WITTGENSTEIN'S *TRACTATUS LOGICO-PHILOSOPHICUS*

AND KAFKA'S *OKTAVHEFTE*:

A COMPARATIVE STYLISTIC AND PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS

by

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Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* and Kafka's *Oktavhefte*: A Comparative Stylistic

  and Philosophical Analysis

Thesis directed by Associate Professor Davide Stimilli and Assistant Professor Henry Pickford

In the mid 1920s, reflecting the common concern of the so-called "*Sprachkrise*" [*Crisis of Language*], both Ludwig Wittgenstein and Franz Kafka were composing writings deeply concerned with language's ability to express human thought. In his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, Wittgenstein established the foundation of his early linguistic theory and attempted to draw the boundary of meaningful language. At the same time, Kafka developed his thoughts of language and ethics in the third and fourth volumes of the *Oktavhefte*. The analog between the *Tractatus* and the *Oktavhefte* is evident not only in their philosophical concepts of language, but also their choice of the aphoristic style. This parallel is not a mere coincidence, but rather motivated by historical possibility and theoretical necessity.

My paper compares these two works, showing that Wittgenstein and Kafka shared an understanding of language as a domain bound within the physical world and hence incapable of expressing our spiritual being. Both emphasized the importance of this limitation, suggesting that we should be conscious of the boundary in order to transcend it into a "higher realm" of the ethical and the aesthetic. However, Wittgenstein and Kafka adopted different methodologies to achieve this transcendence. Presenting itself as a rigorous philosophical writing, Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* constantly reminds its reader of the limitation of its own logical and philosophical language by claiming itself to be "nonsense" and only a transcendent ladder which the reader

should get rid of after climbing up. Without constructing rigorous logical arguments, Kafka was able to criticize language, especially the unnaturalness of natural language, from within language itself. Furthermore, his writing indicates that the poetic nature of language once made manifest can transcend the boundary of language.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Both Ludwig Wittgenstein and Franz Kafka were deeply concerned with the nature of

language and its ability to express human thought. In his major philosophical work, *Tractatus*

Logico-Philosophicus, Wittgenstein established the foundation of his early linguistic theory,

which attempted to draw the boundary of meaningful language. During the same decade, Kafka

developed his thoughts on language and ethics in the third and fourth volumes of the *Oktavhefte*

that include a collection of aphorisms. An analogy between the *Tractatus* and the *Oktavhefte* is

evident not only in their philosophical conceptions of language, but also in their choice of an

aphoristic style of exposition. This parallel is not a mere coincidence, but rather is motivated by

historical possibility and theoretical necessity.

The *Tractatus* and the *Oktavhefte* bear similar historical marks. At the beginning of the

twentieth century, the limits of language became central to discussions among intellectuals in

Europe, especially in the German-speaking area. The so-called "*Sprachkrise*" primarily dealt

with the problem of language skepticism and with doubts about the ability of language to express

human thought. This concern was initially motived by a search for the foundation of ethics,

which manifested itself as a critique of language (*Sprachkritik*) that prevailed among the most

influential thinkers of the time, such as Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Karl Kraus, Fritz Mauthner,

Wittgenstein, and Kafka.

There is no doubt that Wittgenstein shared similar insights with his Viennese

contemporaries regarding the limits of language; however, the essence of Wittgenstein's

linguistic philosophy is overlooked if one interprets the *Tractatus* simply as a theory of

"language skepticism".[1] In the preface, Wittgenstein asserted the existence of a limit to the expression of thoughts, and stated that "die Grenze wird also nur in der Sprache gezogen werden können und was jenseits der Grenze liegt, wird einfach Unsinn sein" (TLP 9). However, what belongs to the "Unsinn" carries significant weight and, according to Wittgenstein, includes the expression of ethical and aesthetic values[2]:

> 6.42 Darum kann es sich keine Sätze der Ethik geben.
>
> Sätze können nichts Höheres ausdrücken.
>
> 6.421 Es ist klar, daß sich die Ethik nicht aussprechen läßt.
>
> Die Ethik ist transzendental.
>
> (Ethik und Ästhetik sind Eins.)

In other words, what is categorized as "nonsense" is elevated to a "higher" realm. In this way Wittgenstein distinguished himself from the main stream of "language skeptics", arguing that what is beyond the limits of language is not at all worthless, but on the contrary holds significant value.

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[1] Scholars such as Rebecca Schuman have interpreted Wittgenstein and Kafka's works as expressions of language skepticism. In her dissertation, "In der Sprachkolonie: Franz Kafka's World and the Limits of Language", Schuman uses Wittgenstein's philosophy of language as the theoretical foundation for an analysis of Kafka's literary works and argues that "Kafka's 'language crisis' is less a crisis and more an expression of a complex language skepticism—a skepticism that calls into question both the referential capabilities of language and the perceptive capabilities of its users" (Schuman 1-2). However, other scholars, Joseph Sharkey for instance, view Wittgenstein and Kafka's works as reaching beyond language skepticism. Sharkey argues for a "skepticism of the skepticism of language" in his book *Idling the Engine: Linguistic Skepticism in and Around Cortázar, Kafka, and Joyce*. He states, "all of his [Kafka's] fiction is not simply a poetic anticipation of poststructuralist linguistic skepticism; it does not merely whisper a bit of simple advice, over and over again: *Language doesn't work*"(Sharkey 190). He demonstrates instead the twofold nature of Kafka and Wittgenstein's attitudes towards the representative function of language: on the one hand, they explore the boundary of this function; on the other hand, they maintain an optimistic attitude towards the limits of language.

[2] Wittgenstein distinguishes between two kinds of "meaninglessness". In his book *Beyond the Limits of Thought* Graham Priest explains that "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 sense, something has sense if its formulation does not violate the canons of conceptual grammar … 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')" (Priest 188). For instance, statements of ethics and aesthetic are *unsinnig*.

A complex attitude towards the inabilities of language was favored by Kafka as well. In the *Oktavhefte,* he expressed a very similar insight concerning the limits of language: "die Sprache kann für alles außerhalb der sinnlichen Welt nur andeutungsweise, aber niemals auch nur annähernd vergleichsweise gebraucht werden, da sie entsprechend der sinnlichen Welt nur vom Besitz und seinen Beziehungen handelt" (*Oktavhefte* 57). However, this statement did not inhibit Kafka from making statements that go beyond the sensible world. Gabriele von Natzmer Cooper describes Kafka's twofold attitude towards language as follows:

> He also experienced moments of intoxicating pleasure, when language poured out of him in marvelous sentences, so that it would be very misleading to draw him as a writer who looked on his medium with fundamental distrust. He was struck by language as a living phenomenon, a manifestation of the human spirit and an integral part of human life; it is hard to fit all this into the one-dimensional perspective of theoretical skepticism Kafka is sometimes said to have adopted (Cooper 131).

Although both Wittgenstein and Kafka held the limits of meaningful language to lie within the sensible world, neither of them hesitated to use "nonsensical" language in their works. This conflict is embodied in their choice of an aphoristic literary form.

Wittgenstein and Kafka were not the only thinkers who saw the aphoristic form as a potential expressive tool for dealing with the capacity of language; other main figures in the movement of the "*Sprachkrise"*, such as Hofmannsthal, Kraus and Mauthner, also engaged in exploring and applying aphoristic expressions in their works. This follows from the innate relationship between aphorisms and the crisis of language described by Richard Gray, in his *Constructive Destruction: Kafka's Aphorisms*:

> The aphorism is conditioned by the aphorist's love-hate relationship with language, which culminates in the attempt to overcome language through language itself. The aphorist is aware of two inherent dangers in language: one is the fear that language devolves into nonsense whenever important, unique recognitions need to be expressed; the other is on the opposite extreme, namely the fear that language makes things all-too sensible. (Gray 61)

It is plausible to perceive Wittgenstein and Kafka as aphorists in Gray's sense; for both the *Tractatus* and the *Oktavhefte* rely on the literary genre of the aphorism, and rely on its capability of expressing the inexpressible.

To explore this relation between their philosophical content and literary form, I shall analyze Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* and Kafka's *Oktavhefte* through two types of comparison: stylistic and philosophical. In the former, I examine the definition and history of the aphorism, followed by an analysis of Wittgenstein and Kafka's conceptions of it. After introducing the general backgrounds of the *Tractatus* and the *Oktavhefte*, I give a detailed structural and textual analysis of these works. In the philosophical comparison, I discuss the authors' respective understandings of the limitation of language with regards to the relation between the subject and the world. Here I offer a close reading of selected aphorisms from both works. Both the literary form and the philosophical content are to be of equal weight in my comparative analysis, since each is indispensable for understanding the other.

CHAPTER II

STYLISTIC COMPARISON: THE APHORISM

A. The Aphorism as a Literary Genre

How should the literary genre of the aphorism be defined? In his article "The Aphorism: Fragments from the Breakdown of Reason," Gary Saul Morson expresses the difficulty of giving a simple descriptive definition:

> Aphorism, dictum, maxim, slogan, witticism, hypothesis, thought, and many other terms for short expressions have no clear definition and are used in contradictory or overlapping ways. A book of aphorisms often contains expressions that in another classification would be called witticisms and maxims. Moreover, some of these terms are often used to refer to any short expression (broad definition) and a particular type (narrow). (Morson 409)

Hence, he argues, the broad scope and vagueness of this genre demands a dialectical rather than a narrowly descriptive definition: a work of aphorisms is not only defined by its genre but also defines it. "Once we know what a novel or an aphorism is all about," Morson states, "we can read a given work in relation to the class. By so doing, we may enrich ideas the genre characteristically treats… Genre becomes essential to meaning, a quasi-part of the work itself" (Morson 411). Furthermore, the etymology of the term reflects the perplexity involved in defining 'aphorism': it is derived from the Greek 'aphorismos', which means 'Abgrenzung', i.e. 'definition'.

Besides the broad scope and vagueness of its definition, the philosophical nature of the aphorism has led to it escaping the attention of many literary critics. Meanwhile, due to its

literary nature, the aphorism is largely neglected by philosophers and has therefore lacked

systematic examination from a strictly philosophical perspective. [3] The difficulty of placing the

aphorism as an object of study belonging to a single academic discipline is considered by some

scholars as an advantage, rather than a shortcoming, of the genre. Dorota Szczesniak, for

instance, describes the interdisciplinary feature of the aphorism as follows:

> Die Spezifik des Aphorismus, der derartige antithetische Paare wie Subjektivität
>
> und Allgemeingültigkeit, Dichtung und Philosophie, Literatur und Wissenschaft,
>
> Kunst und Recht zu verbinden vermag, führte zum Entstehen eines Topos des
>
> Aphorismus als "Mischprodukts", also einer Gattung, die sich an den Nahstellen
>
> von Literatur, Philosophie, Recht und Kulturwissenschaft befindet. Es kann
>
> demnach nicht verwundern, dass parallel zu den literaturwissenschaftlichen
>
> Forschungen über den Aphorismus auch philosophisch orientierte
>
> Untersuchungen zu diesem Genre betrieben wurden. (Szczesniak 19)

 On the one hand, the indeterminacy and interdisciplinarity of the aphorism results in a confusion

of the categorization of its genre; on the other hand, it reflects a complex nature that enables the

genre to be independent from disciplinary confinements. The complexity of the aphorism is

suitable for the aphorists who pursue a linguistic expression that is able to challenge the

established understanding of literature, philosophy and language. Examples of this can be found

throughout the employment of the aphorism in the German literary tradition, especially in its

development during the *Sprachkrise* in the early 20th century.

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[3]Richard Gray demonstrates the confusion regarding the categorization of the aphorism as a literary or philosophical genre: "The aphorism has received relatively little attention from literary historians or theoreticians. The increasing compartmentalization of academic disciplines is partially responsible for this state of affairs, since the aphorism, falling between philosophy and literature, has often been ignored by literary critics because it was considered to belong to the intellectual territory of philosophers" (Gray 16).

B. The German Tradition of the Aphorism

According to Richard Gray, German literature has long been involved in the evolution of the aphorism. The term "Aphorismus" can be traced back to ancient Greece, and to Hippocrates, who first applied the word 'aphorismos' in medical practice "to denote a concise summary of symptoms and treatments for common illnesses" (24) and the term maintained a therapeutic connection as a "medizinischer Lehrsatz" in German. Since the original Hippocratic definition, the aphorism has been adopted in different realms including natural science, religion, philosophy, and literature. It has commonly served to designate expressions of truth telling that include a critical and destructive perspective and a break with traditional values. The early German aphorists such as Georg Christoph Lichtenberg, Johann von Goethe, Friedrich Schlegel, Friedrich von Schiller and Friedrich Nietzsche inherited this mutinous nature of the aphorism, described by Gray as follows:

> Thus the aphorism takes root in Germany not as an expressive form placed in the service of traditional values; nor does it undertake the *dogmatic* presentation of new values; rather it strives to imbue static, rigid values and truths with fluidity and flexibility, assigning to them the character of general hypotheses whose validity must continuously be tested through the application to particular instances. […] Out of the portrayal of this conflict, this dialectical interchange between hypothesis and experiment, between law and application, the German aphorism derives its progressive quality. (Gray 37)

This dialectical quality of the aphorism was further refined and amplified by the German aphorists in the early 20th century. An understanding of the aphorism's dialectical nature is not only important for following the new developments of the aphoristic form of expression during

this period, but also for answering the questions: to what extent did Wittgenstein and Kafka inherit the traditional use of the aphorism, and how did they integrate it with their innovative aphoristic productions?

C. The Aphorism in the *Sprachkrise*

During the *Sprachkrise*, the evolution of the aphorism was accelerated, in response to the radical cultural and socio-political changes of the declining Habsburg Empire. The established ethical ideals and practices of the Habsburg bourgeois were especially criticized by the radical thinkers as artificial and hypocritical. In order to challenge the established moral and social order, the intellectuals targeted its very foundation: language. However, the criticism of language faced a fundamental paradox that was the central problem of all *Sprachkritik*: how can a language be criticized from within itself? In other words, how can the critique of language attack the medium that it uses?

Among many language critics of the time, Mauthner's approach had great influence on his peers, especially on the formation of the *Tractatus*. According to Mauthner all problems in philosophy are problems of language. The problem that concerns him most is language's inability to express "truth". "Truth", for Mauthner, "can only consist in the perfect identity of language with the objective reality it is intended to express" (Gray 101). However, reality "knows only individuals and specific, distinct instances", while language only functions "through the formation of types and categories" (Gray 101-102). Since language is only capable of expressing general terms and concepts, and therefore fails to pick out any singular object, this perfect identity can never be achieved between language and the world. This characteristic was conceived by Mauthner as the "metaphorical" nature of language, and he believed it made

language a "mendacious" phenomenon.[4] Hence, this "metaphoricity" of language makes it

unsuitable as a medium of scientific and philosophical investigation (c.f. Gray 101-102). In his

Wörterbuch, Mauthner elucidated the deceitful nature of language and the task of the critique of

language as follows:

> Die Philosophie ist Erkenntnistheorie, Erkenntnistheorie ist Sprachkritik;
> Sprachkritik aber ist die Arbeit an dem befreienden Gedanken, daß die Menschen
> mit den Wörtern ihrer Sprachen und mit den Worten ihrer Philosophien niemals
> über eine bildliche Darstellung der Welt hinaus gelangen können. (Mauthner i).

On the other hand, his view that the nature of language was metaphoricity led Mauthner

to its mystical aspects. He stated that language has a mystical and metaphorical power that makes

it suitable for poetry but not for science and philosophy. This belief was presented in his writings

about the critique of language. By using the metaphorical and aphoristic writing style, Mauthner

intended to create an "artistic medium" capable of critiquing itself, that would thus allow him to

target the very language being used for criticism. Gray describes this methodology as an artistic

"metalanguage": "Use of language, despite logical skepticism in its efficacy, is legitimized by

the mystical belief in language's potency. Through this affirmative application of metaphor,

language becomes, so to speak, its own metalanguage" (Gray 102).

The artistic metalanguage takes advantage of the problematic aspects of everyday

language and philosophical language by consciously using and exaggerating these qualities. This

methodology was shown in his aphoristic style of writing, which Szczesinak describes in the

following way: "Zusammenhanglosigkeit, Kürze, Konzision, Einprägsamkeit und Pointierung.

Dabei hänge der literarische Welt eines Aphorismus entscheidend von der individuellen

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[4] Similar view can be seen in Kafka's aphorism, where he states that any attempt to reach the truth through language will turn into a lie. In section 1.4 I shall further elaborate Kafka's view on language's ability of expressing truth.

Ausgestaltung dieser vereinzelt auftretenden, originellen Prosa-Kurzform ab" (Szczesinak 23).
Hence, the fragmentary features of the aphorism allow Mauthner to explore the boundaries of language in a literary form.

However, other intellectuals, including Wittgenstein, argued against Mauthner's approach of metaphorizing language. Based on the *Tractatus*, any elaborate use of poetic language in order to reach the mystical is "Unsinn". This conclusion is rooted in Wittgenstein's different understanding of language. In the next section I will demonstrate and compare Wittgenstein and Kafka's conceptions of the aphoristic form in response to Mauthner's critique of language.

D. The Aphorism in the *Tractatus* and the *Oktavhefte*

1. Wittgenstein and Kafka's conceptions of the aphorism

Wittgenstein distinguished his project in the *Tractatus* from Mauthner's critique of language. In 4.0031 he states that "Alle Philosophie ist 'Sprachkritik'. (Allerdings nicht im Sinne Mauthners)" (TLP 4.0031). In contrast to Mauthner's proposal to exclude scientific truth from the realm of language, Wittgenstein claimed that such truth belonged nowhere else but in the domain of language; however, he also claimed that ethics and aesthetics were beyond the limits of language and belonged to the "unsinnig" as what is "höher" and of greater value.[5] To achieve this higher realm, he believed that one could climb up a transcendental "ladder" and meant the *Tractatus* to offer its readers such a "ladder". Wittgenstein describes this as follows:

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[5] See Wittgenstein's statements in the *Tractatus*: "Darum kann es auch nicht keine Sätze der Ethik geben. Sätze können nichts Höheres ausdrücken"(6.42). "Es ist klar, daß sich die Ethik nicht aussprechen läßt. Die Ethik ist transzendental. (Ethik und Ästhetik sind Eins)" (6.421)

> Meine Sätze erläutern dadurch, daß sie der, welcher mich versteht, am Ende als
>
> unsinnig erkennt, wenn er durch sie – auf ihnen – über sie hinausgestiegen ist. (Er
>
> muß sozusagen die Leiter wegwerfen, nachdem er auf ihr hinaufgestiegen ist.)
>
> Er muß diese Sätze überwinden, dann sieht er die Welt richtig. (TLP 6.54)

Wittgenstein's project was a paradoxical one: his statements about the "unsinnig" nature of

structural statements[6] are structural themselves and therefore "unsinnig".[7] An awareness of the

metaphorical and aphoristic nature of the *Tractatus* is necessary for understanding the

philosopher's intention. In *Wittgenstein's Vienna* Allen Janik and Stephen Toulmin describe the

Tractatus as "a book of aphorisms":

> Wittgenstein's propositions are thus neither statements of a scientific nature, nor
>
> are they metalinguistic. Rather, they are *aphorisms* which, by giving a generalized
>
> critique, at the same time convey a world-view […] Once the meaning of this has
>
> been grasped they are no longer necessary. Once one has seen that values are
>
> something not to be debated, but to be acted upon, one no longer needs the
>
> *Tractatus* […] the only way of demonstrating its limitations was by a book of
>
> aphorisms, which showed how the two spheres of facts and value were to be
>
> distinguished. (Janik and Toulmin 200)

The aphoristic nature of the *Tractatus* is also reflected in Wittgenstein's view on what lies

beyond the limitation of language. According to Wittgenstein, there exist things that are

unsayable, and these are the mystical (c.f. *Tractatus* 6.522). In the last thesis of the *Tractatus*, he

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[6] A "structural" statement, according to Graham Priest, is a statement about the internal structure and logical form of some other statements. (c.f. Priest 186).
[7] Janik and Toulmin, in *Wittgenstein's Vienna,* state, "a common objection to the *Tractatus* is that it ends in contradiction, since, in its attempt to transcend the sayable, it too must fail" (199).

concludes that these things should be kept in silence: "wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muß man schweigen" (TLP 7).

However, Wittgenstein's solution — to accept the limitations of language by passing them over in silence — did not satisfy Kafka, whose interest in language was to communicate and express his inner state. The limitations of language are caused by its inability to mediate between inner and external states, and its failure to unify the subject and the world. However, Kafka, as a writer, pursued truth in both directions:

> Kafka's goal was "truth," i.e., the perfect *adequatio* between word and feeling, between linguistic sign and inner being. This "truth," to be sure, had two aspects pointing in opposite directions. One of those was communal, collective, and universalist, the other deeply personal, individual, and subjective. (Sokel 39)

More specifically, Kafka claimed that language betrays the author, because it cannot reflect the true state of his inner world and therefore fails to convey the truth to the reader. This insight into the limitations of language made the aphorism a natural choice for expressing the thoughts contained in the *Oktavhefte*.

Many of Kafka's aphorisms concern language's inability to express truth. He holds a view similar to Mauthner's, that the condition of truth depends on the absolute identity between language and the objective reality it is intended to express. This absolute identity means that truth is indivisible. However, the process of knowing truth must be mediated through language, and language is fragmental and thus incapable of expressing truth. This is evident in aphorism 130, where Kafka states that "Wahrheit ist unteilbar, kann sich also selbst nicht erkennen; wer

sie erkennen will, muß Lüge sein"(Kafka 130).[8] There is a significant similarity between this and an aphorism from Wittgenstein's *Vermischte Bemerkungen*:

> Man *kann* nicht die Wahrheit sagen; wenn man sich noch nicht selbst bezwungen hat. Man *kann* sie nicht sagen; – aber nicht, weil man noch nicht gescheit genug ist.
>
> Nur der kann sie sagen der schon in ihr *ruht*; nicht der, der noch in der Unwahrheit ruht, und nur einmal aus der Unwahrheit heraus nach ihr langt.
>
> (Wittgenstein, *Vermischte Bemerkungen*, 73)

There are three points to be made in comparing these aphorisms. First, unlike Wittgenstein, Kafka does not distinguish between structural statement and non-structural ones. Understanding the distinction between a "structural" and a "non-structural" statement is essential for differentiating Wittgenstein and Kafka's conceptions of truth. According to Graham Priest, a structural statement (proposition) involves claims about logical form or the internal structure of itself or other statements. Second, for Wittgenstein there are thee kinds of truth-value: true/truth, false/untruth and non-truth-valued/nonsense; structural statements belong to the last[9]. For Kafka, there are only two values: truth or untruth, and the structural statement simply belongs to the latter (see *Figure 1* on the following page). Third, for Wittgenstein, breaking the limitations of language results in nonsense but not falsity, and things that call for such expression should be "passed over in silence"; for Kafka, breaking the limitation of language will result in untruth,

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[8] Compared to the first draft of this aphorism, before being modified to be included in the numbered aphorisms: "es gibt nur zweierlei: Wahrheit und Lüge. Die Wahrheit ist unteilbar, kann sich also selbst nicht erkennen; wer sie erkennen will, muß Lüge sein" (Kafka 69). Here, the difference between truth and untruth is even more apparent.

[9] Gray believes that "a number of elements connect this text to Kafka's aphorism relating to truth and lie. First there is the absolutization of the duality between truth and untruth – one rests either in one or the other, not in both, and above all, not in some third sphere that is neither truth nor untruth" (Gray 212). In my opinion, it is very questionable that Gray's claim of "the absolutization of the duality between truth and untruth" can be applied to Wittgenstein's statement.

namely lie.[10] Gray describes the differences between Wittgenstein and Kafka's approaches, noting that while "Kafka insists on the aporia that one cannot express truth except from outside of truth itself, and thus from the sphere of lie, Wittgenstein seems to allow for the possibility that one is able to express truth from within its very domain. Kafka's text makes such resolution appear impossible" (Gray 212). Without constructing a transcendental ladder, Kafka's concern with the limitations of language seems to remain unresolved. Now the problem seems to circle back: how is it possible to criticize a language by using the same language? Kafka's aphoristic method may have the potential to solve this dilemma: sympathizing with Mauthner's methodology of artistic metalanguage, Kafka consciously applies the medium of aphorisms in his writings. Before a detailed examination of Kafka's approach and its similarity/difference with that of Wittgenstein's, I shall first offer a general historical background of both author's aphoristic productions.
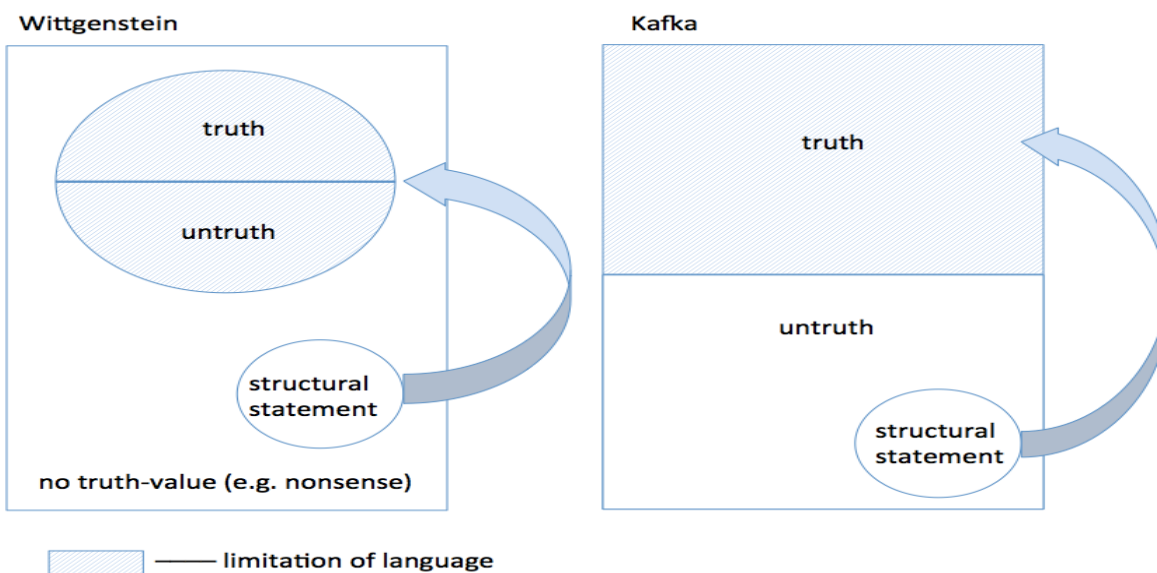

Figure 1. Structural statements for Wittgenstein and Kafka

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[10] In this sense, Kafka's aphorisms are lies. Nonetheless, they possess great value. The importance of Kafka's 'lies' will be elaborated in following sections.

2. The General Backgrounds of the *Tractatus* and the *Oktavhefte*

a) The Birth of the *Tractatus*

  Wittgenstein's earliest thoughts for the *Tractatus* started to take form in the early 1910s, and focused on the theory of logic. Later on they developed into an analysis of the logical form of propositions. By this point the theoretical foundation for the logical theory presented in the *Tractatus* had almost been established, but the *Tractatus* would not have been completed without the ontological insights that he gained through his experiences as a soldier on the front lines of the First World War. Ray Monk points out the remarkable influence of Wittgenstein's enlisted years on the final form of the *Tractatus* in his book, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius*:

> If Wittgenstein had spent the entire war behind the lines, the *Tractatus* would have remained what it almost certainly was in its first inception of 1915: a treatise on the nature of logic. The remarks in it about ethics, aesthetics, the soul and the meaning of life have their origin in precisely the 'impulse to philosophical reflection' that Schopenhauer describes, an impulse that has as its stimulus a knowledge of death, suffering and misery. (Monk 137)

At the outbreak of the First World War, Wittgenstein immediately decided to join the Austro-Hungarian Army. From 1914 to 1916 he served as a volunteer, and at the end of 1916 he enlisted in a fighting unit of the Eastern Front. It may appear to us that Wittgenstein's decision, like lots of young Germans in the Habsburg Empire, was motivated by the feeling of duty to defend his country. However, there was a deeper motivation behind his enlistment: the desire for a fundamental self-transformation by a close encounter with death. This is evident from the diaries written during the war, where he wrote, "Now I have the chance to be a decent human being, for I am standing eye to eye with death" (Monk 112). Indeed, the war brought the personal

transformation he had wished for through a long and bitter process. This process was crucial for the formation of the *Tractatus*, and a large portion of the work was taken from the journals he kept in this period.

During the first two years of the war, he developed the 'Picture Theory of language' — "the idea that propositions are a picture of the reality they describe" (Monk 118). This new development connected his theory of logic and language to his theory of ontology, and explained how language represents the world through their shared logical structure. Monk describes this theory as follows:

> […] one might say a *proposition* serves as a model, or *picture*, of a state of affairs, by virtue of a similar correspondence between *its* parts and the world. The way in which the parts of the proposition are combined – the *structure* of the proposition – depicts a possible combination of elements in reality, a possible state of affairs.
>
> This is to say, there is – and must be – a logical structure which enables language to represent reality. (Monk 118)

The picture theory led Wittgenstein further towards a thesis on the meaning of life, and eventually to mysticism. In the later years of the war, observations on the human soul, the meaning of the self and the world, death and life, belief and religion prevailed in his writings, some of which remained unchanged in the *Tractatus*. For instance, paragraph 6.521 of the *Tractatus* can be found in his notebooks of mid July 1916: "Die Lösung des Problems des Lebens merkt man am Verschwinden dieses Problems. (Ist nicht dies der Grund, warum Menschen, denen der Sinn des Lebens nach langen Zweifeln klar wurde, warum diese dann nicht sagen konnten, worin dieser Sinn bestand?)" His belief that the questions of ontology are

inexpressible led him to the theory of mysticism, which was his focus during the last two years of the war.

Wittgenstein included his thoughts on the mystical in the *Tractatus*, writing "Es gibt allerdings Unaussprechliches. Dies *zeigt* sich, es ist das Mystische" (TLP 6.522).[11] The mystical, according to Wittgenstein, belongs to the inexpressible and beyond the domain of language along with other things of great value like ethical and aesthetic values. By the summer of 1918, the *Tractatus* had taken its final shape, concluding in a single statement without any sub-section, mystical and aphoristic in nature: "Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muß man schweigen" (TLP 7).

b) Kafka's Aphoristic Writings from Zürau

While Wittgenstein was preparing himself for his encounter with death on the front lines, Kafka was facing a fatal battle with his physical being. In the middle of August 1917, Kafka began to show symptoms of tuberculosis and soon received a confirmative diagnosis. The illness was interpreted by Kafka as a natural consequence of his years of struggling between two modes of life as a bureaucrat and a writer. The former was a bread-earning job that provided a minimal physical condition for living, while the latter was seen as his real destiny, where his spiritual needs were nurtured. Kafka believed that the tuberculosis was the end of this long-lasting battle, in the sense that his physical being was finally conceding to the needs of his intellectual being: "manchmal scheint es mir, Gehirn und Lunge hätten sich ohne mein Wissen verständigt. 'So geht es nicht weiter' hat das Gehirn gesagt und nach fünf Jahren hat sich die Lunge bereit erklärt, zu helfen" (Kafka, *Brief aus Zürau an Max Brod (BR 161),* mid-September 1917). Kafka's

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[11] In paragraph 4.1212, Wittgenstein made the distinguishing between '*sprechen*' and '*zeigen*': "was gezeigt werden *kann, kann* nicht gesagt werden" (TLP 4.1212).

worsening health conditions brought him a sense of relief and induced a new mental state (c.f. Binder 510-512).

Moving to his sister Ottla's house in the little village of Zürau, Kafka entered into a relaxing period of solitude, which was described by Max Brod as an "escape from the world into purity" (Calasso 116). There is no doubt that the changing conditions of his life were reflected in his philosophical insights and the transformation of the style of his writing. Roberto Calasso explains that Kafka's aphoristic style was an essential distinguishing feature of this new stage:

> Kafka had never before devised this sort of layout and sequencing for one of his texts […] it was as if they [the collection of aphorisms from the third and forth *Oktavhefte*] had been taken out of a certain *form* in order to be articulated in another […] The conception of the manuscript calls attention to its *unicum* nature: the *Zürau Aphorisms* bear little resemblance to anything that came before, though there are hidden affinities. (Calasso viii)

His philosophical development at this stage was reflected in the inner relationship between his deliberate choice of the aphoristic expression and his insights regarding the limitation of language. As Heinz Politzer points out, between the years of 1917 and 1920 "Kafka consolidated the literary gains that he had made. He discovered a second reality behind the reality he experienced. With a still trembling and yet often highly skillful hand, he created symbols that through their paradoxical form expressed the inexpressible without betraying it" (Politzer 84). Kafka turned to the paradoxical nature of the aphorism to express the "inexpressible" within the domain of the object language.

The formations of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* and Kafka's aphorisms in the *Oktavhefte* share a great number of similarities. During this period, both Wittgenstein and Kafka were driven

by the strong desire to achieve a fundamental self-transformation by going through a progress of self-destruction. Wittgenstein actively sought an encounter death in the battlefield; for Kafka, this self-destructive urge was manifest passively, in the form of disease and a fatal battle between his mental and physical being. Their struggles were engraved in their works and both were of great therapeutic value to the authors themselves (Especially their engagement of aphorisms, as its ancient meaning suggests, serves as a therapeutic "medizinischer Lehrsatz"). They were the authors' attempts to understand the nature of the self and the meaning of life and the world. As I have shown, these ontological insights were fundamentally connected with questions about the limitations of language. In order to gain a deeper understanding of this connection, I shall give a structural and textual analysis of both works in the following sections.

3. Wittgenstein and Kafka's Aphoristic Methodologies: A Structural Analysis

a) A Structural Comparison: the Numerical System

Both the *Tractatus* and the *Oktavhefte* are arranged in numerical systems. In this section I will compare their similarities and differences, and explain the reasons behind, and the importance of, their arrangement.

(1) The Numerical System of the *Tractatus*: Deceiving or Illuminating?

Wittgenstein divides the *Tractatus* into seven primary propositions, and each (except the last) contains further parts based on an order Wittgenstein describes as follows:

> Die Dezimalzahlen als Nummern der einzelnen Sätze deuten das logische
> Gewicht der Sätze an, den Nachdruck, der auf ihnen in meiner Darstellung liegt.
> Die Sätze n.1, n.2, n.3, etc. sind Bemerkungen zum Satze No. n; die Sätze n.m1,
> n.m2, etc. Bemerkungen zum Sätze No. n.m; und so weiter. (TLP 11)

This instructs us to read the *Tractatus* by interpreting the numbers as signs marking "das logische Gewicht" of the propositions, but some scholars claim that Wittgenstein's interpretation of his numerical system is more deceiving than illuminating. For instance, Max Black comments that this system is "so misleading as to suggest a private joke at the reader's expense" (Rozema 108) and claims that the numerical system of the *Tractatus* is irrelevant to its content and thus should not be taken seriously. Ben Ware, in his article "Ethics and the Literary in Wittgenstein's Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus", expresses a similar view, arguing that the numerical system is meant to "deceive the reader into philosophical clarity" (Ware 604). However, I believe that the dismissal of Wittgenstein's own interpretation of the numerical system results in a flawed and incomplete understanding of the *Tractatus*. An examination of some propositions from the *Tractatus* can help demonstrate the relation between the content and the numbering system.

According to Wittgenstein's footnote, propositions assigned to numbers with the same number of digits should have the same logical importance. For instance, all propositions with a one-digit number n are on the same logical level and all propositions with a two-digit number n.m are comments on the proposition n, and so on. In light of this footnote, we can infer that propositions 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.4, 5.5, 5.6 carry the same weight and all comment on proposition 5, "Der Satz ist einen Wahrheitsfunktion der Elementarsätze. (Der Elementarsatz ist eine Wahrheitsfunktion seiner selbst.)" This is a plausible explanation when applied to propositions 5.1 to 5.5, for they are further elucidations of the concept of a truth function and its relation to the logical form of propositions. However, it appears questionable when we take proposition 5.6, "*Die Grenzen meiner Sprache* bedeuten die Grenzen meiner Welt", into consideration. How can this ontological statement be a remark on a statement of propositional logic? In other words, how does propositional logic relate to the limits of "my language" and "my world"? The inner

connection between these two statements becomes clear when we read the commentarial propositions of 5.6. In 5.61, Wittgenstein points out the connection between logic and the world: "Die Logik erfüllt die Welt; Die Grenzen der Welt sind auch ihre Grenzen". In 5.62, he explains that the limits of logic are not only the limits of the world, but also of my world, because *the* world is *my* world: "Daß die Welt *meine* Welt ist, das zeigt sich darin, daß die Grenzen *der* Sprache (der Sprache, die allein ich verstehe) die Grenzen *meiner* Welt bedeuten". Thus, by arranging 5.6 under 5, Wittgenstein *shows* that the study of the limits of propositional logic is directly connected with the understanding of the self on an ontological level. By placing 5.6 on the same logical level as 5.1 to 5.5, he indicates that an understanding of ontology is as important as an understanding of logic. However, the numerical system should not be interpreted *merely* as a measure of the logical progress of his thoughts. The structure of the work also has an aphoristic function, which is essential for Wittgenstein's construction of the "ladder" (cf. p.8 of this paper).

A number of scholars hold the position that studying the literary aspects displayed in the structure of the *Tractatus* is essential to understanding Wittgenstein's paradoxical project of criticizing the nonsensical use of language by using the nonsensical language he criticizes. For instance, in his article "Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus: A 'Poem' by Ludwig Wittgenstein", David Rozema compares the structure of Wittgenstein's numbering system with that of absurdist poetry:

> Reading it this way, we might say that the poem is divided into stanzas, but the division is not shown in spaces between the various sets of "propositions"—that would be too much like obvious, non-absurdist poetry—but, rather, by means of the numbering method Wittgenstein uses.
>
> [...]

This means of dividing the stanzas is just what we might expect from someone who reads a poem as if it were a set of propositions: the white space is wasted space. How the poem looks is unimportant. If you want to indicate what's more or less important, use a rating system. Naturally, then, if one were to write (or read) the Tractatus as an absurd poem that shows the absurdity of taking a poem to be a set of propositions, then one would reflect (or see) what the poem is supposed to show—its absurdity—in its form just as much as in its content. (Rozema 352)

As Rozema points out, the "absurdity" of the *Tractatus* is not only expressed deliberately by its content, but also *shown* through its structure. This analysis calls on Wittgenstein's distinction between saying, 'sagen', and showing, 'zeigen', "Was gezeigt werden *kann*, *kann* nicht gesagt werden" (TLP 4.1212).

A proposition *says* what it represents and "Der Satz kann die gesamte Wirklichkeit darstellen, aber er kann nicht darstellen, was er mit der Wirklichkeit gemein haben muß, um sie darstellen zu können – die logische Form". Propositions about logical form must lie outside logic itself, which according to 5.61 mentioned above, means that they lie outside the world. Because language is limited to what is within the world, this means that it is impossible to analyze the logical structure of the language as a whole and any attempt to do so will result in nonsense. However, this is not to say that the logical form is unknowable to us. Instead of being *said* through language, it is *shown* to us in the structure of language:

4.121 Der Satz kann die logische Form nicht darstellen, sie spiegelt sich in ihm.

Was sich in der Sprache spiegelt, kann sie nicht darstellen.

Was *sich* in der Sprache ausdrückt, können *wir* nicht durch sie ausdrücken.

Der Satz *zeigt* die logische Form der Wirklichkeit.

Er weist sie auf.

A common and intuitive criticism of the *Tractatus* is that most of the propositions in the *Tractatus* are invalid, because they are statements about logical form, which can only be shown but not said. As discussed previously, the author himself seems unable to deny this fundamental paradox in his work: in 6.53 Wittgenstein affirms the nonsensical nature of his project and advises his reader to use it as a "Leiter", which should be thrown away "nachdem er auf ihr hinaufgestiegen ist" (TLP 6.54). However, this statement should be viewed as an aphorism instead of a proposition about logic. Only in this way can we grasp the author's true intention in the project: providing the "ladder" as a way of showing the limits of language instead of saying what they are. This intention is evident in Wittgenstein's numbering method, which allows the logical form of the *Tractatus* to be shown in its structure. In other words, the logical connection between the propositions is manifested in how they stand in their numerical relations. This further elucidates proposition 5.6 where the relation between logic and ontology is not said in any propositions but is, instead, shown in this proposition's relation with other 5.m propositions, and in the fact that it serves as a comment to the primary proposition, 5. A further example can be seen at the end of the *Tractatus* in the previously mentioned single proposition: "7. Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muß man schweigen." In this way, the meaning of the proposition is explicitly manifest in the numerical structure of a primary proposition containing no room for commentary. Hence the number system becomes an indicator of the limits of language.

(2) The Numerical System of the *Oktavhefte*: a Challenge to the Unnaturalness of the Natural Language

The first group of Kafka's aphorisms took shape in the third and fourth *Oktavhefte*, written from October 1917 to February 1918. In the fall of 1920, Kafka selected two-thirds of these aphorisms and copied them onto numbered slips of paper with slight modifications.[12] Calasso offers a very detailed description of Kafka's original manuscript:

> Loose pages—a hundred and three of them—in horizontal format, measuring 14.5 by 11.5 centimeters. The pages were very thin and pale yellow, obtained by quartering a number of sheets of stationery. All the fragments were numbered sequentially, in the upper-right corner, and they varied from single brief sentences to blocks of a dozen sentences. (Calasso viii)

It has already been mentioned that this way of numbering is very remarkable compared to Kafka's other writings. Sometimes, it has been compared with that of the *Tractatus*. The latter was arranged by Wittgenstein following a meticulous logical order, but it is questionable whether Kafka intended to follow a logical order and scholars such as Gray deny the possibility. Since the author himself did not comment on this numerical system on any occasion, the search after his true intention may end in vain. In order to avoid this dead end, I shall distinguish between two methods of analyzing the functions of the numbering: the first is based on the author's subjective intention; the second is based on an observation of the actual and objective effects caused by this system. In Kafka's case, the latter seems more promising, and it will be applied in the following analysis.

In contrast to Kafka's novels and short stories that are based on a continuous narrative structure, his collection of aphorisms appears to be very fragmental and concise. While the definition of the aphorism as a literary genre can be very ambiguous, Kafka's collection of

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[12] These aphorisms were published by Brod in 1953 under the title *"Betrachtungen über Sünde, Leid, Hoffnung den wahren Weg"* (c.f. Gray 216).

aphorisms is unlikely to be confused with his narratives. Here, the numerical system plays an essential role. First, each number acts as an interruption that marks each section with a clear division so that the numerical system functions on a structural level to enforce a non-narrative and fragmental effect. Second, the sequence of numbers allows one to read through the whole book in a nonlinear way by avoiding the restriction of a linear timeline in a narrative, and granting the reader the freedom and flexibility to start with any section without losing track of the structure of the book.

One might argue against the discontinuous effect caused by the enumeration, since the numerical system itself is based on a consistent sequence. However, the continuity of the natural numbers should be distinguished from that of natural language. In natural language, especially in narratives, one dose not enumerate each sentence, such as the 1st sentence is …, the 2nd sentence is …, and so on, and by introducing this numerical system into the ordering of natural language an effect of artificialness and unnaturalness is created. In using natural language, one rarely realizes that one is restricted to a linear timeline, but when stating a sentence, one cannot at the same time state another. Being accustomed to this restriction, one may lose a reflective and critical perspective on the expressive medium itself. However, people have multiple thoughts at the same time and the inability to articulate them all at the same time is an important limitation. Kafka uses this artificial way of breaking down each sentence, on the one hand, to remind his reader of this restriction imposed by natural language, but on the other hand, this form allows one to escape from that linear system. Hence, it is a constant reminder of the unnaturalness of natural language for thought. In this way, the attention of Kafka's reader is drawn to the form of the aphoristic expression as well as its content.

Since natural language is the primary medium bridging the internal and external worlds, we come back to Kafka's conflict between internal and external existence. Natural language is based on the law of the sensible world and bound by the restrictions of time and space. But the internal world doesn't follow these rules: logically related thoughts can happen at the same time and do not have to follow the restrictions of linear time.

In contrast to the *Tractatus*, Kafka does not group the aphorisms by topic; instead they are poured out, in a way casually. For instance, the three aphorisms 35, 37 and 46—characterized by Gray as contrasting "between concepts of possession and being" (Gray 213)—do not appear in sequence. In between these aphorisms Kafka switches to other topics and then circles back after several sections. The aphorisms between 37 and 46 cover various themes and range from theological to psychological reflections and the relationship between each is very loose. While Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* was arranged based on a strict logical order and the number of each aphorism indicates its logical interrelation with others, Kafka does not let one form the impression that there are logical connections between each section. The fact that the physical order and numbering of the aphorisms does not correspond to a logical interconnection creates another interruption preventing the reader from interpreting his collection of aphorisms as a completed and systematic philosophical work.

The tension between the arrangement and the numbering of the aphorisms indicates the non-systematic, nonlinear inner world contrasting with the external, which appears coherent and systematic because external beings follow physical laws. Language, belonging to the sensible world, is insufficient to reflect the authentic image of the inner world so the attempt to describe something outside the limitations of time and place is damned to fail if put into a linguistic medium. The unique characteristic of Kafka's aphorisms is that they allow the reader to glimpse

this inner world, even if only "andeutungsweise". In Kafka's own words, "Die Sprache kann für alles außerhalb der sinnlichen Welt nur andeutungsweise, aber niemals auch nur annähernd vergleichsweise gebraucht werden, da sie, entsprechend der sinnlichen Welt, nur vom Besitz und seinen Beziehungen handelt" (57).

CHAPTER III

PHILOSOPHICAL COMPARISON: THE LIMITS OF LANGUAGE WITH REGARDS TO

THE SUBJECT AND THE WORLD

In the preceding sections, I focused on the literary dimension of Wittgenstein and Kafka's aphoristic writings. In this section, I shall compare their philosophical aspects by offering a close reading of selected excerpts from the *Tractatus* and the *Oktavhefte*. However, the analysis of the literary dimension in both works is indispensible for the elucidation of their philosophical importance and reading these works as aphorisms is essential to understanding their theoretical components.

A. Aphorisms referred to in this section

The following aphorisms from the *Oktavhefte* and the *Tractatus* will be the center of the discussion in the following sections, and thus will be referred to frequently. For the convenience of the reader, I provide them here for quick reference.

Oktavhefte:

35. Es gibt kein Haben, nur ein Sein, nur ein nach letztem Atem, nach Ersticken verlangendes Sein.

37. Seine Antwort auf die Behauptung, er besitze vielleicht, sei aber nicht, war nur Zittern und Herzklopfen.

46. Das Wort 'sein' bedeutet im Deutschen beides: Da-sein und Ihm-gehören.

57. Die Sprache kann für alles außerhalb der sinnlichen Welt nur

andeutungsweise, aber niemals auch nur annähernd vergleichsweise gebraucht

werden, da sie, entsprechend der sinnlichen Welt, nur vom Besitz und seinen

Beziehungen handelt.

Tractatus Logico-philosophicus:

5.6   *Die Grenzen meiner Sprache* bedeuten die Grenzen meiner Welt.

5.62 [...] Daß die Welt *meine* Welt ist, das zeigt sich darin, dass die Grenzen *der*

Sprache (der Sprache, die allein ich verstehe) die Grenzen *meiner* Welt

bedeuten.

5.63   Ich bin meine Welt. (Der Mikrokosmos)

5.631 Das denkende, vorstellende, Subjekt gibt es nicht.

Wenn ich ein Buch schriebe „Die Welt, wie ich sie vorfand", so wäre darin

auch über meinen Leib zu berichten und zu sagen, welche Glieder meinem

Willen unterstehen und welche nicht, etc., dies ist nämlich eine Methode,

das Subjekt zu isolieren, oder vielmehr zu zeigen, daß es in einem wichtigen

Sinne kein Subjekt gibt: Von ihm allein nämlich könnte in diesem Buche

nicht die Rede sein.

5.632 Das Subjekt gehört nicht zur Welt, sondern es ist eine Grenze der Welt.

5.633 Wo in der Welt ist ein metaphysisches Subjekt zu merken?

Du sagst, es verhält sich hier ganz wie mit Auge und Gesichtsfeld. Aber das

Auge siehst du wirklich *nicht*.

Und nichts *am Gesichtsfeld* lässt darauf schließen, dass es von einem Auge

gesehen wird.

B. The Distinction between '*haben'* and '*sein'*

Both the *Oktavhefte* and the *Tractatus* face the paradoxical question: how can one attack the ambiguity of language by using the ambiguous object language? In order to understand Kafka and Wittgenstein's strategies of resolving this perplexity, one should not only focus on the contents of their philosophical claims, but also the particular way that they use language. It is plausible to distinguish between two types of meanings of the statements in both authors' writings. It is always assumed that Kafka's works should be read figuratively. However, in this way one may overlook Kafka's emphasis on the language that he uses. In other words, Kafka's aphorisms frequently present a tension between the literal meaning and the figurative meaning. By balancing and contrasting these two meanings, Kafka is able to draw the reader's attention to the ambiguity of language and the medium of his aphorisms. Conversely, when reading the statements in the *Tractatus*, one should take account of their figurative meanings, instead of interpreting them purely as propositions of logic.

Kafka's distinction between the two main German verbs "haben" and "sein" is a remarkable case for the way of reading I propose and this distinction is also essential for the system of the *Tractatus*. In aphorism 46, Kafka writes, "Das Wort 'sein' bedeutet im Deutschen beides: Dasein und Ihm gehören. This points out the dual meanings of the German word 'sein': 'Da-sein' und 'Ihm-gehören'. There are two usages of this homonymous word: first, as an auxiliary verb that means 'to be' or 'being'; second as a possessive adjective that means 'his'. In other words, when used as a verb it presents a mode of being, while as an adjective it indicates a

relation of possession. Kafka's analysis of the word 'sein' as a homograph is of great importance, for it divulges the ambiguity of language. The language of daily use appears inconspicuous to us, since we use it as granted without much reflection. However, in this aphorism Kafka disabuses us of our seemingly thorough understanding of what is meant by daily language in order to evoke the readers' awareness of the language itself. Moreover, the confusion of our thoughts is often caused by the misunderstanding of language and thus requires a careful examination. "Die Sprache verkleidet den Gedanken", writes Wittgenstein in 4.002, and illuminates this metaphor by reference to the complexity of everyday language, "Die stillschweigenden Abmachungen zum Verständnis der Umgangssprache sind enorm kompliziert." Acknowledging the perplexity of our implicit conventions, Wittgenstein and Kafka seek a methodology that would enable them to clarify the ambiguities of language. This would be a foundation on which an understanding of the subject and the world could be developed clearly, and only in this way could they get their reader to the point where "Er muß diese Sätze überwinden, dann sieht er die Welt richtig" (TLP 6.54).

C. The Subject and Its Relation to the World

In aphorism 35, Kafka states that "es gibt kein Haben, nur ein Sein, nur ein nach letztem Atem, nach Ersticken verlangendes Sein". An interpretation based on its literal meaning would read it as a simple denial of the possessive relation and a positing of the relation of being, which apparently contradicts the opposing claim in aphorism 37. However, the way that Kafka expresses this statement reveals a paradox. The German phrase 'es gibt...' is commonly translated as 'there is', and during the translation, the indication of the possessive relation goes missing. Based on its literal meaning, a proposition containing the verb 'geben' is a three-place

predicate that involves a subject *a*, a direct object *b,* and an indirect object *c*. Intuitively, in order to give *b* to *c*, *a* has to first have *b*. Thus the proposition '*a* gives *b* to c' can be further analyzed into two propositions: '*a* has *b*' and '*b* is given to *c*'. Thus, the verb 'geben' contains a hidden possessive relation. In other words, the form of Kafka's statement, by using the word 'geben', is based on a relation of possession, which contradicts the meaning of this proposition itself.

There is a second paradox if one takes the figurative meaning of this aphorism into consideration: the 'sein', as Gray elaborates the sentence, is "a being which longs for non-being, a breathing that desires final breath and suffocation" (Gray 213). These two paradoxes can be reconciled by noticing the change of tone between the main clause and the dependent clause. The main clause sounds very matter of fact but this objective tone is undermined by the independent clause, which is colored with strong subjective and humanized imagery. In the light of Kafka and Wittgenstein's conceptions of truth and the subject, the following interpretation can be made.

The verb 'sein' as a linguistic phenomenon has its limitations in representing truth and the essence of the subject. There are different uses of 'sein', which cause ambiguity in the understanding of this word. Wittgenstein describes this fundamental confusion as follows:

> In der Umgangssprache kommt es ungemein häufig vor, daß dasselbe Wort auf verschiedene Art und Weise bezeichnet – also verschiedenen Symbolen angehört –, oder, daß zwei Wörter, die auf verschiedene Art und Weise bezeichnen, äußerlich in der gleichen Weise im Satze angewandt werden.
> So erscheint das Wort "ist" als Kopula, als Gleichheitszeichen und als Ausdruck der Existenz; "existieren" als Eigenschaftswort; wir reden von *Etwas*, aber auch davon, daß *etwas* geschieht. (TLP 3.323)

In this paragraph Wittgenstein designates three main uses of 'sein': as a copula, as a sign for identity, and as an expression of existence. The confusion arises from the problem that all three meanings of the word 'sein' have the same linguistic sign. He generalized the problem caused by this kind of misuse of signs as the most common mistakes in philosophy: "So entstehen leicht die fundamentalsten Verwechslungen (deren die ganze Philosophie voll ist)" (TLP 3.324).

Kafka pushes the problematic aspect of 'sein' even further by pointing out its inability to present the subject as a pure unity in its undivided truth. According to Kafka, truth is an indivisible unity. The divided use of 'sein' disqualifies it as a proper medium for representing the absolute wholeness of the subject. Wittgenstein expresses a similar view on the indivisible and essentially coherent nature of the subject, in 5.5421, where he states that "Eine zusammengesetzte Seele wäre nämlich keine Seele mehr" (TLP 5.5421).

This is evident in aphorism 37 of the *Oktavhefte*, where Kafka describes a nameless figure who is facing the accusation that "er besitze vielleicht, sei aber nicht". Since this person is unnamed, his struggle may indicate the general situation of any individual. This struggle is desperate and there is no way to defend his authentic being by using a language that is only capable of expressing the possessive relationships.

Wittgenstein expresses a similar view in the *Tractatus* regarding the possessive relation of 'haben' and its inability to represent the subject's authentic mode of existence. In 5.632 he states that the subject does not *belong* to the world; instead it *is* the limit of the world. Here too, the objective tone of the statement changes into a subjective one in the superordinate proposition 5.63, where Wittgenstein uses a first person pronoun 'ich' and a possessive adjective 'mein'. This employment of the possessive adjective 'mein' starts earlier in 5.6: "*Die Grenzen meiner Sprache* bedeuten die Grenzen meiner Welt". According to the numerical system of the

Tractatus, all the paragraphs of 5.6n are comments on this superordinate proposition. However, there seems to be a discontinuity in his use of the subjective tone. For instance, in the first commentary paragraph, 5.61, he switches back to the objective tone by clarifying the inner relation between *the* world and logic. This is followed by 5.62, where Wittgenstein claims "Daß die Welt *meine* Welt ist, das zeigt sich darin, daß die Grenzen *der* Sprache (der Sprache, die allein ich verstehe) die Grenzen der *meiner* Welt bedeuten." The switch back-and-forth between objectivity and subjectivity leads to the following questions: what does this change of grammatical person indicate? What is its significance for understanding the nature of the subject as it is conceived within the framework of the *Tractatus*?

In order to comprehend Wittgenstein's attitude towards the subject, we should first understand what he attempts to achieve through the project of the *Tractatus*. In his article "Subjectivity in the *Tractatus*", Hans Sluga points out that the *Tractatus* was composed under the influence of a historical moment when philosophy attempted to construct a view of the world that was purely objective and independent from any human subjectivity:

> We must look at the *Tractatus* first of all as part of that great project that has animated so much of modern science and philosophy: the attempt to characterize the world in entirely objective terms. That project has drawn much of its strength from the success of the natural sciences, and these, in turn, have been seen as deriving their strength from the rejection of the old Aristotelian conception of the world which, it is said, interpreted things in human and, hence, subjective terms. (Sluga 125)

This is evident in Wittgenstein's view of the configuration of the world. At the beginning of the *Tractatus*, he claims that the world is the totality of "facts", and that "facts" are the existence of

states of affairs (TLP 1.1, 2). By a "state of affairs" Wittgenstein means a combination of objects (TLP 2.01). If the subject were in the world, it would be either an object or a combination of objects. This idea appears to be unacceptable for Wittgenstein. For him, the subject is complex, yet it cannot be a complex that is made up by a combination of objects, because "Eine zusammengesetzte Seele wäre nämlich keine Seele mehr" (TLP 5.5421). Thus, the subject must be outside the world. This argument is supported by 5.631, where Wittgenstein postulates that in a book entitled *Die Welt, wie ich sie vorfand*, one should include a list of one's body parts, and exhaust which parts are subordinate to his will. For instance, my hands are subordinate to my will, and my limbs and other parts as well. In this way one can infer that my body parts taken as a whole—my physical being— is subordinate to my will. This method of isolating the subject from his physical components shows the subject cannot be on the same ontological level of his physical being; instead, it must be a metaphysical subject that belongs to the higher realm of the 'unsinnig'.

Wittgenstein elucidates this statement further in 5.633, with a metaphor that raises the question of where the metaphysical subject could be located in the world, and what its relation could be to the world. In his discussion of the eye and the visual field, the eye stands for the metaphysical subject, while the visual field refers to the world. The objects in the visual field can been seen by the eye but the eye itself is not in its field of vision and thus cannot be seen. Furthermore, there is nothing in the visual filed that would permit one to infer that it is seen by an eye (c.f. TLP 5.633). Accordingly, the world can be perceived by the metaphysical subject but the metaphysical subject itself is not in the world, and nothing in the world allows one to infer anything about the metaphysical subject.

Wittgenstein's elucidation of the relation between the metaphysical subject and the world explains the relation of identity that holds between the I and *my* world, i.e., I am *my* world. However, it does not answer the question, what is the relation between *my* world and another individual's world? If my world is *the* world (TLP 5.62), another person's world should also be *the* world. Can we then infer that another person's world is identical with *my* world? Sluga explains that Wittgenstein's view of the metaphysical subject is based on a universal perspective instead of an individual one and that his indifference to individuality is counterintuitive to our usual way of understanding an individual subject as a part of a community:

> […] the *Tractatus'* account of the subject has no place for the individuality we normally ascribe to human subjectivity. We generally believe that human subjects are in the world, that they are distinguished by having different bodies, that there is a multiplicity of embodied subjects which together form a human community. (Sluga 133)

This is rooted in Wittgenstein's treatment of the limitation of language. In 5.62, he claims that the identity relation between *my* world and *the* world is manifested in the fact that "die Grenzen *der* Sprache (der Sprache, die allein ich verstehe) die Grenzen *meiner* Welt bedeuten", making the conflict between objectivity and subjectivity apparent in the explanation of "*der* Sprache" as "der Sprache, die allein ich verstehe". The parenthetical clause requires special attention: if *der* Sprache stands for the language that is universally understood (where the definite article *der* emphasizes its objectivity), what is the indication of restricting "der Sprache" by the clause "die allein ich verstehe"? Robert J. Fogelin offers two possible readings: first, it might refer to "a private language, a language that I alone speak"; second, it could have nothing to do with privacy, but "merely a reference to that one and only language I speak" (Fogelin 98). The first

reading appears to be quite straightforward and reinforces other statements on subjectivity found in section 5 (5.63 for instance). However, this reading leaves the problem caused by Wittgenstein's neglect of individuality unsolved. Fogelin addresses this concern and asks, "Where does Wittgenstein establish the essential privacy of each person's representation of the world?" (Fogelin 93) This question, according to Fogelin, is not addressed in the *Tractatus*. This "unsubstantiated doctrine of privacy" can possibly be avoided if we adopt the second reading, which does not involve the privacy of language. This reading also seems to be more truthful to the German text: following the word order in the German sentence, it makes more sense to translate "der Sprache, die allein ich verstehe" as "the language which *alone* I understand", rather than "the language which I *alone* understand" (c.f. Fogelin 94). However, this reading leads to an even more bewildering problem: according to the second reading, "my world is limited to that world what my language represents. Others might speak this same language and be subject to the same limitations", which means that the subject must employ "the thought in order to represent reality" (Fogelin 94). In order to employ his thought, the subject must be on the same ontological level, namely, in the world. In the preceding sections I have demonstrated Wittgenstein's rejection of this idea (see p. 28-29) and in 5.631 he explicitly denies the existence of the subject as a "thinking, representing subject". These considerations make the first reading more plausible, because, though it lacks further explanation, the second leads to a contradiction with Wittgenstein's doctrine of the metaphysical subject. Making sense of the first reading, however, requires an understanding of Wittgenstein's figurative use of language: this private relation between language and myself is not an objective relation in the world, and thus it is "unsayable". Taking into consideration the aphoristic aspect of this statement, it becomes clear

that this is not a proposition of logic. It should, rather, be perceived as a picture, through which Wittgenstein "shows" us his true intention. Sluga summarizes this as follows:

> Language in the Tractatus is a medium for representing the world, not for communicating in it. Language is my language, not our language, the language of a human community. The world is my world, not a world in which human beings struggle together, in which they strive together to understand and subdue it. Subjectivity is not something shared, but only a question of the I. In the Notebooks Wittgenstein writes: The I, the I is what is deeply mysterious! (p. 80)

In other words, the 'I' in the *Tractatus* represents the universal state of the human being, rather the private experience of an individual. This can be seen as Wittgenstein's approach of subjectification of the objective.

The occurrence of the first person pronoun, 'ich', is less frequent in Kafka's aphoristic expressions than in the *Tractatus*. Instead, a considerable amount of the aphorisms in the *Oktavhefte* are articulated with the third person pronoun 'er'. There are several hypotheses regarding Kafka's preference for using a third person perspective. First, it could indicate Kafka's tactic of utilizing the literal meaning of a word in a figurative way. For instance, in aphorism 46, by elucidating the dual meanings of the homonymous word 'sein', Kafka successfully unveils the confusion between two modes of existence hidden behind language's literal meanings. Second, the use of a third person masculine noun may indicate a veiled biographical perspective in the *Oktavhefte* and the aphorisms might depict the author's personal experiences. However, why would Kafka prefer to express himself in the third person instead of directly voicing subjective assertions with 'ich'? The answer to this question gives a hint for the third hypothesis, namely a process of "objectification of the subjective" (Gray 228).

In aphorism 37, Kafka attenuates the subjectivity of his insights by using the third person pronoun 'er', which gives the proposition an objective coloring. In this way, Kafka attempts to free the proposition from the restrictions of a personal perspective in order to construct a common ground for the possibility of communicating the insights carried by this aphorism. In contrast to Wittgenstein, whose concept of subjectivity is not concerned with individuality and its relation to communality, Kafka presupposes that the subject is an individual in a community. For him, the understanding of language is not only about logical validity and self-understanding, but also its ability to function as a communicative medium between individuals. Gray identifies this solicitude as the essential element in Kafka's aphorisms:

> Kafka's art was always an art of self-expression, but that drive toward self-expression was constantly undercut by a crisis of communication. […] the central issue for Kafka was the discovery of a mode of communication of the self that would somehow bridge the gap between the individuality of his experiences and the communality of communication. In other words: How can the absolutely individual become generally communicable to other absolute individuals? How can the experience of one individual be related to the experience of other individuals without the danger of prevarication predicated on the universalizing, de-individualizing thrust of every act of communication? (Gray 250)

The subject in Kafka's aphorisms is placed *in* the world as an individual in a communicative relation with the others. Kafka's subject, unlike Wittgenstein's, is not the higher, but rather the inner. Accordingly, Kafka's concern with the limitation of language is focused not on its ability to mediate between the metaphysical subject and the world, but rather its capacity as a medium between the inner self and the world of other subjects.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

Both Wittgenstein and Kafka acknowledge that language is limited to the sensible world, and that there are indeed things that are unsayable. For Wittgenstein, what is unsayable belongs to the 'Höher', i.e., aesthetics, ethics, and above all the metaphysical subject. Any proposition that attempts to articulate such things is "Unsinn". For Kafka, the ineffable is located in the 'inner' state.

Their different understandings of the limits of language are reflected in the nature of their projects. As a philosopher, Wittgenstein attempts to draw the limits of language for the sake of logical validity in the *Tractatus*. As a writer, Kafka expresses his concern with language's capacity to communicate through his aphorisms in the *Oktavhefte*, struggling to convey his inner state through a language belonging to the external, sensible world. In a letter to his fiancé Milena Jesenská, Kafka writes, "[…] ich suche immerfort etwas Nicht-Mitteilbares mitzuteilen, etwas Unerklärliches zu erklären, von etwas zu erzählen, was ich in den Knochen habe und was nur in diesen Knochen erlebt kann" (Kafka, *Briefe an Milena*, 249). And in a letter to another fiancé, Felice Bauer, he describes that those things "in his bones" are "kaum in menschliche Worte zu übersetzende Dinge"(Kafka, *Briefe an Felice*, 381). This Kafkaesque dilemma shows that even the inadequacy of language to express the internal world is forced to take the form of a language that is only capable of describing sensible beings.

However, based on Wittgenstein's view that the unsayable manifests itself through the structure of the language of objects and facts within the sensible world, he might have said that Kafka's expression *shows* precisely what he attempted to *say*. Wittgenstein viewed this as the

mark of great poetry. In a letter to his friend Paul Engelmann, Wittgenstein comments on

Ludwig Uhland's poem *Graf Eberhards Weißdorn* as follows:

> "Das Uhlandsche Gedicht ist wirklich großartig. Und es ist so: Wenn man sich
>
> nicht bemüht das Unaussprechliche auszusprechen, so geht *nichts* verloren.
>
> Sondern das Unaussprechliche ist, – unaussprechlich – in dem Ausgesprochenen
>
> *enthalten*!" (Wittgenstein's letter to Engelmann, 9.4.17)

He applied the same principle to his own work, striving to reach things beyond the sensible

world by using expressible language through which the inexpressible could manifest itself. In a

letter to his publisher, Ludwig von Ficker, Wittgenstein writes, "Ich wollte nämlich schreiben,

mein Werk [the *Tractatus*] bestehe aus zwei Teilen: aus dem, der hir [sic] vorliegt, und aus

alledem, was ich nicht geschrieben habe. Und gerade dieser zweite Teil ist der Wichtige"

(Wittgenstein, *Briefe an Ludwig von Ficker*, 35). The written part of the *Tractatus* was composed

for the sake of the unwritten.

However, neither Wittgenstein nor Kafka hesitated to use nonsensical language in their

writings. Understanding the *Tractatus* and the *Oktavhefte* as aphoristic compositions is essential

for grasping the authors' intentions and methodologies in their employment of nonsensical

language. An aphorism, by its nature, is not a logical proposition; it is not a picture that shows its

sense. More importantly, it has the ability to reflect upon itself. For Wittgenstein and Kafka, the

use of aphorisms enabled them to critique language without constructing an artificial

metalanguage. In other words, it made possible their conscious use of nonsense to attack the

unconscious nonsense that disguises thought.

Around 1946 to 1947, Wittgenstein was introduced to Kafka's novels by his student

Elizabeth Anscombe. After reading them he said: "This man gives himself a great deal of trouble

not writing about his trouble" (Monk 498). However, this comment can be applied precisely to

his own project in the *Tractatus*: in drawing the limits of the inexpressible, Wittgenstein devoted

an immense amount of effort to the task of not talking about things that were of great value for

him. In a conversation with the Vienna Circle, Wittgenstein described the attempt to talk about

ethical experience as the "impulse to run up against the limits of language":

> In der Ethik macht man immer den Versuch, etwas zu sagen, was das Wesen der
>
> Sache nicht betrifft und nie betreffen kann. Es ist a priori gewiß: Was immer man
>
> für eine Definition zum Guten geben mag — es ist immer nur ein
>
> Mißverständnis, das Eigentliche, was man in Wirklichkeit meint, entspreche sich
>
> im Ausdruck (Moore). Aber die Tendenz, das Anrennen, *deutet auf etwas hin*.
>
> Das hat schon der heilige Augustin gewußt, wenn er sagt: Was du Mistviech, du
>
> willst keinen Unsinn reden? Rede nur einen Unsinn, er macht nichts!
>
> (Wittgenstein, *Wittgenstein und der Wiener Kreis*, 69)

Even though the limits of linguistic expression exist, Wittgenstein suggested that the attempt to

run against those boundaries would not end up in vain. By running against it one will at least

learn where the boundary lies, and one's knowledge of language will be expanded. Kafka shared

the same belief and described the whole of literature as such an attempt. In a diary entry from

January 17th, 1922 he wrote: "Diese ganze Literatur ist Ansturm gegen die Grenze" (Kafka,

Tagebücher 878).

Wittgenstein and Kafka's efforts to explore the boundary of language not only represent

the foremost concern of German literature and philosophy in the early 20th century, but also

contribute to human being's endeavors and struggles for self-understanding throughout history.

The beauty and complexity of the *Tractatus* and the *Oktavhefte,* and their many similarities and

significant differences make this comparison worthy of further study.

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