

# Can illogical thought be possible ?

*Ningombam Bupenda Meitei*  
*(St. Stephen's College)*  
*Department of Philosophy, University of Delhi*

## Abstract

The notion of logical thought has been discussed since time known to rational mind but the notion of illogical thought be possible is rarely thought and in this paper, there is an attempt made to understand the notion of illogical thought by asking whether illogical thought be possible or not, and if it is not , why it is not and if it is yes , then how can it be. The paper comprises of two parts i.e. (i) Illogical thought is impossible . Why it is so? – Early Wittgenstein's reply and (ii) Illogical thought is possible. How can it be? -Criticism to Early Wittgenstein.

## Introduction

Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* is an intellectually revolutionary philosophical work to understand the world through language which is denotable in a form of picture which corresponds to an object through a fixed meaning in a logical space leading to the notion of an *ideal language* in which there is an acknowledgement of the limits of natural sciences and acceptance of non-deniability of metaphysics with concern to God too and the beauty of the mentioned work is the credibility of logic in understanding world and this very credible significant of logic in logical space is expressed by Wittgenstein in the book which is mentioned as,

*" 1.13 : The facts in logical space are the world."*

The point of debate which is raised at this point for discussion in this paper is to expound the query whether there is a possibility to have an access to or have an illogical thought and if the possibility is

impossible,then,why is it so and if it is possible,then ,how can it be understood and in the process of finding the impossibility,Wittgenstein has clarified to a great extent if not possibly to a complete extent ( as the matter of getting it extended to a complete whole may be premature to be either stated or confirmed before the debate) in his book and for the path to get the possibility,a criticism to Wittgenstein's approach in the book is apprised with a notion from natural sciences whose scope has been limited by Wittgenstein in his book as,

*“ 4.113 : Philosophy sets limits to the much disputed sphere of natural science.”*

The debate in the discussion will be revolved around philosophy of logic,language and science.

## **Illogical thought is impossible . Why it is so? – Early Wittgenstein's reply**

To understand reality,world has to be understood and to understand world,language is to be understood and to understand language, proposition has to be understood and to understand proposition,name has to be understood but understanding proposition and name can only be understood from understanding world and to understand world,state of affairs has to be understood and to understand the state of affairs,simple object has to be understood or in a nutshell,the one – to – one correspondence with simple object or *simple* with name needs to be understood in order to understand the totality of facts which are nothing but the state of affairs which in turn is the facts presentable by simple object(s) or simple(s) with their determinate relation which also gives an independent status to all the simple object(s) or simple(s) even if one of the simple(s) get(s) rid of the other simple(s) in the existing relation to get into a new determinate relation.Thus,to understand reality,language is used like a scale in measuring a line but language can't itself be used to understand the same language and since,it is so,then,there has to be an outsider to understand language or a way to give structure to it like a scaffolding to a building and this scaffolding of language is done by logic without which logical space is impossible to talk about and without logical space,there would not be facts to understand world as facts are there in the world not in an arbitrary manner but in a determinate relation and this determinate relation is possible only in a logical space.

A fact is like a situation and to realise the situation in a logical space,a picture is presented and the presentation of a picture displayed becomes fixed as the fact fixes or posits the simple or name which is later worded in language through one-to-one correspondence with their determinate relation which is governed by the rules of logic which are a priori and do need neither approval nor confirmation as logic has to be timelessly non-erroneous and the understanding of picture theory which gives fixed meaning

to a determinate relation between a fixed simple and its name can be found in the book as,

*“ 2.11 : A picture presents a situation in logical space,the existence and non-existence of states of affairs.”*

The reason why a picture theory which describes about the pictorial display of fact in logical space is brought is to go deeper in understanding reality which is understandable through *logical picture* because the notion of logical picture brings to the understanding of the notion of *thought* as stated in the book as

*“ 2.181 : A picture whose pictorial form is logical form is called a logical picture.”*  
*“ 3 : A logical picture of facts is a thought.”*

The debate could be started when a definition of thought is accepted in the book as a logical picture of facts in which there is a clear understanding of the logical space being used as a structure to language to get the total display of the picture of the world because the picture of the world is what is the totality of true thoughts as found in,

*“ 3.01 : The totality of true thoughts is a picture of the world.”*

The discussion above has impelled to accept the relation of world with thought through logical picture which in turn makes a thought itself logical as illogical thinking could be possible only when there is a possibility of illogical thought but the possibility of illogical thought can never be there as thought can never itself be illogical and thus,the crux of the first part of the debate i.e. *illogical thought is impossible* has started rolling and can be found in the book as,

*“ 3.03 : Thought can never be anything illogical ,since,if it were,we should have to think illogically.”*

But,there may be another query asking why there is a need of thought to understand whether there is impossible thought or not as the word *possible* or *impossible* could be played in a language game and the probable reply to it has to be,because as logical scaffolding structures language and logical structure is nothing but essentially and strictly not possible without thought and for its rules,thought is inevitable and it is inherently present whether the thought has to be a human thought or super mind thought or any thought or any thought not yet known so far too as thought here is thought per se as whose thought

is least concerned and supposing if,thought is not considered antecedent to language or if thought is considered consequent to language,then,thought has to pay a heavy price as thought itself can't be revealed and understood in its reality as language conceals thought and if thought is hidden by language ,then,how can there be a discussion on illogical thought being impossible as illogical thought even if it is taken to be possible too for a moment would be blindfolded by language and thus,logic would get lost as it would be kept in darkness by language and thus,thought is nowhere to be discovered to understand reality as thought is nothing but logical in itself and without this being logical in itself,thought is not even possible to be discussed and this is found in the book as,

“ 4.002 : .... *Language disguises thought. ....* “

Thought which is presented in logical picture when worded becomes meaningful only when the picture displayed could be aroused and when such arousal of no picture takes place,then,the word becomes meaningless and the meaningless word is non sensical and may not be non-logical (as non-logical can not be equated to illogical and since it is so,the prefix 'may' has been used giving a room for a point of discussion whether *that* which is illogical has to be necessarily non-logical and if not,then non-logical is not illogical and if yes,then illogical too equals non-logical but the question again is, if  $p = \{ - (-p) \}$  but how can the same  $p$  be  $p = \{ - (non\ p) \}$  and to say  $p = p$  ,one has to accept  $\{ - (-p) \} = \{ - ( non\ p) \}$  but how can it be possible ? )but undoubtedly is illogical as it could not arouse a logical picture which is governed in a logical space. The arousal of a logical picture which is governed in a logical space is possible when logical thought and fact with determinate relation enjoys one-to-one correspondence and the reality is presented in the form of picture which displays state of affairs in the form of simples with their relation and the relation is possible only in logical manner as the relation has to be structured in a logical space and thus,logical thought is born with the arousal of the logical picture and since,thought is logical in itself by the virtue of being in determinate and not arbitrary relation which is also shown in proposition in the form of its logical form also in which non-sensical,illogical thought can never be a proposition and as a result,a proposition expresses a word which corresponds to a determinate object or simple in only in an one-to-one correspondence and this leads to the understanding of the notion of *Ideal Language*.

The notion of *Ideal Language* backed by a fixed *picture theory of meaning* in *Early Wittgenstein* helps in giving a significant importance to logic to an extent that logic has become unmistakable and for that,it must be able to help itself without any external help which again could consequently open the understanding of the notion that whether human existence were there or not or will get extinct or not or whether God exists or not,the power of logic and its significance will always remain immortal and in

fact, the notion of immortality or mortality of logic may not arise as it itself is neither immortal nor mortal as it was there since unknown moment and will remain till unknown moment of world but the fundamental issue is, why there has to be logic even if world exists or not or why logic was there before world exists as it was there from unknown moment of the infinite past is an important query because the presence of logic before world arrives enables thought to be logical so that logical thought could understand world meaningfully as to understand world meaningfully, logical understanding is necessary and it is possible only with logical thought and if thought were illogical, then world wouldn't be understood and thus, world would not have been there but world has been there only with the prior existence of logical thought which is possible with logic only and thus, there remains no room for illogical thought as that would be not only meaningless but also beyond the purview of being possible and hence, illogical thought is impossible provided accepting which is understood that new possibility of form in logic i.e. rules of combination or logical space can't be discovered later in logic and this understanding is strengthened in the book as,

*" 5.473 : Logic must look after itself."*

*" 5.4731 : .... What makes logic a priori is the impossibility of illogical thought."*

The first part of the debate leads to the conclusion that illogical thought is impossible and why it is so also has been discussed and subsequently, this impossibility of illogical thought makes logic a priori and this notion of logic being a priori has heightened both the credibility and intellectual significance of philosophy of logic not only being exposed and expressed by Wittgenstein but also in the world of philosophy both in general and particular arenas of philosophical work.

## **Illogical thought is possible. How can it be? - Criticism to Early Wittgenstein**

The second part of the debate is to be initiated by the criticism to *Early Wittgenstein* without strongly referring to his own introspection in *Later Wittgenstein's* work of *Philosophical Investigations* but yet slightly influenced by the latter work of his and the discussion will be ended by my argument to make an attempt that illogical thought is possible.

If logic pictures world which is understood through language, then through logic, world can be known but through world, logic can not be ascertained, thus logic and world has no one-to-one correspondence internally but manifested to be related externally with a blanket of language but whether language acts transparently is a problem and even if a language acts transparently, there is still a blanket which is transparent and thus, there is no naked link between logic and world and so, how can world gets reflected on logic and even if, a mirror is considered to be a transparent blanket acting like a language between logic and world when it is separated by the mirror, but still, how much credibility could be there in terms of the cleanliness or clarity of the mirror as clarity of meaning of word is very fundamental in Wittgenstein's *picture theory of meaning* because it demands no vagueness but despite this problem, Wittgenstein in the book writes as ,

*“ 6.13 : Logic is not a body of doctrine, but a mirror-image of the world. Logic is transcendental.”*

If logic is a mirror-image of the world, then why can't that very logic also reflect as a mirror-image of the world of natural sciences such as psychology, *Darwin's theory* , physics in case of *Newtonian Mechanics* and modern physics in case of wave-particle duality of an elementary particle in *quantum mechanics* and it can not reflect them, so does Wittgenstein says,

*“4.113 : Philosophy sets limits to the much disputed sphere of natural science.”*

Wittgenstein writes that philosophy limits natural sciences and this notion of his could also be further strengthened from the following points for discussion,

*“ 4.1121 : Psychology is no more closely related to philosophy than any other natural science. ....”*

*“ 4.1122 : Darwin's theory has no more to do with philosophy than any other hypothesis in natural science.”*

*“ 6.341 : Newtonian mechanics, for example, imposes a unified form on the description of the world. ....”*

*“ 6.3431 : The laws of physics, with all their logical apparatus, still speak, however indirectly, about the objects of the world.”*

The above points mending up a high wall for natural sciences to be philosophy will not only awake the dead scientists like Newton, Darwin, Einstein from their graveyard but also send a message of an intellectual horror to those who are in philosophy of science in modern time. If Wittgenstein says that he left Cambridge University because he didn't find oxygen to breathe, it does not mean that either oxygen was not available in the air of Cambridge or the remaining living beings too did not breathe but it can or does also mean that he didn't really enjoy being there because of good reasons known to him only but at the same time, because of good reasons known to the remaining people, they chose to remain there at that point of time in the same place from where he left and this observation can also make one ponder why one or it may be many people's understanding can become the understanding of the whole lot and it is also applicable in case of changing views in terms of laws of physics from Newtonian physics to Einsteinian or modern physics but having said that, the fundamental question is as similar to question asked by Galileo to state heliocentric theory against the sun revolving around the earth in case of *Copernican Revolution*, Wittgenstein's intellectual authority if accepted on the basis of his philosophical arguments which are concerned in *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* in which, he hardly argues but rather writes in the form of aphorism, could not be a strong advocate to limit natural sciences either to be from or to be philosophy because of the need of convincing justification which is lacking in the book.

Before going to the further argument, the notion of universe is necessary to understand the complementarity as for every set  $S$ , there exists its complementary set  $S'$  to form Universe  $U$  in a set theory and the very understanding of it is also applicable in understanding world and its complementary component to form universe in consideration. If the world is denoted as  $W$ , then its complementary world as  $W'$ , then the union of both the worlds can be symbolized as  $W \cup W' = U$ , where  $U$  is universe. Wittgenstein initially did discuss about world and later started using a prefix 'my' before 'world' to be 'my world' which he writes in the book as,

“ 5.6 : *The limits of my language mean the limits of my world.*”

The point of argument could be why has he changed from 'world' to 'my world' and thus limiting his own 'world' from the previous world to the later 'my world' in which he also brings the limits of 'my language' and not as the limits of 'language' per se and this change could not be taken as a mere morphological transformation as there could be a possible fundamental question that, why he has shifted his goal post which perhaps could also appear to be to befit his own theory for his own work at the cost of the true reality and perhaps if that is so, then why should language limit world and if that is so again, then whether logic too has been limited by language or not and if not, then whether should we consider logic is still outside the purview and control of language and if that is so, then, what type of logic is that which has already gone out of the world and further, a question can be raised whether logic as Wittgenstein says is transcendental has also transcended to other world and if that is possible or if that is so, then how many possible worlds are there and if that or those can be calculable or knowable, then what one knows in one world is not enough to know the universe of many worlds if many worlds constitute universe but again, even after that, the complementary component of the entire

worlds ,lets say non-worlds will be there from complementariness and whether logic would also transcend to those non-worlds too which to me,has to because if not,then how can a complementariness apply at the end to constitute the universe,thus logic still governs till the end.

The issue is to make an attempt of finding a possibility for illogical thought being possible but before it,a criticism to Wittgenstein's views on Newtonian mechanics and laws of physics needs to be discussed. Newton did not impose his own laws on nature to understand and describe world ,rather ,it was nature who inspired his line of thought engulfed in scientific enquiry to bring out his own calculations in classical mechanics which again is not an exact but approximated laws to describe world or nature through physics as Newton himself could not and did not have any power to impose his laws on world but instead,he learnt and took from mother nature to describe the world ,in a way,Newton painted the world approximately and not that the world painted by Netwon turned out to be the actual world that is discussed today.

The next argument to criticize Wittgenstein is,if laws of physics are still *indirectly* speaking about the objects of the world,then what are the laws of physics doing in case of determining position of radar,satellites,velocity of rockets,duration of nuclear explosion,time for earth's rotation signifying different seasons and even to the extent of understanding that one stands on the earth's surface is due to gravitational force of attraction and these phenomena are all directly accessible and vividly visible but yet,there are many areas where laws of physics indirectly speak about the objects of the world but not in all the cases and thus,Wittgenstein even born after Copernican Revolution should have rethought to use the word "still indirectly" in the discussion.

The further argument is nearing to the notion of illogical thought being possible by drawing a motivation to create a analogy from the criticism born out of reflecting on the notion of simultaneous presence which is found in the book as,

*" 6.3751 : For example, the simultaneous presence of two colours at the same place in the visual field is impossible,in fact logically impossible,since it is ruled out by the logical structure of colour."*

The presence of two colours is not my attention at this point of discussion but my criticism is focussed on the notion of '*simultaneous presence of*' as *simultaneity* is a profound fundamental concept in quantum mechanics to under the particle-wave dualism of an elementary particle like electron as

electron can neither be considered to be of a matter completely or a wave completely but possesses both the qualities of being wave and matter in nature and hence,thus has dual nature.

Wittgenstein instead of trying to resolve critical observations against *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* which he does so in *Philosophical Investigations* ,writes of vanishing the problem in order to solve the problem and discusses about kicking the ladder away from the top once the top has been reached and both the notion is worthy to criticize and before it,the points made by him are given as,

*“ 6.521 : The solution of the problem of life is seen in the vanishing of the problem.”*

*“ 6.54 : .... He must transcend these propositions,and then he will see the world aright.”*

The argument here is,does one make sensible for one's own problem in life to get solved by waiting for the problem to get vanished or to find the solution for vanishing the problem meaning whether seeking or making an attempt to find solution should not be encouraged or instead, one is motivated with a notion that the problem will vanish but the question is,when and how the problem will get vanished or whether the problem will be made to vanish by some agent or conditions and even if so, can a wise person effort to wait for the vanishing of the problem without having trying to find the solution for it. How will a mathematician or a logician solve problem if he or she has to see for the vanishing of the problem,instead,their seeking of solution will be making the problem to get solved and hence,vanished and can not their problem too also be considered as problem of life and even if not,their own mathematical or logical problem may be a big problem in the life of that mathematician or logician and the remaining people can not consider their such problem of their life as not a problem of life simply because the people's problem and mathematician's problem are viewed differently ,because problem to one may even not be a problem to his or her own neighbour too.

The next argument is on transcending not only world but also propositions at last which results in kicking away of ladder but the issue here is, if the ladder has to be kicked from the top once the top has been reached,then after kicking the ladder away,where is the relation from the ground from where one has started the logical step to reach the top and how can one cut the logical step in parts with discontinuity and whether logic could exist for only at the top leaving out what was on the ground and this notion leads to the loosening of grounding which may impact on the notion of fixed *picture theory*

*of meaning* based on logical picture in logical space. What is the speciality of being at the top that one needs to forget the path undertaken, logical space being undergone in order to know the world aright and if that is the way to know the world aright which is only from the top that too after kicking the ladder away, then, what is the meaning of the ladder whose logical steps are not recognized to be good enough to know the world aright while climbing up and even if that meaning is recognised, then, why some logical steps at the top should be given preferential treatment over those basal logical space on the ground.

Wittgenstein smartly ends his book saying,

*“ 7 : What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence.”*

The ending line sounds like an enslavement to the empire of language that has ignored the notion of “what we can know about” which is eclipsed by the notion of giant “What we cannot speak about” as ‘know about’ and ‘speak about’ can not be the same because there could be areas where one knows about but one can not speak as he or she does not know either language or any medium of propagation of thought but the same very one could be thinking his or her own thought but the fundamental query is whether thinking can be possible without language or not.

Wittgenstein discusses about ‘my language’ limiting ‘my world’ and extending this line of argument, a criticism could be bounced back on him reflecting that the limited language limits the world to a limited world and one who lives in that limited world knows about that limited world only but this observation does not limit any reader to limit himself or herself who is from outside of the one in that limited world as for the reader may find another world too, thus, there may be a logical possibility of having at least more than one world and this discussion should not be confused by two worlds such as world and non world, where non world becomes the complementary part of world in forming universe, as here many individuals may be taken in order to know many different worlds and in each different world if exemplified as the world of Martians, chimpanzees, Amazon tribesmen, bats, ants, rats will be different from the world of modern humans and thus, all of them are likely to have different understanding and in each case, their respective understanding is logical but the comparative study of the logical understanding of any of the two would amount to a lot of differences and because of which, one’s rule to shower love to loved ones may be different from another’s rule for the same and the observation of any thing by these different beings would also be different and that difference could be from different rules applied on oneself and thus, one set of rules can not be considered as either more logical or less logical as there is nothing like more or less logical but the impression of the being with more logical usage over low logical usage would be of considering the former logical be logical and latter logical be illogical.

By going again back to the fixed *picture theory of meaning*, the issue is why there needs to be a determinate relation in a logical space and the theory describes about 'what' only and not 'how' it is to be and why should a logical space be considered only logical which may also mean that there may be some space which is not a logical space and even, why a thought needs to be logical as if thinking always is logical as thinking too could be very arbitrary with no temporal succession and one's fancy could not be considered as not thinking and in fancy thinking, there is a notion of imagined reality too and imagination's role can not be ruled out as Einstein says "*Imagination is far more better than learning*" and in imagination of fancy world, any thinking could be possible but that can not be considered illogical as to be illogical too, there ought to be some rules to play the game of illogical thinking otherwise, the player who is playing the illogical thinking may trespass the boundary of so called logical thinking and in order to refrain himself or herself from doing that, he or she has to obey some rules and those rules are very much in illogical thinking domain, which also sends a notion that why a rule or rules should be obsessed only with logicity as if, the entire rules are in the world of logical thinking only and there are no rules in the world of illogical thinking because if there are no rules in the illogical thinking, then, how can the rules of logical thinking be differentiated from those of illogical thinking as the universe not only comprises of one world but of many worlds but the most accepted view of world is imposed but this imposition could also be criticisable by modern theoretical physics in a domain of *string theory* which discusses about the mathematically accepted logical understanding of many universes called parallel universes of eleven dimensions, thus the world known to mankind empirically as of now is only governed by three spatial coordinates and one temporal coordinate and thus, logic applicable in this world or universe may not necessarily be applicable in other universe and even if necessarily applicable, it may not be sufficient to apply in other universe or world and in that case, there could be a possibility of what one think logical thought in one world is perceived as illogical thought in another world and vice-versa but then, there atleast shows that the possibility of illogical thought exists and if even if that is not showable or unconvincing, then still, the rules of illogical thought capture the domain of illogical space and the boundary is well marked too by the rules of logical thought and thus, if logical thought is possible, then there should also be illogical thought otherwise, logic in both the cases can only eliminate other logic without realizing that one's logic in logical thought can not be the same as to the logic in illogical thought but there is also a rule in illogical thought, thus illogical thought is not impossible and hence, possible and again if one says that the logic unknown to one world is illogical while logic known to his or her own world is logical, then the issue is resolvable when one understands the entire universe or world of many worlds in reality and not by merely kicking the ladder away after reaching the top.

## Conclusion

It is difficult to conclude what to conclude and what not to conclude but at least , some sense of understanding of what is what which is usually not taken to be what is possible and also to be what is taken to be what is possible has been thought ,hence giving an attempt to understand the paper.

---

## Reference

- (i) Logico-Philosophicus, T. (1974). translated by Brian McGuinness and David Pears.

