



## “World” and “Language” with special reference to Wittgenstein’s Philosophy

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**Abstract:** The idea of the ‘World’ is variously described by different philosophers in different times. Some philosophers regarded the world to be ontologically real and on the other hand, some philosophers try to describe the world as our everyday world. However, in Wittgensteinian philosophy, we find two different views regarding the idea of world. Wittgenstein philosophy is divided into two phases. In both the different phases of his philosophy, he holds two different views of the world. But, in both the stages of his philosophy, he regarded “world” and “language” to be inseparable. He believes that the idea of the world has to be described in language. His early philosophy is reflected in his book *Tractatus LogicoPhilosophicus*, there, he regarded the world to be logical possible. He constructed a metaphysical system to explain the idea of the world. However, in his later philosophy, which is to be found in *Philosophical Investigations*, he regarded the world to be our every day or forms of life.

**Keywords:** World, Language, Tractatus, Investigations, Forms of life, Picture Theory

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### I. INTRODUCTION

The idea of the world has been variously discussed in the history of philosophy. Right from the era of Plato to the era of Kant, different philosophers have put forward different and incompatible interpretation about the nature of world. In fact, it is a topic of interest in today’s philosophy as well.

In the history of philosophy the term “world” has different interpretations. Some philosophers tried to describe the world as the physical world. On the other hand some tries to describe the world as something ontological. There is a continuous debate regarding the exact view of the world. The question what the “world” actually means has never been settled.

However, Wittgenstein’s view of the world is different from other philosophers as we find two contrasting views of the “world”. Wittgenstein’s philosophy is divided into two phases early and later. Therefore there are two views found in his philosophy and both the views are different from each other. However, in both phases of his philosophy, he tried to describe the world in relation to language. Wittgenstein played a central role in 20<sup>th</sup> century Analytic philosophy. Wittgenstein’s philosophy has influence upon many areas like logic and language, perception and intention, ethic and religion, aesthetics and culture. In his early philosophy, his primary concern 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 world. He believed that there is a common essence underlying all languages. But in his later philosophy which is mainly recognized with his book *Philosophical Investigation* Wittgenstein criticized all of his earlier views regarding the entire conclusion which he found in *Tractatus*. In his former view, Wittgenstein regarded the world to be mirrored in language and in his later view, Wittgenstein believed that world to be a form of life or a way of living.

#### World and Language in *Tractatus*

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’s 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. He attempts to develop

a conception of the world which is a logically possible world. He uses different concepts through which he builds up the idea of the world.

The *Tractatus* starts with a statement about the world: “The world is everything that is the case.”<sup>1</sup> Wittgenstein further tries to explain the concept of world and states that “The world is totality of facts not of things.”<sup>2</sup> These first two propositions of the *Tractatus* define what Wittgenstein meant by “the world”. “The world is totality of facts and not of things” through this statement Wittgenstein tries to mean that a complete description of the world is not given by a complete catalogue of all the things in it, but by the complete catalogue of all the facts that hold of it. This point of Wittgenstein is explained by George Pitcher in his book “Philosophy of Wittgenstein” by an example. According to Pitcher, “Wittgenstein believed that if the world is the sum total of all objects then it would follow that from a complete list of objects it would be possible for us to say what the world is like or to give a complete description of the world. One cannot form an idea about the world by the complete list of objects that are there in the world. For example, to describe a room is not simply to give a list of objects that are there in the room. Simply from the list of objects that are there in the room one cannot form an idea of a room. To describe a room one has to say, for example, how big the room is, that is the length and the breadth of the room, what are the things that are there in the room, how they are like and how are they arranged in the room. With this information we can form the idea about the room. Here the description of the room includes not the list of the things but how they are arranged. It is listing of facts not of objects. Again, from a list of objects that a room contains one cannot make a number of models of that room by combining and arranging the objects in any possible way. Likewise, it is the fact that is the arrangement of objects that determines the world and not the objects that determines the world, the actual world. Depending on the number of possible arrangements of facts we can take of any number of possible worlds. As there are so many possibilities of combining and arranging these objects and so many qualities these objects might have so it would be impossible to state anything about the actual world. But it can be done if one were given the list of the facts about the room. Therefore, it is the fact that constitutes the world not the object, which can uniquely determine the actual world as distinguished from other possible worlds. Thus, according to Wittgenstein, this world is not composed of things or objects, but it is composed of facts. It is a well arranged world or orderly world which can be broken down into facts [like the pencil was on the table, or the flowers were behind curtains]”<sup>3</sup>

Wittgenstein believes fact to be a complex entity existing in the world as being a group of things arranged or combined in a certain way. For example, the fact that, “the cat is on the mat” is a complex consisting of the cat and the mat, arranged so that the former is on the latter. For Wittgenstein, the world which is spread out in space and time is a configuration of objects which are simple. These simple objects, Wittgenstein believes, made up the substance of the world. However, this configuration of objects goes on changing. Objects change their configuration as a result there is a change in time to time. Objects do not exist independently of any other objects. It has to exist in some configuration with other objects and these configurations of objects are not static or fixed but changing. These configurations of objects is, what called by Wittgenstein, facts. The objects to which Wittgenstein arrives at are simple. These simple objects are called simple because they do not consist of any parts. They never undergo any change. They do not exist in physical state, but exist in logical space. The things that Wittgenstein meant by object cannot exist apart from facts. Therefore, it is fact alone that can exist independently of anything else. Thus, for Wittgenstein, “facts are there to be pictured and described by language”<sup>4</sup>

Wittgenstein himself had not given any example anywhere of facts, states of affair etc. Anthony Kenny, in his book “*Wittgenstein*” gave an example of chessboard to explain the notion of facts, states of affair etc “Imagine that the objects of the world are chess pieces and the squares of the chess board. Then the states of affairs will be the relations between the pieces and squares. That a certain piece is not on a certain square will be a positive or a negative fact. The world that is the case will be the position of the board at any given time. In order to represent the indestructibility of the *Tractatus* objects we must imagine the rules of the chess altered so that it is not permitted to take pieces. This will be as *Tractatus* says the totality of facts not things (it is the position, not just the board plus pieces). Logical space will be chess-space i.e. the set of possibilities allowed by the rules of chess (TLP 1.13). It is essential to the chess piece that they should be possible holders of the position of the board and to the squares that they should be possible positions for the chess pieces. In the rules nothing is accidental: If a piece can occur in a state of affairs (for example if a particular bishop can stand on a block square) then this is written in to the rules for its use, (TLP 2.0.12). The logical rules for the positioning of the pieces give their logical form; pieces may differ in logical form (a knight from a rook) or be merely numerically different (two pawns). The internal properties of pieces may be contrasted with their external ones. A king away from the board and the other pieces is unimaginable; chess pieces cannot be thought of away from the rules and game. The chess pieces are simple: of course actual chess pieces are made of wood or ivory and have shapes and parts; but so far as the rule goes their composition is accidental and hard atoms would do as well.”<sup>5</sup>

Wittgenstein believes that most facts are highly complex facts and some are less complex facts. These in turn are composed of still less complex facts and so on. The facts which cannot be further reduced are the ultimate simples. These simple facts are called atomic facts. They are the ultimate building blocks of the world. They are simplest thing and self subsistent. They can exist by themselves in isolation. However, Wittgenstein has not arrived at atomic facts by direct investigation of complex facts. He arrived at the atomic facts by investigating language. He believed that certain considerations about language require that there must be certain facts which are the atomic facts. Though the atomic facts are simple but it has parts which are the objects. These objects correspond to elementary propositions in language. Wittgenstein believes that our understanding of the structure of world is possible only through our understanding of the structure of language i.e. through an analysis of the logical structure of language. The structure of world and the structure of language correspond to each other. In the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein writes, “The simplest kind of proposition, an elementary proposition asserts the existence of a state of affairs.”<sup>6</sup> To assert the existence of a state of affair is to assert an atomic fact. Thus, Wittgenstein in this way Wittgenstein advocated his “Picture theory of Meaning”.

Language is first and foremost a representational system. It is with language that we make ourselves to pictures of fact. Wittgenstein holds that picturing is an activity of representing the world by means of language that is making a copy of the latter in its logical aspects. It is not as if the world is actually reproduced in language which is impossible, as language and the world are distinct entities. Nonetheless, the world is logically mirrored in language in the sense that the logical structure of the world is perfectly shown in the structure of language. Wittgenstein believed that a proposition in order to be true must agree with reality. According to him, there is a perfect match between the world and language; it is because of this perfect fit between language and the world that the truth and falsity as semantic relations are possible. Wittgenstein’s picture theory provides a new metaphysics of the world especially in the view of the fact that language is a picture of the world. The idea of description enters in the very conception of the world-picture.

### **World and Language in *Philosophical Investigations***

In *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein’s views appears to be very different from *Tractatus* regarding his idea of world and language. Here, Wittgenstein does not regard language to be a representational system. Here, he emphasizes the practical uses of language. Words are instruments of language which may have varying uses. This varying ways in which language may be used helps to structure the idea of the world.

The idea of “forms of life” reflects what Wittgenstein tries to explain about the world in *Philosophical Investigations*, he regarded forms of life as a way of living. Here, the world talked about by Wittgenstein is our everyday world.

Wittgenstein regarded the forms of life as the actions which are established as belonging to a group and which has a common meaning shared in by the members of that group. Wittgenstein considers an example, a case where we would not be able to learn a language because we would not be able to see how it fitted into peoples’ activities. He imagines of visiting a strange country. He states,

“Let us imagine that the people in that country carried on the usual human activities and in the course of them employed, apparently, an articulate language. If we watch their behavior, we find it intelligible, it seems ‘logical.’ but when we try to learn their language, we find it impossible to do so.”<sup>7</sup> (PI 207)

Here, it is imagined that the people “carried on the usual human activities”- that is, they do things that look like our forms of life. But, we do not know what these activities mean to them because we cannot figure out how what they say is connected with them and in addition, we cannot even figure out what they are saying because we cannot; see what it has to do with what they are doing. We cannot know their form of life. Their form of life is different from us. Even if we try to learn their language we cannot learn their form of life. The way of saying and doing which are fused together in every forms of life are different. Every group of beings has their own form of life where they live and grow up. Every group of people belonging to different community has their own forms of life. Even every group of people working in different jobs has different forms of life, for example, a form of life of a doctor is different from a teacher, and a form of life of a cook is different from a form of life of a carpenter.

Wittgenstein tried to explain the idea of the world with his view of language as language game and forms of life. Language game is the network of linguistic and certain non linguistic activities. It is the practice which human beings undertake to interact with the world. Thus, world can be describe within the framework of language games and forms of life. Forms of life may be regarded as a way in which human being lives as a linguistic being. Forms of life are different aspects of lives and social reality of the world. Language games are part of forms of life. Wittgenstein regarded language not only the medium of communication but also a medium through which world can be expressed. Each language games depict a distinct form of life through which it depicts the world or social reality in turn.

Language belongs to social reality. It is used by different people in a society. People living in a society use language to learn and teach different aspects of life. Man is a social animal. He cannot live in isolation. He

has to belong with other members of the community or society. Language (including certain non-linguistic activities) is the only medium of this communication. It is through language different members of the society can communicate with each other. Thus, language becomes a bridge which links man to the world. Language is, therefore, essentially embedded in the world. How this relationship is carried out is explained by Wittgenstein by the idea of language games and forms of life.

## II. CONCLUSION

Thus, from the above discussion we may conclude that both his early and later philosophy were significant in their own place. Wittgenstein in both the stages always tried to show how language helps us to understand different aspects of life. His main focus was upon the relationship shared between language and world. He tried hard to make us clear about the relation between world and language. His early view, he tried to relate the world with a formal language, this view is more metaphysical than practical. He tried to break down the world into ultimate simple. This remains a philosophical question in itself. However, he later realized his mistake. World can be describe variously. It is not only facts which world can be broken down into, it can be things thoughts, events etc etc. So it is incorrect to say “world is totality of facts only” like early Wittgenstein. However, in his later view, Wittgenstein gave importance to practical uses of language and tried to show the world as our everyday world. He regarded ordinary language to be more real than formal language. Here, he believes the world to be a way of living. According to him, formal language creates confusion in definition. Thus, in *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein focused on the ontological explanation of the relation between world and language and in the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein focused on the ordinary language where he regarded world to be a form of life.

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