

EXAMPLE OF ANSWERS TO EXAM QUESTIONS

Prof. Dan Flores
Dept. of Philosophy
Houston Community College
daniel.flores1@hccs.edu

TOPIC: Wittgenstein's *Tractatus-Logico-Philosophicus* §§5.6—5.641, Solipsism

QUESTIONS: How does Wittgenstein end up with a solipsistic position in the *Tractatus*?

ANSWER ONE (POOR ANSWER)

Solipsism says that since I exist and I have experiences that that is all that matters. If I have pain, I know that I have pain so I know that the pain is an experience and that means the pain exists. Wittgenstein says that language exists and that logic exists. He knows this because we use logic to figure out things using our language. If we don't have the right language then we can't use logic. Wittgenstein says that we can't use language to talk about language so even if we experience something we can't use language to explain it. This brings us back to solipsism because we can't talk about our experience so we don't know if we exist but if we do exist it will be because we can use logic.

ANSWER TWO (ACCEPTABLE ANSWER)

We can derive Wittgenstein's solipsism from sections 5.6—5.641. Logic is limited by the world. Logic is the structure of language and language is that method – the use of propositions – to say what is the case about the world. Language, then, is the limit of what can be said about the world and is, therefore, the limit of my own world (5.6) where logic shows that structure of what can be said. It follows that what can be thought and said (or shown) is limited by the world also. And so, "We cannot think, that we cannot think: we cannot therefore say what we cannot think" (5.61). What I say, then, is said by a language that is about the world. But, if my language is about the world, then the world is my world – I use language to say things about the world of which I am the subject.

ANSWER THREE (EXCELLENT ANSWER)

Wittgenstein presents his notion of solipsism between sections 5.6—5.641. For Wittgenstein, there is a strong connection between our language and the way the world is. This is most noted when he writes, "The limits of my language, mean the limits of my world" (§5.6). But in section 5.61 he also states that "Logic fills the world: the limits of the world are also its limits" and that "That the world is my world, shows itself in the fact that the limits of the language (the language which I understand) mean the limits of my world" (§5.62). But what does this mean?

Solipsism refers to the position that all there is is my existence (my consciousness, my pain, my experiences, etc.): "Existence is everything that I experience," as Stephen Thornton puts it.¹ So, Wittgenstein's argument seems to be something like: ***If existence is everything that I experience, and "logic fills the world," and the limits of my language are the limits of my world, then the world would have to be solipsistic since it is my language and my experiences that make up the world.***

And this isn't just a way of speaking. I am my world. There is no subject *in* the world – I am not a thing *in* the world. Rather, the thinking subject (the "I") *is* the world (§5.62). So, solipsism is true, but not in the sense that "I am the only *thing* with a mind, or consciousness, or whatever." But true in the sense that there is only "I" – only the world, only one reality.

¹ "Solipsism and the Problem of Other Minds." Stephen P. Thornton, *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/solipsis/>, January 24, 2016.