

## **World, Thought and Language- with Special Reference to Tractatus**

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**Abstract:** The idea of the world is variously described by different philosophers in the history of philosophy. Wittgenstein is an analytic philosopher and therefore he tried to analyze the idea of world. He arrived at the conclusion that world and language shares a very important feature, that is, the logical structure. Wittgenstein believes that there is an isomorphism between the logical structure of the world and the logical structure of language. Hence, he arrived at the picture theory of meaning. Moreover, Wittgenstein also believes that there is a corresponding relation between world and thought. He believes that thought has to be expressed in language. World, thought and language share same logical structure. Wittgenstein believes that the totality of true thought states the picture of the world.

**Keywords:** World, Thought, Language, Tractatus, Logical structure

### INTRODUCTION

Wittgenstein played a central role in 20<sup>th</sup> century Analytic philosophy. As an analytic philosopher, he put emphasis on philosophy of language. Wittgenstein completed two great works which seems opposite to each other. They are *Tractatus Logico Philosophicus* and *Philosophical Investigations*. Although these two works were different in their view, still we can find certain similarities between them. In his early philosophy, Wittgenstein has completed *Tractatus* in 1921. At that time Wittgenstein's main concern was with representation of language, nature of thought and logic. Wittgenstein's philosophy has influence upon many areas like logic and language, perception and intention, ethic and religion, aesthetics and culture. However, his primary concern, in his early philosophy, was logic, language and its relation to the world. In *Tractatus Logico Philosophicus*, Wittgenstein attempted to apply "logic to metaphysics through language". He attempted to show that there is a relation between thought, language and reality.

### TRACTATUS

Wittgenstein's early philosophy is to be found in his book *Tractatus Logico Philosophicus*. The book *Tractatus* not only tries to explain the central point of philosophy which deals with the world, thought and language, but also attempts to provide answer to the questions that are grounded in logic and in the nature of representation. When there is a careful look into the book itself then it is to be found that Wittgenstein has integrated the logical system, which he acquired from Frege and Russell, with the spiritual understanding of the life of Plato, Kant and Schopenhauer. It also has the reflection of mysticism found in Vedanta and Buddhism. The system of philosophy in the *Tractatus* also has many similarities with that of Plato, Kant and Schopenhauer, both in its analytic rigour and spiritual depth. The unique mixture of logic

and reason within the limits of language, with that of the mysticism and transcendental ideas which is beyond the limits of language marks the genius of the *Tractatus*.

## LANGUAGE AND WORLD

Wittgenstein is one of the few philosophers who brought the question of the relationship of language and world into the focus of the philosophical discourse. In the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein develops a metaphysical system from the consideration of language and meaning. Wittgenstein view on the *Tractatus* is that our understanding of the world or reality is possible only through linguistic analysis. In the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein gives us a conception of the world, but the world he talks about is not an empirical world because his study of the world is not an empirical study. He attempts to develop a conception of the world which is a logically possible world. He believes that there is an isomorphism between world and language. World, according to Wittgenstein, is totality of facts and language is totality of proposition. A proposition in order to be true must agree with the fact in the world.

The metaphysic of the *Tractatus* involves the relation between world, language and thought. Wittgenstein tried to analyze the relation between them and tried to show how they are connected. He regarded the world to be totality of facts. There is nothing in the world which can be outside of facts. Every fact is independent of each other. The totality of facts constitutes the world on one hand and the totality of all propositions constitutes language on the other. Wittgenstein holds that there is an isomorphic relation between language and world. In other words, according to Wittgenstein, language mirrors the world.

Wittgenstein in *Tractatus* also holds that thinking and language are the same. He regarded thought to be just like a proposition. In a letter to Russell in 1919, Wittgenstein states that a thought is a fact. It does not consist of words but of psychical constituents which corresponds to words and have the same sort of relation to world as words. But what these constituents are, he wrote, he does not know.<sup>1</sup> Thus in the metaphysics of Wittgenstein world, language, and thought, stand in the same line and all the three are equivalent to each other. In the *Investigations* also he quoted the same, he wrote, “Proposition, language, thought and world, stand in line one behind the other, each equivalent to each other”<sup>2</sup>

## THOUGHT AND LANGUAGE

In *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein held that thought in the form of language that can directly reflect the world, but it is to be pointed out that the language that philosophers are concerned with is the language of our everyday life. It is the one we are familiar with and also the one we are naturally endowed with. According to Wittgenstein, instead searching for an ideal language one should in fact look into the natural language, which has the ability to represent the world. Wittgenstein wrote:

“Everyday language is a part of human organism and no less complicated than it”<sup>3</sup>

Language to be a part of human organism shows that it is natural as the organism itself and is given a part of the natural history of man.

Wittgenstein agrees with Frege on the need for a “logical syntax” for making the structure of language and meaning clear. But while Frege turned to logic for a “logically perfect language”, Wittgenstein turned to the “logical syntax” of our natural language to get rid of the errors incidental to ordinary grammar. But where as Frege’s logical language is a threat to natural language, Wittgenstein’s “logical syntax” takes into account the logical structure of the latter, thus, showing that it is logical grammar that is the aim of philosophical analysis, and not replacement of the ordinary language by something pure and exotic.

“In order to avoid such errors we must make use of sign- language that excludes them by not using same sign for different symbols and by not using in a superficially similar signs that have different modes of signification: a sign-language that is governed by logical grammar-by logical syntax.”<sup>4</sup>

The sign language avoids all grammatical errors that were present in natural language because of the wrong use of symbols. The errors occurs mostly because of the symbols are not used properly or they are not used according to rules. Sign language rectifies the logical errors, it also does not change the meaning of the symbols concerned.

Wittgenstein was concerned with the inner structure of language and thought so far as it is relevant to the meaning of language. Language and thought are logically connected in the sense that thoughts are the contents of linguistic expressions. That is, thoughts are the contents which underlie the meaning of the expression concerned. But these inner contents are not easily understood from the surface appearance of the linguistic expressions. Wittgenstein wrote:

“Language disguises thought. So much so, that from the outward from the clothing it is impossible to infer the form of the thought beneath it, because the outward from the clothing is not designed to reveal the form of the body, but for entirely different purposes.”<sup>5</sup>

Wittgenstein believes that “ordinary language” as it is given conceals thought more often than not because it is not meant to make everything clear to the undiscerning eyes. That is the reason why he says “language disguises thought.”<sup>5</sup> This means that no thought is as transparent as it is believed to be. Every thought or proposition is clothed in a linguistic garb that makes it difficult for the ordinary readers to decipher it.

According to Wittgenstein, there is no thought that is not expressed in language. The “logical form” of thought is transparent because as soon as one understands a thought, one understands its logical form but in case of language it needs some effort to seize the “logical form”.

There is much similarity between Wittgenstein and Frege in so far as the nature of thought is concerned. Both of them believes that thought are objectively real and are logical. According to Wittgenstein, each thought occupies a place in the system of thought such that the totality of thoughts constitutes the picture of the world.

“A logical picture of facts is a thought”<sup>6</sup>

“The totality of true thought is the picture of the world.”<sup>7</sup>

Like a proposition, a thought is a picture. Like any other picture, the thought somehow depicts or represents state of affairs of which it is a thought. By identifying a thought with a logical picture, Wittgenstein asserts that a thought is a picture the “pictorial form” of which is “logical form”. Thus, thought have to have a logical structure in as much as they are a representation of the world. And being a representation they need to partake of a “logical form”.

We have seen that thoughts are the pictures of possible states of affairs. But what role do thought play in Wittgenstein *Tractatus*? What purpose the notion of thought serves in *Tractatus*? Christopher Gilbert, in his article, “*The role of thought in Wittgenstein Tractatus*” argued that “thought actually played a crucial role in Wittgenstein theory: thought mediate the relation between language and the world, and are therefore necessary for proposition for having sense. At 3.1 of the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein states that, “in a proposition thought finds an expression that can be perceived by the sense”. We should take ‘proposition’ here to mean ‘propositional sign’ or ‘sentence’ since it is spoken or written sentences that are ‘perceptible’. So sentences expresses thought, according to Anthony Kenny, sentences are not the only perceptible expression of thoughts; citing “4.014” of the *Tractatus*, he asserts that “a painting, a sculpture, a musical score would all be expressions of thoughts”. Whether or not thoughts are expressed exclusively by sentences, the fact that they are expressed by sentences at all is significant”<sup>8</sup>

Thus, Wittgenstein regarded the relation between language and thought as a kind of non contingent. Thoughts are to be expressed in language. They are necessarily expressed in language through propositions.

“In a proposition a thought finds an expression that can be perceived by our senses.”<sup>9</sup>

Thoughts and propositions are inseparable because Wittgenstein regarded “thought to be the contents of propositions”. Both of them constitute language. Thoughts are like home to propositions or language.

The main aim of *Tractatus* is to show that language and thought have same “logical form” which they share with “logical form” of the world. Wittgenstein also believes that there is a logical isomorphism between thought language and the world. The “picture theory” also suggests that the world is logically based on thought and language. The “logical form” of and language is the “logical form” of the world.

Wittgenstein, in *Tractatus*, has given importance to signs that can express thought. Signs can be regarded as the vehicle of thought that can alone express thought. He explains this as follows:

“We use the perceptible sign of a proposition (spoken or written) as a projection of a possible situation.”

“The method of projection is to think of the sense of a proposition”<sup>10</sup>

“I call the sign with which we express a thought a propositional sign. And a proposition is a propositional sign in its projective relation with the world”<sup>11</sup>

The propositional signs are regarded by Wittgenstein as the signs which express thoughts, which are about the world being projection of the possible situation in the world. Apart from proposition thoughts cannot be expressed. They are nonexistent if not expressed in proposition.

## CONCLUSION

Thus, according to Wittgenstein, thoughts are constituted by the signs which are the projection of the world. Thought, therefore, is the projection or representation of the world. Being a picture of the world thought is, therefore, true or false. In this lies their semantic worth since true thoughts have a major role to play in language.

Wittgenstein, unlike Frege, holds that thoughts have to be found in language and that too in the very logical structure of language. This makes it evident that the so called Platonic existence of thoughts is a misnomer. The platonic thoughts threaten to disrupt the necessary relation between language and thought because if thoughts could exist independently of language, they would not need a language. But Wittgenstein finds this Fregean argument untenable. Therefore he provides a linguistic theory of thought.

However, Christopher Gilbert pointed out that, “Wittgenstein avoids giving any detailed account of thought because he considers that such discussion will relate to epistemological issues. Wittgenstein thought that it is better not to “entangle in unessential psychological investigations” as did the philosophers of the past. The true purpose of philosophy, he claims, is not to explain thought-process but to give “logical clarification” of thought which are otherwise “cloudy and indistinct”. In other words, Wittgenstein would clarify the obscurity of thoughts by ignoring them altogether, focusing instead on how language itself relates to the world it describes.

## Notes and References

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