

The Tacit Dimensions of Transcendentalism in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*: A Hermeneutic Exercise

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I

The positivists of the Vienna Circle apparently found their hero in Wittgenstein when they read the *Tractatus*. Perhaps, they were amused to see that the *Tractatus* shares the same positivist flavour by treating metaphysics as nonsensical. But sooner they realized that they totally misunderstood the cardinal doctrines of the *Tractatus*, for Wittgenstein did not take any anti-metaphysical stance. The re-reading of the *Tractatus* rather forced Carnap to make the following statement: "I had not paid sufficient attention to the statements in his book about the mystical because his feelings and thoughts in this area were too divergent from mine" (Carnap 1963, p.27). This statement vindicates that it is a clear case of mistaken identity. In fact, the unwritten part of the *Tractatus* assumes more importance for Wittgenstein than that of the written one for it contains the elements of transcendentalism that get revealed through its written part. This is the reason why Wittgenstein in his preface wrote that: "Perhaps this book will be understood only by someone who has himself already had the thoughts that are expressed in it—or at least similar thoughts" (TLP, p.3).

Therefore, it may be surprising to many that a philosopher with a logical bent of mind tried to make inroads into transcendentalism which is otherwise opaque and blurred from the point of view of logic. This is the paradox that one comes across in the *Tractatus*. To quote Wittgenstein's own remark about the *Tractatus*: "my work consists of two parts: the one presented here plus all that I have not written. And it is precisely the second part that is the important one"(Wittgenstein 1963, p.41). Therefore the unwritten part becomes an important subject of study for him. Since the subject matter of transcendentalism remains obscure from the empirical point of view, it cannot be brought under the purview of rigid formal structures of language (ideal language). The elements of transcendentalism cannot even be shown but can only be felt for they transcend both saying and showing.

II

The *Tractatus* starts with a statement "The world is everything that is the case" (TLP,1). The world that Wittgenstein talked about in sections and subsections of 1 and 2 is the world of phenomena with which all of us are acquainted. It is a world of facts existing within the spacio-temporal framework of reference, but not of things.. The point that Wittgenstein tried to emphasize here is that the world of facts is a real world in which facts exist independent of one's will. In a way he flatly dismissed the claim of Hume that there is no external world independent of perceiving mind. Indirectly this is the message given to those who followed the legacy of Hume, namely, Russell and logical positivists. This can also be treated as a radical point of departure from the positivist line of thinking. Further Wittgenstein held that facts alone are pictured through language, for they alone are true or false. In a way the facts in the world and the propositions in language stand on equal footing. This world of facts is the

combination of empirical contingencies and logical necessities. It is this analysis of the world of facts that made Dummett conclude that the *Tractatus* is primarily an essay in the theory of meaning (Dummett 1973, p.679).

What is so interesting in the next move of Wittgenstein is that he tried to set limits to the supremacy of natural sciences through philosophy. As Wittgenstein argued in the process of setting limits to the much disputed sphere of natural science, philosophy "must set limits to what can be thought; and, in doing so, to what cannot be thought. It must set limits to what cannot be thought by working outwards through what can be thought" (TLP, 4.114). Wittgenstein's statement of Wittgenstein suggests that there is something outside the limits of thought that cannot be pictured by the ideal language. This statement culminates in the view that: "The *limits of my language* means the limits of my world" (TLP, 5.6).

III

The above analysis suggests that Wittgenstein is moving towards solipsism. He is of the opinion that solipsism manifests by itself, for it cannot be expressed. A solipsist feels that: "The world is my world: this is manifest in the fact that the limits of language (of that language which alone I understand) mean the limits of my world" (TLP, 5.62). What one can infer from this statement of Wittgenstein is that there is also a world that is private to oneself, and the elements of this world cannot be expressed by means of language, but they exhibit themselves in one way or other. Each one leads a life of one's own priorities, convictions, beliefs and commitments. Therefore: "The world and life are one" (TLP, 5.621). So to say "I am my world (the microcosm)" (TLP, 5.63). But, what is the status of "I" in the above statement? Is it a psychological "I"? No. Then what it is? According to Wittgenstein: "There is no such thing as the subject that thinks or entertains" TLP, 5.631). First of all, Wittgenstein hit a hard nail on the Cartesian subject ("I" as a pure ego) by holding the view that there is no thinking or entertaining subject. It is interesting to note that: "The subject does not belong to the world: rather, it is a limit of the world" (TLP, 5.632). Wittgenstein tried to explain the status of this transcendental "I" with a suitable analogy in section 5.633. The eye cannot be a part of its own visual field. It stands outside it. Similarly the transcendental "I" cannot be part of the world of facts. This is how Wittgenstein admitted solipsism by granting existence to the transcendental subject that alone can witness everything. Therefore, solipsism understood in this form can be characterized as pure realism.

IV

Concerning the issue of the meaning (sense) of the world Wittgenstein held that: "The sense of the world must lie outside the world. In the world everything is as it is, and everything happens as it does happen: in it no value exists---and if it did exist, it would have no value. If there is

any value that does have value, it must lie outside the whole sphere of what happens and is the case" (TLP, 6.41). The world of facts does not contain any value within it. The values belong to 'the realm of ought' but not to 'the realm of is'. Therefore, they do not find any place in the world of accidents and contingencies. The values alone can assign any meaning (sense) to the world.

What is internally experienced alone can provide any meaning (sense) to one's life. Thus life and world become one. This becomes one's own subjective world. What is subjective cannot be put into words, for the simple reason that: "Propositions can express nothing higher" (TLP, 6.42). While explaining the nature of ethical action, Wittgenstein held that: "It is clear, however, that ethics is nothing to do with punishment and reward in the usual sense of the terms. So our question about the consequences of the action must be unimportant. ---At least those consequences should not be events" (TLP, 6.422).. Therefore, all the ethical actions are ends in themselves. Hence they are the attributes of the transcendental will, which is different from the will as a psychological phenomenon. If the transcendental will has any effect on the world, its effect is seen in the limits of one's subjective world. As a result of its effect one can see altogether a different world. To quote Wittgenstein in this context: "The world of happy man is a different one from that of the unhappy man" (TLP, 6.43). Wittgenstein continued to remind us that the world of facts and the transcendental world of values have their independent existence. The latter does not have any bearing on the former.

V

The concepts "death", "eternity", and "life" require some special attention in Wittgenstein's thought, for they are the outcome of a very deep philosophical thinking. First of all, it must be understood that the death of an individual person results in the death of his body; and consequently his subjective world. The natural corollary of such a situation is that death is not an event in one's life, for one does not live to experience one's death (TLP, 6.4311). When viewed from the standpoint of the objective world, death does alter it for there would be some change in the actual state of affairs. Thus death has to be viewed from the subjective and objective standpoints.

Then another key concept in Wittgenstein's thought is "eternity". He did not explain it in terms of "infinite temporal duration". According to him, eternity means timelessness that is bereft of past, present and future. In the absence of these temporal dimensions, our (present) life just belongs to eternity. Consequently it does not have any end. Thus life can also be interpreted from eternal and temporal points of view. There is no end to life from the standpoint of the former, but has an end from the standpoint of the latter. The eternal life belongs to the realm of the transcendental subject, and the temporal life belongs to the world of psychological subjects. This is the reason why Wittgenstein held that the solution to the riddle of life in this objective world "lies outside space and time" (TLP, 6.4312).

Coming to the role of God, Wittgenstein maintained that God (the higher) is nothing to do with what is happening in the objective world. The physical world has its own course. The tendency to view the physical world as a limited whole --"it is this that is mystical" (TLP, 6.4). We hardly realize that there is an eternal world above this

physical world. Perhaps, Wittgenstein indirectly cautioned us not to raise questions about this eternal world, for there are no answers to those questions. In the absence of an answer, the question ceases to exist (TLP, 6.5). The problems of life are untouched. That itself is an answer to them. Those who have really realized the sense of life, maintained Wittgenstein, could not explain its sense. The experience of the realized person (*Jivanmukta*) can never be put into words. His complete detachment from the worldly affairs makes him totally indifferent to this objective world. Isn't this manifestation of his experience?

VI

To conclude: there are lot of similarities between the cardinal doctrines of Advaita Vedanta (a popular Indian philosophical tradition) and those of the *Tractatus*. Like Advaita Vedanta, Wittgenstein clearly distinguished the lower world (the world of facts) from the higher world (the world of bliss or the abode of the transcendental "I", which is also the world of values). What is higher transcends the lower. The lower is always viewed within the framework of spacio-temporal dimensions. All the processes within this lower are subjected to laws of nature. This world is aptly characterized by Wittgenstein, like Advaitins, as the world of accidents and contingencies. There are no other necessities in this world excepting the logical necessities. In contrast to the world of facts, the transcendental world of values provides us with the real sense or meaning of one's life. It is true that: "Wittgenstein's transcendentalism is the hovering spirit of the *Tractatus*. His vision of reality transcends the bounds of the world. Such a vision takes its roots in realizing that the world is only a totality of facts" (Suresh Chandra 2002, p. 34). It is unfortunate that the tacit dimensions of transcendentalism present in the *Tractatus* are somehow obfuscated by the logical analysis of the world of facts that dominated the sections up to 5.5571. Therefore, it would be apt to treat the *Tractatus* primarily an essay in the philosophy of transcendentalism.

Literature

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