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RABINDRANATH TAGORE AND LUDWIG WITTGENSTEIN: Two Sentinels on the Borderlands of Modernity

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Abstract: This paper shall explore how two great masters of twentieth century thought engaged with the mid-twentieth century secular agenda and how one influenced the other. One hundred years ago Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889 – 1951), the Austrian philosopher, fought for the Austro-Hungarian army during the First World War and subsequently experienced a personal, professional and philosophical crisis. In the aftermath of the war, as he sought to rebuild his life, he came across the writings of his contemporary Rabindranath Tagore (1861 - 1941), the Bengali poet and social reformer. This paper will explore the impact of Tagore's work on Wittgenstein and how it opens up new perspectives for theologians today.

Keywords: Language, Mystical Theology, Religion, Seeing, Tagore, *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein

1. Introduction

In the summer of 1927 the 38 year-old Ludwig Wittgenstein was eventually persuaded by Moritz Schlick, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Vienna, to attend his Thursday evening gatherings of students and professors who shared an interest in investigating the logical and scientific bases of philosophy –

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what would later evolve into the famous Vienna Circle. Schlick felt that Wittgenstein "was one of the greatest geniuses on earth"[1] having been one of the first professional philosophers in Vienna to read Wittgenstein's newly published *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* and appreciate its enormous significance.[2] The meetings were tense and Wittgenstein required a certain amount of careful handling to help him engage with the philosophers gathered to appreciate his every word. This is unsurprising. Having worked with Bertrand Russell at the beginning of the twentieth century in Cambridge on the problems of philosophical logic, at first his pupil and later effectively a colleague and rival, the young Ludwig had drawn up the essential framework of the *Tractatus* before enlisting into the Austro-Hungarian *Kaiserlich und Königlich* army at the outbreak of the Great War. The trauma of the conflict was severe in the extreme for the highly-strung son of a sophisticated Viennese *haute-bourgeois* family, not least because of the stress of having to come into contact with the type of people his upbringing and station had conspired to insulate him from.[3] After surrender, capture and incarceration at Monte Cassino Abbey in Southern Italy, the 30 year-old completed the *Tractatus* with its notoriously gnomic final remarks on *das mystische* before lapsing into one of the most famous philosophical silences of modern times. Turning his back on the academy he first worked as a monastery gardener then, in an ultimately doomed attempt, tried to teach primary school children in the Lower Austrian backwaters. When Schlick made his approaches, Ludwig was effectively doing a form of occupational therapy engaged in the construction of an ultra-modernist (and quite stunning) house

[1]M. Nedo, and M. Ranchetti, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Sein Leben in Bildern und Texten*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1983, 206.

[2]R. Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein – The Duty of Genius*, London: Jonathan Cape, 1990, 241 – 243.

[3]L. Wittgenstein, *Notebooks 1914 – 1916.* Trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, Oxford: Blackwell, 1984. P. M. Tyler, *The Return to the Mystical: Ludwig Wittgenstein, Teresa of Avila and the Christian Mystical Tradition*, London: Continuum, 2011.

for his sister Gretl in the unfashionable Kundmanngasse. Hence his reluctance to be drawn once again into professional philosophical discussion. If he had been somewhat idiosyncratic in his communication techniques in the past from now on he would display an unusual turn of pedagogy that bordered on the eccentric. Consequently, we can imagine the surprise of the great and the good of Vienna when "one of the greatest (philosophical) geniuses on earth" would during the meeting turn his back on the assembled professors and recite to them the poetry of the Bengali Nobel Laureate, Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941). Rudolf Carnap in his reminiscences of these meetings suggests that "I sometimes had the impression that the deliberately rational and unemotional attitude of the scientist, and likewise any ideas which had the flavour of 'enlightenment', were repugnant to Wittgenstein."[4] Taking this unusual turn as my starting point I would like to suggest an interpretation of *why* Ludwig may have behaved in this way including along the way an exploration of some of the ideas of Rabindranath Tagore and why he should have held such an appeal to Wittgenstein. I shall then use Wittgenstein's approach to 'science', 'enlightenment' and professional rational discourse in general as a springboard for representing my understanding of the role of theology in the contemporary academy as heir to the medieval Mystical Theology. I shall conclude by outlining the importance of Wittgenstein's 'turn' to the future practices of the academy, in particular those in the arena of theology.

2. ***The King of the Dark Chamber***

In a letter to Paul Engelmann written on the 23rd October 1921 Wittgenstein expressed his disapproval of another of the Bengali's works – the short play *The King of the Dark Chamber*:

> It seems to me as if all that wisdom has come out of the ice box; I should not be surprised to learn that he got it all second-hand by reading and listening (exactly as so many among us acquire their knowledge of Christian wisdom) rather than from his own genuine *feeling*. Perhaps I don't

[4]Monk, R., *Ludwig Wittgenstein*, 244.

> understand his tone; to me it does not ring like the tone of a man possessed by the truth.[5]

He goes on to suggest in the letter that Tagore may have suffered from a weak translation (something he would correct a decade later by attempting with Yorick Smythies his own translation of the play) or indeed that the fault may lie within Wittgenstein himself. The letter alone goes some way to furnishing an explanation as to why Ludwig was to inflict the Bengali's writings on the bemused members of the Vienna Circle a few years later – it was as though Wittgenstein himself was trying to come to terms with Tagore's writings and make sense of how they should be incorporated (or not) into his own inter-war search for 'the truth' (which would include, *inter alia*, his study of Søren Kierkegaard, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Count Tolstoy[6], Oswald Spengler and James Frazer – reflections upon all of whom can be found in the inter-war writings). Accordingly, a few months later we find him writing to Ludwig Hänsel to say that he had revised his opinion as "there is indeed something grand here."[7] Within this re-evaluation of Tagore can be seen Wittgenstein's inter-war (and inter- *Tractatus* and *Philosophical Investigations*) search for the *meaning* of religious truths. Having given (as he thought) final shape to his views on logic and propositional structure in the *Tractatus* it is almost as if he now sought to find similar clarity to these broader religious and aesthetic questions no doubt spurred, I have suggested, by his encounter in the trenches with first 'the nearness of death' and secondly the re-working of the Gospels by Leo Tolstoy. From this, what we might broadly term existential approach, arises

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[5]L. Wittgenstein, *Letters from Ludwig Wittgenstein with a Memoir by Paul Engelmann*, Ed B. McGuinness. Oxford: Blackwell, 1967, 23.10.1921.

[6]McGuinness and Monk tell the strange story of how shortly after arriving in Galicia during his war service in 1914 he walked into a bookshop which only contained one book – Tolstoy's *Gospels*. At this time he was feeling particularly low and in Monk's words he was quite literally "saved by the word" R. Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein*, 115.

[7]Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein*, 408.

one of the observations that occurs in his notebooks at the time: "A religious question is either a "life question" or (empty) chatter. This language game, we could say, only deals with "life questions."[8]

With this comment in mind it becomes clear which criteria Wittgenstein was applying to Tagore's play – was it indeed a 'life question' or mere 'empty chatter'. Initially at first he seemed to think the latter before moving to the former. What was it about Tagore's work that could have elicited this move? Regardless of the writings of both men of letters, the backgrounds and influences on the two men could immediately suggest a bond, if not, to coin Wittgenstein's phrase, a 'family resemblance'. Both were born into grand late nineteenth-century families which would be destined to play significant roles in the cultural destinies of their two nations – Wittgenstein's Habsburg Austria and Tagore's Bengal - with both families' wealth arising from the business acumen and wheeling-dealing of a significant patriarch – in the case of Ludwig his father Karl Wittgenstein whose steel empire made the family 'Stinkreich' after the economic collapse following the First World War. In Tagore's case his grandfather, Dwarakanath Tagore, who amassed a huge fortune from landed estates in the East of Bengal (incidentally, both Ludwig and Rabindranath were expected to follow in the family enterprises: Ludwig ended up moving from engineering and aeronautics to falling into the embrace of philosophy under the tutelage of Russell at Cambridge whilst Tagore spent the time he should have been tending the family estates composing some of the lyrics and poetry for which he is most famous today). The relative wealth of both families gave them also a certain cultural and intellectual independence. The Tagores had lost their high-caste Brahmin status some generations back and readily embraced the reforming zeal of Rammohun Roy's Brahmo Samaj whilst the Wittgenstein's drifted from their

[8]"*Eine religiöse Frage ist nur entweder Lebensfrage oder sie ist (leeres) Geschwätz. Dieses Sprachspiel – könnte man sagt – wird nur mit Lebensfragen gespielt*" *Wittgenstein's Nachlass*: *The Bergen Electronic Edition*. Oxford: OUP, 2000, 183:202.

ancestral Judaism to a nominal Catholicism that seemed to express itself most deeply in their sponsorship and patronage of some of the greatest artistic names of the Viennese Golden Age (including, amongst others, Johannes Brahms, Gustav Mahler and Gustav Klimt). Yet despite this privileged and gilded background both 'seers' had turned their back on their privilege in an effort to direct their best efforts towards the help and good fortune of their fellow citizens. This wandering exile was no doubt influenced by early trauma and loss. Wittgenstein lost three of his brothers to suicide as he was growing up whilst Tagore's sister-in-law (to whom many impute a romantic attachment) herself committed suicide when Tagore was a young man. Finally, mention has already been made of Wittgenstein's unorthodox pedagogical methods. Tagore too was deeply suspicious of mainstream teaching methods and like Wittgenstein had benefitted from a home education which seemed to foster an independence of spirit that bore fruit in the establishment of his innovative educational establishment in Bengal, Shantiniketan, the so-called 'Forest University' - still to this day one of the foremost educational establishments in India.

3. Foundationalism and Fideism

So what does this have to do with the contemporary practice of theology in the academy? Well, if Wittgenstein's contribution to philosophy is hotly disputed[9] his contribution to religious thought is no less contentious.

When we turn to Wittgenstein and the religious it might be argued that rather than influencing a contemporary philosophical debate, Wittgenstein's writing has produced a whole new way of thinking of the discipline, or even developed a new discipline in itself. Surveying the many eminent philosophers who have ventured to interpret his contribution to the discipline the only thing that can be said with certainty is that there is very little consensus amongst them as to what exactly is that contribution and how it should be understood.

[9]Tyler, *The Return to the Mystical*.

Some of the earliest attempts to apply Wittgensteinian approaches to religious issues have also been some of the most far-reaching in that much subsequent scholarship in the area has echoed the approaches of these early pioneers, in particular the work of Rush Rhees, Norman Malcolm, Peter Winch and D. Z. Phillips.[10]

One of the key elements in all four writers, which has become something of a neo-Wittgensteinian orthodoxy, is that religious language must not be treated as any other language but has its own system of verification that will only make sense within the 'religious language game'. Such ideas are clearly influenced by those of the later Wittgenstein, especially the *Philosophical Investigations,* and have become something of a cliché in interpreting Wittgensteinian views of religious discourse. One of the consequences of this is that some scholars[11] while purporting to be 'Wittgensteinian' have in fact introduced an anti-realist character to Wittgenstein's thought which a careful study of his diaries should refute.[12] Such moves have used the importance of *Sprachspiele* from the *Investigations* to make a case for arguing the special importance of religious *Sprachspiele* that are somehow unconnected to other language games.

Common to many of these approaches of the 'founding fathers' of Wittgensteinian philosophy of religion has been the importance they ascribe to Wittgenstein's dictum to look at description rather than explanation in our approach to the phenomenon of religion citing in particular Wittgenstein's

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[10]N. Malcolm, *Wittgenstein: A Religious Point of View?* London: Routledge, 1993; P. Winch, *The Idea of a Social Science*, London: Routledge, 1958; *Trying to Make Sense*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1987; D. Z. Phillips, *The Concept of Prayer.* London: Routledge, 1965; *Religion without Explanation*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1976; and *Religion and the Hermeneutics of Contemplation,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

[11]D. Cupitt, *The Long Legged Fly: A Theology of Language and Desire*, London: SCM, 1987 and *Mysticism after Modernity.* Oxford: Blackwell, 1998.

[12]Tyler, *The Return to the Mystical*.

remark: "We must do away with all *explanation*, and description alone must take its place."[13] Thus Winch suggests we cannot understand what is happening in a monastic community by applying purely naturalistic theories without also taking into account the underlying beliefs that motivate such a community. What they all have in common is the appeal to take the religious *Lebensform* seriously if we are to approach any serious formulation of religion as a fact of human affairs.

4. Faith as Passion

Drury, Wittgenstein's friend and pupil, once told Wittgenstein that he had been reading F. R. Tennant's *Philosophical Theology* to which Wittgenstein replied "a title like that sounds to me as if it would be something indecent."[14] This response perhaps indicates the direction we should take in applying Wittgenstein's writings to the study of religion, *pace* the work of the 'founding fathers'. I have already mentioned Wittgenstein's inter-war 'search for truth' in the writings, *inter alia*, of Kierkegaard, Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky and, of course, Tagore. [15] What emerges from this, as we have already seen, is Ludwig's characterisation (following Kierkegaard) of the 'passion of belief', as for example in this quote from his Notebooks: "Wisdom is passionless. But faith by contrast is what Kierkegaard calls a passion."[16]

In this respect one of the key texts for throwing light on Wittgenstein's attitude to religion is the recollections of his pupil Maurice Drury.[17] Drury had originally gone up to Cambridge to

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[13]L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, ed., G. E. M. Anscombe and R. Rhees, Oxford: Blackwell, 1958, 109.

[14]R. Rhees, *Recollections of Wittgenstein*, Oxford: Oxford Paperback, 1987, 90.

[15]In later life Wittgenstein would tell Drury that there were only two European writers of recent times who had anything important to say about religion: Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky. Rhees, *Recollections of Wittgenstein*, 86.

[16]"*Weisheit ist leidenschaftlos. Gagegen nennt Kierkegaard den Glauben eine Leidenschaft*" L. Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, ed., G. von Wright and H. Nyman, Oxford: Blackwell, 1980, 53.

[17]Rhees, *Recollections of Wittgenstein*.

study for the Anglican priesthood at Westcott House. However, after he had come under the influence of Wittgenstein he abandoned his ordination training and spent two years working with unemployed people in Newcastle and Merthyr Tydfil. With Wittgenstein's encouragement he began to study medicine in 1934 and qualified in 1939. The most important period of his recollections of Wittgenstein dates from the period after the Second World War when Wittgenstein was living in Ireland and Drury working in St Patrick's Hospital in Dublin. After Drury's death in 1976 his recollections were collected and published by Rhees. Commenting on the reason for publishing the remarks Rhees stated:

> The number of introductions to and commentaries on Wittgenstein's philosophy is steadily increasing. Yet to one of his former pupils something that was central in his thinking is not being said.
>
> Kierkegaard told a bitter parable about the effects of his writings. He said he felt like the theatre manager who runs on the stage to warn the audience of a fire. But they take his appearance as all part of the farce they are enjoying, and the louder he shouts the more they applaud.
>
> Forty years ago Wittgenstein's teaching came to me as a warning against certain intellectual and spiritual dangers by which I was strongly tempted. These dangers still surround us. It would be a tragedy if well-meaning commentators should make it appear that his writings were now easily assimilable into the very intellectual milieu they were largely warning against.[18]

His philosophy, so Drury suggests, should not leave us cold: "Christianity says that wisdom is all cold; and that you can no more use it for setting your life to rights than you can forge iron when it is *cold*."[19]

As far as Wittgenstein's personal faith was concerned he seemed to possess a firm belief in the passionate nature of belief

[18]Rhees, *Recollections of Wittgenstein*, xi.

[19]Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 53.

(hence: "I am not a religious man but I cannot help seeing every problem from a religious point of view."[20]) whilst at the same time remaining sceptical as to religious institutions and behaviour *tout court*. Thus if we are to make sense of Wittgenstein's contribution to the philosophical problems arising from religious faith we would do well to look at his conviction of the *passion* of religious faith as much as the 'logical structure' of any supposed religious 'language games'.

5. A Way of Seeing

Allied to Wittgenstein's notion of religion as a 'passion' we can add his categorisation of philosophy as a 'way of seeing'. Wittgenstein famously characterised the job of the philosopher as presenting an overview or 'way of seeing' – the *Überblick*/perspicuous view or 'overlook' as Wittgenstein himself often called it. In his Cambridge lectures of the 1930s, for example, when he returned to academic philosophy after his time in the 'wilderness', Wittgenstein defines the task of philosophy as one of attempting to "be rid of a particular kind of puzzlement. This "philosophic" puzzlement is one of the intellect not of instinct."[21] From this time onwards he describes his approach to philosophy as one of 'tidying up' our notions of the world, making clear what can be said about the world. Thus in the *Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough*, written in 1931, he contrasts Frazer's own 'scientistic' approach to certain anthropological events to his own *Übersichtliche Darstellung*. He states his own position as one which has the form: "Here one can only *describe* and say: this is what human life is like"[22] contrasting it with what he sees as Frazer's approach.

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[20]Quoted in Rhees, *Recollections of Wittgenstein*, 94.

[21]L. Wittgenstein, *Wittgenstein's Lectures: Cambridge 1930 -1932, from the Notes of John King and Desmond Lee*, ed., D. Lee. Oxford: Blackwell, 1980, 21.

[22]L. Wittgenstein, *Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough,* reprinted in *Philosophical Occasions 1912 – 1951*, ed., J. C. Klagge and A. Nordmann, Cambridge: Hackett, 1993, 121.

The 'way of seeing' or 'oversee' is not however intended to engender a passive acceptance of ourselves or the world. Rather, the overview will lead, suggests Wittgenstein, to a change of attitude which will also transform our relationship with the world. For the *Übersichtliche Darstellung* of the philosopher, or indeed of the theologian for that matter, is not another competing *Weltanschauung* with others in the post-enlightenment/scientific world. The point is clarified in the remarks from *Vermischte Bemerkungen*:

> Clarity, perspicuity (*Durchsichtigkeit*) are an end in themselves. I am not interested in constructing a building, so much as having a clear view (*durchsichtig*) before me of the foundations of possible buildings. My goal, then, is different from the scientist and so my think-way is to be distinguished.[23]

We have before us the clear view of possible buildings rather than constructing another building: conflicting *Weltanschauungen* can be held before the *Übersichtliche Darstellung*.

6. In the Beginning was the Deed

Thus, the transformation of the *Überblick* leads to action for if we have followed this procedure aright we shall have moved 'out of the head' to find understanding and meaning in the wider arena of *acting*. Our aim is not to "refine or complete the system of rules for the use of our words in unheard-of ways."[24] From the 1930s onwards, I would argue, Wittgenstein becomes increasingly less interested with enunciating metaphysical theories for the sake of it but rather in providing a *practical way of acting* which will help a distressed person find peace and solace. We can characterise it a way of encouraging the reader

[23]L. Wittgenstein, *Vermischte Bemerkungen* in Volume 8: *Werkausgabe in 8 Bände*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1993, 459. Written as a draft foreword to *Philosophische Bemerkungen* in 1930. See also L. Wittgenstein, *Zettel*, ed., G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright, Oxford: Blackwell, 1967, 464: 'The pedigree of psychological phenomena: I strive not for exactitude but *Űbersichtlichkeit*'.

[24]Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 133.

to move from thinking to seeing to acting.[25] The reading of his philosophy, as has been emphasised all along, is not a passive act but must be an active engagement that challenges the reader to engage with the work on all levels.

Accordingly, I would like to conclude with some suggestions as to how such a Wittgensteinian approach could be applied to the contemporary study of theology. In so doing, I will characterise this post-Wittgensteinian theology as:
i. A way of speaking
ii. A way of writing and
iii. A way of acting
Let us look at each in turn.

6.1. A Way of Speaking

From the *Tractatus* onwards Wittgenstein began to grasp that the act of communication required a choreography between what is *said* and what is *shown*.[26] Meaning lies in the dance between the sayable and the unsayable. Accordingly I would like to suggest that theology which lies, *by its nature,* on the boundary of the effable and ineffable, is the *locus* par excellence for the choreographed dance between speech and non-speech, or better, saying and showing, whilst pointing towards the path to the transcendent. Faced with the impasse between what God is in God's self (beyond speech) and our attempts to talk about it (the 'logos' of 'theos') Michael Sells suggests we have 3 alternatives:
a. Silence.

[25]Tyler, *The Return to the Mystical*.

[26]As Wittgenstein states in his preface to the *Tractatus,* there is what is presented on the written page and what is unwritten, and often "this second part is the important one." L. Wittgenstein, *Letters from Ludwig Wittgenstein with a Memoir by Paul Engelmann*, ed., B. McGuinness, Oxford: Blackwell, 1967, 143. Cf. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans., D. F. Pears and B. McGuinness, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961, 4.1212: 'What *can* be shown, *cannot* be said.'

b. To distinguish between ways in which the transcendent is beyond names and the ways it is not. Here we have the classic scholastic distinction between God as God is in God's Self and God as perceived in God's creatures, i.e., an analogical approach.
c. To maintain the tension of the aporia and develop a form of performative discourse that realises that every assertion of the nature of the transcendent must be accompanied by another that denies it.[27]

My own work over the past few decades has concentrated on the latter approach: more specifically how the medieval writers of the *theologia mystica* or mystical theology work with the impasse of the transcendent through transgressive and irruptive modes of discourse – both spoken and written, and it is to those writers I turn next:

6.2. A Way of Writing

As Sells makes clear and I have developed in my own work, we can observe a clear method of 'mystical discourse' in the medieval period, up to and including the 'Spanish mystics' Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross, that makes use of this performative discourse of irruption to lead us into the effable/ineffable choreography. Paradox, aporia, humour - in short 'shock and awe' – are all part of the linguistic armoury for writers from Meister Eckhart to Margaret Porete, John of the Cross to Francisco de Osuna. In their zeal to lead us into the presence of The One they play with our discursive intellect, subjecting it to all sorts of games. This can be through intellectual challenge, as we find in Eckhart or through startling and challenging images, often erotic (and note here the Dionysian connection between *eros* and the life of prayer) as we find in John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila.

Take, for example, Meister Eckhart, often seen as the 'master of apophasis'. In his hard-cutting and controversial *German Sermons* he took this position to its extreme by suggesting:

[27]M. A. Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsaying*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.

> Masters of little subtlety say God is pure being. He is as high above being as the highest angel is above a midge. I would be as wrong to call God a being as if I were to call the sun black. God is neither this nor that. And one master says 'whoever thinks he has known God, if he has known anything, it was not God he knew'.[28]

Which leads to his ultimate and shattering conclusion: "Therefore let us pray to God that we may be free of God that we may gain the truth and enjoy it eternally."[29]

Eckhart, like other great practitioners of the *theologia mystica,* knew that the stakes were high in trying to bridge the gap between the effable and the ineffable. In articulating this discourse he knew that he had to present a coherent picture of God that contained the very incoherence that lies at the heart of any project to 'contain' or 'pin down' meaning. In my *Picturing the Soul*[30] I suggested that just as Eckhart's shocking language is necessary to maintain a sound theological tension in our approach to God, so psychological language must be equally shocking if it is to maintain the essential unknowability at the centre of the human person (if the term 'centre' itself is appropriate). For I would see the *psyche – logos*, literally 'talk of the soul', as essentially a 'mystical choreography' between what is said and what is shown akin to Eckhart's own. As with God, so with the psyche, there is an unknowing at the heart, and we rush in with empirical and concrete guns ablaze at our perils. Yes, it may be intellectually satisfying but has it *really* told us anything about the nature of the psyche.[31] This writing with 'shock and awe' being, of course, part of Wittgenstein's

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[28]Meister Eckhart, "German Sermons 10" in *Complete Mystical Works of Meister Eckhart*, trans., M. O'C. Walshe, New York: Crossroad, 2010.

[29]Meister Eckhart, "Sermon 32, Blessed are the Poor in Spirit" in *Complete Mystical Works of Meister Eckhart*.

[30]P. M. Tyler, *Picturing the Soul: Revisioning Psychotherapy and Spiritual Direction,* Bangalore: Dharmaram, 2014.

[31]For more on this see my *Pursuit of the Soul: Soul-making, Psychoanalysis and the Christian Tradition*, Bloomsbury, forthcoming.

own armoury as he develops his own choreography of what can be said and what can be shown in his writings.

6.3. A Way of Acting

Finally, drawing on my Wittgensteinian methodology above, I would like to suggest that all theology – whether mystical, pastoral or even dare I say it systematic – must ultimately lead to action. Blessed John Henry Newman famously quoted St Ambrose at the beginning of his *Grammar of Assent*: "It did not please God to save His people through dialectics."[32] For what is the purpose of theology ultimately? Theology, I would like to suggest, is ultimately a transformational art – it is not a pseudo-science or an aesthetic adventure – rather the aim of theology is to establish the conditions, intellectually and affectively – for the Holy Spirit to act on the soul. As John of the Cross puts it in *The Living Flame of Love*:

> When the soul frees itself of all things and attains to emptiness and dispossession concerning them, which is equivalent to what it can do of itself, it is impossible that God fail to do his part by communicating himself to it, at least silently and secretly. It is more impossible than it would be for the sun not to shine on clear and uncluttered ground. As the sun rises in the morning and shines on your house so that its light may enter if you open the shutters, so God, who in watching over Israel does not doze or, still less, sleep, will enter the soul that is empty, and fill it with divine goods.[33]

The danger with this of course, (as the Church has always recognised) is to imagine from this that the life of the Christian is relatively straightforward: we simply make our homes for Christ and he will automatically come and make everything cosy for us. However John is adamant that this is not the case. The way is hard and the price is high. The spiritual, and we could add here the theological, purging is a painful one: *O*

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[32]*'Non in dialectica complacuit Deo salvum facere populum suum'*, St. Ambrose: *De Fide ad Gratianum Augustum*, Chap.5, Para. 42.

[33]*Living Flame of Love*: 3.46.

Sweet Cautery! writes John (*Living Flame*), and ultimately all in us 'much that is good and true' must die. The work of theology, and philosophy as Wittgenstein testifies, is a hard and painful one. We must constantly challenge the discursive intellect and seek out the ways of self-deception especially in our desire to make idols of the *deus*. I was asked in California recently what is 'enlightenment' in the Christian tradition – I could only answer by showing a picture of the famous Rublev ikon and suggesting that the aim of the Christian life is take up the invitation by the Holy Trinity (represented by Rublev by the three angels) to take our place at the empty seat on the table. True theology prepares us to hear that invitation when it must inevitably come, and hopefully to give us the wherewithal to make our way, tentatively and falteringly, to the eternal messianic banquet to which all will be invited.

7. Conclusion

We began this paper with the traumatised Wittgenstein struggling to find an academic mode of speech before the bemused eyes of the Vienna Circle. As I hope to have demonstrated here, the final form his discourse would take, as evidenced in the later philosophy upon which I have drawn heavily in this essay, is ultimately a dialectic that seeks through the choreography of what is said and what is shown to lead to the transformational "release of the fly from the fly-bottle."[34] I have also drawn parallels with the medieval discourse of mystical theology and suggested that this provides a pattern for theology *tout court* and a reminder that theology is at its heart a transformational discipline which must challenge our ways of acting as we make our earthly pilgrimage to our heavenly homes. Accordingly, I hope you will see by now that Wittgenstein's choice of Tagore, and in particular *The King of the Dark Chamber*, for his inter-war reading was prescient for the type of academic discourse he was hoping to foster in the final decades of his life.

[34]Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 309.

The story of 'the King' is simply told. The eponymous King dwells in a dark chamber at the centre of his Kingdom. No subject has seen him – some fear him, some love him and some even doubt his existence. His wife, Sudarshana, grows restless at never being able to see the King and Tagore contrasts her impatient speculations as to the nature of the King with the simple devotion of the maid-servant Surangama who is content to love the King in his darkness:

> Sudarshana: Light, light! Will the lamp never be lighted in this chamber?
>
> Surangama: My Queen, you can meet others in the lighted rooms; but only in this dark room can you meet your lord...
>
> Sudarshana: Living in this dark room you have grown to speak darkly and strangely Surangama, I cannot understand you. No, no – I cannot live without light – I am restless in the stifling darkness.[35]

Sudarshana, representative of the restless *intellectus* can only be comfortable with light, form and discrimination. Surangama, who we can take as representative of the practice of *theologia mystica*, is happy to live in the darkness with all its paradox and mystery – in her unknowing she accepts the will of her Lord, so much so that her intuitive powers can perceive the approach of the King:

> Surangama: I hear his footsteps in my heart. Serving him in this dark chamber, I have gained this new sense – I know and feel without seeing.[36]

Finally unable to bear the strain of not seeing her Lord, Sudarshana searches him out in a pleasure garden and falls in love with an impostor, these acts lead to the destruction of the palace in fire. Entering once again the Chamber while all is fire outside Sudarshana encounters the true King but this time she has seen him and perceives him as terrifying darkness:

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[35]R. Tagore, *The King of the Dark Chamber*, New Delhi: Rupa, 2002, 17.

[36]Tagore, *The King of the Dark Chamber*, 32.

> Terrible, oh, it was terrible! I am afraid even to think of it again. – Oh you are dark and terrible as everlasting night! Even though I only looked on you for one dreadful instant![37]

As John of the Cross proposes – the vision of the Eternal King is dark and confusing as the boundary between the sayable and unsayable is crossed. For as the King states:

> The utter darkness that has today shaken you to your soul will one day be your solace and salvation. What else can my love exist for?[38]

Running from the encounter Queen Sudarshana pursues a destructive course not only for herself but her country (one thinks here of Wittgenstein's war traumas and his 1920s search for 'the truth'). Finally, humiliated and resigned the Queen can once again enter the Chamber. With her intellect laid low can at last finally see the King and discourse with him openly. The 'perspicuous vision' has been restored and the play ends with the King opening the windows and doors of the Chamber to the Queen as she steps into the light.

In summary, *The King of the Dark Chamber* can be taken as an allegory for Wittgenstein's own search to articulate the truths of the spiritual life. Neither fideist, foundationalist or fundamentalist (as I have argued) the turn of the Wittgensteinian key unlocks a whole garden of mystical discourse for us his contemporary readers.

As in psychotherapy, both Wittgenstein and the mystical writers invite us to observe the foundations of possible buildings rather than trying to build one building – the *Weltbild* rather than the *Weltanschauung*. He does not (like Tagore) provide us with clever interpretations and interventions but allows the clarity of insight (*Übersichtliche Darstellung*) to be turned on the 'foundations of possible buildings'.

This post-enlightenment way of knowing (such as therapeutic discourse – to which we could add mystical discourse) requires a more interactive and immediate medium

[37]Tagore, *The King of the Dark Chamber*, 58.

[38]Tagore, *The King of the Dark Chamber*, 58-59.

or frame of reference than could be grasped by the verification of either the Vienna Circle or what we can term 'scientism'. Action is the closest activity available to language and such activity will be tempered by a necessary vein of humility arising from the lack of an overriding *Weltanschauug*. This is the necessary humility of the practitioner of the mystical discourse – whether contemplative or clergy, philosopher or psychotherapist.

For both Wittgenstein, Tagore and our mystical writers *change* and *transformation* are paramount. They entice us, excite us, goad and puzzle us. *They are not meant to leave us alone.* They pose us problems (Wittgenstein's thought games, the mystical writers' word pictures and challenges) which cannot be ignored. By their nature they 'subvert', if they do not subvert they have failed in their task. If we play their games with them they re-orientate our perceptions of reality, ourselves and our place in the world: they are primarily *performative discourses* that 'show' rather than 'say'.

In conclusion, I have argued in this paper that Wittgenstein's Viennese turn not only allowed a new discourse to return to the heart of academic philosophy but also enabled us to appreciate once again the performative discourse that is the ancient practice of *theologia mystica*. The final notations of the *Tractatus* on *das mystische*, once so problematic to hard-core Anglo-American verificationists (the true heirs of Schlick *et al*) can now be seen as an invitation to a re-evaluation of the Catholic tradition of mystical theology as a venerable discourse inviting us to move from thinking to seeing to acting. And in this spirit I conclude with a few final lines of Tagore:

Have you not heard his silent steps?
He comes, comes, ever comes.
Every moment and every age, every day and every
night he comes, comes, ever comes.
Many a song have I sung in many a mood of mind,
but all their notes have always proclaimed,
"He comes, comes, ever comes."
In the fragrant days of sunny April

through the forest path he comes, comes, ever comes.
In the rainy gloom of July nights
on the thundering chariot of clouds
he comes, comes, ever comes.
In sorrow after sorrow
it is his steps that press upon my heart,
and it is the golden touch of his feet
that makes my joy to shine.[39]

[39]Tagore, *Gitanjali.* London: UBS, 2003, 45.