

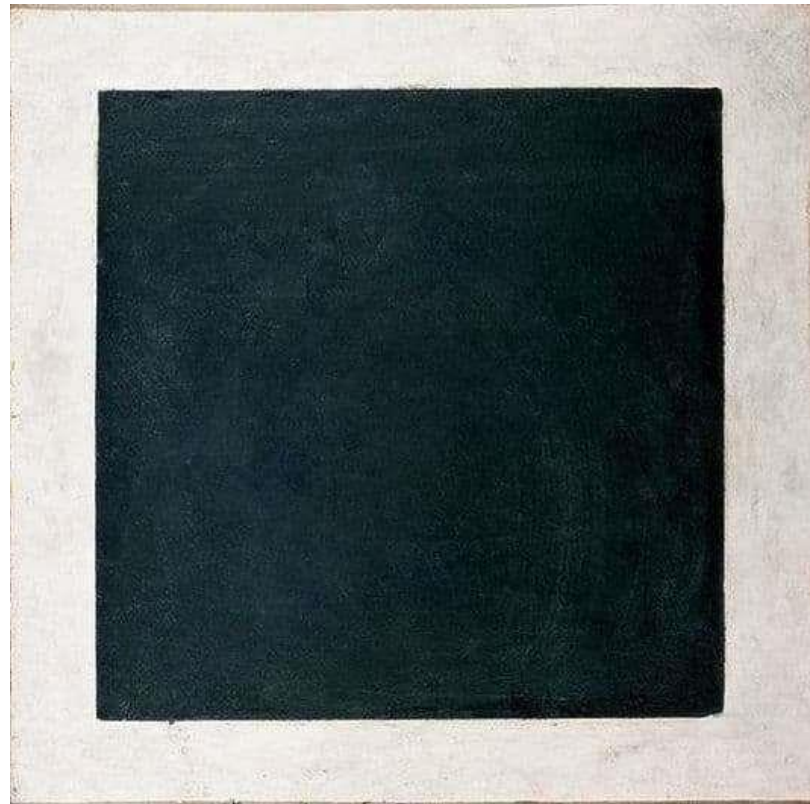
Wittgenstein and Nāgārjuna for Logic and Peace

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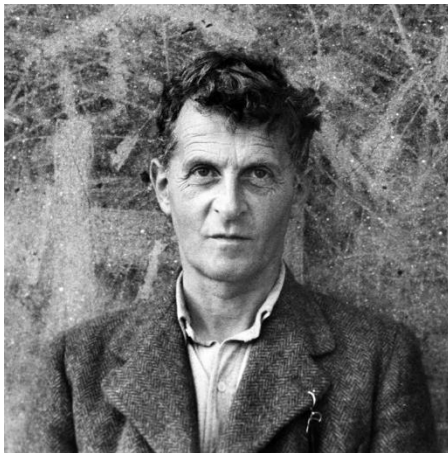
Kazimir Malevich, *Black Square*, 1924

Motivation

- Contemporary possibility of a **true** and **genuinely philosophical** pacifism (i.e. one that is not simply a moralism, but grounded in distinctively *philosophical* methods of reflection, analysis, and imagination).
- Possibility of a philosophical response, grounded in comprehensive reflection on forms of collective life, to diverse types of violence:
 - Wars of nations against nations or against themselves
 - Oppression and dominance of global poor by the wealthy in capitalism
 - Anthropogenic violence of the human against the non-human earth in general (aided by technology, capitalism, and humanism), including climate change

Ludwig Wittgenstein – 1889-1951

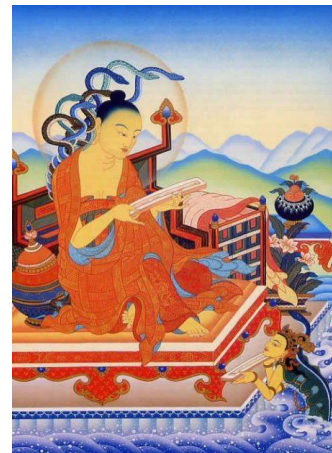
- Tradition: “Logical analysis” (Russell, Frege) of propositions and mathematics
- Main works: *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1921); *Philosophical Investigations* (1952)
- First to take the “linguistic turn,” whereby historical questions and problems of philosophy are seen as essentially problems about the logic and use of our language.



Nāgārjuna – 1st or 2nd Century CE (dates uncertain)

- Tradition: Buddhism and Buddhist philosophical analysis
- Main work: *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (Root verses on the Middle Way)
- Founder of Madhyamaka or “Middle Way” tradition that extends traditional Buddhist critical claims (no-self, analysis of ‘composite’ objects into simples) to

consider the nature of things in general and “dependent arising” as such, arguing for the “emptiness” of all things.



Levinas: War as ontological violence

- Does not lucidity, the mind's openness upon the true, consist in catching sight of the permanent possibility of war? ... We do not need obscure fragments of Heraclitus to prove that being reveals itself as war to philosophical thought, that war does not only affect it as the most patent fact, but as the very patency, of truth, of the real. In war reality rends the words and images that dissimulate it, to obtrude in its nudity and in its harshness. Harsh reality (this sounds like a pleonasm!), harsh object-lesson; at the very moment of its fulguration when the drapings of illusion burn, war is produced as the pure experience of pure being. The ontological event that takes form in this black light is a casting into movement of beings hitherto anchored in their identity, a mobilization of absolutes, by an objective order from which there is no escape. The trial by force is the test of the real. But violence does not consist so much in injuring and annihilating persons as in interrupting their continuity, making them play roles in which they no longer recognize themselves, making them betray not only commitments but their own substance, making them carry out actions that will destroy every possibility for action

-Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 21

Ontology, totality, and violence (struggle of all against all)

- This struggle of **all against all** is determined in advance by an **idea of totality** that is dominant in Western philosophy.
- In this idea of totality, the natures of things are **fixed in advance** as their **identities** and their only possible mobilization is the mutual struggle of these identities.
- Beings are reduced to centers of force and the **struggle of all against all** is the **struggle of their mutually oppositional interests** (interest = inter-esse).
- “Beings interest takes dramatic form in egoisms struggling with one another, each against all, in the multiplicity of allergic egoisms which are at war with one another...War is the deed or drama of the essence’s interest.”

(Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, p. 4)

- Can there be an adequately **philosophical response** to this permanent ontological violence of the struggle of identities against identities?
- Can such a response be grounded in **reason** or **logic** rather than **faith** or **moralism** or **positive theology**?
- Can there be a **permanent peace** that is not the peace of **empires** (in which peace is achieved only by means of a superior force subjugating others) or the peace of **contractual arrangements** (entered conditionally and temporarily, always with each party's own interest still in view)?
- Can permanent peace be achieved, not by a negotiation between constituted forces or subjugation under a superior force, but by **emptying** things of their identities and interests?

Wittgenstein and Nāgārjuna for logic and peace: argument

1. Both Nāgārjuna and Wittgenstein centrally aim for ***a genuine and unconditional peace*** that means the cessation of the **ontological violence** of identities and essences.
2. The peace in each case is not simply a personal or psychological attainment but the ***true pacification of the whole world*** of objects and events. It is not a cessation of philosophical analysis, but a continuation of it by other means and methods.
3. Pacification is to be attained in each case **by logical-linguistic means**. These means work to ***demonstrate the thoroughgoing emptiness of*** i) ***objects*** ii) ***events*** and iii) ***the forms of their logically possible relations***. Showing that objects, events, and forms are empty is, at the same time, showing them to be at peace.
4. The attainment of genuine world peace is an **ethical demand on the critical use of the collective (global) imagination**.

1. Pacifying the world is stilling *the ontological violence of identities and essences.*

Wittgenstein on problems, clarity, and peace

PI 133. It is not our aim to refine or complete the system of rules for the use of our words in unheard-of ways.

For the clarity for which we strive [*anstreben*] is indeed *complete* clarity. But this only means that the philosophical problems should *completely* disappear.

The real discovery [*die Eigentliche Entdeckung*] is the one that makes me able to break off doing philosophy, when I want to. – The one that brings philosophy to peace [*zur Ruhe bringt*], so that it is no longer tormented by questions which place *itself* in question.

There is not *one* philosophical method, although there are indeed methods, like different therapies.

TLP 6.52 We feel that even if *all possible* scientific questions have been answered, the problems of life remain completely untouched. Of course then there is no question left, and this itself is the answer.

6.521 The solution of the problem of life is seen in the vanishing of this problem.

(Is this not the reason why those to whom, after a long period of doubting it, the sense of life became clear, could not say what this sense consisted in?)

‘The real discovery...is the one that brings philosophy peace’

- The “real” philosophical discovery and the root of the diverse methods of philosophical “therapy” is not just one that allows **me** personally to stop doing philosophy, but one that brings *philosophy itself* to peace (with itself).
- It corresponds to the attainment of the *complete* clarity whereby philosophical problems – or the ‘**problem(s) of life**’ – **completely** disappear.
- It is to be attained by means of an insight into the form of *all possible* scientific questions – all those that call out for “**explanation**” in a **causal, structural, or material sense** – and realizing that these leave (what we had taken to be) the problems of life untouched.
- According to the *Tractatus*, this insight is an insight into the **form of all possible facts** or **the world** in logical space (into the form of all that **is** or **can be the case**).

Nāgārjuna for enlightenment and peace

- *For Nāgārjuna, the insight that brings peace is the insight into the form of dependent arising as such.*
- I salute the Fully Enlightened One, the best of orators, who taught the doctrine of dependent arising [*pratītyasamapupādaṃ*], according to which there is neither cessation nor arising, neither annihilation nor the eternal, neither singularity nor plurality, neither coming nor going, for the auspicious pacification of hypostatization [*prapañcopaśamaṃ*]
(MMK, Dedicatory Verse)
- This pacification of cognizing things [*sarvopalambhaopaśaman*], the pacification of hypostatizing [*prapañcopaśamaḥ*], is blissful
No Dharma whatsoever was ever taught by the Buddha to anyone.
(MMK 25:24, concluding the chapter on Nirvāṇa)

- Like Wittgenstein, Nāgārjuna speaks of the **quieting** of a distinctively **philosophical activity**: the “hypostatization” or “reifying” of entities in such a way as to suggest that a philosophical analysis must have the sense of a *philosophical discovery* of their underlying structure or nature
- But also as for Wittgenstein, **the critical target is not just the philosopher’s distinctive activity or proclivity**. It is **also** the routine and everyday activity or habit – inculcated by our language itself- of **assuming stable, individual identities of objects as such**
- With the pacification of this habit, the **entities of the world** – or **all dependently arisen** things -- are as such brought to peace. In this sense, the peace for which both aim is genuinely *world peace*.

2. The *pacification of the world* is the recognition of the *emptiness* of all things and forms.

The emptiness of all things: Dependent Arising and the critique of *svabhāva*

- A main target of refutation in the MMK is ***svabhāva*** (essence, nature, or ‘intrinsic identity’)
- Several of the initial chapters of the MMK criticize the assumption of *svabhāva* as interpreted by previous Buddhist philosophers (e.g. as “sense bases,” “aggregates,” “elements”, etc.)
- Chapters 6-9 target the positing of the *svabhāva* of things that (are thought to) fall into **familiar pairs or oppositions**: condition/conditioned; desiring/thing desired; agent and action; arising/enduring/disintegrating; prior and posterior, etc.; while chapter 15 targets *svabhāva* in general and as such
- It emerges (4:8-9) that the critique of the *svabhāva* or intrinsic identity of things is a demonstration of their **emptiness** [*śūnyata*]. All existents or beings (4:7) of whatever category or type are empty of *svabhāva*.

The *TLP*: *peace and the limits of the world*

- ***TLP*: Whereof we cannot speak, we must be silent** (7). This silence results from a process of “elucidation” (6.54) in which the propositions of the *Tractatus* are themselves revealed as nonsense and the “ladder” they have formed is “kicked away.”
- The insight that is needed to kick away the ladder is an insight into the **limits of language**, beyond which lies simply nonsense (Preface); and yields an insight into or feeling of the **world as a limited whole** (“under the aspect of eternity”)
- The insight into the **whole of reality** is not gained **by means of any proposition** (4.12). The logical form that propositions have in common with reality cannot be described by any proposition or set thereof.

Emptiness of logical form; emptiness of dependent origination

- In clarifying the logical form of the world, we **come to see the world as *at peace***. At the same time, we also gain the insight that the **logical form of the world has no substantial nature, i.e., it is empty of *substance***.
- In this way, we “kick away the ladder” of the **illusion of substance and substantial metaphysical views**.
- MMK 25:24: This pacification of cognizing things [*sarvopalambhaopaśaman*], the pacification of hypostatizing [*prapañcopaśamaḥ*], is blissful
No Dharma whatsoever was ever taught by the Buddha to anyone.

Form of dependent arising = Logical form of all that can be said = Emptiness

MMK 24:18 Dependent origination we declare to be emptiness

It [emptiness] is a dependently designated concept; just that is the middle way.

24:19 There being no dharma whatsoever that is not dependently originated,
It follows that there is also no dharma whatsoever that is non-empty.

TLP preface:

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.

Thus the aim of the book is to draw a limit to thought, or rather – not to thought, but to the expression of thoughts: for in order to be able to draw a limit to thought, we should have to find both sides of the limit thinkable....

It will therefore only be in language that the limit can be drawn, and what lies on the other side of the limit will simply be nonsense.

Emptiness of logical forms of combination in the *Tractatus* and the *MMK*

- TLP 4.0312: ...My fundamental thought [*Meine Grundgedanke*] is that the 'logical constants' are not representatives; that there can be no representatives of the *logic* of facts.
- It follows from this that there are **no substantial logical operations**; conjunction, disjunction, negation and the conditional are ***not real relationships***.
- Cf. the *MMK*: emptiness of "conditions" and the "conditioned" (chapters 1 and 7); emptiness of "conjunction" (chapter 14)
- TLP 5.1361: Belief in the causal nexus is *superstition*.
- Suggestion: in both texts, the idea of something having a *logically substantial relation* to something else is shown to be *empty*

3. The pacification of the world is attained by **logical means** and not by transcendent insight or by seeing the ineffable.

Logical means of pacification (1): negative tetralemma

- In the Buddhist tradition and in the *MMK*, a way of “treating” unanswerable questions by considering – **and rejecting** – **all** of these alternatives with respect to some “universal” claim A:
 - A
 - Not- A
 - A and Not-A
 - Neither A nor Not-A

In this way, the entire space of logical alternatives is considered and rejected so that the tendency to “conceptualize” is stilled

- Examples from the *MMK*:
 - 1.1 Not from itself, not from another, not from both, nor without cause:
Never in any way is there any existing thing [bhāvāh] that has arisen.
- Chapter 25: Application to the claim “Nirvāṇa exists”

Logical means of pacification (2): reflection on sense and reference

- The TLP appears at first – like classical Buddhist analytic projects – to **require a substrate of simple objects** whose determinate **possibilities of combination** allow for the possibilities of sentences to have sense (2-2.021).
- But it is a direct consequence of this **that the objects cannot be described at all** (3.221). It is **impossible even to say of them that they exist or do not**.
- Kicking away the ladder, we come to see that **if we posit substantial objects at the basis of the world, there is nothing we can truly or correctly say of them**, thereby *stilling* the ontological impulse that leads us to them.
- From this position **it is not possible to say even that they are “ineffable”**

Against ineffability: The “Resolute” Interpretation of the *Tractatus*

- According to “**ineffability**” interpretations (e.g. Anscombe), the point of the avowedly **nonsensical but “indicative”** propositions of the TLP is to point to or indicate some substantial content or structure which **can be thought or “seen” but cannot be expressed or said**.
- According to the “**resolute**” interpretation (Conant, Diamond), there is **no “indicative” (as opposed to just plain) nonsense**. The point of the propositions is to get us to engage with **a kind of illusion** – the illusion of giving **a metaphysical explanation** of the world – so we can **ultimately see the basis of the illusion as an illusion of sense**.
- On the “ineffability” interpretations, any pacification to be found would depend on our **insight into an ineffable domain beyond or before** the world.
- On the “resolute” interpretation, **we gain pacification by wholly immanent logical means**.

Against ineffability: Reading Nāgārjuna *without transcendence or mysticism*

- If the use of the negative tetralemma really does bring *logical pacification*, then it **does not leave behind an “ineffable” domain behind or beyond the possibilities of the world which it exhaustively treats.**
- It follows that **pacification does not depend on our capacity to access a domain that is before or beyond the world.**
- For Nāgārjuna, there is no outside-the-world. Nirvāṇa ‘itself’ – the “cessation” or “stopping” of all processes of desire and suffering along with the pacification of the world itself – is not external to the world (saṃsāra) but is non-differentiated from it:
 - 25: 19 There is no distinction whatsoever between saṃsāra and nirvāṇa.

There is no distinction whatsoever between nirvāṇa and saṃsāra.
 - 25: 20 What is the limit of nirvāṇa, that is the limit of saṃsāra.

There is not even the finest gap to be found between the two.

4. The attainment of genuine world peace is an **ethical demand on the critical use of the collective (global) imagination.**

- **Objection 1:** Viewing or seeing the world “as” pacified is not enough to bring it to actual peace. **It is not clear from what has been said how we should act or what we should do to bring about actual peace.**
- **Objection 2:** If everything is empty (and there are no things with identities or interests) then why should we do anything? Why should we act in an ethically “better” way? **If the world is already pacified, why should we act to bring it to peace?**
- **Response:** Wittgenstein on Ethics in the *TLP* and the “Lecture on Ethics” (1929): If one were to write a book that had all the facts of the world in it, there would many facts, but nothing ethical. And yet (letter to Ficker): “the book’s point is ethical...the ethical gets its limit drawn from the inside, as it were, by my book...”
- Diamond (1991) (“Ethics, Imagination and the Method of Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*”): Although there are no “ethical matters” or truths, the *Tractatus* may be read as teaching a way of engaging our imagination of the world that is itself “ethical” in import and effect (and is distinct from the “metaphysical” engagement)

- “In what sense is the aim of the *Tractatus* ethical? The understanding that it is meant to lead to is supposed to be a capacity to ‘see the world in the right way’. That is, it is a matter of not making false demands on the world, nor having false expectations or hopes; our relation to the world should not be determined by the false imagination of philosophy. False imagination is not directly tied to what we say or do, but may be recognized in what we say or do, how we live, by an understanding that draws on another use of imagination.” (Diamond 1991, pp. 168-69).
- If this is correct, then the **challenge of (not only thinking) but achieving peace has the form of a challenge to the global critical imagination**. The challenge is twofold:
 - i) **Negatively**: to **see through** the illusion of identities, ideologies and interests: to see the “grammatical illusion” at the root of ontological violence as the comprehensive illusion that it is
 - ii) **Positively**: to find ways to **imagine a world of universal emptiness** and to **imagine the forms of life that are appropriate to it**.
- Nāgārjuna (MMK, 24:14) “All is possible when emptiness is possible. Nothing is possible when emptiness is impossible.”
- Wittgenstein (*PI*, 19) : “To imagine a language means to imagine a form of life.”

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