theoretical philosophy – on this conception of analysis, ethics ultimately
drives epistemology, metaphysics, philosophy of mind, semantics, philosophy of
science and philosophy of logic.

University Press, 2006).


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