Article

Wittgenstein's Mysticism(s)

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Abstract: I will argue that the examination regarding the topic of mysticism should play a much bigger role when it comes to the ensemble of Wittgenstein's writings. In this sense, while drawing upon previous analyses, I will make the case that the *Tractarian* mystical spirit still animates other works by the author such as his *Lectures on Ethics* and the *Philosophical Investigations*. Then, I will propose that the unity of this mysticism lies in the *sui generis* discovery (or shock) that the world exists; however, as his work progresses, different strategies will be employed to convey this type of message—and they shall vary from the attempt of putting such a perspective into words until the full annihilation of the mere possibility in this regard. Hence, there would be one fundamental underlying type of mysticism in Wittgenstein's proposals, but the unveiling of such a mystical insight will demand different forms of exposition and understanding.

Keywords: Mysticism; Wittgenstein; *Tractatus*; *Lecture on Ethics*; *Philosophical Investigations*

1. Introduction: Philosophical Mysticism and Wittgenstein's Role

Jan van Ruysbroeck, Meister Eckhart, Teresa of Avila, Edith Stein... these are all names who could be easily tied to the tradition of philosophical mysticism. But as Steven T. Katz (1978) once suggested, it is hard to define exactly what a "mystic" is as several meanings and definitions might be applied to the same word. Moreover, many times, religious beliefs from which the denominations "mystic", "mystical", or "mysticism" arise are neither similar nor presuppose a coincident set of practices, and yet the term "mystic" may be equally applied to adepts of a different set of creeds. Just as an example, both Nagarjuna and John of the Cross could be considered mystics in spite of their cultural differences and eventual semantic distinctions regarding the employment of supposedly all-encompassing definitions for terms such as God, Void, union, nothingness, and darkness, which are utilized by them along the pages of their respective works. By that, I want to advance the notion that an exact definition for this "mystical" terminology is not an easy task to pursue. Thus, one solution at this point would be to consider the term "mystic" as an umbrella for those who claim the possibility of the existence of a different form of presence, usually ineffable, albeit rigorously imbued with a sense of reality and meaning, which brings about in those who have experienced it, the belief that they have been in touch with a superior dimension or another irreducible form of reality (Lima 2023). In religious discourses, this perception often assumes the connotation of a sub specie aeternitatis form of divine contemplation or union, whereas, in philosophy, this insight is considered as a possibility for expression (or even existence) beyond the limits determined by logical rationality and discourse.

If this definition is a coherent one, and I think it is, then it is not absurd to claim that we could make the case for Wittgenstein being a "mystic" both personally and intellectually. His biography, in this regard, is a "case closed"; there are many reports of those who were well acquainted with him attesting to his eccentric (even odd) behavior, which is not so different from what is exhibited by devout religious people who may cause many perplexities along their search for isolation and communion with their God. There is

no doubt either about his deep appreciation for religion and religious views despite his continual refusal to establish any doctrines or analyses for them. In sum, if we were to look at Wittgenstein's life while making the hypothetical exercise of imagining that he was simply an ordinary individual—as if he had not written the *Tractatus* (Wittgenstein 1993; henceforth, *TLP*) or the *Philosophical Investigations* (Wittgenstein 2009); solely basing our opinions on his personal diaries in addition to his story on the trenches while serving the Austro-Hungarian Empire—that would be enough to qualify him as a "mystic"; if not, he would at least pass as an extremely "uncanny" religious individual. His comments on the likes of Tolstoy and his subsequent religious conversion, his attempt at becoming a monk, his retreat to the Austrian mountains, and the bequeathal of his earthly possessions to his siblings, in addition to many other passages of his life, make this point abundantly clear.

However, when it comes to his writings, this same "mystical" appraisal has not been utilized to examine his work. As a matter of fact, in this regard, the situation is even more critical because in many cases his biography starts to account for his intellectual views—and that is a mistake.[1] If we are to extract the mystical sense out of his works, then such a task is to be performed hermeneutically; i.e., this goal must be pursued through the application of textual elements and not simply through the episodes surrounding his life. In this sense, I think this is the first foray of its kind: to explain how mysticism could bind different passages of Wittgenstein's phases—spanning from the *Tractatus* all the way to the *Philosophical Investigations* (henceforth, *PI*)—without specifically appealing to whole parts of his personal or private life. I want to demonstrate that the same sentiments behind the "mystical" statements found in the *TLP*—such as the following ones:

> *The sense of the world must lie outside the world.* (*TLP* 6.41)

> *So too at death the world does not alter, but comes to an end.* (*TLP* 6.431)

> *Death is not an event in life: we do not live to experience death. If we take eternity to mean not infinite temporal duration but timelessness, then eternal life belongs to those who live in the present. Our life has no end in just the way in which our visual field has no limits.* (*TLP* 6.4311)

> *How things are in the world is a matter of complete indifference for what is Higher. God does not reveal himself in the world.* (*TLP* 6.432)

And more importantly yet:

> *It is not how things are in the world that is mystical, but that it exists.* (*TLP* 6.44)

> *To view the world sub specie aeterni is to view it as a whole—a limited whole. Feeling the world as a limited whole—it is this that is mystical.* (*TLP* 6.45)

> *There are, indeed, things that cannot be put into words. They make themselves manifest. They are what is mystical.* (*TLP* 6.522)

> *What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence.* (*TLP* 7)

—are maintained throughout Wittgenstein's works. To say that Wittgenstein produces a philosophy of religion would be a far cry from what one can indeed extract from his texts, but it is undeniable that religious mystical feelings are indeed an integral part of his production. The problem, however, is how to account for his "second phase" based on this regard. As we know, in order to contrast the *TLP* to the *PI*, a separation between "the first" and "the second" Wittgenstein has been often suggested. The mystical feeling is easy to be abstracted/obtained out of the "first Wittgenstein": both in his *Tractatus* and in his *Notebooks* (where the sketches for some of the aphorisms employed throughout the *TLP* have initially appeared), he alludes directly to such a mystical terminology. But how does one obtain that mystical outcome while looking solely at the *PI*? This is indeed a very hard demand, but I want to demonstrate that in other attempts, this task has been performed before. Now it is a matter of attaching the first and second periods together while exploring this new possibility of interpretation.

Moreover, I would like to draw attention to the fact that if I am right, the benefits of my reading would be quite intriguing. First, beyond the traditions of logicism, ordinary language philosophy, or analytic philosophy as a whole, we would also be able to understand Wittgenstein as a very influential figure for philosophical mysticism in the 20th century; maybe its most successful proponent in contemporary philosophy. This mysticism, however, would assume a different form when compared to that of his (mystic) peers; this time, in his second phase, an adequate understanding would be enough to comprehend that the mere evocation of the mystical leads to a complete miscomprehension of language, meaning, logic, and also of the "heavenly things"; so much so that it is almost as if the mere summoning of such an idea resulted in its complete annihilation. As we shall observe, therefore, that is the reason why he does not talk at all about such an aspect in his *PI*. As a matter of fact, it is a recurrent topic of discussion among scholars that mystics attempt to say what they cannot, and in spite of issuing many caveats when it comes to the discourse on those ineffable things, they talk about them, nonetheless. From this angle, Wittgenstein is an extremely consequential thinker: he does not talk about mysticism and he dissuades us from even going there; he "burns the bridge" before we can even conceive of crossing it. As it will be shown, based on the writings of J. V. Cuter (2008), solely by approaching this topic, we are led to a conflicting form of *nonsense* with the consequence of exposing ourselves to criticism while paradoxically admitting that we are not providing meaning to our language anymore. In this regard, the destruction of any form of rationality that does not participate in public language games will be complete; the logic of our language does not allow us to go outside this "public world" of ours.

Another curious result is that we could suggest that the entire mobilization of logical innovations postulated by Wittgenstein is brought forward with the finality to hover above that which no language can say, and no logic could capture. Those innovations, however, are interesting per se. Their elaborations are not subsumed under other mystical aspects. As Anscombe (1989, p. 11) points out, Wittgenstein's abandonment of the *TLP* does not negate solid novelties advanced by his first book. As she says, much of it is still genuine: "The theory of truth functions and the use of truth tables to expound it; the conception of some things by showing, though you cannot state them; that "A thinks that p" does not state the existence of a certain relation between a person, A, and a proposition p, though its form might make you think so; that identity is not properly speaking a relation, which, as it happens, everything has to itself. One can find many examples of very useful thoughts in the *Tractatus*". The usefulness of his thoughts could also be obviously considered by taking into account the most important contributions of his second phase: concepts such as *family resemblance*, *language games*, and *forms of life* are quite relevant and necessary for understanding philosophy to this day. Nevertheless, those concepts might also be employed to appeal to something greater that could have never fitted the pages of Wittgenstein's books: a mystical finality, which he so much ambitioned and paradoxically disavowed throughout his career; something, which, in my view, is closely tied to the ethical dimension of his writings. Therefore, in what follows, I will explore Wittgenstein's works basing myself on the existence of such a mystical element while considering that it could play the role of that continuous aspect that is so much required by Wittgensteinian scholars and specialists alike when it comes to the connection of his two most important publications. I hope that my account is of interest both for enthusiasts and academics of philosophical mysticism and for Wittgensteinian specialists as well.

2. Logical Mysticism?

Hence, *das war das Mystische* (or something like that). Although Wittgenstein does not use these exact words, his *Tractatus* nonetheless suggests that there are things that are better appreciated in silence. How troubling this silence seems to be has been a matter of endless controversies. To this day, Wittgenstein's reasons for this *grand finale* have been widely debated and, not infrequently, his *sui generis* mystical closure generates a fair amount of criticism in academia. Below one finds Carruthers' evaluation of this final part:

Nevertheless, since it is, in my view, clearly unnecessary to take any particular stance on the TLP doctrine of the Ethical in order to interpret and assess the semantic and metaphysical doctrines which make up the body of the work, and since my own assessment of the former is less than flattering, I have thought it best to follow Mother Rabbit's excellent advice: 'If you can't say something nice, don't say nothing at all.' (Carruthers 1990, p. xii)

In the end, the prevailing consensus in this regard becomes a curious one: although the author himself postulates that his book had an ethical aim, its mysticism becomes a matter of logic and most certainly not of ethics or religiosity with a finality on its own.[2] This evaluation, however, creates a paradox that places Wittgenstein at odds with his own views. He then becomes either an eccentric or a very weird fellow who clearly missed the control of his own writings:

In a famous letter to von Ficker [Wittgenstein] says, referring to the Tractatus, "the book's point is an ethical one". However, his remark has been ignored or simply downplayed in the intellectual climate that surrounded the work. Even as recent and as well known an interpreter as P. M. S. Hacker merely dismisses the comment, saying, "Wittgenstein's letter to von Ficker is either self-deluding, or disingenuous" . . . But it does show just how strong the tide is, or was, in favor of the "purely logical" view of the Tractatus. (Hodges 1990, p. 7)

Thus, as Hodges puts it, in most cases, the *Tractatus* is understood as a book on the issue of logic—its mysticism, therefore, must be necessarily tied to such an analysis. But, in this case, how should we qualify Wittgenstein's mysticism after all? How does one extract an ethical purpose from a book on logic? How does one account for the author's opinion while, at the same time, dealing with a vast array of logical discussions, innovations, and techniques? In sum, the task of interpreting Wittgenstein is not an easy one, for one must conciliate the author's incursion in the field of logic with the unexpected mystical outburst that suddenly appears with no previous warning at the end of his book. Surprisingly, what seemed to be an austere logical treatise at first turns into a sort of *apologetic* in which the author gives the impression to be facing something like "God", the "Infinite", or the "One without name". It is this curious final excerpt that has impelled scholars and specialists alike to search for answers. In sum, the history of this interpretive endeavor to make sense of the *TLP* has mobilized many scholars while generating much stir and debate. In this regard, it is not my wish to weigh in on the discussion.[3] For now, it suffices to say that there are two readings that have galvanized most of the general attention. The first one is the traditionalist view, which is tied to earlier readers of the *TLP*, many of them students of Wittgenstein himself—such as Malcolm, von Wright, Anscombe, etc. (It is also important to mention scholars who have contributed to consolidating Wittgenstein's significant position in the history of philosophy, such as G. P. Baker and, most notably, P. M. S. Hacker.) On the other side, we find those who have entitled themselves as the resolute readers, who usually come from an American-Anglophone background (although not necessarily restricted to it), with Cora Diamond, James Conant, and Michael Kremer being among their strongest exponents. In sum, depending on how the book is read, *das Mystische* is indeed the result of an inquiry that should not have taken place (that is self-defeating) or a form of illusion which is incurred when normative (logical) laws are disregarded. But, for both "parties", the common thread in understanding Wittgenstein is his preoccupation with logic—on how one makes sense with words, the subsequent establishment of meaning, and his abandonment of logical dogmatism.

Nevertheless, both interpretive communities would agree that what Wittgenstein attempts to do is to explain how language supposedly represents the world; better yet, he tries to describe what the world must be like in order to be thoroughly covered and represented by language. This time, this description will be traced from the inside, based on the limits of logic itself (*TLP* Preface). And what we shall learn through this peculiar form of inquiry is that language emulates the logical form of an ultimate reality, which is composed of simple objects that cannot be further analyzed (*TLP* 2.02–2.02331). Such

objects are the "substance" of the world, and their concatenation will account for the order of things in reality (*TLP* 2.01–2.0141). Language may be able to depict the world because it shares with reality a common logical feature; but what exactly such a trait looks like, we shall never know, for it can only show itself and not be said (*TLP* 2.171). Wittgenstein's quest, thus, as he himself explicitly acknowledges, results to be a contradictory one—for it seems that he does try to depict language and the world from a transcendent perspective (Hodges 1990); it is almost as if by clashing against the limits of language, he then becomes able to delineate through this very same language all sorts of limits. Whether he breaks such boundaries or not, it is a matter of strong discussion. Traditionalist readers will suggest that although he is unable to put such a perspective in words, he still considers that he is able "to whistle" something about it (Hacker 2000). More recent readers, on the other side, refute such a notion. For resolutes, what the author attempts to do is lure the reader to such an inadequate interpretation—and once she is there, hopefully, she will come to her senses that such an enterprise is a metaphysical endeavor which shall necessarily result in the privation of meaning; at this point, there would be a pedagogical, almost therapeutic activity: "If you follow me, I'll bring you to the doors of your philosophical despair; learn from me".

It is based on this perspective that the *Mystical* does not seem to create any stir. On the one hand, what is mystical is this uncanny perspective that the end of the book postulates: albeit something impossible, the author somehow believes he manages to convey the perspective of someone who is not confined to the limits of logic. His *coup de maître* in this regard was to devise a method which, in his mind, was able to do exactly what he claimed at first to be impossible (and that is also the reason why his words do not make any sense, for somehow, he has to break the rules of logic). Thus, mysticism here is the experience of stepping outside logical bounds:

> [There are things that] cannot be said or indeed thought (for thought too 'is a kind of language')—a conception to which any doctrine of the ineffability of the mystical insight into the essence of the world or the transcendence of all that is higher must cleave. But they can be apprehended, inter alia by a grasp of the forms of what can be expressed. He did indeed think that when one has thrown away the letter, one is left with a correct logical point of view... (Hacker 2000, pp. 381–82)

On the other side, however, mysticism becomes the epitome of nonsense; such an inadequate perspective only comes to the fore when the determinations regarding the elaboration of meaning are disrespected, and the normativity of logic is ignored. There is no "*out*-side"; nothing lies beyond language. The mystical here is a trick, but still a logical one—it only emerges when one erroneously believes that one is able to step outside language:

> This gives us a rough outline of Diamond's and Conant's account of the method of the *Tractatus*: the book presents us with metaphysical sentences which lead us to participate in an imaginative activity of articulating the structure of the illusion of an external standpoint on language—an imaginative activity through which we can come to recognize that illusion as an illusion. [The book] is designed to lead its reader to the recognition that certain words she is inclined to utter in philosophy fail to express anything she wants to say—to teach her "to pass from a piece of disguised nonsense to something that is patent nonsense". (Crary 2000, p. 13)

But, in sum, as different as they might be, both perspectives end up being the different sides of the same coin: logic. In this case, Wittgenstein's own assessment of his work would be hyperbole at most.

So, how can one account for Wittgenstein's claim that his book has an ethical finality of its own? How can one comprehend the ethical mysticism that bursts forth at the end of the *TLP*? One possibility at this point would be to claim biographical issues associated with his personal form of mysticism: yes, there are letters in which Russell asserts that Wittgenstein became a mystic and a staunch reader of Silesius; yes, trenches and bayonets may have

influenced the atmosphere under which his book was written—several gloomy passages of his private diaries allude to this possibility; yes, there are conversations with Maurice Drury or Paul Engelmann (his friends) in which religious preferences hover above the thin air of philosophical ideas, etc. In sum, we find in Wittgenstein's personal life plenty of material pointing in this direction and, indeed, one's private life can never be fully dissociated from one's actions in this world. But if we deeply inquire about his mysticism solely by taking into consideration his writings and his philosophical arguments, what can we extract out of his texts? Luckily, that was more or less presented in another article in which a full analysis concerning the *TLP* connection to mysticism has been offered.[4] Consequently, for now I will recover more general parts associated with those ideas and briefly introduce them here because my goal is actually to expand and build upon those views in this new examination. First, therefore, let me start by addressing the characteristics associated with the genre of philosophical mysticism. Then, I will tie such aspects to more general considerations on the *Tractatus*.

3. Mystical Language

In philosophical mysticism, one attempts to "translate" into a coherent textual report what was experienced firsthand. Those who have undergone such an experience frequently claim that they have either contemplated or experienced the ultimate genuine form of reality or that they have witnessed the effective presence of the Divine. From this occurrence results a mysterious, insightful, and *sui generis* type of intuition—something extremely powerful, experiential, and yet distinguished from common sense experience. At this point, another characteristic associated with this episode becomes recurrent: the negativity of speech. On the one hand, nothing that the individual can claim will do justice to the phenomenon that she has just observed; on the other hand, however, she will keep speaking even if her speech could have been refrained beforehand. Moreover, her metaphorical resource will be here of an "apophatic nature": what the description amounts to say is indescribable and inconceivable. If one understands that for every form of language a "metric" comes along with it—i.e., a form of objective or qualitative pattern allowing for different sorts of descriptions—then, one will realize that in the case of mysticism, nothing will be suitable for such an expressive necessity. Language will become solely symbolic as it will be inadequately employed in a realm where it can no longer operate; simply put, when it comes to the plunge into the Divine, no human metric will do the trick. Thus, oxymorons and superlatives will abound, and language will be hypertrophied to reach the Absolute, but the Absolute is too much for our linguistic endeavors. The mystic aims to express the "Whole", but language is always partial. It must discriminate between items; it can never fully embrace the "One" as a whole. In this regard, what we are able to observe in such texts is that the impossibility of this endeavor plunges language into repeated pursuits. But given that this type of struggle is in vain, for its goal is never achieved, what language actually reveals are its continual efforts. Somehow, the sense of "limit" is fully expressed, for what language demonstrates at this point are its expressive limits.

This contemplation of the "Whole" also demands a singular linguistic approach. Another trait of this textual genre is that this "textual translation" of such a peculiar experience is also often recognizable for its unusual "location"—the mystic often speaks from the transcendent perspective of God Himself. But given that language now is not "language" anymore (at least not as we know and employ it), everything results in a logical paradox. On the one side, the mystic is talking about something that she experienced from a transcendent perspective (from the "Whole"); on the other, she is simply unable to describe this occurrence with any other form of accuracy whatsoever. This curious feature has also been thoroughly described in other proposals:

> *In those writings, the effort to affirm transcendence leads to a continuing series of retractions, a propositionally unstable and dynamic discourse in which no single statement can rest on its own as true or false, or even as meaningful. In such discourse, a rigorous*

> *adherence to the initial logical impasse of ineffability exerts a force that transforms normal logical and semantic structures.*
>
> *Performative intensity is a function of the frequency and seriousness with which the language turns back upon its own propositions. At the low end of the scale would be an assertion of ineffability, followed by a full chapter or treatise that freely employs names and predications of the transcendent, and then at the end reminds the reader that the transcendent is beyond all names and predications. At the high end of the scale of performative intensity are passages... in which the mystical discourse turns back relentlessly upon its own propositions and generates distinctive paradoxes that include within themselves a large number of radical transformations, particularly in the area of temporal and spatial relationships. The position taken here is that the paradoxes, aporias, and coincidences of opposites within apophatic discourse are not merely apparent contradictions. Real contradictions occur when language engages the ineffable transcendent, but these contradictions are not illogical. For the apophatic writer, the logical rule of non-contradiction functions for object entities. When the subject of discourse is a non-object and no-thing, it is not irrational that such a logic be superseded... Apophatic texts have suffered in a particularly acute manner from the urge to paraphrase the meaning in non-apophatic language or to fill in the open referent—to say what the text really meant to say, but didn't.* (Sells 1994, p. 4)

Curiously, what is often disregarded or overlooked in more mainstream analyses becomes easily distinguishable to those familiar with the assumptions of mysticism and its language:

> *Wittgenstein's statement in the Tractatus that unsayable things do exist, followed by the statement that this previous statement "must be thrown away" is a classically apophatic move, but one that comes as a kind of postscript, rather than being inscribed within the Tractatus as a whole.* (Sells 1994, p. 220)

Therefore, under such premises, what was Wittgenstein attempting to do? As I see it, the originality of the *Tractarian* inquiry lies in the use of the logical apparatus in order to protect a transcendent reality—which is inscrutable to human rationality and only a mystical experience can reveal—against profanation and debasement. It is almost as if Wittgenstein was providing a description of the logical scaffolding of the world so that he could delimit the things that could be said and separate them from a more elevated sentimental discovery. There is no denying that he presents a new array of technicalities and that he also explores several other logical topics to mobilize and present his ideas. Those inquiries are original and interesting per se. But if they are employed and pursued throughout the whole text that has among other things another strong and vivid motivation: to circumscribe mundane affairs in order to separate them from higher considerations; this is a typical move that is also present in other works of this same tradition. Despite my differences with Nieli's methodology, I think his analysis at this point is "spot-on":

> *What language shares with reality it depicts that show or manifests itself but cannot be said, is just its in-the-world structure. This structure cannot be described by language because it is a property possessed only by virtue of, and in contrast to, the out-of-the-world mystic flight—the flight (i.e., consciousness disattention, intensification, and absorption) into a sacred realm. It is this contrast.*
>
> *This in-the-world structure is then identified by Wittgenstein with "logical form" and "mathematical-logical multiplicity" because logic and mathematical multiplicity represent the outer scaffolding or framework of the world which, in ekstasis, is broken out of. The both/and, either/or framework of consciousness in its attention to a multiplicitous world is transcended in the disattending flight of the mystical experience. In this "flight", logic represents the "/" in the in/out travelogue.* (Nieli 1987, pp. 115–16)

As a matter of fact, we are dealing here with a confluence of two mysticisms—one of an "ethical/religious" type and another of a "logical" inclination. The *Tractarian* logic is also mystical in itself based on its opposition between the *showing* and *saying* distinction.

This distinction is, after all, based on an "unsayable" element, which acquires the status of a type of revelation. Moreover, the structure of such a logic is also ineffable—it is impossible to offer reasons for its internal articulations; we know how things are but not the reasons for it to display such an arrangement. Simply put, there are no viable arguments to defend the way things are; what Wittgenstein does is exhibit a scenario in which the rules for the expression of meaning and sense could not be set in any other way. There seems to be, however, a certain "rationality" behind it—something that, even without explanation, is still expressed behind the rules of logic.

In this type of interpretation, another point worth mentioning is that aphorism *6.54*, the most polemical one, can be assimilated in its full literal meaning. There is no need to advance explanatory hypotheses accounting for the adequate interpretive background of the book; we do not have to postulate a division between "pedagogical aphorisms" and the correct framework for interpreting the theory:[5]

> *The ascent over the ladder alludes to the mystical ascent; the world that one sees from the height of his ascent; the world seen from outside the world (ekstasis)... The final statement was perhaps intended as the most serious of all, for in its counsel to silence we can see the reverence of a pious man before the divine Mysterium.* (Nieli 1987, p. 118)

I see some benefits in this type of reading. The ladder here could be thrown away; in fact, the use of the ladder metaphor is almost commonplace when it comes to mystical inquiries. Furthermore, the problem of the *Tractarian* subject can also be accommodated at this point: this subject who is transcendental (or not), who disappears (or not), in the structure of the work can also be explained based on the pillars of mysticism in philosophy—the whole discussion regarding the "I" is one of the most distinguishable traits of philosophical mysticism. Another benefit is that the entire discussion regarding the logical points of the book does not affect at all the mystical spirit of this work—although what "animates" such logic, its vivacity, is in my view a mystical consideration in this sort of interpretation. In addition to that, this proposal also reverberates in Wittgenstein's personal life and private circumstances (although the expedient of evoking things external to the book is not necessary to uphold a mystical interpretation). Such a reading also explains the reasons for Wittgenstein's admonishment that his book had an ethical finality: the discovery of what is most sacred in life requires an adequate personal counterpart regarding the contemplation of such a revelation. In the face of the Sacred, the employment of language and reason will necessarily collapse; in the face of the Sacred, respect for the meaning of life must be applied in one's own existence.

4. Mysticism Revisited?

I want, however, to expand upon those previous views. And I would like to start with a curious part of one of Wittgenstein's subsequent works: his *Lecture on Ethics*. For one thing, it is clear that although Wittgenstein's (logical) inquiries were certainly in constant change during his intermediary period, his *Lecture on Ethics* seems almost a return to previous ways of thinking especially considering the more "spiritual passages" of the *TLP*. And what happens on the *LE*? Those well-acquainted with the text will remember that Wittgenstein makes the case for the logical implausibility of ethical or religious expressions, which, paradoxically, are nonsensical sentences. But far from admonishing the speaker, what Wittgenstein exalts is the idiosyncratic nature of such expressions. Their lack of meaning is what makes them powerful; their "sense" is actually due to their "nonsensicality":

> *That is to say: I see now that these nonsensical expressions were not nonsensical because I had not yet found the correct expressions, but that their nonsensicality was their very essence. For all I wanted to do with them was just to go beyond the world and that is to say beyond significant language. My whole tendency and I believe the tendency of all men who ever tried to write or talk Ethics or Religion was to run against the boundaries of language. This running against the walls of our cage is perfectly, absolutely hopeless. Ethics so far as it springs from the desire to say something about the ultimate meaning of life, the absolute good, the absolute valuable, can be no science. What it says does not add*

> *to our knowledge in any sense. But it is a document of a tendency in the human mind*
> *which I personally cannot help respecting deeply and I would not for my life ridicule it.*
> (*LE*, Wittgenstein 1965, pp. 11–12)

Thus, in sum, even if Wittgenstein's logical inquiries were changing, the point of the *LE* seems to be similar to the final aphorisms of the *TLP* in several ways: briefly put, one maintains the impression that there are things which are better understood in silence. This aspect at least would have served to show that although Wittgenstein was highly critical of his initial logical endeavors, coming even to repudiate some of his first proposals (one example here would be the logical independency of simple propositions), some parts of a more ethical tendency were preserved sounding very much like those first stipulations. Anscombe (1989, p. 8), for instance, makes it clear that in both texts the same dilemma is postulated: certain actions in the world apparently demand the necessary existence of absolute values, although nothing in the world is found to account for such a "requirement". In sum, as she puts it, life would set us a task, but "our way of executing our task cannot be given among the facts of which the world is made". Our search for adequate parameters in terms of the structuring of our actions is one of the many "burdens" of our lives; even if no definitive logical bipolar (true or false) answer can be provided, there would be nothing ludicrous in relation to this search for ethical "definitions".

In this text (*LE*), Wittgenstein states that if one were able to write a book regarding all facts of the world—those which have occurred in reality and those which we have imagined in our heads—one would come up with a complete and exact description of the world at the level of pure facts. But facts are facts—a lady being robbed and a man helping others would be on an equal footing; both cases would have been simple occurrences taking place within the world. From a purely rationalist view, a robbery and an act of volunteering are both components of the world:

> *But all the facts described would, as it were, stand on the same level and in the same way*
> *all propositions stand on the same level. There are no propositions which, in any absolute*
> *sense, are sublime, important, or trivial.* (LE, Wittgenstein 1965, p. 6)

However, it is obvious that they cannot be on the same level in terms of the appreciation of those very same facts; it is obvious that the occurrence of someone helping another person is a positive thing, whereas someone stealing from others is a negative outcome. By this, Wittgenstein means that there must be an intrinsic valuation connected to these facts. So where do they come from? What is the source of such qualifications?

Wittgenstein then differentiates between two sorts of ethical qualifications, a "pragmatic" and an "absolute" one. In the first case, ethical evaluations are ministered based on determined parameters. The game of tennis, evoked by Wittgenstein himself, works here as a good example. Let us say that I want to determine who is a *good* tennis player and who is not. Well, in order to do just that, I have to analyze who understands adequately the rules of the game in addition to performing better during the occurrence of the matches. If Djokovic scores several points, then he is a *good* player. For his actions have a certain aim and they are well employed to achieve the objectives of the game. Here I have very clear parameters to minister ethical evaluations: *good* is someone who scores many points and knows the rules of the game. Djokovic scores many points and knows the rules of the game. Djokovic, thus, is a *good* player. In this regard, there is nothing mysterious. We have games and other types of situations; furthermore, we have parameters for such cases aiming for this or that outcome—and all we have to do is to apply adequate classifications to that which fulfills certain roles in a much more suitable way according to those same games or situations. But that is not the type of ethics which is troubling to Wittgenstein—much to the contrary. There are no imbroglios here. The problem, however, arises when it comes to the "absolute" classification and evaluation of facts. Thus, in one case, values are attributed because they have a pragmatically ridden reason to exist—they are evaluations of a certain sort based on fixed parameters. On the other hand, however, they simply exist and are "forced" upon us; we simply "recognize" them.

At this point, let us think about another example that is also suggested by Wittgenstein. Let us think about murder. As the author puts it, at the level of pure facts, "*murder will be on exactly the same level as any other event, for instance the falling of a stone*" (*LE*, p. 6), but it is obvious that murder is an act which shall be appreciated as a *bad* action. If the reader is well acquainted with literature, it would be interesting to evoke here the case of Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*. Raskolnikov, the book's main character, devises a plot to subdue and kill Alyona Ivanovna, a heinous pawnbroker and loan shark. In strict rational terms, Raskolnikov excuses himself for killing her. He is able to elaborate all sorts of justifications; but, deep down, he knows that his acts are wrong and that he must be held accountable for them. In the end, his guilt is such that he finally confesses to his crimes and accepts punishment for them. Here we have an example of the "absolute" type of evaluation—to feel inside one's core the existence of certain inclinations that could not have been otherwise. In sum, anyone who is minimally sane knows that rape, infanticide, ethnic cleansing, etc., are all *bad* things. On the other hand, anyone who is minimally well informed also deems that forgiveness, acceptance, tolerance, etc., are all *good* things. But, once again, at the level of pure facts, at the level of trivial occurrences taking place in a mundane world, they are all at the same level. So, how does one know that certain things are *good*, whereas other things are *bad*? It is about this sort of dilemma in which Wittgenstein seems to be interested.

His answer to this case is very intriguing, to say the least. Anticipating some future concepts of his philosophy, he will come to suggest that in all of the occurrences in which we use the *good* evaluation, there is some sort of similarity (perhaps an embryo of the family resemblance concept?). Maybe we are simply applying to such a designation an image coming from the back of our minds while evoking a good day, when the skies were blue, and the weather was good. Either way, in such cases, "we seem constantly to be using similes" (*LE*, p. 9). But similes of *what sort* exactly? He then alludes to the fact that among the "pragmatic" examples that he has used, there must be something in common with those more "absolute" situations. And in order to illustrate what an evaluation concerning an "absolute" occasion is, he sets the case for three examples: that the world exists (i); the experience of feeling absolutely safe (ii); and the experience of feeling guilty, especially if one feels that God disapproves of one's conduct (iii). But let us think more about items (i)–(iii).

Looking closely at such items, we might feel that they are quite peculiar, to say the least. It is easy to see that they have a religious connotation—that is, for instance, Anscombe's approach. But there are other attempts at providing a different analysis as well. One option at this point is to offer a sort of explanation for the language employed by Wittgenstein. In recent interpretations, this is achieved by suggesting that he consciously stretches language beyond its reasonable application. This is, for instance, Kremer's solution ([Kremer 2021](), p. 210), who sides with resolute readers: "It is striking that in the *Lecture*, he engaged in a reflection on ethics in which he took up two examples connected to the project he had just abandoned". In this sort of reading, Wittgenstein's examples are evoked by design. They are "uncomfortable" because they result from the failure to make sense of words, just like what, in this (resolute) interpretation, occurs with the *Tractatus*; in sum, in this view, items (i)–(iii) are echoes of the abandonment of a dogmatic view while marking at the same time a new stance on the workings of language.

But if we take such examples at face value, just like Anscombe did while comparing them to the end of the *TLP*, then we should ask ourselves about the reasons for his unwillingness to deal with more "universalist" or "normal" examples of absolute occurrences. He could have provided many other examples that would have been more "commonplace" and that everyone would have been compelled to accept. In sum, many examples are possible in this regard: the issue of abortion, women's rights, ethnic cleansing, etc. On such issues, there is plenty of literature, and even today they do not seem to be "solved". For instance, the determination that "ethnic cleansing is a *bad* occurrence" seems to me to be almost widely available in "normal" (daily societal) environments. So why does Wittgenstein bring forward such uncanny examples given that many other topics of a more daily

inclination were possible? One possible answer is that he is clearly alluding to an interplay between ethics and religion. Another possibility, however, is that he was strongly alluding to mysticism. Those three items, when transposed to the mystical religious tradition, are repeatedly mentioned in this type of literature. Once again, for those well acquainted with mysticism and its presuppositions (such as its metaphorical nature), Wittgenstein clearly had those assumptions in mind. His examples strongly resonate with *das Mystische*:

> *Nous pouvons donc percevoir la présence de Dieu comme une présence bienveillante; nous attribuons la bienveillance à Dieu, conçu comme une source de sentiment de sécurité. Wittgenstein (dans sa Conférence sur l'Éthique) rapporte le même genre d'expérience: celle de la « sécurité absolue ». Elle peut prendre comme forme « être en sécurité dans la main de Dieu » (c'est-à-dire ne pas pouvoir tomber) où l'anthropomorphisme de la main protectrice est une image très forte de l'ipséité. Cette main est celle de Dieu lui-même. Dire que c'est la main de Dieu, c'est dire que c'est Dieu lui-même qui protège de la chute. Il faut toutefois insister sur le fait que la perception directe de l'amour de Dieu, qui se manifeste comme une miséricorde ou une bienveillance, peut se voiler.* (Nef 2018, p. 32)

Other scholars reached the same conclusion:

> *The mystic-ecstatic experience that forms the radiating core of the Tractatus, and the key to its interpretation, was described by Wittgenstein in a lecture on the foundations of ethics which he delivered at the invitation of a Cambridge student group shortly after his return to academic life in 1929. He describes this experience as the experience of being "absolutely safe"; it is a "state of mind in which one is inclined to say 'I am safe, nothing can injure me whatever happens' ". This experience is offered by Wittgenstein as one of three types which constitute for him personally the terminus of ethical inquiry. By ethical inquiry he understands neither a Weberian-type analysis of postulated norms or values (wertbeziehende Methode), nor a demonstration of man's dependence in ethical matters on traditions or revelations of a divine law to men of the past. Ethical inquiry for Wittgenstein is a truth seeking inquiry (much like the inquiry of Plato's Republic, one might say) which delves into "what is really important", "into the meaning of life", "into what makes life worth living". Further on in the Lecture, Wittgenstein links the absolute safety experience to religious literature, equating it with the experience of being "safe in the hands of God". Being "absolutely safe", or variations on the same theme, can be easily recognized as an expression of the mystic-flight experience in its disengagement of the self or "I" from identity with the body.* (Nieli 1987, p. 91)

In this regard, I think that the *Lecture on Ethics* starts where Wittgenstein had previously left off concerning the issue of mysticism. Those three examples—items (i)–(iii)—recover the same issues that were raised at the end of the *TLP*. However, here, they are further developed. I will explain my views based on these examples.

The *TLP* results in the depreciation of the empirical will (the will that drives me to the fridge, for instance), leaving to the transcendental will—the ecstatic view of the world projected against the background of atemporality—an entire field of absolute values. From this angle, there is the possibility of drawing a division between an "authentic" and "inauthentic" life (*à la* Heidegger) when it comes to the opposition brought forward by Wittgenstein concerning the world of the happy and the unhappy ones, as he puts it (*TLP* 6.43). In any case, the mysticism of the Tractatus could paradoxically get rid of "mystical experiences" irrupting *into* the world. In an important sense of the term, this "mysticism" *is* the experience *of the world*, but the world must be taken here as a totality (as a *whole*). Therefore, every experience is either a mystical one or no experience would be mystical at all. The world, thus, already is *das Mystische*—and he is recovering such a topic once again in his *LE*. The gratuity of existence, the *esse* of existence, is one of the main ingredients when it comes to the belief in something Higher. *Someone* gives me the *world*.

As for being safe in the hands of God, as the previous quotations have already mentioned, it has a lot to do with the feeling of the presence of God in one's life. God, in this regard, has nothing to do with the episodes of a mundane world. The faith of the

religious individual cannot rest on the contingent facts of the world—as Kierkegaard puts brilliantly in his works, the problem is not to believe when there is evidence, but to keep one's belief in the lack of it: "To be a favorite of fortune, is merely evidence that one is duped, because Messrs. Favorites of Fortune do not belong in the religious sphere" (*CUP*, Kierkegaard 1992, p. 428). The mystic, therefore, is the owner of a certainty that cannot be stripped out by the occurrences of the world; her faith is strong exactly because of that. Her religious faith is a way of looking at God's existence as something prior to any contingency of the world. It is something presupposed in any comparison between what one says and what one believes will happen. When one has such a certainty, then one is safe in the hands of God—for whatever happens in this world, nothing will shake the foundations of one's faith. This metaphor is a very common expression among mystics coming from a Christian background: Faith in God has saved me, and I am safe because of my certainty which lies in Him.

Lastly, we are left with the feeling of one's guilt emerging when it comes to the evaluation that God is assessing one's faith—or the feeling that God looks with scrutiny at one's actions in life. To be under the eyes of God, or to feel that God holds one under His focus, is a recurrent theme in Christian literature. For instance, Rudolf Otto wrote an entire book making the case that guilt and despair arise out of the peak of the mystical flight—when one realizes to be in front of something so magnificent, so superior, that one has the impression to be marked by sin; one is insignificant in the face of God. But once that dreadful feeling starts to slowly wane, redemption takes hold. As Otto (1958, p. 37) puts it, "the hard core of such experiences in their Christian form consists of the redemption from guilt and bondage to sin". Thus, for the mystic, she is constantly held accountable not in the face of the mundane world, but rather in front of the holy Divine. The mystic is constantly under the sight of God; a very difficult burden to endure, for she is under a heavier scrutiny when compared to the normal folks.

Otto, for instance, just like Schleiermacher before him, and even William James (in his *Varieties of Religious Experience*)[6] many years after, proposes that usually this experience of being under the sight of God is accompanied by the release from sins. And, not infrequently, it is followed by some form of monism—when the religious individual collapses; her individuality is somehow squashed, and now she is ready to feel the whole world from the perspective of eternity. Wittgenstein does mention the sub specie aeterni perspective in his *TLP*. But does he offer hints in the sense of the experimentation with a type of monism? Even if nothing is mentioned in his *LE*, one finds in his *Notebooks* (Wittgenstein 1969) strong indications of this sort:

> There really is only one world soul, which I for preference call my soul and as which alone I conceive what I call the soul of others. (NB, 23.5.15)

> Only remember that the spirit of the snake, of the lion, is your spirit. For it is only from yourself that you are acquainted with spirit at all" (NB, 15.10.16)

I honestly do not know how to make sense of such passages coming from his *Notebooks* without evoking some sort of mystical religiosity behind Wittgenstein's inquiries. I think that such excerpts also show that his mission was not uniquely logically oriented. (And it comes as no surprise that such lines tend to be massively ignored in more mainstream analyses.)

All in all, I think that now we have the tools to better understand why the dilemma concerning the "*similes*" aspect was so crucial to Wittgenstein; the truth is that this issue alludes directly to the heart of the problem. Once again, let us take a look at what he says in this regard:

> For the first of them is, I believe, exactly what people were referring to when they said that God had created the world; and the experience of absolute safety has been described by saying that we feel safe in the hands of God. A third experience of the same kind is that of feeling guilty and again this was described by the phrase that God disapproves of our conduct. Thus in ethical and religious language we seem constantly to be using similes. But a simile must be the simile for something. And if I can describe a fact by

means of a simile I must also be able to drop the simile and to describe the facts without it. Now in our case as soon as we try to drop the simile and simply to state the facts which stand behind it, we find that there are no such facts. And so, what at first appeared to be a simile now seems to be mere nonsense. (*LE*, Wittgenstein 1965, p. 10)

Thus, what Wittgenstein seems to be claiming at this point is that there must be a similarity between "pragmatic" and "absolute" occurrences. As for the "pragmatic" case, we know how to understand it—it is similar to the case of the tennis match. In other episodes, in the "absolute" ones, there must be a pattern as well, but we are simply unable to comprehend it. Notions such as *good* must be given somehow. However, to claim something of this sort would be nonsense—people would make fun of us; in philosophy, they would call us "metaphysicians". The imbroglio here is a very clear one: someone must provide us with something—a pattern, an evaluation, or something along such lines—but to claim something of this sort is absurd, for it would amount to admitting the existence of a regulatory system coming from out of this world (maybe even admitting the figure of a Divine judge who attributes values according to some pattern which is not understandable to us). However, that would mean not doing philosophy anymore, but rather expressing religious feelings or high hopes for something that the pure analysis of language cannot provide. Either way, Wittgenstein himself acknowledges that while abiding by his own philosophy, this entire chain of thought would collapse into nonsense. The Austrian philosopher does not shy away from this fact either:

. . .after all what we mean by saying that an experience has absolute value is just a fact like other facts and that all it comes to is that we have not yet succeeded in finding the correct logical analysis of what we mean by our ethical and religious expressions. Now when this is urged against me I at once see clearly, as it were in a flash of light, not only that no description that I can think of would do to describe what I mean by absolute value, but that I would reject every significant description that anybody could possibly suggest, ab initio, on the ground of its significance. (*LE*, Wittgenstein 1965, p. 11)

However, reading the text leads to the conclusion that the absurdity of this philosophical conundrum also represents the only way to address the issue. The answer in this regard must be a "mystical impulse", which exhorts us to look for answers beyond the world:

For all I wanted to do with them was just to go beyond the world and that is to say beyond significant language. (*LE*, Wittgenstein 1965, p. 11)

Once again, Wittgenstein faces the dilemma of the mystic: to speak what he really meant to say, but could not.

5. Going Radio Silent: The Case of the *Philosophical Investigations*

One of the ideas I also would like to advance in this paper is a mystical interpretation of the *Philosophical Investigations*, but, as is often the case while dealing with any of Wittgenstein's concepts, this is certainly no easy task. In this sense, I know of two texts that are inclined to offer an interpretation in this regard—one of them I have already mentioned: the commentary by Russell Nieli (1987). The other is a classic of South American philosophy, a text originally written in Portuguese by J. V. Cuter (2008), but which has not yet been translated into English. As the reader shall see, I will side with Cuter and will introduce his view to a broader audience while translating some passages of his work into the language used in this paper. I will, however, also present some personal insights in this regard while trying to further develop and build upon his ideas. Hence, my presentation here will be largely indebted to his proposal. But first, let me briefly address Nieli's inquiry.

For Nieli, whose account is heavily inspired by Wittgenstein's personal episodes, the *Philosophical Investigations* would indeed advocate for some form of therapy—however, he considers this therapy not as a metaphor related to eliminating metaphysical elaborations, but rather as a real therapy devised for serious mental problems associated with Wittgenstein's own activity (and even possible madness). Nieli points out that certain figures of speech are explainable and acceptable when it comes to the part of Wittgenstein's proposals

and philosophical workings. However, according to him, these terms take on a much darker and somber tone when closely examined in the context of what the philosopher is alluding to at this point—as he suggests, figures of speech used in this second period like "cramp *and* trouble *would seem to be all right, as would* therapy, *but* obsession *seems to be somewhat overdrawn and* torment *and* sickness *would seem to be definitely out of place*" (Nieli 1987, p. 204). Thus, according to Nieli, what Wittgenstein is attempting at this point is to dissolve his inner madness—which is associated with his mystical views—into some sort of public tranquility. As the American professor suggests in this regard:

> *In Wittgenstein's later philosophy, the self, weary of its estrangement from society, throws itself headlong into the linguistic stream of social life, losing in the process, the inner dignity of its private sphere.* (Nieli 1987, p. 239)

Thus, what Wittgenstein was trying to do at that point was to submerge his inner, private voice, in the mainstream daily talk in order to cease profound and disturbing revelations. As I have said, Nieli's account offers a good source of citations and materials to better understand the author of both the *Tractatus* and the *Philosophical Investigations*. His book is well written, but I do not think that it provides a satisfactory explanation for Wittgenstein's second philosophy, which, in the case of the *Philosophical Investigations*, he deems as a *quasi*-behaviorist account of language. (I honestly do not think that an interpretation in which a philosopher is attempting to dissolve his inner, private, and personal revelations in the realm of public language—so that he will not go mad—is minimally able to do justice to the wide array of topics presented along the pages of the book.) In sum, for Nieli, the *PI* represents the abandonment of individuality and an embrace of "linguistic tribalism"—when one's profoundest "I" is diluted while assenting to the idea that one must also accept "a sense of oneness and solidarity with the collective so that it dominates the manner in which people experience themselves" (Nieli 1987, p. 238).[7] In sum, Wittgenstein is suggesting that lucidity can only be achieved and obtained through the public realm;[8] almost as if he were attempting to "bury" his own mysticism while ceasing other mystical and orphic voices.

If there are any similarities between Nieli and Cuter, it is their stark refusal to accept Wittgenstein's therapeutic method as an essentially academic occurrence. But here is where the similarities stop: if, for Nieli, this sort of therapy was a real exercise to obtain conciseness and lucidity (as if from stopping one from its descending spiral toward a lunatic asylum), for Cuter, that is certainly not the case; his analysis is much more sophisticated in this regard.[9] For him, it is all about an exercise of asceticism that preserved the mystical pretensions of the *TLP* insofar as those could be maintained. The *PI* then becomes a sort of dialogue that is not aimed toward an external interlocutor; what one actually finds in the book is a sort of soliloquy. This so-called "therapy", therefore, would not have as its ultimate goal the pretension of undoing misunderstandings in the academic environment; rather, it would evoke such misunderstandings in order to dissolve them as inappropriate linguistic practices while simultaneously condemning the author of such evocations to become silent about what, after the therapeutic process has taken place, she understands that she cannot talk about:

> *This reflection, however, is never said; it could never be. If it were said, it would become a topic for further denunciations while offering a new opportunity for the reverent exercise of silence. More than an academic event, Wittgenstein's mature philosophy should be appreciated as a sort of calling towards that which no language can say and that, while attempting to say it, we inevitably end up profaning. My reading proposal. . . is, in many respects, a profanation from which. . . I will try, by all means, to redeem myself.* (Cuter 2008, p. 220, my translation)

In sum, what he is attempting to demonstrate here is that Wittgenstein did not simply direct his attention to mistakes that could be corrected and elucidated (well, of course, one can use Wittgenstein's second philosophy to do just that; that is for sure), but rather to topics that cannot be covered or not even addressed. The *PI*, in this regard, becomes a map

toward the "blind spots of language". Thus, according to Cuter, the analyses presented throughout the *PI* do not have as their main goal the necessity to establish the falsity of the theses at hand, but rather to highlight their lack of sense—and that would be introduced by the systematic violation of public rules guiding language; rules that any philosophical discourse, like any other form of discourse, is obligated to adopt (Cuter 2008, p. 234).

It is in this sense that, with regard to the *PI*, an imaginary partner to the interlocutor is brought forward so that she is able to arouse a philosophical discontentment regarding a vast gamut of situations and facts. The targets here are more or less identifiable: the grammar of mental processes as well as certain mathematical idealizations. In what follows, Wittgenstein would gradually dissolve such uneasiness while simultaneously reducing his imaginary interlocutor to an unstable quietness. Her quietness is provoked by the evidence that her discursive pretensions were based on the systematic violation of rules associated with certain words of our language. (For instance, the notion regarding the word "pain" is here employed with great efficacy in order to achieve such an effect: only one knows whether one is in pain, and one is given the result that the negation of a sentence like "I know that I am in pain" does not make any sense, for it does not describe any situation at all.) The instability associated with this sort of quietness—occasioned because of the interlocutor's attempt to express something about the world, about things, about everything that is at hand before, during, and after the therapeutic process—is an acknowledgment concerning the rules of our language. This instability, then, compels her to renew her attempts in order to express what she wanted to say before, but could not. Thus, once again, this form of therapy will reduce her to another unstable form of quietness, which will bring her to a renewed attempt and, therefore, to a new frustration (Cuter 2008, p. 235). What Cuter is exhibiting here is almost the sketch of a "spiral structure": as if the interlocutor is circling around an unreachable point that keeps boiling up her frustration. But what is she attempting to say, anyway?

In the *TLP*, the discomfort that is hard to express accurately is tied to the internal perception of a timeless, sempiternal order of objects determining the logical space of possibilities from which our world of facts is nothing but a fortuitous and yet decisive occurrence. According to the Brazilian scholar, at this point, the anguishes evoked by the *TLP* relate to the expression of those unexplainable and unsayable conditions of possibility for the workings of logic, sense, and meaning. In the *PI*, however, there is nothing truly unsayable in this regard. As we shall see, the demand for a certain form of contemplation continues, but the case for language has changed. Language now is not the reflection of this essential and unsayable order; in this second phase, it is more like an ordinary occurrence, which is also tied to the strict domain of public rules—in brief, there is nothing essentially ineffable here as there once was with the type of mystical contemplation evoked by the *Tractatus* once the ladder was climbed. As Cuter emphasizes, language becomes a public issue in this second moment. And this demand for a public linguistic character could even be summarized in the form of a *conditional*: if there is "something" that pertains to an essentially private domain, then no rule could ever apply to this "something" as a criterion for its own applications. Applied to what we might call the internal "psychological universe", this configuration has a singular outcome: "The rules which govern this discourse are barred from applying that to which this discourse refers as a criterion for its application" (Cuter 2008, p. 231). The results from this configuration are easy to see, especially when used in Wittgenstein's example of the issue of pain as aforementioned—it is this understanding or this type of rule that separates the first-person perspective, unable to misunderstand one's own pains, from a third-person perspective, who can indeed be fooled by someone else's alleged pains. One of the interesting parts of Cuter's theory is that this perception does not annul the possibility of a certain privacy. For him, the privacy associated with psychological states and processes is reproduced or evidenced by the asymmetry of those rules and cannot be linguistically expressed. In this regard, it is this very asymmetry of rules that acknowledges a certain privacy even without describing it:

> *The sentence "sensations are private" is, simply put, the translation of sentences such as "only I know that I can feel pain", and sentences of this last type are either nonsensical (due to the fact that it does not make any sense to say that I do not know whether I am in pain, and it does not make sense either to affirm that I know that I feel them), or a tortuous statement of grammatical rules (when I respond, for instance, to the allegation that maybe I am wrong about the pains which I affirm to be feeling). In this latter case, as Wittgenstein puts it, sentences such as "sensations are private" and "only I can know whether I am in pain" are comparable to the statement that solitaire is a card game one must play alone. It is a grammar rule, not the description of a fact.* (Cuter 2008, p. 231, my translation)

In order to explain his point of view, he delves deeper into the same example. He suggests that we should think about someone we consider to be physically in pain. To affirm that this individual is in pain is not simply to affirm that she demonstrates the behavior one would expect in this sort of situation. After all, someone who merely pretends to be in pain is also going to exhibit this same sort of behavior. The truth is that descriptions associated with psychological processes cannot be entirely reduced to corporeal processes. However, the criteria used to identify whether a psychological description is adequate must be found in the realm of such corporeal processes. And, as Wittgenstein makes it clear, those criteria are always located in the public domain—in sum, quoting Cuter, such criteria "are separated by a logical gap from the psychological universe to which they refer" (Cuter 2008, p. 232). Nevertheless, the upshot of this configuration is that they still guarantee the functionality of the psychological vocabulary when it comes to "the economy of our linguistic exchanges".

Conversely, let us now engage in the exercise of supposing that something could only be identified through the application of private criteria (something with no connection whatsoever with public criteria of identification). In this case, the result would be that we would be facing something that could not be said, for it simply could not be adapted to the economy of our language games. But is there anything of this kind? To account for this hypothesis, Cuter makes the suggestion of dealing with the notion of the subject—his reader should think about an "I" who cannot be confused with any other entity. So, let us consider the "I" of Cuter. Cuter, the philosopher, just like Diamond, Kremer, or Anscombe, is someone who talks to us, and is used to behaving in a myriad of forms; in sum, he is someone who is identifiable either based on public criteria or based on a series of psychological states. But, according to Cuter, it is the "I" who undergoes such processes—and it is this same "I" that philosophy identifies as the bearer of such processes, or, as he puts it, the "special scope of phenomena" which is contrasted to the external world of external things. If this "I of the I's", bearer of all phenomena (what Cuter dubs as "thinking enclosure") truly existed, then it would be set apart from any possibility of identification while applying that same public criteria. Furthermore, any possible occurrence would be completely neutral with regard to that "entity". This can be observed while judging someone else's behavior when he or she claims to be in pain, for there are publicly available criteria that allow us to evaluate this individual's behavior. In the case of the "I"—that is, in my own case—however, I can express my pain, or pretend that I have it, and even say that I am well. But it is impossible for me to question whether I am in pain or, alternatively, to ignore whether I am pretending to be in pain. Briefly put, Cuter is making the case here for the exclusion of a certain type of question which surrounds the topic of the "I". If the "I of the I's" truly exists, then she does not play any role in the linguistic process; in a certain way, this "I" is linguistically inaccessible: propositions attempting to access this sphere are either nonsensical or disguised grammar assertions (Cuter 2008, p. 234).

In the end, what Wittgenstein makes us face is that in certain specific (philosophical) analyses, the attempt to go beyond the possibilities of sense, of crossing the line of linguistic limits, is radically reduced to some form of nonsense; for instance, it is nonsense (maybe even absurd) the attempt to employ private language criteria. But here is where we also locate one of the many climaxes associated with Cuter's theory: for him, unlike in

more mainstream analyses, Wittgenstein's lessons do not have as their ultimate goal the determination of the falsity concerning the academic theses thoroughly examined in the *PI*, but rather "their lack of meaning which presents itself in the form of the systematic violation of the public rules that govern the language that philosophical speech, just like any other form of speech, is obligated to employ" (Cuter 2008, p. 234). What happens, thus, is that a certain limitation is introduced to this or any language, which is expressed in the necessity of public criteria when it comes to the evaluation of those rules governing speech. Equally important would be that Wittgenstein's theory is not committed to "the inexistence of entities that evade the possibility of an insertion in the economy of our linguistic exchanges" (Cuter 2008, p. 234); if it were, it would be as nonsensical as the theses it was trying to debunk. As Cuter also notes, and also in comparison to the *TLP*, on those things that could not have been said, nothing can be said, starting with their own ineffability. In this case, what can indeed be said is that while one attempted to express certain notions, one violated such and such rules much like children when they misplay the pieces of chess or the cards of a game. Another culmination of Cuter's philosophy is that by accepting what he is suggesting, one also comes to the perception that while pointing to the mistake of our interlocutor's grammar, the thesis that she could advance is reduced to silence, but we "neither say, nor could we say, anything about the existence of unsayable entities"; what we could do at most is "to invite our interlocutor to face this existence in a legitimate and unobjectionable way: to contemplate it without saying anything" (Cuter 2008, p. 234). Cuter does not shy away from the fact that this invitation could never be made, mostly because the notion of "contemplation" is tied to public criteria, which would be absent from the start in this case. (Thus, it is indeed a form of contemplation reminiscent of the *Tractatus*, albeit a most special one.) But, according to him, it is this structure which reveals the book to be a soliloquy; for the reader starts to feel in her bones the recurrence of a certain question, which seems to secure once again the foundations of a solipsist ontology—however, the cogency of the answer to this question undoes the pretension of the "grammaticality" of the question at hand. What one obtains after this therapeutic process is a form of silence that is attentive to the limits of language, which must obey the strict domain of public rules of correction. According to Cuter, it is at this point where mysticism appears. I quote him below:

> *Based on that, the anguish of talking about that which cannot be said ceases; in this regard, a new possibility opens up—but just a possibility—in relation to a silent contact with the raw elements of life, a solitary adventure that takes place behind our eyes and no language could ever have the pretension to describe. At least in my case, that is how the Wittgensteinian therapy reverberated. Far from turning me away from that which is called as the "mystery of existence", this therapy actually magnified it while simultaneously humiliating the pretensions of language and leaving me alone, without discourses or arguments, in front of a deeply uncanny and mysterious spectacle—the experience, so to speak, associated with the being's existence instead of nothingness --, something that lies at the origin, if I am not mistaken, of every authentic mystical experience. Of course, I could try to describe such an experience by saying, for instance, that in such moments I feel like a point without extension in the face of the infinite or other things like that. Quickly, however, I would remind myself that none of that describes anything, and that this attempt at obtaining a form of expression would only resettle me in the scope of a senseless diaphony, which, instead of bringing me closer to the truth, would only push me further away from sense. I return, then, to silence, and I bring language back to the realm for which it was born and created.* (Cuter 2008, p. 236, my translation)

The interesting part of this interpretation is that it does not require an "ontological counterpart" concerning the falsity of the theses at hand. In this type of argument, the Austrian philosopher is not worried about dispelling fake ontologies or localizing "mistakes" as if he could point them out and say: "There is a mistake!" What he is actually doing is evincing that certain proposals cannot be the case, for they simply do not respect the rules that the publicity of criteria demands. That is not to say that certain discomforts are

fully annihilated; the anguish of approaching certain topics or speaking on certain issues is there at each renewed attempt. It is only that its bearer learns at each time to silence her own desire to speak on certain affairs, for she will realize that each attempt is absolutely fruitless in order to articulate what troubles her. At this point, we could even trace a point of similarity to the case of the patient visiting her psychologist's cabinet: even though she is eventually discharged and her worries dissipated, her anguish and challenges never cease; she learns to live them through while acknowledging at the same time that what troubles her cannot stop her, but, nonetheless, her anguishes are part of her and even when "fought against" it will not cease.

6. Mysticism(s): Concluding Remarks

Thus, it should be understood that mysticism also plays a significant role in Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, but this has rarely been understood or properly addressed. My view, therefore, is that Wittgenstein's later philosophy is an exercise in terms of a self-denial, and almost a peculiar kind of confession,[10] which preserved the mystical aspirations of the Tractatus as long as they could be maintained. That is also the reason why this later philosophy does not take the form of an exposition oriented toward an external interlocutor—thus, the PI should be assimilated as a (confessional) soliloquy. And this "philosophical therapy", which is often presented, would not have as its ultimate goal the pretense of undoing misunderstandings by condemning the author of "misplaced statements" to silence. In fact, there would be something even greater behind this composition, which, for obvious reasons, could not be said but should be rather experienced: more than an academic effort, Wittgenstein's mature philosophy should be understood as a kind of gravitation toward the contemplation of that which no language could ever say. And the most typical of these items is to be located in this "I of the I's", an ineffable sort of interiority, which should not be confused with the empirical subjectivity that one is certainly capable of describing on the basis of language games. This configuration evinces the mystical, for one cannot affirm one's own singularity (the appropriation of one's own being) without violating the public criteria associated with the institution of meaning in language. Therefore, faced with a unique discovery, one must remain silent and not succumb to the desire to express the inexpressible. More than dispelling illusions, it is also an invitation to contemplate that which is totally ineffable. We must note, however, that the price to pay here is extremely high: there is no room in Wittgenstein's philosophy for topics that are undeniably important to human experience: such as the appropriation of one's own being (i), death (ii), empathy (iii), etc. On very important topics, we must pass over in silence. (I often wonder whether Heidegger's Dasein, for example, should not be considered an attempt to develop an "ad hoc language game" to deal with those same questions, albeit in a completely different way. I also wonder whether the contemporary philosophy of language has not been led astray by deviating from Wittgenstein's attempt to shed light on the asymmetry of linguistic rules, which allow the existence of the public sense while turning internal investigations into absurd—or impossible—endeavors.)

One could even suggest that this view, which is very much indebted to Cuter's analysis, is very far-fetched or romanticized. (Or even that this is a clear violation of what Wittgenstein postulates; indeed, if one takes the *PI* to be a manual on how to dispel metaphysical illusions for the greater benefit of analytic philosophy, then many of my mystical claims will be criticized; if the sense of therapy alluded here should be circumscribed to that which vanishes or is dispelled within the internal economy of language games, then I must pay the price and assume to practice an "extreme" reading of Wittgenstein.) However, there are good reasons to suppose that the Austrian philosopher did have indeed something of this sort in mind, for in addition to this "I of the I's", there is another aspect that appears to indicate a sense of continuity in this regard: the uninterrupted marvel in relation to the existence of the world, a feeling which seems to lie at the basis of every religious manifestation. Throughout much of his work, this feeling does not change:

It is not how the world is that is mystical, but rather that it is. (*TLP* 6.44)

> *And I will now describe the experience of wondering at the existence of the world by saying: it is the experience of seeing the world as a miracle.* (LE, Wittgenstein 1965, p. 11)

And although Wittgenstein is criticizing one of the passages developed by William James (who probably wrote the most famous book on the issue of mysticism) in his *Principles of Psychology*, it is curious to notice that the problem of the existence of the world comes forward once again:

> *William James, in order to show that thought is possible without speech, quotes the reminiscences of a deaf-mute, Mr Ballard, who wrote that in his early youth, even before he could speak, he had had thoughts about God and the world.—What could that mean!?— Ballard writes: "It was during those delightful rides, some two or three years before my initiation into the rudiments of written language, that I began to ask myself the question: how came the world into being?"—Are you sure—one would like to ask—that this is the correct translation of your wordless thoughts into words? And why does this question—which otherwise seems not to exist—arise here? Do I want to say that the writer's memory deceives him?—I don't even know if I'd say that. These recollections are a strange memory phenomenon—and I don't know what conclusions one can draw from them about the narrator's past!* (PI, § 342)

As can be observed, this *Mysterium* of an unexplained existence is closely associated with the developments of religion. That is why the necessity for a Creator in religious terms becomes so fundamental. Perhaps if one dedicates something to the glory of God, one is actually alluding to this feeling; one is thanking God for one's existence:

> *This book is written for such men as are in sympathy with its spirit. This spirit is different from the one which informs the vast stream of European and American civilization in which all of us stand. That spirit expresses itself in an onwards movement, in building ever larger and more complicated structures; the other in striving after clarity and perspicuity in no matter what structure. The first tries to grasp the world by way of its periphery—in its variety; the second at its centre—in its essence. And so the first adds one construction to another, moving on and up, as it were, from one stage to the next, while the other remains where it is and what it tries to grasp is always the same. I would like to say 'This book is written to the glory of God', but nowadays that would be chicanery, that is, it would not be rightly understood. It means the book is written in good will, and in so far as it is not so written, but out of vanity, etc., the author would wish to see it condemned. He cannot free it of these impurities further than he himself is free of them.* (PR, Wittgenstein 1975, Preface)

Briefly put, Wittgenstein never lost his impetus toward the mystical, but he did annihilate any sort of pretension to mention it. The "blind spots of language", which include the marvel at the world's existence, point in this direction.

Notes

[1]   Russell Nieli, highly influenced by K.T. Fann (and his *Wittgenstein: An Introduction*, University of California Press: Berkeley, 1971), has probably developed the first and best "mystical commentary" on Wittgenstein's work up to this date. However, I firmly disagree with him when it comes to his analysis of the *Philosophical Investigations* as we shall see. Another issue is that he strongly appeals to extratextual elements (mostly associated with Wittgenstein's personal life) in order to explain several textual passages, something that I aim to avoid. It is also worth mentioning that the reception of his work was an "unfortunate" one. He released his book right before the beginning of Cora Diamond's attack on the traditionalist views of the *TLP* and the likes of P.M.S Hacker. In this sense, right after its release, his work was not "new", as it did not address the "issue of the moment". In addition to that, his views are too perennialist—by that, I mean that he takes mysticism to be a universalist sort of experience, almost pre-cognitive and non-referential. After the writings of Steven T. Katz, it is hard to uphold such views. (Katz did indeed provide a devastating critique of Nieli's book by the time of its release.) I do think that both "problems" could be addressed; they do not land a fatal blow to the main idea behind his analysis. Nieli, however, never dealt with both issues. Shortly after, he also "retired" from the field and did not continue his research on Wittgenstein.

[2]   However, it is important to mention that there have been interesting initiatives to assuage such a strict configuration coming from different sides of current Wittgensteinian interpretive tendencies. In the "traditionalist corner", Hodges' *Transcendence and Wittgenstein's Tractatus'* is a good example of this fact. In the "resolute side", one should mention Marie McGinn's *Elucidating the Tractatus* or even *Wittgenstein's Moral Thought,* a book edited by Reshef Adam-Segal and Edmund Dain.

[3]   For those interested in such a history, I would strongly recommend Bronzo's (2012).

[4]   For more, I suggest Lima's (2023, nº25. pp. 50–66).

[5]   For more on this type of critique, I suggest looking at Engelmann (2018, nº 140. pp. 591–611).

[6]   A book that Wittgenstein knew quite well and tended to praise.

[7]   I have slightly adapted the quotation.

[8]   Nieli also alludes to some similarities akin to the Heideggerian project. In this regard, it is almost as if the *Wittgensteinian* linguistic subject abandons his solitude to make sense of the world with others (*in der Welt sein mit den Anderen*).

[9]   From here on, I will follow Cuter's ideas very closely. The next paragraphs are entirely based on his writings.

[10]   In this sense, it is not surprising that he begins his work by quoting Augustine.

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