

Ramesh Chandra Pradhan

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# Mind, Meaning and World

A Transcendental Perspective

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*For  
Rohin, Nivriti and Sanya*

# Preface

The present monograph is designed to cover a part of the area concerning mind, meaning and world. The problem of mind is as old as philosophy itself. It covers such concepts as consciousness, intentionality, self, meaning and so on which borderline on the issues concerning life as a whole. These issues provide a perspective on how to understand man, his self and the goals of his life. Thus, the problems of mind have occupied the centre stage of philosophizing in the contemporary world. It is not without reason that philosophers in the West as well as in India are concerned with the nature of mind and consciousness since time immemorial.

Mind is a metaphysical reality just as the world is. It is in this sense that the central problem of the book is mind and its multiple dimensions. It is the metaphysics of mind and consciousness which is the central issue that will be dealt in this essay. Mind and consciousness constitute the broad metaphysical scope of this essay. It is primarily because there is no way we can introduce any other issues concerning man and the universe without taking into account the nature of mind and consciousness. Consciousness constitutes an important area in philosophy of mind because it constitutes the core of the mental world which spreads from language and meaning to action. Everything that is significant in human life presupposes the mind which is known as the locus of thought, intelligence, emotions and volitions. Consciousness is the characteristic of all these mental phenomena. Therefore, ultimately consciousness is the bedrock phenomenon in the philosophy of mind.

There have been many attempts in the recent past to understand consciousness in psychology, neurophysiology, cybernetics and cognitive science. These sciences have attempted to provide a science of consciousness based on the scientific findings gathered by the natural scientists. But the so-called science of consciousness has failed to address the central problem of consciousness, namely, how consciousness is possible in a predominantly material world. This has been called the “hard problem” of consciousness by David Chalmers who has challenged the dominant method of reductive explanation of the mental phenomena including consciousness. The scientific method is largely objective, reductive and naturalistic in its explanation of the mental phenomena. That is why the science of consciousness has failed to address the first-person and subjective nature of consciousness.

In this essay an attempt is made to present a metaphysics of consciousness because metaphysics is well placed to attempt at a broad framework in which consciousness can be explained. Metaphysics is not bound by the scientific method; it brings in the method of interpretation and integration to explain consciousness in its finite as well as infinite dimensions. Consciousness is not bound by the human body nor does it admit the limits of the material world, or even of the brain. Therefore, there is no reason to confine consciousness to the human body or the brain. Given this metaphysical stance which may be called the transcendental stance, it can be seen that consciousness unfolds many of its dimensions which are not revealed within a scientific framework. The present essay therefore aims at a metaphysics of consciousness which can bring out the higher-order phenomena of the mind which are far beyond the level of cognitive consciousness. The following are the major theses of the metaphysics of consciousness discussed here:

1. Consciousness is unlimited and unbound.
2. The structure of consciousness is normative in the sense that meanings are implicitly structured into consciousness.
3. Consciousness at a higher level is transcendental and not empirical. It is not psychological and neurological because the mere study of the brain cannot account for consciousness in its higher dimensions.
4. Consciousness is I-consciousness or subjective consciousness open to the first-person explanations.
5. Self is the locus of consciousness. Therefore, there is the necessity of the transcendental subject or ego to integrate consciousness into a unified field.

These theses have been variously discussed in this essay in order to project a holistic field of consciousness.

In this connection it has been inevitable to discuss the nature of the self or the ego because it has a larger impact on the nature of consciousness itself. Consciousness in order to be unified requires a unifying self or ego as the unitary principle. The sceptics who have rejected the very idea of self are bound to acknowledge that in the absence of the unifying self, there would be no possibility of consciousness being integrated into a seamless whole as it has been claimed by the phenomenologist like Husserl. Therefore, it is important to bring out the metaphysical significance of the self. Moreover, it is not the empirical self which is important; attempt must be to see the importance of the transcendental self which has played a prominent role in the writings of Kant, Husserl and Wittgenstein. The transcendental self can account for the possibility of transcendental consciousness.

Another accepted problem which has been central to the essay is the nature of the world. Consciousness is connected with the world which is represented within the domain of consciousness. The world is placed within the domain of consciousness because the consciousness like reason is unbounded. There is nothing beyond consciousness, and so the world cannot be placed outside the domain of consciousness. The world is the empirical correlate of consciousness, but transcendently it is within consciousness. There is no reason to believe that the world's reality is denied by placing it in consciousness. But from a transcendental point of view, we can never make the world independent of consciousness and mind as Kant and Husserl maintain.

The meaning of the world is already constituted in consciousness. The structure of the world is constituted in the intentional structure of consciousness. The very idea of meaning is a contribution of the conscious mind. Besides, the meanings that we constitute regarding man, society, culture, ethics, law, politics and religion are all implicit in the domain of consciousness. It is therefore important to study the nature of meaning in the mind and consciousness. However, it cannot be said that all meanings are linguistic. There are non-linguistic meanings as well. All meanings are part of the constitutive normative structure of the mind and consciousness.

The mental phenomena and the meanings are all placed within the domain of the holistic structure of consciousness. What we call the mental phenomena are the conscious phenomena, and they are the ones which are constituted within consciousness. This thesis can be called the constitutive thesis which is part of the metaphysics of consciousness. Language itself is underlined by consciousness such that there can be no solution of the problem of meaning in language without taking into account the constitution of meaning in consciousness. The relation between language and thought which has been at the centre of contemporary philosophy of mind can be resolved only by bringing in consciousness into the picture. Meanings are directly the products of consciousness.

This essay attempts a survey of the problem ranging from mind, language, world and meaning to the problem of higher-order consciousness as reflected in the Indian theories of consciousness in Advaita Vedanta and Buddhism. Both these systems provide a transcendental account of consciousness in which consciousness rises above its empirical and bodily conditions. They provide a new dimension to consciousness by introducing the moral and spiritual aspects of consciousness. Consciousness is not only concerned with the world, but also it transcends the world. In that case, consciousness becomes the absolute reality as in Advaita Vedanta and Yogacara Buddhism. There is a way of elevating consciousness beyond its narrow confines imposed by the natural sciences. Transcendental philosophy liberates consciousness from its empirical conditions and sees it as unconditioned and absolute.

This essay brings together the important insights from three rich philosophical traditions concerning consciousness, namely, the analytical, phenomenological and Indian traditions. The canvas is vast, but I have only partially touched upon the key issues concerning consciousness, meaning and the world keeping in view the vast number of issues remaining to be unexplored.

My central thesis is that only a transcendental theory of consciousness can solve the problems confronting philosophers today. The natural sciences have left the problem of consciousness unsolved in all its dimensions. Therefore, metaphysics must step in to unravel the deep structures of consciousness.

Shimla, India

Ramesh Chandra Pradhan

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## About the Author

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# Chapter 1

## Wittgenstein on Self, Meaning and World



### 1.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will discuss Wittgenstein's views on self, meaning and world in an attempt to bring out the connections between self, language and the world within a transcendental framework. Wittgenstein has opted for a transcendental way of bringing out the connections between language and logic on the one hand and the world on the other. From his early philosophy in the *Tractatus* (Wittgenstein 1961a) and to his later philosophy in the *Investigations* (Wittgenstein 1953), he has pursued a method of understanding language and the world which can be called transcendental (Shwayder 1969: 66–70; Stenius 1960; Pradhan 2008). Though he calls his early philosophy transcendental, he calls his later philosophy grammatical (Wittgenstein 1953) in nature. However, we can consider Wittgenstein as a transcendental philosopher in general as he has given up the empiricist and the naturalist way of interpreting language and the world.

Wittgenstein's project of a transcendental philosophy of language and meaning hinges on his notion of self that influences his notions of language and meaning. The concept of self is central to the project of mapping the meanings of language and world within a non-naturalistic framework. This is evident in the way language and meaning are protected by Wittgenstein from the naturalist onslaught in the hands of the empiricists and the positivists. The latter have always made attempt to reduce meaning to sense experience and thus have subjected language and meaning to naturalist analysis (Quine 1960). Wittgenstein has resisted this naturalist move throughout his philosophy.

My aim here is to articulate the fine nuances of the transcendental methodology in Wittgenstein's philosophy of language and world. Besides, I will bring out his concept of self so as to integrate the concepts of self, world and language within the transcendental framework. My main argument is that the transcendental concept of self is central to Wittgenstein's philosophy of language and meaning.

## 1.2 Philosophy, Logic and the Transcendental Method

Wittgenstein's philosophy in general and his early philosophy in particular can be said to belong to the broad category of transcendental philosophy because of its adherence to the tenets of philosophizing within the broad framework of bringing out the logical structure of language and the world. That language and world have a logical structure or logical form is the basic assumption of Wittgenstein's philosophy of language. Wittgenstein writes:

*My work has extended from the foundations of logic to the nature of the world.* (Wittgenstein 1961b: 79e)

This statement reflects Wittgenstein's philosophical method of exploring the foundations of logic and language and the logical structure of the world. The foundations of logic could not be explored unless logic is treated transcendently. This is what Wittgenstein realizes when he treats logic as transcendental. He writes:

Logic is not a body of doctrines, but a mirror-image of the world.  
Logic is transcendental. (Wittgenstein 1961a: 6.13)

This statement makes it clear that logic can be taken as a transcendental discipline which consists of the logically necessary propositions. By the transcendental discipline, Wittgenstein means a discipline that deals with the a priori and necessary logical truths which show the logical structure of language and the world. In this sense, logic reveals the logical form of language and the world. He writes:

The propositions of logic describe the scaffolding of the world, or rather they represent it. They have no 'subject-matter'. (Wittgenstein 1961a: 6.124)

Wittgenstein suggests that logic has a no "subject matter" in the sense the sciences have, but it treats the world only from a formal point of view by presenting what logical possibilities the world must have. This is expressed in the following way:

The exploration of logic means the exploration of everything that is subject to law. And outside logic everything is accidental. (Wittgenstein 1961a: 6.3)

That is, the realm of logic is the realm of necessary laws such that they hold irrespective of what the world actually is, but not what the world must be. The world in fact is subject to the logical laws because "logic pervades the world" (Wittgenstein 1961a, b: 5.61) and that "logic is *prior* to every experience—that something *is so*. It is prior to the question 'How?', not prior to the question 'What?'" (Wittgenstein 1961a: 5.552).

Wittgenstein's transcendental logic is not a domain of substantive truths, but of logical possibilities which account for its relation with the world. Logic is the realm of all logical possibilities with regard to the world. That is why he says:

The fact that the propositions of logic are tautologies *shows* the formal –logical—properties of language and the world. (Wittgenstein 1961a: 6.12)

These formal properties are the logical possibilities of the world which logic lays down by making language the logical picture of the world. It is language which