

«Crededi propter quod locutus sum.» (Psalms)

“The limits of my language means the limits of my world.” – Ludwig Wittgenstein, Tractatus

Wittgenstein postulates that “the limits of my world” may be derived from the “limits of my language”. Does Wittgenstein mean to say that the limits of ‘a person’s world’ is purely linguistic? He uses the verb “to mean” – not any equivalent of the verb “to equal”. Therefore I do not interpret Wittgenstein in the sense that he has bombastically claimed that language, in fact, is the ‘true Real’. He presents us with a matter-of-factly observation that there inadvertently and ineluctably arises a relationship of *meaning* between the world in which we inhabit and the language with which we make representations, concepts and conjectures. Although the sentence above, written by Wittgenstein, seems to be of a ‘constructivist’ character, as it might seem that every person has his own world according to the language he chooses to wield on it, that is emphatically not the case Wittgenstein is making. Wittgenstein’s theory is one of cognitive humility, in the sense that he recognizes that the world as a canvas, in all its vastness, can only be bleakly painted by human language however honed, refined or advanced. The profundity, in the quite commonsensical aphorism of Wittgenstein, is however not one of pure linguistic ilk. In describing what is “my world” he ventures onto saying something about ontology, and its epistemological premises. Wittgenstein has undoubtedly made a very interesting remark, concerning that language partakes in describing reality while also recognizing its limits (“*my*” in stead of *the* world), but I want to question whether “the limits of my world” may still be defined by Wittgenstein’s dictum within Man’s extralinguistic faculties, and pose the question of whether Wittgenstein’s own dictum has its limitations.

The doubly repeated noun in plural, “a limit”, serves a *trompe de l’oeil*, directing our attention toward a world negatively defined by limitations. However, before long, as one attempts to sublimate the meaning of placing the boundaries of each man’s world at his linguistic limitations, one finds that our capability to represent the world expressively, or rather by implications, in language is far from being a pessimistic or inhibitive way of perceiving, by way of imagination, the horizon of limits to this world, because Wittgenstein’s dictum means to say that there is no other limitation to our world, except that which we may not accommodate in language. I would argue that Ludwig Wittgenstein, in his aphoristic manner, here summarizes the take-home message of Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*.

When we call upon words to describe reality the words are not merely *directed* at some specific thing, they are expressing something *about* that which we are speaking of. This is an about-ness inherent in our language. This is how we come to make the world “my world”. In every utterance, of mine, there lies an intentionality to which the close friend in a conversation listens intently to capture and understand. It lies not in any or all of the words that I speak – they are nigh-almost *flatus vocis* to my friend – it is something *about* what I say, and how I say it. This underscores the agency Wittgenstein places in his definition of the relationship between the world, me and language.

Though Wittgenstein speaks much truth in only one of his sentences extracted from Tractatus, he does not speak the whole truth. Is it true that the limit to Man’s relation to this world may be reduced to the three simple constituent parts “me, language and the world.”?

The Tractatus of Wittgenstein comes from his earlier period as an earnest writer. In his Considerations much of his earlier work is either recanted, or deemed rather imperious in their conclusions for which he had no sound reason, as he saw it. This theme of certainty is raised in On Certainty. For there are several fields of the human faculties that elude Wittgenstein’s theory of how Man relates linguistically to the world. His theory should imply that an extralinguistic perceptiveness and aesthesia in its inarticulate form are impossibilities. Now, those are not incantations, they are

very real and commonsensical objections to Wittgenstein's theory. Our encounter with the world occurs many years before we are able to speak, let alone before becoming literate. Now, even though we are helplessly bound to our congenital concepts of how to understand reality when we are born, we are as much agents then, acting upon this world, as we have ever been.

In a way one might see that Wittgenstein's theory is somewhat unjustified in extolling language to the extent to which nothing exists outside. Even though my new friend has not yet heard of this new phenomenon I may speak of it to him. And he might even tell me that it is something he has been thinking of for long! This might have been the case for people to whom theistic religion was completely unknown until Nestorian missionaries came to China where Confucianism is, and was, the largest spiritual denomination. As with the abstract concept of "our Father who art in heaven" it is likewise with the abstract concept of the number two. No one has ever encountered the number two or seen the face of God, nonetheless we find that it takes little explanation for someone to understand such concepts that have been waylaid in their minds for a long time. The revelatory irruption a reader might experience from reading a book is likewise an experience of thoughts that already "were there", but had not come to mind as articulately as before. This is a sort of tension that perpetuates all language.

Concepts, representations and conjectures may very well exist within my mind even though I am struggling to find the words to describe them. This is true for thoughts of a priori kind, but even more patently for thoughts about our experience of life. There is a constant tension between what we do experience and what we are capable of expressing. Some poets, like Michel Houellebecq and Baudelaire, say that the words come before the poem. A strange thing to say. However, when reflecting upon the internecine conflict within language itself which is reality versus representation, it should not come off as so much at odds with their profession as writers. None of these authors claim that the words with which they are portraying the world is what made either the idea or the reality exist. It is however a predicate for articulate expression.

Later in his life, Wittgenstein wrote a remonstrance toward those who thought a private language to be tenable. He needed not alter his theory from *Tractatus* much, because he already were very much aware and interested in the real and extant relationship between language and reality. He needed only to reclaim the abstract world, of values and absolutes, in which we live as real, and not something constructed by and for the wellbeing of the ruling class.

We have all experienced how it hurts to not be able to explain something for which we long to put out on display for someone else, so as to create a feeling of sameness in this world, in connection with someone else. This refers back to the about-ness mentioned above. Much of what our linguistic endeavors are imbued with are a sense of meaning to convey something that is impossible to either manifest in action or anything material. It is the constant repetition of Hegel's dialectic on the Master and the slave in everyday life, in which we find our own existence affirmed through the recognizing the other as an "I", with the reciprocity of this recognition that occurs. In light of this one might find Wittgenstein's theory highly illuminating, in the sense that these affirmative experiences of our own existence would be impossible were we to be bereft of our language. In that sense my world is completely coextensive with the extent to which my language is capable of reaching out. Thence, we find Wittgenstein in the right.

As with all aphorisms, they are thought-provoking, illuminating and nigh-never true in all regards – so too with Wittgenstein's theory. His cardinal virtue is that of maintaining an idealist's longing for a language attuned to the complexities that the relationship between 'I' and the 'world' prompts. If memory serves me well he finished *Tractatus* with the line "Whereof one cannot think, thereof one

should not speak." But do we not all experience, from time to time, longings that has no remedy in this world? Does that not speak of that there are things distinct from what a dictionary may define what thoughts might capture? The etheric is a very real experience. No one described in the Bible sees the face of God. And the priest uses therefore, symbolically, incense in every mass and disperses it on the Bible so as to signify that we are spoken to from beyond. To be spoken to "from beyond" is not something exclusively religious, it is also what one experiences every time one in beholding the countenance of someone else. Notwithstanding the topical pertinence of this, we might suppose that Wittgenstein actually was familiar, or even inspired, by such thought as he was raised in a Jewish family. I believe that Wittgenstein was in the wrong, if he ever meant to say that all that is inarticulate is not actualized as "my world", and therefore resembling a "false consciousness". But I believe any such a conclusion would be to surmise on unsound reason, and be in disregard of all his later works. Therefore, I dare say that Wittgenstein could approve of the sign, under which, I have written this essay on his understanding of language, the subject and the world: "I believe, therefore I am speaking".