Chapter 3

To What Extent is Solipsism a Truth?

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My title[1] is taken from one of the most obscure, and most discussed, sections of an already obscure and much discussed work, the discussion of the self, the world, and solipsism in sections 5.6-5.641 of Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*.[2] Wittgenstein writes:

> 5.6 *The limits of my language* mean the limits of my world.

> 5.61 Logic fills the world: the limits of the world are also its limits.
> We cannot therefore say in logic: This and this there is in the world, that there is not.
> For that 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.
> What we cannot think, that we cannot think: we cannot therefore *say* what we cannot think.

> 5.62 This remark provides a key to the question, to what extent solipsism is a truth.
> In fact what solipsism *means*, is quite correct, only it cannot be *said*, but it shows itself.
> That the world is *my* world, shows itself in the fact that the limits of the language (*the* language which I understand) mean the limits of *my* world.

Interpretations of the ensuing passages have tended to focus on solipsism as an epistemological or metaphysical thesis.[3] While such discussions have their value, and I will draw on them at points in my own reading of the text, I want to focus on another way of approaching these passages. This approach is suggested by a remark of Brian McGuinness, that 'solipsism ... in his [Wittgenstein's] case was not an intellectual exercise but a moral and mystical attitude'.[4] I think the general thrust of McGuinness' remark is correct, although I would not put the point quite as he does. I would prefer to say that solipsism is an intellectual, moral and mystical exercise aimed at bringing about a change in one's spiritual life. Simone Weil once wrote 'subjectivism, absolute idealism, solipsism, scepticism ... the Upanishads, the Taoists and Plato ... all of them, adopt this philosophical attitude by way of purification'.[5] I would add Wittgenstein to this list; and so I want to construct a reading of *Tractatus* 5.6-5.641 which will help to illuminate the ethical purpose which Wittgenstein famously claimed for the book.[6]

I will argue, however, that to *stop* with the purification achieved through
solipsism leads to an incomplete and misleading conception of Wittgenstein's
ethical vision. James C. Edwards, in his book *Ethics Without Philosophy*, and
Emyr Thomas, in a recent article, 'From Detachment to Immersion: Wittgenstein
on the Problem of Life', develop interpretations of the *Tractatus*' ethical outlook
which are, to my mind, incomplete in this respect.[7] Both Thomas and Edwards end
up accusing Wittgenstein, in the *Tractatus*, of a failed attempt at selflessness, an
essentially narcissistic, heroic vision, of the self as perfecting itself through
detachment.[8] In contrast, I will argue that the ultimate point of the *Tractatus*'
discussion of solipsism is that detachment is incomplete unless, and until, it ends in
a complete and final self-abandonment, in which the very conception of the 'I'
required by solipsism is left behind. This rejection of all forms of self-assertion,
including the self-assertion found in certain misguided forms of asceticism, piety
and false humility, is what the *Tractatus* really aims at. In this respect, the
Tractatus stands in the great tradition of mystical thought, and in this paper I will
try to say something about the way in which Wittgenstein can be placed in that
tradition. After a meeting with Wittgenstein in December 1919, Russell wrote to
Lady Ottoline Morell: 'I had felt in his book a flavour of mysticism, but was
astonished when I found that he has become a complete mystic. He reads people
like Kierkegaard and Angelus Silesius. ... It all started from William James'
Varieties of Religious Experience ... He has penetrated deeply into mystical ways
of thought and feeling ... .'[9] My analysis of the *Tractatus*' discussion of solipsism
will help to make clear the truth in these remarks.

I

My project, then, is to develop a reading of the *Tractatus*' remarks on solipsism
from the perspective of the ethical aim of the work. In order to give some initial
plausibility to this project, I want to say something about the terms employed in the
key passage, TLP 5.62:

> This remark provides a key to the question, to what extent solipsism is a truth.
> In fact what solipsism *means*, is quite correct, only it cannot be *said*, but it shows itself.
> (TLP 5.62)

The three terms are: 'truth', 'means' and 'shows itself'. I want to give each of
these terms, as they occur in TLP 5.62, a *practical* reading.

I begin with 'shows itself'; once this is properly in place the other two terms
will be easily dealt with. The *Tractatus* famously draws a distinction between that
which can be *said* in language and that which can only be *shown*. For example,
Wittgenstein argues that the 'logical form' which a proposition shares with the
reality that it depicts cannot itself be made the subject of depiction, but is *shown* in
the proposition which possesses it. However, talk of logical form as 'shown' in a

proposition easily tempts us into a picture in which 'logical form' is a *something*, an entity standing in relation to a proposition, so that it a *fact* that this proposition has that logical form. If our language cannot depict this fact, then it seems this must be a merely contingent limitation which can be overcome by rising to the level of a meta-language, as Russell suggested in the Introduction to the *Tractatus*. The Tractarian response to such a suggestion will be that in discussing 'logical form' we are attempting to state the essential presuppositions of any meaningful language whatsoever. To treat this as a *fact* which could be represented in a language is to suppose a language in which we could at least envisage the possibility of this fact's *not* obtaining. But such a language, Wittgenstein would argue, would be an 'illogical language' – which is to say an impossibility.

Yet the *Tractatus* itself, insofar as it helps itself to talk of 'showing' logical form, seems to be such an impossible language. Notoriously, Wittgenstein himself not only accepts this charge, but explicitly applies it to his own work:

> My propositions are elucidatory in this way: he who understands me finally recognizes them as nonsense, when he has climbed out through them, on them, over them. (He must so to speak throw away the ladder, after he has climbed up on it.)
> He must surmount these propositions; then he sees the world rightly. (TLP 6.54)

The proper understanding of this passage has been the subject of much debate. One prominent line of interpretation, represented by such commentators as P.M.S. Hacker and David Pears, has it that Wittgenstein recognizes a realm of ineffable fact-like quasi-truths, such as the fact-like quasi-truth that language and world share a common logical form. These quasi-truths cannot be expressed in language, but are *shown* in the proper workings of language. On this view, the propositions of the *Tractatus*, while literally nonsense, serve a useful purpose by directing our attention to the ineffable features of reality and language that undergird all our meaningful discourse. In this way, they enable us to 'see the world rightly'.

This line of thought has been attacked by such interpreters of the *Tractatus* as Cora Diamond and James Conant.[10] Diamond calls it 'chickening out', a refusal to take seriously Wittgenstein's claim that his propositions are nonsense. She insists on a 'resolute' reading of this claim. The propositions of the *Tractatus*, insofar as they attempt to circumscribe the limits of language and thought, are 'simply nonsense', as the Preface tells us:

> The book will... draw a limit to thinking, or rather – not to thinking, but to the expression of thoughts; for, in order to draw a limit to thinking we should have to be able to think both sides of this limit (we should therefore have to be able to think what cannot be thought).
> The limit can, therefore, only be drawn in language and what lies on the other side of the limit will be simply nonsense.

As Diamond argues, to take the propositions of the *Tractatus* to gesture at ineffable quasi-facts underlying all factual language is to continue to image necessity as a

fact; it inevitably leads to the nonsense of formulating as propositions that which is said to be inexpressible. Hacker's discussion of solipsism provides some prime examples of this difficulty. He is driven into saying things like this:

> What the solipsist means, and is correct in thinking, is that the world and life are one, that man is the microcosm, that I am my world. These equations... express a doctrine which I shall call Transcendental Solipsism. They involve a belief in the transcendental ideality of time. ... Wittgenstein thought that his transcendental idealist doctrines, though profoundly important, are literally inexpressible.[11]

The problem here is of course, that it is only by expressing it that Hacker manages to seem to communicate to us what it is that is supposed to be inexpressible. In attributing such ineffable doctrines to Wittgenstein, Hacker ignores Wittgenstein's characterization of philosophy as 'not a theory but an activity' whose result is 'not a number of "philosophical propositions", but to make propositions clear' (TLP 4.112). He takes 'we cannot ... say what we cannot think' (TLP 5.62) to express a thesis of the 'inexpressibility of the unthinkable'.[12] But he ignores the *Tractatus*' claim that 'the thought is the significant proposition' (TLP 4) with its strong suggestion that the inexpressible is, conversely, unthinkable.

Now I agree with Diamond and Conant that irresolute readings such as Hacker's are, at bottom, incoherent nonsense; and it is a methodical purpose of the *Tractatus* to bring us to see that philosophical theorizing, conceived as offering us a source of grounding or justification for logic, language or life, will, in the end, produce nothing but such nonsense. Nonetheless, I do not think that all deployments of the terminology of 'showing' in the *Tractatus* are *irredeemable* nonsense. There is a sense that can be given to some of these uses of 'showing' which does not degenerate into the incoherence of envisaging in the form of a fact that which we declare not to be a fact. We should *not* read talk of 'showing', and correlatively of 'perceiving', 'seeing' and 'recognizing' that which is shown on the model of a *relation* between a subject and some ineffable fact-like entity ('that *p* is shown to *S*', '*S* perceives that *p*'). This form of the idea of showing is exactly what the *Tractatus* wants to teach us to abandon. Rather, we should read talk of 'showing', and correlatively 'seeing', on the model of the demonstration of a technique and the uptake required to understand the demonstration. In essence, my suggestion is that one who 'sees' that which is shown, is simply one who 'knows how to go on'.[13] On this reading, phrases such as 'the logical form of the world' have no independent meaning; it is only the larger contexts – 'showing the logical form of the world', 'seeing the logical form of the world' and so on – which have a meaningful use. These phrases are like 'dancing the waltz', which should be understood simply as 'waltzing' rather than as involving a relation between a dancer and a particular 'dance' (the waltz). It is significant that the introduction of the terminology of 'showing' at TLP 4.022 ('A proposition shows its sense') is embedded in a discussion of *understanding*. To understand a proposition is to 'know what is the case, if it is true' (TLP 4.024). However this should not be seen as an instance of 'knowledge-that'. To understand a proposition *p* is not to know

another proposition of the form '*p* is true if and only if *q*'. Clearly knowing such a proposition presupposes understanding *p* and cannot explain it. Rather, understanding is a form of 'knowledge-how'. One understands a proposition by knowing how to use it – when to assert it and when to deny it.[14]

In general, then, I would suggest that uses of 'showing' in the *Tractatus* may be two-sided.[15] On the one hand, talk of showing can tempt us into the nonsensical illusion that we grasp a realm of super-facts beyond the reach of language. On the other hand, talk of showing can, innocently enough, direct us to the practical abilities and masteries that are part of our ongoing talking, thinking and living.

If we can redeem, in some contexts, the notion of 'showing' in this fashion, then I think it is also possible to redeem talk in the *Tractatus* of the communication of a 'truth' which is other than propositional. But, again, we should not be drawn into the nonsensical illusion of a realm of ineffable proposition-like 'truths' which we can yet, mysteriously, grasp. There is another sense of 'truth' which we can appeal to here, exhibited in such Biblical passages as: '...whoever does the truth comes into the light... .'[16] 'Truth' as something which one can *do* is not something we might be tempted to think of as expressible in a proposition. It is, rather, a way to be followed, a 'path' for life. Insofar as the *Tractatus* communicates a 'truth' it is by demonstrating to us, in practice, how to follow such a path.[17] Solipsism, I want to argue, is *part* of this path; and in asking 'to what extent solipsism is a truth?' Wittgenstein is asking *how far* solipsism will take us along the way. This aspect of Wittgenstein's question – '*How far* is solipsism a truth? – is typically submerged in more metaphysically and epistemologically oriented readings of the remarks on solipsism, and it is one of the advantages of my way of understanding these remarks that it makes room for a dimension along which we can, in some sense, 'measure' the truth of solipsism.

Now Wittgenstein's general answer to our question is this: 'In fact what solipsism *means* is quite correct, only it cannot be *said*, but it shows itself.' We have already seen how I intend to read the claim that 'what solipsism *means*' *shows itself* and is *correct* – that is, a *truth*. But in what sense can this be what solipsism 'means'? Does not talk of 'meaning' here suggest, after all, that solipsism is a (failed) attempt to put across a true doctrine – something like a linguistic proposition? My response to this corresponds to my reading of 'showing' and 'truth'. The word translated as 'means' by Ogden ('*meint*'), has various senses, as does the English 'means'. One of these is 'intends' as in '*Sie meint es gut*' ('She means well'). It is in this sense of 'what solipsism intends' that I would like to read 'what solipsism means', not in the sense of 'what solipsism intends to *say*', but rather in the sense of the underlying intention of solipsism. It is this intention that is said to be 'quite correct' and, so far as it goes, a truth.

Putting all this together, I suggest the following reading of 5.62:

> This remark provides the key to the question as to how far solipsism can take us along the path of spiritual and ethical enlightenment. In fact, the intention of solipsism is a good one, but this cannot be communicated through a set of principles, but must be demonstrated in practice.

My goal is to substantiate this reading by showing how it is possible to read the ensuing discussion of solipsism as a set of instructions for a kind of spiritual exercise or, better, to show how the writing and reading of this discussion, and of the book that contains it, can constitute such an exercise. As a preliminary to this I need to say something about one more concept deployed in TLP 5.62, the concept of the 'limits' of language and the world. Both the numbering scheme of the *Tractatus* and the continuation of TLP 5.62 indicate that the 'remark' which provides the key to the question of the truth of solipsism is TLP 5.6:[18] '*The limits of my language* mean the limits of my world.'

Interpreters have taken widely different views of the role of the concept of 'limits' in the *Tractatus*. In my opinion, the way in which this question is answered will be decisive not only for one's understanding of the metaphysical and epistemological ambitions of the *Tractatus*, but also for one's understanding of its ethical vision. Those interpreters who end up saddling the *Tractatus* with a narcissistic ethics of heroic self-perfection arrive at this point because they have failed to appreciate that the book in fact embodies a thorough-going deconstruction of the notion of 'limits' of language, thought, and world – and so also of the 'self of solipsism'.

II

As we saw above, Hacker's irresolute reading of the *Tractatus*' talk of saying, showing, and nonsense, forces him to *say* that which he takes Wittgenstein to categorize as inexpressible, thereby attributing to Wittgenstein a view which is self-refuting in a fairly obvious fashion. In the context of the discussion of solipsism in particular, one source of Hacker's difficulties is the fact that he takes seriously the notion of 'limits' of language, logic and the world as deployed in TLP 5.6-5.641. Hacker thinks that it makes sense to ask what the limits of language and the world *are* and what the source of delimitation *is*; his answer is that *the* limit, the source of all limits, is the metaphysical subject. This subject is identified by Hacker with a Schopenhauerian metaphysical will, the bearer of good and evil, and also the determiner of the meaningfulness of language. On this view, it is the metaphysical will which establishes the projective relation between language and the world whcih is necessary for names to mean objects and so for propositions to depict states-of-affairs. This produces a tightly delimited Russellian language of experience: 'the sketchy account of "projection" of logico-syntactic forms which Wittgenstein propounded in the *Tractatus* is strongly egocentric on the one hand, and concerned with a "momentary" language on the other.'[19] It is such a view of the metaphysical subject as the determiner of both linguistic meaning and ethical value which leads to the conception of Wittgenstein's ethical outlook as a narcissistic heroism of self-perfection, as we will see.

It is characteristic of resolute readers on the other hand, to see the *Tractatus* as

aiming not at determining the source and extent of the limits of language at all, but rather at leading us to see the search for such limits as itself illusory. As Juliet Floyd puts it:

> the book repeatedly conjures up the idea of language and thought as limited, as bounded by a fixed and necessary framework of logical or propositional form, and it also conjures up the idea of logic as limited, as bounded by its role as an inexpressible yet necessary form of infinite complexity mirroring the necessary structure of the world. But the underlying intent of such conjuring ... is to shake us free from these ideas of effability and necessity.[20]

Cora Diamond portrays Wittgenstein's claim that 'the limits of my language mean the limits of my world' as expressing a rejection of a Russellian 'two limits view'. For Russell, the limits of my experience, and so the limits of the objects which I can directly *name*, are narrower than the limits of the world, of all the objects that there are. It is only because I can use descriptions – that is, quantifiers – that I can go beyond the limits of my experience, and reach out towards the limits of the world. The *Tractatus*' conception of meaningful propositions as embedded in a single logical space, and the associated account of the logical functioning of quantifiers, Diamond argues, entail the incoherence of this view. She concludes:

> Wittgenstein's remarks about the limits of language and the world... are concerned with the difference between a Russellian two-limits view ... and a one-limit view. ... The world is *my* world in the sense that there is nothing... which is in *the* world and which *I* cannot name. The idea that the use of quantifiers enables me to reach beyond the limits of my experience to objects 'outside' experience is incoherent. The rejection of the two-limit view does not, though, leave us with one of a sort of thing, namely a limit, of which the Russell view had had two. It is the mistake of solipsism to treat its rejection of a two-limit view as leaving us confined within the limit which Russellian realism had sought to get us beyond. That is, solipsism rejects the Russellian idea that we can get beyond the 'limits of private experience' but keeps its conception of that limit: it does precisely give us one of what Russell had given us two of. The solipsist does not rigorously follow out his solipsism; if he did, it would lead to a non-Russellian realism. A one-limit view self-destructs; we are not left, at the end of the *Tractatus*, with a philosophical view about a 'far side' of the 'limit', but merely with there being the sentences of our language. ... The Russell notion of the 'limit' of experience is meant to be the notion of something about which we can ask: 'Can we get beyond it, and if so how?' The *Tractatus* technique first makes available a criticism of the Russellian answer to that question; we are then meant to see that the Russell question has been shown not to be a question at all.[21]

James Conant explains the self-destruction of the idea of the limits of language as follows:

as readers of the *Tractatus* ... we are drawn into the illusion of occupying a certain sort of a perspective. From this perspective, we take ourselves to be able to survey the possibilities which undergird how we must represent things as being, fixing what is 'logically' necessary and what is merely contingent. From this perspective, we contemplate the logical structure of thought as it is and imagine that we are also able to contemplate the possibility of its being otherwise. We take ourselves to be occupying a perspective from which we can view the logical structure of language 'from sideways on'.

However, we come to recognize that this perspective is illusory through a process of attempting to theoretically articulate it –a process which terminates in our loss of any assurance that we are making sense:

The assumption underlying Tractarian elucidation is that the only way to free oneself from such illusions is to fully enter them and explore them from the inside. ... The illusion that the *Tractatus* seeks to explode, above all, is that we can run up against the limits of language. The book starts with a warning about a certain kind of enterprise – one of attempting to draw a limit to thought. In the body of the text, we are offered (what appears to be) a doctrine about 'the limits of thought'. With the aid of this doctrine we imagine ourselves to be able both to draw these limits and to see beyond them. We imagine ourselves able to do what the Preface warns we will fall into imagining ourselves able to do (once we imagine ourselves able to draw a limit to thought): we imagine ourselves able 'to think both sides of the limit' (and hence 'able to think what cannot be thought'). The aim of the work is to show us that beyond 'the limits of language' lies, not ineffable truth, but rather (as the preface cautions) *einfach Unsinn* [simply nonsense].[22]

In my opinion, Conant and Diamond are absolutely right to see the *Tractatus* as undermining the very project of trying to establish the limits of language, thought and world, rather than as trying to establish these limits through some sort of ineffable insight. If the question of the limits of thought is answerable only by something which cannot be *said*, then there is no answer, and there is no question either:

For an answer which cannot be expressed the question too cannot be expressed.
The riddle does not exist.
If a question can be put at all, then it *can* also be answered. (TLP 6.5)

Therefore, the *Tractatus* rejects as illusory the very notion of a 'limit' of language or the world; but to do so is to reject as illusory the notion of the 'metaphysical subject' which *is* a 'limit' of the world. What has not been fully appreciated up to this point is the ethical significance of this result. In what follows I will try to make this clear.

I have suggested that, for Wittgenstein, solipsism is the beginning of a kind of a path of purification. That some such connection existed for him is clear from an entry that he made in his wartime diary after reading some of Nietzsche's works:

> I am strongly affected by his hostility against Christianity. Because his writings too have some truth in them. To be sure, Christianity is the only *sure* way to happiness; but what if someone spurned this happiness? Might it not be better to perish unhappily in the hopeless struggle against the external world? But such a life is senseless. But why not lead a senseless life? Is it ignoble? – How can it be reconciled with the strict solipsistic position (*streng solipsistischen Standpunkt*)? But what must I do in order that my life shall not be lost to me? I must be conscious of it always.[23]

Here the 'strict solipsistic position' seems to be functioning as some kind of test of the way of life Wittgenstein finds presented as an alternative to Christianity by Nietzsche. So in some sense, for Wittgenstein, solipsism, 'strictly carried out', (*streng durchgeführt*, 5.64) has a part to play in the way of life he would lead.

III

You may have been wondering for some time now in what sense this could be true. Before turning to a more detailed discussion of the text itself, I want to introduce a simple example which may help to set us thinking in the right direction. Leibniz is one philosopher whom we know Wittgenstein admired, and whose metaphysics has, in one sense, a quasi-solipsistic tinge.[24] For Leibniz, the spiritual substances, or monads, which make up the created world are isolated from one another, each representing the entire universe from its own perspective, yet each in causal relationship only to God (although all in pre-established harmony with one another). In the 'Discourse on Metaphysics', section 32, Leibniz tries to establish 'The Utility of These Principles in Matters of Piety and Religion'. He writes:

> We also see that every substance has a perfect spontaneity (which becomes freedom in intelligent substances), that everything that happens to it is a consequence of its idea or its being, and that nothing determines it, except God alone. And that is why a person of very exalted mind, revered for her saintliness, was in the habit of saying that the soul must often think as if there were nothing but God and itself in the world.[25]

The 'person of very exalted mind' whom Leibniz had in mind was the Spanish mystic St Teresa of Avila. In a letter to a mystically minded correspondent, Andreas Morell, he wrote:

> As to St. Teresa, you have reason to esteem her works, I found there one day this lovely thought that the soul must conceive of things as if there were only God and itself in the world. This even yields a considerable reflection in philosophy, which I usefully employed in one of my hypotheses.[26]

Leibniz's source was probably St Teresa's *Life*, where we read in chapter XIII: 'the utmost we have to do at first is to take care of our soul and to remember that in the

entire world there is only God and the soul; and this is a thing which it is very profitable to remember'.[27]

In the context in which St Teresa makes this remark, her concern is to offer practical advice to 'beginners' in the practices of prayer and contemplation. Such beginners are subject to a number of temptations, one of which is to 'desire that everyone should be extremely spiritual when one is beginning to find what tranquillity, and what profit, spirituality brings'. This temptation is to be avoided because the beginner is not yet a good enough model of the spirituality she would seek to inculcate in others. Teresa speaks from her own experience:

> When... I tried to get others to practise prayer, and when on the one hand they would hear me saying so much about the blessedness of prayer, while on the other hand they would observe that I, who practised it, was so poverty-stricken in virtue, it would lead them into temptations and various kinds of foolishness.[28]

Seen in this light, Teresa's remark is like the advice not to try to remove a speck from your brother's eye when there is a beam in your own – her counsel is one of humility in spiritual life: 'Let us strive, then, always to look at the virtues and the good qualities which we find in others, and to keep our own grievous sins before our eyes so that we may be blind to their defects.'[29] Far from being solipsistic in any metaphysically serious sense, Teresa's counsel is designed to promote better relationships between the spiritual novice and her neighbors. In this light, Leibniz' appeal to her writings has to appear as a hollow manipulation in which he tries to extract the authority of her reputation for piety as a sanction for his elaborate metaphysical system.[30] Yet Leibniz' correspondent, Morell, saw a deeper meaning in another sense in St Teresa's saying: 'The thought that the soul is to consider the world as if there were nothing but God and itself in the world is founded on nothing but a veritable self-denial, and is excellent.'[31] St Teresa's disciple and fellow-worker St John of the Cross gave as a spiritual maxim: 'Live in this world as if there were in it but God and thy soul, so that thy heart may be detained by naught that is human.'[32] Here St John counsels an attitude of detachment from the world: 'Divest thyself of what is human in order to serve God.'[33] This is, of course, one of the great thoughts of the mystical tradition and the fount of ascetic practices, voluntary poverty and acts of mortification which we often find hard to understand today. Here we see the association of detachment from the world with the adoption of a quasi-solipsistic stance: act as if you are alone in the world (with God). Part of the key to understanding Wittgenstein's discussion of solipsism, I think, is to make this connection – but it is only *part* of the key.

Wittgenstein opens the discussion of solipsism with the pronouncement: '*The limits of my language* mean the limits of my world' (TLP 5.6). As several interpreters have pointed out, the unexpected intrusion of an essential use of the first-person possessive pronoun 'my' here shocks the reader, given the abstract and almost authorless discussion which makes up the *Tractatus* up to this point. I see

the placement of this text and this pronoun at this particular juncture as quite deliberate.[34] For the argument of the *Tractatus* up to this point has been one concerted effort to *make language mine* through the construction of a theoretical apparatus adequate to enable me to *understand* language in the sense of establishing and bringing to explicit knowledge the essential nature of all representation. This effort to make language mine, to master and possess it, is at the same time an effort to master and possess the world, which since the very first pages of the book has been constrained to conform to the structures of language as a seeming condition of the possibility of meaningful language. Thus the opening sentence of the *Tractatus*, 'The world is the totality of facts, not of things' (TLP 1), imposes already on reality the structure of a proposition so that, if we can secure an understanding of the general *propositional* form, we will at the same time have grasped the essence of reality, the 'nature of all Being', as Wittgenstein puts it in his wartime *Notebooks*: 'My *whole* task consists in explaining the nature of the proposition. That is to say, in giving the nature of all facts, whose picture the proposition *is*. In giving the nature of all Being.'[35]

The significance of this way of looking at the project of the *Tractatus* up to TLP 5.6 ('*The limits of my language* mean the limits of my world') can be brought out by considering some of Wittgenstein's worries about the nature of the will and of the purpose of life in the *Notebooks*. These topics make a sudden appearance in the midst of purely logical discussions in the entry for June 11, 1916: 'What do I know about God and the purpose of life?' There follows a long series of remarks, ending with: 'I cannot bend the happenings of the world to my will: I am completely powerless. I can only make myself independent of the world – and so in a certain sense master it – by renouncing any influence on happenings' (NB 72-73).

Much of the remainder of the *Notebooks*, through January, 1917, is taken up with the topics introduced here; we will discuss this further below. For the moment I want to highlight one entry from this long and complex discussion, written two months later, on 8 August 1916:

> How can man be happy at all, since he cannot ward off the misery of this world?
> Through the life of knowledge.
> The good conscience is the happiness that the life of knowledge preserves.
> The life of knowledge is the life that is happy in spite of the misery of the world.
> The only life that is happy is the life that can renounce the amenities of the world.
> To it the amenities of the world are so many graces of fate. (NB 81)

These two *Notebooks* entries evince a desire to solve the problem of the meaning of life through a form of renunciation of the world, made possible by a 'life of knowledge'. I suggest that the knowledge in question is the very knowledge that Wittgenstein took himself to be seeking in trying to give 'the nature of all Being' – the knowledge of the *limits* of language and the world. In giving these limits, he would be establishing once and for all the necessary structures of the world; he would therefore also be establishing the set of all possibilities. This determination

of the limits of possibility would allow him to master the world, by adopting an attitude of indifference towards the *happenings* of the world – those states-of-affairs within the strictly delimited set of all possible states-of-affairs which just *happen* to obtain.

IV

So the author of the *Tractatus,* seems to himself to have followed the path of knowledge to achieve a mastery over language and the world; thus both language and world have become, for him, *mine*. (The same can be said for the reader of the work; in working through the text one is led down the same path that Wittgenstein followed. Thus reading the book is an imitative act, and insofar as the writing of the book is an 'ethical deed' so is its reading.) Thus he thinks that he can go on to say: 'That the world is *my* world, shows itself in the fact that the limits of the language (*the* language which I understand) mean the limits of my world' (TLP 5.62).[36] '*The* language which I understand' is the language which I have *made* mine through coming to *know* how it works, how it manages to represent the world, which is therefore also *mine*. I become all-embracing, all-possessing – 'The world and life are one. I am my world. (The microcosm.)' (TLP 5.621-5.63.)

Yet this 'achievement' of mastery over the world begins to unravel before it is even finished being proclaimed. For 5.61 reminds us that, according to the theory of language as pictorial representation developed in the earlier part of the book, the limits of language and the world are also the limits of *logic* and so of *thought*. Logic, language and thought cannot 'get outside' these limits, for that would be, as the Preface warned us, only to produce nonsense. Yet if we can say 'there is the I' then this 'I' cannot be *in* the world, for 'we cannot … say in logic: This and this there is in the world, that there is not'. Thus when we deploy the terminology of 'showing' in 5.62 to claim that the world's being *mine* 'shows itself' in 'the fact that the limits of the language … mean the limits of *my* world' we are driven into an irresolute reading of 'showing' – into the nonsense of claiming that something shows itself which cannot be said – and yet, it seems we *do* say it – 'I am my world'.

Wittgenstein develops this problem in a number of different ways, all of which lead to the conclusion that the 'I' which tries to claim the world as 'mine' through mastering it is not *in* the world at all. At 5.631 we are given the image of a book titled 'The world as I found it'. This book would purport to be a description of *my* world. In this book, he claims, there will be mention of my body, and of which parts of the world obey my will; but in this book there will be *no* mention of the 'I' of the title. Thus, 'in an important sense there is no subject'. But of course there is mention of 'I' – not *in* the book, but in its title. At 5.633 we are given another image, that of the eye and the visual field. As the eye is not found *within* the visual field, so the 'I' is not found *within* the world. But of course the eye *is* somewhere, only not somewhere in my visual space, but rather somewhere in physical space.

These metaphors suggest that the 'I' of solipsism must be located not *in* the world but somewhere 'outside' of it. But there is no 'outside' of the world, the totality of facts. So the 'I' must be located not quite 'outside' while yet not being 'inside' – at the 'limit' of the world.

Peter Sullivan has argued persuasively that these arguments against the presence of the self of solipsism *in* the world are grounded in Wittgenstein's rejection of a substantial *a priori*: 'There is no order of things a priori' (TLP 5.634).[37] If the eye were a part of the visual field, this would provide an *a priori* order to our visual experience, privileging one part of that experience over others. If the self of solipsism were a part of the world, then the world would have a privileged centre, a fixed point of origin for the coordinates of logical space, as it were. For the self of solipsism, by acquiring knowledge of the necessary conditions of the possibility of language and the world, has become one of those necessary conditions. If the self were a part of the world, then facts about that self – facts recording its possession of knowledge of the structure of language, thought and reality – would have the status of *a priori* truths. Thought would have gotten beyond the limits of logic. Thus, by mastering the world, the self has written itself out of that world.

The consequence of this is what David Bell calls 'self-effacing solipsism':[38] 'Here we see that solipsism strictly carried out coincides with pure realism. The I in solipsism shrinks to an extensionless point and there remains the reality co-ordinated with it' (TLP 5.64). Yet one might argue that the self has not been effaced here, but merely displaced to the 'limit' of the world from whence it remains the essential defining condition of the world.[39] For does not Wittgenstein hasten to add:

> There is therefore really a sense in which in philosophy we can talk of a non-psychological I.
> The I occurs in philosophy through the fact that the 'world is my world.'
> The philosophical I is not the man, not the human body or the human soul of which psychology treats, but the metaphysical subject, the limit – not a part of the world.

Here, we might say, the philosophical self is not the 'I' of the title of 'The World as I found it' – for the title of the book can be dispensed with – but its author, without which the book does not exist. It is not the physical eye – which, from within the visual field, cannot be proved to exist – but the 'geometrical eye' which structures that field internally. From this point of view, it might appear that in being displaced to the limit of the world, the self of solipsism, far from having shrunk to an extensionless point, has come to occupy the place of greatest importance. *It is* the limit, the author, the structurer, the ground of all Being.

To take this line, however, one must take seriously the talk of the philosophical self as a 'limit' of the world. I have already indicated my agreement with those interpreters who see the *Tractatus* rather as trying to destabilize the very idea of a 'limit' at work here. What I want to show now is that the role that we take this idea to play in the *Tractatus* will have a decisive influence on our reading of the

ethical significance of the book.   In order to see this, we need to discuss Wittgenstein's conception of the *will* in the *Notebooks* and the *Tractatus*.

V

As we saw, Wittgenstein's first recorded reflections on the purpose of life are connected to the problem of the will: 'I cannot bend the happenings of the world to my will: I am completely powerless' (NB 73). 'My will' here is identified with my *desires*, wants and wishes. Classically, these desires are seen as the *cause* of my *actions*. But Wittgenstein maintains that the atomic facts which make up the world are logically independent. Therefore 'The events of the future *cannot* be inferred from those of the present. The belief in the causal nexus is superstition.' (TLP 5.1361) and again 'A necessity for one thing to happen because another has happened does not exist. There is only *logical* necessity' (TLP 6.37). In consequence, the will is free, but powerless: 'The freedom of the will consists in the fact that future actions cannot be known now. We could only know them if causality were an *inner* necessity, like that of logical deduction' (TLP 5.1362). 'The world is independent of my will. Even if everything we wished were to happen, this would only be, so to speak, a favour of fate, for there is no *logical* connexion between will and world, which would guarantee this, and the assumed physical connexion itself we could not again will' (TLP 6.373-6.374). These last two remarks are repeated *verbatim* from the *Notebooks* entry for 5 July 1916, the day after Wittgenstein recorded his first thoughts on God and the purpose of life.

   On that same day Wittgenstein notes an alternative way in which to think of the 'will' as related to the world not from inside as the cause of action, but from outside, from the limit:

> If good or evil willing affects the world it can only affect the boundaries of the world, not the facts, what cannot be portrayed by language but can only be shewn in language.
> In short, it must make the world a wholly different one.
> The world must, so to speak, wax or wane as a whole. As if by accession or loss of meaning. (NB 73)

The *Tractatus* repeats these thoughts, in almost the same words, at 6.43, and adds: 'The world of the happy is quite another than that of the unhappy'.[40]

   But how can will 'affect the boundaries of the world' in this way? Wittgenstein is drawn to the following kinds of answer:

> The world is *given* me, i.e. my will enters into the world completely from outside as into something that is already there.
> Good and evil enter only through the *subject*. And the subject is not part of the world, but a limit of the world. (NB 74)

> ...the willing subject would have to be happy or unhappy, and happiness and

unhappiness could not be a part of the world.

As the subject is not a part of the world but a presupposition of its existence, so good and evil which are predicates of the subject, are not properties in the world. (NB 79)

In short, the will can affect the limits of the world because the willing subject simply *is* that limit. 'The will is an attitude of the subject towards the world. The subject is the willing subject' (NB 87). My unhappiness stems from a lack of co-ordination between my antecedent *wants* and the contingent facts which I find in the world; I can then make myself happy by *renouncing* all such wants, counting them as nothing, and adopting an *attitude* of acceptance towards whatever happens.

I can only make myself independent of the world – and so in a certain sense master it – by renouncing any influence on happenings.

... we are in a certain sense dependent, and what we are dependent on we can call God.

In this sense God would simply be fate, or, what is the same thing: The world – which is independent of my will.

I can make myself independent of fate.

There are two godheads: the world and my independent I.

I am either happy or unhappy, that is all. It can be said: good or evil do not exist.

In order to live happily I must be in agreement with the world. And that is what 'being happy' *means*.

I am then, so to speak, in agreement with that alien will on which I appear dependent. That is to say: 'I am doing the will of God'.

Live happy! (NB 73-75)

In 'living happy' I make myself independent of fate – independent of God. By 'doing the will of God' – agreeing with whatever the world brings me – I become a godhead – 'the independent I'.

Wittgenstein would have been familiar with this sort of solipsistic response to the problem of life from his youthful reading of Otto Weininger's *Sex and Character*.[41] Here is Weininger's account of the point of Kant's ethics:

Having made this determination, we now understand this 'Critique of Practical Reason' as follows. Man is alone in the universe, in eternal monstrous loneliness.

He has no purpose outside of himself, he lives for nothing else – he has flown away, far beyond wanting-to-be-a-slave, being-able-to-be-a-slave, having-to-be-a-slave: deep under him, all human society has disappeared, social ethics has sunk; he is alone, *alone*.

But he has now become one and all; and because of that he also has a law in himself, because of that he is himself all law, and no capricious arbitrary will. And he asks of himself, that he should follow this law in himself, the law of his self, that he should be only law, without hindsight or deference (*Rück-Sicht hinter sich*), without foresight or caution (*Vor-Sicht vor sich*). This is the dreadful greatness: that he obeys duty has no *further* sense. Nothing is superior to him, the alone, the all-one. (*Nichts ist ihm, dem Alleinen, All-Einen übergeordnet.*) … Kant's most lonely man does not laugh and does not dance, he does not bawl and does not rejoice: he has no need to make a noise, since the universe is too deeply silent. The senselessness (*Sinnlosigkeit*) of a groundless world (*einer Welt 'von ohngefähr'*) is not duty to him; rather, to him his duty is the

sense of the universe. Saying yes to *this* loneliness, that is the 'Dionysian' moment in Kant: only that is morality.[42]

If Wittgenstein's view in the *Tractatus* were anything like this, one could appreciate why one might see 'selflessness' as 'both an ambition and a thwarted one at that in the early thought of Wittgenstein', as Emyr Thomas puts it.[43] One could understand James Edwards' assessment: 'the outcome of the *Tractatus* ... is narcissistic: the self is the maker of meaning'.[44] Edwards sees the ethical vision of the *Tractatus* in terms of a heroic struggle towards self-perfection, a 'transfiguration' of the self through 'ascent to a godlike self-consciousness'. This self-consciousness is also the 'contemplation of the world *sub specie aeterni*', the 'feeling of the world as a limited whole' which Wittgenstein identifies with '*das Mystische*' at 6.45. But here, as Edwards remarks, we have not self-denial, but 'a manifestation of heroic self-assertion ... the truest exemplification of the will-to-power. And, in the end, once the ladder is kicked away, only naked will remains'.[45]

VI

Yet for anyone familiar with Wittgenstein's writings of the time, particularly his correspondence with his friend Paul Engelmann, this description of his ethical vision must strike a discordant note. It neglects an influence as important for the early Wittgenstein as Schopenhauer and Weininger: his reading of such Christian and quasi-Christian writers as Kierkegaard, Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky[46] and the seventeenth century Silesian mystic Johann Scheffler (also known as Angelus Silesius). Wittgenstein was profoundly influenced by Tolstoy's rendering of the message of Jesus, *The Gospel in Brief*, which he discovered during the war. 'At its time', he told von Ficker, 'this book virtually kept me alive.'[47] Yet Tolstoy preached not self-assertion but humble service to others and love of one's neighbour. Wittgenstein's own actions after the end of the First World War, giving up philosophy and taking up a career as a schoolteacher in rural Austria, show the seriousness with which he took this teaching.

Edwards tries to accommodate this dimension of Wittgenstein's thought and life and explicitly recognizes Tolstoy's influence. He discusses a passage from the *Notebooks* in which Wittgenstein writes:

> Is only he happy who does *not* will?
> 'To love one's neighbour' means to will!
> But can one want and yet not be unhappy if the want does not attain fulfillment? (And this possibility always exists.)
> Is it according to the common conceptions, good to want *nothing* for one's neighbour, neither good nor evil?
> And yet in a certain sense it seems that not wanting is the only good.
> Here I am still making crude mistakes! No doubt of that! (NB 77-78)

Edwards comments that this passage:

> shows both [Wittgenstein's] temptations and his resistance. ... One can see Wittgenstein tempted to identify the good life with the renunciation of desire ... a Schopenhauerian influence; yet he never succumbs. ... The Christian influence of Tolstoy, calling him to a life of active love of the least fortunate of men, is stronger than the advice of Schopenhauer to turn away from wanting any alteration in the necessary fabric of things.[48]

Yet the characterization of the self and the will as limits of the world which Edwards ultimately attributes to Wittgenstein seems to leave no room for a 'life of active love' unless 'to love one's neighbour as oneself' is understood as 'affirming whatever happens in the life of one's neighbour in the act of affirming the world as my world'.

Similarly, Edwards' attempts to account for Wittgenstein's own life choices on completing the *Tractatus* fall flat. Edwards tells us that:

> in going to the mountains to teach in the peasant schools, there is ... a corresponding *practical* attempt heroically to ascend from the normal human condition and to put on the attributes of a god. The image that springs immediately to mind is the *imitatio Christi*. Not only does his life in the mountains reflect that service to the poor and humble which Jesus (and Tolstoy) preached; it represents Wittgenstein's own self-conscious attempt to become Spirit, to become a god.[49]

Yet to truly imitate Christ is not to serve the poor and humble *in order to* become a god. It is to be poor and humble in the service of others. To imitate Christ one must climb not the mountain of the transfiguration but Golgotha. As St Paul puts it:

> Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the very nature of a slave, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient to death – even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every other name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.[50]

The imitation of Christ is found in that self-denial which not only renounces the desire for all the amenities of the world, but renounces the desire to be a god, to *grasp*, to *possess* 'equality with God'. It is this self-denial which leads to exaltation – not exaltation sought as a form of self-aggrandizement, however, but exaltation found in the radical undermining and transformation of the very nature of our wanting and willing.[51]

By the time of writing the *Tractatus,* Wittgenstein would have encountered such thoughts in the mystical couplets of Angelus Silesius' *Cherubinic Wanderer.*[52]

Silesius preaches detachment (*Gelassenheit*):

> I, 22 Detachment
> As much as you abandon to God, so much may He be for you,
> Not less and not more will He help you out of your troubles.[53]

> I, 44 One must let go of the something
> Man, if you love something, you don't truly love;
> God is not this and that, so let the something go completely.[54]

But this detachment is incomplete unless it culminates in the extinction of will, and the negation of the 'I':

> VI, 191 To renounce the world is to renounce little
> The whole world is nothing; You have despised very little,
> Even if you have brought the world out of your Spirit.

> VI, 192 To renounce yourself is to renounce something
> You must get out of yourself. If you hate your own self,
> then I will take you to have renounced something.

> VI, 193 One must be killed
> Everything must be slaughtered. If you don't slaughter yourself for God,
> Eternal death in the end will slaughter you for the enemy.[55]

Yet this teaching can seem mysterious, since Silesius also teaches that we are to do God's will:

> I, 281: His commandments are not difficult
> Man, if you live in God, and die to your will,
> then nothing is so easy for you, as to fulfill God's commands.[56]

How, one might ask, can death to self and will allow me to fulfill God's commandments – especially the commandment 'to love your neighbor as yourself'? As Wittgenstein exclaimed in the *Notebooks*, 'to love one's neighbor is to will!' and to love one's neighbor as one's self, one must have a self. The answer is that we are to empty ourselves so that God may fill us:

> I, 138 The more you go out, the more God enters
> The more you can pour yourself out of yourself,
> the more must God with his Godhead flow into you.[57]

> II, 136 Detachment
> Go out, God goes in: die to yourself, God lives in you:
> Be not, it is He: do nothing, the command is fulfilled.[58]

Our will, then, becomes truly one with God's not through our adopting a stance in which we accept whatever occurs, but rather through our opening ourselves to serve as channels of God's life and activity. As William James, explains in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, in a passage which Wittgenstein surely knew well: 'In Paul's language, I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me. Only when I become as nothing can God enter in and no difference between his life and mine remain outstanding'.[59] Again, here is Angelus Silesius:

> II, 144 What is detachment?
> What is detachment? I say without hypocrisy:
> That it is the will of Jesus in your soul.[60]

Seen in this light, the Tractarian conclusion that 'solipsism strictly carried out coincides with pure realism. The I in solipsism shrinks to an extensionless point and there remains the reality co-ordinated with it' (TLP 5.64) takes on a different appearance. It appears as the very model of self-emptying, of that denial of self which is needed before the divine life can enter in. But what of the 'metaphysical self' of which, according to TLP 5.641, philosophy can speak? Even this self, I maintain, has to be killed. As Simone Weil puts it:

> We possess nothing in the world – a mere chance can strip us of everything – except the power to say 'I'. That is what we have to give to God – in other words, to destroy. There is absolutely no other free act which it is given to us to accomplish – only the destruction of the 'I'.[61]

Wittgenstein's analogy of the 'I' of solipsism with the eye of the field of vision can help us to see why it is necessary to destroy this 'I'. As Wittgenstein was later to point out, my visual field 'has no neighbours'. It is equally so for the 'I' of solipsism. For the metaphysical self, the limit of the world, other people can appear only as objects *in* the world, not as other selves. But to love one's neighbour as one's self, one must have neighbours! So to love one's neighbour as one's self, one must kill the 'I' that recognizes no neighbours – the metaphysical self. Of course, this is not to kill any person, but only an illusion, although an illusion which is sustained and cherished because it answers to a desire – the desire to master the world, to be God.

VII

I stated above my agreement with Diamond, Conant and others that the *Tractatus* aims in the end not to trace out the limits of language, thought and reality, but to explode the illusion that there are such limits to be drawn. Now we can see the full ethical significance of this act – to explode this illusion is to explode a cherished myth, because it is to explode the illusion of the godhead of the independent 'I'.

Solipsism is, in part, a truth, *because* it leads to its own elimination. Solipsism is, strictly followed through, the self-humbling of pride.[62]

It is true that Wittgenstein tells us that there is 'really a sense in which in philosophy we can talk of a non-psychological I'. But we must recall that 'philosophy' for Wittgenstein is 'not a theory but an activity' whose object is 'the logical clarification of thoughts' (TLP 4.112). Philosophical problems are to be unmasked as nonsense through revealing their sources in 'the misunderstanding of the logic of our language', (Preface) so that their solutions will be found 'in the vanishing of the problem' (TLP 6.521). Wittgenstein tells us that: 'The I occurs in philosophy through the fact that the "world is my world"' (TLP 5.641), but note well the quotation marks around the phrase 'the world is my world'. Wittgenstein is signalling here, I think, that there is no real 'fact' that the world is my world (the words 'the fact that' do not occur in the German text). There is only a bit of language – 'the world is my world' – which we ultimately recognize to be nonsense. But in recognizing this to be nonsense, we do not only give up a philosophical misconception, we give up at the same time a conception of ourselves as 'alone in the universe, in eternal monstrous loneliness' and a life-project grounded on that conception, 'saying yes to *this* loneliness, the "Dionysian" moment in Kant'.

But what, you might ask, does this leave us with? What is our conception of ourselves, and what projects are we left to pursue? Having disposed of the 'I' of solipsism, am I left with any 'self' at all? Having renounced not only the amenities of the world, but my will as well, how will I act? As we saw above, to love one's neighbour as one's self, one needs a self – and one must will.

To try to answer these questions in terms of some new theory of the self and the will would of course do violence to Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy as 'not a theory, but an activity'. Still, I think, something *can* be said in response to them. At the end of the *Tractatus*, we are left with *ourselves*. We are left, in particular, with Ludwig Wittgenstein, the author of this book, and his readers – human beings, capable of communicating with, and understanding, one another. 'My propositions are elucidatory in this way: the one who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsense' (TLP 6.54). 'My' and 'me' here are not nonsensical attempts to express the mysterious 'I' of solipsism. In the *Notebooks*, Wittgenstein exclaims 'The I, the I is what is deeply mysterious!' (NB 80). To come to see this as a philosophical problem is to come to see it as resting on 'the misunderstanding of the logic of our language', and so to see it vanish.

Not only are we left with ourselves, but we are enabled to simply *act* in the world. In the *Notebooks*, as we have seen, Wittgenstein rejected a conception of the will as the underlying *cause* of our actions, and was drawn to a conception of the will as adopting an attitude or stance towards the world as a whole. He suggested there that to 'be happy' it was only necessary to 'be in agreement with the world' and that this could then be called 'doing the will of God'. (NB 75). But now we see that *this* way of 'doing the will of God' is just a self-seeking attempt to secure personal happiness. To truly do the will of God is simply to *act*, to do as

God commands, so that 'not I, but God liveth in me'. Here we find yet another conception of the will that Wittgenstein at least briefly explored in the *Notebooks*: 'The act of the will is not the cause of the action but is the action itself' (NB 87). Of course, this is not really a 'conception' of the will at all, in the sense of a theoretically articulated account. But that is not something we should ask of *Wittgenstein*, if we take the spirit of his philosophy at all seriously.

So, I have argued, at the end of the *Tractatus*, when we have thrown away the ladder, we are simply left with ourselves, acting in the world. But, one might object that this leaves no room for 'the mystical ways of thinking' in which Russell had found Wittgenstein absorbed. In one way, I think this is right and in another way wrong. For, as his friend Paul Engelmann tells us, Wittgenstein 'was never a mystic in the sense of occupying his mind with mystic-gnostic fantasies. Nothing was further from his mind than the attempt to paint a picture of a world beyond ... about which we cannot speak'.[63] Readings of the *Tractatus*' mysticism commonly rely on 6.45: 'The feeling of the world as a limited whole is the mystical feeling'. But, on my reading, the concluding sections of the book, the 6.5s, proclaim the end of all such conceptions of 'limits' of the world, exposing them as 'simple nonsense'. Nonetheless, 6.522 asserts that 'There is indeed the inexpressible. This *shows* itself; it is the mystical'. Here we have an occurrence of 'showing' which, I think, can be redeemed through being given a *practical* reading. When the mystical shows itself, one 'sees the world rightly' – one knows how to live. The connection of this thought to the properly mystical tradition is made clear in the following saying of St John of the Cross:

> The venerable and blessed father Fray John of the Cross was once asked how a man went into ecstasy. 'By renouncing his own will,' he replied, 'and doing the will of God. For ecstasy is naught but the going forth of a soul from itself and its being caught up in God, and this is what happens to the soul that is obedient, namely, that it goes forth from itself and from its own desires, and, thus lightened, becomes immersed in God.'[64]

When we climb the ladder of the *Tractatus*, we are 'going forth from ourselves'. For the ladder is not only a ladder of philosophical nonsense, but a ladder of our own desires, and of the illusions they enmesh us in. When we throw the ladder away, we are lightened of our burden, and enabled to simply do the will of God. We overcome (*überwinden*) not only Wittgenstein's propositions, but ourselves. In St Paul's words, we 'put off [the] old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires' and 'put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness'.[65] Thus 'made new' we will live *in* the world, in service of others, without being *of* the world.

At least, this is how things are supposed to work – but Wittgenstein's own life experience, his failure to truly serve the students to whom he was assigned as a teacher, showed him that salvation is not to be had as cheaply as he had hoped. That, however, is another story.

Notes

1   Versions of this paper were presented to the philosophy departments of the University of Notre Dame and the University of East Anglia. I thank the members of both audiences for helpful discussions. Thanks are especially due to David Burrell for comments on an earlier version of this paper.

2   Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. C.K. Ogden (London: Routledge, 1922) hereafter referred to as 'TLP' in the text. Also translated by B.F. McGuinness and D.F. Pears in 1961. In general I will follow Ogden's translation of the *Tractatus*, as I do here. Occasionally (as in rendering '*unsinnig*' by 'nonsense' in TLP 6.54 below) I will follow the Pears-McGuinness translation, or combine the two, incorporating modifications of my own.

3   See for example P.M.S. Hacker, *Insight and Illusion: Themes in the Philosophy of Wittgenstein* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), ch. IV; also David Pears, *The False Prison: A Study of the Development of Wittgenstein's Philosophy*, Vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), ch. 7; Juliet Floyd, 'The Uncaptive Eye: Solipsism in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*', in L.S. Rouner (ed.), *Loneliness*, Boston University Studies in Philosophy and Religion (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998); David Pears, 'The Originality of Wittgenstein's Investigation of Solipsism', *European Journal of Philosophy*, **4**, 1996, pp. 124-136; David Bell, 'Solipsism and Self-Reference', *European Journal of Philosophy*, **4**, 1996, pp. 155-174; Peter M. Sullivan, 'The "Truth" in Solipsism and Wittgenstein's Rejection of the A Priori', *European Journal of Philosophy*, **4**, 1996, pp. 195-219; H.O. Mounce, 'Philosophy, Solipsism and Thought', *Philosophical Quarterly*, **47**, 1997, pp. 1-18; and Cora Diamond, 'Does Bismarck Have a Beetle in his Box? The Private Language Argument in the *Tractatus*', in A. Crary and R. Read (eds), *The New Wittgenstein*, (London: Routledge, 2000).

      Hacker's interpretation brings in ethical themes, in a way more fully developed by James C. Edwards (see note 6); Floyd's essay also addresses these themes in a way to which I am more sympathetic, yet without working out the issues explored in this paper.

4   Brian McGuinness, *Wittgenstein: A Life; Young Ludwig 1889-1921* (Berkeley: The Univeristy of California Press, 1988), p. 228.

5   Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace* (London and New York: Routledge, 1963), pp. 56-7. The initial inspiration for much of my reading of Wittgenstein on solipsism came from reading Weil on detachment and self-abandonment.

6   In a well-known letter to Ludwig Ficker, Wittgenstein stated that 'the point of the book is ethical': C.G. Luckhardt (ed.), *Wittgenstein: Sources and Perspectives* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1979), p. 94. I provide an interpretation of this claim in my 'The Purpose of *Tractarian* Nonsense', *Noûs*, **35** (2001), pp. 39-73.

7   James C. Edwards, *Ethics without Philosophy: Wittgenstein and the Moral Life* (Tampa: University Presses of Florida, 1982); Emyr Vaughan Thomas, 'From Detachment to Immersion: Wittgenstein and the "Problem of Life"', *Ratio*, **12**, (1999), pp. 195-209. Thomas' interpretation largely repeats (albeit unwittingly) Edwards' more developed reading, so in what follows I will concentrate on Edwards. (In fairness to Edwards, I should mention that, in private correspondence, he has indicated that he would not now want to be committed to all aspects of the interpretation developed in *Ethics without Philosophy*.)

8   Both Thomas and Edwards also read the later Wittgenstein as moving beyond the self-absorption that they find in the *Tractatus*. My interpretation, which sees this move as already present in the early work, thus emphasizes the continuity of Wittgenstein's ethical concern.

9   Quoted in B. McGuinness and G.H. von Wright (eds), *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Cambridge Letters*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1995), p. 140.

10   Cora Diamond, 'Throwing Away the Ladder: How to Read the *Tractatus*', in *The Realistic Spirit: Wittgenstein, Philosophy and the Mind* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991); James Conant, 'The Method of the *Tractatus*', in E.H. Reck (ed.), *From Frege to Wittgenstein: Perspectives on Early Analytic Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

11   Hacker, *Insight and Illusion*, *op cit.*, n. 3, pp. 99-100.

12   Ibid., p. 101.

13   This line of thought is expressed and explored by Edwards in *Ethics Without Philosophy*, *op. cit.*, n. 7. As we shall see, Edwards does not consistently follow through on his insight, falling into an irresolute reading of talk of the subject as the 'limit' of the world which 'shows itself'. This difficulty prevents him from seeing the fully developed significance of the way of purification which Wittgenstein is attempting to communicate in the *Tractatus*.

14   In this paragraph I borrow from my 'The Purpose of *Tractarian* Nonsense' *op. cit.*, n. 6, as well as my 'Mathematics and Meaning in the *Tractatus*', *Philosophical Investigations*, **25**, 2002, pp. 272-303.

15   I would like to call this an ambiguity, but that would be misleading since on one side we have nothing but nonsense.

16   John 3:21. The New International Version paraphrases this as 'whoever lives by the truth, comes into the light…'. See K. Barker (ed.), *The NIV Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), p. 1598. The King James translation 'But he that doeth truth, cometh into the light…' is more accurate here.

17   Again, I borrow from 'The Purpose of *Tractarian* Nonsense' *op. cit.*, n. 6, here.

18   According to the instructions provided at the beginning of the book, 5.62 comments not on 5.61 but on 5.6. Further confirmation of this reading can be gleaned from earlier versions of these remarks in the *Notebooks* and the *Prototractatus*, as is demonstrated by Peter Sullivan in 'The "Truth" in Solipsism', *op. cit.*, n. 3.

19   Hacker, *Insight and Illusion*, *op. cit.*, n. 3, p. 100.

20   Floyd, 'The Uncaptive Eye', *op. cit.*, n. 3, p. 80.

21   Diamond, 'Does Bismarck Have a Beetle in his Box?', *op. cit.*, n. 3, pp. 282-283; see also Conant, 'The Method of the *Tractatus*', *op. cit.*, n. 10, on which I draw in the next paragraph.

22   Conant, 'The Method of the *Tractatus*', , *op. cit.*, n. 10, pp. 422-424.

23   Diary entry for 8 December 1914, quoted in McGuinness, *Wittgenstein: A Life*, *op. cit.*, n. 4, p. 225. For the German, see Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Geheime Tägebucher 1914-1916*, ed. W. Baum (Vienna: Turia & Kant, 1991), p. 50.

24   When his friend and student M. O'C. Drury told Wittgenstein that he had to read Leibniz for his exams, Wittgenstein replied: 'Count yourself lucky to have so much time to study such a great man as Leibniz': M. O'C. Drury, 'Conversations with Wittgenstein', in R. Rhees (ed.), *Recollections of Wittgenstein* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 105.

25   G.W. Leibniz, *Philosophical Essays*, ed. and trans. R. Ariew and D. Garber

(Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing, 1989), p. 64. A similar remark is made in idem, 'A New System of the Nature and Communication of Substances, and of the Union of the Soul and Body', in ibid., p. 143.

26 G.W. Leibniz, *Textes Inédits*, Vol. 1, ed. G. Grua (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1948), p. 103 (my translation). Reference taken from Leibniz, *Philosophical Essays*, *op. cit.*, n. 25.

27 Teresa of Avila, *The Life of Teresa of Jesus: The Autobiography of Teresa of Avila*, ed. and trans. E. A. Peers (New York: Image Books, 1991), p. 142. Reference taken from G.W. Leibniz, *Discours de Métaphysique et Correspondance avec Arnauld*, ed. G. LeRoy, (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1984), p. 265.

28 Teresa, *Life*, *op. cit.*, n. 27, p. 141.

29 Ibid., p. 142.

30 As argued by Stuart Brown, 'Some Occult Influences on Leibniz's Monadology', in A.P. Coudert *et al.* (eds), *Leibniz, Mysticism and Religion* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1998), pp. 5-6.

31 Leibniz, *Textes Inédits*, *op.cit.*, n. 26, p. 109 (my translation).

32 John of the Cross, 'Points of Love', in *The Complete Works of Saint John of the Cross*, Volume III, ed. E.A. Peers, trans. P. S. de Santa Teresa (London: Burns, Oates and Washbourne, 1935), p. 256.

33 Ibid., p. 255.

34 I also see it as an important improvement over its placement in the *Prototractatus* manuscript, where the discussion of solipsism (TLP 5.6-5.641, *Prototractatus* 5.335-5.33552) occurs before the discussion of the forms of elementary propositions (TLP 5.55-5.5571, *Prototractatus* 5.34-5.4223) and also before the discussion of propositions of the form '*A* thinks that *p*' (TLP 5.54-5.5423, *Prototractatus* 6.001-6.0051), and is treated as in some way part of the commentary on Wittgenstein's treatment of the identity sign (*Prototractatus* 5.33).

35 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Notebooks 1914-1916*, ed. G.H. von Wright and G.E.M. Anscombe, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, 2nd edn (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), p. 39, hereafter referred to in the text as 'NB'. The entire apparently ontological development of the early 2s in the *Tractatus* is driven by linguistic considerations.

36 The phrase '*the* language which I understand' translates 'der *Sprache, die allein ich verstehe*', and there was at one time uncertainty whether this was to be rendered 'the language which only I understand' (which suggests Wittgenstein's adherence to a form of private language, of the sort he later criticized in the *Philosophical Investigations*) or 'the only language which I understand'. Ogden's translation, used here, and accepted by Wittgenstein, favours the second alternative, and this is confirmed by a notation made by Wittgenstein in Frank Ramsey's copy of the *Tractatus*. See Jaakko Hintikka, 'On Wittgenstein's "Solipsism"', *Mind*, **67**, 1958; and C. Lewy 'A Note on the Text of the *Tractatus*', *Mind*, **76**, 1967.

37 Sullivan, 'The 'Truth' in Solipsism', *op. cit.*, n. 3.

38 Bell, 'Solipsism and Self-Reference', *op. cit.*, n. 3, p. 160.

39 This is the conclusion reached in Thomas, 'From Detachment to Immersion', *op. cit.*, n. 7, p. 202.

40 This also repeats a thought recorded in Wittgesnstein's *Notebooks*, *op. cit.*, n. 35, p. 78, on 29 July 1916.

41 See Ray Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius* (New York: Free Press, 1990), pp. 19ff. Monk sees Weininger's solipsism in the *Tractatus* (p. 190) and uses these lines from *Sex and Character* as the epigraph of his biography of Wittgenstein: 'Logic and ethics are fundamentally the same, they are no more than duty to oneself.'

42 Otto Weininger, *Geschlecht und Character* (Munich: Mathes & Setz Verlag, 1980), pp. 210-211 (my translation). (I thank Marian David and Vittorio Hösle for help with the translation of this passage.)

43 Thomas, 'From Detachment to Immersion', *op. cit.*, n. 7, p. 202.

44 Edwards, *Ethics without Philosophy*, *op. cit.*, n. 7, p. 71.

45 Ibid., pp. 66-72.

46 Reading Weininger, or Edwards' description of Wittgenstein's ethical vision, one can't help but be reminded of Raskolnikov in Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*.

47 Letters to Ludwig von Ficker, in Luckhardt, *Wittgenstein*, *op. cit.*, n. 6, p. 91.

48 Edwards, *Ethics without Philosophy*, *op. cit.*, n. 7, p. 41.

49 Ibid., p. 70.

50 Phil., 2:5-11, with 'emptied himself' in place of the NIV's 'made himself nothing', and 'slave' in place of the NIV's 'servant'. Contrast this 'self-emptying', 'taking the very nature of a slave', with Weininger's lonely Kantian, far above all wanting-to-be-slave, being-able-to-be-slave, having-to-be-slave. Weininger's Kantian, far from emptying himself, is full of himself.

51 This transformation of our willing and acting is itself not an action that we can perform. Paul's talk of Christ's "humbling himself" is paradoxical insofar as it seems to suggest something that we can "imitate" by *doing something*, "humbling ourselves." But the transformation that is required has to be worked *upon* us. That this has occurred will be made manifest in the different character of those actions that we *do* perform.

52 Angelus Silesius, *Pélerin Chérubinique (Cherubinischer Wandersmann)*, ed. and trans. H. Plard (Paris: Aubier, 1946). This edition has French and German facing texts. I could not find a reliable and complete translation in English. I am responsible for all translations into English in this paper. Since my French is better than my German I have been guided by Plard's translation in reading the *Cherubinic Wanderer*, but I have in all cases translated the German and not the French translation.

The regard with which Wittgenstein held the *Cherubinic Wanderer* can be gleaned from the company it keeps in the following entry in his diary for 22 January 1931: 'Traffic with authors like Hamann, Kierkegaard, makes their editors presumptuous. This temptation would never be felt by the editors of the *Cherubinic Wanderer*, nor yet the *Confessions* of Augustine or a writing of Luther's': Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Denkbewegungen: Tagebücher 1930-1932, 1936-1937. Teil 1: Normalisierte Fassung*, ed. I. Somavilla (Innsbruck: Haymon Verlag, 1997), p. 41 (my translation).

53 Angelus Silesius, *Pélerin Chérubinique*, *op. cit.*, n. 52, p. 64.

54 Ibid, p. 68.

55 Ibid., pp. 346, 348.

56 Ibid., p. 104.

57 Ibid., p. 82.

58 Ibid., p. 130.

59 William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: a Study in Human Nature* (New York: Collier Books, 1961), p. 328.

60 Angelus Silesius, *Pélerin Chérubinique*, *op. cit.*, n. 52, p. 132.

61 Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, *op. cit.*, n. 5, p. 23.

62 Once again, this is not an action, but a transformation that is worked upon us. It is in a sense forced upon us by the very "logic" of solipsism, though it is always open to us to refuse to follow this through "strictly" to its conclusion, as we are drawn to do by the desire to maintain our illusions.

63 Paul Engelmann (ed.), *Letters from Ludwig Wittgenstein: With a Memoir* (New York: Horizon Press, 1968), p. 79.

64 John of the Cross, *Complete Works*, *op. cit.*, n. 32, p. 257.

65 Eph. 4: 22-24.