

The Thought (*Gedanke*): the Early Wittgenstein

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1. Introduction:

The aphoristic *Tractatus* does not dwell much on the concept of thought in the Tractarian picture of language, thought and reality. The available literature also does not give a detailed commentary on the *Gedanke*. This paper will attempt to analyse the definitions of thought given at *TLP* 3 and *TLP* 4 (Henceforth I shall use *TLP* for the *Tractatus Logico Philosophicus*). *TLP* 3 defines thought as a logical picture of facts while *TLP* 4 redefines thought as a proposition with a sense. The question is are these two conflicting definitions, one being ontological and the other being linguistic, related to each other and if so how.

Apparently the two definitions of thought are devoid of any psychological element. This is in agreement with the spirit of the *Tractatus* where the divorce of philosophy from psychology is explicit at *TLP* 4.1121. Here the author warns against getting entangled in unnecessary psychological investigations. An evidence to this can also be cited from the *Notebooks* where he has implied that the study of thought processes is not psychological but logical (*NB* 10.11.1914). Yet in sharp contrast to this there is a letter that Wittgenstein wrote to Russell in 1919. In it Wittgenstein explicitly mentions that a *gedanke* consists of psychical elements. The closest evidence of thought being psychological in the *Tractatus* is at *TLP* 5.541 where Wittgenstein writes that propositions of the form such as 'A believes that p is the case' and 'A has the thought p' are propositions of psychology. Unlike *TLP* 3 and *TLP* 4, 'A has the thought p' is not an objective reference to thought but here thought is spoken of as being subjective to A. The psychical element can be clearly spotted and this is more closer to Wittgenstein's letter.

2. *TLP* 3:

TLP 3 may be analysed as –

- i) Thought is a picture.
- ii) Thought is not only a picture but a logical picture.
- iii) Thought is a picture of facts.

A picture is a model of reality (*TLP* 2.12) representing a possible situation in logical space (*TLP* 2.11 and *TLP* 2.2002). It is comprised of elements (*TLP* 2.13). Thought being a picture we can thus deduce that thought is a model of reality being comprised of elements and presenting a possible situation in logical space. The elements of thought also must have a determinate relation among them and must stand for objects.

Thought is not only a picture but a logical picture. We are told that a logical picture is a picture whose pictorial form is logical form (*TLP* 2.181). Pictorial form is the common element between picture and reality (*TLP* 2.17) and logical form is the minimum of common element between a picture and reality (*TLP* 2.18). Therefore a picture may have more than logical form in common with what it depicts but every picture must at least have logical form in common. To be a picture of what it depicts, a picture must have logical form. In this sense every picture is a logical picture (*TLP* 2.182).

Therefore, thought must be a logical picture. It is a kind of picture whose pictorial form is logical form. There is something in common between thought and of what it is a picture. Thought may be said to be a logical picture par excellence because it is the only kind of picture whose pictorial form and logical form coincide.

Thought is a logical picture of facts. Facts are groups of things arranged in a particular manner. A *sachverhalt* is a fact which is not comprised of other facts while a *tatsache* is a fact consisting of two or more component facts. Facts exist in the world and their components are objects. Thought being a picture of facts, thoughts must be a picture of the world. Or in other words, thought is a model of reality (from *TLP* 2.12).

3. *TLP* 4:

TLP 4 defines thought as a proposition with a sense. It can be rewritten as a thought is a picture of reality with a sense. (A proposition is a picture of reality *TLP* 4.01). For Wittgenstein the sense of a proposition, firstly, is that it represents such and such a situation (*TLP* 4.031). Secondly, he says that we grasp the sense of a proposition when we know what must be the case if it is true and what must be the case if it is false. These two definitions of sense are not opposed to each other but rather imply that the truth value of a proposition can be determined only in its relation to a situation.

TLP 4.03 states that the connection between a proposition and a situation is that the proposition is its logical picture. Or in other words a proposition is a logical picture of a situation or facts. We already have a thought is a logical picture of facts (*TLP* 3). Therefore we can conclude that a thought is a proposition (which is a logical picture of facts). *TLP* 4 which states that thought is a proposition with a sense can be restated as : thought is a logical picture of facts with a sense. The linguistic element in the definition of thought thus disappears and therefore *TLP* 4 is reducible to *TLP* 3 with only an adage 'with a sense'.

4. Relation between *TLP* 3 and *TLP* 4:

It may be observed that the early Wittgenstein was considering thought and language to be the same and considered its relation to the world as a logical picture. *TLP* 3 and *TLP* 4 in spite of their apparently different formulations are at bottom the same. Ofcourse the two definitions cannot be reduced to identical ones but they try to define thought from the same perspective, i.e., as a logical picture of reality.

5. Thinking and Speaking:

The Preface to the *Tractatus* sums up the complete intention of the book which is to draw a limit to thought. Since this cannot be done because to do it we would have to think the unthinkable, the task must be accomplished in the field of language. For in language we can distinguish the sensible from the nonsense and thus draw the limit.

Thus limiting thought can only be made by limiting language. From this it appears that the realms of thought and language coincide. So whether there can be thoughts apart from their expressions, from the Tractarian point is hardly possible. All thoughts must at least be capable of being expressed. Each thought is a potential propositional sign. Or in other words what is thinkable is possible too. In the *Notebooks* he writes that a situation is thinkable means that we can picturise it to ourselves (*N.B.* 1.11.1914). Thus every thought can picturise a possible situation and hence is capable of being expressed in language. We have further evidence to the fact that Wittgenstein in his early days held that thinking and language are the same. (And obviously then they must be coextensive). Firstly, he held that thinking is a kind of language; secondly, a thought is a logical picture of a proposition and thirdly, thought is a kind of proposition (*NB* 12.9.1916). He also says that what cannot be imagined cannot be spoken about also (*NB* 15.10.1916). Moreover at *TLP* 5.61, Wittgenstein writes in unequivocal terms that we cannot think what we *cannot* think and therefore what we cannot think we cannot say either. It means what cannot be thought cannot possibly be spoken about either. These entries suggest that thinking and language (speaking) are coextensive.

Yet the early Wittgenstein makes a distinction between sense and nonsense. Propositions according to the *Tractatus* are of two main kinds, sensible and nonsensible. Under the former are included empirical propositions and scientific propositions. Nonsensible propositions are of three kinds, gibberish, senseless propositions (*Sinnlos*) which include the propositions of logic and mathematics and nonsense propositions (*Unsinn*) which attempt to say the unsayable. Under this last category come ethics, aesthetic, metaphysics as well as the *Tractatus* itself. They attempt to represent something which can never be stated in descriptive language because they are attempts to say the unsayable. Thus they become nonsense when expressed in language because they can never be expressed but must be "passed over in silence"²³. This seems to suggest that there are things (thoughts) which cannot be expressed in language. Therefore we cannot reach a definite conclusion as to whether the early Wittgenstein believed that thinking without speaking is possible or not. We have proof that thinking without speaking is not possible as well as on a deeper analysis the *Tractatus* seems to suggest that thinking without speaking is a possible case.

I would like to mention an entry in the *Notebooks* which says that behind thoughts true or false there always lies a dark background which can only be later expressed as a thought (*NB* 8.12.1914). This implies that truth value of thoughts can be determined. Obviously this is done by comparing it with facts or states of affairs and this is the thought of which we are aware of. Behind it there is a background which we do not know and can be expressed only later. Now when this background is expressed as a thought, does not this corresponding thought also have a background? And if yes, there will be regress ad infinitum.

6. Conclusion:

Therefore, we see that the Tractarian thought is not a psychic entity, but a propositional sign projected onto reality. The thought of *TLP* 3 is the same as that of *TLP* 4 because thought as a logical picture of facts is identified with sign language. As far as the *Tractatus* is concerned the constituents of thought are unknown. The *Tractatus* mentions 'objects' of thought only once at *TLP* 3.2. It is not clear whether these 'objects' are the constituents of thought or that to which thought is directed. The author

only writes that a thought can be expressed in such a way that the elements of the propositional sign correspond to the objects of the thought. Apart from this, apparently, the *Tractatus* implies that the realms of thought and language coincide. Further consider two remarks from the *Tractatus*. *TLP* 3.001 states that a state of affairs is thinkable means that we can picture it to ourselves and *TLP* 3.03 which states that thoughts cannot be illogical because if it were then we should have to think illogically. These two propositions imply that it is 'we' who do the thinking. Thus thought as a model of facts originates in 'us'. Thoughts must always represent a possible state of affairs and thus we cannot describe an illogical world or say what it would be like (*Prototractatus*). There is a remark occurring only in the *Prototractatus* where Wittgenstein writes that if I can imagine a thing in a situation then I cannot imagine it outside the situation (*PT* 2.031). It implies that in thinking, objects or things cannot occur by themselves but in a situation and misfitting objects in a situation can never be imagined. So even in the language of thoughts illogical thinking is not possible. And finally it may be pointed out that Wittgenstein poses the question without answering clearly whether thought is a kind of experience and goes on to say that experience is world without the need of a subject (*NB* 9.11.1916). Assuming the answer is affirmative, we can say thought is world and does not need a subject.

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