NOTES TO WITTGENSTEIN’S TRACTATUS

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§5.6—5.641, Solipsism

§5.6,
“The limits of my language, mean the limits of my world.” W seems to be suggesting that there is some sort of (strong) connection between my “world” and my “language.” Could he mean something like what my world is is shaped by my language? What would this mean?

§5.61,
Logic is limited by the boundaries of the world. But given §5.6, it also would seem that, given that there is a strong relationship between logic and language, the world itself is limited by logic. Logic/language are the limits of the world, and the world is “filled” by logic?

“This and this there is in the world, that there is not.” In other words, we cannot say that there are some such and such things in the world AND there are not other such and such things since this would mean that we would have to know the total of “the way things are” in order to say that some such and such does not exist. But we are bound by the limits of the world and logic. And since the world does not show us that such and such does not exist, we cannot say that it does not. We simply do not know all possibilities and do not know enough about the world make such claims.

We can never say (think, discuss, imagine, conceive) comprehensibly things which we cannot think of or conceive of.

§5.62,
Solipsism refers to the position that all there is is my existence (my consciousness, my pain, my experiences, etc.). Or, in other words, “Existence is everything that I experience”¹ – what exists is what I experience.

Saying and Showing mean something very specific for W. When he says, “In fact what solipsism means, is quite correct, only it cannot be said, but it shows itself,” he means something like ‘Since the limits of the world are the very limits of logic and language, we cannot go beyond this world and this language (this logic). So, there is no language or logic with which to describe (“say”) the fact that the world is the limit of language and logic. But, the sentence “The world is the limit of language and logic” shows that this is the case. This is all there is.’ Or, as Martin Pulido puts it, “Language and pictures cannot say what their structures have in common, they can only show them, because any language or picture relies on the logical form that is mirrored in them. We cannot step out of our language with language to depict language.”²

§5.621—5.632,
I am my world. My language, my world. Thus, only one world? Thus, there is only my life, one life. Thus, there is no subject in the world, for the subject, i.e., the thinking subject (the “I”) is the world. And the world is limited by it – by language and logic.

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.

§5.632—5.6331,
To emphasize his point that ‘I am the world and this can only be shown, not said’ W uses an analogy with the eye. The eye sees, but there is nothing in the “the field of sight” that says the eye is doing the seeing. Nevertheless, through the eye’s field of sight is shown all that can be seen. The eye does not know that it is the thing doing the seeing. It just sees and this is what is shown to me.

¹ http://www.iep.utm.edu/solipsis/
§5.634,

*A priori* – meaning *that which comes before experience*. When W says that no part of experience is *a priori*, what he means is that we never come to know things prior to experience. Experience is all there is. There is no prior knowledge of things. And since everything we see and can describe could be otherwise, none of it could be a priori since that would mean that whatever was known a priori could not be other than what it was. This assumes that knowledge *a priori* is knowledge of what is necessary. But, since things could be different, things are not necessary.

§5.64,

There is only the "I" – an extensionless point. Reality. This is all there is.

§5.641,

The "I" is not a psychological thing, it is a "metaphysical subject" – "metaphysical" meaning pertaining to what is real. Since there is nothing but the "I" from a strictly metaphysical standpoint since nothing comes before experience, and what exists is what is experienced (by the "I"), existence (reality) is identical with the experiences of the "I" which is just to say that existence (reality) is nothing but "I".