CHAPTER-IV
CHAPTER: IV

DOCTRINE OF SILENCE

'Half of what I say is meaningless. I say so that the other half may reach you'.

: Kahlil Gibran

The object of analysis within this chapter will be the multi-dimensional silence of Wittgenstein on various issues. This chapter is very much related to the previous two chapters. There, we discussed Wittgenstein's peculiar style of writing, which is in the form of aphorisms, short paragraphs, very often loosely connected. This style is not "accidental" but a conscious and deliberate choice made by him. It has generated a lot of controversy in the interpretation of his thoughts. This chapter is a kind of archaeological process of digging out the submerged meanings from the depth of Wittgenstein's stylistic representations and the possibilities of his proverbial silence on various issues. Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy as an activity, not a set of theory and his view that philosophy cannot be put beside the natural sciences gives a foundation to construct his doctrine of silence. The topic of 'Wittgensteinian silence' is one of the other polemical points among the scholars. Our assumption on this problem is that there are methodological, as well as cultural and
epistemological implications for this ‘silence’. Our analysis in the chapter will be an attempt to justify this assumption.

The general outline of this chapter will be to dig out the areas of Wittgensteinian silence, which is a prevalent theme in the early and later periods. So, we intend to analyse the works of this period. We would like to understand his ‘silence’ and its implications in relations to his times. In any thinker, we can see that the influence of his/her immediate cultural surroundings is very much a decisive factor. Hence, our critical understanding will try to bring out the preconditions of his silence, as well as the role it plays in relation to a culture.

A ‘realm of silence’ or ‘realm of the unutterable’ appears both in the early and later periods of Wittgenstein. But the methodological compulsions for this ‘silence’, as a realm of higher values, are different in both these periods. It is important to take note of the differences, when we focus on the commonality involved. Our contention is that, as in the case of the style of writing, positing a ‘realm of the unutterable’ is an internal development from the content of thinking of Tractatus and Philosophical Investigations.
As we discussed in the last chapter, for Wittgenstein in *Tractatus* philosophy is not descriptive but elucidatory. Its aim is to clear up muddle and confusion. ‘Language’ is identified here to ‘descriptive’ language. That’s why he says, ‘the totality of true propositions is the whole of natural science.’¹ And ‘what can be said’ is identified as ‘propositions of natural science.’ So he declares:

“The correct method in philosophy would really be the following: to say nothing except what can be said, i.e. propositions of natural science--i.e. something that has nothing to do with philosophy”.²

But here the important question is what about the propositions of logic, mathematics, ethics, aesthetics, metaphysics and so on? Wittgenstein’s conclusion is that the propositions of logic, aesthetic, ethics etc. do not say anything. They are senseless or nonsensical because they are attempts to transcend, in language, the limit of language and, hence the world. Nevertheless he asserts that there are important things such as moral and aesthetic values, meaning of life, etc., which although cannot be said, but can be shown. He calls them mystical. “There are, indeed, things that cannot be put into words. They make themselves manifest. They are what is mystical.”³

² Ibid., 6.53.
³ Ibid., 6.522.
He considered the cardinal problem of philosophy, to draw a clear picture of what can be said and what cannot be said, but only shown. How important the say and show-itself distinction was intended to be is indicated in a letter Wittgenstein wrote to Bertrand Russell after the First World War. Having just read Russell's comments on the unpublished *Tractatus* manuscript, Wittgenstein said:

"Now I'm afraid you haven't really got hold of my main contention, to which the whole business of logical propositions is only corollary. The main point is the theory of what can be expressed by propositions—i.e. by language (and, what comes to the same, what can be thought) and what cannot be expressed by propositions, but only shown; which, I believe, is the cardinal problem of philosophy." 4

For someone having a background in the philosophical culture of Kant, Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche—for someone who had been a one-time follower of Schopenhauer—the cardinal problem of philosophy obviously can not be a technicality of logic. The bulk of *Tractatus* deals with language and logic because Wittgenstein wants to 'signify what cannot be said, by presenting clearly what can be said'. 5 In this way *Tractatus* itself is not a saying but a showing or a pointing, as Wittgenstein himself claims in the preface of the book:

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5 TLP, I. 4.115.
"The whole sense of the book might be summed up in the following words: what can be said at all can be said clearly, and what we cannot talk about we must pass over in silence." 6

The Tractatus is not intended as a textbook in logic or to correct some trifling errors in Frege and Russell. Rather, as Engelmann point out in his memoir, "the Tractatus is an attempt to place a boundary around the "sayable" and to point beyond the "sayable" to that which is really important" 7 Similarly, in trying to clear up the view that "certain mystical conclusions" found in the Tractatus were a secondary derivative from its views on logic, Englelemann writes:

"Logic and mysticism have here sprung from one and the same root, and it could be said with greater justice that Wittgenstein drew certain logical conclusions from his fundamental mystical attitude to life and the world." 8

Wittgenstein’s “cardinal problem” was the Reality revealed in the mystical experience itself and the impossibility of describing it in a non-worldly manner by language drawn from, and sharing the structure of, a logically multiplying world. His critique of language in the Tractatus was an attempt to show that language is a profane, inner-worldly medium, and

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6 Ibid., Preface
8 Ibid., p. 135.
that through such a medium, a message which is sacred cannot be articulated.

The distinction between what is said in language and what is shown by language emerges from Wittgenstein's picture theory of language. According to the Wittgenstein's picture theory of language i.e., the correspondence theory, which we will discuss in detail in the next chapter, propositions are pictures depicting the actual states of affairs. The relationship between a language and the facts of the outside reality is largely ostensive in nature. The utterable propositions according to this theory, can be divided into the, analytic and synthetic. The first group of propositions, which can be uttered meaningfully, is essentially tautological and is available in the mathematical and the logical sciences. The synthetic propositions picture the existing state of affairs and they are empirically verifiable. Such propositions show 'what is' the case. This is the so-called limit of language that Wittgenstein is referring to in the Tractatus. Anything beyond the empirical reality, i.e., the higher sphere of values, cannot be meaningfully uttered in language, for which language is constitutionally incapable. Hence he suggests that,

"What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence."\textsuperscript{9}

\textsuperscript{9} TLP. 7.
But for Wittgenstein, the limit does not mean the end of everything, or an emptiness, in which case he would have ended up as another positivist. For, him, the boundary of language, the limit of the utterable, is a pointer towards a realm of possibilities. This crucial aspect of difference between Logical Positivists and Wittgenstein is brought out by his friend Paul Engelmann as follows:

"The difference is only that they have nothing to be silent about. Positivism holds – and this is its essence- that what we can speak about is all that matters in life. Whereas Wittgenstein passionately believes that all that really matters in human life is precisely what, in his view, we must be silent about."\textsuperscript{10}

Obviously, there is a tremendous difference between the declaration of logical positivists that 'metaphysics is meaningless and Wittgensteinian positions on the 'realm of the unutterable'.

Wittgenstein is not denying the realm of higher values, like God, good and evil, justice and virtue etc. What he is rejecting is the systematically elaborated metaphysical discourse by philosopher on this transcendental realm. According to \textit{Tractatus}, we can speak only about the empirical reality and the tautologous truth in language. Metaphysical

\textsuperscript{10}Engelmann, n. 7, p. 97.
discourses are attempts to rupture these boundaries of language. According to him this attempt to conceptualise an area that we must be silent about is bound to fail. Thus, it can be said that for Wittgenstein, 'silence', means the 'end of concepts or categories of understanding' and not an end of communication as such. 'Silence' manifests itself through the utterable, as 'poetry convey thoughts by themselves without words.'\textsuperscript{11} Thanking for a poem sent by Paul Engelmann he express this idea as follows, "if only you do not try to utter what is unutterable then nothing gets lost. But the unutterable will be unutterably – contained in what has been uttered."\textsuperscript{12}

Then, by 'being silent', in the case of Wittgenstein, is meant a refusal to produce a meta-narrative or meta-theory on the transcendental. For him, the utterable is a medium through which the unutterable is manifested. By delimiting the 'island of utterable', he tries to show from the coastline, the vastness of the 'ocean of unutterable'. This saves his 'realm of silence' from being dumb and mute and makes it a speaking silence'. It stands, as an 'other', refusing to be 'trapped' in the vulgar eloquence of a period of 'meaningless Hubbub', at the threshold of an organic dialogue. His silence is the starting point of a new set of possibilities and can be decoded only within a new ethical horizon.

\textsuperscript{12} Engelmann, n. 7, p. 7.
In a letter to his friend Ludwig Von Ficker, Wittgenstein says that *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* has got two parts, one written and the other unwritten. Among these, he considers the latter part of the book as important. Because this unwritten part of the book is actually a circumscription of the ethical, which he leaves to the realm of silence. He closes the particular latter by saying, “In brief, I think; all that which many are babbling today, I have defined, in my book by remaining silent about it.”

The silence, which is a permanent counter text in Wittgenstein, thus, is a conscious choice of a person who confronts the limits of linguistic expression within an estranged ‘form of life’. In such a culture ‘communication’ itself is a masking mechanism. The eloquence of the ‘babble of many’, or the one-dimensional flow of information is a strategy to strangulate the authentic communication.

Wittgenstein’s silence, hence, is not an emptiness but a ‘space’ to withdraw from the surrounding hypocritical culture and its manifestations. According to him, it is impossible to articulate this ‘space’ without losing

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the spiritual essence of it. He expresses this idea with a characteristic metaphor as follows:

"If you have a room which you do not meant certain people to get into, put a lock on it for which they do not have the key. But there is no point in talking to them about it unless of course you want them to acquire the room from outside."\(^{14}\)

Neither does his 'room of silence' speak to the world not can language enter not it. This makes the exploration into this silence indirect and compels us to resort to an archaeological method. Language can at the most just leaves you 'there' at the boundaries of this space, or at the coast like beyond which lies the ocean of silence. This is what he meant by saying. "The limits of my language mean the limits of my world."\(^{15}\)

Language gets terminated at the very some point of termination of empirical world. In short, the picture theory of *Tractatus* is the methodological pre-condition of a 'realm of silence' in the early period. Since language can picture only the existing state-of-affairs, the realm of 'ought', the realm of future possibilities, is not a subject that can be expressed in language. The moral will or the ethical projects of humanity lie outside the boundaries of language. According to this linguistic

\(^{14}\) Wittgenstein, n. 11, P.7.

\(^{15}\) TLP, 5.6.
positivism, language just pictures the neutral state-of-affairs. The meaning of life and the moral will of the agents, all lie outside. He says "The meaning of life i.e. the meaning of the world, we can call God... To pray is to think about the meaning of life. I cannot bend the happening of the world to my will. I am completely powerless..."\(^\text{16}\)

If we look at Wittgenstein's life from about the middle of World War I and the correspondence between him and Engelmann and through his writings in Notebooks from that period, it becomes clear that his life itself was a showing forth of a deep religious experience which he had sometime during the war years. The evidence seems to point to the fact that at some time in 1916 he made the choice to become a religious man. Russell saw the change as that of one who moved from being anti-Christian to Christian. Von Wright reports:

"The period of the war was a crisis in Wittgenstein's life. To what extent the turmoil of the time and his experiences in war and captivity contributed to the crisis, I cannot say. A circumstance of great importance was that he become acquainted with the ethical and religious writings of Tolstoy exercised a strong influence on Wittgenstein's view of life, and also led him to study the Gospels."\(^\text{17}\)


One can assume that the war had its effect and that it was probably the war with its message of random and meaningless death which forced Wittgenstein to come out of the grips of former brash rejection of religion and to find a place outside of the world on which he could rest his own being. These religio-mystical views are reflected in his philosophical writings. The relation between Wittgenstein's Mysticism and his philosophical writings, is described by Engelmann as:

"He was a mystic. To him the meaning of the world and the purpose of life lay outside the physical and psychological universe. At the same time, his cultural-philosophical investigations ... are entirely based on rational argument, since the mystic element can only become manifest but never communicated in explicit statements."\(^{18}\)

The mystical surrender, before an inexpressible God, an utterable meaning of life, echoes in his early period. Complimentary to this mysticism, the whole question of reality is reduced to a problem of the mental affliction of a person. For example he says in *Tractatus*: "The world of the happy man is a different one from that of the unhappy man."\(^{19}\) If one cannot, as he says in the Note Books, "bend the happenings of the word," in other words, the world of facts, the only option left is to change your mental attitude towards the world, thus creating an 'entirely different' world for yourself. To be precise, each one can create ones own solipsistic

\(^{18}\) Engelmann, n.7, p. x.
\(^{19}\) TLP, 6.43.
world. The same world of facts has a different significance for a 'happy man'. But since both of them are 'completely powerless' they 'cannot bend the happenings of the world'. The facts of the world exist as neutral entities without any value dimension and the meaning of life essentially lies in the ethical attitude of the moral agents. The status quo of the real world is maintained intact and the problem of meaning of life is unutterable. As C.A. Van Peursen says:

"What was said earlier in connection with the Note Books, Now acquires a new perspective; the world of facts, the world of meaningful language- where language may correspond with states of affairs and assumes a logical structure- allows no room for the will, moral values or questions of happiness and the meaning of life. This is what Schopenhauer called the world as 'Idea'."  

The world as my world, which is identical with life, is changeable with a moral will but not the outside factual world. One can try out the possibilities of change in the solipsistic world that belongs to one self. But this cannot be articulated into a metaphysical system. At this point Wittgenstein comes closer to Kant who also rejected the possibility of rational metaphysics as a system. But Wittgenstein, by rejecting the possibility of articulating, the realm of ethical as regulative ideals, takes the line of thinking initiated by David Hume to its limits.

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For Wittgenstein, the realm of the ethical is an area where one must resort to silence. In short, as Van Peursen says, "Wittgenstein believes that, whereas one cannot alter the course of things in the universe, one can change one's view of it. This idea is also to be found in Spinoza and in some respects, goes back to the stoic view of life." Life and the meaning of life, the higher values, etc., are outside history, outside the spatio-temporal and logical relationships. And these are the problems about which we cannot produce meaningful propositions and they belong to the mystical. And one can change, one's "view of it" but not the world. Wittgenstein says, "there are indeed, things that cannot be put into words...they are what is mystical." That means, the mystical silence replaces even the limited role of philosophy, expressing the ultimate reality as practical ideals, the function Kant allotted for philosophy.

There is no objectively presented 'categorical imperative', to regulate life among the human beings in a society. Instead of that, it seems, Wittgenstein demands that 'purity of heart', from each individual, to guide their lives. The positivist methodology of *Tractatus* and the blend of Jewish and Christian mysticism lead him to the grandiloquent statement that there can be no ethical proposition. "The proposition can express

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21 Ibid., p. 68.
22 TLP., 6.522.
nothing that is higher." This is the point at which one must transform oneself and practice the value of 'higher' realm. Then there is no significance in asking for articles of faith to follow or slogans to chants.

The nonsensicality of the expression of 'the higher', in the form of metaphysics, continues as the central theoretical position in the later stage of Wittgenstein's philosophising also. But now the methodological paradigm has changed considerably and equally important is the change in conviction regarding cultural and historical problems. By the end of the First World War and during the following decades, the word transformed unrecognisably. All these socio-political and cultural events and new intellectual movements influenced Wittgenstein's thinking. His active intellectual career falls between first and the second world wars, which naturally, added to the deep melancholic mood inbuilt in his personality. His Jewish lineage, repeated tragedies in his family, the strong influence of Spengler and his own disgust towards a civilisation based on scientific and instrumental rationality deepened the already strong feeling of resignation in him.

The western civilisation that is "characterised by the word 'progress' and occupied with building an ever more complicated

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23 Peursen, n. 20, p. 71.
24 See the memoirs of friends like Paul Engelmann, Fania Pascal, Norman Malcolm etc. and the published letters of Wittgenstein.
structure."\textsuperscript{25} He says, is in its sinking stage. The root cause of this destruction, according to him is the scientific thinking and his "way of thinking is different from their (scientists)"\textsuperscript{26} In the context of mounting opposition to the atom bomb during the Second World War, Wittgenstein considers bomb as a bitter medicine that "offer a prospect of the end, the destruction of a evil, our disgusting soapy water science."\textsuperscript{27}

Wittgenstein’s opposition to the dominant mode of western civilisation can be seen in the following remark on science as a methodology and on scientific civilisation as such:

"It is not absurd for example, to believe that the age of science and technology is the beginning of the end of humanity; that the idea of great progress is a delusion, along with the idea that the truth will ultimately be known; that there is nothing good or desirable about scientific knowledge and that mankind, in seeking it, is falling into a trap. It is by no means obvious that this is not how thing are."\textsuperscript{28}

All these, beyond dispute, establish the fact that he was completely alien to the mainstream European civilisation and he can justifiably be associated with the similar spiritual exiles like Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, Pascal, Tolstoy, etc. It was a period in which a significant section of

\textsuperscript{25} Wittgenstein, n. 11, p. 7.
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., p. 7.
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., p. 56.
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., p. 56.
European intellectuals wished to 'flee' from the 'civilisation' and were in search of a spiritual refuge. This shows, as Fania Pascal says, that Wittgenstein belonged to his time and place. She says in her memoir that the "... idealisation of Russia he shared with many Central European intellectuals of his time" was a natural outcome of a desperate need for a spiritual refuge. The idea of Russia as a spiritual refuge fascinated him for a long time.

Wittgenstein's conversations with friends and their memoirs, provide satisfactory evidences for his contempt of a civilisation that, according to him, is steadily degenerating. He was completely in agreement with the spirit of Spengler's book, *The Decline of the West* which, according to him, "will teach ... about the age we were now living in." When he says that in the age we live, "Wolves eat lambs" he rightly observes the nature of western society. Hitler's ascension to power, the phenomenon which is described by Wittgenstein as "government taken over by gangsters" the mass annihilation of Jews and subsequent events which culminated in another world war tremendously influenced the intellectual life of that period. In Wittgenstein's case these development

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31 Ibid., p. 116.
32 Ibid., p. 116.
led to the completion of his estrangement from western civilisation and by this time he firmly believe that "dark ages are coming again." 33

Wittgenstein’s objection to his contemporary world and the modern European civilisation, in general can be summarised as follows: Firstly, as he says in the case of Frazer’s analysis of primitive societies, contemporary world is “far removed from the understanding of a spiritual matter.” 34 Secondly, he objects to the modern belief in “progress” and building of “ever complicated structures” and to the methodological belief in “the historical explanation, the explanation as an hypothesis of development.” 35 His third objection is to the consideration of scientific rationality as ‘the’ true methodology and all others as primitive. His change in the conception of language and the rejection of the picture theory of language in general is intrinsically connected to these objections.

In his later period he treated the ordinary practice of language as sufficient for the purpose. Now language has ‘limits’, not because it can meaningfully utter only synthetic and analytic propositions, but the ‘limits’ are set by the grammatical system of language. As P.M.S. Hacker says, “No language, as it were, is incomplete from within. It is what it is. If it

33 Ibid., p. 116.
35 Ibid., p. 69.
provides no means for certain type of discourse, then it is silent."

Accordingly, in his later philosophy, the freedom of expression is more than in the picture theory of language. The possibilities of language-game are infinite, of course, within the ambit of the rules of the game. This can be traced to the paradigmatic change of the language-game in the later period.

'The important difference is that among all these possible language-game none can claim superior status over others. Since he categorically rejects the possibility of a private language, an individual who is alienated from the existing language-game and cannot obey their rules, is left with the only option of withdrawing into the spiritual silence. Wittgenstein throughout his life was such a silent outsider to the western civilisation. He expresses his deep spiritual alienation in the following words:

"It is very remarkable that we should be inclined to think of civilisation – houses, trees, cars etc. as separating man from his origins, from what is lofty and eternal, etc. our civilised environment, along with its trees and plants, strikes us then as though it were cheaply wrapped in cellophane and isolated from everything great, from God, as it were."
In a World, that went against its own Gods, values and ideals, thinkers like Wittgenstein attempt a 'rescue operation' to restore this 'higher' sphere. He restores his God and meaning of life, to the realm of silence and refuses to produces a systematic treatise to prove the existence of the 'higher'. In this sense Wittgenstein is nearer to Immanuel Kant, who more or less in a similar way preserves this realm of higher as noumena, which cannot be expressed through the categories of understanding. Both denied the efficacy of a rational, theoretical and systematic narrative on the practical ideals. Wittgenstein elevated the sublime above the access of the 'earthly language-games' and maintained a mystic silence above it.

Terry Eagleton's comment on Wittgenstein's later philosophy is significant in this context. He says that

"The Investigations are a voice in dialogue with itself and an implied 'other'. Silence as an 'implied other' is the constant presence in Wittgenstein who makes articulated discourse a medium to express and make evident this other."\(^{38}\)

That means, in a different sense, silence is a language, exiled within the language, in Wittgenstein's writings. This is because, 'higher' realm is not something to be 'talked about' directly; it is something to be manifested through the utterable, and all through the activities of an

ethically conscious human being. Ideals are to be lived or practised not something to be preached. This is the pragmatic behind Wittgensteinian silence. He says "... ethical reward and ethical punishment, ... must reside in the action itself."  

Hence we may conclude that, there entails a sort of dualism of the utterable and the unutterable, phenomena and noumena. From Descartes onwards, modern European thinking is dominated by the tension between science and religion, between the material and the spiritual. In the early stage of his philosophising, Wittgenstein maintained an uneasy balance in this tension by demarcating the realms of the utterable physical reality and the unutterable spiritual world.

Having stated that language, along with logic, is a boundary of the world, and that only picture-propositions can count as language, Wittgenstein was left, apparently with the problem of how to explain the propositions of the *Tractatus* itself. Since they were neither picture propositions, nor tautologies –the only type of statements recognised in the *Tractatus* as meaningful. Carnap points out:

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39 TLP, 6.422.  
40 Ibid., 6.54.
"In the first place he seems to me to be inconsistent in what he does. He tells us that one cannot make philosophical statements, and that whereof one cannot speak thereof one must be silent, and then instead of keeping silent he writes a whole philosophical book." 41

Carnap's criticism, a very common sort of criticism, is because of the failure to understand the personal dimension of Wittgenstein's concluding remark. Wittgenstein does not tell us to be silent, and then he writes book. He writes his book, and at its end tells us to be silent. The fact that Wittgenstein tells us to be silent after he has written the book, after he has elucidated the structure of language to his own satisfaction, is concerned with the elucidation of the structure of propositions, and for whatever reason, cannot rest until these questions are answered. But if that is true, then philosophy takes us away from concern with the world in which we live, and sinks us in a concern about our mode of representation of the world. Only after one has conquered one's obsession with symbols, can one cultivate one's concern for the world. Only then can one set about the real challenge of life. Carnap's criticism is really based on his confusing a personal statement by the philosopher, who has already elucidated the structure of symbols, with a statement about the logical status of those elucidations themselves. Wittgenstein tried to extricate himself from this predicament by saying that:

"My propositions are elucidatory in this way: he who understands me finally recognizes them as senseless, when he has climbed out through them, on

41 Rudolf Carnap, Philosophy and Logical Syntax, p. 435.
them, over them. (He must so to speak throw away the ladder, after he has climbed up on it.)

Wittgenstein belongs to the group consisting of Kierkegaard, Tolstoy and similar thinkers, with his own personal version of Christian religion and idea of salvation, which is based on voluntary moral action. In a conversation he said to his friend Drury, that it is his belief that only if one tries to be helpful to others, can one find one’s way to God. Ultimately he is thus appealing to the ‘purity of heart’ of the individuals as moral agents to find out their own salvation through charity measures. For that one needs more a silent adherence to this conviction than a well-articulated defence of this conviction. Richard M. McDonough’s suggestion on concluding remarks of Tractatus, is quite significant in this context. He says:

"The negative tone of the remarks with which Wittgenstein concludes the Tractatus might be brought into line with the more positive tone... had he concluded the book with the following remark (which is consistent with his views):

7.001 Whereof one must be silent, thereof one must oneself do a great deal of work."

42TLP, 6.54