

## 1 Introduction

Aesthetics is usually understood as the philosophical investigation of art, beauty, and taste. Standard questions within the field pertain to the essence of art, artistic and aesthetic value, aesthetic experience and judgment, and the meaning, understanding, and interpretation of artworks. Most of these themes figure in Ludwig Wittgenstein's writing, where, from 1915 onward, we find observations on aesthetic contemplation, reason-giving in aesthetics, and the nature of musical meaning and understanding. In Wittgenstein's *Nachlass*, there are also numerous remarks on composers, literary authors, poets, and, for example, the notion of a genius, testifying to his awareness of the aesthetic debates prevalent in his cultural milieu. Music in particular had a dominant role in Wittgenstein's life and thought, which is natural given his early immersion in Viennese musical life.<sup>1</sup>

However, in addition to its narrow disciplinary sense, the term aesthetics has a broader philosophical use. In the broad sense of the term, originating in the work of Alexander Baumgarten and underscored by Immanuel Kant's philosophical project, aesthetics refers to the investigation of the domain of sensibility in general (Baumgarten 1954, §CXVI; CPR A21/B35–36). As such, aesthetics is explicitly contrasted with the conceptual domain of logic. Sensible perception, imagination, and feeling are treated as a realm independent of and irreducible to the discursive realm of concepts, contributing to cognition on its own terms.

The two senses of "aesthetics" have natural points of overlap, because judgments about art and other objects of aesthetic appreciation are often treated as paradigm examples of judgments pertaining to sensibility. Kant too ultimately connects transcendental aesthetic as discussed in the *Critique of Pure Reason* with his account of pure judgments of taste, in spite of his initial hesitation to deem the latter worthy of transcendental investigation (CPR A21/B35fn; see Guyer and Wood 2000, xiii–xiv). Nonetheless, it is possible to address issues belonging to aesthetics in the narrow sense independently of sensibility (as in the quest for the definition of "art"), and questions pertaining to sensibility independently of philosophy of art and beauty (when investigating, e.g., the nature of visual experience).

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<sup>1</sup> Wittgenstein's family was exceptionally musical and regularly hosted musical events attended by people like Johannes Brahms, Josef Joachim, Gustav Mahler, Josef Labor, and Richard Strauss. It is also indicative of the family's eminence in musical circles that when Wittgenstein's brother, the concert pianist Paul Wittgenstein, lost his right arm in the war, Maurice Ravel, Sergei Prokofiev, and Benjamin Britten composed music for the left hand specifically for him. On Wittgenstein's life and family, see Janik and Toulmin 1973; McGuinness 1988; Monk 1990; and Waugh 2008.

The ambiguity of the term contributes to the difficulty of appreciating Wittgenstein's views on aesthetics and their relevance for his philosophy. That Wittgenstein's own usage of the term oscillates between the broad and narrow senses adds to the difficulty. For example, in *Notes Dictated to G. E. Moore in Norway* in 1914, Wittgenstein alludes to Kant's distinction between transcendental aesthetic and transcendental logic. In a discussion on visual spots that may be internally related to each other either spatially or with regard to their color, he states: "We might thus give a sense to the assertion that logical laws are *forms* of thought and space and time *forms* of intuition" (NB, 118). Here, space and time as "forms of intuition" are precisely what Kant's transcendental aesthetic treats and does so independently of aesthetics narrowly conceived (CPR A 21–22/B 35–36).

The word "aesthetics" appears in Wittgenstein's notes for the first time in 1916. He writes: "Ethics must be a condition of the world, like logic. Ethics and aesthetics are one" (NB, 77). Again, the alignment of logic and the amalgamated ethics-cum-aesthetics suggests that the word is used in its broad sense. In his later philosophy, Wittgenstein connects such experiences as observing the lighting in a room, reading a sentence with a peculiar attention, and listening to music to what he calls intransitive understanding, namely, the kind a kind of understanding that cannot be discursively further explained, and even to the question of idealism and realism. These examples similarly disclose a broader understanding of the notion of aesthetics than the disciplinary sense of the term accommodates.

This is not to say that one cannot read some of Wittgenstein's remarks against the backdrop of aesthetics in the disciplinary sense. In his lectures on aesthetics in 1933 and 1938, Wittgenstein addresses the distinction between the beautiful and the agreeable, the justification of aesthetic judgments, the criteria of understanding the arts, and the cultural embeddedness of artefacts. These themes correspond to discussions prevalent in the field of aesthetics. At the same time, other topics central in mainstream aesthetics are absent from Wittgenstein's enquiry. For instance, while Wittgenstein makes observations on specific works of art, the classificatory concept of art does not inform his approach. Nor does he address the definition of the concept "art," central in mainstream aesthetics, even if the topic readily lends itself to his idea of family resemblance and has been treated by reference to it.<sup>2</sup> Wittgenstein's interest lies in complex and historically developing "aesthetic systems" like music and architecture, which he claims

<sup>2</sup> See Weitz 1956. For discussions on art in light of Wittgenstein's philosophy, see, for example, Wollheim 1968; Eldridge 1987; Sedivy 2016, 97–147.

should be investigated “grammatically,” in a way similar to the philosophical investigation of language (LC 9:40; LA II:18).<sup>3</sup>

A characteristic feature of Wittgenstein’s treatment of aesthetics, marking a clear contrast with mainstream analytic aesthetics, is that he does not seem to approach the topic in any systematic fashion. Notwithstanding his lectures where some aesthetic questions are discussed at more length, Wittgenstein’s remarks on aesthetics and the arts typically surface in the context of other topics just to disappear from sight again. In this regard, his approach is closer to the German tradition, where the arts and especially music are allied with such core areas of philosophy as epistemology, metaphysics, and ethics. In the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein refers to music at key moments of his explication of the picture theory of language. In *The Blue and Brown Books*, music is connected to aspect-seeing and the understanding of language. And in the *Philosophical Investigations*, music figures again as an object of comparison for the understanding of language. Some scholars have treated such interconnections as evidence of Wittgenstein’s determination to bring aesthetics to bear on broader philosophical issues much in the same way as Kant did in his *Critique of the Power of Judgment*.<sup>4</sup> Others, by contrast, are less optimistic about relating Wittgenstein’s remarks on aesthetics and the arts to his core concerns and lean toward treating them as his personal musings or cultural commentary of a nonphilosophical kind.<sup>5</sup>

This contribution to *Elements in the Philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein* strives to show that aesthetics plays an important role in Wittgenstein’s philosophy throughout his career. In doing so, the Element draws on the interpretative tradition that emphasizes affinities between Wittgenstein and Kant.<sup>6</sup> I thus disagree with the traditional readings according to which Wittgenstein’s

<sup>3</sup> Edited collections dedicated to Wittgenstein’s aesthetics include Johannessen 1998; Allen and Turvey 2001; Gibson and Huemer 2004; Lewis 2004; Majetschak and Lütterdelfs 2007; Arbo, Le Du, and Plaud 2012; Hagberg 2017. Special issues on the theme have been published in *L’Art du Comprendre* 20, 2011; *Aisthesis* 6 (1), 2013; *Ápeiron: Estudios de filosofía* 10, 2019; and *Estetika: The European Journal of Aesthetics* 57 (1), 2020.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Cavell 1969; Bell 1987; Moore 1987, 1997, 203–206; Appelqvist 2017, 2019b; Day 2017.

<sup>5</sup> This view is common among the representatives of the so-called traditional reading of Wittgenstein’s philosophy and often reflects a strictly disciplinary understanding of aesthetics (see von Wright 1977, ix; Hacker 1986, 101; Glock 1996, 31; Budd 2011, 775; Schroeder 2017, 612).

<sup>6</sup> Accounts on the strength, source, and pervasiveness of Kant’s influence on Wittgenstein and the exegetical detail in which they are explicated vary across the literature. Accordingly, any given Kantian interpretation is Kantian to a greater or lesser degree. Some argue that the similarities between the two can be attributed to Schopenhauer’s influence (e.g., Hacker 1986; Pears 1987; Stern 1995; Sluga 2011). Others have read Wittgenstein more directly in light of Kant’s transcendental idealism. On Kant’s influence on Wittgenstein’s early philosophy, see Stenius 1960; Kannisto 1986; Glock 1992, 1997; Moore 1987, 2013; Appelqvist 2013, 2016. On his influence

remarks on aesthetics (and ethics) cannot be seamlessly fitted into the larger framework of his philosophy. I also contest the resolute readings that, while stressing the ethical and sometimes aesthetic import of Wittgenstein's work, reject the notion of ineffability as central for Wittgenstein's position.<sup>7</sup> From the Kantian viewpoint, ineffability – the principled impossibility of conceptually determining every aspect of our encounter with reality – is but a natural corollary of the essentially nonconceptual domain of aesthetics.

Reading one enigmatic philosopher with the help of another equally challenging and complex thinker has its obvious dangers. Kant's philosophy is subject to as much controversy as Wittgenstein's, and appealing to Kant always involves interpretation. Moreover, if Wittgenstein was influenced by Kant's views, as I argue, those views have been transformed and incorporated into his own project. The affinities between the two also come in degrees. Sometimes we hear but faint echoes of Kant in Wittgenstein's writing, at other times a remark by Wittgenstein reads almost as a paraphrase of Kant's text.<sup>8</sup> Finally, the views of both Kant and Wittgenstein have been appropriated and developed further in aesthetics and elsewhere. It is not always easy to disentangle Wittgenstein's own position from a "Wittgensteinian" position, and the same applies to Kant. I have tried to stay as close as possible to the original texts, but some of Kant's views have become so entrenched in aesthetics that it is occasionally more natural to talk more generally about Kantian views.

Wittgenstein is notoriously sparing with his references to other philosophers, including Kant. It is thus difficult to determine with certainty what the exact sources of his expressed views are. We know that Wittgenstein read *The Critique of Pure Reason* in 1918 and some of his explicit references to Kant appear already in 1914.<sup>9</sup> He also compares Kant favorably to Schopenhauer, and claims that Kant's method is the "right sort of approach" in philosophy (LWL, 73; Rhees 1981, 95). Such remarks would be surprising had Wittgenstein not had first-hand knowledge of Kant's philosophy. Yet, to my knowledge, there is no direct evidence of Wittgenstein reading Kant's *Critique of the Power of*

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on Wittgenstein's later philosophy, see Cavell 1969, 1979; Williams 1981; Bell 1987; Garver 1994; Appelqvist 2017, 2018, 2019b; Ritter 2020.

<sup>7</sup> The resolute reading approaches the *Tractatus* as a text that employs literary techniques, thereby bringing aesthetics to bear on Wittgenstein's work. At the same time, it rejects the interpretation according to which the early Wittgenstein is committed to the idea of inexpressible logical, ethical, or aesthetic knowledge or understanding. See Diamond 1983, 1988, 2000; Kremer 2001; Conant 2002, 2005.

<sup>8</sup> Consider, for example, TLP 2.013 vs. CPR A24/B38; TLP 5.61 and PI §435 vs. CPR A 476/B504; PI §118–119 vs. CPR Axiii; CV, 94 [82] vs. CPR A598/B626.

<sup>9</sup> See McGuinness 1988, 252, 270; Monk 1990, 158. Ian Proops has argued that Wittgenstein's earliest references to Kant betray familiarity with Kant's *Prolegomena* (Proops 2004, 109; see NB, 15; TLP 6.36111).

*Judgment*, although some of Wittgenstein's ideas, such as wallpaper as an example of beauty, strike curiously close to Kant's text (see LC 9:16, 9:20; CPJ 5:229). Given the inconclusiveness of the available evidence, I am reluctant to make strong claims about the actual historical link between Kant and Wittgenstein. It is possible that some of Wittgenstein's Kantian commitments, like the distinctions between the agreeable and the beautiful, between reasons and causes, or between nature and art, have been transmitted through other thinkers. My argument is rather that, regardless of their exact mode of transmission, the affinities between Wittgenstein and Kant are too deep and pervasive to be ignored. Most importantly, I am convinced that only by reading Wittgenstein's remarks on aesthetics in light of Kant's philosophy can we understand their meaning and significance for Wittgenstein's philosophy as a whole.

The structure of this Element follows the chronological development of Wittgenstein's work, beginning from his early philosophy. The primary goal of Section 2 is to cast light on Wittgenstein's alignment of ethics and aesthetics in the context of his early philosophy. The textual evidence of the *Tractatus* is limited, but combining it with the earlier *Notebooks 1914–1916* will help to uncover central features of Wittgenstein's understanding of the perspective that aesthetics and ethics share. The section ends by relating this perspective to the overall framework of the *Tractatus*, especially to its fundamental distinction between saying and showing.

Section 3 explores Wittgenstein's most sustained discussions on aesthetics, available in the lecture notes from 1933 and 1938. Of the two sets of notes, the 1933 notes have been meticulously taken and carefully edited. The 1938 notes, while more well-known, are less reliable in this regard.<sup>10</sup> The key theme figuring in both sets of lectures is the nature of aesthetic judgment and the possibility of its justification. In 1933, Wittgenstein stresses the Kantian contrast between judgments of beauty and of the agreeable, arguing against the possibility of explaining aesthetics in a naturalistic fashion. In the 1938 lectures, the notion of aesthetic explanation, given by reference to reasons rather than causes, is developed further. Like Kant, whose account of beauty combines a subjective and an objective component, Wittgenstein discusses the interface between subjective reactions to aesthetic phenomena and the communally shared rules, conventions, and practices that are constitutive of those phenomena. The argumentative goal of Section 3 is to explicate how the two sides of

<sup>10</sup> See Anscombe's letter to von Wright on March 14, 1984, available at the National Library of Finland; Diamond 2005, 99.

aesthetic judgment come together in a way that anticipates Wittgenstein's mature discussion of rule-following.

Section 4 addresses Wittgenstein's comparison between language and music, a theme mentioned already in his earliest writings and becoming increasingly prominent in his later thought. The issue at stake is the constitution of meaning and the related question of understanding. We find early formulations of Wittgenstein's position in the *Brown Book* and more developed versions of the same ideas in the *Investigations*. After contextualizing Wittgenstein's remarks on musical meaning against the tradition of aesthetics, the section argues that a nonconceptual form of understanding, similar to aesthetic judgment as Wittgenstein understands it, is evoked in the *Investigations* to complement the discursive form of understanding cashed out by reference to rule-formulations.

Section 5 addresses the broader significance of aesthetics in Wittgenstein's philosophy. Starting from Wittgenstein alignment between philosophical and aesthetic investigation, it offers a preliminary analysis of the contribution of aesthetics to his conception of the method of philosophy. A central notion in this context is that of surveyable representation, which Wittgenstein develops in close proximity to aesthetics. As a whole, the interpretation defended in this Element highlights the continuities of Wittgenstein's thought from his earliest philosophical innovations to his mature understanding of language and philosophy.

## 2 Wittgenstein's Early Philosophy

### 2.1 Aesthetics and Ethics

In the *Tractatus*, ethics and aesthetics are claimed to be one (TLP 6.421). Consistent with this claim, most of Wittgenstein's early references to aesthetics appear in the context of his reflection on the purpose of life. The discussion unfolds by reference to three frameworks that, for Wittgenstein, are intimately intertwined or even identical, namely, ethics, aesthetics, and religion.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, it is impossible to make sense of Wittgenstein's early account of aesthetics without paying attention to what he writes about ethics and religious faith. Another caveat concerns the sources available. While Wittgenstein's 1916 notes contain a lot of material on the problem of life, the number of related remarks in the *Tractatus* is limited. It is therefore difficult to judge whether the *Tractatus*'s account of ethics and aesthetics corresponds to the one we may extrapolate from *Notebooks 1914–1916*. However, since certain key features of Wittgenstein's

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<sup>11</sup> On the interconnections, see Barrett 1991; Tilghman 1991; Gmür 2000.

conception of the aesthetic judgment survive to his latest remarks, we may assume that the *Notebooks* provide a fairly reliable picture of his early approach to aesthetics.

What Wittgenstein calls the “problem of life” arises out of the tension between the contingent facts of the world and the possibility of happiness – a tension equally present in Kant’s philosophical enterprise (TLP 6.521, 6.41; CPR A814/B842; CPrR 5:113; CPJ 5:176).<sup>12</sup> According to the *Tractatus*, the world is the totality of contingent and hence valueless facts. The picture theory of language, usually seen as the philosophical core of the *Tractatus*, leaves no other role for the subject but to picture those facts; that is, to think about how things either actually or potentially stand. The subject is a spectator of facts over which it has no control; it “does not belong to the world: rather, it is a limit of the world” (TLP 5.632; see TLP 6.373). Yet, toward the end of the book Wittgenstein suggests that, in addition to its picturing relation to the world of facts, the subject has a will (TLP 2.1, 6.423–6.43; see NB, 72–73). In contrast to valueless facts, the will is either good or bad, and this difference manifests itself in the happiness or unhappiness of the subject’s world (TLP 6.423–6.43; NB, 86–87). But what does it mean for the will to be good if facts have no value? And how is it possible to reach harmony between one’s will and the world, which is what happiness requires?

Wittgenstein’s response to the problem is articulated by reference to a particular perspective on the world, which is distinct from the perspective of natural sciences yet available for the subject. Natural sciences operate within the domain of meaningful language, where all propositions have the general form “This is how things stand” (TLP 4.1, 4.5). Since how things stand is accidental, the facts of the world are neither good nor bad. Accordingly, the problem of life remains completely untouched even when all possible empirical questions about the world have been answered (TLP 6.52). However, there is another perspective that does not yield any thoughts or propositions. Wittgenstein calls this perspective the view *sub specie aeterni*, the “view from eternity,” and suggests that the experience of value or purpose resides in that perspective (TLP 6.45).

The subject’s experience of value does not correspond to thoughts or propositions in the technical sense of the *Tractatus*, because every possible thought is about empirical facts, whether possible or actual (TLP 6.42). So instead of characterizing the evaluative perspective or the experience emerging from it as a thought or a proposition, Wittgenstein speaks of *viewing* and *feeling*. He writes: “To view the world *sub specie aeterni* is to view it as a whole – a

<sup>12</sup> See Moore 1987; Appelqvist and Pöykkö 2020.

limited whole. Feeling the world as a limited whole – it is this that is mystical” (TLP 6.45). Rather than approaching the world as an aggregate of mutually independent and contingent facts – a complete catalogue of which is provided by the corpus of the natural sciences – the evaluative perspective takes as its object the world viewed as a limited whole (TLP 1–1.21, 4.11). As such, the world is viewed from a unique point of view that belongs to the subject as the world’s limit (TLP 5.632). Accordingly, the world takes on the character of being the subject’s life: the world is given to me as “my world,” which is to say that, for the subject, the “world and life are one” (TLP 5.62–5.621). This insight falls outside the bounds of meaningful language. At the same time, it is the first step for seeing how the world of contingent facts can relate to the subject’s will and to good and bad as predicates of that will (NB, 79).<sup>13</sup>

The perspective on the world as a unique, limited whole is equally manifest in aesthetics, ethics, and religion. While both ethics and religion, at least ordinarily understood, are directly related to the question of the value and purpose of life, the connection is not as obvious in the case of aesthetics. Yet, for Wittgenstein, aesthetics actually assumes priority over ethics and religion. This is because what he writes about the evaluative perspective echoes features that are traditionally attributed to aesthetic attitude or judgment.

Wittgenstein’s identification between ethics and aesthetics emerges for the first time in 1916 as an elaboration of the claim that ethics “must be a condition of the world, like logic” (NB, 77). In the *Tractatus*, the identification is preceded by a characterization of ethics as “transcendental” (TLP 6.421).<sup>14</sup> From the viewpoint of Kant’s philosophy, there is no essential difference between the two explications, because transcendental just means the necessary conditions for the possibility of judging the world (CPR A56/B86). Wittgenstein’s position reflects this conception: neither ethics nor logic is *about* the world of empirical facts, but condition that world. Logic conditions the world by grounding the possibility of facts including propositions. Logical form makes it possible for objects to combine together into states of affairs, and it allows thoughts and propositions to picture those states of affairs since the necessary condition for such picturing is a shared form between the picture and the pictured (TLP 2.033, 2.17). But how are we to understand the conditioning of ethics-cum-aesthetics?

<sup>13</sup> For an alternative reading of “feeling the world as a limited whole,” see (Friedlander 2001, 136–144). Friedlander acknowledges the link between Kant and Wittgenstein, but overlooks the role of the notion of a world-whole in their respective accounts (cf. Stenius 1960, 223; Moore 2013, 253).

<sup>14</sup> In the *Notebooks*, Wittgenstein calls ethics “transcendent” (NB, 77). However, his characterization of ethics as a condition of the world implies that what he means is transcendental rather than transcendence. This interpretation is reinforced by the mature formulation of the same point in TLP 6.421.