Introduction

Where Intelligibility Gives Out

Jens Pier

Philosophers are interested in exploring the limits of what our minds can grasp and our words can say, sometimes to push back those limits, sometimes to sound the alarm at illusory attempts to push them back. A philosopher who perhaps more than any other exemplified both attitudes is Immanuel Kant.
——Béatrice Longuenesse[1]

For Wittgenstein, philosophy comes to grief not in denying what we all know to be true, but in its effort to escape those human forms of life which alone provide the coherence of our expression. He wishes an acknowledgment of human limitation which does not leave us chafed by our own skin, by a sense of powerlessness to penetrate beyond the human conditions of knowledge. The limitations of knowledge are no longer barriers to a more perfect apprehension, but conditions of knowledge überhaupt*, of anything we should call 'knowledge.' The resemblance to Kant is obvious […].*
——Stanley Cavell[2]

1. What Limits?

There is a confounding issue at the very heart of philosophical reflection. It is the question of where, and in what sense, the bounds of intelligible thought, knowledge, and speech are to be drawn. Is there a way in which we are *limited* in what we think, know, and say (and thus in what we can understand and do)? And if so, does this mean that we are *constrained* – that there is something beyond the ken of human intelligibility of which we fall short? Or is there another way to think about these limits of intelligibility – namely, as *conditions* of our meaning and knowing anything, beyond which there is no specifiable thing we cannot do? Both Immanuel Kant and Ludwig Wittgenstein have written extensively on these issues, and their writings prove to be a focal point for *both* broad possibilities outlined above: at a first pass, we might call them a "restrictive" versus a "constitutive" notion of limits.

This problem of the limits of intelligibility is far-reaching and enduring. To inquire into the limits of human thought, knowledge, or language is to acknowledge that we are "finite thinking beings," as Kant puts it.[3] Indeed, one way of understanding our essentially problematic position in the world[4] which leads us into philosophy is to view it as a position of being fated to the perpetual attempt to reckon with the limits of intelligibility: we are creatures for whom it can

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[1] Quoted in Steve Pyke, *Philosophers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 118.
[2] Stanley Cavell, "The Availability of Wittgenstein's Later Philosophy," in *Must We Mean What We Say? A Book of Essays*, rev. ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 57.
[3] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), B72.
[4] I owe this formulation to Thomas Nagel, who recently characterized the human condition this way in his eulogy for Barry Stroud.

become a live question how to make sense of thought, action, knowledge, the good life, the nature of self-consciousness, mortal existence, and so forth – and where this sense-making *gives out*.

If we apply the distinction "restrictive versus constitutive" to our attempts to find out where sense-making and intelligibility "give out," our issue can be framed this way: we want to know whether we should consider this "giving out" a straightforward *failure* (i.e., an inherent shortcoming of human sense-making) or rather the result of a *confusion about the very conditions of success and failure* (i.e., an improper grasp of the fundamental adequacy and legitimacy of human sense-making). In terms of the opening quotation by Béatrice Longuenesse, the former option would interpret intelligibility giving out as us trying, and failing, to "push back" against limits we cannot transcend even though we would need to do so for some philosophically relevant purpose or other. The latter option would instead "sound the alarm" against such attempts at transcendence, viewing them as "illusory".

In other words, if we broadly characterize the philosophical enterprise as the attempt to make sense of making sense[5] and to determine the limits of where there is any sense to be made, there arises an immediate question about the nature of the problem: *how* might limits figure in our thinking and speaking, and in what way might our best efforts at thought and speech give out in the face of them? The most natural line of thought seems to be the "restrictive" interpretation: as finite creatures we are faced, in our attempts to make sense, with limits as *constraints* – as *limitations* in the original, intuitive sense which Stanley Cavell describes in the second opening quotation. They are then taken to be "barriers" to a more perfect or proper understanding.[6] Limits in this sense would be instances at which we have to own up to our confined and imperfect grasp of things, and to the fact that, as we can only get so far in our urge to make the world intelligible to us, there remains a *residue* we cannot reach. There are many examples of this way of thinking about limits which are regularly brought up in the debates that shape this volume. The most persistent among them are (a) the alleged confinement of our knowledge (or cognition) to "mere" appearances, leaving the "things in themselves" unknown and unknowable; and (b) the

[5] Cf. A. W. Moore's analogous definition of metaphysics in *The Evolution of Modern Metaphysics: Making Sense of Things* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 7, 44.

[6] One fairly recent guise of this idea can be found in James Ladyman's, Don Ross's, and David Spurrett's naturalist attack on the reliance on intuitions in mainstream analytic metaphysics. Against this, they claim that "human intelligence, and the collective representational technologies (especially public languages)" may be good for complex social interactions, navigation in certain environments, and engagement with "medium-sized" objects and situations. However, "proficiency in inferring the large-scale and small-scale structure of our immediate environment, or any features of parts of the universe distant from our ancestral stomping grounds, was of no relevance to our ancestors' reproductive fitness" ("In Defence of Scientism," in *Every Thing Must Go: Metaphysics Naturalized* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 2). Their call in subsequent chapters for a naturalization of metaphysics, and for philosophy to defer to the sophisticated methods and models of modern science to remedy the natural inhibition of our cognitive grasp, represents one standard avenue open to those who argue for a restrictive understanding of the limits of making sense – at least if the restriction is not taken to be absolute and insurmountable.

alleged confinement of linguistic meaning (or sense) to the sphere of fact-stating propositions, leaving logical structure and the relations between facts and propositions ineffable lest we resort to talking (albeit potentially illuminating) "nonsense".[7]

However, as Andrea Kern points out in her contribution to this volume, there is an alternative line of thought. It follows the classical Aristotelian idea that some limits to what can become intelligible to us are not pernicious "constraints" or "barriers," but rather constitutive of that very intelligibility: Aristotle develops this idea in the context of his theory of substances, i.e., of ordinary things in the natural world which we can perceive with our senses. One aspect of his classical hylomorphic distinction between the form and the matter of substances is that *form* is their principle of intelligibility, whereas their *matter* is not intelligible as such, but only by way of having a form. That does not mean that there is something mysterious and ineffable in (or about) the things around us. The distinction between matter and form rather gives expression to Aristotle's terminological choice to use "matter" as the name for an aspect of things which he isolates in reflection. As such, this aspect is no candidate for being made intelligible precisely because we have separated it from the very unity with form in which it originally inheres, and in which there is no question about its intelligibility. Aristotle works out a way to make sense of making sense, to understand how we understand things, by introducing a distinction we do not explicitly employ in our everyday understanding, but which makes that understanding itself intelligible. We might say, as Kant later did in a similar context, that this aspect of things "is [...] never asked after"[8] in our normal epistemic dealings with the world. And on this Aristotelian picture, it is precisely by virtue of matter – of this limit of intelligibility – and its interplay with form that anything about the natural things with which we are concerned in our lives can become intelligible at all.

Whether this Aristotelian idea is correct or not, it brings out a crucial point: there may very well be elements in our ways of making sense that are themselves beyond the reach of making sense (or at least of the particular way of making sense in which they are involved) – though by no fault of ours. It is not that we are in some way deficient and miss out on a "hidden" aspect of things which, once uncovered, would enhance our understanding. It is rather that a very plain and familiar aspect of things, when viewed in isolation from the very understanding it engenders, is not suited to being understood (in the same way). The aspect in question is *constitutive* of intelligibility, precisely *in* being unintelligible in abstraction and by itself. A limit of intelligibility in this sense is a limit insofar as it is a *condition* of intelligibility. If our understanding does not reach

[7] For a reading of Kant in accordance with (a), see Paul Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), ch. 15; for a reading of Wittgenstein in accordance with (b), see P. T. Geach, "Saying and Showing in Frege and Wittgenstein," in *Essays on Wittgenstein in Honour of G. H. von Wright*, ed. Jaakko Hintikka (Amsterdam: North-Holland, 1976).
[8] Kant, *Critique*, A30/B45.

beyond it, it is because it is grounded in it and there is nothing more, no residue, left to be understood.

But if there are such limits of intelligibility – limits that do not restrict but rather ground our understanding – we can encounter a peculiar difficulty. What if we come upon a limit of just this kind and mistake it for something else: a constraint, a confinement, a limitation which does not enable us to do something but cuts us off from it? In such cases we might be seriously misled, and indeed fall prey to a confused and pernicious kind of *self-deception* or *self-alienation*, if we seek a philosophical remedy to help us overcome such a limit. We may be under the impression that it *is* a failure or deficiency on our part after all that separates and obfuscates what should be fully transparent and intelligible to us, when in fact we are mistaken about the very thing that constitutes our understanding in the first place. Stephen Mulhall makes this point when he writes that "it is fatally easy to interpret limits as limitations, to experience conditions as constraints".[9] It is helpful (and increasingly becoming common practice) to stick with this piece of terminology: *limits* are constitutive and "non-contrastive," nothing lies beyond them; *limitations* are restrictive and "contrastive," they separate what is included in them from what is not.

Misunderstanding ourselves and our position with regard to this distinction can give rise to all sorts of further confusion: if we live our lives according to the idea that there are unknowable and ineffable things beyond our reach – where there may in fact be *nothing* that we cannot think, know, say, or do –, then we might surrender to ignorance, chance, destiny, or some other higher power where we should take matters into our own hands. Thus, if we mistake constitutive limits for restrictive limitations, we become more susceptible to metaphysical puzzlement, linguistic confusion, debilitating skepticism, and to moral apathy and political inertia. To be sure, all of these instances of confoundment may be stepping stones to a genuine philosophical insight: in his contribution to this volume, G. Anthony Bruno touches upon some such cases from a Kantian perspective, while Jean-Philippe Narboux and Gilad Nir articulate some avenues open to us from a Wittgensteinian point of view in the face of failings of making sense. But to mistake where intelligibility gives out *per se* for the place where it gives out "for us," due to an inherent shortcoming of ours, can make us underestimate the extent and power of our own freedom: our autonomy as thinkers, speakers, knowers, and agents in the realm of intelligibility.

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[9] Stephen Mulhall, *Philosophical Myths of the Fall* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 94. Mulhall makes this point in relation to Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Wittgenstein, and places them in a tradition that originates in Kant. He is on strong exegetical ground here: we know that Kant was indeed concerned with such a distinction, as is demonstrated by the following remark about "boundaries" (*Grenzen*) and "limits" (*Schranken*): "Boundaries (in extended things) always presuppose a space that is found outside a certain fixed location, and that encloses that location; limits require nothing of the kind, but are mere negations that affect a magnitude insofar as it does not possess absolute completeness" (*Prolegomena*, 4:352). For further discussion see also Peter Sullivan, "Synthesizing without Concepts," in *Beyond the* Tractatus *Wars: The New Wittgenstein Debate*, ed. Matthew Lavery and Rupert Read (London: Routledge, 2011); and Moore, *Evolution*, 241-8.

2. Kant and Wittgenstein: A Shared Sensibility

In modern times, no other thinkers have faced up to this troubling possibility of self-alienation with the same rigor and in such depth as Kant and Wittgenstein. Their wrestling with these questions of intelligibility and its limits is often couched as a concern with the limits of knowledge in Kant's case and with the limits of language in Wittgenstein's. However, a more thorough engagement with their writings shows that their questions are intimately connected to whole avenues of thought that lie elsewhere, and that they were keenly aware of this. Issues of experiential judgment and the nature of the proposition, of transcendental illusion and nonsense, and of critique and elucidation quickly lead into questions that concern all of the philosophical matters already touched upon in this introduction – and more.[10]

The most crucial sensibility shared by Kant and Wittgenstein concerns the *peculiar intellectual temptation* that the limits of intelligibility present to us. One might ask: if they both regard the attempt to step beyond the bounds of experience or sense as perfectly futile, illusory, or even nonsensical, why devote such large portions (and arguably even the core) of their philosophizing to them? The answer, which especially the essays in Parts II and III of this volume trace out and investigate, is that they are acutely aware of how easy it is to want to step outside of making sense in order to "*truly*" make sense – to make sense of making sense by going beyond sense proper. Philosophy, on this picture, is supposed to make up for the constraints encountered by imperfect human reflection in its everyday operations. The philosophical impulse is to give an account of *all* there is to be said about making sense, and hence – so it may seem – to go beyond our run-of-the-mill ways of doing so. We might spell out this urge to attain intelligibility beyond intelligibility as "reason['s …] unquenchable desire to find a firm footing beyond all bounds of experience"[11]

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[10] To address all of these questions would go far beyond the confines of this text. A short overview of classic scholarship on the issues as a signpost for any interested reader will have to suffice: to the best of my knowledge, the earliest treatment of a shared concern with limits of intelligible thought in Kant and Wittgenstein appears in the aptly titled concluding chapter "Wittgenstein as a Kantian Philosopher" in Erik Stenius, *Wittgenstein's* Tractatus*: A Critical Exposition of Its Main Lines of Thought* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1960), ch. 11. Many additional shared themes of Kant and Wittgenstein – as well as points of contention and discrepancy between them – that emerge from their joint engagement with the limits of intelligibility are touched upon in P. M. S. Hacker, *Insight and Illusion: Themes in the Philosophy of Wittgenstein*, rev. ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 206-14. Interestingly enough, by now the surge of interest in the connections between Kant and Wittgenstein on these issues is mostly associated with two later papers: Bernard Williams, "Wittgenstein and Idealism," *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* 7 (1973) (which is actually, over long stretches, a critical examination of the 1972 first edition of Hacker's book); and Jonathan Lear, "The Disappearing 'We'," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society: Supplementary Volume* 58 (1984). One further issue deserves special mention. Perhaps the most attention has been paid in recent decades to an illuminating connection between Kant and Wittgenstein: their concern with how human understanding is related to, dependent upon, and expressive of modes of self-consciousness. A review and discussion of the most important contributions, albeit with an eye to the differences between Kant and Wittgenstein on the matters involved, can be found in Béatrice Longuenesse, *I, Me, Mine: Back to Kant, and Back Again* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), ch. 2.

[11] Kant, *Critique*, A796/B824. See also Kant's insistence that the metaphysical "desire" in question is a "pressing need, which is something more than a mere thirst for knowledge," in Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, trans. and ed. Gary Hatfield, rev. ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 4:367.

or as a deep-seated and recurring "tendency […] to run against the boundaries of language" – to attempt "*to go beyond* the world and that is to say beyond significant language".[12]

There are important differences between these two diagnoses. The exact significance assigned to experience and language, respectively, remains unexplained so far. And despite the obvious resemblances that Cavell and others have detected between Kant and Wittgenstein, the exact relationship of their *prima facie* diverging experiential and linguistic focuses is a vexing and complex issue.[13] The same can be said for their claims regarding the specific kind of confusion or oscillation that our "desire" or "tendency" leads us to – are Kantian "transcendental illusion" and Wittgensteinian "nonsense" the same, or at least related?[14] And what about the relationship between the special kinds of knowledge Kant and Wittgenstein each claimed as constitutive for finding our way about in the world – "transcendental" and "grammatical" knowledge?[15] There is a lot to suggest that these connections are genuine and strong, but an exploration of these questions goes beyond the limitations of this introduction.[16] The decisive point for our purposes, however, is that Kant and Wittgenstein share a sensibility for an issue – they see the difficulties and distortions into which our urge to arrive at intelligibility beyond intelligibility can lead us. We may then deem it necessary to step "outside of our skins" in order to view thought and language "from sideways-on"[17] and see whether their relation to things truly renders them intelligible. The attunement to, and articulation of, this deep problem is a shared legacy of Kant and Wittgenstein.[18]

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[12] Ludwig Wittgenstein, "A Lecture on Ethics," in *Philosophical Occasions 1912-1951*, ed. James C. Klagge and Alfred Nordmann (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993), 44. See also Wittgenstein's remarks on "the urge to run up against the limits of language" in his conversations with the Vienna Circle in *Ludwig Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle: Conversations Recorded by Friedrich Waismann*, ed. Brian McGuinness and trans. Joachim Schulte and Brian McGuinness (Oxford: Blackwell, 1979), 68-9.

[13] In his chapter in this volume, Hans Sluga finds one area of undisputed common ground between Kant and Wittgenstein: he reconstructs the ways in which Wittgenstein was very likely influenced by Kant in his thinking about the difficulties in drawing the limits of thought *from within thought itself*. Possibly his taking up Kant in this abstract way was made possible by the fact that his reception of Kant's ideas, mediated by Mauthner and Schopenhauer, was largely free from questions surrounding experience and idealism.

[14] See Kant, *Critique*, A293-8/B349-55; Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. C. K. Ogden and F. P. Ramsey (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1922), 27-9.

[15] See Kant, *Critique*, A56-7/B80-1; Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker, and Joachim Schulte (New York: Wiley, 2009), §§29, 47, 90, 150, 232.

[16] For a discussion of Kant's and Wittgenstein's striking similarities on these points and the connections between transcendental illusion and nonsense as well as transcendental knowledge and grammatical knowledge, see Cavell, "Availability," 57-60. For a discussion of some of the differences, see ibid., 60-1.

[17] Tellingly, John McDowell uses his evocative phrase about an illusory "view from sideways-on" to describe the imaginary vantage point the notion of which is the object of both Wittgenstein's and Kant's criticism. For the former, see his "Non-Cognitivism and Rule-Following," in *Wittgenstein: To Follow a Rule*, ed. Steven Holtzman and Christopher Leich (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), 150; for the latter, see his "Intentionality as a Relation," in *Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel, and Sellars* (Cambridge, Mass./London: Harvard University Press, 2009), 63-4.

[18] That legacy is addressed in this volume too: using resources from Kant's and Wittgenstein's writings, Barry Stroud's opening essay explores some of the problems that arise from our wanting to attain an external, seemingly more "objective" perspective on some of our fundamental ways of thinking. In their contributions, Pirmin Stekeler-Weithofer and Dave Suarez put the Kantian and Wittgensteinian concern with an illusory "view from sideways-on"

None other than Wittgenstein himself was among the first to recognize this kinship between his and Kant's philosophy: far from viewing his own philosophical concerns as a sharp break with classical German philosophy, he saw (or came to see) the morale of his work as a re-statement of a Kantian lesson:

> The limit of language manifests itself in the impossibility of describing the fact that corresponds to (is the translation of) a sentence without simply repeating the sentence. (We are involved here with the *Kantian* solution of the problem of philosophy.)[19]

There are many possible interpretations of this mysterious passage.[20] I will focus on one avenue that can help us bring into view not only Kant's and Wittgenstein's shared *sensibility* for a problem but also arguably their joint understanding of what it would take to give a *response* to that problem. In thinking about Wittgenstein's striking remark, one point that emerges is this: if we want to understand, we can only do so *from within* understanding itself. We *can* describe the facts that correspond to what we are thinking and saying, to be sure. But to do so is not – and does not require us – to go beyond what we are thinking and saying. It does not ask us to attain intelligibility beyond intelligibility. "The great difficulty here," as Wittgenstein puts it in a passage quoted in several chapters of this volume, "is not to present the matter as if there were something one *couldn't* do."[21] The "problem of philosophy" in this context is the problem which philosophy itself and its demands pose to the human mind, and the solution would lie in a proper understanding of how to grasp human thought and language from within human thought and language.[22] To attain a view of ourselves that sees our ways of understanding as *fine* for what they are, not as *ill-suited* for what they are not: that is arguably the crucial point of convergence between Wittgenstein's and Kant's philosophical goals.[23]

Kant raises just this point, in a passage of equal bearing on this volume as the Wittgenstein quote above, with regard to the notorious problem of things "in themselves" as the putative proper objects of our efforts to obtain knowledge:

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in touch with the writings of Hegel and Heidegger, respectively. And Graham Priest, in his chapter, works out his own dialetheic solution to the problem to fix what, on his reading, Kant and Wittgenstein were not able to do.

[19] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value: A Selection from the Posthumous Remains*, trans. Peter Winch and ed. Georg Henrik von Wright with Heikki Nyman, rev. ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 13e.

[20] Many of the aspects at play here are discussed in Barry Stroud, "Meaning and Understanding," in *Seeing, Knowing, Understanding: Philosophical Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018). The following is indebted to Stroud's text, just as the entire present volume owes much to his works on the whole.

[21] Wittgenstein, *Investigations*, §374.

[22] For further discussion of this task, see Stroud, "Meaning," 244-54; and see Cora Diamond, *Reading Wittgenstein with Anscombe, Going On to Ethics* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2019), 39-44. In the background of these discussions is Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 4.114, to which I turn in a moment.

[23] The issue might be more complicated with regard to Kant: for a recent exploration of the exegetical and systematic points both in favor of and against a position congenial to the picture of the human standpoint in Kant as I propose it here, see Anil Gomes, A. W. Moore, and Andrew Stephenson, "The Necessity of the Categories," *Philosophical Review* 131, no. 2 (2022). Their question is whether Kant allows for non-human forms of mindedness that are radically different from ours (specifically, discursive cognizers who have different categories)—and whether he is justified in whatever position he takes.

> If the complaints '*That we have no insight into the inner in things*' are to mean that we do not understand through pure reason what the things that appear to us might be in themselves, then they are entirely improper and irrational; for they would have us be able to cognize things, thus intuit them, even without senses, consequently they would have it that we have a faculty of cognition entirely distinct from the human not merely in degree but even in intuition and kind, and thus that we ought to be not humans but beings that we cannot even say are possible, let alone how they are constituted.[24]

The "complaints" and worries that our capacities of making sense are not enough, not sufficient to do what they ought to do, and hence our urge to go beyond them, are based on a fateful and deceptive misunderstanding of ourselves and those very capacities. And it seems that both Kant and Wittgenstein see one of the root causes of this disquieting and ever-present possibility of self-alienation, but also the major resource for its dissolution, in philosophical thought itself. Just think of Kant's declaration that metaphysics is a "battlefield" for human reason to endlessly wrestle with "questions which it cannot dismiss, [...] but which it also cannot answer,"[25] and his project to finally bring "peace" to it by means of his "*[c]ritical* philosophy […] which sets out […] by investigating the *power* of human reason".[26] Or recall Wittgenstein's insistence that the "real discovery" which is needed in philosophy "is the one […] that gives philosophy peace, so that it is no longer tormented by questions which bring *itself* in question".[27]

3. A Critical Project and Some Implications

Philosophy, then, is one of the major sites where our urge to transcend intelligibility finds expression *and* where it can be countered – once we have arrived at a way of doing philosophy that finally comes into its own and, to borrow a phrase by Cora Diamond, "meets our real needs".[28] If this is indeed Kant's and Wittgenstein's joint vision, then Wittgenstein's early ideas of Tractarian logical form and his later[29] notions of elucidatory surveyability and treatment may very well be taken to be continuations of the Kantian tradition of critical philosophy. His insistence

[24] Kant, *Critique*, A277/B333.
[25] Kant, *Critique*, Avii-viii.
[26] Immanuel Kant, "Proclamation of the Imminent Conclusion of a Treaty of Perpetual Peace in Philosophy," in *Theoretical Philosophy After 1781*, ed. Henry Allison and Peter Heath (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 8:416.
[27] Wittgenstein, *Investigations*, §133. To further see the affinity to Kant's project, it seems helpful to me to take Wittgenstein's insistence on the necessary "discovery" as (partly) uttered in response to his diagnosis of "the bumps that the understanding has got by running up against the limits of language" (§119) – though I will not argue for that connection here.
[28] See Cora Diamond, "Introduction II: Wittgenstein and Metaphysics," in *The Realistic Spirit: Wittgenstein, Philosophy, and the Mind* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991), 22, 32. See also Wittgenstein, *Investigations*, §108.
[29] This distinction is, of course, very much a matter of degree with Wittgenstein: considerations of philosophy as an elucidatory and diagnostic activity already figure in his early thinking; see e.g. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 4.112. The emphasis on them, however, arguably becomes more pronounced in Wittgenstein's later works; see e.g. Wittgenstein, *Investigations*, §§89-133, 254-5, 309.

that we must "limit the unthinkable from within through the thinkable"[30] could then reveal itself to take up, in a modified guise, Kant's own project of delineation from within: the sphere of valid judgments famously coincides with the sphere of appearances (or *phaenomena*) for Kant. And his striking claim is that "the domain outside of the sphere of appearances is empty (for us),"[31] and that, in employing the concept of things in themselves (or *noumena*) as a purely negative "boundary concept"[32] and remaining steadfastly within the phenomenal sphere, "our understanding […] sets boundaries for itself".[33]

For all the questions about the exact degree of kinship between them on this matter,[34] and about the potential of this delimiting project in current (meta-)philosophical discourse,[35] we are nonetheless now in a position to see the general shape of what a joint Kantian and Wittgensteinian response to the problem of limits of intelligibility might look like: it would lie in the realization, via a self-delimitation of thought, of human *freedom* – the freedom that a self-determined stance vis-à-vis our own finitude and conditionedness can afford us. Indeed, Wittgenstein and Kant might well be placed in a tradition that insists that the flipside of our conditionedness *is* our spontaneity, our capacity to always make a new beginning – in thought, speech, knowledge, or action – from the finite and conditioned standpoint that we occupy.[36] That does not mean that they actually or fully succeed in what they set out to do. In fact, there are interpretations claiming that the precise respects in which they *fail* might be among the most illuminating features of their endeavors.[37] But regardless of whether they get there: their call to self-delimitation leaves us with a philosophical task. It is a move in the reflective struggle for human autonomy – for a self-determined life with the intellectual and practical capacities we have, rather than the (illusory) ones we might want to measure ourselves against.[38] As such, their

[30] Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 4.114.
[31] Kant, *Critique*, A255/B310.
[32] Kant, *Critique*, A255/B310-1.
[33] Kant, *Critique*, A256/B312.
[34] See A. W. Moore, "Was the Author of the *Tractatus* a Transcendental Idealist?," in *Wittgenstein's* Tractatus: *History and Interpretation*, ed. Peter Sullivan and Michael Potter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).
[35] See Johannes Haag and Till Hoeppner, "Denken und Welt – Wege kritischer Metaphysik," in *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie* 67, no. 1 (2019).
[36] For a paradigmatic exposition of this intertwinement of spontaneity and conditionedness, see Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2nd ed. (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 8-9. See also Mulhall, *Myths*, 93-6.
[37] Regarding Wittgenstein, this possibility is raised in Mulhall, *Myths*, 112-24. Regarding Kant, it is specifically argued for as an actuality that can lead to a deeper appreciation of Hegelian and Cantorian approaches to the problem of self-delimitation in Guido Kreis, *Negative Dialektik des Unendlichen: Kant, Hegel, Cantor* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2015), 144-61. Additionally, A. W. Moore, in his chapter in this volume, introduces the possibility that both Wittgenstein and Kant may founder *by their own lights* and fail to draw the bounds of sense – but that this foundering might well equip us to glean from their writings an *ineffable* understanding of those very bounds.
[38] I take this to be the meaning of Wittgenstein's remark that "[w]ork on philosophy […] is really more work on oneself. On one's own conception. On how one sees things. (And what one expects of them.)" (Wittgenstein, *Culture*, 24). On the concept of a capacity, see Andrea Kern, *Sources of Knowledge: On the Concept of a Rational Capacity for Knowledge* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2017), ch. 6; and Patricia Kitcher, *Kant's Thinker* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), ch. 10.

project is one of autonomous self-understanding – an understanding, from within, of the very form of human existence and mindedness.[39]

Before I turn towards an overview of the chapters of this volume, I want to close these introductory remarks by pointing out three implications of this possible way of looking at Kant and Wittgenstein that I have sketched out. The first concerns the prospects for our thinking about limits, the second our way of reading and interpreting Kant and Wittgenstein, and the third the issue of engaging with historical figures in philosophy more generally.

First of all, both Kant and Wittgenstein seem to have thought that their works would enable us to tell apart exactly where we are concerned with limits in the constitutive sense, behind which there is nothing left to think or do – and where, conversely, we *can* go further as we are only concerned with contingent and surmountable limitations. Beyond these limitations, there may well remain sense to be made and knowledge to be gained. Both of them were keenly attuned to this need to tell one from the other and can be seen to allow, even urge us, "sometimes to push back those limits," as Longuenesse puts it. We might come upon all manners of *movable* limitations in the course of our engagement with the world.[40] A proper understanding of the exact relation between limits and limitations, and which cases fall under which concept, is one of the decisive tasks we are left with after Kant and Wittgenstein, and all the chapters of this volume take it up in one way or another.[41]

The second implication of my picture of Kant's and Wittgenstein's shared critical undertaking is this: the ascription to them of a philosophical belief that we are "cut off" from something – a residue beyond the ken of human intelligibility – could reveal itself to be a crucial

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[39] On this theme of self-understanding, Lear has argued that the kind of transcendental reflection or argument that Kant and Wittgenstein can be seen as engaged in is concerned with "revealing in its broadest and deepest context what it is to be X" (Lear, "Disappearing," 222). This may well be their joint aim if we take X to be the concept of thought or intellectual powers as such. Lear eventually argues for the radical conclusion that such a revelatory argument must bring out that any qualification about our thinking and its constitutive limits as holding "for us," or as being describable in a slogan like "We are so minded," must disappear: "there is no concept of being 'other minded'. The concept of being minded in any way at all is that of being minded as we are" (Lear, "Disappearing," 233). This is one of the possible ways of thinking open to us once we get the issue of limits of intelligibility and self-determination into view. A quite different interpretation of Kant's philosophy of mind and cognition is given by Jocelyn Benoist in his contribution to this volume: he investigates, from a broadly Wittgensteinian perspective, the ominous role that the notion of "the Absolute" plays in our making sense – and to what extent Kantian critical philosophy might depend on it from the very beginning in order to style itself, misleadingly, as the modest, "limited" alternative. If Benoist is right in this, then his Kant would be self-contradictory – while Lear's Kant would arguably be guilty of question-begging with his antecedent reliance on that which goes beyond all limited mindedness.

[40] See, on the one hand, Wittgenstein's famous discussion of propositions and beliefs which form the "river-bed" of our "world-picture" and serve to guide our thought – until they potentially "change back into a state of flux" (Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, ed. G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright, trans. Denis Paul and G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1969), §§96-7). See also, on the other hand, Kant's treatment of the concept of inhabitants of the moon, which is objectively valid as our judgments employing it could (from his standpoint in the 1780s) potentially be vindicated: "in the possible progress of experience we could encounter them [i.e., lunar inhabitants]" (A493/B521). On the latter example, see §3 of Guido Kreis' contribution to this volume.

[41] Two recent collections of further essays concerned with this task (and adjacent ones) are Sofia Miguens, ed., *The Logical Alien: Conant and His Critics* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2020); and A. W. Moore, *Language, World, and Limits: Essays in the Philosophy of Language and Metaphysics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

exegetical misunderstanding. The idea is that such a reading mistakes what Kant and Wittgenstein are in critical engagement with for their own philosophical agenda. What they say *resembles* what they critique because what they critique is one of the most fundamental ways we can be misled about ourselves. We often try to pay due attention to our own finitude in making sense, and therein can be deluded about the nature and effects of our being finite. It is crucial to fully make transparent this delusion, as well as its allure and power, to arrive at a new understanding – yet a philosophical approach that so fully recognizes and articulates the pull of what it is up against risks being mistaken as *endorsing* it instead. A remark by Cavell, made with an eye to Wittgenstein, could thus be widened to include Kant and his muddled reception as well: a reading which interprets their concern with limits as one with constraints rather than conditions, and thus likens their ideas to restrictive views about limitations, "misses the fact that [… their] ideas form a sustained and radical criticism of such views – so of course it is 'like' them".[42] This exegetical question of how Kant's and Wittgenstein's remarks about limits are to be taken is another point that animates the entirety of contributions to this volume – and there are many different takes indeed.

Thirdly, the picture of the Kantian and Wittgensteinian enterprise I am recommending might shed some light on the question why we should still engage with the so-called "history" of the discipline. Kant and Wittgenstein should not be seen first and foremost as figures who purported certain views – say, transcendental idealism or the say/show distinction – which are well-understood and should now be preserved, taught, or discussed with an "archival" interest. If that was all they were, we would stand under no more obligation to engage with them than a physicist does to acquire more than a passing understanding of the early modern precursors and foundations of her own discipline. If we fall for the facile distinction between "systematic" and "historical" work in philosophy, this can seem to rid us of the obligation to concern ourselves with these "historical" claims as long as we go for the "systematic" option.

But what if the history of philosophy differs from other genres of intellectual history in that grappling with the issues at the heart of philosophy constitutes a *perennial* task – a task that includes the inhabitation of, meditation over, and careful investigation into different points of attraction and repulsion in logical space? And what if elements in Kant's and Wittgenstein's thinking like transcendental idealism or the say/show distinction offer us ways to get our bearings in these deeply human issues – not primarily as "positions" to be studied and simply consigned to "the canon," but to be taken up as tools offered by two interlocutors who set their sights on some of the deepest problems for thought? On such an understanding, a major part of why Kant and Wittgenstein enjoy the status and afterlife that they do stems from the fact that what they say

[42] Cavell, "Availability," 44.

is precisely *not* well-understood yet. And that is not because their style is obscure – although the jury may certainly still be out on that too – but because what they struggle with represents a struggle for all of us insofar as we are human beings, finite thinking creatures tasked with reconciling reason and finitude. We inherit their problems because they are, albeit sometimes in a different guise, *our* problems. Engagement with them is not to be relegated to a point of "historical interest" but rather, at its best, gives expression to some of the most significant features of the philosophical enterprise overall.

4. The Chapters of This Volume

The chapters of this volume are divided into four parts: "I. Limits Assessed," "II. Limits in Kant," "III. Limits in Wittgenstein," and "IV. Limits Reconsidered". The essays in Part I enable the reader to take an introductory look at the limits of intelligibility from a broadly Kant- and Wittgenstein-inspired perspective. Parts II and III are comprised of essays that investigate the specific ways in which the limits of intelligibility figure in Kant's and Wittgenstein's thought, respectively. They thus deepen the reader's understanding of the general perspective opened up in Part I. The chapters of Part IV offer a critique and recontextualization of such a perspective, drawing upon ideas in phenomenology, dialetheism, metamathematics, and the works of other influential authors.

Part I opens with Barry Stroud's essay "Metaphysical Dissatisfaction," where he engages with the master theme of his later work: the dissatisfaction into which we can fall in reflecting on some of our indispensable ways of thinking. This dissatisfaction brings out where thought – or at least *consistent* thought – reaches its limits: in trying to investigate some of our ways of thinking, we seem to have to step beyond them in order to properly assess them, and still find ourselves making use of those very ways of thinking in order to attain any understanding of them at all. In proper Kantian fashion, Stroud emphasizes the inevitability of this problem that metaphysical reflection poses for us, and the need to recognize our necessarily *engaged* perspective upon it. And in proper Wittgensteinian fashion, he abstains from a straightforward answer in favor of a deeper understanding of the very stakes of the problem: he leaves the reader with the question of how to make sense of the peculiar metaphysical undertaking we are drawn into in thinking about the conditions of consistent thought.

Whereas Stroud takes his cue from Kant and Wittgenstein in sketching a *problem*, A. W. Moore gives an account of how their work *responds* to that problem (and ones related to it). His essay "The Bounds of Sense" introduces the reader to the ways in which both thinkers have tried to demarcate "that of which one can make sense" – and to the ways in which their issues and proposed solutions have deeply shaped the beginnings of 20th century analytic philosophy. The

disquieting question Moore raises is this: do we have any proper way of going forward in trying to draw the bounds of sense? Do we not inevitably fall prey to a pernicious kind of self-stultification, i.e., trying to "stand" on both sides of those bounds or limits and hence (partially) beyond meaning and intelligibility? And if so, what does *that* mean? His investigation yields a striking conclusion: Wittgenstein, and in his wake authors like Ayer and Quine, point us in the direction of Kant's transcendental idealism – and equip us to see that the proper articulation of that very doctrine must lead to nonsense. The question with which Moore leaves the reader is whether there might be a way to attain a deep and yet ineffable understanding from this peculiar kind of nonsense.

Part II begins with Guido Kreis' paper "Kant on Why We Cannot Even Judge about Things in Themselves". In it, Kreis develops his eponymous radical exegetical claim by building mainly on his reconstruction of a central argument in the *Critique of Pure Reason* and supporting it with material from Kant's other critical works. He argues that Kant's philosophy does not permit us any judgment about things in themselves whatsoever. This could be called a form of ignorance, albeit a unique one. On Kreis's reading, Kant claims that there cannot be any objectively valid judgment about things in themselves, and since so-called "judgments" without objective validity are actually no judgments at all, there is *no* judgment about things in themselves available to us – not even a negative one. Kreis considers the theses and antitheses of the antinomies, analytic judgments, and the practical postulates as potential candidates for such judgments, each of which fail his test. He ends by concluding that we should read Kant's critical writings in such a way that they do not feature any judgments about things in themselves, and suggests one way to do so: putative judgments of this sort could be read as higher-order judgments about the *concept* of a thing in itself.

In her essay "The 'Original' Form of Cognition: On Kant's Hylomorphism," Andrea Kern investigates the distinction between form and matter in Kant's theoretical philosophy – his adoption of an Aristotelian hylomorphism. This connection to Aristotle is sometimes recognized in Kant scholarship, though most proponents claim that against the backdrop of a structural analogy, Kant and Aristotle also differ in an important respect: according to them, while Aristotle puts forth a hylomorphic conception of *being*, Kant only offers a hylomorphic conception of *cognition* in which sensibility provides the matter and understanding the form. Against this, Kern claims that this "interiorization" of form cannot be squared with Kant's actual views. She argues that form is not internal for Kant – but neither is it external. Rather, it is "original form". This interpretation of Kant, which Kern calls "hylomorphism all the way down," means that the form and the matter of cognition are jointly actualized in virtue of each other. The understanding cannot be understood apart from its part in a hylomorphic unity with sensibility. Kern concludes

that a proper appreciation of this unity enables us to see that it is impossible to distinguish the form that objects have as objects of cognition from the form they have in themselves.

G. Antony Bruno's paper "Logical and Moral Aliens Within Us: Kant on Theoretical and Practical Self-Conceit" intervenes in recent debates in Kant scholarship about the possibility of a general logical alien. Such an alien is a thinker whose laws of thinking violate ours. She is third-personal as she is radically unlike us. Proponents of the constitutive reading of Kant's conception of general logic accordingly suggest that Kant rules out the possibility of such an alien as unthinkable. Bruno adds to this an often-overlooked element in Kant's thinking: there is reason to think that he grants – and in fact presupposes – the possibility of a *transcendental* logical alien. Such an alien is a knower whose laws of experience violate ours. She is first-personal as she is radically like us. In other words: she is us, insofar as we are alienated from ourselves and our experience. Bruno goes on to draw an analogy between her, a dogmatist, and another transcendental alien, an evil agent. Just as a dogmatist is alienated from her (our) experiential laws, an evil agent is alienated from her (our) moral law. These forms of theoretical and practical self-conceit require self-knowledge in the form of a critique of speculative or practical reason. In bringing this point out, Bruno aims to shift from the question of whether logical laws constitute our thinking to the question of whether grasping our experiential and moral laws constitutes our reason.

The first chapter in Part III is Hans Sluga's paper "Wittgenstein on the Limits of Language". Sluga interprets Wittgenstein's famous call to silence at the end of his *Tractatus* – that "whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent" – as a critique of philosophy itself. According to him, Wittgenstein was concerned throughout his philosophical life with finding a way to delineate the limits of language. These limits, once we have them clearly in view, rob our attempts to put forth philosophical theories of their legitimacy. Sluga sets out to give a critical assessment of this Wittgensteinian critique of philosophy. In order to do that, he primarily focuses on the roots of that critique in Wittgenstein's earliest writings – his notebooks, his 1913 "Notes on Logic," the 1914 set of notes dictated to G. E. Moore, and the *Tractatus* itself. Wittgenstein's influence by Fritz Mauthner and, mediated through Mauthner, by Kant receive special attention. Sluga's conclusion is that, far from Mauthner's radical anti-philosophical bias, we can come to see a deep appreciation of the power, the draw, and the significance of philosophical problems in Wittgenstein's writings. He closes his essay with a short look at how Wittgenstein's thinking about the limits of language evolved later in his life.

Jean-Philippe Narboux's essay "The Threefold Puzzle of Negation and the Limits of Sense" investigates a particular philosophical puzzle via an examination of its status in the writings of Wittgenstein. The puzzle concerns negation and can take on three interrelated guises. The first

puzzle is how not-*p* can so much as negate *p* at all – for if *p* is not the case, then nothing corresponds to *p*. The second puzzle is how not-*p* can so much as negate *p* at all when not-*p* rejects *p* not as false but as unintelligible – for if *p* is unintelligible, then *p* is nothing but scratches and sounds and does not seem apt for negation. And the third puzzle is how "not" could be anything but hopelessly equivocal if it sometimes (per the first puzzle) requires, and sometimes (per the second puzzle) precludes the intelligibility of *p*. Narboux investigates these three puzzles, their respective structures, and their relations to each other. The second puzzle is expounded as the "centre of gravity," and in countering two objections to the threefold puzzle, Narboux detects a special predicament with regard to the second puzzle's concern with "unipolar" propositions – propositions that do not admit of an intelligible negation. The essay ends by indicating the first steps that could potentially lead us out of the threefold puzzle.

The issue of unipolar propositions shows up again in Gilad Nir's paper "Truth and the Limits of Ethical Thought: Reading Wittgenstein with Diamond," where he investigates how a reading of Wittgenstein along the lines laid out by Cora Diamond's interpretation can make for a novel approach to ethical truth. Unipolar propositions that can only be true and whose denials would be unintelligible play a crucial role in this: following Diamond, Nir discusses the propositions "'someone' is not the name of someone," "five plus seven equals twelve," and "slavery is unjust" as his three prime examples. He starts out by discussing the connection between Diamond's discussion of undeniable truth and Wittgenstein's treatment of the task of drawing the limits of thought in the *Tractatus* and goes on to examine Diamond's thoughts on ethics and the role of cumulative historical processes in ethical truth. Even though Diamond is concerned with a strong Wittgensteinian conception of limits, an upshot of her reading and reception of his ideas is that the limits of what we can coherently think about ethical matters may shift in time. From this diagnosis, Nir ultimately draws resources to delineate a middle-ground position between realism and relativism, and to formulate and defend a form of disjunctivism in ethics.

Part IV opens with Graham Priest's paper "On Transcending the Limits of Language". The first half of the paper is critical: Priest develops an interpretation of Kant as trying, and failing, to limit our judgments to phenomena and abstain from making claims about noumena; and an interpretation of Wittgenstein as trying, and failing, to develop a theory of meaning that abstains from attempting to say the unsayable. On Priest's reading, both Kant and Wittgenstein find themselves saying things that by their own lights cannot be said: in Kant's case, claims about noumena; in Wittgenstein's case, structural claims. While Kant attempts a solution of the problem which also fails, Wittgenstein bites the bullet and leaves his *Tractatus*, for the most part, void and meaningless. Priest responds by suggesting his dialetheic approach as a possible

alternative – or, potentially, as an amendment to a Kantian or Wittgensteinian theory. According to this approach, certain problems in philosophy arise from true contradictions and thus require a theory that makes sense of contradiction. A subgroup of these problems (among them the noumenal and structural issues in Kant and Wittgenstein) are about things that both are and are not ineffable. In the second half of the paper, Priest develops a dialetheic account of ineffability, and a concise formal theory to ensure that contradiction in the limits of language does not spread to other areas.

In his essay "Art, Authenticity, and Understanding," David Suarez starts out from a striking parallel between early 20th century debates over the possibility of metaphysics and the debates that animated Kantian and post-Kantian debates in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Wittgenstein and Carnap side with Kant's dismissal of transcendent metaphysics – albeit without his confidence about the possibility of a substantive alternative account of making sense. Heidegger, by contrast, follows Fichte and the early German romantics in seeing answers not in science or the analysis of language, but in the non-discursive forms of understanding and expression exemplified in art. Suarez frames this as a new guise of the metacritial question of accounting for the possibility of critical philosophy itself. He traces the development of the adjacent issues from Kant via Carnap and Wittgenstein to Heidegger's thoughts about "the nothing," which he defends as an ostensive indication of intersubjectively accessible structural features of our encounters with things. Towards the end of the essay, Suarez draws on Audre Lorde to illustrate the place of art and poetry in talking (or refraining from talking) about these existential features and conditions.

Jocelyn Benoist's paper "No Limit: On What Thought Can Actually Do" critically examines the very notion of a limit itself. He specifically questions whether a putative opposition of philosophical "camps" emphasized in recent years is actually tenable. This opposition is taken to hold between classical approaches in a Kantian spirit, operating with the notion of necessary limits to human cognition and sense-making, and a recent "speculative" turn in philosophy championed by Quentin Meillassoux, looking to overcome such limits. Benoist's contention against this dichotomy is that the rhetoric of unlimitedness depends on ideas about limits that are rooted in the very Kantian way of thinking it claims to oppose. What is more, these ideas are just as questionable as they, in turn, rely on a notion of "the Absolute" which they claim to undermine. Benoist goes on to investigate the foundations of modern thought about limits and finitude in perception and thought, and the consequences these ideas have had. He closes the paper by arguing that the notion of a limit as it has been formative for recent philosophy is inconsistent, and that our focus in philosophy should rather rest on the contextual conditions of

thought: on this picture, thoughts articulate a contextually determined grip on reality, which presupposes that reality is used in a certain way.

Pirmin Stekeler-Weithofer's essay "On the Speculative Form of Holistic Reflection: Hegel's Criticism of Kant's Limitations of Reason" concludes the volume. In it, Stekeler-Weithofer develops an interpretation of Hegel that aims to show how a proper understanding of the nature of speculative sentences might achieve what Kant set out to do: to vindicate our most fundamental claims to knowledge as actual knowledge, rather than mere acts of believing. To this end, Stekeler-Weithofer develops his conception of speculative geographies (or "maps") as an interpretive tool and introduces a condensed version of his Hegelian-inspired distinction between empirical, generic, and speculative sentences. On his reading, Kant's employment of the "boundary concept" of a noumenon is bound to fail as it needs to employ a contrast between our human point of view and that of an omniscient God – which turns out to be an aperspectival "view from nowhere" and thus an incoherent notion. Stekeler-Weithofer ends the essay by suggesting ways in which Hegel's logical analysis can help us to better comprehend the reflective ascent necessary to make our conceptual differentiations and typical ways of understanding intelligible to ourselves.

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