

The End of Language and the Beginning of Meaning: On the Problem of Science in Pre-Wittgenstein

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Abstract: "Silence" is Wittgenstein's unique gesture towards metaphysics, and the corresponding view reflects the philosophical insights of pre-Wittgensteinian linguistic analysis. Based on theoretical constructs such as truth and value function term theory and logical image theory, Wittgenstein draws a boundary between the world, language and meaning, specifying the logical "speaking" world, beyond which things are "unspeakable" due to lack of objects, "show" themselves, and paucity of relevant verbal meaning. In order to avoid the futility of language, what we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence. The issue of "silence" also reflects the fundamental philosophical views of Wittgenstein in the early period, and is also relevant and inspiring in the present age.

Keywords: Pre-Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, the Problem of "Silence", Metaphysics.

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Wittgenstein's previous philosophical work focused on the delimitation of language, and his insights are concentrated in *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (Hereafter referred to as TLP). In his view, one can speak of the empirical world only within the limits of logic. What is beyond logic is "unspeakable", and "What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence" (TLP7, quoted below in the text of the book only by number).^[1] Accordingly, he establishes a unique philosophical view that philosophy should clarify and correct, remove meaningless propositions, and defend the boundaries of knowledge; all the unspeakable should be silenced, and the meaning of philosophy is not to provide theories and develop new knowledge, but to "keep silent" appropriately. Criticizing the traditional Western metaphysics for its usurpation of the boundaries of language and abandoning the total rejection of the meaning of metaphysical propositions by logical positivism, the pre-Wittgensteinian metaphysics based on the logic of language is obscure and fascinating, and its view of "silence" is abstract and mysterious: what is "silence"? What are we silent about, why are we silent, and how can we ask questions about the world and life with our limited words? And has Wittgenstein himself crossed the border of silence and said the "unspeakable"? These are the questions that seem to be inescapable for those who try to approach Wittgenstein's early thought and understand the true meaning of his analytic philosophy and philosophy of language.

I. The presentation of the question of "silence"

In order to talk about "silence," it is necessary to first sort out and comprehend the lineage of Wittgenstein's metaphysical outlook, to grasp the concept of "silence" in the context of the overall framework paradigm of TLP, and to further explain the subject and object of "silence" to understand the reasons for the silence of the unspeakable.

1.1. The lineage of thought on the issue of "silence"

From the overall structure of TLP, the expression about "silence (Schweigen)" appears at the end of the book, i.e., the seventh proposition: "What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence", but it contains the ideas about The ideas of the "speaking" and the "unspeakable," of language and the world, of speech and meaning, can be said to be expressed in different propositional discourses throughout the whole TLP. Based on the logical atomism on the logical construction of the world, the image theory on the relation between propositions and the world, and the theory of the truth-value function term of the basic propositions, as outlined in the six main propositions,^[2] Wittgenstein concludes with this maxim without explanation, drawing a boundary on language with logic as the edge, but tacitly acknowledging the mysterious universe beyond speech. The warning to keep silent suggests the inseparability of language from the world and from meaning, showing the philosophical orientation of language in pre-Wittgensteinian metaphysics, and constituting the basic idea of the relationship

between language and the world in the pre-Wittgensteinian period.

Wittgenstein has been called by Shrike (1930) the first person to make a decisive shift from analytic philosophy to philosophy of language. From the point of view of the history of ideas, the question of "silence" also lies fundamentally in the linguistic turn in Wittgenstein's philosophical problems. On the one hand, Wittgenstein's previous philosophical system contained the main features of analytic philosophy or philosophy of language, such as the syntax as the starting point, the construction of the basic principles including logical atomism, theory of meaning, and theory of context, especially his principle of context is the inheritance and development of Frege. On the other hand, he goes beyond the limits of analytic philosophy to analyze specific types of propositions and moves toward the interpretation of commonalities and meanings, starting from the logical structure of the world and introducing the concept of images, so that ideas and propositions are intertwined and intrinsically related, and then smoothly transitions to the level of language, returning the exploration of the world to the problem of language itself.^[3] In addition, from pre-Wittgenstein's ideas, we can also clearly detect his reconstruction of classical German philosophy, especially Kant's philosophy, and the focus is especially on the issue of boundaries.^[4] In Kant, the boundaries are diverse, and the boundaries of knowledge alone have both empirical and logical meanings, whereas Wittgenstein's general idea is to eliminate the inconsistency in the question of boundaries at the level of logical language.^[5] He does not say anything about the innate order emphasized by Kant, but keeps to the inner boundaries of the world, arguing that "the facts in logical space are the world" (1.13),^[6] language as an image of the world "mean the limits of my world" (5.62),^[7] so that the boundaries of the world, language, and logic are united in language, and the need for linguistic delimitation is clarified by distinguishing between what can be said and what cannot be said in order to delimit the boundaries of thought.

1.2. The subject of "silence"

To speak and not to speak are two sides of the same coin, so the subject of "silence" is the subject of speech, that is, "self". Whether we are talking about the boundaries of language or the boundaries of the world, Wittgenstein's expression contains the same "self". The philosophical self is not the human being, not the human body, or the human soul, with which psychology deals, but rather the metaphysical subject, the limit of the world—not a part of it." (5.641).^[8] It is clear from the discussion, which is dominated by proposition 5.6 and its sub-propositions, that the "self" is not some simple subject or Cartesian ego, but the "philosophical self" or the "metaphysical subject". Wittgenstein's account of the subject begins with the isolation of the subject; the "self" is not part of the factual world, but is outside of it, because we must speak and think within the boundaries of logic, whereas thinking and asking questions about the "self" of the metaphysical subject transcends logic and therefore the world. The thinking and questioning of the metaphysical subject transcends logic and therefore transcends the world, so he says "The subject does not belong to the world: rather, it is a limit of the world." (5.632)^[9] How to understand the subject as a boundary? Wittgenstein gives the example of the eye and the field of vision to illustrate: the eye is the beginning and the limit of the field of vision, not the content of the field of vision, just as the subject is the beginning of the world, not contained in it; the field of vision must belong to the eye, otherwise it would not be a field of vision, just as the entire field of facts belongs to the subject, otherwise it would not be a fact. From this point of view, the "self" seems to dominate all existence like God, and the world can be described and drawn by "us", while as an isolated metaphysical subject, the "self" itself is outside the world, outside the field of vision, so the "self" is inherently unspeakable. In this way, Wittgenstein extends the demarcation of speech and silence to the dimension of the subject, and his concept of subject is actually the boundary concept between what can be said and what cannot be said, as scholar Jiang Yi (2002) puts it: "The metaphysical subject Wittgenstein refers to here is all about his thought tenet: we must not speak of the unspeakable, and we must remain silent about the unspeakable."^[10]

1.3. The object of "silence"

What is silence about? The question of whether there is an object of silence has been a matter of debate in the academy, with one side of the divide being the "traditional reading" and the other side being called the "non-traditional reading". The traditional reading is the mainstream view, represented by G.E.M. Anscombe, Anthony Kenny, Meredith Williams, etc. Their arguments can be briefly summarized in two aspects: first, they affirm Wittgenstein's work on language delimitation by means of image theory and truth-value function term theory; second, they believe it is true that there is something that cannot be spoken but can be shown, so the "unspeakable" does exist as an object of silence. Non-traditional traditional readings mainly include logical positivist readings and decisive readings. Although there are internal differences between the two schools of thought, there is a general agreement on the issue of silence, namely, that the TLP7 proposition is misleading, as Otto Neurath (1959) argues that Wittgenstein's use of the grammar is directed and targeted to talk about "something", and if one really wants to avoid the metaphysical attitude, the object of "silence" should be eliminated altogether. Michael Kremer (2001) argues that TLP7 is an incoherent reduplicative proposition that prohibits people from saying meaningless

things while at the same time speaking about what they call the "unspeakable", violating the prohibition while issuing it. It is therefore tantamount to meaningless talk.^[11]

In the context of the TLP, this paper agrees with the traditional reading that "silence" has an object, and that its object is the unspeakable. On the one hand, just as Wittgenstein's work on demarcation is consistent, so too is the view of the "unspeakable", which is coherent, consistent and parallel. As Wittgenstein said in the TLP6.54: "My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical, when he has used them—as steps—to climb up beyond them."^[1] Therefore, the TLP can be seen as a practice of its conclusions, and the process of reading and exploring this philosophical treasure is to climb the ladder and gradually understand Wittgenstein's way of thinking about the world, with the aim of achieving cognitive transcendence. On the other hand, Wittgenstein's admonition to remain silent about the ineffable is precisely because he perceived the human impulse to "push the boundaries of language". It is good to live in the world of logical clarity with clarity and understanding, but it is difficult to restrain the thoughts and words about the ethics of life, the way of constancy and the highest values. The warning to keep silent is also a warning to stop the urge to speak about something mysterious in metaphysics that is beyond the scope of language, and to get rid of the meaningless and futile entanglement. In addition, TLP7 may be strictly contradictory, but the value of its thought and inspiration is inextinguishable, and it would be paranoid and superficial to take it out of context and disregard its inspirational meaning.

II. Reasons for "pass over in silence"

Following Wittgenstein's basic view on the problem of "silence," this section attempts to explain the reasons for the silence of the unspeakable at a micro level. In the context of the text of TLP and the specific objects of the unspeakable that Wittgenstein deals with, such as ethical values and logical forms, the question of why there is silence can be explained on three levels: the interpretability of the object of speech, the display of the premises of language, and the paucity of meaning of the unspeakable.

2.1. The "realm of mystery" is unexplainable

The basic idea of Wittgenstein's linguistic demarcation is to move from the speakable to the unspeakable: unspeakable means what is beyond the speakable. At the beginning of the *Philosophical Treatise on Logic*, he sets up a logical framework for a world of facts based on objects: the world is the sum of what happens, i.e., facts, and "The facts in logical space are the world." (1.13); facts are expressed in the existence of states of affairs, and states of affairs have objects as their basic constituent units, forming the fact-state-of-affairs-objects structure, which is the fundamental logic of Wittgenstein's view of the world.^[6] Based on this, he specifies the scope of what can be said: propositions (i.e., the totality of language) speak of a world of facts; facts are broken down to their smallest units - "atomic facts" as Russell called them - which are objects, and thus speech is ultimately speech about objects. The "object" has always been a complex concept in philosophy, with a double meaning of manifestation and object itself in Kant, the carrier of "objectification" of self-realization in Marx, and the reference to linguistic expressions in Frege and Russell. Wittgenstein's object is understood as "the substance of the world" (2.021), which is the most fundamental reality, being independent and possessing unchanging necessity, from which the properties of things are configured and then expressed through propositions.^[12] It is for this reason that what people say about the world is based on objects, which define the bottom line of the range of explanations that language can make.

The "speakable" is a fact, and a fact must have an object; on this premise, it is easy to conclude that what has no object is necessarily unspeakable, and that this unspeakable metaphysical world is, in Wittgenstein's case, the "realm of mystery". In contrast to the "propositions of natural science" (6.53)^[11], which have a concrete reference, the "realm of mystery" is a non-object world, about which propositions are constructed in a way that violates logical form, without an object as an entity as its ontological foundation,^[13] and which is thus far removed from the world of speakable facts; such things as the world of subjects, ethics and values, aesthetics, theology, and religion belong to the "realm of mystery" and are not recognizable, speakable objects. In brief, "Everything that can be put into words can be put clearly." (4.116).^[14] However, a priori and mysterious things like ethical values in the world cause the object of reference to be so vague and vague that we cannot think about it clearly, and even if we understand it, it is difficult to say it clearly, so we should be silent about it.

2.2. The logical form can only "show" itself

Logical form is the essence and boundary of the world, and in the case of language, propositional logic is a prerequisite of language, but it is also "unspeakable" - "propositions can represent the whole of reality, but they cannot represent what they must have in common with reality in order to be able to represent it-logical form" (4.12).^[15] Wittgenstein compares logic to "the scaffolding of the world" (6.124)^[16]. We erect the "scaffolding" of logic to build the skyscraper of the world, but just as the scaffolding is not part of the building, logic itself is not in the world, and as mentioned earlier, what lies outside the world is something we cannot speak about. "What expresses itself in language, we cannot express by means of language." (4.121)^[17], which means that language can

only corroborate logic while expressing it and cannot speak of logic itself. If we try to explain logic in a language premised on logic, the circular argument itself is illogical, and if we try to explain logic in other ways, we have to construct another set of "logic" and another "world" outside of logic. Not to mention how difficult it would be to achieve such a construction, just to imagine how to explain the means used to explain logic would be to fall into an endless regression. Thus, the logical form itself is unspeakable. But unlike the "mysterious domain", logical forms are not unspeakable because of their emptiness. Obviously, one can perform complete logical reasoning, write logical expressions on paper, and judge whether they are logical or not. The diffidence is that logical forms can only "show" themselves, and "what can be shown, cannot be said" (4.1212)^[17]. In this way, people think about and use logic as a formal tool, which is a kind of "show" of logic in the mind, while if they resort to language and think about what is the essence of logic, they will fall into a meaningless circular black hole, and can only experience it in its dynamic "show". At this point, through the theory of "show", Wittgenstein associates the "speakable" with the "unspeakable", and the unspeakable can be shown through certain factual judgments that can be said.^[18] Due to the limitation of my academic ability, it is difficult for the author to elaborate more on the complex concept of "show" here, except to mention that being shown is a certain kind of experience or expression beyond language, in order to show Wittgenstein's reservation of the world beyond words.

2.3. Metaphysical discourse is poor in meaning

"A thought is a proposition with a sense." (4)^[19], so there is a slightly pragmatic reason for keeping silent about the unspeakable: not to make meaningless statements. Wittgenstein closely links logic and meaning by stipulating that meaningful propositions must have two conditions: first, they must conform to logical syntax; second, the names contained in the proposition must have denotations. The analysis of propositions must come down to the denotation of primitive symbols as simple objects of things, and propositional logic gives us the possibility of speech and the boundaries of what is said;^[20] only meaningful propositions have truth value, and meaningless propositions are fundamentally incomprehensible and absurd; what is beyond logic, even if said, is nonsense or a misuse of language. Instead of talking nonsense and thinking about nonsensical things, we should keep the purity, direction and validity of language, and say what is meaningful, that is, what is speakable.

"Most of the propositions and questions to be found in philosophical works are not false but nonsensical. Consequently we cannot give any answer to questions of this kind, but can only point out that they are nonsensical." (4.003)^[21] From this position, "silence" becomes Wittgenstein's strategy for dissolving meaninglessness, and keeping silent is the right approach in philosophy. It is true that in life we can indeed think about metaphysical things and generate grotesque ideas of nothingness, just like talking about flying horses, cats that overlap life and death, particles or quanta that can collapse into different forms and properties, and people in their original state, and so on. But in Wittgenstein's view, this is an idea poor in meaning; by delimiting the domain of silence, Wittgenstein is not trying to prove that metaphysics is unspeakable and unthinkable, but rather to make it clear that this venture into the boundaries of language is doomed to futility. It is important to note that the "meaninglessness" here is a judgment on the language of propositions, not a complete dissolution and negation of "meaning", "The sense of the world must lie outside the world."(6.41)^[22], Wittgenstein does not deny that there is a world of meaning outside of speech, as will be discussed later.

III. Wittgenstein's philosophical view through the lens of "silence"

Wittgenstein is seen as the philosopher who put an end to philosophy. Like the pioneer Marx's critique of the young Hegelians and his transformation of traditional philosophical thinking, Wittgenstein points the finger at the "disease" of traditional philosophical metaphysical discourse and treats it with the tools of linguistic-logical criticism, elevating the self-renewal of Western philosophy to a whole new level. "Silence" is Wittgenstein's unique gesture in the face of metaphysics, and it is also an important entry point for grasping his philosophical and ethical views, and the corresponding views are also inspiring for today's philosophical research.

3.1. Understanding of philosophical activities

In TLP, Wittgenstein defines philosophy bluntly: "All philosophy is a 'critique of language'" (4.0031)^[23]. Wittgenstein repeatedly states that philosophy is an activity rather than a doctrine, and that the fruit of philosophy is not the construction of propositions, but the clarification of propositions, the bringing back of language into the orbit of logic. Marx also criticized the metaphysical philosophical discourse represented by the Young Hegelians, pointing out that the abstract philosophical language of Feuerbach, Bruno, Steiner and others obscured the historical reality of man, and that language seemed to dissolve the veneer of metaphysics, but in fact stopped the philosopher's descent from the "world of thought" to the "world of reality. The language seems to dissolve the metaphysical veneer, but in fact it leads to the suspension of the philosopher's landing from the "world of thought" to the "world of reality."^[24] In Wittgenstein's time, when scientific knowledge and technology had made great progress, philosophers were more concerned with language and logic than ever before, and Wittgenstein's critique of metaphysics was more radical than Marx's, and his lifelong mission was to eliminate

metaphysical language. But unlike Marx's aggressive attitude of exalting salvation, Wittgenstein's construction of a new theory is slightly more negative.^[25] On the one hand, although he sees the eradication of metaphysical language as a cure for philosophy, he does not think that philosophy has the possibility of being saved or liberated; on the contrary, philosophical problems are not false propositions, but pseudo-propositions lacking truth values and fundamentally meaningless; on the other hand, in Wittgenstein's vision, philosophy and science are antagonistic; science has the function of explaining the world, and not only that, it also has the vocation of explaining the world. On the other hand, in Wittgenstein's view, philosophy and science are antagonistic; science has the function of explaining the world, and not only that, it also has the vocation of explaining the world, whereas philosophy seems to be a detector that corrects nonsense and stops misuse in time. Therefore, Wittgenstein does not share the goal of pursuing scientificity in philosophy, let alone encouraging philosophers to transform the world with the tools of discernment. In this way, Wittgenstein seems to have denied the methodological significance of philosophy in the early period, and to have been obsessed with defending the uselessness of philosophy. In addition, I tend to think that Wittgenstein's philosophical outlook reflects the influence of pragmatism on him: to speak of meaningful natural scientific propositions and to keep silent about vague and useless metaphysics, Wittgenstein seems to give a functional property to speech to achieve a purpose, to achieve some clarification, and there are vague hints of pragmatist perceptions such as James and Peirce's understanding of the function of thought. Of course, this preliminary inference needs further research and demonstration.

3.2. Explanation of the ethics of life

Ethics is a fundamental question of the meaning of life, and Wittgenstein also discusses it several times in TLP. If people are forced to be silent because of the awe of the infinite knowledge of the vast world and the ambiguity of everyday language, they are undoubtedly the most vocal about their own lives and ethics as living individuals, yet Wittgenstein concludes without any further explanation: "It is clear that ethics cannot be put into words." (6.421)^[22] As mentioned earlier, it is easier to explain why ethics is "unspeakable" if one follows the philosophy of language constructed by Wittgenstein in terms of truth-value function term theory and logical image theory, but it is a Hamletian ethical dilemma whether to remain silent about this particular unspeakable matter. Wittgenstein's choice is to show the unspeakable by constructing a theory of the "speakable".^[26] The sense of the world must lie outside the world.....in it no value exists—and if it did exist, it would have no value." (6.41)^[22], the edge of the world is the final boundary of language, but the beginning of the meaning of the world, and Wittgenstein takes the meaning of life out of the daily drudgery and makes it a transcendent value. The ethical value, which may not be able to be expressed in words, is shown as a spiritual quest in the sky ahead of the path of life, attracting people to think and to seek, while the journey of life continues to go forward, finding a universal and sacred value for life. In this way, the activity of life itself is also a manifestation of ethical meaning. Wittgenstein did, to some extent, speak ethical "nonsense" in spite of the linguistic boundaries he erected, but this was the outward expression of his strong ethical concern, and his own life was made complete by his belief in and pursuit of the absolute meaning of life, as he said in his last words: "Tell them that I have lived a good life!"

3.3. Realistic inspiration for the problem of "silence"

In the twenty-first century, scientific discoveries continue to be made, the range of technical means is more sophisticated than ever, "how things are" becomes clearer, and the question of "how it exists" (6.44),^[27] which was mysterious in Wittgenstein's time, can already be explained by more than one "speakable" objects, the forms of discourse and the ways of expression seem to have been enriched. However, people are accustomed to computers encoding and decoding night and day, happy to accept appearances and answers from artificial intelligence, and unconsciously relying on digital memory as a "tertiary retention".^[28] While these add convenience to human life, they also regulate people's daily behavior and consume their desire for individual expression and free speech. On the one hand, people's addiction to the proliferation and fragmentation of colloquial terms makes everyday language even more confusing, while on the other hand, the ubiquitous digital recordings, such as the random posting and sharing of cards, and the live commercial broadcasts, dissolve the sanctity of language and leave people with no time to care about the mysterious universe beyond the world. For all these reasons, the living space of philosophy is being compressed. Whether one accepts Wittgenstein's warning or not, the core of "silence" should be the active thinking of what can be said and the active search for the meaning of the world, rather than the inability to say anything under the rule of technology and the loss of discernment. In the new era, what role should philosophy play, how to reconceptualize the world, society and ethics, and what kind of symbiotic relationship between science and philosophy are all questions that need to be soberly understood and deeply considered.

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