Not how the world is, is the mystical, but that it is. 


The Tractatus of Wittgenstein is truly one of the most remarkable masterworks of modern philosophy, not only in its extraordinary aim presented in the foreword, that is, to solve all the problems of philosophy, and in the extreme density and logical rigour, which allows not a single unnecessary world, and makes readers describe it with the metaphor of a crystal palace. Apart from the logical and language-philosophical results, which make up the main body of the book and are a major influence for all the later investigators of language, the metaphysical claims that start turning up on the final pages, thus reinterpreting and completing the linguistical discussions into a coherent philosophical system touching all the philosophical disciplines, gnoseology, metaphysics and ethic alike, if only for one or two sentences, are maybe the points most worth considering.

Now, we will try to understand and interpret these metaphysical conclusions and in their relation with the logico-linguistical side of the work, and compare Wittgenstein’s results with other general metaphysical systems and views, religiously and philosophically grounded alike, given that in metaphysics this distinction tends to blur, especially in our European thinking which is firmly grounded in the Judeo-Christian religious tradition.

According to Wittgenstein, the world is made up of facts, and things, and the world is the sum of these facts. Although this may at first seem like an unnecessary game with worlds, this is the ground on which the whole system is built, the foundation without which both the linguistical and the metaphysical claims would fail. So, what difference this choice of worlds makes? What is a fact and what is a thing? A fact is something which exists in some distinct way and not in some other way. The existence of the certain material things (for example the planets, or the book on my desk) are facts, the natural laws (laws of physics) and the existence of you or me are also facts. The natural laws could be imagined in some other way, nor the existence of matter in general and distinct material objects or persons are absolute undoubtable necessities. There are facts, which can be expressed in true statements (the sky is blue, I exist, Wittgenstein was a philosopher, Socrates was mortal), and other statements are false, because the facts they try to express simply don’t exist. This means that the world has a distinct character the universe exists in a certain way. It is because of the emphasis of this crucial thought that the world „fact“ is chosen instead of „thing“. If we would say that the world is the sum of „things“, that would easily lead to a tautological and over-general interpretation like „the world is everything“ or „everything is everything“, and would miss the important point of the distinct character of the universe made up of some facts and not of some other facts.

After establishing these grounds about the world’s existence, Wittgenstein proceeds to explain complicated but strict logical thought series how thought and language are the ways to comprehend these and communicate(express) these facts, and that they are theoretically able to accomplish this task completely. „If a question can be put at all, it can also be answered“ At the same time, he finds that the traditional questions of philosophy concerning metaphysics, aesthetics and ethic, are not answerable, nor can be put correctly using the logical structure of language. Opposed to some later positivists (for example John Carnap), who after making
this observation conclude that these kind of questions are nothing but utter nonsense, as a results of his strict and complete analysis of facts and statements, Wittgenstein founds a suprising but nonetheless logical solution of the problem: The answers to the philosphical questions are not facts of the world, but they are found outside of the universe, and thus also outside of the scope of language whose task is to express the facts of the world. „The meaning (aim) of the world is to be found outside the world.“ The metaphysical answers are not be found by the means of logic and language, as these are the tools to deal with the universe, but by mystical experience. „Mystical experience is grasping the world as a wholeness with borders“ Now if we at this point look back at the previous sections of the works, we find that this is exactly what Wittgenstein does therein. He locates the borders of the world by describing it as the sum facts, with distinct character, and then makes an analysis of this bordered wholeness, examines it’s logical structure and our(human being) relation to this structured sum of facts. After completing the investigation of the world, and strictly locating it’s borders along with the borders of language, which two in this work he finds exactly the same, he proceeds to look outside the world, where the metaphysical questions and answers are located, doubting the existence(in some way which language cannot express) of these not in the slightest way.

At the end of the work we encounter the famous sentence „About which it is not possible to speak, must one be silent.“ This would is the final brick, completing the crystal palace, containing the wholeness the world and the language, it’s walls being the borders. But that is not the most curious thing about this great intellectual building. If read attentively we may notice the „back door“ a few statements earlier, the lines in which the results of the work are applied to the work itself, condemning it’s own statements as meaningless, but a the same time likening it to a ladder, on which the reader may climb up to the heights of true understanding, and then may toss away. So they maybe meaningless in the „tractatus-sense“ of logical meaning, but as the metaphor suggest, they are still useful, and even necessary, as without a ladder it could be impossible to climb up. This seeming self contradiction of the system (defining the limits of language, and at the same time using it in a way which transcend those limits), may be regarded as a failure of the system, but in an undoubtably more fruitful way, it can also be seen as it’s completion in the sense of fulfilling the purpose for which it was designed. The borders of the world being located by the logico-linguistical philosophical system, we may proceed to venture outside the limits of the world, and as a result, outside our system. But could have the borders been transcended without at first being located and thoroughly examined? As the ladder metaphor also suggests, that is not very likely. So summing our results up in a few worlds, the tractatus examines the sturture of the universe and the language(the way of comprehending and expressing facts of the universe), and by setting the borders opens the way to transcend them, and enter the realm of metaphysical questions and answers, which are located outside these limits.

Now we may proceed to the further consideration of these gnoseologic and metaphysical results of Wittgenstein, which can easily be interpreted as the main aim and purpose of the entire logico-linguistic system of the work, the ladder on which we may climb up to the realm of metaphysics. We may regard these claims as thee statements, the latter two being quasi-contradictory.
- The metaphysical reality exists outside the universe.
- Language deals with the universe, so it can’t express metaphysical questions and answers.
- Language may be a way to reach metaphysical conclusions, by being used and then being transcended. (Ladder metaphor)

The contradiction, between the latter two dissolves as we realise that by talking about metaphysics we are already outside the borders of logic and language, so the very idea of contradiction becomes meaningless or at least disregardable.

Although language is a quite limited tool, it is still the main form of human thought and the main way of human understanding. In the pursuit for metaphysical understanding, we may still use this imperfect tool, until found some more reliable way for getting knowledge, and maybe starting out with the hard and innacurate way of language is the only way to transcend it and proced to the mystical experience which makes our old tool dispensable, and our knowledge more real, although nearly impossible to communicate. We have to notice that the use of language as a tool for metaphysical understanding means the same as constructing and practising metaphysical systems, including religions (in the sense of philosophical systems).

The curious thing is that the conclusions of Wittgenstein, instead of condemning these systems as useless nonsense (as some other positivists do), give them sense and usefulness and a right to exist, by judging them flawed and imperfect and in some way nonsense, but at the same time regarding them as tools in the pursuit of true knowledge otherwise unreachable.

This process can be paralleled with certain doctrines of christianity, that say that our knowledge of god is necessarily partial and imperfect while living in this world, but that should not stop us by desiring and pursuing this knowledge with all our heart, so that as a prize of our efforts god may grant us this true wisdom. As St. Paul writes in one of his letters: „Now we see only through a mirror, and our vision is blurred, but then we may know as we are being known now“. If we browse thorough the history of philosophy, we may easily come across more cases of this phenomenon, the creators of great systems of metaphysics abandoning or transcending their own systems for uncommunicateable truths found out in the process of creating these systems and using them as forms of thought. St. Thomas of Aquino, the scholastic philosopher and theologian, whose book, the Summa Theologica, was used as the main source of education for theologians for more than 600 years, after creating his monumental system, dealing with the nature of god and the realation of creatures to him, put down the pen in his old age and wrote no more. He said that all the he had written was of no worth and that compared to reality it is completely weightless. But to realise this, he had to spend his entire life with philosophical and theological thinking. He had to create the system to be able to transcend it. The scholastic theology was his ladder, indeed very different, but in some sense still suprisingly similar to that of Wittgenstein. We can find exactly the same process more than a millenia before the work of Wittgenstein. If we read St. Augustine’s monumental treatise about the Holy Trinity (De Trinitate), we find that he warns us just the same way as Wittgenstein: To gain real understanding, one must transcend and throw away these philosophical explanations, as they not the truth, but only a way to the reality of god for the humans with with naturally weak understanding. A ladder. It seems like our principle which we discovered as the final conclusion of Wittgensteins tractatus, has it’s occurrences throughout the entire history of metaphysics. To still widen the group of examples, we may
mention Pascal as well and his famous sentence about God being the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jakob, and not the God philosophers. Not at all surprisingly, he was a philosopher well before making this remark. We could without doubt find more examples of this „ladder-effect“, but at the moment that doesn’t seem necessary.

These examples support and at the same time widen our interpretation of the conclusion of the tractatus which is this: All metaphysical systems are imperfect and in some way meaningless, because the metaphysical reality lies outside the world and the language deals only with the facts of the world. However, these systems may be used as „ladders“, ways of getting nearer to the metaphysical reality, and in some non-logical way allow for a higher understanding, and the transcendence of the systems itself.

We have seen examples of the „ladder effects“ well before Wittgenstein, so the question may arise, if his work has added anything to the understanding of this phenomenon. The answer is without doubt positive. There are particularities of Wittgenstein’s case which make it stand out among the other examples and make it especially interesting and fruitful for our understanding. Opposed to St. Thomas, Augustine and Pascal who were christian thinkers, and their turning was in some way strictly related to their religion, Wittgenstein’s case was not connected to any particular religion, thus making the „ladder-effect“ more general, and at the same time more rewarding to philosphical investigation. But most importantly, his work gives the most grounded and logical reasoning for the transcendence of philosophy, by exactly locating it’s borders and limits, and making the departure grounded by the strict examination of that which is being thrown away. It can be said that the abandoning of logic almost seems logical. Finally I have to remind you, that for true understanding, you must transcend and throw away all that is written here, as if it were a ladder, which you may toss away after climbing up on it. Until then, we must still talk, so that we may discover that about which it is not possible to talk, and then be must silent.