Wittgenstein's Affirmation of Mysticism in his "Private Language" Argument[1]

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Abstract

Although the view that mystical experiences are ineffable is present in many mystics in both East and West, mystical *philosophies* are rare in the West, where "scientific," common sense, or ordinary language philosophies dominate. One exception is Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* which holds that there are ineffable mystical things about which one "must be silent". Indeed, Wittgenstein, throughout his career admired India's Tagore, who held mystical views. However, many scholars agree with Nieli, who argues that Wittgenstein, in his "Private Language Argument" replaces his earlier *Tractatus*-mysticism with the view that *all* genuine language and experience is public. The paper argues that Nieli is incorrect. Mysticism is still present in Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* but in a more subtle form than that of the *Tractatus*. Specifically, the mysticism of *Tractatus* is what has been called an "autobiographical" mysticism while that of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* is what has been called a "radiant" mysticism. Given Wittgenstein's longstanding admiration for Tagore, the persistence of mysticism into Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* should be no surprise. The paper argues that rather than denying the mystical, Wittgenstein's private language argument actually spell out the place for the ineffable more precisely than had been done in the *Tractatus,* thereby helping to explain Wittgenstein's longstanding admiration for Tagore.

Keywords: Wittgenstein, Tagore, mysticism, Private Language, ineffability

> To prepare, in a spirit of reverence and by a life of discipline, for the world-life in which the soul is to attain maturity amidst her daily work of self-dedication and find at the serene end of her physical existence her own perfect revelation in a world of ineffable light and life, – is the only way the soul can attain to existence and meaning (Tagore, "The Fourfold Way of India", 503).

Although there are many marks of a mystical state, James (2012, 267-68) identifies ineffability as the "handiest" mark by which he classifies a mental state as mystical, and

many mystics, in both the East and the West and in most major religions, claim that mystical states are ineffable. For example, this claim is found in the ancient *Taittirȳa Upanishad* (Matilal 1975). It is also found in various forms in the modern Indian philosophers and mystics Rabindranath Tagore and Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (Sinha 1994, 109-119; Radhakrishnan 1991, 26; Brightman 1991, 413-15).[2] It is generally held that mystical states of consciousness are private states that can normally only be achieved by extraordinary individuals (Stace 1960, 33, 52, 55, 59, 76; Underhill 1999, 34-36, 328; King 2002, 17-18). However, though the view that mystical experiences are ineffable is present in many religions and in many mystics in both East and West (Otto, 2016), genuinely mystical *philosophies* are rare in the West, where "scientific", ordinary language or common-sense philosophies tend to dominate. One exception is Wittgenstein, who, in his early *Tractatus-logico-philosophicus* (hereafter *TLP*), first published in German in 1921, defended the mystical view that there are things that are beyond "the limits of language" and, therefore, about which one "must be silent" (*TLP*, Preface, 6.522, 6.54, 7).[3] *TLP's* doctrine of silence is also reminiscent of Tagore's philosophical views. For, according to Sarinindranth Tagore (2014 268), Rabindrananth Tagore's nephew, the very last works in his uncle's life are, "filled with the image of silence further extending the metalinguistic conviction that language his no final vocabulary with which to answer the question of being". However, in Wittgenstein's "Later Philosophy" (hereafter, WLP), beginning with his *Philosophical Investigations* (hereafter, *PI*), published posthumously in 1953, the mystical dimension appears to have disappeared altogether or, at least, to have been radically deemphasized. For *PI's* "Private Language Argument" (hereafter PLA) argues against the possibility of a private language and, therefore, it would seem, against the possibility of private (mystical) experiences. It is natural to assume that *PI* (293) sees mystical experiences as just another private "beetle" each mystic has in their own unopenable mental "box" that, since it cannot be put into words of public language, "cancel's out, whatever it is," so that "the box might even be empty." This anti-mystical reading of WLP is

argued in Nieli's *Wittgenstein: From Mysticism to Ordinary Language.* Nieli's thesis is that WLP abandons the mystical philosophy of inwardness from his early *TLP* and replaces it with the view that *all* genuine language and experience is ordinary public language and experience, which is why WLP inspired "Ordinary Language Philosophy" (Biletzki and Matar 2018, §'s 1, 3; Parker-Ryan 2018, [I]). Since, on Nieli's view, everything in WLP becomes outward, public, and expressible in "ordinary language," there is no place left for *TLP's* mystical "inner" self. The present paper argues that mysticism is still present in WLP, but in a more subtle form than that in *TLP.* Since Tagore had his own doctrine of the ineffable (see epigraph above and Kannath, 2004), and given Wittgenstein's longstanding admiration for Tagore, from his early *TLP*-period to his "later period" (Monk 2012, 410), the persistence of mysticism into WLP should be no surprise. The present paper argues that rather than denying the mystical, PLA attempts to spell out the place for the ineffable more precisely than it had been in *TLP.* Thus, WLP's PLA can be seen as clarifying the conceptual place for the ineffable that Wittgenstein saw in Tagore and others.

§ I sketches the orthodox view of Wittgenstein's mysticism. § II explains Nieli's view that PLA banishes private or mystical experiences from WLP. § III argues against Nieli that PLA explicitly endorses the view that there are private ineffable *experiences.* § IV refutes the main textual objection in *PI* itself to the present view and argues that PLA actually attempts to specify the nature of the ineffable more precisely than had been done in *TLP.* § V clarifies WLP's view on the question whether or in what sense mystical experiences can be expressed in language.

1. Wittgenstein's Mysticism

> There are indeed things that cannot be put into words. … They are what is mystical. (Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 6.522)

The view that there are things, in fact, the most important things, that are ineffable, is, arguably, the central theme of *TLP.* For in the Preface to *TLP* Wittgenstein states that "The whole sense of the book" is that "what can be said at

all can be said clearly, and what we cannot talk about must be passed over in silence" and that, therefore, "the aim of the book is to draw a limit to thought, or rather—not to thought but to the expression of thoughts; for in order to draw a limit to thought … we should have to be able to think what cannot be thought." That is, the whole aim of the book is to delineate what can be "said," roughly, the propositions of natural science, from the truly important matters that cannot be "said." *TLP* specifies the domain of the mystical to include everything of "authentic value", that is, "ethics, aesthetics, religion – all that is 'transcendental'" (Black 1970, 373-4). Since the "transcendental" includes everything is *a priori* (*TLP*, 6.13, 6.3-6.34), this would include the "metaphysical" propositions (*Sätze*) of *TLP* as well. Indeed, Wittgenstein's remark to Ficker that there are two parts to *TLP*, the part that can be written (the account of the logic of factual propositions), and the part that cannot be written (the "mystical" part), where the latter is the most important part (Monk, 2012, 178), clarifies *TLP's* attempt to set the "limits of language". For, whereas Carnap (1969, 435-6) reads *TLP's* attempt to demarcate the limits of language as an attempt to safeguard the factual (scientific) propositions by segregating them from the mystical "nonsense" that might confuse them, *TLP's* real point was the reverse, namely, to quash the illusion that the genuinely "authentic" issues are solved when one solves scientific problems: "We feel that even when all *possible* scientific questions have been answered, the problems of life remain completely untouched" (*TLP*, 6.52). Thus, Wittgenstein is quite serious when he told Ficker that *TLP* is a book on "ethics," that is, "the mystical", and that this ethical part of the book cannot be written. *TLP's* positive attitude towards the mystical explains why philosophers such as Russell and Carnap, as great as these were in their own specializations, were incapable of understanding Wittgenstein's real intentions in *TLP*.

The place of the mystical in WLP is, admittedly, harder to see, but it is not entirely absent. At *CV* (10), written in 1931, Wittgenstein still invokes the *TLP*-doctrine that there are limits to language. However, this is not particularly significant since in 1931 Wittgenstein had just returned to philosophy and

had not yet made the decisive moves towards his WLP. But Wittgenstein also refers to the limits of language doctrine at *PI* (119): "The results of philosophy" are achieved by the "bumps that the understanding has got by running its head up against the limits of language" and it is these bumps that "make use see the value of the [philosophical] discovery". However, Wittgenstein does not, as he had done in *TLP*, go on in *PI* to attempt to describe what is beyond the limits of language. He does not go on to specify that the mystical includes ethics, aesthetics, religion, and metaphysics. That is, whereas *TLP* had been criticized because it states that one cannot "say" mystical things, and then proceeds to attempt to "say" them (Carnap 1969, 435), WLP reaffirms that there are limits to language but, *prima facia*, more consistently than *TLP*, keeps silent about them.

It is for this reason that almost all of the discussions of Wittgenstein's mysticism focus on *TLP*. Very few commentaries on Wittgenstein mention the mystical in connection with WLP at all because the bare acknowledgement that he still retains the idea that there are limits on language is very little on which to ground a mystical doctrine. Indeed, Hallett (1977, 209-210) argues that *PI's* (119) reference to the old *TLP*-doctrine that there are limits to language is a holdover from his earlier *TLP*-period and does "not belong" in in WLP.

2. Nieli's View that Wittgenstein abandons *Tractatus*-Mysticism in his "Later Philosophy"

> In his attack on universal essences, Wittgenstein, it would seem, is consciously trying to dispense with the two great enemies of his post-Tractatus period—destructive positivism on the one hand, mysticism, metaphysics, and the potential torments of the inner life, on the other. (Nieli, *Wittgenstein: From Mysticism to Ordinary Language*, 234)

According to Nieli, WLP does not merely reject *TLP's* mysticism but actually sees it as WLP's "enemy". Nieli gives several kinds of explanations for Wittgenstein's alleged reversal on the mystical. First, Nieli (1987 246-47) holds that Wittgenstein was personally motivated by his own inner torment, and thought that producing a philosophy that denies

the "inner" might help those with inner demons to lead a normal life free of torment from psychic conflicts. Second, on a more conceptual basis, Nieli (1987, 220), holds that Wittgenstein's "private language argument" (PLA) rejects "at least for the purposes of a philosophy of language, the notion of a private or personal sphere inaccessible to public view." According to Nieli (1987 197, 222), following Strawson (1954), WLP's message is "Forget about the private object so that you can direct all your attention to publicly observable things and events". For Nieli, the Wittgenstein of PLA is not merely a philosopher interested in the philosophy of language but a psychic healer who holds that an "inner life" is bad for one. Since WLP's reasons for his hostility to the private sphere are set out in its PLA, it is necessary to consider, at least briefly, that argument. The core of PLA is set out at *PI* (258),

I want to keep a diary about the recurrence of a certain sensation. To this end I associate it

> with the sign "S" and write a sign in a calendar for every day [when] I have the sensation. … [A] definition of the sign cannot be formulated. But … I can give myself a kind of ostensive definition. … I speak or write the sign down, and … concentrate my attention on the sensation—and so, as it were, point to it inwardly. But what is this ceremony for? For that is all it seems to be! A definition surely serves to establish the meaning of the sign. Well, this is done by [concentrating] my attention; for in this way I impress upon myself the connection between the sign and the sensation. But "I impress it on myself" can only mean: this process brings it about that I remember the connection right in the future. But in the present case, I have no criterion of correctness. One would like to say: whatever is going to seem right to me is right. And that only means that here we can't talk about "right".

Wittgenstein's objection to the indicated "ceremony" is that concentrating one's mind on the connection between the sensation and its description does not establish *criteria* for the correct use of the sign. If his memory fails about which sensation he called "S", he has no criteria for determining that his memory is incorrect. He could consult other of his memories, but that would be like looking at one copy of the newspaper to verify what's in another copy of the same newspaper (*PI*, 265). This problem does *not* arise for public languages. Suppose Wittgenstein sees a green patch, which he calls "G", and

determines to record in his diary every time he sees the same shade of green again. If a member of his linguistic community observes him record an "G" in his diary upon seeing a yellow patch in normal light, they can correct him. It is precisely the impossibility of this kind of independent check that is lacking in his private sensation-language: "The balance on which impressions are to be weighed is not the impression of a balance" (*PI* 259). In brief, a person's private memory is only the "impression" of a criterion. But since genuine languages require actual criteria for the use of words, and since private languages do not have them, but only impressions of them, private languages are not genuine languages. Thus, these alleged private words do not have any meaning at all, *not even for the alleged private language user*. That is, it is not merely that we in the public world cannot understand what the private language user means by their words, but that the private language user cannot understand their own private words because there is no meaning there to understand (Nieli 1987, 222).

This would appear to be bad news for mysticism. For PLA does not merely deny the possibility of private languages in the quite reasonable sense, with which most people could agree, that private experiences are "too intimate or personal to be expressed through public language," but, rather, as part of PLA's "war against the inner, private object" (Nieli, 1987, 222, 224). That is, PLA wants to "eliminate the private object and the activity of mind reflecting upon itself" (Nieli 1987, 223).

In place of a philosophy, like that in his own earlier *TLP*, that allows a significant place for the inner (mystical) life, Wittgenstein's WLP has tried to create "a philosophy of language in which the only reality that is to count is public reality" (Nieli 1987, 225). Private feelings and mental states are "banished from our field of apperception by being denied linguistic expression" to the point that "one does not talk about them even to oneself" (Nieli 1986, 225). That is, PLA not only denies the possibility of a private language but also denies private experience and the private object altogether thereby condemning the human self to absorption in the public (ordinary) world.

3. The *Affirmation* of Private Experience in Wittgenstein's "Private Language Argument"

> The essential thing about private experience [privaten Erlebnis] is really not that each person possesses their own exemplar, but that nobody knows whether other people have this [LW's emphasis] or something else. The assumption would be possible—though unverifiable—that one section of mankind has one sensation of red and another section another. (Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 272)

Although PLA argues that a private language is impossible, the reader is surprised when at *PI* (270), clearly referring to private sensations, Wittgenstein makes an unexpected admission,

> Let us now imagine that … I discover that whenever I have a particular sensation a manometer shows that my blood pressure rises. So that [thereafter] I shall be able to say that my blood pressure rises without using any apparatus. This is a useful result.

Garver (1994, 214-15) points out, this "perplexing" passage seems to take back everything Wittgenstein has been arguing in PLA. For Wittgenstein here admits that one might establish a useful correlation between private sensations and public manifestations after all. However, Garver goes on in the same passage to point out that that the moral of *PI* (270), taken in its *entirety*, does *not* contradict the central conclusion of PLA. For the later parts of *PI* (270) point out that in this hypothetical case "it seems quite indifferent whether I have remembered the sensation *right* [LW's emphasis] or not. … We, as it were, turned a knob which looked as if it could be used to turn some part of the machine, but it was a mere ornament, not a part of the mechanism at all". The "machine" or "mechanism" here is the correlation between the private sensation and the public reading on the manometer – and *PI* (270's) claim is that talk of this "machine" is a mere "ornament" because the alleged *mechanism* connecting private and public states plays no role whatsoever in our language.[4]

Thus, the alleged "useful" correlation between the private sensation and the manometer reading is not so useful after all because it actually reduces, upon further examination,

to a correlation between writing "S" in one's diary and one's blood pressure rising, which are both public events.

It cannot be denied that Garver makes a good point here. *PI* (270), taken in its entirety, does take back the "perplexing" admission that one might have to countenance correlations between private states and public physical manifestations. However, Wittgenstein does *not* take back everything in that passage. At *PI* (272) (see above epigraph), Wittgenstein explicitly admits that there is no problem with the view that human beings have "private experiences [*privaten Erlebnis*]". Far from denying that there can be private experiences, *PI* (272) *explicitly affirms that there can be private experiences*, and though Wittgenstein is here discussing private sensations, there is no reason why the point cannot be generalized to include a wide range of private experiences, including mystical experiences.

PI (272) does, however, place a significant restriction on these private experiences, namely, that "nobody can know whether other people have *this* experience or something else", where the use of the demonstrative "this" in the formulation is crucial. Consider the hypothetical case in which Wittgenstein has a private experience (which might be a private pain or a mystical experience). *PI* (272) does *not* deny that Wittgenstein can tell his peers that he has such an experience. It only denies that he can tell them that he has "*this*" private experience. This restriction makes perfect sense. The word "this" is a demonstrative, and the reference and meaning of demonstratives, like "I", "this," and "that" are dependent on the *context* in which they are used (Georgi, [I], §'s 2. b, 3. b & c, 4. d; 5. a & b). However, there is a significant difference between "I" and "this". Although the word "I" is a demonstrative, the word "this" is not merely a demonstrative but is what is called a "true demonstrative" in the sense that its reference, in any given context, normally requires *more* than the mere uttering of it (Braun, 1996). Consider the following example! When Wittgenstein, sitting in a coffee shop, says "I knew Bertrand Russell", one does not require anything more to determine that Wittgenstein is referring to himself, the person that uttered that statement. When, however, in the same coffee shop, he

says "This is my favorite coffee", one normally requires more information to know to what "this" refers. Suppose, for example, Wittgenstein had *mistakenly* ordered the wrong coffee that day but that his friend had ordered the kind of coffee Wittgenstein had meant to order. In this case, Wittgenstein cannot merely say that "this" is my favorite coffee, but must, perhaps by *gesturing with his arm at his friend's coffee*, say "this" is my favorite coffee. It is only by means of that gesture, in context, that he successfully indicates which coffee is his favorite.

The important point, for present purposes, is that since the word "this" which plays such a prominent role in *PI* (272) is a "true demonstrative," it requires *a great deal of context*, even more than is required for ordinary demonstratives, to determine what it means. In the aforementioned case, it requires knowledge of the spatial context (the coffee shop), but it also requires knowledge of Wittgenstein's gestures as he utters the word "this". But these matters of context are precisely what is, *by definition*, lacking in putative private uses of words. When Wittgenstein has his hypothetical private experience of a certain sensation, or a private mystical experience, he cannot convey to his linguistic community which private experience he means because that experience, being private, is, so to speak, in a different "space" from the public "space" he shares with his linguistic community. It is not in the "space" of the coffee shop or the "space" in which clarifying arm gestures are made. Wittgenstein cannot indicate which private experience he means by gesturing at it, as he does in the case of his friend's coffee. If he gestures at his sensation with his public arm, that gesture does not, by definition, penetrate into his private mind and pick out the right private experience. However, if he privately "gestures" at his private experience, perhaps by focusing his mental attention on it, once again, this "private pointing" cannot, by definition, penetrate into the public space of his linguistic community and fix the reference of his private word for that public community.

The fact that *PI* (272) acknowledges that human beings can have "private experiences [*privaten Erlebnis*]," but cannot coherently say that they have "*this*" private experience, has another significance. Although many, but not all different sorts

of words are believed, in one way or another, to "'hook onto' bits of reality", it is often held that the demonstratives and indexicals are *paradigm* cases of this sort of "referring" language that "hooks onto" reality (Michaelson 2019, § 1). Kaplan (1989), whose account of demonstratives and indexicals has set the baseline for all subsequent accounts, also holds that some demonstratives and indexicals achieve "direct reference" to the relevant object in the world. If this is the case, then, when *PI* (272) states that one cannot coherently refer to "this" private experience of one's own, he is denying that by talking about one's private experiences one is coherently talking about something in *reality* to which one has *direct reference* denied to anyone else. His reasons are not hard to find. For WLP holds that the word "this" functions in our language a very particular way. *PI* (380), warning against the tendency to posit a "private ostensive definition," states that it must be possible to ask of any putative "this": "This?—What?" That is, a "this" is always a "this-such". It is this human being, this tree, this airplane, etc. Furthermore, the word "this" "hooks onto" reality via the appended "such". If Jones, at a party, points at a potted plant, and says, "This is my wife", he has not succeeded in picking out the appropriate object because the criteria for calling something a wife are massively different from those for calling something a potted plant. Further, the criteria for the application of these various sortal terms, "wife", "tree", or "airplane", to items in the world are, as WLP puts it, embodied in the "grammar" of the public language (*PI*, 353). Since, however, this appeal to these *public* criteria for the application of demonstrative referring expressions are, by definition, lacking in the case of a putative private experience, the idea that one can do an end-run around public language in which such demonstratives operate within specific sorts of restrictions and somehow manage to use them to refer (or directly refer) successfully to a private object is incoherent. The "such" that is required to mediate the connection of the "this" with the object in reality is lacking in private uses of "true demonstratives." Thus, *PI* (272) does not deny that one can have private (mystical) experiences but only that one can use the bare demonstrative "this" (minus the "such") to put such *wordless private or mystical* experiences into

words (whether private or public words) – thereby completely distorting *both* the logic of the situation *and* the nature of private experiences.

Rather than denying the possibility of private experiences, mystical or otherwise, what PLA actually does is separate the notion of private experiences from *the sort of* factual language, whether this language be private or public*,* that depends on the sort of contact with reality that is established by means of the "true demonstratives".[5]

But this is the same claim made by many mystics. Significantly, it is also claimed by R. Tagore in *Shesh Lekha 13,*

> Today, my sack is empty
> I have given completely
> whatever I had to give.
> In return if I receive anything
> Some love, some forgiveness—
> Then I will take it with me
> When I step on that boat
> That crosses to the festival of the wordless end
> (quoted in S. Tagore 2014, 268-69).

This is not merely the idea that death is "wordless" (the end of the "words" of this material life), although that that is involved as well, but is that the wordlessness of death itself symbolizes the idea that "the telos of existence is thought to be wordless" (S. Tagore 2014, 268). S. Tagore (2014, 269) goes on to point out correctly that Tagore's language here recalls Wittgenstein's final remark in *TLP* (7) that "Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent." Nieli is, therefore, incorrect that WLP abandons the mysticism of *TLP* in WLP. That same mysticism is present, precisely where one might think it most unlikely to find it, in WLP's PLA. For in PLA, where Wittgenstein might seem to deny the possibility of private or mystical experiences, he actually *affirms* it, but stresses that it is a "wordless" experience (irrespective of whether these are "pubic" or "private" words). That is, *PI* (272) not only reaffirms *TLP's* (6.522) mystical view that there are things that cannot be put into words", but even attempts to specify the precise nature of this "wordless" experience, and the associated limits on language more precisely than *TLP* had done. Nieli has, in effect, confused WLP with the "ordinary language philosophies"

defended by some of Wittgenstein's disciples, like John Wisdom, Norman Malcolm and J.L. Austin, with WLP's much more spiritual view.[6]

4. Reply to an Objection

> The great difficulty here is not to represent the matter as if there were something one couldn't do. As if there really were an object from which I derive its description, but I were unable to shew [zeigen] it to anyone. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 374)

Although it is argued in the previous section that WLP affirms the possibility of private (mystical) experiences, some might claim that *PI* (374) contradicts this? For if, as *PI* (272) implies, one can have "private experiences", then, since the private is, by definition, not something one can express to anyone else, there *is*, contra *PI* (374), something that one cannot do, namely, put one's private experiences into words. How are *PI* (374) and *PI* (272) consistent with each other?

There is no contradiction. For when *PI* (374) stresses that it is important not to represent the matter as if there is something one cannot do, *PI* (272) actually *explains why there is nothing that one cannot do*. Recall that *PI* (272) allows that there can be private experiences but adds that what is not possible is that "no one can know whether I have *this*" private experience (where the demonstrative is crucial to the formulation). Thus, *PI's* (374) point is that when asked if there is something one cannot do (i.e., express private experiences into words), WLP replies that one cannot coherently specify for any "this" that *this* is what one cannot do!

The real common thread between *PI* (272) and *PI* (374) is that both are, as *PI* (374) indicates, opposed to the idea that *the proper model of private or mystical experiences* is that "there [is] an object from which I derive its description but I were unable to show anyone". That is, WLP is opposed to the use of the name and object-named model in these kinds of cases. Thus, it is not private or mystical experience *per se* that WLP finds objectionable, *but only that specific distorting model of private or mystical experience*. Specifically, WLP objects to the view that a private or mystical experience is like a beetle in a the unopenable box of the mind that can, somehow, be called "this"

beetle, but cannot be shown to anyone. Similarly, the language that expresses private or mystical experiences is not like the language that describes objects in containers (experiences in the mind or beetles in boxes). If one uses this name-object model, which *is* appropriate in other contexts, like most scientific contexts, in order to conceptualize mystical experience, one will only produce a caricature of private or mystical experiences that can then easily be "refuted" by "scientific" minded philosophers: "So you mystics are claiming that you each have a private mystical beetle in your various mental boxes that you each cannot show to anyone else – even to other mystics? Then how do you know that what you mean by your 'mystical experience' is the same as what other mystics mean by their 'mystical experiences'?" What Wittgenstein objects to in PLA is this name-object model of private experiences, not "*privaten Erlebnis*" as such.

Garver's correct point that in *PI* (270) Wittgenstein takes back his earlier suggestion in *PI* (270) that there could be a "useful" correlation between private experiences and readings on a manometer should not be surprise. Garver is right that Wittgenstein, further down in the passage, suggests that the private object drops out as irrelevant because it does not matter if he remembers it incorrectly. But still further down, in the very last paragraph of *PI* (270), referring to our language-game of sensations, Wittgenstein makes clear that this does not mean that he completely rejects a sensation-language,

> And what is our reason for calling "S" the name of a sensation here? Perhaps the kind of way this sign is employed in this language game.—And why a particular sensation, that is, the same one every time? Well, aren't we supposing that we write "S" every time?

Wittgenstein here reaffirms that we do possess a "sensation-language" in which we talk about our own sensations but that it is a very different kind of language-game from the language-game of physical objects. We talk about our sensations as we talk, as he will say two paragraphs later in *PI* (272), about "our own [*privaten*] exemplar", *not* as we talk about the "this" beetle. Whereas the name-object model is appropriate in the natural sciences, the language of mental states is, with some important qualifications, properly modelled on *expression*-language

(McDonough [I], § 7), not on the sort of "referential' language that involves "true demonstratives". Roughly, when one speaks about one's private or mystical states, one is not *naming* objects hidden in the unopenable box of the mind, but rather giving *expression* to one's private states.

Finally, the last paragraph in *PI* (270) explains a crucial feature of WLP's notion of concept formation. Specifically, WLP holds that we do *not* form our concepts by deriving them from objects, but, rather, much the reverse, our concepts (for example of a physical object or a sensation or a mystical state) *are based on the way we use words*. Thus, our concepts of mental states are based on our the very unique ways we talk about them as opposed to the way we talk about physical objects. Thus, our concepts physical states are formed on the way we use that kind of physical language that is essentially parasitic on the use of the "true demonstratives", but our concepts of mental states are dependent on our natural ways of *expressing* those mental states. Thus, in order to understand the concepts of mental states, one must examine the ways the actual "language-games" of mental-state ascription. Similarly, in order to understand our concepts of mystical states, one must look at the actual "language-games" in mystical communities. There will, of course, be a concept of those mystical states because there are *de facto* communities of people express such states in virtually all times and cultures and there are notable similarities about the way these very different communities talk about these states (Stace 1960, 31-40, 134-152). There is, therefore, no more need for Stace (1960, 13-18) to argue that the enquiry into the nature of mystical states or language about those states is worthwhile than there is to argue that the enquiry into the nature of physical states or scientific language about those states is worthwhile. For the justification for the enquiry into the nature of mystical states is supplied by the existence of these widespread "forms of life" and the associated "language games" (*PI*, 83, p. 226). There is no need to "justify" an interest in mystical language any more than there is a need to justify an interest in physical language. Both kinds of language are *equally* grounded the "natural history" of human beings (*PI*, 25, 415, p. 230). Neither has any more basic priority

over the other: "What has to be accepted, the given, is—so one could say—*forms of life* [LW's emphasis]" (*PI*, p. 226). That includes, of course, mystical "*forms of life*."

5. Ineffable in What Sense?

> Although declaring that the heart of their experience is ineffable, [some mystics] have much to say about it, pouring out their story in journals, letters, poems, essays, sermons, and confessions—telling all. Other mystics find the inner light within the silence of their own souls, and let their light shine without the accompanying clamor of words. (Brightman, "Radhakrishnan and Mysticism", 393)

It is often said that many mystics, like the author of *TLP*, claim that their mystical experiences are ineffable, and then spend a great deal of time talking about them, e.g., Carnap (1969, 435) criticizes *TLP* on the grounds that Wittgenstein "seems to me to be inconsistent in what he does [in *TLP*]. He tells us that one cannot make philosophical statements and that whereof one cannot speak thereof one must be silent; and then, instead of keeping silent, he writes a whole philosophical book". However, one can escape Carnap's objection by making certain distinctions about what it means to "say" something or "put something into words". One "puts something into words" in one sense when one makes a factual statement of the sort that is parasitic on the "true demonstratives" and one "puts something into words" in a very different sense when one writes a poem or allegory. The present section attempts to clarify WLP's (*PI*, 270-272) account of these two different senses.

Brightman (1991, 402) states that "the mystic experience is ineffable only in the sense in which the taste of good food is ineffable". However, this gets one no further absent an explanation of the sense in which the taste of good food is ineffable. Phillips (1991, 153) attempts an explanation: "Givenness is always ineffable. It can be pointed at by words, but words cannot convey it directly. All discourse ultimately points back to an ostensive step [at which point] we must simply behold." That is, since "givenness" is always ineffable, it can only be "pointed at" in an original "ostensive step" in which one "simply behold[s]" the given. This would be news to Sellars

(1997, 13-14) who, referring to that "great foe of immediacy", Hegel, holds, that it is a myth that anything is simply "given" to consciousness. Sellars sees it as one of the most pervasive and destructive myths in philosophy that there is some "this" that is "purely given" in ostension independently of *mediation* by sortal terms like "human" or "tree" – and it is the "myth of the given" that underlies Phillips' seductive but ultimately *impotent* notion of the mystical as a pure "this" that one can only "simply behold".

Although one might not think so at first glance, Sellars' critique of the "myth of the given" is good news for the mystic. For if Phillips were correct that one can only "simply behold" the "given," it would be hard to understand how *any* words that purport to convey mystical experiences, even poems, have any meaning whatsoever. Further, WLP *(PI*, 272) agrees with Sellars both that there are no pure "thisses" and that the word "this" succeeds in referring to items in reality only via the appended sortal terms. Thus, Phillips' view is precisely the opposite of the account of the mystical implicit in WLP (*PI*, 270). Since, for WLP, the grammar of these sortals is enshrined in the grammar of *public* languages, there are can be no private uses of "this" that succeed in referring to *objects* in reality. Since, however, WLP (*PI*, 272) admits that we can talk about private experiences, but not "this" private experience, it follows that our talk about private experiences is not factual language. The language in which WLP (*PI*, 272) allows that we can describe our mystical experiences is not like the factual language in which one describes "this" tree. That is, when one describes one's mystical experience, one is not referring to an *object* (like a beetle in some unopenable box) and subsuming it under some public sortal term like "tree". However, WLP (*PI*, 272) allows that one *can* describe one's mystical experience in the sort of non-factual language that is not parasitic on the "true demonstratives", which explains why mystics often employ poetry or allegory to convey their mystical experiences.

One can, therefore, specify the sense in which, for *PI* (272), one *can*, and the sense in which one *cannot*, put mystical experiences into words. One *cannot* put mystical experiences into words in the sense in which one can put ordinary or scientific "factual" discourse that is parasitic on the "true

demonstratives" into words. That is, in mystical discourse one cannot say of some possible "this" that it falls under some sortal expression whose meaning is described in the grammar of public language. One *can*, however, put a mystical experience into words in the sort of non-factual language, like poetry or allegory, that does *not* "hook onto" reality by means of "true demonstratives" like "this". There is, therefore, no contradiction between the fact that mystics often claim that mystical experiences cannot be "said" in words and then go on to "say" a lot about them. For there are two different notions of "saying" involved. The basic point is that there are two very different sorts of language and of their relation to "reality"[7] involved here. There need not, therefore, be any "inconsistency" in mystical discourse of the sort that Carnap finds in Wittgenstein's *TLP,* and the same conclusion can be extended to mystical discourse in other philosophical, religious, and literary figures. One can, however, also infer from this that the Wittgenstein of *TLP* is the first "autobiographical" sort of mystic mentioned by Brightman (1991, 393-94) in the epigraph above, that is, the kind that says that the mystical is ineffable, but then proceeds to say a lot about it, while the Wittgenstein of WLP is the second sort of mystic mentioned by Brightman, namely, the "radiant" kind that "finds the inner light within in the silence of their own souls" and "let[s] their light shine without the accompanying clamor of words." Thus, the reason Nieli cannot find any mysticism in WLP is that he is looking for the "autobiographical" mysticism found in *TLP*, but the mysticism of WLP is of the latter "radiant" sort exhibited by so many of the great mystics of the East who let "their light shine without the accompanying clamor of words".[8]

NOTES

[1] By Wittgenstein's early philosophy is here meant his Tractatus. By his "later philosophy" is here meant his Philosophical Investigations (PI). The sole reference in the present paper to his Culture and Value (CV) is a 1931 remark during the transition from his "earlier" to his "later philosophy". References to TLP are either to the Preface or to proposition number. References to CV are to page number. References to PI are either to paragraph number, i.e., (PI, 435), or to page number, i.e., (PI, p. 230) as required.

2 For a discussion of Tagore's and Radhakrishnan's views that mystical insight concerns a higher "reality" see Tagore (1924) and Conger (1991).

3 It is surprising that though Stace (1960, 46, 291) mentions Wittgenstein several times concerning broadly logical or linguistic points, he never once mentions *TLP's* mysticism.

4 For an account of Wittgenstein's general opposition to mechanistic views of language in WLP see McDonough (1989).

5 It does not follow from this that mystical language is not in some sense about a "higher reality" but only that it is not about a "reality" that can only be spoken about by means of *"true demonstratives"*.

6 For a discussion of ordinary language philosophy see Parker-Ryan 2018, [I]! However, one should not assume from the fact that that the ordinary language philosophers do not acknowledge the mystical in their philosophical views that they are *necessarily* antithetical to it. The present author was once visiting Norman Malcolm in his university offices when he opened a large package in his mail containing an illustrated edition of the *Tao Te-Ching* that he had previously ordered. Malcolm exclaimed "Magnificent!" and stated how impatient he had been for its arrival. It is noteworthy that Malcolm was, in his day, one of the rare genuinely religious philosophers, an Anglican (McDonough [I]. §1), and the Anglicans do have a significant mystical tradition (Ball 2007, Chap. 5).

7 See notes 2 and 5 above!

8 It is noteworthy that when Harry Frankfurt (2013, 112) met Wittgenstein while visiting Malcolm at Cornell in 1949 (McDonough, [I], § 1), he stated that Wittgenstein "shown … with a very remarkable, nearly incandescent inner light - a light of single minded and uncannily concentrated pure dedication to a search for clarity and truth" and seemed "almost supernaturally dedicated to these ideals". Wittgenstein's person, so to speak, "radiated" his spiritual earnestness.

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