

From Logic Towards the Mystical: the Appearance of Mysticism in Wittgenstein's Writings¹

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*He was once a logician and a mystic. It might be time...
to consider 'the mystic' as just as much a key to Wittgenstein's
work as others have stressed in the past the 'logician'*
Frederick Sontag, Wittgenstein and the Mystical (1995)

I

I start my reflections by calling attention to the problem of the reception (interpretation) concerning an intellectual work: the proposal of an author is not infrequently different from what he has actually achieved; often it is also the case that specialized readers will comprehend a certain author in a very different way when compared to the evaluation that the author made of his own production. In this sense, I would like to illustrate my observation with the following quotation:

Was habe ich aus dem Gespräch mit Anna Seghers gelernt? Daß die meisten Schriftsteller von der Literatur nicht mehr verstehen als die Vögel von der Ornithologie. Und daß sie am wenigsten ihre eigenen Werke zu beurteilen imstande sind. Denn in der Regel wissen sie zwar, was sie ungefähr zeigen und verdeutlichen, erreichen und bewirken wollten. Dieses Wissen trübt ihren Blick auf das, was sie tatsächlich geleistet und geschaffen haben. Der Kritiker soll prüfen – so gründlich und so sorgfältig wie möglich –, was der Autor geschrieben hat. Was der Autor sonst über sein Werk zu sagen hat, sollten wir nicht ignorieren, indes auch nicht sonderlich ernst nehmen. (Reich-Ranicki, 2001, p. 390) ^{2*}

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- 1 I thank João Cuter and Anderson Nakano for extensive discussion regarding some parts of this text. I also thank my colleagues Abby Butler and Anri Matthee for their commentaries as well.
 - 2 My translation: "What have I learned from the talk with Anna Seghers? That the majority of authors know as much about literature as birds know something when it comes to ornithology; and that they know even less on how to evaluate their own work. It is certain that they know approximately what they want to show and clarify; what they aim to reach and produce. But this notion obscures one's outlook in regard to what they were capable of achieving and what was performed indeed. The critic must prove – as comprehensively and carefully as possible – what the author has written. What the author has to say regarding his own work one must not ignore, but one should not take it seriously either".

* I have decided to translate every quotation in German.

The aforementioned situation alludes to the meeting between the literary critic Marcel Reich-Ranicki and the writer Anna Seghers. It is also about the “deception” of the first in relation to the “incorrect” comprehension of the author concerning the merits of her own work. It is this incredulity (or rupture) concerning the interpretation of one’s own accomplishment that compels the critic to assume that even if authors are aware of what they intend to achieve there subsists a difference (gap) in regard to what they think that have achieved and what they have indeed accomplished.

Given this perceptible difference between authorship and reception, I wonder whether we should not consider the case of Wittgenstein to be extremely similar to the passage just observed. After all, how could the author suggest that his own work – which is entirely permeated by inquiries in the realm of the philosophy of logic – actually displays a careful ethical message? I particularly believe that in no other contemporary case there subsists such a strong distinction between what an author has professed to have accomplished and what his readers (scholars) have actually understood. If the Austrian’s goal in relation to his first philosophy was to propose a profound examination of an ethical dimension, one may state with no fear of exaggeration that Wittgenstein’s failure, from the point of view of the reception, was a monumental one. The author who makes his entrance into history – considered along the years as the legitimate heir of Frege and Russell – is quite distinct from the person who writes to von Ficker, the Austrian editor. It is not by chance, therefore, that even in the most in vogue interpretations some commentators consider that the author ends up deceiving himself in regard to the scope of his own achievements:

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)

In this sense, how can one conciliate logic and ethics? How can one maintain the ethical pretensions of the author while dealing with the obvious logical inquiry which corresponds to the largest part of the book? An initial possibility would be to downplay this perspective – as we have seen in Hacker’s proposal – or to simply ignore this view as a whole. In either case, we may here adopt the premises of the critic: an author is not entirely responsible for his own work. The comprehension of what he achieves evades his comprehension – as we have seen, it is the same case of the bird: the flight does not allow it the right to say anything about ornithology. As a matter of fact, such an evaluation is not something rare when it comes to the *Tractatus*. In some cases, it is also suggested that the most “speculative” parts of the *tractarian* text should actually be suppressed:

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)³

3 *Mother Rabbit* is a fictional character developed by Walt Disney, whose emblematic quotation is here parodied by the commentator.

Another possibility is to find for this view of the author a hypothesis in which logic and ethics are two residents living together in a common domicile. In order to make this approximation, it is common for the proponents of this thesis to approach figures such as Otto Weininger, whose writings could shed light into what should guide research concerning Wittgenstein's ideas:

Logik und Ethik aber sind im Grunde nur eines und dasselbe – Pflicht gegen sich selbst. Sie feiern ihre Vereinigung im höchsten Werte der Wahrheit, dem dort der Irrtum, hier die Lüge gegenübersteht: die Wahrheit selbst aber ist nur eine. Alle Ethik ist nur nach den Gesetzen der Logik möglich, alle Logik ist zugleich ethisches Gesetz. Nicht nur Tugend, sondern auch Einsicht, nicht nur Heiligkeit, sondern auch Weisheit ist Pflicht und Aufgabe des Menschen: erst beide zusammen begründen Vollkommenheit.

...

Die Ethik ist nicht im selben Sinne logisches wie die Logik ethisches Gebot. Die Logik rückt dem Ich seine völlige Verwirklichung als absolutes Sein vor Augen; die Ethik hingegen gebietet erst diese Verwirklichung. Die Logik wird von der Ethik aufgenommen und zu ihrem eigentlichen Inhalte, zu ihrer Forderung gemacht. (Weininger, 1920, p. 200)⁴

As I see it, the problem with such a view is twofold: in the first place, Weininger's logic does not express the same logical-mathematical pungency of Russell's and Frege's writings, which are strongly connected to Wittgenstein's own text; secondly, it also demands a very "dangerous" approximation in relation to the author's life. Here, somehow, the biography of the trenches starts to overcome the content of the books⁵ – and as professor João Vergílio Cuter made me see, truth-tables and bayonets should not be mixed.

And, lastly, another possible perspective is to consider that Wittgenstein's initial production (especially the *TLP*) assumes the expression of an irony, and this would strongly reverberate in terms of the "ethical content" advanced by the book. For now, it is enough to say that I will tackle this theory in another section. Meanwhile I will only state that this reading invalidates the most important part of the book according to the words of the author himself. If on the one side his biography overcomes (surpasses) his philosophy, the problem here is to completely ignore what he actually said.

Therefore, given that I go against the aforementioned analyses, given that I oppose the evaluation made by other commentators regarding the expression and the assimilation concerning ethics in the context of the *Tractatus*, the reader may ask me now about how to situate the text in the terrain of ethics – once again, I reiterate here that this is something required by the author himself; after all, Wittgenstein wrote that his book had an ethical purpose. In my opinion,

4 My translation: "Logic and ethics are fundamentally one and the same – the duty towards oneself. They celebrate their union in the highest value of truth, confronting here the mistake and there the lack of truth: truth itself, however, would be only one. Ethics is only possible according to the laws of logic; logic is at the same time an ethical law. Not only virtue, but also discernment; not only holiness, but also wisdom: a duty and a task of men: only when both are together can one establish perfection.

...

"Ethics is not logical in the same sense that logic is an ethical commandment. Logic situates the I of its complete fulfillment in front of one's eye as an absolute being; ethics, on its turn, is what allows for this achievement. Logic is undertaken by ethics and transforms its real content, its request".

5 Maybe the greatest example of this reading is found in Janik & Toulmin (1973). The above quotation also serves as the preface of Monk's work (1990). Here in Brazil, it is also worth mentioning the work of professor Paulo Margutti Pinto (1998). Despite my disagreement with the approach of such authors in relation to certain topics of Wittgenstein's philosophy, I must recognize the excellent work made by them. In my opinion, those commentaries must still be studied and thoroughly analyzed.

therefore, a correct approach to this demand is to be fulfilled through an adequate examination regarding the problem of mysticism. It is there where one will locate the key to a more comprehensive treatment concerning Wittgenstein's writings as a whole.

II

In a certain manner, my first contact with Wittgenstein's text was fairly similar to what happened to the vast majority of my colleagues. The text seemed to be a hermetic work; it also assumed a deep oracular quality. Furthermore, it also did not look like any other thing which I had read back then.⁶ In sum, I would dare to say that my first impression was that I was reading something which had "fallen from the sky", whose content resulted from the explicit combination between the "non-argumentative" prophecies of a mystic and the "rigorous demonstrations" of a logician. But if the experience proportioned by the book seemed to equate the testimony provided by some sort of revelation, on the other hand something quickly became manifest: what the text revealed also demanded a profound knowledge of explicit references – especially on the logical field starting with the critiques directly addressed to names such as Frege and Russell. It also required the study of references which today are not as prominent as they used to be – such as in the case of Mauthner and of Weininger himself. Today I understand that this prophetic tonality aims to achieve a perlocutory dimension in a very special sense of the term; and even if the text does not want to say anything, it still shall provoke deep effects.⁷ That is why along the search to comprehend the extension of such effects, every time that I read the *Tractatus* I make the exercise of situating myself closer and closer to the references which are hidden or which are directly alluded by the text – moving from the Grimm brothers until reaching the figures of Hertz and Boltzmann. By increasing one's comprehension regarding the presuppositions of the text, one obtains more refined repercussions at each time. While reading the text based on such different influences, it becomes clear that the *Tractatus* possesses this peculiar capacity of innovating itself by stating something additional at each reading. When I go back to the text, its magnitude is always expanded. It is almost as if the range (scope) of the book could never be foreseen; the interpretation is always expanded, and the limit is never achieved. Somehow there is always something new to be uncovered with regards to the *Tractatus*.

However, even if in that first reading I had absorbed almost nothing, my first oracular (mystical) impression was kept until current days – as a matter of fact, I would dare to say that such an impression has never abandoned me; on the contrary: at every reading this impression is strengthened and renewed. Particularly, and not much by my own choice (especially during my childhood), I had direct contact with religious precepts. By alluding to a term frequently employed by Wittgensteinians, I could say that I was raised inside a religious *form of life* – not surprisingly this feature has influenced and accompanied my philosophical preferences. I comprehend, additionally, that a "religious interpretation" of any text could be criticized based on an obviously partial view as critics could suggest. However, I could defend myself here by evoking the words of Wittgenstein himself; after all, according to him, every question could be seen from

6 Maybe my experience was comparable to Goldstein's impression (2002, p. 421): "My experience on first reading the *Tractatus* was, I suspect, similar to that of many others. I was young and impressionable; the text seemed unlike anything else I had ever read and completely unlike any other philosophical treatise that I had encountered. The propositions appeared to have an almost ethereal quality, each one pregnant, momentous and dauntingly impenetrable, yet the whole was tightly organized, its elegant structure disclosed by a numbering system which indicated the logical role of each proposition in the construction".

7 For more, one should observe Cuter, J.V., (2008), p. 218.

a religious point of view.⁸ It is not by chance, therefore, as I see it, that the *Tractatus* was also written from this (religious) perspective and that a considerable part of the intellectuals attracted to Wittgenstein experienced life from a similar perspective (stance) – Maurice Drury, Peter Geach, G. E. M. Anscombe, just to name a few of them.

In spite of my initial lack of comprehension concerning the logical status of the problems which Wittgenstein addressed, it was precisely because I was inserted in this religious background that I was able to capture the tonality of the end of the book, which sounded very similar to this *form of life* experienced by me since the beginning. Already at that first reading the mystical-speculative content of the final parts seemed to be familiar and, until today, this is how I make sense of the composition. To sum it up, that the author threw the ladder away by concluding his work through a congenitally mutism⁹ seemed to acquire the contours of an elaborated episode embedded in a *negative theology* or in *apophatic mysticism*. My proposal, therefore, is the following one: to experience the *Tractatus* as a work of *theology* based on a *mystical-negative* inclination. As a matter of fact, I also would like to suggest the possibility of extending this *negative-theological* reading to the final texts of the author – without appealing to the trenches or to the author's life.

III

If I am about to propose a new reading in relation to Wittgenstein's work, especially in the case of the *Tractatus*, it would be better if I initially started with a detailed and prolonged evaluation concerning the problems which Wittgenstein aimed to elucidate (or dissipate). The imbroglio is that large parts of philosophy's history, but also its interpretations and readings are not necessarily developed in a "linear" path. As we have seen at the beginning, there subsists here an interpretive difficulty. The problems of philosophy are rarely comprehended in their original dimensions; the presuppositions of philosophical problems are frequently left behind. In a certain manner, and also inside this scope, comprehending the philosopher (and the role played by him along the pages of history) demands a previous comprehension of how his work was taken in consideration and how his philosophical problems were historically apprehended (understood).

In this sense, an excellent access to Wittgenstein's work is to consider it as the convergence of two major heritages – *philosophical criticism* and *philosophy of logic*.¹⁰ From here on, I would like to affirm that I also subscribe to this thesis. However, a detailed recollection of these two traditions would require a very long time – and even if I provided this recollection, my exposition would still lack the subtlety which is found in more elaborated approaches. But given that I mention this convergence, it would be interesting to briefly demonstrate how this confluence takes place in order to extract some consequences which, as I see them, are absolutely necessary for the topics addressed in the next sections.

Generally speaking, this interpretation suggests that Wittgenstein attempts to fulfill the task evoked by *philosophical criticism* – to circumscribe what can be said (but also thought and considered) – based on a meticulous investigation of logic. After the *Tractatus*, the delimitation of knowledge's extension will no longer be due to the inherent character of the subject who aims to know – it is no longer due to the subject's cognitive structure or due to what the subject himself inserts on things. From now on, the delimitation of knowledge is established by observing the most general laws that there are, which are also normative, and that also restrain

8 Rhees, R. (ed.), (1984), p. 94.

9 Here I employ the terminology elaborated by Margutti Pinto (1998).

10 I allude here to the admirable interpretation of Lopes dos Santos (1993).

judgment to certain limits of expression or to certain propositional attitudes. It is here where one finds the true limits regarding the extension of knowledge. Allow me to explain: since Kant, many were the authors who endorsed *criticism*;¹¹ they emphasized philosophical investigation by inquiring about the extension of human knowledge; proponents of this view intended to discover what one could know with an excellent degree of scrutiny. The commitment of the critical task of philosophy is, therefore, to delimit the extension of the metaphysical realm by demonstrating that the typical scope of its problems is located beyond the capabilities of human reason; according to Kant, what mostly contributes to this diagnosis is the fact that the capabilities of the subject who aims to know are limited; in this sense, the terrain of human rationality would be circumscribed to certain categories. It follows from this reflection that metaphysics is not susceptible to any sort of investigation or anything remotely possible. In sum, the pretensions of metaphysics (taken here as an object of pure knowledge) are to be considered as illegitimate.

If the *critical* tradition possesses as one of its central tenets the philosophical reflection surrounding the possibilities of what one is able to know; that is, if this tradition advocates the establishment of a limit to the extent of that which it is licit to think (or to inquire) about – passing through the categories of thought and even crossing the “regions” where we might be able to penetrate (such as physics, mathematics etc) –, the logical tradition, on its turn, “connects” (links) its *raison d'être* to the essential structure regarding the discourse on what is (on being).¹² In this tradition, which goes back to celebrated names in the history of philosophy such as Parmenides and Aristotle, it is suggested that the capacity of discourse (of language itself) to represent reality is due to the fact that both spheres have features in common which allow for this “interchangeability”. Hence, the content expressed by language would retain an essential sort of adequacy with the structure of the world; as a consequence, there would not be a problematic relation of inadequacy between being and saying (the *Aristotelian* categories, for instance, would not refer to a kind of predication; they would be rather the categories of the structure of the world). From here one could conclude that there would be an intrinsic relation between logic and ontology.

And what does the *Tractatus* have to do with this notion? Which would be the role played by Wittgenstein's book along this tradition? The first publication of the Viennese philosopher would reveal its *critical* heritage by suggesting a delimitation in relation to the most general extension of thought (of what would be licit for us to conjecture/think about),¹³ fixing, in this regard, a proper domain to the character of rationality; postulating, furthermore, a particular realm to philosophical pretensions – which should never occupy the same level of practical and empirical sciences.¹⁴ It is by making the effort to circumscribe with maximal accuracy the limits regarding the propitious use of reason – of what can be said (the essence of any and every imaginable proposition) – that we find in the *Tractatus* its adherence to a *critical* (*Kantian*) inclination. Nevertheless, this task of delimitation is performed in a very peculiar manner by the *Tractatus*: it is here where, for the first time, the new tools of logic – of this science admirably reinvented in the end of the 19th century – will be employed with the most absolute consequences for the fulfillment of this philosophical endeavor. Assuming the objectives and the *modus operandi* of these two lineages (the *critical* and the *logical* one) as the presuppositions of this discussion, we can finally observe how both philosophical traditions are “linked” (connected) in a powerful reflection regarding the limits of every possible rationality – a factor that in the *Tractatus* contributes to a prodigious achievement: the replacement of the role played by

11 Just as a curiosity I would like to mention here two very well-known “philosophical schools” (from the critical tradition): the School of Marburg & the School of Baden.

12 Lopes dos Santos, *Ibid.*, p. 15.

13 *TLP* 3; 3.001; 3.02; 4.114 & 6.

14 *TLP* 4.11 & 4.111.

the subject in regard to the task of defining the boundaries of what one is able to know – as we have previously seen in the case of Kant – by a meticulous analysis of logic, taken here as the fundamental pillar for the establishment of the limits of thought.

It is at this point, however, that I move away from this thesis in order to abandon it given that, in my opinion, the end of the book is not some sort of recovery of metaphysics in an aesthetic-sentimental realm à la Schopenhauer. It is undeniable that we may draw parallels with Schopenhauer by suggesting that the *TLP* also results in the depreciation of the empirical will (the one which takes me to the fridge, for instance), leaving to the transcendental will – that is, the ecstatic view of the world projected against the background of atemporality – the entire field of absolute value. However, I wish to demonstrate that Wittgenstein's motivation is actually another; it is actually an even stronger one. I believe that the end of the book is an appeal towards the defense of a translogical reality – a mystical one – in order to safeguard it against profanation and debasement. In sum, it is the delineation of what is beyond the scope of logic by circumscribing the extension of what is licit for us to know about in a rational (cognizable) realm. In this sense, the treatment concerning the limits of logic would allow us to foresee two realities – a profane one, restrained by logic; and a sacred one, which goes beyond any possibility to *say* it, but that could rather be *shown* through contemplative silence.¹⁵ In sum, if in other readings the final part is nothing but a secondary supplement in regard to more important discussions, the aesthetical-contemplative view (of a *Schopenhauerian* inclination) finds a way to assimilate the final aphorisms into the rest of the text as a whole. However, in my reading, those passages are actually even more important given that they are the amalgamation of the composition – the final aphorisms “condition” the construal of the book. Such aphorisms sustain the *TLP* as a whole; as a matter of fact, the entire book converges to this accomplishment. In the following lines I will explain this idea.

IV

Throughout the pages of the *Notebooks* and also of the *Tractatus* there subsists a common textual “maneuver”: in both compositions, aphorisms start from an initial set of questions related to the philosophy of logic when, all of a sudden, they erupt into the form of the problem of mysticism. But for which reason does this thematic take place inside a philosophy which is originally oriented to deal with topics leaning towards the relation between logic and language – a manifest critique against the proposals of Frege and Russell? This issue will invariably be inconvenient for commentators – and the approaches to this topic will be numerous. In the first of them (i), Wittgensteinian mysticism is associated to the perspective of the interlocutor who, bumping against the limits of logic, is able to glimpse the ineffable link which runs across world and language keeping them together – it is all about a contemplative *insight* that cannot be propositionally articulated. In a second proposal (ii), this mysticism is the expression of an aesthetical *Schopenhauerian* experience; when the relation between subject and object is “transposed” and the “principle of sufficient reason” is finally overcome. In this interpretation, one might have the impression that its proponent is making the case for the same experience of artists and poets – when the aesthetical experience surpasses rational expression. Lastly (iii), one must also mention the proposal which intends to liberate the reader from “metaphysical entanglements” such as what those two previous views advocate. The “(mystical) unsayable” is, in this sense, the very illusion in which one has engaged by not providing meaning to propositional signs composing the propositions of language.

15 Curiously enough, in the Tractarian construal, the common logical structure underlying language and reality, which would “mirror” each other, could also not be *said*. This structure could only be *shown*.

If there is a common factor to all of those views, it must be that they start from an exclusively logical-linguistic background. In this case, the mystical sentiment which unexpectedly appears in the last aphorisms is the culmination of a logic that, on the one hand, can be read as indicating the suggestion of the existence of inaccessible domains in relation to the analysis of language; and, on the other hand, the very illusion that the theory is attempting to restrain (curb). However, one way or another, criticism still subsists and the search for an even more comprehensive interpretation continues given that the demands of aphorism *TLP* 6.54 never appear to be fully satisfied based on the details of each theory. As I have stated, I do not uphold the *Schopenhauerian* (ii) proposal because it creates a possible, but not necessary link between the framework of the book and its final aphorisms. Although it allows us to obtain a refined reading, the *Tractatus* would still *stand on its feet* supposing that we disposed of all the final parts of the book. In this sense, as I see it, a reading which allows for the interpretation of the final aphorisms simply as an increment and not as a protagonist of the whole schema fails by not preserving the ethical pretensions of the author.

However, and most importantly, I would like to focus with greater emphasis on the other two proposals (i) & (iii), respectively known as the “traditional reading” and the “resolute interpretation”. After all, they represent the hermeneutical hypotheses which “monopolize”, so to speak, the attention of current *scholars*. For now, it suffices to say that the “imbroglio” is how to adequately address the propositions of the *Tractatus* – and such a problem occurs due to a very special reason.

The crucial point is that language is only adequate for the articulation (description) of *facts* or to operate expressions resulting from such *facts*. But in order to achieve this goal (in order to articulate *facts*), there should necessarily be a correspondence between the configuration of world and language; there should be a “mutual logical essence”. However, the Tractarian theory advocates that expressing this essence would require certain conditions that would surpass any possible factual domain.¹⁶ The result would be that those conditions would not even be allowed to be correctly articulated by language; they would exceed the possibility of linguistic expression. I believe that the traditional interpretation suggests that this is exactly what the author intends to achieve. He incurs a mortal prohibition: to *say* what could not be obviously stated. In a certain way, the failure of the project is already foreseen. But the defeat of a certain form of *saying* paves the way for the triumph of a certain form of *showing*.¹⁷ In this sense, the book manages to deal with a series of topics which, at least in theory, language itself would not be able to *say*. And among such topics, we could mention the following ones: (i) the essential harmony between thought, language & reality; (ii) the necessary existence (indispensability) of objects; (iii) the existence of logical relations between propositions; (iv) the notion of a logical form; besides several other issues.¹⁸ All in all, the reader would be attracted to some sort of plateau from which he would transcend the linguistic realm and, once there, he would be able to adequately contemplate, in silence, the link between logic, language and world. It is from this configuration that results the author’s reprimand against his own theory given that it would also violate the conditions of possibility of language. In this case, the final aphorisms would amount to an ethical reprimand acting against the very endeavor which the book itself aims to develop (fulfill).

In the second case, in that of which concerns the resolute reading, this position will suggest that the book is a “pedagogical-therapeutic” activity, which aims to dissipate the illusion

16 Once again, I allude to the ideas developed by Margutti Pinto, *Ibid*.

17 *Idem* 16.

18 For more, one should observe the writings of Hacker, P.M.S., (2000), pp. 353 – 356.

sustaining that it is possible to “leave language behind” in order to *say* language itself. Based on presuppositions contained in the philosophy of Frege, the authors of this proposal will suggest that nothing can be articulated beyond logic and, therefore, beyond a certain linguistic scrutiny. Therefore, the book actually reveals an irony. The author will “lead” his reader to a point in which he professes his metaphysical beliefs; simultaneously, however, the reader will eventually realize that his own statements at this point are unsatisfactory given that they are the result of a certain disregard for the requirements concerning the institution of meaning in language. The ethical message is once again an admonishment of a logical inclination. Here, however, the admonishment is not oriented towards the book, but it is destined for the reader who keeps falling into the “metaphysical traps” of language. To understand the author, in this view, is to understand his censorship regarding a metaphysical impetus. One who does not adequately understand the rules of language fails in his conduct, because what he is *saying* happens to be meaningless.

Several are the issues associated to both readings. Going through all the details would demand a lot of time (and several other lines). But, as I see it, when it comes to the traditional reading, one could state that such an option has the same problems associated to the *Schopenhauerian* interpretation: the book would still *stand on its feet* even without its final aphorisms; after all, the most important *insights* associated with a good comprehension of this work would appear before the final sections. On the other hand, when dealing with the resolute reading, I must admit that this interpretation is certainly successful to create a necessary concatenation with aphorisms ranging from 6 to 7. However, in this reading, ethics is about the proper functioning of a linguistic program and not necessarily about an adequate moral conduct (stance). The most controversial part is that this outcome is obtained through a refined irony, based on Kierkegaard. This hermeneutic option, however, turns Wittgenstein into an “epigone” of the Danish philosopher; and it also makes compulsory to accept a feature which is in evident contradiction when compared to the words of the Austrian philosopher himself:

There is something teasing about Kierkegaard’s writings & that is intended, of course, even though I am not sure whether they are intended to have precisely that effect that they have upon me. There is also no doubt that one who teases me forces me to deal with his concern & if that concern is important, this is good. – And yet there is something in me that condemns this teasing. And is this only my resentment? And I know quite well that with his mastery of it Kierkegaard reduces the aesthetic to absurdity & that of course he wants to do that... The idea that someone uses a trick to get me to do something is unpleasant. It is certain that it takes great courage (to use this trick) & that I would not – not remotely – have this courage; but it’s a question whether if I had it, it would be right to use it. (PPO, p. 131)

Given this passage, and also because of historical inconsistencies – after all, at no point in history does one find any suggestion in the writings of those who have spent considerable intellectual time with Wittgenstein (Russell, Ramsey, Carnap, Anscombe etc) that the *Tractatus* was written in order to “dispel illusions” –, I believe that such an interpretation is also incapable of securing to the book the ethical protagonism that Wittgenstein emphasized. However, what really caught my attention in this debate is a difference which, until today, I do not believe was correctly addressed by specialists. As I see it, the greatest opposition between these two interpretations lies in distinctive perspectives attempting to situate the reader/interlocutor in what would be considered as the most adequate *point of view* to comprehend Wittgenstein’s work. If the traditional reading advocates that the book makes the case for some sort of transcendence by placing the reader in a privileged perspective in relation to the text, its resolute counterpart will place the reader/interlocutor inside the linguistic realm. In sum, in the first reading

it is possible to access the text through a distinguished external position, whereas in the other interpretation language assumes a “plastic” disposition; language assumes different shapes in order to accommodate internal perspectives. I believe that the following diagrams could be very elucidative in this case:

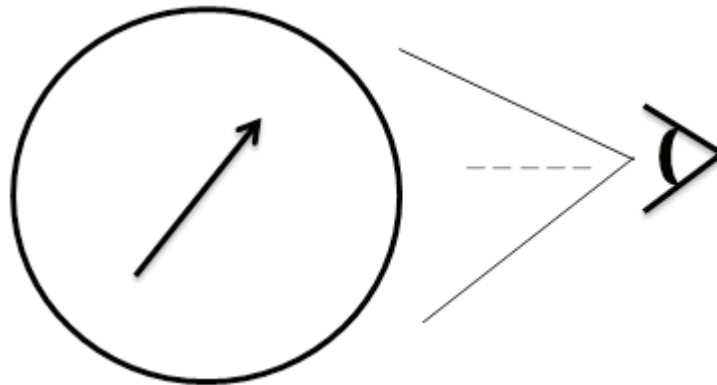


Figure 1. The point of view of a traditional reader of the *Tractatus*

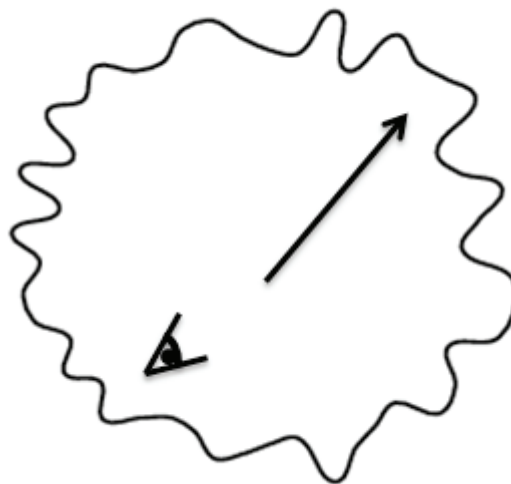


Figure 2. The point of view of a resolute reader of the *Tractatus*

Therefore, even if the exegetical differences related to both readings are many, I believe that the point of major disagreement is how to assimilate the position of the *tractarian* interlocutor inside the theory. From the one side, the reader's transcendence in relation to language is affirmed; from the other, it is suggested that this tendency is a fallacious one – one cannot be placed outside language; there is no side outside language. However, I intend to demonstrate that there is another way to approach the situation.

V

I consider *mysticism* to be the theory developed around the possibility of an experience imbued with a rigorous 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.¹⁹ In religious discourse, this element may also be considered to be the search of consolation in the arms of God (and eventual union with Divinity).²⁰ In sum, in the interior of mysticism, there subsists a noetic sense of dependence in relation to something which is beyond a relational and qualitative experience (which is actually *wholly other*). It is all about an absolutely mysterious intuition, *sui generis*, extremely powerful and completely distinguished from common experience.²¹ It is this peculiarity which allows for religious discourses to associate this experience with the appearance of “spiritual/supernatural manifestations”.²²

Mysticism is also the most recognizable index of a *negative theology*, whose rhetoric demands from itself an impossible mission – a meticulous description regarding the nature of God. The failure of the project, however, is foreseen beforehand. Its discourse is impossible; in spite of that, the gravitation of speech towards this unknowable (and divine) object is irresistible. As Angelus Silesius puts it:

One Cannot Grasp God

God is the purest naught, untouched by time and space / The more you reach for Him,
 the more he will escape (CW, I, §25)

In order to fulfill its goal, the strategy here is a *negative* one: the “mystic” describes everything that the object of his speech cannot be given that this item is so sublime that not even the most eminent adjectives of his language would be able to grasp (describe) it. Curiously enough, the author of the speech never reaches the end of his message – in a sense, speech could be refrained beforehand; on the other hand, it could perpetually go on. In sum, the author of such a speech refines and “magnifies” his message as long as he is able to continue. Words acquire a symbolic status because they aim to go beyond their own discursive limitations; there subsists the pretension of describing a realm in which language simply cannot penetrate. Given that language is elaborated based on a metric – which we may call “objectual” or “qualitative” – linguistic structures become inoperative in this case; no metric is suitable to this “ultimate realm”. Not even vocabulary perfection would perform the trick here. Since the object of such a speech is unapproachable, language will be hypertrophied in the same proportion of what is unreachable. In short, this language keeps moving towards an “unreachable beyond”, but it always falls short of any useful description. This is what one finds, for instance, in the formulations of Pseudo-Dionysius. Even if attempting to explain something about his intriguing inquiry, all that he allows us to contemplate are his unusual figures of speech. It is not by chance, therefore, that we find ourselves with terms that could have assumed numerous translations such as what he calls “supraessential spheres”, “luminous darkness”, “hypercosmic”, “supramundane”, and so on.

I want to point out that the search for God, or for what is “supraessential” according to Pseudo-Dionysius’ language, is all but innocuous when it comes to language. The case is that this proposal demands a sort of transcendence which is not a privileged one, but the only possible conception. This proposal actually requires a contemplation which is singular and unique and that one might call as *sub specie aeterni*. This is accomplished when the subject of the discourse is dissolved in the perspective of eternity – when internal and external (linguistic)

19 Jones, (2016), p. 22.

20 According to Nef, F., (2018), p. 7: “J’accepterai provisoirement la définition de la mystique comme expérience directe de Dieu ou de la Dêité, union avec Dieu, même si cette définition est extrêmement large”. In French, there is indeed a distinction between “la mystique” and “mysticism”, but, for practical reasons, I will not get into the details of this important distinction.

21 *Idem* 16.

22 William James, for instance, wrote an entire book on this issue (*The Varieties of Religious Experience*).

sides are annihilated (dissolved). An interesting metaphor for this idea would be to consider language assuming the shape of a "Klein bottle" or of a "Möbius strip", or even as assuming the disposition of "Wheeler's participatory universe". In a sense, everything would be language. In a further sense, not even language would be anything. Any and every manifestation would be taken here as "secondary", and they could all be traced back to this ultimate and even more general reality that the thinker, in a "suicidal quest", aims to elucidate. However, given that this search will be an unsuccessful one – let us not forget that the failure of this process is foreseen beforehand and that this would happen because language cannot overcome (go beyond) the realm in which it was originally developed (conceived) –, the result of this inquiry must be abandoned. The entire outcome is inferior beyond comparison when contrasted to the initial goal of the investigation.

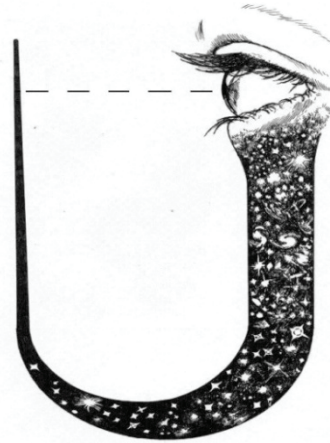


Figure 3. The point of view of a mystical reader of the *Tractatus*²³

Therefore, generally speaking, a mystical inquiry which intends to highlight this "preceding (*wholly other*) reality" or even to describe this *sui generis* intuition declared by the individuals who have experienced it demands a particular point of view, which is not to take place inside language and neither outside of it in a position that one might be able to articulate:

In those [mystical] 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... 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, such as those discussed here, in which the mystical discourse turns back relentlessly upon its own propositions and generates distinctive paradoxes...

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, 1990, p. 4)

23 This picture was adapted from John Wheeler's "participatory universe".

Therefore:

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, 1990, p. 220)

I propose that Wittgenstein's first publication has suffered from classifications which have interfered with a better appreciation (evaluation) of the book. Exegetical options which are not entirely suitable in regard to the style and the thematics associated with the text have transformed the book's reception into something very different if compared to the author's original goal. That is why the author considered his intellectual mission to be of an ethical inclination whereas his readers and critics have analyzed the book under a different scope.

VI

In my proposal one must think the *Tractatus*, just like Wittgenstein's first writings, in an even larger convergence. Contrary to what current readings advocate, the *TLP* is not solely about the confluence of two traditions evoked along the history of philosophy, but three: logic (i), criticism (ii) and mysticism (iii). In short, there must be a specific kind of mysticism expressed in this work (*TLP*), and this topic would only be partially circumscribed by the logic of our language.²⁴ Seen from this angle, I additionally propose that the *Tractatus* is the most successful mystical contemporary work; the latest breakthrough of philosophical mysticism, so to speak, given that it was able to include in its conception of the mystical a notorious dependence on the application of logic – which, in the case of the *Tractatus*, was already a quite innovative achievement. However, in my view, admitting just the logical reading of the *Tractatus* limits the understanding of Wittgenstein's work as a whole, considering that it ignores the tacit influence of mysticism beyond the application of logic. The logical reading, therefore, allows us to understand the strictly logical innovations of this book, but this perspective disregards other issues that remain implicit in the work of the Viennese author. My hypothesis is that these two topics – the application of logical descriptions and everything else that does not fit the logical description of language – can be better "harmonized" with the adoption of philosophical mysticism.

Another point which favors my reading is that a "mystical interpretation" of the first writings appears to be more suitable based on passages which are not only polemical, but which also tend to be neglected in other analyses. For instance, by accepting the hypothesis that the *NB* represents the first drafts which have originated the *TLP*, how could one then interpret aphorisms of the following type: "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)? Or even: "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)?

24 And even logic would assume here a very peculiar role: "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". For more, one should see Nieli, R., (1987), pp. 115 – 116.

Unless one assumes a mystical background, I do not see how such passages could be correctly addressed. Therefore, I would like to emphasize once again that the mystical is not simply a metaphysical *jibber-jabber* – in this sense, the case of ethics is paradigmatic.²⁵ The author of the *Tractatus* is here absolutely consequential. What Wittgenstein would have actually achieved, through the application of logic, no other proponent of mysticism was able to adequately demonstrate. If, before Wittgenstein, the vast majority of mystical investigations had taken place in purely speculative terms²⁶ – largely because of the adoption of elements which still required further inquiry, or due to the fact that logic was not sufficiently developed to “sustain” other types of research – in the *Tractatus*, through the use of logic, the philosopher is finally able to establish the extension (coverage) of the mystical. It is by circumscribing the extension of reason with an absolutely congruent use of the new logical apparatus of his time that Wittgenstein is able to accomplish what no other “mystic” before him was capable of achieving: he establishes a “logically well-formed” frontier in relation to the extension of the mystical.²⁷ Curiously, a long-awaited chapter of philosophy – the fulfillment of the *critical* task of philosophy through a meticulous investigation of logic – is carried out even if through an “unorthodox” manner. The investigation of the *Tractatus*, therefore, is a delimitation concerning the extension of what is profane and also an examination regarding the scope of the sacred, of what is truly mystical; the peculiarity, however, is that this inquiry takes place in the realm of logic.

VII

Now we are able to understand the reasons why Wittgenstein considered his book to make the case for ethical finalities. The discovery of what is sacred demands an adequate stance in the case of one's own life; it demands a silent contemplation in perpetual silence. And this occurs mainly because of two reasons: language would debase the realm of the sacred because it would be the index of a “vulgar” world (taken here as a world composed by objects and not by senses); consequently, the same revelation would require in the realm of life a reformed (renovated) stance – and this would happen mostly because of the acquisition of a certainty: as Wittgenstein would say, philosophy reveals from now on that the sense of the world lies outside of it (6.41), and that God does not reveal himself in this realm (6.432). Furthermore, when the author throws the ladder away,²⁸ making the case for contemplative silence, it should be seen that the *Tractatus* is actually subscribing to the ancient mystical tradition of endorsing silence.²⁹

³⁰ This quietude, however, is not a mere linguistic device; it is actually an attempt to mitigate the

25 *Contra* Carruthers, P., (1990).

26 The case of Damascius, Neoplatonist philosopher, is here paradigmatic.

27 This seems to be Paul Engelmann's evaluation concerning the *TLP*, (1968), p. 97: “When he [Wittgenstein] nevertheless takes immense pains to delimit the unimportant, it is not the coastline of that island which he is bent on surveying with such meticulous accuracy, but the boundary of the ocean”.

28 As a matter of fact, in Christian mysticism, the metaphor of the ladder which must be thrown away is almost a “commonplace”: it appears vehemently in authors such as John of the Ladder and, most notably, with Teresa of Avila and Francis de Sales (both of them are also considered as “Doctors of the Catholic Church”).

29 As MacCulloch, D., (2013), p. 241, puts it: “Wittgenstein's dictum was effortlessly anticipated by Isaac of Nineveh, the seventh-century theologian of awareness and wonder: ‘Love silence above all things, because it brings you nearer to the fruit that the tongue cannot express... and then, from out of this silence something is born that leads to silence itself’”.

30 At this point, however, as an unknown reviewer made me see, one should notice here the convergence of “two types of silence”: the first type comes forward through a mystical stance, but there is also a second one, another different type of silence, which is the result of the logical presuppositions employed by Wittgenstein. I thank the reviewer for this observation.

power of reason. The entrance into superior realms demands the mitigation of reason; reason must be reduced to ashes – it is this factor which allows for the end of linguistic articulation and the fall of the greatest barrier regarding the union with the divine; it is this factor which allows for the acquisition of the *perspective of eternity*.

I see some benefits in my reading. The final propositions are here absolutely necessary; without them the book does not make sense (i). The ladder can be thrown away, disappearing as a whole, and this fact would not create any sort of problem (ii). The subject also disappears – even if I have not dealt with this topic, one of the premises of Christian mysticism is the disappearance of the subject (iii). Besides that, we can also accommodate different perspectives in terms of logic; there is no “embargo” concerning the pretensions of the logicians (iv); this interpretation would also explain the confluence of philosophical criticism, philosophy of logic and mysticism (v); this reading would also reverberate in Wittgenstein’s own biography, although, as I see it, one does not need to appeal to biographic affairs at all in order to defend such a mystical interpretation (vi). Finally, my reading can also be associated to the evolution of Wittgenstein’s work as a whole (vii).

As for this last item, I will not spend too much time on it – this will be the topic of future research, articles and developments. One should notice, however, that Wittgenstein’s Lecture on Ethics is highly interesting in this sense. This “mystical spirit” is also present in the works of his *intermediary period* – one must simply take a look at the beginning of his *Philosophical Remarks*.³¹ The case of the *Philosophical Investigations* is also an emblematic one – professor Cuter has proposed a very special interpretation for the book, and it is also a mystical one.³² Despite minor disagreements with him, I endorse his point of view; he advances that the PI is an attempt to “humiliate” our (vain) linguistic pretensions. For now, in that of which regards this analysis, it is enough to say that the discovery of a certain interiority is something impossible to be even articulated. In this sense, the expression of something *uniquely mine* does not respect the requirement of public criteria associated to language games – any attempt to enunciate something *wholly personal* results in the privation of sense. From this angle, the contact with this (sacred) interiority, or with *life* itself, is something absolutely silent. Once again we are facing the gates of the mystical. In sum, here a new hypothesis is born in relation to the writings of Wittgenstein: one that might be called as the *via negativa* – it is all about understanding the author as a proponent of the tradition of philosophical mysticism, which is a crucial element concerning a *negative-theological* heritage.

I would like to finish this paper with a final anecdote, also about intellectual criticism and the challenging activity of reception and interpretation surrounding an intellectual work. Curiously, once more, it will be about Marcel Reich-Ranicki, a famous critic of works written in German – I always consult his texts when there is this possibility. In one of his admissions, he tells us that he knew beforehand about the sketches of Günter Grass’ *Tin Drum*.³³ However, after hearing about the plot from the author himself, he simply did not think that the story was worth

31 But, as professor João Vergílio Cuter has suggested to me repeatedly, the case is that there is no consensus whether this preface was written specifically for this work (*Philosophical Remarks*). Another possibility is that this peculiar beginning was elaborated for another manuscript: the MS 140 (*Grosses Format*) dated from 1934. In any case, even if those lines were (or not) written based on the *Philosophical Remarks*, this point does not alter the fact that the religious feeling alluded by Wittgenstein would still be present in a substantial part of his *intermediary period*. This thesis, therefore, can be upheld whether this preface was written for the *Philosophical Remarks* or for any other work of this period.

32 He is currently writing a book on it.

33 *Die Blechtrommel*, in German.

it and initially came to ignore what turned out to be one of the greatest literary achievements of the last century:

Gelernt habe ich ..., daß es sich nicht lohnt zuzuhören, wenn Schriftsteller von der Handlung eines Romans berichten, an dem sie gerade arbeiten. Solchen Geschichten kann man in der Regel nichts, aber auch gar nichts entnehmen. Denn aus den kühnsten und originellsten Einfällen ergeben sich meist miserable Bücher – und absurd scheinende Motive können zu großartigen Romanen führen. (Reich-Ranicki, 2001, p. 442)³⁴

All in all, in some cases, it might be that the author's evaluations concerning his own works are actually correct. However, some ears might lack the "melodic comprehension" (or even another element) which will invariably interfere with the appreciation of the composition. Let us not forget, therefore, that absurd motives might actually lead us to great creations.

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34 My translation: ..."I have learned that it is not worth listening about the plot of a romance in which authors are still working upon. Usually, in such stories, nothing can be found; nothing really. And that is because even from the most audacious and original ideas result, most of the times, miserable books – whereas even from the most absurd motives excellent romances might appear".

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Abstract

My goal here is to approach Wittgenstein's initial writings based on the tradition of philosophical mysticism. The benefit of my reading is that it will allow some clarification in regard to obscure passages and still unexplored perspectives concerning this initial period which, in my opinion, still require additional scrutiny. As I see it, especially when it comes to the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein does not "arrive" at the mystical due to the failure of a logical-linguistic inquiry/analysis related to certain realms of knowledge, on the contrary. I will make a case for supposing that the application of logic occurs with the purpose of establishing the scope of the mystical. Therefore, what I propose here is an attempt to develop a "mystical interpretation" of the initial writings of the author.

Keywords: Wittgenstein; Mysticism; Philosophy of Logic

Resumo

Meu objetivo aqui é o de abordar os escritos iniciais de Wittgenstein com base na tradição do misticismo filosófico. O benefício de minha leitura se deve ao fato de permitir uma certa clarificação no que tange a determinadas passagens obscuras, além de trazer à tona perspectivas inexploradas concernentes ao período inicial do autor; fase esta que, em minha opinião, ainda requer um nível de escrutínio adicional. Entendo que especialmente no caso do *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein não incide no místico por conta de uma limitação da perquirição lógico-linguística relacionada a determinadas regiões do conhecimento, pelo contrário. Irei sugerir que a aplicação da lógica ocorre com o propósito de estabelecer o escopo do místico. Portanto, o que proporei em seguida é a tentativa de desenvolvimento de uma "interpretação mística" em relação aos escritos iniciais do autor.

Palavras-chave: Wittgenstein; Misticismo; Filosofia da Lógica