THE ZEN OF WITTGENSTEIN

An elucidation of the elusive “ethical point” of the Tractatus by means of Zen Buddhism

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ABSTRACT | In this paper I develop the strong parallels between Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* and Zen Buddhism, as exemplified by Loori’s *Riding the Ox Home: Stages on the Path to Enlightenment*. By developing a comparison in terms of shared method and shared purpose, I employ Zen as a tool to solve the most profound problem raised by a resolute reading of the *Tractatus*: How can a work of nonsense lead an individual to ethical realizations?

Ludwig Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* is one of the most notoriously difficult and esoteric texts in the history of philosophy. However, it is my hope that by mobilizing the terminology and structure of what may seem to be an entirely unrelated philosophical teaching, Zen Buddhism, additional light can be shed on what Wittgenstein hoped to achieve with his towering first foray into philosophy. By focusing on the parallels in the methodology and purpose of Zen and the *Tractatus*, it will gradually become clear how Wittgenstein could have, in less than 150 pages, taken himself to have resolved the problems of philosophy. Further, what I hope to make clear with my analogy to Zen Buddhism is the way in which the primary purpose of Zen and the *Tractatus*, the quest to discover the limits of language, thought, and reality, is integrally related to a second, equally important project: an ethical reorientation of the individual. Wittgenstein explicitly referenced the book’s ultimately ethical point in a letter to his publisher, Ludwig von Ficker, and it is only by attaining a firm grasping of the dual purpose of the *Tractatus* that we can truly understand how Wittgenstein’s work can teach us not
only how to think, but how to live.

Zen Buddhism has existed for fifteen hundred years and, much like the *Tractatus*, and Wittgenstein’s work in general, many varying and often contradictory interpretations of it have been put forward. However, as I intend to use Zen only as a means to elucidate the meaning and purpose of the *Tractatus*, I will make no attempt to explicate the many alternate conceptions promulgated by different Zen thinkers throughout history, or to take sides in the many ongoing internecine debates within Zen. Instead, I will simply employ a more general Zen paradigm, as exemplified in the influential American Zen master John Daido Loori’s book, *Riding the Ox Home: Stages on the Path to Enlightenment*. The conception of Zen that Loori develops in this work exhibits almost all of the key features of a Tractarian paradigm of philosophy, and by making this clear, I will demonstrate how the *Tractatus*, a book of self-destructing pseudo-propositions can lead its reader to an ethical point. In doing so, I take up a task that Michael Kremer attempted in his essay “The Purpose of *Tractarian* Nonsense.” However, I believe that deeper similarities can be developed within a comparison to Zen, rather than the work of St. Paul and St. Augustine, which is Kremer’s primary focus, and that this comparison will give us a much stronger push towards an understanding of the full purpose of the *Tractatus*.

I. THE PROBLEM

Let us now turn to the nature of the problem one faces when attempting to locate an “ethical point” in the *Tractatus*. In Warren Goldfarb’s paper, “Metaphysics and Nonsense,” he makes this problem all too evident. The author outlines Cora Diamond’s resolute reading of the *Tractatus* in opposition to the standard reading, which he labels “irresolute” (64). A resolute reading of the *Tractatus* strives to take Wittgenstein at his word and not introduce, as so many of Wittgenstein’s readers have, an arbitrary distinction between propositions that are truly nonsense and other propositions that may be ‘strictly speaking’ nonsensical, but that in actuality manage to convey some ineffable, inexpressible meaning. Personally, I am convinced that an austere conception of nonsense does greater justice to the *Tractatus*, but as Goldfarb notices that it raises a seemingly insurmountable problem:
if the transitional statements of the *Tractatus* are truly nonsense and not intended to lead us to grasp some form of ineffable content, why did Wittgenstein have to write these specific sentences? If Wittgenstein intends for us to transcend and dispose of the propositions of the work once we reach its end, why bother to develop such “richly articulated nonsense” rather than just any old nonsense? (64). Goldfarb points out that Wittgenstein does not even leave us with a Begriffsschrift, as Gottlieb Frege did, and is ultimately forced to acknowledge his deep puzzlement and unsatisfying inability to find any resolution to this problem.

Michael Kremer, a subscriber of the resolute reading that Goldfarb outlines, recognizes this apparent flaw in his own reading as well, but attempts to rectify it. In “The Purpose of *Tractarian* Nonsense,” he reformulates Goldfarb’s questions as such: “What did [Wittgenstein] think he could accomplish by [writing a book consisting almost entirely of nonsense]?” (71). It is this form of the question that I will pursue in the passages to follow. Like Kremer, I believe that Wittgenstein’s comments in his letter to *Der Brenner* publisher Ludwig von Ficker can help point the way to an answer. In this letter, Wittgenstein wrote, “The book’s point is an ethical one.” Therefore, if we take Wittgenstein at his word, grasping this unspoken “ethical point” will be crucial to our understanding of why Wittgenstein constructed the *Tractatus* as he did, and what point he hoped this structure could convey.

No explicitly ethical propositions appear in the *Tractatus* until the 6.4’s, and the final passages of the book reveal that even these are merely transitional, senseless attempts to assert the inexpressible. But looking for the ethical ramifications of the text only in these passages would be as foolish as looking for the work’s logical ramifications only in sections of the *Tractatus* in which Wittgenstein talks about logic. If we follow Cora Diamond, it becomes clear that Wittgenstein draws a fundamental parallel between the logical and the ethical, and stresses that both are inexpressible, “transcendental,” and, mostly importantly, pervasive within our world (*Tractatus* 6.421). We must therefore attempt to understand the ethical in relation to the book’s overall methodology and stated desire to elucidate the limits of thought and language, and the peculiar method by which it strives to achieve that goal.
II. THE METHOD OF THE TRACTATUS

I believe that the 5.6’s best exemplify the method of the Tractatus and demonstrate the manner in which it is able to draw the limits of the world “from the inside,” as Wittgenstein puts it. In these passages it seems that “Mr, Wittgenstein manages to say a good deal about what cannot be said,” to steal a phrase from Bertrand Russell’s much maligned introduction to the book (22). He begins with a discussion of language, the world, and logic. In 5.6 he states, “The limits of my language mean the limits of my world.” He then connects the limits of the world to logic: “Logic fills the world: the limits of the world are also its limits” (5.61). In the next sentence he appears to spell out an implication of this insight: “We cannot therefore say in logic: This and this there is in the world, that there is not” (5.61). This directly refutes the book’s first sentence, “The world is all that is the case” (1). Wittgenstein clarifies his point by demonstrating that his target paradigm “would apparently presuppose that we exclude certain possibilities, and this cannot be the case since otherwise logic must get outside the limits of the world: that is, if it could consider these limits from the other side also” (5.61). And yet, this appears to be exactly what these passages do.

Wittgenstein cannot say what is in the world and what is not, because this would “presuppose that we could exclude certain possibilities,” which presupposes an ability to think outside the limits of logic. But to exclude the possibility of saying what is in the world and what is not seems to entail the exact same presupposition of an ability to think beyond the limits of the logic that he is explicitly trying to deny. In this way, even proposition 5.61, which we may be drawn to cling to as an actual, meaningful truth about the logic and the world, is recognized to be paradoxical and ultimately self-defeating.

This same sort of contradictory, self-defeating attempt to explicate the limits of the world emerges once again in 5.631, when Wittgenstein tries to connect these assertions to the “metaphysical subject, the limit—not a part of the world” (5.641). Wittgenstein writes in 5.631, “The thinking, presenting subject; there is no such thing. If I wrote a book ‘The world as I found it,’ …of it alone in this book mention could not be made.” He continues in the following proposition: “The subject does not belong to the world but is a limit of the world” (5.632). In these sentences, we
again see Wittgenstein trying to say exactly what can’t be said, immediately following his claim that we are unable to say it. In asserting that there is no such thing as the subject, these propositions treat the subject as an ‘it,’ something that is actually manifest in the world. Here we are once again trapped in a paradox, and irresolute readers are forced to simply give in and claim, ‘Though ‘strictly speaking’ we cannot say it, there is an ineffable ‘it’ there nonetheless.’ This stance does not do justice to the depth of Wittgenstein’s thought, and is only a first stage along the way to an understanding of the *Tractatus*.

As long as we still have the temptation to treat the subject as an ‘it,’ even if only to deny ‘it,’ our propositions will be doomed to nonsensicality. As Cora Diamond argues, “we see only the two possibilities: *it* is sayable, *it* is not sayable. But Wittgenstein’s aim is to allow us to see that there is no ‘it’ [at all]” (24). It is not by refuting the metaphysical subject that Wittgenstein’s propositions find their force, but by demonstrating the insubstantiality of the very idea of such a subject’s existence. Wittgenstein’s own sentences can, in this way, be seen to carry out the “strictly correct method” of philosophizing described in 6.53 upon themselves. When his reader first begins to struggle with the sentences, it seems there is some content that could be grasped, if only the correct form of expression is found. But, the sentences are designed to self-destruct when thought all the way through, revealing that the very attempt at their formulation is nonsensical. By improperly treating something like “the thinking, presenting subject” as an ‘it,’ an existent thing in the world, even while trying to deny that ‘it’ can be such a thing, we see that Wittgenstein’s sentences miss his thought, because they really are, “at the end, entirely empty” (Diamond 24).

III. THE PURPOSE OF THE *TRACTATUS*

At this point, Wittgenstein’s method—demonstrating that a paradox arises as soon as one tries speak at all of these matters—has been revealed, and Wittgenstein has shown his reader that the only way to transcend his propositions is to pass over them in silence. This is what Wittgenstein is getting at in the preface and the final sentences of the *Tractatus*, all of which originate in his epiphany that, “What can’t be said, can’t be said!” (pre-Tractarian journals). To understand him is to under-
stand that his sentences are truly nonsense and, what’s more, to understand exactly why: They presuppose an ability to think outside of logic to formulate assertions where there can rightfully be only silence. This final stage of understanding is what Wittgenstein means by “throw[ing] away the ladder” and “surmount[ing] these propositions” (6.54). Once we have grappled with the provisional propositions of the *Tractatus* and have seen them ultimately dissolve into nonsense, the desire to speak of the nonexistent phenomena to which they were supposed to refer will have dissipated as well. The confusion that engendered our original desire to speak of these things has been exposed and this realization will allow us to pass over them in silence.

By proceeding through the maze of propositions Wittgenstein has created, and after having “climbed out through them, on them, over them,” we will have learned to “see the world rightly” (6.54). This is the purpose of the *Tractatus*, and the purpose of the activity of philosophy itself, as Wittgenstein conceives of it. We will have learned to recognize what can be said, and be freed from the desire to imagine that there is anything else. Thus, the unique structure of the work is absolutely fundamental to the achievement of its purpose. In arduously surmounting the propositions of the *Tractatus* we will have learned to see the limits of the world, the limits of reality, from the inside, from the realm of what can be said. The apparent need to step outside of this realm can now be seen for what it is—nonsense—and will dissolve along with the conception that prompted it. In this way, Wittgenstein will have achieved the goal he stated in the preface, that of “drawing a limit to the expression of thoughts,” and his reader will be empowered to actualize his most important insight: “whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent” (*Tractatus* preface, 1).

The first part of our task has thus been completed. We have now seen how the unique method of the *Tractatus* leads to the accomplishment of the book’s explicit purpose, the purpose that actually appears in the preface, and we have attained clear understanding of what that purpose is: The clarity of thought and reality. What we have yet to do is connect this purpose to any sort of “ethical point,” though as we have seen, Wittgenstein claims this second part is of paramount importance to the work. It is for this that I will turn to Zen Buddhism. The first order of business will be to establish Zen as an apt parallel to the *Tractatus* in terms of both methodology
and purpose, so that the connection I will postulate between the ethical dimensions of Zen and the *Tractatus* can ultimately be seen as valid and justified.¹

I intend to illustrate the similarities between the teachings of the *Tractatus* and those of Zen Buddhism by utilizing one of the most famous parables in the Zen tradition, “The Ox-Herding Pictures.” This parable combines drawings and poems within a simple narrative meant to guide Zen students along the path to enlightenment. Many variations of these images have been developed in the centuries since it was first adapted from early Daoist philosophy, but Master Loori’s version is particularly precise and insightful. It is important to remember, however, that the ten stages discussed do not represent ten absolutely distinct steps along a linear, uniform process of enlightenment; Zen is not Alcoholics Anonymous, and Enlightenment is not something akin to sobriety. Instead, these stages taken together form a general illustration of the method of Zen and show what this method is supposed to accomplish. As such, they serve as a series of signposts, a set of guiding concepts similar to the framing remarks found in the Preface and final sentences of the *Tractatus* (Loori xvi).² I will lean heavily on the commentary Loori provides to accompany the poems, but it is important to remember that part of their point is that they are poems and pictures, not theories or doctrine. Wittgenstein himself recognized the inherent advantages and value of these mediums, and argued that poems, parables, and stories are able to deliver ethical guidance in a way that is unavailable to what he calls “meaningful” propositions.

**IV. THE ZEN METHOD**

In Zen, the pursuit of knowledge about the world is most often framed in terms of an internal quest to understand the nature of the self, and this holds true in the metaphorical “Ox-Herding Pictures.” The first stage on the Zen path to enlightenment is titled “Searching for the Ox.” To begin the process of enlightenment entails recognizing the doubts that plague us and allowing the questions that these

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¹. I am far from the first to notice the similarities between Zen and Wittgenstein’s philosophy, but as far as I can tell, none have yet attempted an analysis of these similarities from a proper resolute perspective, though Rupert Read appears to have a paper forthcoming.

². Even in this first phrase, the Wittgensteinian parallels are apparent.
doubts suggest to take form within our minds. In this stage, we first commit ourselves to the search for the ox. Loori writes, “The ox depicted in Kuoan's pictures represents the True Self; thus the search is basically a process of discovery of the nature of the self” (5). Our doubts and questions trap us in a state of illusion in which we view the metaphysical subject as a ‘thing,’ an ‘it’ that we “need to assert, protect, and reinforce through our efforts to delineate a boundary between … what is “inside” and what is “outside” of the self” (5). Because we have formulated the questions: ‘What is the self?’ ‘What is the World?’ we are convinced there must be answers in the form of some ‘thing’ or another. We imagine that we could get to these answers if only we were only able to properly delineate what lies “inside” the subject from what lies “outside” of it, namely the world. This view will later be seen as illusion, however, and in the second stage we come closer to this understanding.

In this second stage, “Finding Traces of the Ox,” “we get at the heart of the questions and dig into them” (9). As we ask ourselves “What is truth? What is reality? What is life? What is death?” and investigate these questions through self-examination, a light breaks through and we seem to see the way forward (16). We begin to formulate real answers, in the form of the rejection of the premises of the question. There is no metaphysical subject. We cannot find it in the world because, in a sense, it is the world. Though my intent is to focus on parallel methodology, and not to suggest too close of an alignment between the content of Zen philosophy and Wittgenstein’s own ideas, the similarities between this Zen notion of self and the conception Wittgenstein develops in the latter parts of the Tractatus are so overt that I would be remiss to pass by them entirely without acknowledgement.

In the third stage, “Seeing the Ox,” clear vision is finally attained, if only for a moment. “The ox has no place to turn in the brambles,” and we approach “the true nature of reality for the first time,” as “the True Self becomes conspicuous” (22-23). To achieve this clarity of vision, we must fight our own “insidious tendency” to think we haven’t “got it unless we can name it” (25). As Wittgenstein knew and sought to undermine in the Tractatus, “people quickly latch onto it, make a concept out of it, grasp and strangle it. That’s not it. That misses it” (25). By grasping in this way, we let our potential comprehension of the world and of the self slip away. Like water in a closed fist, the tighter one squeezes, the faster is disappears. This clinging continues into the fourth stage, “Catching the Ox,” in which we take ourselves
to “have acquired something concrete, something substantial that we can point
to and feel special about,” a feeling that surely characterizes many readers’ experi-
ences of the *Tractatus* (30). In Zen, this propensity to conceive of our realizations
as concrete entities that we can tag and label with our words is “one of the worst
possible illusions,” we can fall under, and the subsequent stages on the Zen path
aim to show the reader how to overcome this tendency and truly see “the mystery
that is unspeakable” (30, 25).

The next two stages, “Taming the Ox” and “Riding the Ox Home,” are focused
upon moving the reader from grasping this mystery as an intellectual insight to
actualizing it in their lives. I am aware that my discussion of the Zen ‘method’
has been concerned primarily with abstractions rather than the tangible activities
carried on within Zen temples, where monks engage in a highly ritualized series
of chores and chants, contemplate koans, and practice zazen, among many other
activities. My particular presentation of the Zen method has, in large part, been a
function of the particular focus and constraints of this essay. However, there are
philosophical grounds for my approach. What may be lost if one treats the Zen
method from a literal, anthropological perspective, is that recognition that none of
these highly ritualized activities are pursued entirely for their own sake. As Loori
says, everything one encounters in Zen training, “All of the devices and skillful
measures, are provisional means to get us to see the truth. All of it – every form and
ritual, the words, the ideas, koans, insights – is specifically designed to ultimately
self-destruct. We really can’t hold on to anything because there is nothing to hold
on to” (47). This inherent provisionality and self-destruction of Zen practices is the
crux of the Zen method, when understood as a philosophically coherent whole.

The Zen master presents the student with paradoxical koans, contradictory ideas,
and seemingly impossible insights. In grappling with these seemingly unsolvable
problems, the student is able to progress on the path to enlightenment only when
he learns to recognize the empty formulations that lie at their root.³ Where Witt-
genstein says that one recognizes his sentences as “senseless, when he has climbed
out through them, on them, over them,” the Zen master claims that in order to
recognize the various provisional methods as empty, “We take them up, chew them,

³. There are endless historical accounts of this process available, which again, I unfortunately
do not have the space to examine here.
fully digest them, make them our own and let them go” (*Tractatus* 6.54, Loori 47). Though the metaphor is different, both philosophies are aligned in the essence of their method.

V. THE PURPOSE OF ZEN

However, the Zen method, just like that of the *Tractatus*, seems in the end to have led us to nothing, to nonsense. The problems that the student intended to solve have dissolved as the student has progressed through the Zen method and reached an enlightened view of the world. We may still be tempted to look for a concrete ‘thing’ that represents the purpose of this method, but stages eight and nine, “Transcending the Ox” and “Returning to the Source,” reinforce that this temptation is based on delusion. Part of what is achieved with the Zen method is that which Wittgenstein attempts to convey himself: an ability to “see the world rightly” (*Tractatus* 6.54). The ox has been ridden home, and it is now forgotten and transcended. There is no longer a need to search for the True Self, for what lies “inside” and “outside” its limits, because from the enlightened perspective this dichotomous delineation has fallen away. Thus, there is “nothing lacking” within this perspective - everything that can be said will be said (Loori 51). There is also “nothing extra” - we will “stay out of the way and allow things to take care of themselves” (Loori 51, 64).

The purpose of Zen, the perspective it aims to achieve, mirrors the criteria Wittgenstein established for “seeing the world rightly” in the *Tractatus*. Attempts to go beyond what can be said do not add anything at all, because there is nothing outside of the sayable to be grasped, gestured at, or even whistled. Their absence is not a “lack” of anything, but could instead be described as the presence of clarity. The removal of these unjustifiable assertions allows the world to present itself naturally and spontaneously. This is what explains the absence of metaphysics from Zen, as well as from the *Tractatus*. Any attempts to spell out the metaphysical nature of reality is ultimately superfluous, an attempt to add something “extra,” and necessarily lapses into nonsensicality.

A large part of the purpose of Zen, as well as the *Tractatus*, is to develop an understanding of the universe from which metaphysical statements are obviously un-
necessary, as the true nature of reality is simply and undeniably visible. With a clear view of the nature of reality in Zen, “Everything is inside. We have swallowed the whole universe!” (Loori 63). We have seen fully up to the limits of reality and have no desire to transgress them, because we know that “everything is inside”; the idea of an “outside,” an external perspective on the limits of the world, was only an illusion that we no longer have the urge to cling to. In the enlightened state of Zen, “there is no search for enlightenment” and “there is no persisting in delusion” (Loori 56-57). We are no longer gripped by illusions and no longer conceive of enlightenment as something we must search for. In ingraining and actualizing this conception, enlightenment has already been achieved, and everything is illuminated.

**VI. THE “ETHICAL POINT”**

In Zen, we learn to see the nature of the self and the nature of the absolute, unspeakable nature of reality when we “take [the teachings] up, chew them, fully digest them, make them our own, and let them go” (Loori 47). In this way, true understanding is reached only when the teachings themselves have been transcended and disposed of, just as Wittgenstein’s readers only learn to “see the world rightly” once they have climbed the ladder of paradoxical propositions that constitute the *Tractatus* and subsequently thrown that ladder away (6.54). This ability to “see the world rightly,” is clearly one of the main points of the *Tractatus*, but Wittgenstein claimed that it was inextricably tied to another. In the letter to Ludwig von Ficker that I referenced at the beginning of this paper, Wittgenstein wrote, “My work consists of two parts: the one presented here plus all that I have not written. And it is precisely this second part that is the important one.” This second, unwritten part of the work is concerned with the ethical, which he feels himself to have put “firmly in place by being silent about it” (ibid.). And yet, because Wittgenstein does not ever explicitly state the connection between the ethical and the logically enlightened perspective to which he leads his reader, it may be unclear how the ethical is conveyed in his work.

Thus far our inquiry has proceeded out from the *Tractatus* to Zen, illustrating their

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4. This rejection of the possibility of clarity from a view outside of the world calls to mind Wittgenstein’s own criticism of Bertrand Russell’s approach to logic.
similarities in that order, but that order will now be reversed. In so doing, I will use the ethical purpose clearly expressed in Zen Buddhism to develop an interpretation of the nature of the ethical as it appears in the *Tractatus*. This is a useful approach because in Zen the connection between the sphere of the ethical and the sphere of what Wittgenstein would call the logical, is shown to the student through the use of the parables, stories, poems and koans that constitute the tradition. As early as the fifth poem, “Taming the Ox,” the connection between understanding and living is made clear. In this stage, “We learn to live what we have seen and realized, and to do so effortlessly and spontaneously” (38). The manifestation of this understanding in life leads to the natural expression of compassion and the other moral virtues in our everyday actions. Loori writes that in Zen, “Compassion is wisdom in action” (39). Ethics does not entail any further doctrine or universal theses, but rather emerges directly and naturally from the Zen Master’s ability to see the world as it is. In the fifth stage, “We see what we can do and we do it. We do it without even reflecting or knowing that we’re doing it. Compassion happens. It happens the way we grow our hair. It is that simple and that mysterious” (39). By accomplishing its goal of revealing the nature of the world, Zen also manages to show its student a way of life, and these two goals flow naturally side-by-side with one another.

This moral and ethical path that emerges alongside understanding is “beyond words and ideas,” and does not involve pursuing an external, objective perspective from which specific ethical doctrines are set forth (44). It is derived from normal, organic experience. This is exhibited in the final line of the poem of stage nine, “Returning to the Source,” which reads, “Still, the endless river flows tranquilly on, the flowers are red” (61). Though the student has now achieved a clear view of reality, he must nonetheless continually return to the world and actualize his realizations. “The endless river flows on,” and the Zen practitioner who has achieved the enlightened perspective learns to flow with it, living naturally and experiencing all of its aspects in their “thusness,” the simple and true recognition of their nature (63). This is the experience of living in “this very moment itself” (*ibid.*). It is “an image of the whole body-and-mind directly experiencing the moment—an effortless activity,” and according to Zen it leads to the transformation of greed, anger, and ignorance (the three poisons), into compassion, wisdom, and enlightenment (the
three virtues) (44,46). Reinforcing the relation between this ethical action and the right view of the world, Loori writes that it is this ethical transformation of our action that “confirms our intimacy with the nature of reality” (46). Seeing the world rightly leads to spontaneous ethical action, and in turn this ethical behavior reifies one’s understanding of reality.

This ethical component of Zen is ultimately even more crucial to the overall purpose of Zen than is the achievement of a clear view of the world, as can be seen by the tenth and final stage in the spiritual journey. This last stage is “Entering the Marketplace,” and it involves the return of the enlightened practitioner into the world. It is not enough that he has achieved wisdom, because Zen philosophy is at least equally dedicated to achieving “perfect harmony” in ordinary life (69). The master must return to the world, and once they have done so, their teaching will be “manifested in all circumstances all the time” (72). Their every action will be part of their spiritual practice, because these actions will emerge impulsively from a clear understanding of the world. A Master with a clear understanding of Zen is given a clear view of the world, and from this develops the ability to live naturally in the present, experiencing the world as it is. This is the path that Zen shows to its practitioners, without ever needing to explicitly assert ethical dictates or theories.

I believe that the ethics inherent in the *Tractatus* can be understood to exhibit the same sort of intimate connection with “seeing the world rightly.” In teaching us to recognize the confusions that engender the so-called problems of philosophy, Wittgenstein reveals that there is really nothing for us solve. The problems of philosophy are founded upon illusion, and when we learn to see this they naturally dissolve. For Donatelli, “it is this kind of liberation from a problem, this change in ourselves that counts as ethical according to the *Tractatus*” (§5). The liberation from the problems of philosophy naturally leads to the disclosure of the ethical, because in the *Tractatus*, as in Zen, the ethical and the logical are two dimensions of the same practice. Wittgenstein expresses this in his pre-tractarian journals, when he writes, “every problem is the main problem,” “the whole single great problem,” “the great problem round which everything I write turns” (Kremer 155). He is looking for one “extremely simple,” “liberating thought” which will unravel this great problem in which he is trapped, and he finally finds it with, “What can’t be said, *can’t be said!*” (Kremer 155-156). With this one phrase, Wittgenstein believes he has
solved his great problem, which contains both logical and ethical repercussions, in its essentials. By showing his reader’s the truth of this insight through the unique methodology of the *Tractatus*, he both teaches them to see the world clearly and to live ethically by only acting in accord with this understanding. When this has been accomplished, we will be able to live in the eternity of the present, and engage fully with the objects around us (6.4311).

When Wittgenstein writes in 6.522 that “there is indeed the inexpressible. This shows itself; it is the mystical,” he is not suggesting that there is a realm of mystical ineffable truths that language blocks us from expressing, but that we must nonetheless grasp; rather, it is ethics that is the “mystical,” which cannot be expressed but ultimately “shows itself.” Though this truly “can’t be said”—even 6.522 is merely a pseudo-proposition—when we have come to the clear view of the world to which Wittgenstein’s propositions deliver us, the ethical will have been shown as well. Following Cora Diamond, and mirroring Zen ethics, it is a “way of life into which the *Tractatus* initiates us,” not by presenting rules or enforcing some external perspective, but by freeing us to “discover [the real] in our own lives and experience” (Diamond 81). Clarity is achieved not when we climb outside of our ordinary experience, as Russell imagined, but by living fully and clearly within it. Thus, the full purpose of the *Tractatus* is two-fold; it teaches us to “see the world rightly,” and then allows us to return to ordinary life free from illusion, aware of how to act. If we follow Zen logic, this way of living will lead to the natural expression of virtue in our action, in that all such action will flow from clear understanding and full engagement with what is real in the world. The specifics of this way of life cannot be properly expressed in the prescriptive propositions and universal imperatives of traditional ethics, and Wittgenstein must pass over it in silence. And yet, if we work our way through the *Tractatus* and truly come to see all the problems of philosophy disappear, this understanding will naturally alter and guide our actions.

There are many further specific connections to be developed between Zen philosophy and the ideas of the *Tractatus*, particularly concerning karma and “ethical reward and ethical punishment,” the absence of inherent value in the world, death and the cessation of the world, and finding eternity in a single moment, to pick out a few, and this would be worthwhile for a project with a larger scope (6.422, 6.41, 6.431). My aims have been limited. In the *Tractatus*, the connection between
Wittgenstein’s philosophy and its ethical implications can seem baffling. Zen Buddhism, on the other hand, is able to demonstrate their fundamental interrelatedness through vast numbers of poems, stories, koans, parables, rituals and other mediums. In Zen, the connection between right understanding and right action are clearly spelled out, and I have used this as an analogy to reveal that the philosophical and ethical problems of the Tractatus are both aspects of the same “great problem.” The parallel with Zen has also allowed me to elucidate the sense in which Wittgenstein held himself to have solved both dimensions of this problem “in essentials,” by teaching his reader the art of silence (Tractatus preface). In some ways, I feel that Zen can serve as a sort of corollary to Wittgenstein’s work and a model of the second, unwritten part of the Tractatus, which as of now, we can only imagine.

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