What Do Words Represent?

To say that A is A
Means that A is not A
Therefore A is A.
This means that affirmative is negative and negative is affirmative. . . . as irrational as irrational can be. The irrationality is even more obvious if we replace A with an ordinary term: When we see a mountain, we call it a "mountain." When we turn to the river, we call it a river. This is just common sense. But the idea of *prajñā* thinking is that "The mountain is not a mountain, a river is not a river; thus, a mountain is just a mountain, a river is just a river."[47]

—Suzuki Daisetz

We require words to express ideas. Indeed, our very cognition would be impossible without words. In order to recognize the thing that we are holding in our hands we have to know that it is denoted by the word "book." The powerful impact of the experience of knowing a word is vividly illustrated in the biography of Helen Keller, who could not see, or hear, or speak, when she first learned the word "water" as water was poured over her hands.

The Limits and Potential of Logic

Certain rules—grammar—are needed in order to use words correctly. We know that if we say, "The book is on the table," we would be understood, but if we say, "Book table is the on," it would make no sense. Grammar alone, however, is insufficient for argument. Logic that enables correct reasoning is necessary to arrive at viable conclusions. That was the thinking of the Greek philosophers who emerged out of the debates of the sophists, and the classical logic of Aristotle (384–322 B.C.) that held sway for more than two millennia. Aristotle explained this logic using the syllogism, following the familiar three stages.

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47 Suzuki 2000, pp. 327–28.

(Major Premise)	M is P
(Minor Premise)	S is M
(Conclusion)	S is therefore P

Thus, S is a minor term and M is a middle term and P is the major term. In our contemporary terminology, this is called the subsumptive relationship between groups.

Interestingly, a very similar kind of logic developed in India called *hetuvidyā*, which sets out the following steps:

(Theme = Conclusion)	Voice/sound is transient
(Cause = Minor Premise)	Voice/sound is something created
(Example = Major Premise)	All created things are transient; for example a bottle.

Here, that which is the large premise, as we can see from the term "example," originally began with a proposition or example, and then was gradually invested with logic. *Hetsuvidyā* logic was introduced to Japan in ancient times and continued to be studied, and it is said that Fujiwara Yorinaga (1120–1156), an extraordinary scholar who was killed in the struggle over the succession of emperors known as the Hōgen Rebellion, was particularly well versed in Indian logic. *Hetsuvidyā* logic was taught in the *Shasekishū* (Collection of Sand and Pebbles), an anthology of Buddhist tales (*setsuwa*) compiled by the priest Mujū (1226–1312). The example given there is:

Conclusion	You are an idiot.
Cause/Minor Premise	Lacking wisdom
Example	You are like a beast[48]

Here the "example" is not so much a logical "major premise" as literally a simile. In Japan, it appears, Indian logic fizzled out.

One might be inclined to think of logic as a sort of eternal truth that does not change through the ages, but from the end of the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth century, great strides were made in delineating the rules of logic, all as a result of applying the basics of mathematics to the field. Mathematics, too, is thought to be made up of principles of eternal truth. For example, the rule is the total of the angles of a right triangle is 180 degrees. But if one precisely measures the angles of an actual triangle drawn on a piece of paper and adds them up, they might not come to *exactly* 180 degrees. In that case, the explanation given is that the triangle that was drawn is not

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48 *Shasekishū*, vol. 1, p. 84.

precise. No matter how precisely one might try to draw the lines, the angles will be slightly off because of the roughness of the paper, the thickness of the drawing implement, and so on; a perfect triangle cannot be drawn. This is what led Plato to observe that the perfect triangle is in fact the *idea* of a triangle.

Important philosophical issues emerged in the late nineteenth century with new developments applying mathematical methodologies in the field of logic. The phenomenology of Husserl was one of the results of the study of the philosophical basics of mathematics. He criticized the theory that sought to ground the principles of mathematics in human psychology, arguing for the idea-theory view, and developed the principles of phenomenology as the means for understanding it. Friedrich Ludwig Gottlob Frege (1848–1925) and Bertrand Russell (1872–1970), on the other hand, sought to demonstrate the rigor of mathematics by deriving its principles from logic. The three-volume *Principia Mathematica*, coauthored by Russell and Alfred North Whitehead, which undertook to demonstrate mathematical theorems on the basis of logical axioms, had a decisive impact on twentieth-century science of philosophy.

Logic is what gives the world structure . . . logical space is endowed with multifarious states of affairs . . . which constitute our world.

The one who sought to apply a thoroughly logical approach to philosophy under the influence of Russell, pushing philosophy to its limits, was Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951) in his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1921). According to Wittgenstein, logic is what gives the world structure, which can be called logical space. Logical space is endowed with the possibilities of multifarious states of affairs from which actual affairs emerge, the totality of which, in turn, constitutes our world. Humans understand that world by representing it in the notation of language. Therefore this notation itself represents the structure of the world. This representation theory was the feature of *Tractatus*, although Wittgenstein himself would later refute the idea.

The reason that *Tractatus* had such a great impact beyond the scope of logical philosophy was that it sought to strictly define the limit to which one could speak: Anything that could be spoken of, could be clearly spoken, while "Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent" (*Tractatus* 7).

This carried on Kant's critique of pure reason, and pursued the rationalism of modern philosophy to its ultimate. Kant's critique drove the central issues of metaphysics that had concerned philosophers thus far—God, the spirit, etc.—out of the realm of pure reason. Wittgenstein pushed that critique even further: we can only speak about that which we can ascertain as fact: We "can say nothing except what can be said, i.e., the propositions of natural science" (*Tractatus* 6.53).

Thus we can speak about things of this world, but we cannot see or describe the subject that is seeing or describing that world. We can speak about the "I" as an individual

in the world, but the "I" that is thinking about the structure of the world as a whole is no longer an existence within the world. "The subject does not belong to the world but is a limit of the world" (*Tractatus* 5.632). The view that the world as seen and described by me is that of "solipsism" (5.62), but inasmuch as the "I" cannot be brought into the world, it is a solipsism precluding the "I," meaning that, "solipsism strictly carried out coincides with pure realism" (5.64). The paradox lies in the notion of a world from which the "I" is alienated.

Wittgenstein writes in the introduction to *Tractatus* that everything beyond the boundary is simply nonsense. But we should be careful about interpreting this statement. Wittgenstein does not say that there is nothing "beyond the boundary" that "cannot be described." In fact, he clearly admits the existence of things that cannot be expressed, as he says, "There is indeed the inexpressible. This *shows* itself; it is the mystical" (6.522).

Such an "inexpressible" opens up the possibility of a different perception from "describable"—namely "demonstrable." "God," as well as "logic" are only showable; they cannot be described. But what does it mean to be "shown"? How can it be that things like "God" and "logic" cannot be described and yet they have been given names? Even saying they are "inexpressible" means in a way that they are being expressed. Are they concepts we cannot grasp through our powers of reason and yet can be sensed by some other means?

We already encountered this sort of dilemma in Kant's idea of "things in themselves" (see Chapter 2, p. 22). Kant believed that cognition was an act of human reason, but, as to whether humans have something other than reason in their cognition he surmised that there seemed to be some things at work, and he called them "things in themselves." We may be perplexed by the notion that there is something we cannot cognize, yet still it exists. Wittgenstein's line—"Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent" is more final on this point. The more one is told one "must be silent," the more one wants to speak about the "something." So how should we treat that strange realm of things that we want to describe even when they defy description.

The Logic of *Soku-Hi*: A Logic of Contradiction

The philosophical system built by Wittgenstein, which ought to have been the most splendidly logical system, turned out to have strange areas of ambiguity around its edges. Bertrand Russell, who was Wittgenstein's teacher, had in fact observed numerous curious paradoxes from the time he wrote his fanciful *Principia Mathematica*. Russell was quite expert at turning up such curious paradoxes, including the famous "Russell paradox" about which he wrote to Frege.

To explain this paradox here might become more technical than desirable, but we may consider instead the "liar paradox," which is similar to it but a bit easier to understand. This classic paradox is illustrated by the statement: "This sentence is false."

Is this statement true or false? If it is true, then the sentence is false, and if it is false, then the statement is true. The point is that a statement like "this sentence" referring to itself produces a contradiction. Wittgenstein's principle that one cannot speak about oneself derives from this difficulty with self-reference. When any system of logic tries to speak about itself, the argument, no matter how rigorous, results in contradiction. In order to avoid such contradictions, Russell introduced into his system a complex order that precluded self-referential statements.

Despite self-reference having been so strictly prohibited in Russell's logic, the young genius Kurt Gödel (1906–1978) nimbly surmounted that barrier. In 1931 he proposed what he called the "G sentence," which is "G is not provable," showing that neither the G sentence nor the denial of it could be proven. If the G sentence could be proven, it would mean that it could not be proven. Contrarily, if the denial of the G were to be proven, it would produce the contradiction that the unprovable had been proven. This, too, is a clear case of self-reference, but by representing the statements using natural numbers, Gödel skillfully cleared the barrier posed by Russell, demonstrating that in the system of natural numbers there exists a formula that can be neither proven or disproven. This was Gödel's first incompleteness theorem.

What this accomplished was to clarify that it was not possible to get rid of the curious situation accompanying self-reference, no matter how unsurmountable the barriers might be. In that attempt, it was necessary to note that the paradox is produced not by mere self-reference but by self-reference including a negative. Wittgenstein's system, too, results in a paradox by excluding the subject as something "that cannot be described."

Now we come to the appearance of Suzuki Daisetz (1870–1966), who wrote regarding such paradoxes that we should boldly embrace the contradictions. Suzuki's Zen teachings were widely popular with the younger generations in Europe and the United States who resisted the formalistic logic of the establishment, and "Beat Zen" became the darling of the anti-establishment. Suzuki's writings are indeed rather ambiguous and difficult to grasp. They may sound fine to those who have achieved enlightenment, but if we accept contradictions, then anything goes and all order will collapse. Of course, what Suzuki was trying to teach was not that simple.

In the fifth chapter of his *Nihonteki reisei* (Japanese Spirituality), which is entitled "The Zen of the *Diamond Sutra*," Suzuki explains the logic of the *Diamond Sutra* (*Kongō hannyakyo*; Skt. *Vajracchedikā prajñāpāramitā sūtra*) following the formula "For A to be affirmed as A, A has to be non-A; therefore, it is A," and called it the "soku-hi no ronri" (logic of affirmation-in-negation).[49] The *Diamond Sutra* is one of the groups of sutras called the Wisdom sutras and is known for copious use of negation. Its negation, however, is aimed at warning against attachment to certain things in order to advance one's

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49 Heisig et al. 2011, pp. 214–16.

training, and is not intended to be a denial that mountains are mountains or rivers are rivers. It simply means, for example, that you should "pursue the path of the bodhisattva without becoming attached to the bodhisattva."

Suzuki, however, understands this blending of affirmation and negation to be the logic of Zen. Moreover, if through negation we arrive at a great affirmation, then that can be said to be a religious experience. Suzuki wrote in *Nihonteki reisei*,

> It may be quite circuitous to deny something that is ordinary common sense, to have that again denied, and then to return to its affirmation, but in fact there is much in our consciousness that we would not recognize without undertaking this circuitous route. The wisdom of the *Heart Sutra* is that, from the viewpoint of spiritual intuition itself, a mountain is from the outset a mountain, and a river is a river; there is nothing bothersome or complicated about it. However, the path between our emotional senses and our spiritual senses is not so easy to achieve.[50]

If we follow this explanation, we could formulate his logic as follows:

Affirmation/sensory intuition	A is A (the mountain is a mountain)
Negation, circumlocution	A is not-A (the mountain is not a mountain)
Affirmation/spiritual intuition	Therefore A is A (Therefore the mountain is a mountain)

Naturally the issue is not one of the mountain as an objective existence but one of the subject's awareness. Therefore, as Ueda Shizuteru writes, one could also say "I am not I, therefore I am."[51] This is not a matter of logic, however, but should more properly be described as belonging to the realm of religious experience.

This sort of thing is fairly understandable, but the language of Zen does not stop with that. Suzuki also introduces the famous koan about the bamboo staff:

> The priest takes out his bamboo staff and asks, "If this is a bamboo staff, you will be in conflict with it. If it is not, you will be against it. What do you call this if you neither touch it nor turn your back?" This is a koan. To "touch" means to affirm; to "turn one's back" means to deny. What it is saying is how to neither affirm or deny it, but to distance oneself from both affirmation and negation and show a bamboo staff as a bamboo staff.[52]

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50 Suzuki 2000, pp. 327–28.
51 Ueda 2000.
52 Suzuki 2000, p. 332.

This is not an illustration of the nature of *soku-hi*, but of the logic of "not A and not non-A." If non-neutral (where there is no possibility of any middle ground between true and false), only affirmative or negative is possible. If neither one is valid, what else is possible? This situation is significantly close to the liar's paradox and Gödel's incompleteness theorem.

One system of logic used in Indian Buddhism follows four steps:

Affirmative	Negative
This is A	This is not A
This is not-A	This is not not-A
This is both A and not-A	Not "both A and not-A"
This is both not-A and not not-A	Not "both not-A and not not-A"

Especially the last, expressing the double negation, is often used to express thoroughgoing negation. As long as we are using words, no matter how carefully we choose them, their meaning is limited. And once we transcend the limits of words, we have entered the realm of the experience of enlightenment that words do not cover. Put in Wittgensteinian terms, even if we tried to speak about what cannot be spoken of, it would be nonsense; it is something that can only be experienced, not expressed.

Zen, however, although it does have this Indian-style logic and formulas, is a little different. The question "What do you *call* this if you can neither touch it nor turn your back?" still asks us to "call/explain" something. Suzuki here can be regarded as being somewhat careless. Instead of "call," he writes "show wherefore the bamboo staff is a bamboo staff," making a leap from describing something to showing something. He tries to resolve the contradiction between affirmative and negative not in words but in reality, saying "the aim of Zen is to try to resolve the contradiction on the basis of facts." Those facts are not of course the limited facts of Wittgenstein, but the experience of a world transcending facts. In that case, it may be possible.

Once we transcend the limits of words, we have entered the realm of the experience of enlightenment that words do not cover.

The original koan, however, asks us to explain. It insists that we not just show, but explain something that "cannot be explained." Is such a thing possible? The Zen Buddhist and artificial intelligence scientist Zhou Changle at Xiamen University has compared Gödel's theorems with Zen koans in an attempt to create a formula for the logic of Zen koans.[53] Introducing the operator symbol □ he names it the "enlightenment operator," and says that "A is non-A" is in fact □ (A ∩ non-A),

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53 Zhou 2006, p. 81.

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and so does not violate the law of contradiction. Level of enlightenment rises through $\square$ (A ∩ non-A), he believes. If we say that T (0) is the zero-level true and F (0) is the zero-level false, then $\square$ [T (0) is F (0)] becomes first-level T (1). Next, from first-level T (1) and F (1), use of the operation of $\square$ [T (1) is F (1)], brings us to second-level T (2). In this way, the level gradually rises, toward T (infinity) enlightenment. This looks like a good idea, but still something seems equivocal. Proceeding from T (1) to T (2) and so on as enlightenment deepens, when would one reach ultimate enlightenment at T (infinity)? It would mean not the sudden enlightenment that is sought in Rinzai Zen (in which enlightenment is achieved immediately, without going through various stages) but gradual enlightenment (enlightenment after accumulated stages of training), and suggests that ultimate enlightenment is unreachable. That doesn't sound like a viable Zen commentary.

Language Games and Zen

Now let us look at how the language of Zen treats "that which cannot be spoken of." The famous *Blue Cliff Record* (Ch. *Biyán Lu*; Jp. *Hekiganroku*), a collection of Zen Buddhist koans originally compiled in Song-dynasty China, is quite concerned with the problem of words, returning constantly to the question of how one can speak about "things that cannot be spoken of." For example, in Cases 71, 72, and 73, Hyakujō Ekai (Ch. Baizhang Huaihai; 720–814) says to his disciples, "With your mouth and lips closed, how would you say it?" and collects their responses. "With your mouth and lips closed" means to be unable to say anything. This, too, is concerned with the problem of how to express things in a situation that cannot be verbalized.

The exchange in Case 71 goes as follows:

> Hyakujō [Baizhang] asks Isan [Guishan], "How do you speak with your mouth and lips closed?"
> Isan [Guishan]: I'd rather you did it first, Master.
> Hyakujō [Baizhang]: I could say it. But if I did so, I fear I should have no successors.

Isan does not answer the question, asking his Master to do so. Hyakujō, too, offers no answer, recognizing the dilemma.

But in fact, perhaps Isan *has* answered. Zen priests are not always straightforward. When he says, "I'd rather you did it first, Master," he is in fact answering; his response is as if spoken with "mouth and lips closed." You may say, "but his mouth and lips were not closed," for though being told not to, he has brazenly spoken using his mouth and lips.

Still, by what he has said, the exchange transcends ordinary conversation. The answer is not a straight answer and appears at first glance not to be an answer at all. The point of Isan's response is that his spirit is free in the face of the contradiction. By

deflecting the question, he opens up a realm that cannot be seen only by giving a straight answer to the question. This is precisely what Zen means by "speaking about what cannot be spoken of."

It may be appropriate here to consider Wittgenstein's thought in his later life. Having believed that he had solved all the problems of philosophy in *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, he moved away from the world of philosophy. He joined the military, worked as a gardener in a monastery and then as an elementary school teacher, and during his peregrinations he concluded that the *Tractatus* was mistaken. That was the beginning of his later philosophy.

Language consists not only of propositions that represent facts but functions in the form of orders or interjections and so forth.

When he returned to philosophy later in his life, Wittgenstein abandoned the "picture theory" of language that he had set forth in *Tractatus* according to which language consists of one-to-one correspondences between language and the world, and the proposition that verbal statements themselves represent the world. The supposition was that there is only one world, and that the language that corresponds to that world has to be clearly verified. However, a language thus restricted would be a language in a very special sense that ignored the circumstances of language as it is actually used. Language consists not only of propositions that represent facts but functions in the form of orders or interjections and so forth. To deny such diverse usages of language would skew the true analysis of language.

One of the examples that Wittgenstein often cited in his later period was the conversation between a builder (A) and his assistant (B).

> A is building with building-stones: there are blocks, pillars, slabs and beams. B has to pass the stones, in the order in which A needs them. For this purpose they use a language consisting of the words "block," "pillar," "slab," "beam." A calls them out; — B brings the stone which he has learnt to bring at such-and-such a call. Conceive this as a complete primitive language . . . (*Philosophical Investigations*, Proposition 2.)[54]

The point to be made here is that the "block," "pillar," "slab," and "beam" are not simply the designated stones. When A calls for "block," B does not just identify "block," but has to deliver a "block" to A. Once that task is fulfilled, then the role of the word "block" in that context is completed. So in such an instance, we can say that the word "block" does not just correspond to a picture, but is an abbreviation for "bring me a block," but

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54 See Michael Foord translation at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Language-game_(philosophy).

because of the understanding between A and B, "block" serves as a complete sentence meaning of "Bring me a block."

Wittgenstein called this way of using language "language games." Language games use language according to particular situations in order for matters to go smoothly. Between builder A and his assistant B, the four-word language game works well in constructing a building. Variations on this game are of course possible, for anything—"bring me x, y, z." or by simply pointing to "this" or "that" as the abbreviation, or even without saying anything, but simply pointing to the stone in question, on the understanding that pointing means "bring that to me." In the last case, even though words might not be used, the structure of the exchange is the same as if words were used, so it can still be called a "language game."

Changing the scene somewhat, there may be cases when children in the process of learning language, or even adults who are in the process of learning a foreign language, might point to a picture of a block of stone drawn on the board in a classroom, or write down the word "block" when the teacher says "block." In Chapter 3 we talked about the ethics or rules that exist among human beings, and those rules, too, are complex language games, though they may not, of course, be games played according to clearly delineated rules.

Human life is . . . a complex tangle of language games; there is no meaning in seeking to avoid or transcend them.

As long as language games work smoothly, there are no problems, but as soon as the rules cease to work well, the game stops. If someone says "block" and a "slab" or a "pillar" is what they get, the game is over. The boss will not be happy.

Wittgenstein's position in his later years was that all philosophical problems boiled down to language games, and he considered that the task of philosophy was to eliminate complex metaphysical issues and allow language games to be played smoothly. He called this "showing the fly the way out of the fly-bottle" (*Philosphical Investigations*, Proposition 309).

So what is the aim of such language games? There is no answer to that. Human life is ultimately compounded of a complex tangle of such language games, and there is no meaning in seeking anything that might avoid or transcend them. Ultimately, Wittgenstein left the problem of his first period of "showing what cannot be spoken of" unresolved. It is rather like Watsuji's argument about the ethics that works "among humans," but not beyond that scope.

But let us come back to the language of Zen. The Zen dialogues are in a sense a kind of language game, but they break the usual rules of language and perplex others. To say "If this is a bamboo staff, you touch it. If it is not, you turn your back. What do you call this if you neither touch it nor turn your back?" closes the way for both affirmation

and negation and thoroughly perplexes us. There, as Suzuki says, we can learn to convert the intellectual dead-end problem into one that is to be resolved through holistic understanding. I suppose that can be called a game, but it actually makes the game rather risky. It is like Kurt Gödel's incompleteness theorem; while it is a game, it points to the limits of the game and then throws us outside of the game.

So what is there outside of such games? That is what I would like to take up in Chapter 5.