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## **Nishida Kitarō's Logic of Absolutely Contradictory Identity and the Problem of Ethics in Zen**

Ethics is learning about the concept of good and principles in human behaviour; it is associated with the existence of moral standards. In the case of Zen, however, we cannot speak about ethics in the sense of some collection of precepts, which distinctly belong to this school. Can Zen ethics even be said to exist, since Zen masters advocate overcoming the duality of all opposites, including the opposition between good and evil?

The answer to this question also seems not to be clear to some Zen practitioners, for instance in contemporary American Zen centers, where some masters have justified their blameworthy behaviour (drunkenness, seduction of female pupils) by claiming to be free from the concepts of good and evil<sup>1</sup>. Of course, such behaviour has been criticized not only by public opinion, but also by other Zen masters.

In my opinion, Zen ethics should be treated as a part of philosophical reflections on the experience of Enlightenment. Such a statement brings us to the problem of Zen philosophy.

In this article, I would like to present the analysis of Zen ethics from the point of view of Nishida Kitarō's philosophy of 'absolute nothingness' (*zettaimu*) and its logic of paradox, i.e. logic of absolute contradictory self-identity (*zettaimujunteki jikodōitsu no ronri*), which is, in my opinion, the key to Zen master's teaching and *kōans*<sup>2</sup>.

The scope of this article does not allow me to present all the arguments which are important to defend my interpretation of Zen philosophy as 'paradoxological nihilism' and Zen logic as the logic of absolutely contradictory self-identity, which I have discussed elsewhere.<sup>3</sup> I will mention only the most important problems.

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<sup>1</sup> Yampolsky 1986: 64.

<sup>2</sup> *Kōan* is an account of a Zen master's actions or statements, including questions and answers, which is regarded as the expression of Enlightenment. Also, quotations from various texts, not only Buddhist, are treated as *kōans*, since they point to the reality of Enlightenment.

<sup>3</sup> This article is partly an English translation of Chapter Five from my book on Zen philosophy (Kozyra 2003), which was published in Polish. The first part of this book (Chapter Two on Polemics on Zen theory and practice, and Chapter Three on Zen language) was translated into English and published as *Nishida Kitarō's Logic of Absolutely Contradictory Self-Identity and the Problem of Orthodoxy in the Zen Tradition* (Kozyra 2008). Chapter Six on Paradoxological Nihilism as well as its relation to Nishida's philosophy of science, which was analysed in my book on Nishida Kitarō's philosophy of Nothingness (Kozyra 2007) was translated into Japanese (see: Kozyra, 2006). See also on Nishida and Shinran: Agnieszka Kozyra 2007.

In the first part of this article, I will present some interpretations of Zen philosophy, which are different from Nishida's. After explaining how Nishida's own experience of Zen practice made him abandon institutional Zen and seek his own philosophical interpretation of Zen, I will introduce the outline of Nishida's philosophy of 'absolute nothingness' (*zettai mu*) and his logic of paradox as (the logic of absolute contradictory identity) as related to Zen teaching.

In the second and third part of my article, I will use Nishida's interpretation of Zen Enlightenment as the experience of the reality regarded as absolutely contradictory self-identity (the structure of such reality is paradoxical) to answer the following questions:

How can one explain the logical connection between Enlightenment (Jpn. *Satori*) and Great Compassion (Jpn. *Daihi*) as the Buddhist ethical ideal? (The realization of true self and the experience of reality 'as it is', i.e. as Thusness or Suchness (Sk. *Tathāta*, Jpn. *Nyo*) is only one aspect of Enlightenment (the epistemological aspect), the other aspect of Enlightenment is ethical.)

Why do Zen masters stress the importance of overcoming the dualism of good and evil but, on the other hand, demand from their disciples compliance to strict rules in monastic life and do not tolerate behavior that in society is regarded as immoral?

In my opinion, the answers to the above questions are crucial to understand Zen ethics. The answers for these questions can also be found in Buddhist sutras and commentaries, but I would like to focus on the words of Zen masters, since Zen is claimed to be "transmission separate from [written Buddhist] teaching" (*kyōge betsuden*). Let me concentrate on the problem of the logic of paradox in Zen ethics, since the scope of this article does not allow me to discuss other important Zen dilemmas, such as, for instance, why Zen masters have left so many written accounts and commentaries if Zen is not to be explained in words. (I have discussed them in my other books and articles<sup>4</sup>).

## **I. The Logic of Paradox and Zen Philosophy**

### **Polemics on the philosophy of Zen**

Let me introduce just a few voices in the discussion on philosophical reflection in the Zen tradition, since some scholars deny philosophical discourse in Zen.

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<sup>4</sup> See for example: Kozyra 2003:144-183, Kozyra 2007: 125-132, Kozyra 2008: 96-98.

Hsueh-li Cheng, probably influenced by the “negative method” of the Madhyamika school of Buddhism, claims that Zen masters had no vision of reality. According to him, the essence of Zen philosophy is not an explanation of the nature of reality but a critical attitude, intellectual liberty, creativeness and practical attitude. Such “critical philosophy” liberates a human being from prejudices, dogmatic tendencies and illusions.<sup>5</sup> His analysis of the practical aspect of Zen leads him to the rather controversial comparison of Zen and Confucianism. Hsueh-li Cheng does not explain the difference between chaotic and arbitrary choices and the “openness of Zen philosophy,” that he postulates. He does not determine the criterion of Truth, which is crucial to Zen, since Enlightenment must be verified.<sup>6</sup> Hsueh-li Cheng’s conclusions reminds one of Thomas Cleary’s interpretations of Zen as not an ideology but a “practical psychology of liberation.”<sup>7</sup>

Suzuki Daisetz always emphasizes that, while Enlightenment liberates a man from all conditional determinations, at the same time true Zen masters throughout history “have a certain firm basis of truth obtained from a deep personal experience.”<sup>8</sup> Zen teaching may look chaotic but in fact there is one clear current in Zen masters’ teaching. It should be noted that Suzuki was referred to by many authors of books on Zen, such as Allan Watts or Robert Linssen, who claimed that treating Zen as a philosophy is a grave mistake.<sup>9</sup> They usually quote the following words of Suzuki Daisetz: “To understand Zen one must abandon all he has acquired by way of conceptual knowledge and strip off every bit of knowledge that he has painfully accumulated around him.”<sup>10</sup> Suzuki warned that any „philosophy of Zen” would be nothing more than „a castle in the sand.”

The above statement by Suzuki only apparently contradicts his opinions presented in his article titled “The Philosophy of Zen.”<sup>11</sup> The problem is the meaning of the phrase “to understand Zen.” When Suzuki denies rational thinking, he means that it is an obstacle on the way to the experience of Enlightenment. Of course, he is right to claim that rational discourse is not the way to the experience of Enlightenment — all true Zen masters, past and present, would agree to this conclusion. However, Zen is also a form of human expression and, as such, is meant to be

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<sup>5</sup> Cheng 1959: 29-30.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.: 30.

<sup>7</sup> Cleary 1989: vii.

<sup>8</sup> Suzuki 1969: 54.

<sup>9</sup> Watts 1960: 17, Linssen 1960: 46.

<sup>10</sup> Suzuki 1956: 349.

<sup>11</sup> Suzuki 1951: 5.

communicated and articulated in concepts and notions, belonging to the so-called rational sphere. The following quotation is proof of the fact that Suzuki Daisetz was aware of the unavoidability of the philosophical aspect in Zen: “Zen is not to be conceptualized, let me repeat, if it is to be experientially grasped; but inasmuch as we are human in the sense that we cannot remain dumb, but have to express ourselves in one way or another, indeed, we cannot have an experience if we cease to give expression to it. Zen would not be Zen if deprived of all means of communications. . . . The conceptualization of Zen is inevitable: Zen must have its philosophy. The only caution is not to identify Zen with a system of philosophy, for Zen is infinitely more than that.”<sup>12</sup>

In my opinion, Suzuki’s interpretation of Zen is not all that different from that of his friend, Nishida Kitarō, but in contrast to Nishida, Suzuki avoids systematic analysis on the logic of Zen. Although Suzuki calls the philosophy of Zen “the philosophy of emptiness,” he is not a philosopher—first and foremost he is a Zen master concerned with leading people to the experience of Enlightenment itself. Dealing with Zen, he is not just a scholar whose main aim is to clarify philosophical aspects of the doctrine. Suzuki encourages everybody to experience the emptiness, not to understand its philosophical implications. According to him, only by emerging in emptiness can one experience emptiness. “The proper way to study *śūnyatā* [emptiness – A.K.] is to become aware of it, in the only way *śūnyatā* can be approached. That is to say, the philosopher has to purge every residue of what the mind has accumulated by assiduously applying himself to the work of intellect. . . . There is no other way than that of casting away this intellectual weapon and in all nakedness plunging right into *śūnyatā* itself.”<sup>13</sup> In Nishida’s writings, one cannot find any encouragement of Zen practice. Unlike Suzuki, Nishida is first of all a philosopher; concerned with the logical structure of his vision of reality, he tries to prove his point of view by linking his conclusions not only to dilemmas of Western philosophy or to religious experience, but also to modern physics.<sup>14</sup>

Abe Masao continues Suzuki Daisetz’s mission of explaining the essence of Zen to foreigners by comparing Zen philosophy with such Western philosophers as Nietzsche, Whitehead, or Tillich. However, Abe does not characterize the philosophy of Zen in a systematic way—in his

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.: 4.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.: 5.

<sup>14</sup> As seen for instance in Nishida’s philosophical essay *Keiken Kagaku* (*Experimental Science*, 1939).

comparative studies he admits similarities but mainly emphasizes differences, clearing out what is not Zen philosophy.

Many previous studies have overlooked the firm logical structure of paradox in Zen. An example of an interpretation that totally neglects not only the logical aspect of Zen but also its philosophical aspect is Bernard Faure's book *Chan Insight and Oversights: An Epistemological Critique of the Chan Tradition*. Faure stresses the importance of historical analysis, including the examination of the particulars that inform the ritualistic character of Zen teaching.<sup>15</sup> He writes, "Chan texts are necessarily rhetorical in the sense that they imply a departure from an ontological conception of truth toward a more reformative and dialogical conception."<sup>16</sup> The deconstructive approach to Zen tradition that Faure takes is very interesting and innovative, but in my view some of his conclusions oversimplify the problem. He suggests, for instance, that the enigmatic structure of *kōan* is not the expression of the unique "will to truth" but rather of a "will to power."<sup>17</sup> This interpretation is justified only in some marginal aspects of Zen *kōan*, such as, for instance, their usage during funeral rituals in medieval Japan. In my opinion, the meaning of "enigmatic structure of *kōan*" was explained by Nishida — according to him *kōans* complies with the logic of paradox and expresses the paradoxical structure of reality experienced in the act of Enlightenment.

### **Nishida Kiatrō's Zen Practice**

Nishida's unique interpretation of Zen tradition, which is philosophical and free from a sectarian approach (he does not advocate orthodoxy of any specific Zen line, such as Rinzai or Sōtō), was also influenced by his own experience of Zen practice.

Nishida started his practice of Zen in April 1896 at Senshin'an, a small meditation center at the foot of Utatsuyama in Kanazawa, under the guidance of Setsumon Genshō (1850-1915). Nishida was apparently encouraged by his friend, Suzuki Daisetz (Daisetsu, 1870-1966), who had attained the initial awakening—"seeing one's nature" (*kenshō* 見性)—at Engakuji in Kamakura in 1895. It is possible that Nishida may have found some consolation in his Zen practice during times of personal crisis, as he endured a short separation from his wife and encountered difficulties in obtaining a new post after he lost his job in 1898 at the Fourth Higher School in Kanazawa. In 1901, Setsumon formally received him as a lay

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<sup>15</sup> Faure 1993: 212, 225.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.: 242.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.: 215.

disciple (*koji* 居士) and gave him the name Sunshin (Inch Mind). Subsequently, in Kyoto, Nishida took part in *sesshin* (an intensive Zen practice) under the guidance of master Kokan Sōhō (1839-1903) at Taizōin, one of the subtemples of Myōshinji.

Convinced that Zen should be explained in philosophical terms, Nishida never discarded his philosophical approach. Perhaps it is for this reason that he encountered so many difficulties in his *kōan* practice. Even in 1903, when master Kōjū Sōtaku (1840-1907) verified that Nishida had passed the *kōan* “Mu,” which indicated that he had experienced *kenshō* (initial awakening<sup>18</sup>), Nishida remained unsatisfied. He wrote to Setsumon about his doubts, although his teacher in Kanazawa merely replied stressing that he should not doubt the validity of Zen training. In a letter to Suzuki Daisetsu, Nishida complained, “What good is it if the master considers that I have passed a *kōan*, and yet I am not satisfied? There are Zen practitioners who pass one *kōan* after another, thereby achieving seniority status. I am impressed by neither their behaviour nor by what they say”.<sup>19</sup> Years later, after Nishida’s death, Suzuki Daisetz commented on this problem: “There are those cases, especially with a man like Nishida, who has a rational, logical mind. But Nishida must have grasped something. Otherwise, the kind of philosophy he developed would never be possible”.<sup>20</sup>

Although Nishida abandoned his formal Zen practice in 1904 and thereafter solely devoted himself to philosophy, in Suzuki Daisetz’s view, it was in 1923 that Nishida’s final breakthrough in Zen took place, nearly twenty years after he had ceased his practice. Nishida said to Suzuki: “My thoughts have reached the point where they cannot be explained by the framework of conventional philosophical language”.<sup>21</sup>

His philosophy began a new phase at around the same time. He proposed a philosophy of “absolute nothingness” (*zettai mu* 絶対無) and a logic of absolutely contradictory self-identity. Even if one doubts that the new phase of his philosophy was connected with his “final breakthrough,” it is evident that Nishida linked his logic of absolutely contradictory self-identity to the Zen tradition. Nishida’s philosophical approach to Zen was expressed in a letter he wrote to Nishitani Keiji (1900-1990) in 1943. “It is

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<sup>18</sup> *Kenshō* – is sometimes translated as ‘initial awakening’ in relation to the idea of grades in Zen practice. However, in some phrases it is directly related to Enlightenment – *kenshō godō* 見性悟道, *kenshō jōbutsu* 見性成佛.

<sup>19</sup> Yusa 2002: 75.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.: 73.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.: 190.

true that my philosophy is related to Zen experience. Most people do not know what Zen is. I believe that the essence of Zen is grasping reality itself (*genjitsu haaku* 現実把握). I always wanted to translate Zen experience into the language of philosophy, although I may not have succeeded in my attempt. But to do so was my most important ambition from the time I reached thirty.”<sup>22</sup>

Nishida’s philosophy is not Zen philosophy, although it is inspired by Zen. He continued dialogue with Western philosophy all his life and also tried to resolve many problems that were not discussed by Zen masters, such as the problem of the philosophy of science.

In his essay *Bashoteki Ronri to Shūkyōteki Sekaikan* (Logic of Topos and Religious Worldview) Nishida makes clear his own definition of *kenshō* (‘seeing one’s nature’). According to him, ‘seeing one’s nature’ means to penetrate to the roots of one’s own self, to the bottom (*kontei* 根底) of absolute contradictory self-identity<sup>23</sup>.

For the purpose of this article it is not necessary to answer the question “Was Nishida Kitarō really enlightened?” I would like to argue that Nishida’s philosophy offers a coherent interpretation of Zen Philosophy and Zen Ethics.

### **Nishida Kitarō’s logic of absolutely contradictory self-identity (the logic of paradox) and Zen kōans**

It should be noted that Nishida distinguished three types of discrimination:

1. irrational indiscrimination (*higōriteki mufunbetsu* 非合理的無分別), which is not logical. In the case of irrational discrimination we cannot judge irrational statements to be true or false, since such statements are chaotic and have no logical rules to govern them, so we simply reject them without analyzing them.

2. rational discrimination (*gōriteki funbetsu* 合理的分別), which is in compliance with the principle of non-contradiction (“A” is not “non-A”)—formal logic. It should be noted that to designate formal logic Nishida also uses such terms as ‘abstract logic’ (*chūshōteki ronri* 抽象的論理), ‘objectifying logic’ (*taishōteki ronri* 対象的論理). In the case of formal logic we regard true judgment as affirmation or negation, so we can call it “two-value” logic (affirmation or negation).

3. ‘discrimination without discrimination’ (*mufunbetsu no funbetsu* 無分別の分別), which is in compliance with the principle of self-contradiction—

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<sup>22</sup> Muramoto 1997: 91.

<sup>23</sup> NKZ vol. 11: 445-446.

the truth is both affirmation and negation at the same time and in the same respect, so it is a “one-value” logic of absolutely contradictory identity (the complete logic of paradox).

The principle of non-contradiction of formal logic (“A” is not “non-A”) is only one aspect of the logic of absolutely contradictory self-identity (“A” is not “non-A” and “A” is “non-A”). That is why “rationality” of formal logic is included in the logic of paradox as one of its aspects—formal logic is the aspect of self-determination of the reality in self-negation. Delusions arise if one becomes attached to objective determination and thereby is not able to grasp the whole structure of absolutely contradictory self-identity.<sup>24</sup> To designate the logic of absolute contradictory self-identity, Nishida also uses such concepts as ‘concrete logic’ (*gutaiteki ronri* 具体的論理), ‘true dialectic’ (*shin no beshōhō* 真の弁証法), and ‘logic of paradox’ (*hairi no ri* 背理の理). From the point of view of the logic of absolutely contradictory self-identity, the truth (the judgment which is truly adequate to the reality conceived as absolutely contradictory identity) is a paradox, i.e., affirmation and negation at the same time and in the same respect. That is why the logic of absolutely contradictory identity is “one-value” logic, which is ‘a standpoint without a standpoint’ (*tachiba naki tachiba* 立場なき立場).<sup>25</sup>

Nishida states that his logic of absolutely contradictory self-identity is a paradox from the point of view of formal logic. He also uses such expressions as *hairi no ri* to designate his logic of absolutely contradictory self-identity. The meaning of the word ‘paradox’, which in Greek means “a judgment opposed to the prevailing opinion” (*gyakusetsu* 逆説) is connected with the problem of self-contradiction. Since the principle of non-contradiction is the demarcation line of formal logic, paradoxes are thought to be absurd, since they are considered to be caused merely by erroneous reasoning. Therefore, much effort has been given to “solving” such paradoxes in philosophy and science. However, Nishida’s ‘absolutely contradictory self-identity’ is a paradox which cannot be solved by proving that paradoxical self-contradiction is only superficial and can be explained in terms of formal logic. In this article the word ‘paradox’ is defined as “one dimensional self-contradictory judgment,” and “one dimensional” means that self-contradiction belongs to the same temporal and spatial aspect. Nishida’s ‘absolutely contradictory self-identity’ is a synonym for a thus-defined ‘paradox’. I am proposing that Nishida’s logic of absolutely

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<sup>24</sup> NKZ vol. 11: 445-446.

<sup>25</sup> NKZ vol. 8: 570.

contradictory self-identity is the most complete expression of the logic of paradox.

According to Nishida, the Buddhist notion of “form is emptiness and emptiness is form” (*shiki soku ze kū* 色即是空; *kū soku ze shiki* 空即是色) complies with the principle of self-contradiction of the logic of paradox. (Form (A) is emptiness (not-A) and yet emptiness (not-A) is form (A).) Nishida states it very clearly: “Emptiness is form and form is emptiness as absolutely contradictory identity of affirmation and negation.”<sup>26</sup> He also emphasizes that to grasp the meaning of ‘seeing into one’s own nature’ (*kenshō*) is “to grasp fully the logic of paradox.”<sup>27</sup> “Zen speaks of *seeing into one’s own nature and attaining enlightenment* (*kenshō jōbutsu*). But this Zen phrase must not be misunderstood. *Seeing* here does not mean to see anything externally as an object; nor does it mean to see an internal self through introspection. The self cannot see itself, just as an eye cannot see itself. And yet this does not mean that we can see the Buddha-nature transcendently either. If it were seen in that way [as an object] it would be a hallucination.”<sup>28</sup>

For Nishida, the functional meaning of Zen *kōan* is a tool or means (*shudan* 手段) that helps in grasping the paradoxical structure of reality. He quotes the following *kōan* to explain his point of view: “One day Shoushan Shennian<sup>29</sup> taking up a bamboo stick, said: ‘When you call this a bamboo stick, you are wrong; and when you don’t call it a bamboo stick, you are also wrong. What, then, do you call it?’”<sup>30</sup> Shoushan’s words can be taken as expressing the direct paradoxical judgment: “Calling a bamboo stick a bamboo stick is wrong and is not wrong at the same time and in the same respect.”

It is important to take into consideration the usage of direct and indirect paradoxical judgments and concepts in Nishida’s philosophy. *Kōans* not only function as “tools,” but they are also descriptive—they are paradoxical judgments describing the true reality, i.e. the structure of reality, which complies to the logic of absolutely contradictory self-identity. Nishida stated that the words of Zen masters should be understood in terms of the logic of absolutely contradictory identity.<sup>31</sup> He sometimes uses direct paradoxical judgments, stating for instance that “the world of absolutely

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<sup>26</sup> NKZ vol. 11: 18.

<sup>27</sup> NKZ vol. 11: 446.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.: 424-425.

<sup>29</sup> Jpn. Shuzan Shōnen, (926-993).

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.: 446.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.: 430-431.

contradictory identity is self-identical in itself and at the same time is not self-identical in itself<sup>32</sup> or “the world of absolutely contradictory identity is always determined and at the same time it is always changing.”<sup>33</sup> He also uses direct paradoxical concepts such as ‘immanent transcendence’ (*naizaiteki chōetsu* 内在的超越) or ‘discrimination without discrimination’ (*mufunbetsu no funbetsu* 無分別の分別). In his philosophy the reality is regarded as ‘continuation without continuation’ (*hirenzoku no renzoku* 非連続の連続),<sup>34</sup> and inner unity of the self as ‘unity without unity’ (*tōitsu naki tōitsu* 統一なき統一).<sup>35</sup>

However, direct paradoxical judgment and concepts alone may not be sufficient to communicate to others the vision of reality as absolutely contradictory self-identity. Nishida had to explain that his approach is not irrational or at its best mystical (in the sense that “mysticism has nothing to do with objective knowledge”). That is why he used indirect paradoxical concepts and judgments to link his common sense/formal logic vision of reality with his vision of reality as absolutely contradictory self-identity. Indirect paradoxical concepts explain various aspects of absolutely contradictory self-identity.

Let us consider the notion of ‘absolute nothingness’ as an indirect paradoxical concept. It is not a direct paradoxical concept because the ‘name’ of this concept itself is not self-contradictory (there is no self-contradiction in the name of ‘absolute nothingness’ as there is in the case of ‘immanent transcendence’). However, ‘absolute nothingness’ is defined as nothingness identical with being (*u soku mu* 有即無), and that is why its meaning is paradoxical.

Nishida’s concept of ‘topos of absolute nothingness’ must not be objectified but also treated as an indirect paradoxical concept. ‘Topos of absolute nothingness’ is the spatial aspect of absolutely contradictory identity, and as such is also a paradox: place/topos of ‘absolute nothingness’ is the ‘final place’ (*kyūkyokuteki basho* 窮極の場所) which has no place; that is why it is ‘groundless ground’ (*mukiteiteki kitei* 無基底の基底).<sup>36</sup> If it had its place, it would not be the final place. ‘Absolute nothingness’ can be regarded as the field of consciousness in only one of its many aspects. Forgetting about the whole paradoxical structure of

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<sup>32</sup> NKZ vol. 9: 278.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.: 301.

<sup>34</sup> NKZ vol. 6: 217.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.: 219.

<sup>36</sup> NKZ vol. 11: 18.

absolute nothingness leads to the mistaken conclusion that the field of consciousness is something out of which the individual consciousness emanates. ‘Topos of absolute nothingness’ (the spatial aspect of absolute contradictory identity) is the paradoxical state, in which all individual entities are unique and separated, and yet are mutually unhindered and interfused—a state which cannot be objectified.

Nishida warns that the state of contradiction can neither be thought of from the standpoint of subject-object dualism nor can it even be imagined, therefore it is a grave mistake to objectify its approach. The world of absolutely contradictory identity in its spatial/ topological aspect is ‘groundless ground’ since there is no foundation of beings which can be separated from other beings, just as there is not anything that emanates being. Nishida believed, it should be noted, that the Buddhist expression “because there is no place in which it abides, the Mind arises” should be understood as implying the ‘topos of absolute nothingness’ or ‘groundless ground’.<sup>37</sup>

Nishida emphasized that the relation of ‘one’ and ‘many’ is a relation of absolutely contradictory self-identity: ‘many’ remain ‘many’ and at the same time is ‘one’; ‘one’ remains ‘one’ and simultaneously is ‘many’.<sup>38</sup> ‘One’ cannot be regarded as the foundation of ‘many’, since in such a case the relation of ‘one’ and ‘many’ could not be ‘absolutely contradictory self-identity’ in which no element is regarded as a fundamental element or at least as more important than the others. Nishida states that the world of absolutely contradictory self-identity of ‘one’ and ‘many’ means that “innumerable things always contradict one another and at the same time are ‘one’.”<sup>39</sup> Nishida compares such a paradoxical state to an infinite sphere, which has no circumference and its center is everywhere. Such an infinite sphere is groundless (*mukiteiteki*) and reflects itself within itself.<sup>40</sup> It should be noted that such a vision of reality as infinite with the center at any point is reminiscent of the notion of “the mode of existence in which all phenomenal things are mutually unhindered and interfused” (*jijimuge*) of the Kegon school.

In fact, Nishida’s absolutely contradictory self-identity of one and many should be regarded as exactly such a paradoxical state in which all individual entities are unique and separated and yet are mutually unhindered and interfused, and that is why they are ‘one’. In such a vision

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<sup>37</sup> NKZ vol. 11: 415.

<sup>38</sup> NKZ vol. 6: 170.

<sup>39</sup> NKZ vol. 11: 18.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*: 18.

of reality, there is no single element which is more real than others and can be regarded as lying beyond or behind the interdependence of all individual entities. In Kegon thought, the state of all phenomenal things being mutually unhindered and interfused was compared to ‘Indra’s Net’, a net of jewels in which each jewel reflects all other jewels. It is easy to imagine that one jewel reflects the jewels that are close to it, but it cannot be imagined that it reflects all jewels, no matter how far they are from it. Nishida expresses the same idea of unhinderedness, quoting Zen master Panshan Baoji (Jpn. Banzan Hōshaku, 720-814), a disciple of Mazu Daoyi (Jpn.. Basō Dōitsu, 709-788):

“It is like waving a sword in the air. It does not leave any trace as it cleaves the air. The blade is also untouched. The individual self and the world, individual entity and totality, are in a relation of absolutely contradictory identity.”<sup>41</sup>

### **Relation of “Mind” and “Buddha” as Absolute Contradictory Self-Identity**

Many passages in Nishida’s essay *Bashoteki ronri to shūkyōteki sekaikan* (Topological Logic and Religious Worldview) express his conviction that the relation of ‘Mind’ and ‘Buddha’ in the Buddhist tradition must be understood in terms of the logic of paradox. He writes, for example, “Whole Mind is Buddha” (*zenshin soku butsu* 全心即仏), “Buddha is wholly man” (*zenbutsu soku jin* 全仏即人), and “no difference between Buddha and man” (*jinbutsu fui* 人仏不異).<sup>42</sup> “Mind in itself is Buddha, Buddha in itself is Mind,” he says, yet this “does not mean that Buddha and Mind are identical from the point of view of objectifying logic/formal logic.”<sup>43</sup> In this context ‘Mind’ (Jpn. *shin* 心; Sk. *citta*; Ch. *xin*) means the conceptual, discriminating mind, which distinguishes between subject and object. Individual self is the same as Buddha—such a statement is contradictory since individual self is relative and Buddha is absolute.

Zen masters often referred to the notion “Mind is Buddha.” It should be noted that one of the *kōan* from the collection *The Gateless Gate* (*Mumonkan*) directly expresses this truth: “Mind is Buddha” (*sokushin sokubutsu* 即心即仏).<sup>44</sup> Mazu Daoyi also stressed that “Outside mind there is no Buddha, outside Buddha there is no mind.”<sup>45</sup> The same truth was

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<sup>41</sup> NKZ vol. 11: 430.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.: 430.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.: 423.

<sup>44</sup> Nishimura 1996: 135.

<sup>45</sup> Dumoulin 1979: 57.

expressed by the Japanese Zen Master Shinchi Kakushin (1207-1298), whose words Dumoulin rendered in verse:

*Mind is the Buddha.  
The Buddha is mind.  
Mind and Buddha, such as they are,  
Are the same in the past and the future.*<sup>46</sup>

If the sentence “Mind is Buddha” were to be interpreted from the point of view of formal logic, the conclusion would be that no religious practice is required. “Mind” and “Buddha” would be synonyms, and would not be different from each other at all. However, all Zen masters claim that people must follow religious practice to realize their ‘buddha-nature’. Hakuin Ekaku (1689-1769) wrote: “Yet sentient beings do not know how close it [Buddha] is, and search for it far away. How sad!”<sup>47</sup>. How could it be that, as Ikkyū Sōjun (1394-1491) stated, “we have one moon [Buddha nature], clear and unclouded, yet are lost in darkness.”<sup>48</sup>

Nishida maintained that the identity of the individual self and Buddha should not be understood in terms of formal logic, since it makes sense only from the point of view of the logic of absolutely contradictory identity. From the point of view of formal logic the statement “Mind is Buddha” means that two elements are identical; they are only different names for the same thing (A=A). From the point of view of the logic of contradictory identity, however, “identity” is always contradictory—the individual self *is* Buddha and *is not* Buddha at the same time and in the same respect. “Mind is Buddha, Buddha is Mind”—this true statement does not mean that the world is an emanation of the Mind. An individual self (*shin* 心) is not an individual self (*hishin* 非心), and that is why it is an individual self (*shin* 心). The relation of Buddha and human beings must be understood as “contradictory identity” in compliance with “‘is’ and ‘is not’ logic” (the so-called *sokuhi* 即非 logic, *soku no ronri* 即の論理) characteristic of *The Perfection of Wisdom Sutras* (Sk. *Prajñāpāramitā-sūtra*, Jpn. *Hannya Haramita Kyō*).<sup>49</sup> The *sokuhi* logic of *The Perfection of Wisdom Sutras* expresses the truth that the true ‘absolute’ must be ‘absolutely contradictory self-identity’.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Dumoulin: 1990: 30.

<sup>47</sup> Stevens 1993: 7.

<sup>48</sup> Ikkyū 1982: 79.

<sup>49</sup> NKZ vol. 11: 446.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*: 405.

Nishida took the words of the famous Japanese Zen master Shūhō Myōchō, known as Daitō Kokushi (1282-1338) to be the best expression of the paradoxical relation between the relative ‘Mind’ and the absolute ‘Buddha’: “Separated by a billion eons (kalpas), and yet not separated even for a moment. Always face to face, yet never met.”<sup>51</sup>

The logic of absolutely contradictory self-identity neither nullifies the self nor merely signifies that the self becomes Buddha or comes closer to Buddha. It indicates rather that the relation of the self and ‘the absolute’ are always ‘reciprocal polarization’ (*gyaku taiō* 逆対応)<sup>52</sup>, i.e. one becomes the other through self-negation. According to Nishida, Dōgen’s (Dōgen Kigen, 1200-1253) saying “to study the way of Buddha is to study the self, to study the self is to forget the self” should be understood in this context.<sup>53</sup> The logic of absolutely contradictory self-identity can also be seen in such Buddhist concepts as “passions are Enlightenment” (*bonnō soku bodai* 煩惱即菩提 or “samsara is nirvana” (*shōji soku nehan* 生死即涅槃).

If it is admitted that the reality experienced in Enlightenment is absolutely contradictory self-identity, it must also be admitted that only judgments in which the opposites are contradictory identical (paradoxical judgment) are adequate to such reality. This is not the problem of finding or not finding sufficient expressions to describe the experience of ‘Enlightenment’. It is the problem of shifting from formal logic to the logic of absolutely contradictory self-identity. Nishida calls such a ‘shift’ ‘the overturning of the self’ (*jiko no tenkan* 自己の転換).<sup>54</sup> What is the difference between attaining ‘buddha-nature’ by transformation and attaining ‘buddha-nature’ by shifting?

Let us compare this difference to a visual change in the perception of geometrical figures. If one sees a square and then after sees a triangle in the same place, that means either the square was replaced by a triangle or by some transformation a square was changed into a triangle. However, when one is looking from the point where diagonals of a square, which is the part of a cube crosscut, one sees a square and then if one changes one’s point of view even a little bit, one can see a cube, although no transformation has taken place. In such cases the change from a square to a cube will be due to a shift in point of view.

Another argument that the logic of absolutely contradictory self-identity constitutes the structure of reality revealed in the experience of

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.: 399.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.: 415.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.: 411.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.: 425.

Enlightenment is the Zen term *munen* 無念 (‘non-thinking’). Both Nishida and Suzuki Daisetz argued that true insight into reality is possible only as ‘discrimination without discrimination’, a notion which is a paradox itself. It should be noted that the term ‘no-thinking’ (*munen*) is interpreted by the Sixth Patriarch, Huineng (Jpn. Enō, 638-713) as “thinking while not thinking,”<sup>55</sup> which is exactly the meaning of Nishida’s concept of ‘discrimination without discrimination’. Huineng taught: “This Dharma-door of mine, from the past onwards, from the beginning has been established with no-thought as its doctrine, no-mark as its substance, no-dwelling as its basis. *No-thought means to be without thought while in the midst of thought.* No-mark means to be apart from marks while in midst of marks. No-dwelling is the basic nature of human beings.”<sup>56</sup>

The same logic of paradox can be seen in the Zen term ‘No-Mind’ (*mushin* 無心). Dahui Zonggao (Jpn. Daie Sōkō, 1089-1163) said: “The so-called No-Mind is not like clay, wood, or stone, that is, utterly devoid of consciousness; nor does the term imply that the mind stands still without any reaction when it contacts objects or circumstances in the world. It does not adhere to anything, but is natural and spontaneous at all times and under all circumstances. There is nothing impure within it; neither does it remain in a state of purity.”<sup>57</sup> Dahui complies to the logic of paradox, when he states that: There is nothing impure within No-Mind; neither does it remain in a state of purity.

I think that Nishida’s logical approach to Zen—in terms of his logic of absolutely contradictory self-identity—provides a coherent explanation of inner logical structure of such Zen concepts as No-Mind. The limited scope of this article does not allow us to reflect on how Nishida’s logic of absolutely contradictory self-identity is useful in interpreting such problems as the meaning of Zen metaphors, levels of meanings in *kōan* (including the typology of paradoxical judgment in *kōan*), or relations of Zen to the doctrine of other Buddhist schools.<sup>58</sup>

From the point of view of the logic of absolutely contradictory self-identity, the orthodoxy of Zen is not any “formal logic doctrine” but the structure of paradox itself. Only those Zen statements which comply with the logic of contradictory self-identity indirectly (as a ‘skillful means,’ *hōben* 方便) or directly can be labeled “orthodox.” Each thesis alone, and each antithesis

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<sup>55</sup> Yampolsky 1967: 138.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*,: 162.

<sup>57</sup> Chang 1957.

<sup>58</sup> Kozyra 2003.

alone is only the “partial truth,” while the truth of Zen itself is the absolutely contradictory self-identity of any thesis and its antithesis. According to Nishida, the main function of *kōan* is to describe the nature of reality revealed in the experience of Enlightenment in compliance with the logic of paradox. Nishida would not agree with Faure that the enigmatic structure of *kōan* is not the expression of the unique “will to truth” but rather of a “will to power.”<sup>59</sup> According to Nishida, *kōans* are direct reflections on the experience of absolutely contradictory identity, and as such they are direct or indirect paradoxical judgments. As a method of Zen religious practice, *kōans* also play the role of “catalysts of Enlightenment”; they “catalyze” a reaction that can be described as a shift from the formal logic of perspective to the perspective of the logic of absolutely contradictory self-identity. Zen *kōan* are definitely expressions of a ‘will to truth,’ and only by the distortion of their original meaning and purpose could they become the expression of ‘will to power.’ To overlook the paradoxical structure of indirect paradoxical concepts and judgments in Zen tradition is to forget that “the finger pointing to the moon remains a finger and under no circumstances can be changed into the moon itself.”<sup>60</sup>

## II Zen Paradoxical Ethics

The following key issues need to be considered when analyzing Zen Ethics: the critique of formal ethics rooted in the duality of good and bad, the contemplation of the essence of ‘great compassion’ (*daihi*) and the differences between ‘paradoxical ethics’ and formal ethics.

### Dualism of Good and Evil as an Obstacle on the Way to Enlightenment

Why should a Zen disciple not distinguish between good and evil or sacred and profane?

Under Nishida’s ‘logic of paradox’, choosing between any pair of opposites, including good and evil, is an obstacle to overcoming epistemological dualism, considered to be an essential condition for ‘Enlightenment. The distinction between good and bad, so important for the norms of social life, turns out to impede those seeking ‘Enlightenment’. This is why Huineng taught his pupils: “Don’t think about what’s good, don’t think about what’s bad”<sup>61</sup>.

Sengcan (Jpn. Sōsan, ?-606?), the Third Zen Patriarch wrote:

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid.: 215.

<sup>60</sup> Suzuki 1969: 78.

<sup>61</sup> Nishimura 1996: 98.

*Ignorance begets the duality of calm and anxiety [...],  
Gain and loss, good and evil –  
Let's discard these concepts*<sup>62</sup>.

The necessity of going beyond the duality of opposite notions also applies to the *sacrum-profanum* dichotomy. Linji Yixuan (Jpn. Rinzai Gigen,?-866) taught: “If you love what’s sacred and hate what’s worldly, you will drift on a sea of births and deaths, and in the end you will drown in it.”<sup>63</sup> Such names as ‘Buddha’ or ‘Enlightenment’ are only intermediate concepts pointing to the reality of ‘Enlightenment’, which cannot be objectified. “If you look for ‘buddha’, you become a slave to the concept ‘buddha’”<sup>64</sup>, taught Linji, who had in mind the concept ‘buddha’ as the object of the subject’s cognition. Wherever there is a duality of subject and object of cognition, there can be no change of perspective in perceiving reality, which is why emancipation cannot take place. It is in this context that the following words of Linji should be understood: “If you meet ‘buddha’, kill ‘buddha’”<sup>65</sup>. ‘Buddha’, or ‘enlightened self’, means going beyond all duality, thus it cannot be an object of perception. A student of Zen must kill ‘buddha’, that is, reject the concept of ‘buddha’ in order to realize that the ‘individual self’ is contradictorily identical with the ‘enlightened self’. A similar purpose lies behind other seemingly blasphemous statements by Linji, such as deeming ‘final emancipation’ or ‘enlightenment’ to be hitching posts for asses<sup>66</sup>. For only fools allow themselves to be tied to intermediate concepts without realizing that they are merely ‘a finger pointing to the moon’, not the moon (essence of reality). Huangbo Xiyun (Jpn. Ōbaku Kiun, ?-850) warned that ‘buddha’ cannot be treated objectively, because then the “path of ‘buddha’ will lead you astray just as the path of demons”<sup>67</sup>.

The following words of Daitō Kokushi mean much the same:

*Breaking through [to ‘Enlightenment’ – A. K.], I set aside  
all ‘buddhas’ and patriarchs*<sup>68</sup>.  
*Ignorance and ‘Enlightenment’ –*

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<sup>62</sup> Suzuki 1962: 126.

<sup>63</sup> Iriya 1996: 52.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.: 83.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.: 96.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.: 35.

<sup>67</sup> Blofeld 1973: 75.

<sup>68</sup> Kenneth Kraft 1992: 192.

*those are deceptive words  
always deluding monks*<sup>69</sup>.

Bassui Tokushō (1327-1387) taught: “When ignorance appears, break through it, even if you encounter ‘Enlightenment’, ‘Buddha’ or a demon as ignorance”<sup>70</sup>.

Such concepts as ‘Buddha’ or ‘Enlightenment’ point only indirectly to the true essence of reality, which is ‘absolutely contradictory self-identity’. No concept which can be negated in such a way as to generate an opposite concept can be treated as commensurate with reality, even if it is a sacred name. If we consider the word *dharma* (Chin. *fā*; Jpn.. *hō*) to refer to all objects of cognition distinguished by negation, the words of the *Perfect Wisdom Sutra* – that there are no better or worse dharmas – become comprehensible”<sup>71</sup>. All dharmas are empty, that is, have no permanent nature, thus we cannot determine their hierarchy.

Mazu Daoyi emphasized that the concept of evil is as empty as all other dharmas:

*Do not become attached to good,  
do not reject evil.  
Defilement and purity –  
If you are not dependent on them,  
You will comprehend the empty nature of evil.  
You can never grasp it at any moment,  
Because evil has no constant nature*<sup>72</sup>.

Mazu stressed that “you cannot get attached to anything, even the dharma ‘buddha’”<sup>73</sup>, precisely because all dharmas are empty. Recognizing the superiority of one dharma over another (for instance, the dharma ‘buddha’ over the dharma ‘tree’) can occur only due to their utility in leading people to ‘Enlightenment’. That is because such concepts as ‘cosmic body of Buddha’ or ‘Enlightenment’ often become an ‘appropriate way’ by which Zen masters lead people to emancipation. These sacred concepts, however, can become obstacles to attaining the experience of ‘Enlightenment’ if they are regarded as direct signs, that is, commensurate with reality.

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid.: 16.

<sup>70</sup> Dumoulin 1990: 200.

<sup>71</sup> Conze 1968: 115.

<sup>72</sup> Dumoulin 1979: 57.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.: 57.

Many seemingly blasphemous statements by Zen masters are meant to stress that absolutely everything has the ‘nature of buddha’. Yunmen Wenyan (Jpn. Unmon Bun’en, 864-949), when asked about the ‘nature of buddha’, replied that it can even be found in excrement<sup>74</sup>. Some scholars see in these words the influence of Chuangzi, who, when asked where the ‘Way’ is, replied, “The ‘Way’ is in urine and feces”<sup>75</sup>.

A person who does not understand the ‘emptiness’ of good and evil cannot fathom the essence of reality. This is precisely why Baizhang Huaihai (Jpn. Hyakujō Ekai, 720-814) stated that rejecting the duality of good and evil is a condition for ‘Enlightenment’. “When you forget about what’s good and what’s evil, about secular life and religious life, when you forget about all dharmas and do not allow any thoughts relating to them to arise, when you relinquish body and mind – then you will achieve complete freedom”<sup>76</sup>.

This type of approach by Zen masters to the dualism of such opposite concepts as good-evil or sacred-profane is the reason why objects of Buddhist veneration had no absolute value for them – at most, such objects had relative value due to their utility on the path to ‘Enlightenment’. Zen masters warned that excessive attachment to Buddhist religious objects could be barriers on the path to the experience of ‘Enlightenment’. For example, Dōgen cited the legend of a monk who always carried a casket with a golden statuette of Buddha Śākyamuni, which he venerated every day by burning pastilles and praying. A Zen master commanded him to throw away the casket, as the master saw excessive attachment to form in his behaviour. The monk, however, did not want to do this and intended to leave the monastery. Before he left, the master summoned him and told him to open the casket. Inside was a venomous snake. Dōgen commented on this parable as follows: “Images of Buddha and relics should be accorded respect, because statues or pictures present the one who attained ‘Enlightenment’, and relics are his remains. It is mistaken to expect, however, that ‘Enlightenment’ will occur as a result of venerating religious objects. This mistake condemns you to the torment of venomous snakes and evil forces”<sup>77</sup>.

Religious objects thus do not have absolute value. This is reflected in the behaviour of Danxia Tianran (Jpn. Tanka Tennen, 739-824), who spent a night in a ruined temple together with two other monks, and since it was very cold, he started a fire using wood from a Buddha statue. When his

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<sup>74</sup> Nishimura 1996: 73.

<sup>75</sup> Buswell 1997: 335.

<sup>76</sup> Dumoulin 1988: 171.

<sup>77</sup> Dumoulin 1979: 99.

companions asked him why he destroyed the Buddha statue, he replied, “I only looked for the sacred remains of Buddha”. One of the monks said, “But Buddha’s remains are not in a piece of wood”. To which Danxia responded, “So I burned only a piece of wood”<sup>78</sup>. According to Dōgen, Danxia’s behaviour was an expression of absolute freedom from form<sup>79</sup>.

As Daisetz Suzuki correctly observed, Danxia’s behaviour did not at all mean that Zen masters called for the destruction of Buddhist statues. This parable merely serves as a reminder that attachment to religious forms should not eclipse religious spirit.

This is why Myōan Eisai (1141-1215) gave a large starving family a piece of copper meant to serve as the halo on a Buddha statue – he did not have anything else to give them. When other monks criticized him for this, Eisai said that Buddha sacrifices even his entire body if the hungry need it<sup>80</sup>. The issue of religious objects in Buddhism must be considered also in the context of ‘an expedient mean’ (Jpn.. *hōben*), which a master should choose to fit the specific situation. Daitō Kokushi stressed that the most important thing is to go beyond the duality of all concepts, including the duality of sacred and profane. He admitted, though, that the adoration of Buddhist statues or the financing of temples helps many people to strengthen their karmic bonds with Buddhism<sup>81</sup>.

### **‘Great Compassion’ as an Ethical Ideal**

Transcending the duality of good and evil does not mean that persons who have attained ‘Enlightenment’ behave randomly and chaotically – instead, their behaviour is governed by the ‘logic of paradox’. They are not unconstrained hedonists, because the freedom attained in the act of ‘Enlightenment’ means freedom from all desires considered to give rise to suffering. Furthermore, in the act of ‘Enlightenment’, they become aware of their paradoxical identity with the entire universe. Due to an experience of ‘absolutely contradictory self-identity’ with everything that exists, they are capable of perfectly empathizing with everything that exists, which is why they are filled with ‘great compassion’.

The Sanskrit concept *mahākaruṇā* (Chin. *taibei*; Jpn. *daihi*) is usually translated as ‘great compassion’, but it should be noted that from the standpoint of the ‘logic of paradox’ it means total acceptance resulting from the structure of reality as ‘absolutely contradictory self-identity’. For

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Stryk, Ikemoto 1981: 16.

<sup>81</sup> Kraft 1992: 119.

true compassion is possible only when the subject and object of cognition are identical. It is only under the ‘logic of paradox’ that you can love others as yourself, because others are you, and you are identical with them. As opposed to ‘The Smaller Vehicle’ of Buddhist teachings, in ‘The Great Vehicle’ ‘Enlightenment’ is always connected with the will to emancipate all beings. Being aware that “form is emptiness” means awakening ‘perfect wisdom’. By extension, understanding that “emptiness is form”, thus ultimately grasping the ‘absolutely contradictory self-identity’ of ‘emptiness’ and form, engenders ‘great compassion’. Those who have attained enlightenment feel unity with all suffering beings, which is why compassion is their natural state. They spontaneously act for the good of all beings, striving to emancipate them from the circle of birth and death. Because they are contradictorily identical with the entire universe, ‘great compassion’ does not refer only to ‘sentient beings’ – in this context, Dōgen stated that “‘great compassion’ is also shown in birds or flowers”<sup>82</sup>. According to Abe Masao, the indissoluble tie between ‘perfect wisdom’ and ‘great compassion’ was expressed most fully in the following passage from a translation of the *Heart Sutra* by Xuanzhuang (Jpn Genjo, 600-664): “When Avalokiteśvara (Jpn.. Kannon) practices the excellence of the ‘supreme wisdom’, he sees five aggregates creating the illusion of a separate ‘I’ as ‘emptiness’ and frees all people from all suffering”<sup>83</sup>. In the *Nirvana Sutra*, ‘great compassion’ is considered to be an attribute of ‘buddha-nature’<sup>84</sup>. Abe agreed with Suzuki Daisetz’s view that many Zen practitioners identified ‘Enlightenment’ only with ‘perfect wisdom’ without attaching importance to the meaning of ‘great compassion’<sup>85</sup>. He emphasized that it is impossible to separate these two concepts, though he pointed out that ‘great compassion’ is not the result of moral self-perfection, but the “direct action of the ‘individual self’ that is ‘non-self’, because it transcends the duality of all opposites, including the good-evil opposition”<sup>86</sup>. Abe cited the following parable about the master Zhaozhou Congshen (Jpn. Jōshū Jūshin, 778-897). When asked whether ‘buddha’ is free from all desires, Zhaozhou replied in the negative: ‘buddha’ is overflowing with the desire to emancipate all suffering beings<sup>87</sup>. Dōgen also stressed that the essence of Buddha Śākyamuni’s teaching is ‘great

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<sup>82</sup> Abe 1985: 114.

<sup>83</sup> Cleary 1991: 158.

<sup>84</sup> Suzuki 1948: 117.

<sup>85</sup> Abe 1985: 79.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

compassion’: “The compassion of Tathagata cannot be expressed in words. Everything he did was for the good of sentient beings”<sup>88</sup>.

Perfect compassion is possible only if the subject (I) and the object of cognition (for instance, another person) are one, though they preserve their separate characteristics. Masao Abe cites Vimalakirti: “I am sick because other people are sick” - this sentence can also be interpreted in accord with the ‘logic of paradox’<sup>89</sup>.

The state of ‘Enlightenment’, deemed ‘non-self’, proves to be compassion so profound that we cannot imagine it. This is why those who set off on the path of ‘enlightenment’ make the following vow: “I pledge to emancipate countless beings”. As Chen-chi Chang rightly noted, ‘great compassion’ is unconditional love that can be realized only by reaching ‘true emptiness’<sup>90</sup>. He emphasized that ‘great compassion’ is unrelated to righteous retribution, because according to karmic law, he who does evil must reap the consequences – evil begets evil. There is no just judge who orders and rewards<sup>91</sup>.

The Enlightened person expresses their ‘great compassion’ in acts that others consider to be good as well as acts considered to be bad. It is in this context that the passage from the *Vimalakirti Sutra* – where Bodhisattva attained ‘enlightenment’ while taking the path of evil – should be understood<sup>92</sup>. Zen ethics distinguishes no acts considered bad always and everywhere. ‘Great compassion’ can be expressed in many different forms depending on the situation, because it is not the letter of the law – it has much in common with the evangelical spirit of love.

The concept of ‘great compassion’ is paradoxical, because those who demonstrate ‘great compassion’ cannot pass to the opposite state – they are unable to act without compassion. It means final, total, timeless affirmation. It should not be supposed that Buddha loves a man for abiding by ethical precepts, or for deserving Buddha’s love in some other way. It was precisely for the purpose of distinguishing ‘great compassion’ from the concept of love conditioned by the concept of absence of love that Buddha Sakyamuni taught the following in the *Lotus Sutra*:

*I neither love nor hate anyone,  
I am not attached to anything.*

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<sup>88</sup> Dumoulin 1979: 99-100.

<sup>89</sup> Abe 1985: 79.

<sup>90</sup> Chang 1959: 158.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.: 160.

<sup>92</sup> Komatsu 1984: 284.

*I convey true knowledge all the time*<sup>93</sup>.

This approach signifies not indifference, but unconditional love that rejects no one and no thing. Without the spiritual breakthrough of ‘Enlightenment’, this state is unattainable for man – he cannot love unconditionally to the point where even speaking about love would be impossible because no other emotion could exist from which it could be distinguished. Those filled with ‘great compassion’ are incapable of hatred or indifference. This state of absolute acceptance cannot be achieved by persistent religious practice. It is as unfeasible as the evangelical injunction to love thy enemies, that is, the demand made upon Christians to emulate Christ and, after receiving a blow to one cheek, turn the other cheek without feeling hatred toward the perpetrator. We come to the conclusion that ‘great compassion’ is the supreme value (thus the supreme good), yet it is a paradoxical value because it is not conditioned on its negation. In this sense, Great Compassion can be regarded as an indirect paradoxical concept.

The necessity of overcoming epistemological dualism (including dualism of good and evil) on the way to Enlightenment does not lead to the conclusion that good deeds do not make sense. However, one must not forget that we never encounter abstract good or evil, but concrete acts whose effects are felt as good or evil. Deeds treated as good in certain eras are treated as bad in others (slave holding, for instance – Aristotle considered slaves to be “tools endowed with a soul”<sup>94</sup>). Furthermore, changing circumstances determine the value of an act – killing a man on the street in peacetime is bad, but killing an enemy soldier on the battlefield is considered praiseworthy. Good in the human world is never perfect – often it is merely a lesser evil. The motives behind ethical actions are important, as insincere intentions can lie behind so-called good deeds (for instance, enjoying a feeling of moral superiority over others). We must keep in mind that a longing for absolute good lies behind Zen masters’ denial that ethical self-perfection has any value. They believed that absolute good can flow only from ‘great compassion’, which is closely related to ‘Enlightenment’. Zen practitioners were thus advised not to try to perfect themselves ethically, but to strive for ‘Enlightenment’ at all costs, as this is the source of absolute good. The enlightened do not do good by automatically abiding by specified rules. Instead, they demonstrate the spirit of ‘great compassion’ in a manner suitable for the situation in which

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<sup>93</sup> Murano 1974: 101.

<sup>94</sup> Łanowski 1978: 119.

they find themselves, in accordance with the principle of choosing the ‘appropriate means’. Thanks to this, all beings can be led to emancipation. It is in this context that the following words of Daitō Kokushi should be understood: “When you succeed in making the ‘Enlightened self’ your own, then even if you do not seek perfection, perfection will appear in you by itself”<sup>95</sup>. Dōgen taught: “The best way is to rid yourself of attachment to your ego, so that you can perform good deeds for others without expecting a reward. There is no rejection of ego if there is no desire to help others. But in order to achieve this state, you must first realize that everything is ‘emptiness’”<sup>96</sup>. Musō Soseki (1275-1351) taught that the perfect doing of good is possible only after attaining ‘Enlightenment’, which is why perfecting oneself ethically should not be the aim of religious practice<sup>97</sup>. He emphasized the paradoxical character of compassion, stating that it has no object.<sup>98</sup> Those who have attained ‘Enlightenment’ bestow ‘great compassion’ upon all beings regardless of whether they are good or evil. Overcoming the duality of good and evil, or transcending epistemological duality, enables ‘great compassion’ to emerge, the fulfillment of humanity’s dream of not having to choose between good and evil, but merely to act in accordance with the spirit of love. The essence of ‘great compassion’ can thus be expressed by citing the words of St. Augustine: “Love and do what you want”<sup>99</sup>.

According to Nishida, “love is an imperative flowing from the depths of the human heart”<sup>100</sup>. According to Nishida, few people know what love really is. True love is not instinctive, not physical infatuation, not the desire to possess someone only for oneself, not acceptance understood as a reward for obedience or success. Absolute love means compassion that’s possible precisely because ‘I’ is contradictorily identical with ‘you’. Love, thus understood, is an absolute imperative stemming from the nature of reality<sup>101</sup>. Nishida wrote: “We find compassion at the foundation of our ‘self’, because all opposites become unified in true compassion on the principle of ‘absolutely contradictory self-identity’”<sup>102</sup>. ‘Great compassion’ occurs only as the result of self-negation, when you discover that you are absolutely contradictorily identical with the Absolute. The only path to

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<sup>95</sup> Kraft 1992: 115.

<sup>96</sup> Takahashi 1983: 28.

<sup>97</sup> Cleary 1994: 2.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Tatarkiewicz 1990, vol. 1.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.: 436.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.: 437.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.: 445.

‘great compassion’ is the spiritual breakthrough known in Buddhism as Enlightenment, not ethical self-perfection. Nishida cites the words of the Zen master Shidō Bunan (1603-76) in this matter: “While alive, be like the dead. Whatever you might do in this state of empty self will be good”<sup>103</sup>. Great compassion can be spontaneously expressed only by someone, who experiences the paradoxical state in which “one is all and all is one” - here is a logical link between the epistemological aspect and the ethical aspect of Enlightenment – the experience of paradoxical identity with everything that exists is the reason of “feeling what is felt by others” and therefore the source of Great Compassion.

### **‘Paradoxical Ethics’ Versus Formal Ethics**

In the logic of paradox (the logic of absolutely contradictory self-identity) the truth is both affirmation and negation at the same time and in the same respect, so it is a “one-value” logic – truth is only the paradoxical unity of the opposites. That is why choosing one of the opposites (breaking rules as the opposite of not-breaking rules) does not comply to the logic of paradox. The problem of breaking the rules or not breaking the rules in Zen should be analyzed also in the above context. If one chooses only one of the opposites (chooses to break rules) it means that one’s behaviour does not comply to the logic of paradox.

Zen masters were aware that teaching the necessity of overcoming the duality of good and evil could be understood as moral indifference or, worse, praise of actions heretofore considered evil. This duality cannot be transcended by choosing what is generally considered to be bad. This is why Zen practitioners, who regarded breaking all socially recognized rules to be an expression of ‘enlightenment’, were admonished by their masters. For example, Ikkyū Sōjun rebuked one of his pupils who delighted in desecrating Buddhist religious objects. The pupil slept on an altar among Buddhist statues and used Buddhist sutra scrolls as toilet paper. When asked by Ikkyū why he did these things, he replied he could do so because he was a ‘buddha’. Then Ikkyū asked him, “Since you are a ‘buddha’, why don’t you wipe yourself with clean, white paper instead of paper covered with ink writing?” The pupil was unable to answer. Asked for his verse expressing ‘Enlightenment’, he recited:

*When I sit in zazen meditation  
at the Fourth and Fifth Avenue bridges [of the capital – A. K.],  
all the people walking past,*

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid.: 437.

*are like trees in a dense forest*<sup>104</sup>.

The pupil's words attest to the fact that he had not come to grasp the true meaning of 'emptiness'. According to the famous Buddhist teaching: "form is emptiness and emptiness is form" (*shiki soku ze kū, kū soku ze shiki*). During a disciple's meditation, people ceased to be people for him, because he stopped on one aspect of the truth – he reached only the state in which "form is emptiness", but he did not reach the state in which "emptiness is form", since he had broken away from the 'ordinary perspective' of perceiving reality. Ikkyū thus corrected him, stressing that people walking by someone who has attained 'Enlightenment' are not like trees in a dense forest – "they are as they are"<sup>105</sup>. Identity of form and emptiness is self-contradictory, one should not forget that emptiness is not simply the negation of form.

Constantly rejecting ethical norms recognized by society is not an expression of 'Enlightenment' – it merely shows that the duality of opposite concepts has not been overcome. Spectacular cases of breaking all rules were incidents justified by the given circumstances, not a regular practice of Zen masters.

I feel Dōgen made a highly apt remark concerning this problem: "Some Zen monks make a great mistake by doing evil under the pretext that they don't have to do good or accumulate good karma. I have never heard of any [Buddhist – A. K.] teaching that would bid monks to rejoice in doing evil"<sup>106</sup>. Dōgen encountered this erroneous interpretation in China as well as Japan. He considered this mistake to stem from the treatment of Zen in a manner abstracted from Buddhist teaching as a whole.

Zen ethics relating to the concept of 'great compassion' can be called 'paradoxical ethics'. The notion of 'great compassion' is an intermediate paradoxical concept, because it is not conditioned on its negation. It is not the opposite of the absence of compassion, but total, unconditional acceptance. This is precisely why the culmination of Bodhisattva's practices is the 'state of cloud dharma' (Sk. *dharmameghā bhūmi*; Chin. *fayundi*; Jpn. *hōunji*), in which Bodhisattva does not scorn anything and aspires to emancipate all suffering beings, like a cloud that sprinkles rain upon all thirsty plants, including the basest weeds<sup>107</sup>.

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<sup>104</sup> Stevens 1993: 36.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Takahashi 1983: 23.

<sup>107</sup> A reference to a parable from Murano 1974: 99.

‘Great compassion’ is inextricably linked to ‘Enlightenment’, and it cannot be demonstrated by someone who has not experienced ‘Enlightenment’. Zen practitioners should aim for ‘Enlightenment’ without devoting attention to distinguishing between good and evil, which would inevitably lead to epistemological duality. ‘Paradoxical ethics’ differs from formal ethics in that it does not establish any Ten Commandments or other moral principles – instead, it is the spirit of the law.

Zen masters were aware that teaching about overcoming the dualism of good and evil could be erroneously understood as encouragement to break all moral precepts. This is why they emphasized the necessity of abiding by Buddhist commandments and warned against committing the ‘Ten Evil Deeds’ or the ‘Five Gravest Offenses’<sup>108</sup> in their preaching to laymen. They also advised observance of Confucian ethics, which also lay at the foundation of social relations in feudal Japan.

Dōgen considered loyalty to one’s feudal lord to be consistent with Buddhist doctrine. He also stressed that there is no conflict between filial loyalty and becoming a monk, because the merits accumulated by a son-turned-monk enable emancipation not only of his parents in this incarnation, but also his parents in the six previous incarnations<sup>109</sup>. According to Dōgen, everyone should try “to refrain from evil and do good” (Jpn.. *shiaku shūzen*) while keeping in mind their limitations and the relativity of the concept of good. People should behave in accordance with the teachings of Buddha and do good unto others even when such deeds are truly slight and have no lasting effects<sup>110</sup>. Dōgen stated that any deed whose purpose is to win praise is not a good deed. He taught: “You should do good while concealing yourself from people’s sight, but if you do something bad, admit to it and rectify the evil you have done”. He emphasized that Zen practitioners should concentrate completely on seeking the way to ‘enlightenment’ without being concerned about criticism from others, provided the practitioners are convinced they are right. They should not spend time reproaching others’ faults, because such an attitude entails entangling oneself in the duality of good and evil<sup>111</sup>.

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<sup>108</sup> The ‘Ten Evil Deeds’ (*jūaku*) are: ‘killing’ (*sesshō*), ‘stealing’ (*chūtō*), ‘adultery’ (*jain*), ‘lying’ (*mōgo*), ‘harsh words’ (*akku*), ‘uttering words which cause enmity between two or more people’ (*ryōzetzu*), ‘engaging in idle talk’ (*kigo*), ‘greed’ (*ton’yoku*), ‘anger’ (*shinni*), ‘wrong views’ (*jaken*). The ‘Five Gravest Offenses’ (*gogyaku*) are: ‘matricide’ (*setsumo*), ‘patricide’ (*setsupu*), ‘killing an arhat’ (*setsuvarakan*), ‘wounding the body of Buddha’ (*shutsubusshinketsu*), ‘causing disunity in the Buddhist order’ (*hawagōsō*).

<sup>109</sup> Dumoulin 1979: 97.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.: 98.

Hakuin Ekaku warned feudal rulers that excessive oppression of their subjects would lead to rebellion, which could result in the extinction of their clan<sup>112</sup>. Some of his advice must have shocked those to whom it was addressed. For instance, he wrote a letter to Lord Nabeshima of Okayama recommending that the ruler “wash the hooves of his vassals’ horses whilst smiling”<sup>113</sup>. Some Zen masters referred to the concept of punishment in successive incarnations for bad deeds. For example, Ikkyū Sōjun said that killing causes you to be reborn in hell; lust, in the world of hungry ghosts (Jpn.. *gaki*); stupidity, in the world of animals (Jpn.. *chikushō*); anger, in the world of fighting demons (Jpn.. *ashura*) – but abiding by Buddhist moral precepts enables you to be reborn in the world of people (Jpn.. *ningen*)<sup>114</sup>.

The introduction of detailed monastic rules was meant to show that the freedom of ‘Enlightenment’ is not based on the permanent rejection of all principles and duties. In India, monks were itinerant, collecting alms and leading an ascetic life. In China, under the influence of local customs, monks also had to work the fields in order to satisfy their daily needs, though they did not give up the practice of collecting alms. The Fourth Patriarch, Daoxin (Jpn Dōshin, 560-651), introduced rules regulating the lives of his purported 500 pupils. The first rules regulating a monastic community are believed to have been established by Baizhang Huaihai, though the text of these rules has not survived. The oldest entirely extant set of rules regulating Zen monastic life dates back to 1113, and was brought to Japan before the end of that century<sup>115</sup>. Many Japanese Zen masters used Chinese instructions as models in formulating their own monastic regulations. A third of Dōgen’s *Treasury of the Eye of the True Dharma* is just such a collection of detailed instructions concerning, among other things, the way monks should clean their teeth<sup>116</sup>. The most important rules concerned the prohibition of killing, stealing, lying, sexual relations and drinking alcohol. Numerous rules in contemporary Zen monasteries in Japan prescribe how monks should behave not only during meditation, but also while eating or when outside the monastery<sup>117</sup>. Although pupils had to break all the rules occasionally in order to express their ‘Enlightenment’, over time it became a tradition in the Japanese Rinzai school to limit such eccentric behaviour solely to private meetings

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<sup>112</sup> Yampolsky 1971: 194.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*: 220.

<sup>114</sup> Stevens 1993: 45.

<sup>115</sup> Kraft 1992: 103.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>117</sup> Nishimura 1973.

with the master. On these occasions, the pupil could express the freedom stemming from ‘Enlightenment’ in the most shocking ways.

The complete absence of discipline in monastic life was sharply criticized, as is evident in Eisai’s comments on the Daruma school. Eisai deplored the fact that adherents of this Japanese Zen school “eat when they are hungry and rest when they are tired”<sup>118</sup>. The school’s founder, Nōnin, taught: “There are no precepts that you should be guided by, there is no religious practice. No lusts exist initially, everyone is enlightened from the beginning. That’s why we do not practice and do not observe rules. We eat when we are hungry, we rest when we are tired. Why recite invocations to Buddha, why make offerings, why refrain from eating fish and meat, why fast?”<sup>119</sup> Eisai, a staunch supporter of monastic discipline, believed the Daruma approach led to corruption. Unfortunately, we know too little about the Daruma school. Its downfall and absorption by the Sōtō school was primarily the result of Nōnin’s failure to obtain direct confirmation of his ‘Enlightenment’ from a Chinese Zen master<sup>120</sup>.

Ignoring all rules is incorrect from the standpoint of the ‘logic of paradox’, because it betrays an attachment to breaking rules as the antithesis of following them, in which case conceptual duality is not transcended. Eisai’s critical remarks were justified, however, only if Nōnin and his pupils did in fact believe that the way to ‘Enlightenment’ was breaking all ethical precepts.

Strict monastic discipline was also necessary to deal with down-to-earth problems that priors faced. The ban on women (including nuns) staying overnight in male monasteries was no doubt meant to insulate Zen pupils from dangerous temptations. Monastic discipline, for example, in 14<sup>th</sup>-century Daitokuji must have been in a sorry state, since Daitō Kokushi was forced to implement the following punishments: novices who failed to memorize the sutras used during the three daily ceremonies were to be deprived of their vestments and bowl (attributes of a monk), then expelled from the monastery; other transgressions were to be punished by whipping (five lashes) or deprivation of meals for an entire day; monks holding prominent positions who behaved improperly were to lose the prior’s favor forever<sup>121</sup>.

We must keep in mind that monks in monasteries where discipline was not properly enforced often led idle lives, neglecting their spiritual

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<sup>118</sup> Dumoulin 1990: 9.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Kraft 1963: 143.

<sup>121</sup> Kraft 1992: 122.

development. Moreover, the majority of novices were young boys turned over to monasteries by their families despite not showing any particular religious predilections. Buddhist monasteries were important educational centers before the rise of a well-developed neo-Confucian school system. Masters often reproached monks for their love of luxury. “Do not become attached to worldly things; devote yourselves entirely to searching for the ‘Way’. Buddha taught: ‘Have for property only vestments and a bowl, and if you receive food from someone as alms, do not consume it all and share it with the needy.’ If keeping food for later is not allowed, it’s all the more blameworthy to have a fondness for worldly goods”<sup>122</sup>. Daitō Kokushi pointed out however, that while the rules he advised were appropriate for monastic life, they “should not be treated as the most important, are not the essence of Buddhist practice, as they do not constitute the path to ‘Enlightenment’”<sup>123</sup>. Bankei Yōtaku (1622-1693), too, expelled pupils from the monastery for various transgressions, though he took back those who repented. He told higher-ranking monks to set an example for novices through their behaviour and applied the penalty of expulsion from the community, though only as a last resort<sup>124</sup>.

Zen masters stressed that the pressure of external restrictions in monastic life should have no effect on generating internal freedom, which should be manifested in every situation. This is the sense behind the following verses: “Carrying buckets of water, toting kindling – how unfathomable, how amazing”<sup>125</sup>.

It is thus clear that the ethics of ‘great compassion’, which goes beyond good and evil, does not mean rejection of all ethical principles recognized by society. Only those who attain ‘enlightenment’ can break all rules in the name of ‘great compassion’, which can be expressed in any form depending on the situation.

The Buddhist concept of ‘great compassion’ is often interpreted as passive identification with the downtrodden, which does nothing in a practical sense to ‘improve the world’. This view is evident, for instance, in commentary by Paul Tillich on the subject of Buddhist ethics<sup>126</sup>. ‘Great compassion’ is clearly not linked to any specific commandments or concrete program to better the world. It can be expressed in any form depending on the situation, it does not necessitate any particular reforms of the social system. As the ‘spirit of the law’, it transcends specific ethical

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<sup>122</sup> Dumoulin 1979: 98.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Haske 1984: 154.

<sup>125</sup> Shibayama 1980: 267.

<sup>126</sup> Abe 1985: 183.

rules precisely because they are not immutable. Suzuki Daisetz Suzuki describes the state of the enlightened as holy and distinguishes it from a moral outlook. “A moral person will never be holy so long as he remains within the sphere of morality, which is a relative sphere. Morality is never innocent, spontaneous, unconscious of itself”<sup>127</sup>.

Nietzsche’s words – that what is done out of love always happens beyond good and evil<sup>128</sup> – acquires new meaning from the standpoint of the ‘logic of paradox’. Nietzsche himself may well have sensed this meaning when he wrote: “What else is love but understanding and rejoicing in the fact that another person lives, acts, and experiences otherwise than we do? In order to bridge these opposites with joy, love must not eliminate or deny them”<sup>129</sup>.

In this article, Nishida’s logic of paradox (logic of absolutely contradictory self-identity) has been traced in Zen masters’s teaching on ethics. I have tried to prove that only by taking into consideration the paradoxological structure of Zen discourse on ethics, can one explain the logical connection between the epistemological aspect of Enlightenment and the ethical aspect of Enlightenment. Such a paradoxological structure can also be seen in Zen masters’s admonitions which can be summarized as follows: Do not choose good or evil but at the same time do not choose evil, although the way to such a goal is not a moral discipline.

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<sup>127</sup> Suzuki 1952: 606-607.

<sup>128</sup> Nietzsche 1973: 65.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*: 110.

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