On Transcending the Limits of Language

Graham Priest

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Departments of Philosophy, the CUNY Graduate Center, and the
University of Melbourne

Abstract: There is a phenomenon one meets frequently in philosophy, both
Eastern and Western. A philosopher argues that there is something which is
beyond the limits of (any) language, and so is ineffable. Of course, there is
an obvious and immediate problem. The philosopher applies language to the
thing in question in doing so. Most philosophers faced with this contradiction
try to take some evasive action. However, the cure is often worse than the
disease. In the first sections of the paper, to illustrate the matter, we will
look at Kant's views about noumena in the *Critique* and Wittgenstein's views
about structure in the *Tractatus*. A quite different reaction to the problem is
to accept that we are dealing with something contradictory: something which
both does and does not transcend the bounds of language. How, exactly, can
one understand such a view? In the final section of the paper I will give a
precise dialetheic theory which shows how.

> *Great stress is laid on the limitations of thought, of reason, and so*
> *on, and it is asserted that the limitation* cannot *be transcended.*
> *To make such an assertion is to be unaware that the very fact that*
> *something is determined as a limitation implies that the limitation*
> *is already transcended.*[1]

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[1] From Hegel's *Logic*. Miller (1969), p. 134.

1   Introduction

There is a phenomenon one meets frequently in philosophy, both Eastern and Western. A philosopher argues that there is something which is beyond the limits (any) language, and so is ineffable. Of course, there is an obvious and immediate problem. The philosopher applies language to the thing in question in doing so.[2] Most philosophers faced with this contradiction try to take some evasive action. However, the cure is often worse than the disease. To illustrate the matter, and given the scope of this volume, in the first sections of the paper, to illustrate the matter, we will look at Kant's views about noumena in the *Critique* and Wittgenstein's views about structure in the *Tractatus.*.

A quite different reaction to the problem, if one finds oneself in this situation, is to accept that we are dealing with something contradictory: something which both does and does not transcend the bounds of language. How, exactly, can one understand such a view? In the second part of this paper I will give a precise dialetheic theory which shows how.

2   Kant

2.1   Phenomena and Noumena

So let us start with Kant.[3] In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant famously makes a distinction between phenomena and noumena. Phenomena are those things that are perceivable via the senses. Noumena, or at least, what we can say about them, are more problematic, as we shall see in due course. However, essentially, those things are noumena which are not phenomena. Some examples of noumena that Kant cites are: God, the cosmos, and the soul.[4] Further examples we will come to in a moment.

The distinction between phenomena and noumena makes perfectly good sense for a non-Kantian as much as for a Kantian. And all can agree that phenomena are in space and time (or just time in the case of internal sensations). Many would argue, however, that not all things in (space and)

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[2]Priest (1995) provides a whole raft of philosophers who find themselves in this situation, including, Kant, Wittgenstein, Frege, Heidegger, and Nāgārjuna.

[3]The following draws heavily on Priest (1995), ch. 5. I figured that I couldn't say it much more clearly than I said it there; and I guess you can't plagiarise yourself.

[4]See, e.g., Kant's *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, §45.

time are phenomena. For there are many physical entities, including those that are responsible for our perceptions (such as photons and electromagnetic radiation), which are not themselves perceivable.

It is therefore important to note that Kant has a somewhat distinctive view about what sort of things phenomena are. For Kant thinks that objects in themselves cannot be perceived, or *intuited* in his jargon; what are perceived are our mental representations of such objects. He explains the view thus (A 109):[5]

> Appearances are the sole objects which can be given to us immediately, and that in them which relates immediately to the object is called intuition. But these appearances are not things in themselves; they are only representations, which in turn have their object—an object which cannot itself be intuited by us, and which may, therefore, be named the non-empirical, that is, transcendental object $= x$.

The phenomena or representations perceived are a result of something contributed by the things in themselves, but also of the *a priori* structure which the mind employs to constitute the representations (intuitions). In particular, space and time are not features of things themselves, but are the most important such structures. For Kant, a horse is a spatio-temporal representation of an object; but what the representation is a representation of (which might more normally be thought of as the horse) is neither perceived nor in space and time.

It follows that for Kant all things in space and time are phenomena, as well as the converse. So when Kant talks about the objects, or things in themselves as he puts it, which occasion our representations, he is talking about noumena. Theoretical entities, such as photons and electromagnetic radiation, to the extent that Kant could make sense of such notions at all (which does not seem very great) are phenomena.

2.2 The Categories of Judgment

Next, we need to look at Kant's views concerning the categories. Categories are concepts of a certain kind. Kant calls them 'pure', meaning that they have no empirical content (unlike, for example, the concept *horse*). The

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[5]Quotations from the *Critique* are from Kemp Smith (1933).

precise details are not too important, but how they are obtained is. Kant abstracts them from what he took to be the logical forms of judgments, or statements as we might now put it. In the neo-Aristotelian logic he endorsed, every judgment has a quality, quantity, relation, and modality. And it may have each of these in one of three ways. Corresponding to each of the three ways, there is a category. These may be tabulated as follows:[6]

	Logical Form	**Category**
Quantity	Singular Particular Universal	Unity Plurality Totality
Quality	Affirmative Negative Infinitive	Reality Negation Limitation
Relation	Categorical Hypothetical Disjunctive	Substance Cause Community
Modality	Problematic Assertoric Apodictic	Possibility Existence Necessity

To illustrate: consider, for example, the judgment 'Some dogs may not have tails'. This has particular quantity (*some*), negative quality (*is not*), categorical relation (no connectives), and problematic modality (*may*). It thus deploys the cateories of plurality, negation, substance, and possibility. Or again, the statement 'If any piece of metal is heated then it must expand', has universal quantity (*any*), affirmative quality (*is*), hypothetical relation (*if*), and apodictic modality (*must*). It thus deploys the categories of totality, reality, cause, and necessity.

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[6]I take the table from the *Prolegomena*, §21, except that I have reversed the order of the three quantities, following Bennett (1966) p. 77. It is perhaps stretching the point a little to say that the categories of modality are a matter logical form, in the modern sense, for Kant takes them to be semantic rather than syntactic. (See A74=B100 ff.) I will ignore this subtlety.

The exact details of the taxonomy, drawing as they do on a neo-Aristotlian account of logical form, rather then a contemporary account, are somewhat archaic. However, that is beside the point here, which is that the categories are abstracted from the logical forms of judgments, and, crucially, that each judgment deploys one or more category.[7] Kant himself observes this in the following passage (A245=B302):

> [The categories] cannot themselves be defined. The logical functions of judgments in general, unity and plurality, assertion and denial, subject and predicate, cannot be defined without perpetrating a circle, since the definition itself must be a judgment, and so must already contain these functions.

2.3 The Applicability of the Categories

Having sorted out the categories, the next, and crucial, point to note is Kant's view that they can be (meaningfully) applied only to phenomena. As Kant puts it in the *Prolegomena* §30:[8]

> Even if the pure concepts of the understanding are thought to go beyond objects of experience to things in themselves (noumena), they have no meaning whatever.

Kant comes back to this point again and again in the *Critique* (for example, A95, B147, A139=B178, A239=B298).

There would appear to be three arguments for this. The first concerns the Transcendental Deduction of the categories. Kant faces the problem of what grounds we have for supposing that the categories can be applied to anything, or, in more modern jargon, how we can be sure that our language applies to reality. Whilst more modern philosophers might try to argue this in terms of some feature of the nature of language, its use, or evolution, Kant seeks the solution in the nature of consciousness. We do not need to follow the argument through all its tortuous turns; essentially, it runs

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[7]It should perhaps be noted that in the *Prolegomena*, §§18ff., Kant distinguishes between objective and subjective judgments, only the former of which deploy the categories. This, however, is an aberration in Kant's thought, and, by the second edition of the *Critique*, subjective judgments have become mere associations of ideas. See, e.g., Kemp Smith (1923), pp. 288f.

[8]Quotations from the *Prolegomena* are from Beck (1950).

as follows. It is a feature of each individual consciousness that it has a unity. How is this possible? It is possible, according to Kant, because the objects of consciousness themselves have a unity. How is this unity possible? The answer, again according to Kant, is that it is precisely my judgments deploying the categories that unify the objects. Thus, the applicability of the categories is guaranteed, ultimately, by the unity of my perception. Given this account, it follows that the categories are mental features that are—like space and time—constitutive of my perceptions, mental representations. To apply the categories is, *ipso facto*, to construct a phenomenon—and so not a noumenon. As Kant sums it up (A111):

> The a priori conditions of a possible experience in general are at the same time conditions of the possibility of objects of experience. Now, I maintain that the Categories, above cited, are nothing but the conditions of thought in a possible experience just as space and time are the conditions of intuitions for that same experience. They are fundamental concepts by which we think objects in general for experiences, and have therefore a priori objective validity. This is exactly what we desired to prove.

A second reason that Kant gives for supposing that the categories apply only to phenomena goes as follows. Kant observes that to apply a category it is necessary for us to have some criterion, or *schema* in his jargon, of its applicability. In the 'Schematism of the Pure Understanding' Kant gives what he takes to be the criteria of the applicability of the categories. He does not deny that, at least in principle, there could be other criteria; but, as a matter of fact, these are the only criteria that we have, or that beings constituted like us could have. Now, it turns out that the criteria for all the categories involve time. To give a couple of the simpler examples (A143=Bl83 ff.), 'the schema of substance is permanence in real time', 'the schema of necessity is existence of an object at all times'. It follows that it makes sense to apply the categories only to those things that are in time: phenomena. As Kant puts it (Al45=Bl84 ff.):

> We thus find that the schema of each Category contains and makes capable of representation only a determination of time ... The schemata of the pure concepts of the understanding are thus the true and sole conditions under which these concepts obtain

relation to objects and so possess significance. In the end, therefore, the Categories have no other possible employment than the empirical.

The third and final argument that Kant uses for the non-applicability of the categories to noumena is based on the Antinomies. The Antinomies are pairs of arguments for contradictory conclusions, which, Kant holds, are inherent in thought, in a certain sense. Kant is no dialetheist, however. He has to diagnose a problem with the arguments. His diagnosis is precisely the fact that in the course of the arguments a category is applied to a noumenon, that is, outwith its bounds. As Kant says (A421=B449):

> If in employing the principles of understanding [GP: the categories] we do not merely apply our reason to objects of experience, but venture to extend these principles beyond the limits of experience, there arise *pseudo-rational* doctrines which can neither hope for confirmation in experience nor fear refutation by it. Each of them is not only in itself free from contradiction, but finds conditions of its necessity in the very nature of reason—only that, unfortunately, the assertion of the opposite has, on its side, grounds that are just as valid and necessary.

This is not the place to go into the adequacy of Kant's arguments.[9] Suffice it here to say that Kant's view that the categories cannot be applied to noumena is no mere aberration on his part. It is entirely central to the framework of his Transcendental Idealism.

2.4   Noumena are Beyond Language

Kant's view that the categories cannot be applied to noumena embroils him in contradictions at the limits of language.[10] For, if one cannot apply the categories to noumena, one cannot make statements about them. As Kant himself puts it (A679=B707):

> There are no concepts available for any such purpose; even the concepts of reality, substance, cause, nay, even that of necessity

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[9] On which, see Priest (1995), ch. 6.

[10] The point is nicely argued by Moore (2012), ch. 5.

in existence, lose all meaning, and are empty titles for [possible] concepts, themselves entirely without content, when we thus venture with them outside the field of the senses.

But as critics from Hegel onwards have pointed out,[11] the *Critique* is full of statements about noumena, so applying the categories to them to make statements—which Kant, presumably, takes to be not just meaningful but true. To give an example, Kant talks of noumena causing our sensations, blatantly deploying, amongst other categories, that of causation (e.g. A288=B145):

> Understanding accordingly limits sensibility, but does not thereby extend its own sphere. In the process of warning the latter that it must not presume to claim applicability to things-in-themselves but only to appearances, it does indeed think for itself an object in itself, but only as transcendental object, which is the cause of appearance, and not itself appearance.

And this is just one example.[12] When Kant says that noumena may be supposed to exist (A253=B309), he deploys the category of existence; when he says that they are not in time, he deploys the category of negation. Even the statement that the categories cannot be applied to noumena deploys the categories of possibility and negation. Hence, unless Kant is to accept that his own theory is meaningless, he must accept that one can make statements about noumena.[13]

It might be thought that Kant resolves this problem in his distinction between knowledge and thought. He concedes that one cannot have knowledge of noumena (Bxxv f.):

> [T]hat we have no concepts of understanding, and consequently no elements for knowledge of things, save in so far as intuition

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[11] See, e.g., Inwood (1983), p. 146, Priest (1995), ch. 7.

[12] See Kemp Smith (1923), p. 412.

[13] According to an influential interpretation of the *Critique* (Allison (2004)), noumena are not a different kind of thing from phenomena. One and the same object can have a phenomenal aspect and a noumenal aspect. The phenomenal aspect is what is at issue when we consider the object as falling under the categories; the noumenal aspect is at issue when we consider how the thing is in itself. Allison's interpretation has certainly been contested (see Stang (2016)), but even granting its correctness, this does not help. *Ex hypothesi*, one can say nothing about the noumenal aspect of an object, which Kant does, on this interpretation, every time he talks about noumena.

can be given corresponding to these concepts; and that we can therefore have no knowledge of any object as thing in itself, but only in so far as it is an object of sensible intuition, that is, an appearance—all this is proved in the analytical part of the *Critique*. Thus it does indeed follow that all possible speculative knowledge of reason is limited to mere objects of experience.

He claims, though, that we can at least think about them. The passage continues:

> But our further contention must also be duly borne in mind, namely, that though we cannot know these objects as things in themselves, we must yet be in a position to at least think them as things in themselves; otherwise we should be landed in the absurd conclusion that there can be appearances without anything that appears.

To say that we cannot know anything about noumena, whilst true enough, is somewhat misleading. It suggests that the impossibility of having knowledge is due merely to our lack of epistemic access. The impossibility of knowledge arises for a much more profound reason: a lack of conceptual access. The reason that we cannot have knowledge of noumena is precisely that we cannot even make statements about them: any (meaningful) such statement would have to apply the categories, and so is impossible.

And given this, it is just as impossible to entertain thoughts about noumena as it is to know anything about them. For both involve (meaningful) statements about noumena. The considerations about knowledge and thought are therefore beside the point.[14]

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[14]Some philosophers, e.g., Ewing (1938), p. 198, have suggested that one can think about noumena by applying the pure categories, that is, the categories without their criteria of application (the unschematised categories). But this cannot be right. The pure categories provide only the logical *forms* of judgment, as Kant himself points out (e.g., B150). They cannot provide substantial content. As Kant puts it (A248=B305):

> The pure categories, apart from formal considerations of sensibility, have only transcendental meaning; never the less they may not be employed transcendentally, such employment being in itself impossible, inasmuch as all conditions of employment in judgments are lacking in them, namely, the formal conditions of subsumption of any ostensible object under these concepts. Since, then, as pure categories, they are not to be employed empirically, and cannot be employed transcendentally, they cannot, when separated from all

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3 Wittgenstein

3.1 Language and Reality

Let us now move to the Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus*, and let us start with his account of language, reality, and the relationship between them.[15]

First, reality. Here we find states of affairs. These are assemblages of objects. They are no mere congeries, however. The objects in a particular state of affairs fit together, like the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle (or links in a chain, to use Wittgenstein's own simile), according to possibilities intrinsic to them. The objects in a state of affairs are articulated into a determinate structure, and the way that the objects are structured is called the *form* of the state of affairs. A state of affairs that exits is called a fact; and the world is the totality of facts.

On the other side of the fence, language is composed of propositions. These are all truth-functional compounds of atomic (elementary) propositions; and hence their truth values are determined, via the truth functions, by the truth values of the atomic propositions they contain. Atomic propositions are composed of names. Like states of affairs, such propositions are no mere congeries. In particular, within a proposition the names are related to each other in a certain way. The way they fit together is the *form* of the proposition.

An atomic proposition represents a state of affairs if the names in the proposition refer to the objects in the state of affairs, and the form of the proposition is the same as the form of the state of affairs. As Wittgenstein says, the proposition forms a picture of the fact. We might call this the *isomorphism* theory of representation. An atomic proposition is true just if the state of affairs it represents is a fact.

3.2 Saying and Showing

Given an atomic state of affairs (or proposition), say (abstractly) aRb, it is important to distinguish between it (or the claim that it makes) and facts about its internal structure, such as that it involves a and b, that these are

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sensibility, be employed in any manner whatever.

[15]Quotations from the *Tractatus* are from Pears and McGuinness (1961). I shall refer to its sections thus: T1.1. Again, what follows draws heavily on Priest (1995), ch. 12.

related in a certain way, or even that it is a state of affairs (or proposition). I will call these things *structural facts* (following *T*4.122), though, as we will see, this use of 'fact' is problematic.

This distinction is closely connected with a distinction Wittgenstein draws between saying and showing. We may say that a proposition expresses the fact that the objects it is about are in such and such a way, or that it *says* that they are thus and so. If one did not know what objects were named by the names in the proposition, one would not know what it said. But, even then, one could see something about the proposition, for example, that it has a certain form: Wittgenstein says that the proposition *shows* its form in this way. As he puts it (*T*4.121):

> Propositions show the logical form of reality. They display it.

In a similar way, and quite generally, all structural facts are shown: a proposition shows that it is a proposition, shows what its constituents are, etc.

3.3 Structural "Facts"

We now come to the crux of the matter. Any attempt to construct a proposition expressing structural facts results in something meaningless.

There are two senses of meaninglessness that Wittgenstein uses in the *Tractatus*.[16] In one sense, something has sense if it carries non-trivial information, that is, if it states that we are in some possible world, as opposed to some other. The opposite of having meaning in this sense, Wittgenstein calls *sinnlos* (normally translated as *senseless*). In another way, something has sense if its formulation does not violate the canons of conceptual grammar, in the way that 'is a horse is a concept' does. Something that is meaningless in this sense can carry no information at all, trivial or otherwise. For this sense of meaninglessness, Wittgenstein uses the phrase *unsinnig* (usually translated *nonsense*). Structural claims are meaningless in this much stronger sense. To see why, let us consider a couple of examples.

Consider any claim to the effect that a state of affairs (or a proposition; the considerations are the same) has a certain form. First, note that the form of the state of affairs is not one of its components in the same way that the objects that comprise it are. For the form of a fact is the way that its objects are structured, and this can no more be another object than the form of a

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[16]On the two, see, e.g., Black (1964), p. 160.

certain house is another of its bricks. If the form of the fact were just another object, on a par with the objects that comprise it, then the fact would just be a congeries of objects, and not a unity. The form of a fact functions in a quite different way from its objects: it is the way that the objects are put together. Russell puts the matter succinctly as follows:[17]

> [Form] cannot be another constituent, or if it were there would have to be a new way in which it and the ... other constituents are put together, and if we take this way as again a constituent, we find ourselves embarked on an infinite regress.

The regress would be vicious since, if it arose, there would be nothing, ultimately, "holding all the constituents together". The form of a state of affairs must, then, be a quite different sort of thing from the objects that constitute it. Hence, a state of affairs cannot say anything about its own form.

One might think that although a state of affairs cannot be about its own form, some other state of affairs can be. But this cannot be the case either. For the form of a fact is not an object at all: it is the way that objects (or names) are put together; as such, it is a quite different *sort* of thing. But if it is not an object, then it cannot be an object in a state of affairs, and therefore there can be no propositions about it. As Wittgenstein puts it ($T4.121$):

> Propositions cannot represent logical form: it is mirrored in them
> What finds its reflection in language, language cannot represent.

A similar problem arises if we consider propositions expressing another kind of structural fact—say, one to the effect that something is a proposition. This is (or at least appears to be) a proposition concerning the proposition in question, and so requires us to name it. But names name objects, not propositions, which are quite different.

This follows from several doctrines of the *Tractatus*,[18] but the fundamental reason is quite simple. Propositions state how things are. It therefore makes sense to affirm or deny them. Objects, on the other hand, just are; it makes no sense to affirm or deny them. As Wittgenstein puts it ($T3.144$):

> Situations can be described but not given names.

> Names are like points; propositions like arrows—they have sense.

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[17]Russell (1913), p. 98.

[18]For example, objects are simple ($T12.6$); but propositions are obviously complex.

We see, then, that since propositions are not objects they cannot be the constituents of a state of affairs any more than form can.

We have just examined two examples of structural facts; and what we have seen is that attempts to express them produce claims which violate the canons of logical grammar. We are forced to treat as objects things that cannot possibly be objects, since they have quite different functions (form binds; propositions state). Thus, structural facts cannot be expressed. Attempts to do so produce something *unsinnig*. As Wittgenstein summarises the matter (*T*4.1212):

> What can be shown, cannot be said.

3.4 Saying the Unsayable

Wittgenstein's view that structural facts cannot be said embroils him in contradictions at the limits of language.[19]

Structural facts cannot, quite literally, be said. Any attempt to make such claims must produce a string of symbols that is nonsense. Yet Wittgenstein says them all the time. Most of the *Tractatus* contains nothing but structural claims. Let me give just a few examples.

We have seen that, though form can be shown, nothing can be said about it. Yet we have the following assertions about form at *T*2.033 and *T*2.18:

> Form is the possibility of structure.

> What any picture, of whatever form, must have in common with reality, in order to depict it—correctly or incorrectly—in any way at all, is its logical form.

We also saw that it is impossible to make propositions about propositions. Yet we have the following assertions at *T*3.141 and *T*3.22:

> A proposition is not a blend of words.—(Just as a theme in music is not a blend of notes.)

> A proposition is articulate.

> In a proposition a name is the representative of an object.

Finally, we sometimes find Wittgenstein actually saying what it is that propositions show, for example, *T*4.1211 and *T*4.126:

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[19]The point is, again, nicely argued by Moore (2012), ch. 5.

> Thus, one proposition 'fa' shows that the object a occurs in its sense, two propositions 'fa' and 'ga' show that the same object is mentioned in both of them.

> When something falls under a formal concept as one of its objects, this cannot be expressed by means of a proposition. Instead it is shown in the very sign for this object. (A name shows that it signifies an object, a sign for a number that it signifies a number, etc.)

As Russell summarises the situation in his introduction to the English translation of the *Tractatus* (p. xxi):

> Everything, therefore, which is involved in the very idea of the expressiveness of language must remain incapable of being expressed in language, and is, therefore, inexpressible in a perfectly precise sense ... What causes some hesitation [about this view] is the fact that, after all, Mr. Wittgenstein manages to say a good deal about what cannot be said.

Just as for Kant, then, Wittgenstein is caught red-handed, saying the unsayable.

4   Responses

Of course, both Kant and Wittgenstein are well aware of the predicament in which they find themselves. They respond to it somewhat differently, however.

4.1   Kant's Response

Kant's response is clearest in the chapter of the *Critique* entitled 'The Ground of the Distinction of all Objects in General into Phenomena and Noumena', which tries to avoid the contradiction by distinguishing between an illegitimate positive notion of noumenon and a legitimate negative, or limiting, notion. This does not help: according to Kant, the negative notion is there to place a limit on the area in which we can apply the categories, and so make judgments (A255=B311). But to say that there are (or even may be) things about which we cannot judge is precisely to make a judgment about them.

Specifically, it quantifies over them and applies the category of plurality. The "legitimate" notion is, therefore, just as illegitimate as the "illegitimate" one.

So unsuccessful was this chapter of the *Critique* that Kant completely rewrote it for the second edition, but without doing anything to remove the fundamental contradiction. As Kemp Smith puts it:[20]

> But beyond thus placing in still bolder contrast the two counter-assertions, on the one hand that the categories must not be taken by us as other than merely subjective thought functions, and on the other that a limiting concept is indispensably necessary, Kant makes no attempt in the new passages to meet the difficulties involved. With the assertion that the categories as such, and therefore by implication, those of reality and existence, are inapplicable to things in themselves, he combines, without any apparent consciousness of conflict, the contention that things in themselves must none the less be postulated as actually existing.

Kant is caught squarely in a contradiction at what he takes to be the limits of language—and one that is entirely integral to his Transcendental Idealism.

4.2   Wittgenstein's Response

Wittgenstein faces up the problem of speaking of the ineffable squarely, in a way that Kant never does. His solution is the stunning penultimate proposition of the book, *T*6.54:

> My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognises them as nonsensical, when he has used them—as steps—to climb up beyond them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it.) He must transcend these propositions, and then he can see the world aright.

With the sudden jerk of a conjurer, Wittgenstein intends to remove the table-cloth, leaving the best china in place. Unfortunately, there is little doubt that in this case the china comes off with the cloth. If Wittgenstein is right, then the propositions of the *Tractatus*, far from being the rungs of a real ladder

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[20]Kemp Smith (1923), pp. 413f.

that one can ascend, are like the rungs of a holographic ladder that will not support any weight put on them: the 'propositions' of the *Tractatus* are not even propositions at all in Wittgenstein's sense; just nonsense. There is therefore no question of understanding them. Conversely, if one does understand them, as one certainly seems to—read the *Tractatus*!—then they cannot be nonsense.[21]

Indeed, the move saws of the very branch on which Wittgenstein is sitting. For if the "propositions" of the *Tractatus* are nonsense, they cannot establish anything; so they cannot establish that there are things that cannot be said; and so motivate the claim that attempts to say such things are nonsense.

One might suggest trying to harness the distinction between saying and showing at this point, by claiming that someone who understands the *Tractatus* understands what its nonsense statements show, not what they say. This however, will not work. In the *Tractatus* it is grammatical sentences that show things in virtue of their logical form. Nonsense has no logical form, and so shows nothing.

There is nothing Wittgenstein can do, then, but resort to the Zen-like silence of $T7$:[22]

> Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent.

The silence would have been more convincing had Wittgenstein himself not told us in the *Tractatus* what the structural propositions say—in fact, had never written the book.

5 The Logic of Ineffability

5.1 And So?

What we have now seen is that both Kant and Wittgenstein find themselves saying things that, according to them themselves cannot be said. For Kant, these are claims about noumena; for Wittgenstein, they are structural claims. Both take defensive action. Kant tries to avoid the problem by drawing a

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[21]Ironically enough, Wittgenstein even seems to concede this in the introduction to the *Tractatus*, since he says (p. 4) that the thoughts expressed by the *Tractatus* are unassailably and definitively true—and so not nonsense.

[22]There is an irony even here, though. In speaking of that of which one cannot speak, Wittgenstein is speaking of it.

distinction between two senses of *noumenon*; but the "licit" sense of the notion is just as guilty of the problem as the "illicit" sense. Wittgenstein takes the heroic course of action, agreeing that his text is indeed mostly meaningless. This destroys the whole *Tractatus*, leaving—nothing.

One can respond to these contradictions simply by rejecting each theory. Maybe Kant's Transcendental Idealism is just wrong; maybe Wittgenstein's account of the relationship between language and reality is completely misguided. (After all, he himself later came to think so.) However, we are in the realm of paradoxes of self-reference here. What Kant and Wittgenstein say cannot not be done is shown to be possible by what they *themselves* say. Given that, and given that a dialetheic approach to the paradoxes of self-reference is well articulated,[23] another natural reaction to the situation is a dialetheic one. We are dealing with things that both are and are not ineffable.[24]

Of course, dialetheism is contentious; but here is not the place to undertake a defence of it.[25] Accepting dialethism about the matter can be only a first move, however. One needs a precise account of what is going on, and, if possible, a guarantee that contradiction does not get out of hand, infecting presumably consistent areas. The rest of this paper is devoted to that task.

5.2   Approaching the Problem

First, what *sort* of thing is it which, for Kant and Wittgenstein, is ineffable? Certainly not sentences. These wear their effability on their sleeve. It is what sentences express. We may take these to be states of affairs (hereafter, *soa*s). If A is any sentence, let us use $\langle A \rangle$ as its name, and $[A]$ as a name for the soa that it expresses.

Now, statements are true or false, and soas obtain or do not. Let us write T for *is true*, and O for *obtains*. There is an obvious connection between these two things, namely:

- $T \langle A \rangle \dashv\vdash O\,[A]$

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[23]E.g., Priest (1987).

[24]A quite different reaction is suggested by Moore (2014). He accepts that the problematic claims are indeed nonsense, but tries to make sense of this. For a critique of this, see Priest (2015).

[25]This is undertaken in Priest (1998), and, at greater length, (1987), (2006), and elsewhere.

(Here, $\dashv\vdash$ indicates deducibility in both directions.) Since we are not now attempting to avoid the paradoxes of self-reference, we may happily take T to satisfy the T-Schema:

- $T\langle A \rangle \dashv\vdash A$

It follows that $O\left[A\right] \dashv\vdash A$.

Let us write the claim that sentence x expresses soa y as Exy. In particular, then, we have:

- $E\langle A \rangle \left[A\right]$

That x is ineffable, Ix, can now be expressed in the obvious way:

- $\neg\exists y Eyx$

There is nothing contradictory about the existence of ineffable things, i.e., $\exists x Ix$, as such. But for any A, we have $\exists y Ey\left[A\right]$, and so $\neg I\left[A\right]$. So for any A, $I\left[A\right]$ *is* contradictory. Thus, if someone makes a claim about a soa, and in the process names it as $\left[A\right]$, for some A, then their words commit them to $\neg I\left[A\right]$.

5.3 A Formal Theory

Let me now give a formal theory verifying the principles I have just spelled out, and showing them to be non-trivial (i.e., showing the contradictions involved do not spread everywhere). The underlying logic is the paraconsistent logic LP.[26]

Since we are dealing with two kinds of objects, sentences and soas, a natural way to proceed would be with a two-sorted language. However, with a bit of juggling, we can use a one-sorted language, and specifically, the language of arithmetic, so that we are dealing with just natural numbers. We can identify sentences with their gödel codes. The numbers that are not gödel codes can be thought of as soas. As a first cut, one can think of the even numbered soas as effable, and the odd numbered as ineffable.

The language, then, is that of first-order arithmetic. We take some gödel coding of the language. If A is any sentence, let $\#A$ be its gödel code, and let $\langle A \rangle$ be the numeral of this.

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[26]See, e.g., Priest (1998).

We now take the standard interpretation of the language, except that we extend the anti-extension of the identity predicate (i.e., the set of pairs that make it false), with $\langle s, s \rangle$, for some number s. That is, s satisfies $\neg x = x$, as well as $x = x$. (There could, in fact, be more than one such s, even a whole class of them. But for our purposes, one will suffice.) It is known that extending the interpretation in this way preserves anything that was true or false in it before (though it may make *more* things true or false).[27] In particular, all the truths of the standard model are still true in this interpretation.

Now, enumerate the gödel codes: $g_0, g_1, ...$, and define a function, f, as follows. If n is not a gödel code, then $f(n) = 0$. On gödel codes, f is defined by recursion, thus:

- $f(g_0) = 0$

- $f(g_{n+1}) = \mu m (m > f(g_n) \wedge m$ is not a gödel code $\wedge m$ is even)

That is, f maps all the gödel codes of formulas to even soas. The map is clearly onto this set, and, as far as the gödel codes go, one to one. Moreover, f is a primitive recursive function. Hence, there is an arithmetic formula, $F(x, y)$, which defines it. If $G(x)$ defines the set of gödel codes, we may define the formula Exy as:

- $\exists z (G(z) \wedge z = x \wedge F(z, y))$

The observant will note that the identity clause would seem to be redundant. However, it will earn its keep in due course. For any sentence, A, we may define $[A]$ as the numeral if $f(\#A)$. It is easy to see that $E \langle A \rangle [A]$. For, by construction, $F(\langle A \rangle, [A])$, so $G(\langle A \rangle) \wedge \langle A \rangle = \langle A \rangle \wedge F(\langle A \rangle, [A])$, and thus, $\exists z (G(z) \wedge z = \langle A \rangle \wedge F(z, [A]))$.

Recall that Ix is defined as:

- $\neg \exists y Eyx$

So for any sentence A, $\neg I [A]$. Moreover, take any odd soa, n; then there is no gödel number, m, such that $f(m) = n$. So, n satisfies $\neg \exists y Eyx$. That is, $\exists x Ix$.

Finally, come back to the number s. Take any sentence, S, and let $s = \#S$. Then if n is any number other than s, $n \neq \#S$; but by construction,

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[27]See, e.g., Priest (2017), 2.4.

$s \neq \#S$ as well. Hence, $\forall z \neg z = \langle S \rangle$, and so $\forall z \neg (G(z) \wedge z = \langle S \rangle \wedge F(z, [S]))$. That is, $I([S])$. So the soa s is both effable and ineffable.

We may now add a monadic truth predicate to the language. It is well known that any interpretation of the kind we have been using can be extended to an interpretation of the language augmented by T, which maintains the interpretation of the arithmetic vocabulary, but which validates the T-Schema in the form: $T \langle A \rangle \dashv\vdash A$.[28]

In the extended language, we may define Ox as:

- $\exists y (Ty \wedge Eyx)$

It is then easy to check that $T \langle A \rangle \dashv\vdash O[A]$. For suppose that $T \langle A \rangle$ then since $E \langle A \rangle [A]$, $\exists y (Ty \wedge Ey[A])$; that is, $O[A]$. For the converse, if $Ex[A]$, then, by construction, this x must be $\#A$. So if $\exists y (Ty \wedge Ex[A])$, then $\exists y (Ty \wedge x = \langle A \rangle)$. That is, $T \langle A \rangle$.

We have, then, a precise theory of the notions in question. Moreover, much of what is true in the model is quite consistent. In particular, arithmetical claims that do not concern s behave quite consistently.

5.4 Reflections on the Theory

As a little thought shows, the key move in the theory which makes some soas effable and ineffable is the behaviour of the number s. Note that in LP the consequence relation does not contrapose. In particular, we have $\exists z(z = x \wedge A(z)) \dashv\vdash A(x)$, but we do not not have $\neg \exists z(z = x \wedge A(z)) \dashv\vdash \neg A(x)$ due to the possible inconsistent behaviour of the identity predicate.

Nor is this a simple technical trick. If S is effable and ineffable, then $I \langle S \rangle$ and $\neg I \langle S \rangle$. Since s is $\#S$, then, for some P, Ps and $\neg Ps$. The Leibniz Principle of the difference of discernibles tells us that if for some P, Pa and $\neg Pa$ then $a \neq b$. Hence $s \neq s$. So the contradictory behaviour of s is exactly what we should expect in this context.

On a quite different note, the machinery gives us a theory of soas that can be both effable and ineffable. In might be more accurate, however, to call it a *schematic* theory. For it tells us nothing about the nature of the soas in question. We have taken them simply to be numbers. One might think of this as an artifact. However, a better way of looking at the matter is this. Just as we have thought of gödel numbers as the codes of sentences,

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[28]See Priest (2002), §8.

we might think of the non-gödel-numbers as the codes of soas. The theory itself tells us nothing about what these soas actually are. For this, we need a theory which does so, to which our theory may be adjoined. Thus, if that theory is Kant's, in the extended vocabuliary of the adjunction, it will be the case that:

- I[The categories cannot be applied to noumena]

Or if the theory is Wittgenstgein's, it will be the case that:

- I[Propositions cannot represent logical form]

Soas such as these would then give determinate content to our s. s would then no longer be *merely* a code number. The information would tell us exactly which soa it was the code number of.[29]

Finally, because the theory we have is schematic in this sense, it can be adjoined to any theory of the Kant/Wittgenstein kind, which tells us that some things are ineffable, and says what some of these things are. In this way, it is a quite general theory of contradictory ineffablity.

6   Conclusion

The projects of Kant's *Critique* and Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* deliver contradictions at the limits of what can be said. The theories themselves say what they imply cannot be said. Nor is the contradiction an aberration: it is delivered by the very core elements of these projects. If one is not to junk the projects entirely, one could, of course, simply take back some of these core elements, enough to avoid the contradiction. The response considered in the last section is quite different. It may require one to revise the underlying logic of the projects—though only in exceptional cases—but it does not require one to reject any of the core metaphysical assumptions. In that sense,

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[29]And given such a theory, we might well want to make the code numbers of soas mirror the structure of soas, in exactly the same way that gödel-numbers mirror the structure of sentences. We might also, then, use this structure to define f in a less arbitrary way, so that if $f\langle A\rangle = [A]$ and $f\langle B\rangle = [B]$, then $f\langle A \wedge B\rangle = [A \wedge B]$—where the $\wedge$ on the right hand side is the operation which conjoins soas. Note that the countabilty of the domain is not a problem. If we are dealing with a theory that concerns more than a countable number of soas, we can take ourselves to be working in set theory (of which arithmetic is a part). The set of soas can then be as big as one wishes.

it is not revisionary at all. Indeed, it just follows these assumptions through to their logical conclusions.

Given a theory of the Kant/Wittgenstein kind, we may think of soas as divided into the effable and the ineffable. Some things will be consistently on the effable side of the boundary. (For Kant, these are statements about phenomena; for Wittgenstein, these are empirical statements.) There are, presumably, also thing which are consistently on the other side, though clearly no examples of such can be given. One can think of the things that are effable and ineffable as on the boundary of the two regions, belonging to both sides.[30] Indeed, one can think of them as *constituting* the boundary. We may then take our theory to provide a quite general account of what happens at the boundary of language.

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