

*The Zen of Ludwig Wittgenstein:
An Elucidation of the Elusive 'Ethical Point' of the Tractatus*

5113 Words, not including the abstract and Bibliography

Abstract:

This paper strives to elucidate the “ethical point” of Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* by means of an analogy with Zen Buddhism. By developing a comparison between these two philosophies in terms of their parallel method and parallel purpose, a fresh attempt is made to resolve the most profound problem raised by “resolute readings” of the *Tractatus*: How can a work of nonsense lead an individual to ethical realizations? These resolute readings, as exemplified in the work of Jim Conant, Cora Diamond, Michael Kremer, Warren Goldfarb and Piergiorgio Donatelli, among others, have toppled decades of accepted interpretation of Wittgenstein’s early work and risen to great prominence in recent years. This paper represents an attempt to take up the problem from a new perspective, in hopes of pointing the way towards a solution to one of the great lingering dilemmas in the field.

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 taken himself to have resolved the problems of philosophy in less than 150 pages. Further, what I hope to make clear with this imperfect analogy 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 agent. Wittgenstein explicitly referenced the *Tractatus*' 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, as is the case with Wittgenstein's work, many varying and often contradictory interpretations of it have been advanced. 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 enumerate the manifold alternate conceptions promulgated throughout its history or take sides in any of the ongoing internecine debates. Instead I will employ a broad Zen paradigm, as exemplified in the influential American Zen master John Daido Loori's book,

Riding the Ox Home. In doing so, I hope to show how the *Tractatus*, a book of self-destructing pseudo-propositions, can ultimately lead its reader to ethical realizations.¹

The Problem

When one attempts to discover an ethical point in the *Tractatus*, as Wittgenstein's personal correspondences urge us to, all methodical attempts seem to lead only to an impasse. In Warren Goldfarb's paper, "Metaphysics and Nonsense," he makes this difficulty all too evident. If we strive to take Wittgenstein at his word and engage the propositions of the *Tractatus* as truly empty, as rungs a ladder to be climbed and thrown away, and avoid introducing arbitrary distinctions between propositions that are senseless and propositions that may be 'strictly speaking' nonsensical, but that somehow still manage to convey an ineffable, inexpressible meaning, a seemingly insurmountable problem arises: 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 need to write these specific sentences at all? 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?² Goldfarb identifies the problem, but

¹ This is a task that Michael Kremer attempted in his essay "The Purpose of *Tractarian* Nonsense." However, a comparison to Zen Buddhism, rather than to the work of St. Paul and St. Augustine, will prove more fruitful and provide a stronger push towards a full understanding of the twofold purpose of the *Tractatus*.

² Ibid.

is ultimately forced to acknowledge his deep puzzlement and unsatisfying inability to resolve it.

Michael Kremer recognizes this apparently fatal flaw in his own resolute reading of the *Tractatus* as well, and attempts to find a solution. 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]?”³ It is this form of the question that I will pursue in the passages to follow, and 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 asserted that, “The book’s point is an ethical one.”⁴ Grasping this unspoken “ethical point” will therefore be absolutely crucial to our understanding of why Wittgenstein constructed the *Tractatus* as he did and what point he hoped this unique structure could convey.

Seeking the ethical ramifications of the *Tractatus* only in the passages in which Wittgenstein explicitly mentions ethics would be as foolish as looking for the work’s logical ramifications only in sections of the text in which Wittgenstein talks about logic. Wittgenstein believes there to be a fundamental parallel between the logical and the ethical, and stresses that both are “transcendental,” and pervade our world.⁵ We must therefore attempt to understand the ethical within the book’s quest to elucidate the limits of language, thought, and reality, and in relation to the peculiar method by which it strives to achieve that goal.

³ Kremer, ‘The Purpose of *Tractarian* Nonsense,’ p.71

⁴ Wittgenstein, Letter to Ludwig von Ficker

⁵ *Tractatus*, 6.421

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.⁶ Wittgenstein 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."⁷ In the next sentence he spells out an implication of this insight: "We cannot therefore say in logic: This and this there is in the world, that there is not."⁸ Any attempt to do so, Wittgenstein explains, "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."⁹ And yet, this appears to be *exactly what these passages do*.

One 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.

⁶ Russell, Introduction to the *Tractatus*, p.22

⁷ *Tractatus*, 5.61

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., 5.61

In this way, even proposition 5.61, which we may wish 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 extend these assertions to the concept of the “metaphysical subject, the limit - not a part of the world.”¹⁰ 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.”¹¹ In these sentences, we again see Wittgenstein trying to say exactly what can’t be said, immediately after he claims 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 manifest in the world. We are once again trapped in a paradox, and some readers simply surrender and claim, “Though strictly speaking we cannot say ‘it,’ there must be an ineffable ‘it’ nonetheless.’ This stance cannot do justice to the depth of Wittgenstein’s thought and represents an early stage for any 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... Wittgenstein’s aim is to allow us to see that there is no ‘it’” at all.¹² Wittgenstein’s

¹⁰ Ibid., 5.641

¹¹ Ibid., 5.632

¹² Diamond, ‘Throwing Away the Ladder,’ 24

propositions do not simply refute the concept of a metaphysical subject, but rather demonstrate the insubstantiality of the very idea of such a subject's existence. Wittgenstein's own sentences can, in this way, be understood as carrying out the "strictly correct method" of philosophizing that he describes in 6.53. When one first begins to struggle with these sentences, it seems there is some content that could be grasped, if only the correct form of expression is found. But, when thought all the way through, the sentences are designed to self-destruct, 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."¹³

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 laid out, and Wittgenstein has shown his reader that the only way to transcend his propositions is to pass over them in silence. Wittgenstein gestures at this in the preface and the final sentences of the *Tractatus*, which originate in his epiphany that, "What can't be said, *can't be said!*"¹⁴ To understand him is to understand that his sentences are truly nonsense and to see exactly why: They presuppose an ability to think outside of logic to formulate assertions where there should only be silence. This final stage of understanding is what Wittgenstein means by "throw[ing] away the ladder" and

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Wittgenstein, pre-*Tractarian journals*

“surmount[ing] these propositions.”¹⁵ 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.”¹⁶ This is the explicit 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 live free 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. Only by arduously surmounting the propositions of the *Tractatus* will we learn to see the limits of the world. 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 achieves the goal stated in the preface, that of “drawing a limit to the expression of thoughts,” and his reader is empowered to actualize Wittgenstein’s most important insight: “whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent.”¹⁷

¹⁵ *Tractatus*, 6.54

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Preface to the *Tractatus*, 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, 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 point is of paramount importance to the work. It is for this task that we will turn to Zen Buddhism. However, first I must establish Zen as an apt parallel to the *Tractatus* in terms of both methodology and purpose, such that the connection I postulate between the ethical dimensions of Zen and Wittgenstein's work can ultimately be understood as valid.

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 sketches and poems in a simple narrative meant to guide Zen students along the path to enlightenment. Taken together, these stages form a general illustration of the method and ultimate purpose of Zen Buddhism. They serve as "a series of signposts," a set of guiding concepts akin to the framing remarks found in the Preface and final sentences of the *Tractatus*.¹⁸ Many variations of these images have been developed in the centuries since it was first adapted from early Daoist thought, but Master Loori's is particularly precise and insightful. I will here lean heavily on the commentary Loori provides, but it is important to recognize that "The Ox-Herding Pictures" consist of poems and pictures, not propositions, doctrines or theories. Wittgenstein

¹⁸ Loori, *Riding the Ox Home*, xvi – even in this first phrase, the Wittgensteinian parallels are apparent.

acknowledged the advantages of these a-logical 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.

The Zen Method

In Zen, the pursuit of knowledge about the world itself is often framed as 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." Beginning the process of enlightenment entails recognizing the doubts that plague us and allowing them to take form within our minds. In this stage, we commit ourselves to the search for the ox. Looi writes, "The ox depicted in Kuon's pictures represents the True Self; thus the search is basically a process of discovery of the nature of the self."¹⁹ Our doubts and questions trap us in a state of illusion. 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."²⁰ 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 believe 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 this second stage, "Finding Traces of the Ox," we come closer to this understanding.

¹⁹ Ibid., 5

²⁰ Ibid.

In this stage we ask ourselves “What is truth? What is reality? What is life? What is death?”²¹ As we investigate these questions through self-examination, a light breaks through and we seem to see the way forward. We begin to formulate an answer, 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.²²

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.”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.”²⁴ As Wittgenstein recognized, “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 slip away. Like water in a closed fist, the tighter one squeezes, the faster it 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’ experiences of the *Tractatus*.²⁶ In Zen, this propensity to conceive of our realizations as concrete entities that we can tag and label is “one of the worst possible illusions,”

²¹ Ibid., 16

²² 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.

²³ Ibid., 22-23

²⁴ Ibid., 25

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., 30

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.”²⁷

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. Rather than examining the tangible activities, the practices, ceremonies, chores, chants, rites, and rituals carried on within Zen temples, my discussion of the method of Zen Buddhism has proceeded at a high level of philosophical abstraction. This has, to some degree, been a function of the particular focus and constraints of this essay, which aims to elucidate Wittgenstein’s work, and not describe Zen as a historical practice. However, there are philosophical motivations behind my approach. When one treats the Zen method from a literal, anthropological perspective, it is easy to forget that none of these highly ritualized activities are pursued for their own sake. As Looi affirms, “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.”²⁸ This provisionality and self-destruction of Zen practices is the key to the Zen method, and can only be grasped if Zen is treated as a philosophically coherent whole.

The Zen master presents the student with paradoxical koans, contradictory ideas, and seemingly incoherent insights. The student is able to progress on the path to enlightenment and transcend these insoluble problems only when he or she

²⁷ Ibid., 30, 25

²⁸ Ibid., 47

learns to recognize the empty formulations that lie at their root. Where Wittgenstein 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, fully digest them, make them our own and let them go.”²⁹ Though the metaphor changes, the fundamental parallel between the method of Zen Buddhism and that of the *Tractatus* shines through.

The Purpose of Zen

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 towards an enlightened view of the world. We may still be tempted to seek a concrete ‘thing’ that is the purpose of the Zen method, but stages eight and nine, “Transcending the Ox” and “Returning to the Source,” confirm 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.”³⁰ 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

²⁹ *Tractatus*, 6.54. Looi, *Riding the Ox Home*, 47

³⁰ *Tractatus*, 6.54

this perspective - everything that can be said will be said.³¹ There is also “nothing extra” - we will “stay out of the way and allow things to take care of themselves.”³²

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 unnecessary, 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!”³³ We have seen fully up to the limits of reality and have no desire 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.³⁴ In the enlightened state of Zen, “there

³¹ Loori, *Riding the Ox Home*, 51

³² *Ibid.*, 51, 64

³³ *Ibid.*, 63

³⁴ 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.

is no search for enlightenment” and “there is no persisting in delusion.”³⁵ 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.

The “Ethical Point”

In Zen, we learn to see the nature of the self and of reality when we “take [the teachings] up, chew them, fully digest them, make them our own, and let them go.”³⁶ True understanding is reached only when the teachings themselves have been transcended and disposed of, just 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.³⁷ 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 referenced earlier, 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.”³⁸ This unwritten part of the *Tractatus* is concerned with the ethical, which he feels himself to have put “firmly in place by being silent about it.”³⁹ And yet, because Wittgenstein does not ever explicitly state the

³⁵ Ibid., 56-57

³⁶ Ibid., 47

³⁷ *Tractatus*, 6.54

³⁸ Wittgenstein, Letter to Ludwig von Ficker

³⁹ Ibid.

connection between the ethical and the logically enlightened perspective to which he leads his reader, it is unclear how the ethical is conveyed in his work.

Thus far, our inquiry has moved from the *Tractatus* to Zen, illustrating their parallels in that order, but now that sequence will be reversed. I will use the ethical purpose clearly manifested in the parables, stories, poems, and koans of Zen Buddhism to reveal the nature of the ethical point of the *Tractatus*. As early as the fifth stage, “Taming the Ox,” the intimate connection between right understanding and right living is made clear. In this stage, “We learn to live what we have seen and realized, and to do so effortlessly and spontaneously,” Looi writes.⁴⁰ The manifestation of this understanding in life leads to the natural expression of compassion and the other moral virtues in our everyday actions. In Zen, “Compassion is wisdom in action.”⁴¹ Zen ethics do not entail any further doctrine or universal theses, but rather emerge directly and naturally from the 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.”⁴² 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

⁴⁰ Looi, *Riding the Ox Home*, 38

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 39

⁴² *Ibid.*

from which specific ethical doctrine are set forth.⁴³ 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."⁴⁴ 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," a simple and true recognition of their nature.⁴⁵ This is the experience of living in "this very moment itself."⁴⁶ 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).⁴⁷ Looi writes that it is this ethical transformation of our action that "confirms our intimacy with the nature of reality."⁴⁸ 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 one has achieved wisdom, because Zen philosophy is at

⁴³ Ibid., 44

⁴⁴ Ibid., 61

⁴⁵ Ibid., 63

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 44, 46

⁴⁸ Ibid., 46

least equally dedicated to achieving “perfect harmony” in ordinary life.⁴⁹ The master must return to the world, and once they have done so, their teaching will be “manifested in all circumstances all the time.”⁵⁰ 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 achieves a clear view of the world, and from this develops the ability to live naturally in the present. Zen shows this path to its practitioners through its paradoxical methodology, without ever reverting to explicit ethical dictates or theories.

I believe that the ethical purpose of the *Tractatus* exhibits this 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 nothing left for us solve. The ‘problems of philosophy’ are founded on 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*.”⁵¹ 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.”⁵² The ethical and logical elements of philosophy are intertwined, and form one single, multidimensional philosophical

⁴⁹ Ibid., 69

⁵⁰ Ibid., 72

⁵¹ Donatelli, “The Problem of the Higher in Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*,” Section V

⁵² From Kremer, “The Cardinal Problem of Philosophy,” 155

problem. Wittgenstein needs 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!*”⁵³ Through the unique methodology of the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein allows his readers to internalize this insight, and in so doing, he teaches them both to see the world clearly and to live ethically by acting in accord with this understanding. This is what will enable us to live eternally in the present and engage fully with the objects around us, as the *Tractatus* implores.⁵⁴

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 ineffable but true propositions that the limits of our language block us from expressing. It is ethics that is the “mystical,” which cannot be expressed but ultimately “shows itself” in the change in our actions. Though ethical rules cannot be tabulated into a set of clear, universal, *a priori* propositions—even 6.522 is merely a pseudo-proposition—when we have come to the understanding 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.”⁵⁵ 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 live. If we follow Zen logic, this way of life will also consist

⁵³ Ibid., 155-156

⁵⁴ *Tractatus*, 6.4311

⁵⁵ Diamond, ‘Realism and Resolution,’ 81

in the natural expression of virtue in our action. The specifics of this way of life cannot be properly expressed in the prescriptive propositions and universal imperatives of traditional ethics, and Wittgenstein passes over 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 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 itself, and finding eternity in a single moment, to name a few overlapping concepts, and this would be worthwhile for a project with a larger scope.⁵⁶ My own aims have been more limited. In the *Tractatus*, the connection between Wittgenstein’s philosophy and its ethical implications can seem baffling. Zen Buddhism, on the other hand, clearly demonstrates 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 Zen as an analogy to reveal that the philosophical and ethical problems of the *Tractatus* are both aspects of the same “great problem.” This parallel with Zen has also allowed me to elucidate the sense in which Wittgenstein believed himself to have solved both elements of this problem “in essentials,” simply by teaching his reader the art of silence.⁵⁷ In some ways, I feel that Zen can serve as a corollary to Wittgenstein’s work and a model of the second unwritten part of the *Tractatus*, which as of now, we can only imagine.

⁵⁶ *Tractatus*, 6.422, 6.41, 6.431

⁵⁷ *Tractatus*, preface

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