

## The Saying/Showing Distinction in Early Wittgenstein and Its Implications

Jafar Morvarid<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

In this paper, I shall try to clarify the saying/showing distinction and to emphasize the role of this distinction in constructing a coherent picture of language and the world. In order to properly understand the differences between the sayable and the showable, I will throw light on the limits of language and the world. I will explain why it is impossible to say the showable and why it leads to non-sense. I will elucidate the relation between mysticism and the saying/showing distinction and show that both of them are better understood in light of Wittgenstein's solipsism. I will explain how Wittgenstein's transcendental solipsism is different from classical solipsism and how the former leads to pure realism. At several points, I will use the Kantian framework to explain Wittgenstein's view, especially when justifying Wittgenstein's realism.

In reply to Russell's comments on the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein wrote:

"Now I am afraid you haven't really got hold of my main contention, to which the whole business of logical propositions is only corollary. The main point is the theory of what can be expressed (*gesagt*) by proposition \_ i.e. by language (and , what comes to the same , what can be *thought*) and what can not be expressed by propositions, but only shown (*gezeigt*) ;which , I believe , is the cardinal problem of philosophy...."

Again in a letter to Von Ficker, he said that the *Tractatus* consists of two parts:

---

1. Assitant Professor , Ferdowsi University of Mashhad

"of the one which is here, and of everything which I have not written .And precisely this second part is the important one. For the Ethical is delimited from within ... by my book and I'm convinced that, strictly speaking, it can only be delimited in this way." (FL 10/11.19)

In fact, the distinction between what can be said by meaningful propositions and what can only be shown by them is the focal point of philosophy.

We can say that the two letters clarify the structure of the *Tractatus's* project. The *Tractatus* consists of two parts: a logical one (atomistic ontology, picture theory, tautologies, mathematics, sciences) and a mystical one (solipsism, ethics and aesthetics).

What is it for a proposition to be meaningful? And what is it for a meaningful proposition to be true?

According to Wittgenstein of *Tractatus*, *our* mind is the mirror of our world. The limits of our mind are the limits of our world. The world is the totality of facts, not of things. The world is every thing that is the case. The case is the state of affairs that obtain.

There are two kinds of proposition: compound or molecular propositions and simple or atomic propositions. A compound proposition is made up of a number of simple propositions. And a simple proposition is made up of a number of signs that have a one-to-one correspondence to things in a state of affair. The meaningfulness of propositions is based on this correspondence.

We know *a priori* that there is *isomorphism* between the state of affairs in reality and thoughts in the mind. For a simple proposition to be meaningful it must have *isomorphism* with reality; and for it to be true its corresponding state of affair must be a fact. A proposition is meaningful only when its negation is possible, too.

Only propositions that state the states of affairs satisfy this necessary condition and thus only they are meaningful. In contrast, propositions that try to state the preconditions of language do not satisfy it and thus are not meaningful either.

As for truth, to compare a proposition with reality, we need *a posteriori* testing. That is, no picture is *a priori* true. The focus of direct comparison with reality lies in the facts which we are acquainted with.

How could we discover what showable facts obtain and what

showable facts do not obtain? That is, how could we discover that a proposition trying to say a showable fact, if *per impossible* it could be said, is true? In other words, what is the criterion of these propositions' truth, assuming that they have truth value?

Facts make up the content of the world, and their corresponding sentences make up the content of the language. We can state and have knowledge of things that change in the world. We stay at *the higher level* and make factual statements about things at the *lower level*. We, as a *nomena* self, with our features and limits, think about states of affairs and use our thoughts for expressing meaningful propositions.

We state propositions about *conditioned facts*, although we have preconditions in our language and our world. Put differently, we, as a second-order beings, think and say meaningful propositions about first-order facts.

However, it is not possible to express meaningful propositions about preconditions of thought, language, and the world. We are not in a higher position than boundaries of language and the world, from where we can look down at, and contemplate about, them.

We have knowledge of *conditioned facts* in virtue of their *conditions*, but it is not possible for us to have knowledge of the *conditions* themselves.

To state and know propositions about preconditions of language and knowledge is to fall into a vicious *circle*. In addition, we do not have such a *transcendental faculty* that can have data and knowledge about the *transcendental things* themselves. We can only identify and clarify the limits of language and the world from within. It is to say that there are things in the world which, although unsayable, can be shown or displayed. And this is the very main point of the *tractatus* on which Wittgenstein stressed in the final passage when he said: "We must remain silent about whatever which can not be said." They can only be shown or exhibited in the propositions that say the various things that can be said.

The sentences of the *Tractatus* (which try to say things that are *shewn*) would be helpful, in spite of their being strictly *nonsensical*. After using them as step "to climb out beyond them" and "to see the world rightly"; we must throw them away.

It is worth noting that we must distinguish between logical truths and thing that are *shewn*. Logical truths are tautologies and are *sense-*

less propositions. But attempting to say what can only be *shewn* produces *non-sensical* formations of words. Tautologies or *sense-less* propositions show the "logic of the world", although what they show is not what they attempt to say. In fact, every proposition shows the logic of the world.

At several points in his *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein remarks different kinds of showable and ineffable things: the pictorial form common to picture and what is depicted (TLP 2.172, 2.174), the meanings of signs and that two signs have the same meaning (TLP 3.33ff., 6.23), that a given symbol signifies an object or a number (TLP 4.126), the sense of a proposition (TLP 4.022, see 2.221, 4.461), the logic of facts (TLP 4.0312), the logical multiplicity or form of a proposition and of reality (TLP 4.041, 4.12f.), that a proposition is about a certain object (TLP 4.1211, 5.535), that something falls under a formal concept (TLP 4.126), that logical propositions are tautologies and do not refer to logical constants (TLP 4.0621, 4.461), that one proposition follows from another (TLP 5.12, 5.132, 6.1221), the limits or scaffolding of language and the world (TLP 5.5561, 5.6f., 6.124), that there is no soul (TLP 5.5421), the truth in solipsism-that the "world is my world" (TLP 5.62), that there are laws of nature (TLP 6.36), the ethical and every thing that is "higher" (TLP 6.42f), the meaning of life – the mystical (TLP 6.52ff), the pronouncements of the *Tractatus* itself (TLP 6.54).

We can classify them as follows:

The logical forms common to propositions and what they depict (inexpressibility of the harmony between thought and reality)

The meaningfulness of signs and the senses of propositions (prohibition of semantics)

The logical relations between propositions (no rules of logical inference)

The logico-syntactical category of signs (formal concepts are pseudo-concepts)

The structure of thought and world (limits to thought are set from within)

The mystical (the ineffability of value).

The underlying idea of all above is that the preconditions of symbolic representation can not themselves be represented (NM 108-

9).

Propositions that try to state the essential features of symbolic representation fall into two problems:

Such a proposition itself must be in accordance with the laws of logic and representation. So those logical properties that it tries to state must have been understood before. Otherwise, this proposition does not conform to logic and so can not be a meaningful proposition. (TLP, 3.031 , 4.12 , 5.4731)

Such a proposition tries to say an important point: the limit and structure of thought and the world. It refers not to a possible state of affair, but to something which is the bound of sense. But attempting to clarify the bounds to exclude the "nonsense" itself results in *nonsense*.

What is the relation between the saying/showing distinction and *mysticism*? In his life, Wittgenstein was attracted by Kierkegaard and Tolstoy. It was important for him that religious faith must influence all aspects of human life. So, religious belief, in his view, is not a belief among others, and God is not merely an object like other objects in which we believe. We should not treat religious belief on a par with scientific belief and try to prove it; rather we must treat religious belief as something transcendent, something which must be accepted as a whole and which completely pervades us.

Mystical themes are not the essential core of the *Tractatus*; rather, Wittgenstein presupposed them for providing his philosophy with epistemic coherence.

The saying/showing distinction was used primarily for showing the logical properties of language. But it finally provided the criterion for distinguishing the empirical propositions from higher realms of value - such as ethics, aesthetics, and religion. *Mysticism* is the archetype of these higher realms of value.

There are differences between logic and *mysticism*. Logical properties can be shown by empirical propositions. But what shows the mystical? It is not propositions that show ethical values, but it is people's actions and attitudes that show them.

In the *Tractatus* and the *Notebooks*, these items are introduced as mystical:

"The problem of life", which remains untouched even if all scientific problems have been solved (TLP 6.43ff. 6.52f.)  
a "contemplation" or "feeling" of the world *sub specie aeternitate* ,

that is , from outside , as a "limited whole" (NB 7.10.16 ; TLP 6.45)

the claim that ethics and aesthetics are based on accepting the world (NB 20.10.16 ; TLP 6.42-6.43)

The idea that death is unreal (TLP 6.43ff.)

It seems that the *tractatus* identifies God with the "general propositional form". Wittgenstein characterized both as "how things stand" (NB 1.8.16; TLP 4.5, 5.471f.) and this is the very possible link between the logical and mystical theories.

The *tractatus* describes the mystical through three features:

It is the paradigm of what is "inexpressible" and shows itself,

It is the content of an attitude , "experience" or feeling,

It is the existence of the world. (Clock, H.J., "Mysticism", in *A Wittgenstein Dictionary*, P.252, Blackwell, 1996)

It can be said that both Wittgenstein's mysticism and his saying/showing distinction are based on his transcendental solipsism.

The core idea of solipsism is that the limits of my language mean the limits of my world, so the world is my world. (TLP 5.62, 5.6; NB 23.5.15)

Thus, there are limits to language and the world and life. And we can state only the facts which are within these limits. The facts beyond these limits can only be shown.

According to Russell's principle of acquaintance, followed by Wittgenstein, meaningfulness is derived from individual's immediate present experience. This leads to semantic solipsism. However, Wittgenstein repudiated skepticism by using the transcendental approach. He developed this approach in Kantian terms. Kant believed that the Cartesian's dualism is a sort of idealism. He proclaimed that Descartes is an empirical idealist and a transcendental realist. Contrary to Descartes, Kant is an empirical realist and a transcendental idealist.

Kant regarded the transcendental subject as the transcendental unity of apperception. He overcame skepticism and individualism by virtue of transcendentalism. According to Kant, the transcendental ego encompasses other minds. So, he believed, the problems of skepticism and individualism disappear. The same is true about Wittgenstein's view: in Wittgenstein's approach, transcendental solipsism encompasses other minds and accommodates individual's solipsism. It does not deny the empirical realm; but rather, empirical realm and empirical propositions themselves manifest transcendental solipsism

and we find out solipsism through them. And these propositions have meaning in virtue of showing solipsism. They say and state the empirical content and stimulatingly show transcendental solipsism. Empirical content is possible only when solipsism underlies it. We can put the matter by asking a transcendental question: When is the empirical proposition possible? In other words, when can a proposition say and convey an empirical content? An empirical proposition is possible, only if *transcendental solipsism* is presupposed. Transcendental solipsism is a transcendental condition for every empirical knowledge. At the empirical level, there is no solipsism. So, the individual and classical solipsisms are rejected. But at the transcendental level, every empirical proposition falls under transcendental solipsism. Thus, in order to be able to take a *realistic view* about empirical proposition, we must have assumed transcendental solipsism. Put differently, transcendental solipsism is a necessary condition of the possibility of the realistic view about propositions. Although the empirical fact is said at the same time that transcendental solipsism is shown, the latter has logical priority to the former.

Kant believed that the "I think" is a prefix which comes before every judgments. He supposed that this element guarantees the coherence of the system of beliefs and knowledge. Schopenhauer elaborated this notion and proclaimed that the subject of knowledge is merely an indivisible point. It is the center of all existence and determines the limits of the world. The world is my representation and the idea of a world without a representing subject is a contradiction in terms. Schopenhauer replaced Kant's transcendental unity of apperception with the *superindividual cosmic will*. It underlies the world as representation. (Clock, H.J., "Solipsism", in *A Wittgenstein Dictionary*, P.348, Blackwell, 1996)

Instead of accepting the Cartesian soul, Wittgenstein (like Kant) introduces the metaphysical subject which is the limit of the world. The metaphysical subject is not a possible object that can be seen. Rather, it is the eye itself. It is an indivisible point. Wittgenstein called it the "geometrical eye" and "the extentionless point" (NB 11.6/ 4.8/ 12.8/ 2.9/ 12.10.16; TLP 5.63, 5.633-5.64; BB 63-5)

Like Kant, Wittgenstein accepted transcendental idealism. He believed that there are no other minds or other things of which we can

have knowledge. There exists only the self and its immediate experiences. We make judgments about other minds and other things only through our immediate experiences. This approach (namely Wittgenstein's solipsism) is different from skepticism. Skepticism suspends knowledge of other things and minds, but it does not necessarily deny their existence. It admits the possibility of their existence, while rejecting knowledge of it. In contrast, solipsism denies their existence altogether.

Both the solipsist and the skeptic believe that we can not have knowledge of other minds, but their reasons are different: the solipsist denies our knowledge of other minds, because he believes there is no other minds at all; the skeptic denies it because he believes that though there can be other minds, we do not have epistemic access to them. Thus, both the solipsist and the skeptic hold that the conditional "for every x, if x is another mind, then we do not have knowledge of it" is always true. But while the former ascribes its truth to the falsity of the antecedent, the latter ascribes it to the truth of the consequent.

How does Wittgenstein's solipsism lead to pure realism? And what is special about Wittgenstein's solipsism that makes it different from classical solipsism?

As mentioned earlier, Kant's transcendental idealism is compatible with empirical realism. Kant does accept empirical propositions at the empirical level. In contrast to Hume and Locke, he believes that we have access to primary qualia. Then we bring, according to his transcendental idealism, all empirical knowledge under the ideal forms (i.e. epistemic conditions) at the transcendental level.

Like Kant, Wittgenstein does not deny the empirical realism. The truth of solipsism manifests itself in the very possibility of representation and in the logical form of all empirical propositions. In Wittgenstein, transcendental solipsism leads to pure realism, and transcendental subject (ego) replaces the transcendental unity of apperception. The transcendental ego takes the place of "eye" and can not be part of experience. It does not drop out of the experience but is so much involved in it that it can not be described (PG 156).

The self in Wittgenstein's solipsism is different from the self in traditional solipsism. The self or metaphysical subject in Wittgenstein is impersonal and devoid of any individuality. This is the starting point of his pure realism.



Because representation is a linguistic matter, transcendental solipsism in Wittgenstein takes a linguistic turn. "The *I* is replaced by the sentence, and the relation between the *I* and reality is replaced by the relation between the sentence and reality." (Clock, H.J., "Solipsism", in *A Wittgenstein Dictionary*, P.350, Blackwell, 1996)

Classical solipsism says: "I alone exist". In the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein made the two following comments on this:

(i)...what the solipsist means is quite correct, only it can not be said, but makes itself manifest....

(ii) Solipsism when its implications are followed out strictly coincides with pure realism.

The first comment relates to Wittgenstein's opinion that we must speak in a formal mode, not in a material one. The solipsist is guilty of trying to say something that can only be shown, and he must restate his position in the formal mode in order to get rid of absurdity. Wittgenstein wrote in 5.61 of the *Tractatus*:

Logic pervades the world: the limits of the world are also its limits. So we can not say in logic [i.e. as an *a priori* truth], "The world has this in it, and this, but not that." For that [i.e. saying that such and such does not exist] would appear to presuppose that we were excluding certain possibilities and this can not be the case, since it would require that logic should go beyond the limits of the world....we can not think what we can not think, so what we can not think we can not say either....

So, the solipsist in saying that "I alone exist" or "only my experiences are real" is using the material mode. And in the material mode, such sentences appear to have genuine negation, i.e., it is possible that there is something beyond immediate experience. But this implication is evidently impossible.

The word "I" is not a demonstrative pronoun and is not essential to representation of facts. This is how solipsism coincides with pure realism. But is Wittgenstein's solipsism really different from the classical solipsism?

One might say that Wittgenstein's approach is only a sophisticated version of the classical solipsism. For example, John Canfield remarks that what might be called the thesis of selfless solipsism lies at the heart of the *Tractatus* (Cook, J. W., *Wittgenstein's Metaphysics*, P. 66, Cambridge University, 1994).

However, Wittgenstein himself emphasized that there are differences between his thesis and the classical solipsism. The classical solipsism is a metaphysical view attempting to say something about the essence of the world and so is nonsense. In his lecture of 1932-1933, Wittgenstein said: "The solipsist who says "only my experiences are real" is saying that it is inconceivable that experiences other than his own are real. This is absurd if taken to be a statement of fact.' (WL 35, p.22) He also pointed out "from the very outset realism, idealism, etc. are names which belong to metaphysics. That is, they indicate that their adherents believe that they can say [as opposed to show] something definite about the essence of the world." (PR, p. 86)

Wittgenstein remarked that since the classical solipsism employs the form of "I alone exist", it can not explain the ordinary sentences such as "I fell on his foot, not mine" and "my sister has blue eyes".

A third difference, he remarked, is that the classical solipsist fails to recognize that such words as "I" and "my" have different grammars when used in speaking of experiences and when used in saying such things as "I alone exist" and "only my experiences are real".

According to his version of solipsism, reality merely consists of phenomenal objects so that material objects and other people can be nothing more than that. It is not possible to transcend immediate experience even in thought. In his 1931-1932 lectures, Wittgenstein states this idea in the material mode: "idealists were right in that we never transcend experience" (WL 32, p. 80). In his later years, he did not abandon this idea, but did reformulate it in the formal mode. Thus in a passage in *Zettel*, he says:

It is only apparently possible "to transcend my possible experience"; even these words only seem to make sense, because they are arranged on the analogy of significant expressions. (Z & 260).

### References and Abbreviations

- 1- FL Letters to Ludwig von Ficker, ed. Allan Janik, tr. B. Gillette, in *Wittgenstein: Sources and Perspectives*, ed. C. G. Luckhardt (Hassocks: Harvard Press, 1979).
- 2- NM "Notes dictated to G.E. Moore in Norway" [1914], in NB 108 19.

- 3- NB *Notebooks* 1914-16 [German-English parallel text], ed. G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright, tr. G. E. M. Anscombe, rev. edn (Oxford: Blackwell, 1979).
- 4- PR *Philosophical Remarks*, ed. Rush Rhees, tr. Raymond Hargreaves and Roger White (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975).
- 5- TLP *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* [German-English parallel text], tr. D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961).
- 6- WL32 *Wittgenstein's Lectures: Cambridge, 1930-1932*, ed. Desmond Lee (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).
- 7- WL35 *Wittgenstein's Lectures: Cambridge, 1932-1935*, ed. Alice Ambrose (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958).
- 8- Z *Zettel* [1945-8, German-English parallel text], ed. G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright, tr. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1967).
- 9- Clock, H.J., "Mysticism", in *A Wittgenstein Dictionary*, P.252, Blackwell, 1996.
- 10- Clock, H.J., "Solipsism", in *A Wittgenstein Dictionary*, P.348, Blackwell, 1996.
- 11- Cook, J. W., *Wittgenstein's Metaphysics*, P. 66, Cambridge University, 1994.

پروہ شگاہ علوم انسانی و مطالعات فرہنگی  
پرتال جامع علوم انسانی



پښتونستان د علومو انساني او مطالعاتو فریښی  
پرتال جامع علوم انسانی