



## Wonder and Tugendhat's Mysticism

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**Abstract:** Ernst Tugendhat has recently argued that mystical experiences are prompted by a specific sense of wonder or awe. This sense of wonder, he contends, promises to alleviate the existential stresses that follow from the kinds of concerns our propositional language engenders. In this essay, I outline Tugendhat's account of mysticism, focusing on the role wonder plays in it, and expressing a few perplexities about his position. Specifically, I question whether Tugendhat is committed to a disjunctivist theory of experience (with an epistemic or mystical orientation to the contents of experience) and whether this implicit disjunction hinges on a difference between the skilled environmental coping usually associated with a non-propositionally structured form of know-how and a propositionally structured form of knowing-that. I then consider whether Tugendhat's conception of mysticism involves a form of skilled coping that he had previously rejected in his discussion of human language use. The potential re-emergence of skilled coping in mystical practices, I conclude, indicates a tension in Tugendhat's account of mysticism and its relation to wonder.

**Keywords:** Tugendhat, Ernst; awe; mysticism; propositional language; skilled coping; wonder.

One of the remarkable features of Ernst Tugendhat's book *Egocentricity and Mysticism* is its systematic integration.<sup>1</sup> Beginning with a consideration of the basic competencies involved in saying "I," Tugendhat develops an account of The Good and a theory of recognitively structured action to show that mysticism and religion are essential responses to the existential stresses engendered by the very linguistic capabilities that define our species and the forms of practical deliberation these capabilities introduce. Unlike religion, however, mysticism—Tugendhat argues—remains a live option or viable practice for attenuating these stresses, because it can offer us peace of mind.

Interestingly, Tugendhat suggests that a sense of wonder is crucial for mystical experience and attaining peace of mind. Wondering at the existence of the world, for instance, or a beautiful work of art, or an elegant mathematical proof, prompts us to put ourselves into perspective and momentarily relinquish the commitments governing our everyday lives.

I find myself oscillating between two competing reactions to Tugendhat's argument. On the one hand, I find his philosophical anthropology, specifically his discussion of the existential stresses I-Sayers suffer from, compelling. On the other hand, I find his account of wonder—and the sense of mysticism it is supposed to motivate—rather unpersuasive. In other words, it seems to me that Tugendhat's account of our propositionally structured deliberative capabilities is at odds with the kind of skilled coping he attributes to our experiences of wonder. And it's not clear to me that

<sup>1</sup> Ernst Tugendhat, *Egocentricity and Mysticism: An Anthropological Study*, transl. Alexei Procyshyn and Mario Wenning, New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2016. [Henceforth cited as *EM*]

wonder allows us to move from one to the other in the way that Tugendhat requires.

I argue that this is a genuine puzzle of Tugendhat's philosophical anthropology. So, in what follows, I want to test whether a sense of wonder can support the move from the deliberative activities engendering our existential concerns to the skilled coping that is supposed to attenuate these stresses and that Tugendhat associates with mysticism. I start by outlining the main features of Tugendhat's philosophical anthropology to contextualize the discussion. I then move on to offer a quick account of his notion of mysticism and the role wonder is supposed to play in it. Then I consider how the practices he associates with mysticism hinge on a sense of wonder.

### Tugendhat's Philosophical Anthropology

Let me turn to Tugendhat's philosophical anthropology. On his view, what distinguishes us from other species is the propositional structure of human language. Although this point of departure might seem purely theoretical, Tugendhat shows how the propositions expressed in human language transform the way we relate to the world, to ourselves, and to one another. Specifically, Tugendhat shows how the propositionality of human language changes the structure of action and deliberation. In turn, these changes call attention to the distinctively practical registers of our language use. In brief, Tugendhat's fundamental contention is that the prudential and moral deliberations that characterize so much of our day-to-day reflection hinge on being able to use a propositional language competently. Furthermore, a sufficient condition for determining competence is the ability to say "I." In this sense, then, the very structure of our language—a language expressing propositional content that allows speakers to take up different stances to one and the same content, to reason counterfactually, and use deictic expressions that call attention to the various loci of practical deliberation—is the ultimate, defining feature of who we are.

Tugendhat's argument that our defining features—or, more precisely, the defining features of an I-Sayer—are to be found in the structure of propositional language and the basic competencies that such a language presupposes is in my view completely novel. Typically, philosophical anthropologies approach the task of defining humanity via some set of constitutive features of consciousness, or in terms of our specifically practical orientation to the world. A philosophical

anthropologist might, for instance, focus on our abilities to use concepts (or metaphors, in Hans Blumenberg's case), or to possess a theory of mind, skillfully cope with our immediate environment, or experience a specific kind of existential stress. We now know, however, that we share many of these abilities and experiences with other concept mongers, like ravens (who appear to reason inferentially and problem-solve), and social beings like primates, and so on. The uniqueness of Tugendhat's argument stems from the way in which he derives the practical and existential characteristics usually taken to be fundamental from the way I-Sayers use propositional language. What makes us unique, on his view, is that our language extends beyond communication to introduce a practical orientation to the world, others, and ourselves, which involves more than mere skillful coping. Hence, unlike the pragmatic modes of communication involved in the signal-languages of other animals,<sup>2</sup> human language involves an extra-communicative dimension: the propositions embedded in our communicative interactions require us to take a stand on the proposition expressed (that is, affirm or deny it, endorse or reject it, and so on), coordinate it with other possible stances, and reflect upon the proposition expressed in light of what we want, or think is better or worse (relative to the situation at hand). The propositional content of human language, in short, involves a range of

<sup>2</sup> As I am using it here, the term "signal-language" refers to a situation-dependent mode of communication. It is the kind of language one attributes to wolves or primates, for instance, to explain their communication. Signal languages differ from propositionally structured human languages in that expressions in a signal-language depend upon their context to fill in their meaning such that the expressed meaning and the context in which it is expressed cannot be separated. Although in any given situation a signal-language may adequately impart information (for example express anger, warn others of a potential threat, express a desire to play, or show deference to a social superior), successful communication presupposes the situation rather than asserting anything about it. The meaning conveyed thus remains inherently contextual and can be understood and assessed only with reference to the context of expression. Thanks to the propositional content embedded in them, expressions in human languages do not depend on context in this way. They are context-transcending. This independence from context makes possible the deliberation about what would be better or worse.

deliberative practices and modes of evaluation that are simply unavailable to users of signal-languages. For, without cross-contextually stable contents, the need to coordinate commitments and the kinds of deliberations involving the subjunctive mood simply do not arise. The communicative activities agents undertake within a signal-language can only be assessed in light of their situation-specific conditions of success. For example, did a subordinate wolf successfully express deference to the alpha? Did the honeybee communicate the location of the lavender or manuka correctly? Although both instances involve communication (one even relaying a fact about the world), these modes of communication do not open onto anything further. In the case of the honeybee, communicating the location of the lavender to another member of the hive does not allow either bee to reflect on whether it would be better to gather lavender or manuka nectar. Some further capacity to coordinate basic commitments and track them across multiple contexts of action is needed before the bee can weigh up which option would be better.

To put the point a little differently, the situation-dependence of signal-language communication makes more sophisticated forms of reflection on what would be a better or worse course of action next to impossible. For signal-languages have neither the resources to enable more sophisticated counterfactual considerations nor do their communicative interactions require the cognitive competencies needed to track commitments or ideas across different contexts.<sup>3</sup> Thinking about what would be a better or worse course of action, however, requires precisely these resources and competences, since reflecting on what one ought to do hinges upon information not immediately available within one's situation. It also rests upon considering states of affairs that have not (yet) obtained. The honeybee, on Tugendhat's view, cannot consider such alternatives, because it cannot reason counterfactually. It cannot reflect upon what it would do if it were presented with two equidistant sources of nectar, or whether it would prefer to collect nectar from the manuka or lavender fields, since the ability to compare and weigh up the different options in light of preferences requires a kind of cross-contextually stable content. Similarly, a wolf cannot reflect upon how it might respond to a

situation if the hierarchy of its pack were different, or what would have happened had its show of deference to the pack leader failed. These kinds of considerations require propositional content that signal-languages do not possess, and a specific set of capabilities that bees and wolves simply do not have.

The propositionality of human language thus implies a set of cognitive abilities needed to reason counterfactually and evaluate possible outcomes. As Tugendhat argues (*EM* ch.2), the evaluative dimensions made possible by propositionally structured language involve three basic registers with which a competent speaker implicitly operates. First, a speaker recognizes herself as participating in some kind of a whole (for example, a space of reasons) and, second, as necessarily occupying an epistemic perspective within this whole—what Tugendhat calls, following Tyler Burge and Sydney Shoemaker, "a locus of responsibility" (*EM* ch.3), which is a point of view from which one's deliberation on potential courses of action in light of what one finds important to oneself or to others takes place.<sup>4</sup> This in turn implies, third, a realization that the epistemic privilege an I-Sayer attaches to her perspective remains relative—other perspectives or loci remain possible and other I-Sayers have different views on what is important to them. When these perspectives or loci are considered together, it becomes apparent to an I-Sayer that what she takes to be paramount may not be so, in the grand scheme of things.

Tugendhat's focus on the propositional content and the reflective capacities required to competently use a propositionally structured language allows him to reconceive what it means to be an I-Sayer.<sup>5</sup> This anthropological turn focuses on the practical

<sup>4</sup> See Sydney Shoemaker, "On Knowing One's Own Mind," reprinted in *The First-Person Perspective, and Other Essays*, New York, NY: Cambridge University Press 1996, pp. 25–49; Tyler Burge, "Reason and the First Person," in *Knowing Our Own Minds*, eds. Crispin Wright, Barry C. Smith, and Cynthia Macdonald, New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1998.

<sup>5</sup> One of the more interesting consequences of Tugendhat's position is that being human is not sufficient for being an I-Sayer: infants and young children who have yet to master a natural language (or indeed humans who suffer from an extreme cognitive impairment) and cannot competently use indexical expressions like "I," "you," and "this," are not (yet) I-Sayers. See *EM* ch.1 for Tugendhat's discussion of this point.

<sup>3</sup> Or so Tugendhat contends. Whilst I find this line of argument persuasive, I think it is also worth flagging the fact that Tugendhat's claim here is empirical in nature. It needs to be tested experimentally.

implications a propositionally structured language has for speakers. Specifically, Tugendhat emphasizes that I-Sayers must take a stance on what they should do. Taking a stance thus explicitly situates them within a space of reasons and introduces them to differing stances or priorities. Such an encounter has a further consequence too. For taking a stance while acknowledging that others are possible prompts an I-Sayer to reflect on her concrete choices in light of her priorities as a whole. As Tugendhat notes,

the practical question that focuses primarily on the value and importance of individual concerns points to the more fundamental question in which the "me" [the notion of subjectivity] is being problematized. Now the question is, "How do I want to or should I understand myself?" – which means, "How do I want to or should I live?" [EM 74]

We can reformulate the thrust of Tugendhat's remark as follows: since deictic expressions like "I," "me," and the like, have no substantive content of their own and merely identify a locus of practical deliberation within a space of reasons, it no longer makes sense to try to define what it means to be an I in broadly metaphysical or transcendental terms, that is, by delineating a some set of necessary and sufficient conditions for self-consciousness or subjectivity (as for example Kant, Freud, or even Heidegger might do). Rather, as Tugendhat suggests, we should think of what it means to be human in terms of the inherently practical orientation involved in taking a stance on what is the case, what one desires, and what would be better, given what we know. Since these human endeavors hinge on the extra-communicative dimensions of propositional language, Tugendhat urges us to adopt a philosophical anthropology that embraces a thoroughly normative conception of self and agency. On this account, the defining trait of individual agents concerns the How of their lives, which they arrive at by reflecting on how they ought to live. As Tugendhat argues, reflecting on how one ought to live involves,

1. Making sense of the individual perspective/standpoint from which we relate to the content of our concerns for the good;
2. Relating to the whole of one's life (past, present, and foreseeable future);
3. Making sense of how one ought to live in light of one's basic commitments. [EM ch.5]

Reflecting on the How of one's life puts one in contact with the kinds of wholes that are available

only in virtue of a propositionally structured language. On the one hand, we make sense of our individual perspective on the good by reference to a space of reasons comprising all other possible perspectives. On the other hand, we begin to conceive of ourselves as a (narrative) whole, whose conclusion might come sooner than we would like. These deliberations also introduce a peculiar kind of cognitive oscillation between the individual perspective I inhabit and the wholes this perspective figures into.

The oscillation between first- and third-person perspectives turns out to be the source of existential anxieties. For reflecting on how one ought to live, Tugendhat says, exhibits a peculiar tension: what is crucially important from one perspective appears to be inconsequential from the other. That is, the uniqueness or specificity of my individual concerns and what I take to be important in light of my priorities seems to count for naught when viewed from the third-person perspective afforded by my reflection on the space of reasons as a whole. I seem caught up, as it were, between two competing and incommensurable ways of assessing my plans and goals – and yet I do occupy both.

As Tugendhat argues in detail, the kinds of existential stresses we usually associate with being human are consequences of a concern for the How of one's life, which follow from the unique linguistic capabilities of humans. In trying to coordinate the various contexts in which they find themselves and come to terms with the whole of their lives, I-Sayers learn to envision that which is important to them remaining unrealized or indeed a world that gets on just fine without them altogether. For all our efforts to achieve something good and be esteemed, we are vividly aware that our individual achievements are inconsequential when we consider them within the grand scheme of things.

### Mysticism

Being an I-Sayer thus turns out to be intrinsically stressful, for the very abilities that make saying "I" possible, also entail a form of practical deliberation that forces us to confront a fundamental worry. As the discussion of the concern for the How of one's life already intimated, the propositional content that agents reflect upon requires them to take up a practical stance on what is better or worse. But to determine this, agents also have to decide how they ought to live their lives as

a whole. As part of this process, each I-Sayer develops a sense of the good. Now, the plurality of perspectives one might take on what is important or good, and what should be esteemed, intensifies one's need to reflect upon what one ought to do. Furthermore, since one's reflections on how best to live life in light of one's priorities imply at least two wholes (the whole of one's life, and the sum total of related perspectives one could take on the How of life), also I-Sayers become acutely aware of their relative insignificance in the grand scheme of things.

This oscillation, Tugendhat contends, is the source of a familiar phenomenological or existential concern: the thought of one's own death. Crucially, Tugendhat argues that the angst triggered by reflecting on one's mortality concerns a non-imminent event. The specifically human anxiety about death is not a fear of a perceptible threat in one's environment, but the realization that one's life will end someday. Or, in Tugendhat's formulation of this thought, "I will die soon, but not now" (EM 79f). Thus, our propositionally structured deliberative and recognitive ability, which prompted us to consider our life as a whole, also entails an anxiety concerning our own death. According to Tugendhat, then, the anxiety in the face of an ever present but non-imminent death is a cognitively dissonant experience brought on by the fact that an I-Sayer needs to consider her life as a whole, while taking up two contrary stances towards it, namely a first-personal perspective about what is important to her and a third personal-perspective where the notion of importance no longer seems to fit.

As Tugendhat further argues, I-Sayers have come up with two strategies for coping with this kind of cognitive dissonance: religion and mysticism. "The problem that religion and mysticism hold in common," Tugendhat tells us, "but solve in opposite ways is that of contingency" (EM 98). That is, religion and mysticism develop specific practices for attenuating this cognitive dissonance or anxiety by targeting its source, namely the contingency or relativity of our first-personal perspective on "the How" of life. But religion and mysticism differ, on Tugendhat's view, precisely with regard to the perspective they insist agents adopt. The belief in a superhuman and personal entity, which Tugendhat takes to be constitutive of religion, insists on the first-personal evaluative perspective, and provides a set of practices aimed at helping us realize our contingent sense of the good, while ensuring that the evaluative perspective on the whole of existence is filled by a being for whom we already matter. The practices

defining mysticism, on the other hand, are intended to help I-Sayers 'break free' of their first-personal evaluative perspective by relinquishing the very desires and drives that constitute their contingent take on things, and learn to see things from the perspective of the universe as a whole. As Tugendhat puts it:

Historically, humans have come up with two ways to alleviate this condition of suffering....The path of mysticism consists in putting the weight of one's wishes into perspective, or even denying them. This involves a *transformation of one's self-conception*. The path of religion, on the other hand, leaves the wishes as they are and undertakes instead a transformation of the world by means of wishful projection. [EM 99]

I want to bracket here any concern for the accuracy of Tugendhat's characterizations and try instead to unpack his basic contention. As I read him, Tugendhat makes three basic claims. The first is that the essential difference between religion and mysticism is intrinsically bound up with the difference between the two evaluative perspectives we may adopt in virtue of our propositionally structured language. That is, the extra-communicative deliberative abilities enabled by propositional content make it possible—and necessary—for us to assess our activities from the first-person perspective (in terms of our goals and priorities), while coordinating other such perspectives in a whole (a universe of discourse, a space of reasons, and so on) so that we may see the relativity of what we hold dear and assess our actions in light of other loci of deliberation. It is also important to stress that the very idea of the universe as a whole, or a systematic integration of all possible perspectives, is coherent only in virtue of the kind of language we have. And it is precisely a propositional language's ability to coordinate all possible perspectives into a whole that makes mysticism possible.

An I-Sayer does not only relate to individual persons and objects. As I have shown...an I-Sayer also always has an awareness of *allness*. This allness, we could say, surrounds humans on all sides with its vastness (greatness), power, and mysteriousness beyond comparison. [EM 95]

The second claim Tugendhat makes is that the dissonance and anxiety caused by oscillating between a contingent first-person perspective and a perspective on the grand scheme of things (which he characterizes as wondrous) prompts I-Sayers to develop specific practices for attenuating this anxiety: on the one hand,

a reality-oriented set of practices that aim to transform the world so that it better reflects one's priorities and thus facilitates realizing one's goals, and on the other hand, a self-oriented practice that aims to relativize one's basic commitments in order to attenuate the stresses they cause. The third claim is that these practices for achieving peace of mind double down on one perspective or the other. That is, the practices themselves are intrinsically connected to one of the two viewpoints I-Sayers can take up. Hence, in light of the anxiety caused by oscillating between the two perspectives on their lives, I-Sayers need to choose between them in order to implement the appropriate practices for attaining peace of mind.

### Wonder

The oscillation seems to introduce a problem for Tugendhat's account: on the one hand, he wants to say that mysticism involves relinquishing our respective first-person perspectives, or at least parts thereof, in order to fully accommodate the context-transcending super-perspective of the universe as a whole, so that we can achieve some peace of mind. At the same time, he insists that the coherence of the 'super-perspective' depends upon our propositional language, which also entails the first-person perspective we are trying to relinquish. At first blush, then, it would seem that mysticism is a self-defeating enterprise, since it is caught up in a performative contradiction: what one is being asked to relinquish for the sake of one's peace of mind provides the very means to relinquish it.

Tugendhat is aware of the problem. In fact, it informs his criticism of the various mystical traditions, from Buddhism to Daoism. It also explains why he introduces the notion of wonder. For the experience of wonder, Tugendhat thinks, does not involve the kind of propositional content that structures our other deliberative abilities, nor does it rely on those features of the first-person perspective that generate the performative contradiction just sketched out. Wonder purports to allow us to move from the deliberative and practical engagements defining our first-person experience to a situated kind of attention that brackets the existential stresses we typically encounter. It is therefore able to offer I-Sayers peace of mind, while putting them in touch with the universe as a whole.

This line of thought does not strike me as convincing. But before saying more in this vein, I will first address how Tugendhat's sense of wonder is supposed

to work. In effect, it functions in much the same way that the experience of beauty or the sublime does in a Kantian reflective judgment: the experience of wonder presents us with a non-discursive content that becomes thematic when we take up a distinctive cognitive orientation to the world. This experience, furthermore, is irreducible to our epistemic, prudential, or moral concerns. Wonder, Tugendhat insists, is the awareness that one has found something incomprehensible. Yet, unlike mere perplexity, wherein I encounter my own epistemic ignorance but can in principle find a reason for the perplexing event (that is, I can overcome my ignorance), wonder involves coming up against the limits of my ability to find reasons altogether. This experience of attending to something that cannot in principle be explained without a shift in cognitive perspective (and hence a qualitative transformation in the experience itself), is supposed to allow us to move beyond our egocentric responsiveness to reasons, into a properly mystical mindset.

If the experience of wonder is up to this task, then Tugendhat may have found a way around the performative contradiction I pointed to earlier. The experience of awe one has in reaching the limits of one's reasoning and deliberative capacities by attending so completely to something wondrous would provide another route to stepping back from oneself—Tugendhat's technical term for putting things into perspective, with the aim of achieving peace of mind. Indeed, the experience of wonder would bring peace of mind precisely because it involves bracketing out the propositional contents and deliberative practices that engender our existential stresses. Tugendhat writes,

we possess the capacity to become so engrossed in something being true that our own egocentric position as a focal point recedes into the background.... It can therefore be said that any such proposition of the form, "how astonishing that A exists" points to the mystical. [EM 133]

### Perplexities

Tugendhat's account of mysticism is less persuasive than it would appear at first blush. The problem with it, as far as I can tell, is that Tugendhat shifts the goalposts of his own discussion. If I understand him correctly, he introduces a form of non-discursive, skilled coping—that is, the sustained experience of wonder—at the end of his discussion of mysticism, in

order to make good on his claims concerning the latter's therapeutic character. Moreover, wonder is supposed to avoid the performative contradiction that besets some historical forms of mysticism (for example, some forms of Buddhism or Daoism). Yet, this experience of wonder seems at odds with his insistence that I-Sayers are defined by the competences involved in using propositional language. All of a sudden, they now possess another ability, which is that of complete (or rather self-relativising) absorption in the fact of existence. And it is not clear where this ability comes from or how it is connected to the defining features of I-Sayers more generally, that is, a propositionally structured language and the capabilities required to use it competently.

In the first instance, it seems imperative that an ability to experience wonder should be constitutive of I-Sayers. For the ability to become engrossed in some fact of existence – which is a non-propositional mode of attending to things in the environment – needs to be connected to the competencies and forms of deliberation made possible by propositional language. Without such a connection, introducing wonder would be *ad hoc*. Furthermore, the experience of wonder needs to be connected to our propositionally structured capabilities because it presupposes the kinds of totalities that were initially reserved for propositional language users. Indeed, Tugendhat is committed to the view that signal-languages cannot wonder about the world as a whole.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Although Tugendhat does not explicitly draw it out, the thesis that only I-Sayers can wonder at things follows straightforwardly from the relationship between the various wholes at play in the experience of wonder and his views on propositional language. Since signal-languages are situation-dependent, they cannot coordinate the various *loci* of practical deliberation or action (in fact, signal languages do not imply such *loci*, as deliberating on what would be better or worse requires the kind of counterfactual reasoning available only to propositional language users). Signal-languages therefore lack the propositional content required for the coordination and integration of loci of deliberation into the context-transcending superperspective without which one could not step back from one's unique existential commitments and anxieties to wonder at something. For without the ability to acknowledge that one's existential commitments and anxieties are not so important in the grand scheme of things, one could not become engrossed in the very fact of something's existence. One cannot wonder at it – even if it remains perplexing.

Despite this intimate relationship for propositional language users, however, the experience of wonder must remain distinct from our other linguistic capacities, lest it should collapse into mere perplexity: reasons would swamp the mysteriousness that initially engrossed us. Put differently, unless there is a substantive difference between the skilled coping involved in the experience of wonder and the deliberative abilities made possible by language, Tugendhat's conception of mysticism would be synonymous with epistemic ignorance.

This brings me to my first perplexity. I am not sure how Tugendhat manages to sustain the connectedness and difference between wonder and our propositional forms of deliberation. I can see why they need to be so connected, but not how the relation works. Indeed, Tugendhat's own analysis of wonder treats it as an expressive speech act, which simply presupposes some fact or proposition without directly asserting anything about the presupposed facts. But an expressive speech-act nevertheless maintains a deep connection to propositional contents and need not involve the kind of self-relativisation Tugendhat attributes to wonder. Paradigmatic cases involving the expression of pain or sorrow show that expressives can work in the opposite direction: rather than putting my concerns into perspective, these experiences intensify my first-personal relationship to the world.

Furthermore, in spite of being no stranger to common experiences of pain and sorrow, if I accept Tugendhat's definition of wonder, I fear I may have never wondered at anything in my life. At best, I may have only ever been perplexed. Although I have engaged in performances that seem to be instances of non-discursive skilled coping, where my egocentric perspective has receded into the unreflective performances and sense of the whole associated with the activity, I have never lost sight of the whys and hows of these performances. For example, the skilled attention involved in experiencing a work of art, the balancing act and sensitivity to a shifting centre of gravity involved in riding a mountain bike across rugged terrain, or indeed the many trained reflexes and powers of discernment involved in skillfully playing ice hockey. In fact, the sense of whole one experiences when playing a sport like hockey, which includes coordinating one's role with that of teammates, tracking the positions of as many players as possible, and relativizing one's first-personal experience (for example, taking a hit for the team, despite an easily avoided possible injury) seems like a paradigm case of the kind of experience Tugendhat

attributes to the wondrous. And yet my experiences of skilled performance simply do not bring me to the limits of my reason-giving abilities even as they put me in touch with their respective wholes and remain non-discursive. These activities seem to involve a sense of know-how. And it is an open question just how distinct know-how is from a propositionally structured know-that, which underwrites my engagement.

The limitations of my experience aside, it seems that Tugendhat has introduced a disjunctive account of experience: wondering at the existence of the universe is just a different kind of experience, a different mode of cognitive engagement, from the ones I entertain or take up in my more practical forays. A disjunctive account would help explain the difference between perplexity and wonder in that the superficial similarity between them (a sense of non-comprehension) has obscured a more fundamental difference between an epistemic and non-epistemic cognitive performance. On such a view, there is a specific kind of cognitive performance that mystics can engage in (and that we would normally attribute to knowing-how) that is independent of and disconnected from reasons (that is, of knowing-that). If this is right, then Tugendhat's position would be akin to the one we find in Kant's philosophy of beauty: under the right conditions, we can shift our cognitive orientation from an epistemic, prudential or moral one to an aesthetic one. Given that Tugendhat's prime examples of wonder involve works of art, this seems like a promising way to understand his position, especially in light of his earlier discussion of Rudolph Otto's theory of the numinous, which functions much like Kant's notion of the sublime (*EM* 95f).

This brings me to my second perplexity. I am simply not sure how helpful, in the end, Tugendhat's suggestion is, that we wonder at art. Kant's judgments of taste are still judgments (or in speech-act theory's terms: they are expressives), which means that we can give a certain kind of reason to support the claim that, "This is beautiful." Put differently, the shift in cognitive orientation does not entail a shift in the possibility of reason giving: judgments of taste do involve knowledge-that—even if it is a different sort of knowledge than what we find in the moral or empirical spheres. The shift in cognitive orientation, then, simply shifts what a reason looks like rather than bracketing reason-giving entirely. Similarly, I see no reason why someone who wonders at something cannot share her sense of wonder with others in much the same way that a Kantian subject shares her experience of beauty. So,

although there need not be a reason of the sort we find in our practical deliberations, it still feels premature to say that the experience of wonder takes place beyond the limits of reason-giving.

Following on from the Kantian parallel, we may well wonder why the effort to put oneself into perspective for the sake of one's peace of mind does not simply intensify the very anxiety one was trying to alleviate. As we saw with the sincere expression of pain or sorrow, there's no reason to think that experiences without propositional content automatically bracket an egocentric orientation. This concern is slightly different from the potential performative contradiction we began with. What is at stake here is a variation on Kant's doctrine of subreption: if reflective judgment provides us with the appropriate analogue for understanding the experience of wonder, why does wonder not strengthen or intensify our egocentricity—and hence, the existential stresses attendant on it—rather than relieve it? Kant certainly thought that experiences of beauty strengthened our cognitive abilities, while the awe or enthusiasm we feel in the face of the sublime is in fact a sense of our own ability to render sheer chaos intelligible. It seems equally plausible, then, that the experience of wonder may throw us back onto ourselves just as easily as it can allow us to bracket our own concerns.

## Conclusion

I have framed my concerns with Tugendhat's conception of mysticism as a perplexity rather than a criticism because I would like to invite further discussion and inquiry rather than carve out and defend a specific philosophical position. As I have mentioned earlier, much can be said to recommend Tugendhat's philosophical anthropology. He has delineated a productive alternative to the transcendental and metaphysical approaches we typically encounter in philosophical anthropology, and indeed still encounter in certain strains of contemporary European philosophy. His efforts to distinguish the therapeutic character of religion and mysticism from the epistemological, metaphysical, and ethical content of specific religious and mystical doctrines are immensely valuable contributions.

Nonetheless, I still think the project Tugendhat has initiated is in need of further development. At the least, the perplexities I have articulated above need to be addressed. In particular, the disjunctive account



of experience needs to be spelled out. For, as things stands, the precise difference between the two kinds of experience—an experience of knowing-that and an experience of knowing-how, for which perplexity and wonder serve as ciphers—remains implicit in Tugendhat's account of mysticism, while nevertheless underwriting it. To the extent that I have understood him correctly, and his theory of mysticism does hinge on an underdeveloped disjunctive theory of experience, I may have good grounds to find his position rather unpersuasive. Furthermore, it is not clear to me that the specific sense of wonder Tugendhat introduces is really all that distinct from other forms of skilled action or know-how. In this sense, it is not clear that experiences of wonder, which are brought on by a specific kind of cognitive engagement with the limits of our reason-giving powers (itself a specific kind of skilled activity), exclude propositional treatment, even if they do in

fact differ in some way from the extra-communicative functions of propositional content, which Tugendhat takes to be basic. Lastly, it is not clear that the kind of self-relativization Tugendhat describes as necessary for attaining peace of mind does not throw one back, even more deeply, into egocentric anxieties once the mystical experience has run its course. What needs to be shown is that mystical experiences involving wonder are in fact transformative ones. This, however, seems quite distinct from Tugendhat's minimal prescription of wondering at the very existence of things. For transformative experiences appear to transcend the therapeutic character Tugendhat attributes to his conception of mysticism wherein one steps back from the world to find peace of mind. These kinds of experience transform our situations so that one might finally be at home in the world.