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Wittgenstein and Kierkegaard on Religion

Keywords: Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein, religion, Christianity, faith, limits of language, indirect communication

Słowa kluczowe: Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein, religia, chrześcijaństwo, wiara, granice języka, komunikacja pośrednia

Abstract

This article discusses the influence of the Danish philosopher on Wittgenstein's views on religion. It begins by presenting all the evidence of Wittgenstein's interest in Kierkegaard that the author has found in the memoirs and letters of people who knew the Austrian philosopher. This is followed by selected ideas that make up Kierkegaard's vision of Christianity, such as the limits of thought and language, Christian paradoxes, Christian faith as subjective truth, and the method of indirect communication. The final sections focus on those of Wittgenstein's remarks on religion that especially converge with the ideas of Kierkegaard described earlier. This article provides a general overview of the connections between the two thinkers' statements on religion. Combined with knowledge of other works, it distinguishes between analogies that have already been thoroughly studied and those that require further, deeper investigation.

Introduction

Kierkegaard is considered one of the most notable founders of existentialism, while Wittgenstein's ideas initiated the impressive development of analytic philosophy. These philosophies differ greatly, and it is easy to believe that their proponents have little in common and that there is indeed plenty that stands between them. Søren Kierkegaard's philosophy is not mentioned in any of Ludwig Wittgenstein's key works. However, Kierkegaard's ideas certainly inspired Wittgenstein, who was familiar with some of the Dane's works, particularly his *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Crumbs*. Wittgenstein's appreciation for the Danish religious thinker is evident in his own remarks recorded in *Vermischte Bemerkungen* (*Culture and Value*) and *Denkbewegungen* (*Movements of Thought*), as well as in the recollections of his friends (see Malcolm, 1958, 1993; von Wright, 1962, 1995; Waismann, 1965; Drury, 1981, 1981a; Bouwsma, 1986; Hänsel, 1994, among others). The most potent proof of Wittgenstein's appreciation of Kierkegaard's philosophy is his statement, quoted by Maurice O'Connor Drury (one of Wittgenstein's closest friends) in his memoirs. Wittgenstein is believed to have said: 'Kierkegaard was by far the most profound thinker of the last century. Kierkegaard was a saint' (Drury, 1981, p. 102).

This article examines the key areas of convergence between Kierkegaard's and Wittgenstein's views on religion, which demonstrate the impact that some of the Dane's ideas had on one of the founders of analytic philosophy. In section 1, I collected information attesting to Wittgenstein's interest in Kierkegaard's ideas, as recorded in the memoirs and letters of his acquaintances (and his sister). I have tried to include all such information. Section 2 presents selected ideas on Christianity, primarily from the books written by Kierkegaard under the pseudonym Johannes Climacus (*Philosophical Crumbs* and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Crumbs*). These ideas concern the limits of language and thought, the paradoxes of Christianity, the Christian faith as subjective truth, and the method of guiding readers to their own subjective truths. Section 3 contains quotes and brief comments on what I consider to be Wittgenstein's most interesting statements on religion, which appear to be inspired by the works of Climacus or are at least similar to them.

The connections between the concepts of Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein form the central theme of the books of Charles Cregan (1989), Marielle Nientied (2003) and Genia Schönbaumsfeld (2007). Additionally, there are books that primarily address other issues but include valuable insights into the influence of Kierkegaard's ideas on Wittgenstein and the similarities between the concepts developed by both philosophers. Examples of such works include the contributions of Allan Janik and Stephen E. Toulmin (1973), James C. Edwards (1982), Stanley Cavell (1969), D. Z. Phillips (1999), Stephen Mulhall (2001), and Jerry Gill (2017).

Furthermore, many articles exploring the connections between the philosophical and religious ideas of Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein have been published. These have been written by D. Z. Phillips (1970, 1993), James Conant (1989, 1993, 1995), Russell B. Goodman (1983, 1986), John W. Cook (1987), Paul Holmer (1980), Alastair Hannay (1990), M. Jaime Ferreira (1994), Stephen Mulhall (1999, 2001), John Lippitt and Daniel Hutto (1998), Anthony Ruud (2005, 2013), Roe Fremstedal (2006), Genia Schönbaumsfeld (2009), Yusuke Suzuki (2011), and Jamie Turnbull (2012), among others. The articles by these authors known to me concern relatively detailed issues, and most of them study and compare the positions of both philosophers on a specific question. However, they do not provide a broad overview of the connections between the two thinkers' views on religion.

Such a picture could be expected to be found in books primarily focused on the convergence between the views of Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein. However, except for Schönbaumsfeld's book (2007), these do not demonstrate many similarities between the two thinkers' statements on religion.

In the first chapter of her book, Genia Schönbaumsfeld points to evidence of the Austrian philosopher's interest in Kierkegaard's writings. These references she cites accord with the information presented in this article.¹ In that chapter, however, I find missing, among other things, several illuminating remarks by Wittgenstein recorded in his diaries, as well as comments on the 'great writer' from the lectures on religious belief (Wittgenstein, 1967, p. 70).

¹ I have been collecting such material since the 1990s, and I included most of it in my 2003 dissertation.

The subsequent chapters address affinities between Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein in their understanding of the aims and methods of philosophy. According to Schönbaumsfeld, ‘Wittgenstein and Kierkegaard are united in their common aim of paving the way, in their writings, for an authentic existence – free of self-deception and illusion – and that hence their conception of philosophical authorship is fundamentally an ethical one’ (Schönbaumsfeld, 2007, p. 83). Schönbaumsfeld criticises D. Z. Phillips’s contrasting position (which emphasises asymmetries between Kierkegaard’s and Wittgenstein’s works) and James Conant’s interpretation of the *Tractatus* and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments*, especially his thesis that Kierkegaard’s book, like the *Tractatus*, includes a ‘revocation’ of itself.

In the final chapter, the author directs her critique against the so-called ‘target view’ concerning the status of religious belief (expressed, among others, by Father O’Hara, mentioned in Wittgenstein’s lectures),² and also argues against Kai Nielsen’s fideism, which renders religious statements incommensurable with other forms of discourse and immunises them against rational criticism.

In her book, Schönbaumsfeld argues against some commentators on Wittgenstein’s philosophy who attribute to him certain positions on issues in the fields of metaphilosophy and the philosophy of religion, while quoting and interpreting primarily those remarks by Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein that can be used to show that the positions in question are mistaken. The book therefore pursues aims different from those I set for myself when writing this article.

Nientied’s book (2003) is primarily devoted to Kierkegaard’s thought, to his indirect communication (used by him in existentially significant matters). In two chapters, the author also recalls and interprets selected remarks by Wittgenstein concerning his methods of philosophy, in which this kind of communication appears.

In one chapter, Nientied refers to the opposition between ‘saying’ and ‘showing’ in the *Tractatus* as well as to remarks from the first part of the *Philosophical Investigations* which suggest that the late Wittgenstein attributed

² See Wittgenstein, 1967, pp. 57–59. This view can also be attributed to at least a few contemporary philosophers.

to some of his statements not only a descriptive function, but also a function of showing. Another chapter focuses on Wittgenstein's remarks about aspect change in seeing something (from the second part of the *Investigations*) and about the transformation of a system of belief (from *On Certainty*).

Nientied's reflections lead to the conclusion that the two thinkers in question, despite representing different philosophical traditions and cultural contexts, developed similar methods of philosophy (based on indirect communication techniques) and understood in a similarly non-standard way the relationship between faith and knowledge, as well as the role of faith (manifested in actions, world-pictures, and forms of life) in shaping and changing worldviews and belief systems.

Creegan's book (1989) contains a chapter on religion, which is mainly filled with reflections on the implications of Wittgenstein's philosophy for religious questions. Occasionally, the chapter points out the connections between Kierkegaard's and Wittgenstein's views. Creegan writes that Kierkegaard's leap to a 'perspective of faith' can be understood in terms of Wittgenstein's early philosophy; that, like Wittgenstein, Kierkegaard made remarks in his *Book on Adler* that served to clarify the correct use of expressions (in the *Investigations*, remarks of this kind are called 'grammatical'); that Wittgenstein's idea of a happy man shows similarities with Kierkegaard's figure of the knight of faith; and that both philosophers solved the problem of theodicy in a similar way. To me, these similarities seem rather far-fetched and superficial.

The general picture of the connections between Kierkegaard's and Wittgenstein's views of religion presented in this article is also limited and incomplete (due to its length). I am showing the connections concerning the three essential issues: (a) the limits of language, (b) faith and an attitude to the world, (c) the method of philosophy. These connections appear to me to be the most evident and are supported by numerous interesting citations. As far as I know, none of the articles I have listed, which are amongst the most highly regarded and frequently cited, contains a discussion of Kierkegaard's influence on Wittgenstein's religious views or the convergence of the two philosophers' views on all three issues within a wider scope.

I have endeavoured to include many of Wittgenstein's representative statements on religion and Kierkegaard's related ideas, which could have provided the main source of inspiration for Wittgenstein. Due mostly to

the article's length limit, I did not highlight many potential sources of inspiration for Wittgenstein in Kierkegaard's works. Instead, I have limited myself to outlining certain ideas of Kierkegaard that shaped his vision of Christianity and are contained in the works published under the pseudonym Johannes Climacus that were most likely familiar to Wittgenstein and had a significant impact on him.

A general overview of the connections between the two thinkers' statements on religion seems valuable to me for three reasons. (1) It provides insight into the various connections between eminent philosophers, which is interesting from the perspective of the history of philosophy and ideas. (2) It provides significant context for in-depth studies of Wittgenstein's position on religious issues and can facilitate an understanding of his individual statements on Christianity. (3) Combined with knowledge of other works, it helps distinguish between analogies in the statements of the two thinkers that have been thoroughly studied and those that are waiting for further, deeper study. The latter include, as I will demonstrate, the analogy between Kierkegaard's concept of subjective truth and Wittgenstein's concept of the proper attitude of the subject to the world.

1. Wittgenstein on Kierkegaard

Respect for Kierkegaard's philosophy characterised Wittgenstein's views from his youth until the end of his life. He most likely came across Kierkegaard's philosophy just before the outbreak of the First World War. This was around the time that first German translations of Kierkegaard's works were published, thanks to Theodor Haecker, who was connected with *Der Brenner*, a journal published by Ludwig von Ficker.

Haecker spent many years disseminating Kierkegaard's ideas in Austria, which greatly helped them to take root in German-language philosophy. He not only translated Kierkegaard's texts, but also wrote about the philosopher. In his monograph *Søren Kierkegaard und die Philosophie der Subjektivität*, published in 1913, Haecker expressed his respect for Kierkegaard's personality and commitment to his ideas. Juxtaposing him with the Austrian philosopher Fritz Mauthner, Haecker called Kierkegaard 'a true critic of language' (see Janik, Toulmin, 1973, pp. 177–179).

Wittgenstein must have read *Der Brenner*, which published Haecker's translations and articles. He was probably encouraged to read them by his sister Margaret, who was seven years his senior and counted Kierkegaard among her favourite writers (see Wuchterl, Hübner 1979, p. 30). In the summer of 1914, Wittgenstein contacted the publisher and enlisted von Ficker's help to distribute a significant portion of his inheritance to impoverished Austrian writers and artists. One of the beneficiaries was Theodor Haecker.

In August 1914, shortly after the outbreak of the First World War, Wittgenstein volunteered for service in the Austro-Hungarian army. He was assigned to an artillery regiment stationed in Cracow. In early 1916, he was transferred to a howitzer regiment. In the summer of that year, he took part in bloody frontline battles with this unit during the Brusilov Offensive, displaying extraordinary courage. Notes about God and the meaning of life began to dominate his journals that summer.

From September 1916 onwards, Wittgenstein attended the officers' artillery school in Olomouc (Olmütz) in Moravia as part of his military service. There he befriended the architect Paul Engelmann. The two men remained in close contact for over a decade, exchanging letters and discussing philosophy, religion, literature, and art. These conversations sometimes referenced the thought of Kierkegaard, with whom Engelmann was familiar. In a letter to Wittgenstein dated 8 January 1918, Engelmann discusses his reading of *Stages on Life's Way*. In his remarks on Wittgenstein's philosophical views, he notes their similarity to some of Kierkegaard's ideas (see Somavilla, 2006, pp. 32, 150, 153). It cannot be ruled out that Wittgenstein himself pointed the architect to this similarity.

During the war, in his spare time, Wittgenstein worked on his theory of the relations between language, thought, and reality. Sometimes he read Kierkegaard's works, sent to him by his sister Hermine. In a preserved letter to her brother dated 20 November 1917, Hermine Wittgenstein referred to the Kierkegaard books she had sent him: 'I hope they are what you want, because I don't know anything about him or his writings, so I just picked a few volumes at random: The Diary of a Seducer, which I bought in another bookshop, will follow' (McGuinness, Ascher, 1996, p. 48).

Between 1916 and 1918, Wittgenstein experienced a spiritual rebirth of sorts. Bertrand Russell, whom Wittgenstein met in 1918 to discuss his *Tractatus* after a long break, noticed changes in his way of thinking. In a 1919 letter to Lady Ottoline Morell, Russell wrote, 'I had sensed

a hint of mysticism in his book, but I was astonished to discover that he had become a devout mystic. He reads people like Kierkegaard and Angelus Silesius, and he seriously contemplates becoming a monk' (Wittgenstein, 1974, p. 82).

It is quite likely that Wittgenstein didn't abandon Kierkegaard's books in the 1920s when he was working as a primary school teacher in villages in Lower Austria. In a letter dated 14 October 1921, Wittgenstein's friend Ludwig Hänsel informed him of the difficulties in finding Kierkegaard's *Practice of Christianity* (Hänsel, 1994, p. 56). One of Wittgenstein's students, Karl Gruber, revealed that he had seen books with peculiar titles in Wittgenstein's room, including one about anxiety. This was most likely Kierkegaard's 'The Concept of Anxiety' (see Wuchterl, Hübner, 1979, p. 96).

Kierkegaard's name also came up in Wittgenstein's disputes with neo-positivists in the late 1920s and early 1930s. At a meeting in December 1929, he is believed to have remarked that ethical statements express grappling with the limits of language, a concept previously brought forward by Kierkegaard (Waismann, 1965, p. 12).

Between 1930 and 1946, Wittgenstein lectured intermittently on his philosophy at the University of Cambridge. According to H. D. P. Lee's memoirs from 1929–31, Wittgenstein intended to learn Danish in order to read Kierkegaard in the original (Lee, 1979, p. 218). He also criticised English translations of Kierkegaard by Walter Lowry for failing to convey the richness of the original style. According to Drury, Wittgenstein referenced Kierkegaard during disputes in Cambridge and was familiar with his concept of the stages of life: the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious (Drury, 1981, pp. 102–103).

In 1938, Wittgenstein delivered a series of lectures on religious beliefs, the content of which was transcribed by several students. During these lectures, he recounted the story of the 'great writer'.

The great writer said that when he was a boy, his father gave him a task, and he suddenly felt that nothing, not even death, could take away his responsibility [to complete this task]; it was his duty, and even death could not change that. He said that this was, in a sense, proof of the immortality of the soul – because if it lasts [responsibility does not die].

(Wittgenstein, 1967, p. 70)

Most likely, the "great writer" to whom the lecturer referred was Kierkegaard.

In one of his personal notes, Kierkegaard states that: ‘no one will find in my notes (and this is my consolation) a definitive explanation of what filled my life’ (Kierkegaard, 1968, IV A 85). However, in his diaries, he refers to his father’s confessions, which (as he believed) assigned him special duties and lifelong tasks (Kierkegaard, 1968, II A 803–806). In striving to fulfil these tasks, he radically changed his way of life, gave up marriage, and devoted himself to writing, which was aimed, among other things, at exposing the illusion of ecclesiastical, inauthentic Christianity.

Søren’s relationship with his father is also indirectly reflected in his works. In his *Unscientific Postscript*, the author tells the story of an old man and his orphaned grandson, who had to swear to the old man that he would remain faithful to Christianity forever (Kierkegaard, 2009a, pp. 199–200).

Georg Henrik von Wright, Wittgenstein’s successor as professor of philosophy at Cambridge and one of his literary executors, writes about the strong impression that Kierkegaard’s writings made on the Austrian philosopher (von Wright, 1958, p. 21). Another of Wittgenstein’s friends, Norman Malcolm, included the following comment about his teacher in his memoirs: ‘He also esteemed Kierkegaard. He referred to him with a hint of awe, calling him a “really religious” man. He had read the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, but found it “too deep” for him’ (Malcolm, 1958, p. 71). Malcolm also published Wittgenstein’s letters, one of which states the following: ‘Kierkegaard is far too deep for me, anyhow. He bewilders me without producing the positive effects that he would in deeper souls’ (Malcolm, 1958, p. 75).

In the last years of his life, Wittgenstein felt weary of Kierkegaard’s philosophy. He is believed to have told Drury: ‘I couldn’t read Kierkegaard again now. He is too long-winded. When I read him, I always wanted to say, “Oh, all right, I agree, I agree, but please get on with it.”’ (Drury, 1981, p. 103). Oets Kolk Bouwsma also quotes Wittgenstein as making a similar statement in 1949 (Bouwsma, 1986, p. 46).

The name of Kierkegaard appears several times in Wittgenstein’s diaries from the 1930s and 1940s. In one of his notes, Wittgenstein attributes an inner purity to the Dane and writes that Spengler is incapable of recognising Kierkegaard’s value because he is too great for him: ‘It is interesting how wrong Spengler, who usually has good judgement, is in his evaluation of Kierkegaard. Here is one who is too great for him and stands too close;

he only sees “the giant’s boots”” (Wittgenstein, 2003, p. 213). There are also many comments by Wittgenstein that seem to result from reading books by Kierkegaard, even though the name itself is not always mentioned. Some of these comments are quoted below.

2. Kierkegaard

2.1 Paradoxical Christianity

The notion of the paradox plays a key role in Kierkegaard’s philosophy. He uses it to denote something that is generally beyond the comprehension of reason: ‘The absurd, the paradox, is a sign, a puzzle, a complex puzzle that forces the mind to admit, “I cannot solve that; this cannot be understood”. This does not mean, however, that it is nonsense.’ (Kierkegaard, 1968, X2, A 354).

Kierkegaard considers the relationship between an individual and the absolute (eternal truth) to be paradoxical. In *Philosophical Crumbs*, published under the pseudonym Johannes Climacus, he illustrates this paradox by writing about reason (thought) gifted with passion that runs into something it does not know (Kierkegaard, 2009, pp. 117f.). When reason reaches the limits of what can be thought, it collides with something that seems not to be expressed by known terms. This unknown, which escapes the power of thinking, provokes a particular passion of thought. ‘This is the highest paradox of thought: to want to discover something that cannot be thought’ (Kierkegaard, 2009, p. 111).

According to Climacus, reason desires to reach the unknown and will not stop pursuing it. However, this pursuit only reveals the weaknesses and limitations of reason. In its passion, reason attempts to reach the unknown through thought and disclose it through language. However, the unknown cannot be described. By defining the object of reason’s pursuit as ‘what is unknown’, and ‘what is absolutely different from reason’, I neither approach it nor gain knowledge of it. The unknown cannot be thought about; to think of something as ‘absolutely different’ is to remain within the limits of thinking. What my term is supposed to refer to manifests itself from beyond these limits. The unknown cannot be described, nor even thought. Climacus calls this unknown entity ‘God’.

The existence of God cannot be proven, nor can his essence be described. Reason can only recognise that it has reached its limits. Unless it negates itself, it will go astray. The only way to approach the unknown is to abandon proofs and leap beyond the immanence of reason into faith.

Climacus believes that Socrates recognised the paradox of the relationship between the individual and the unknown. In Christianity, that paradox is absolute: Christianity emphasises original sin and the fundamental difference between humans and God. The sinful human being loses the ability to reach the truth independently and, contrary to the Greek view, no longer participates in eternity. Eternity does not manifest itself as something accessible to reason.

It used to be paradoxical that an eternal truth takes an attitude towards the individual; now, the absolute paradox is that it makes reference to a human being born in sin. Moreover, the concept of eternal truth itself is a paradox in Christianity. The fact that God revealed himself to humans and that eternity came about in time is paradoxical and absurd to reason. Christianity claims that the omnipotent God lived as a human, subject to the same weaknesses and limitations as others. This can mean that the infinite is finite and the eternal is temporary. This seems contradictory and therefore incomprehensible, yet it is still far removed from incongruous nonsense that can easily be verified by reason. The absurdity discussed here refers to something that transcends reason and knowledge.

The paradox limits the claims of reason, and at the same time can demonstrate to a human that he does not live in truth. The state of untruth, the state of sin, moves the human infinitely far away from God; however, by realising his difference and remoteness, the human obtains a chance to be born again, by a leap into faith he gains the possibility to approach God and be reconciled with Him. The sinful human no longer communes with the eternal idea through reason but can reach eternity thanks to the grace of God, and that in a way more absolute than that which the Greeks proposed.

Even in the Socratic model, the relationship between the existing and the unknown was inconceivable. Both elements of this relationship were also incomprehensible: on the one hand, the existing subject relating to the unknown with a passion that defies reason; on the other hand, the unknown manifesting itself and distorting self-knowledge. Christianity distances these poles, inaccessible to reason, from one another,

yet also opens up the possibility of bringing them together. For behold, the paradox of the unknown – the eternal God – becomes man, and the simple paradox – the existing man – may gain a share in the unknown, which is eternity. The proper relationship between man and God must now be bound up with a greater passion, which is to be the Christian faith.

2.2 Subjective truth and faith

In *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Crumbs*, Kierkegaard, writing as Climacus, develops the concept of subjective truth. Earlier he describes the difference between objective reflection, which leads to historical and speculative knowledge (objective truth), and subjective reflection, which leads to essential ethical and ethico-religious commitment (subjective truth).

Subjective and objective reflection can occur as moments of a single process. However, they have opposing vectors, and Climacus attributes an incomparable understanding of truth to each. Objective reflection, which aims at abstract thinking and historical knowledge, leads away from the subject; conversely, subjective reflection concerns the quality of the individual's relationship to the subject of consideration or thought.

When truth is considered objectively, reflection is directed at truth as an objective entity to which the knower relates. The focus is not on the relationship, but on the truth to which the subject relates. If this is the only truth, then the subject is in truth. Conversely, if the truth is approached subjectively, the focus is on the individual's relationship. If the manner of this relationship is truthful, then the individual is in truth, even if they relate to untruth in this way.

(Kierkegaard, 2009a, pp. 167–168)

Thus, an individual may be objectively in truth, relating to something that is true, yet subjectively, and essentially, in non-truth, insofar as the 'how' of their attitude is incorrect. The opposite can also occur. Climacus illustrates the first option by writing about someone who lives among Christians, has the proper image of God, and prays; however, he prays to the true God in non-truth. The second option is represented by an individual who desires to address God with all their heart and with the greatest piety. However, that individual lives in a pagan country and,

when praying, venerates an idol. Climacus prefers the latter because in religious matters to be in subjective truth is more important than knowing the objective truth.

The truth of a statement does not entail truth as a value of an individual's attitude to what has been said. Subjectively speaking, truth as an agreement between thought and reality is an abstraction. The key is not what has been said, but how the human relates to a statement. In a particular case, that 'how' becomes the 'passion of the infinite', which Climacus refers to as subjective truth. Someone who lives in subjective truth chooses, by faith, what is, objectively speaking, 'uncertain', if not absurd and inconceivable. 'The objective uncertainty maintained through appropriation in the most passionate inwardness is truth' (Kierkegaard, 2009a, p. 171). For Kierkegaard, authentic Christian faith is a form of subjective truth.

2.3 Indirect communication

In his pseudonymous writings, Kierkegaard developed an original method of philosophy known as indirect communication.³ In his *Journals*, he defines indirect communication as the transfer of ability and juxtaposes it with the direct transfer of knowledge. Indirect transfer lacks its own object in the sense in which the object of the direct transfer is knowledge, objective truth. Kierkegaard uses this transfer primarily to guide the reader to the subjective truth: the individual's proper attitude towards God, himself, and the world.

Indirect communication is recommended when a given person is not interested in the religious dimension of life, and rather than striving for the truth of existence, attains self-satisfaction by replacing it with ownership of beautiful experiences or feelings, achievements at work, and consideration or discussion of ethical subjects. In such cases, direct communication is fruitless. It is construed by the listener as confirmation of their own convictions or – in other circumstances – an attack on the person that needs to be repelled. To inspire the need for seeking truth in an individual, communication must be indirect in nature (see Anderson, 1963).

³ Kierkegaard writes about indirect communication in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, *Practice in Christianity*, and *Journals*. See also Kierkegaard's *The Point of View*.

The characteristic features of indirect communication are: an anti-authoritarian and atheoretical nature, and a descriptive, subjective quality. Unlike objective knowledge, subjective truth cannot be expressed in an objective linguistic construct. It is the truth of existence, not binding for everyone in the same way, but only for a specific person. The person who uses indirect communication does not exactly know the subjective truth, to which he is supposed to lead the recipient. For that reason, he only provides a stimulus designed to prompt the recipient to reflect and lead him towards existence in truth. Philosophical systems and theories become useless in indirect communication. They ignore existence and the value of existence. 'There can be no system for life itself,' Kierkegaard states (as Climacus) in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (2009a, p. 100). And in *Journals*, he writes that one need not convey what is ethical in the form of theory (directly), as such communication would be unethical (Kierkegaard, 1968, VIII², B 81, 22).

Indirect communication assumes forms different to the ones used in systematic philosophy and the sciences. Kierkegaard applies literary forms here: essays, letters, and narratives. Short literary narratives often intertwine with strictly philosophical considerations. The protagonists of Kierkegaard's books are people representing various 'stages on life's way'. Kierkegaard describes his protagonists (their ways of thinking, systems of values) in circumstances that require making important decisions. He tries to lead his readers from the aesthetic stage to the religious one, or – as in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* – from speculation to Christian faith. He does not do it as one who has achieved the Christian stage of life, but as one who can clearly see it.

Kierkegaard published his works under pseudonyms, acting as if he were not presenting his own views and not taking responsibility for the content of his books. In this way, he disappears as an instructor or authority figure. The reader is left alone to face the panorama of personalities and potential mindsets depicted, and to relate to the message presented.

For Kierkegaard, the manifestation of God in the human was the model of indirect communication. Jesus Christ is 'the sign that shall be spoken against' (Lk 2:34), the sign which is also somehow internally contradictory. The fact that the almighty God became a humble and derided human

being is a contradiction that requires an attitude to be taken, and forces every individual to make a choice.

Indirect communication as the transfer of ability is present in many areas of life. Among other things, it creates ethical and ethical-religious communication. Ethical communication is indirect in the strict sense; its purpose is to actualise what is ethical understood as the proper attitude to the world and God. Religious-ethical communication, as exemplified by Christian communication, is not solely indirect; it also involves transmitting knowledge. Christian religiousness requires the assimilation of knowledge about the teachings of Christ. This knowledge is conveyed directly. However, what is most important – faith, or subjective truth – can only be achieved through indirect communication. Conveying the Christian message is, in fact, conveying the ability.

When a listener refers to God with full commitment, when it is not a matter of awakening faith but rather of supporting it, Kierkegaard recommends a different method of communication: ‘the edifying discourse’, which does not possess all the features of indirect communication. In this case, the role of the teacher does not change. He only provides a motive that encourages the student to search for their own way and truth, moving them further away from the teacher.

Stopping a man on the street and standing still to talk to him is not as difficult as saying something in passing to a passer-by, without oneself standing still or causing the other to pause, without wanting to get him to go in the same direction, but precisely urging him to go his own way instead. And this is how it is between one who exists and another who exists, when the communication concerns truth as existence-inwardness.

(Kierkegaard, 2009a, p. 232).

How did the above ideas influence Wittgenstein’s religious reflections? First, I highlight the traces of Kierkegaard’s reflections on the limits of language, the passionate struggle of individuals to achieve the unknown, and the paradox of Christianity in Wittgenstein’s notes. Further, I consider the traces of his familiarity with Kierkegaard’s concept of subjective truth and his philosophical method.

3. Wittgenstein

3.1 The limits of language

Wittgenstein tried to draw the borders of the meaningful use of language. He was inspired to such pursuits by various writers. In the days of his youth, Austrian literature and philosophy often tackled the question of the boundaries of language (see Janik, Toulmin, 1973, pp. 92f., 120f.). One of the sources of his inspiration was probably the writings of Kierkegaard.

The boundaries of language are discussed in *Notebooks* 1914–1916 and *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. In his well-known letter to Ludwig von Ficker, Wittgenstein wrote: ‘My book draws limits to the sphere of the ethical from the inside as it were, and I am convinced that this is the ONLY rigorous way of drawing those limits.’ (Wittgenstein, 1969a, p. 35).⁴ These words recall a passage from *Either/Or* concerning the boundaries between the sphere of music and that which can be expressed in literary language.

If I imagined two kingdoms adjoining one another, with one of which I was fairly well acquainted, and altogether unfamiliar with the other, and I was not allowed to enter the unknown realm, however much I desired to do so, I should still be able to form some conception of its nature. I could go to the limits of the kingdom with which I was acquainted and follow its boundaries, and as I did so, I should in this way describe the boundaries of this unknown country, and thus without ever having set foot in it, obtain a general conception of it. And if this was a task that engrossed my energies, and if I was indefatigable in my desire to be accurate, it would doubtless sometimes happen, that as I stood sadly at my country’s boundary and looked longingly into the unknown country, which was so near me and yet so far away, that some little revelation might be vouchsafed to me.
(Kierkegaard, 1980, pp. 52–53)

In 1930, Wittgenstein delivered a lecture on ethics at Cambridge University. The lecture addressed the status of ethical expressions, particularly statements about absolute values.

According to ‘early’ Wittgenstein, an absolute value does not belong to the world of facts that can be described in language. Therefore, ethics as a science concerning absolute value remains impossible: ‘if I contemplate

⁴ See also Janik and Toulmin, 1973, p. 192.

what Ethics really would have to be if there were such a science, this result seems to me quite obvious. It seems to me obvious that nothing we could ever think or say should be the thing.’ (Wittgenstein, 1993, p. 40).

If judgements about absolute value are to be formulated as part of ethics, then it needs to be stepped beyond the description that ascertains the occurrence of specific facts, and therefore, in line with the convictions of the author of the *Tractatus*, it cannot be a science, as it turns into a collection of meaningless sentences:

Our words used as we use them in science, are vessels capable only of containing and conveying meaning and sense, natural meaning and sense. Ethics, if it is anything, is supernatural and our words will only express facts; as a teacup will only hold a teacup full of water and if I were to pour out a gallon over it.

(Wittgenstein, 1993, p. 40)

A human feels a tendency to speak about something transcendental, which is decisive for the sense of life, about absolute values; however, such statements are absurd. Wittgenstein himself is ready to assign an absolute value to experiences of a particular kind. He attempts to describe these experiences, speaking of wondering at the existence of world, a feeling of absolute safety, and a sense of guilt.

It is also absurd to assign absolute value to the aforementioned experiences. These experiences are facts, and according to Wittgenstein’s early convictions, the world delineated by facts does not contain absolute values. For that reason, the author of *A Lecture on Ethics* says: ‘It is the paradox that an experience, a fact, should seem to have supernatural value’ (Wittgenstein, 1993, p. 43).

Ethical and religious expressions used to express something important to our life are, according to the author of the lecture, ‘a hopeless running against the boundaries of language’. *A Lecture on Ethics* ends with the following words:

My whole tendency and, I believe, the tendency of all men who ever tried to write or talk Ethics or Religion was to run against the boundaries of language. This running against the walls of our cage is perfectly, absolutely hopeless. Ethics so far as it springs from the desire to say something about the ultimate meaning of life, the absolute good, the absolute valuable,

can be no science. What it says does not add to our knowledge in any sense. But it is a document of a tendency in the human mind which I personally cannot help respecting deeply and I would not for my life ridicule it.

(Wittgenstein, 1993, p. 44)

Some statements in *A Lecture on Ethics* remind those of sections of *Philosophical Crumbs*, with Climacus writing about reason's passionate attempt to discover something that still remains unknown to it. Wittgenstein himself noticed that connection, as attested by what he said while talking to neopositivists in 1929: 'Man has the urge to thrust against the limits of language. (...) Kierkegaard, too, recognised this thrust and even described it in much the same way (as a thrust against paradox)' (Waismann, 1965, p. 12).

Soon after delivering the lecture on ethics, Wittgenstein changed his position on the boundaries of language and the status of the ethical statements. That change was already expressed in his conversation with neopositivists in December 1930. In the conversation with Schlick in December 1929, Wittgenstein still repeated the idea about ethics as a thrust against the limits of language. In his statement from 1930, however, he seems to reject this idea: 'Thrusting against the limits of language? Language is not a cage' (Waismann, 1965, p. 16).

Early Wittgenstein considered religious statements senseless (*unsinnig*), as they did not correspond to possible states of affairs. He construed them as an expression of the fight against the boundaries of language. Following the change in his conception of language and its relations to the world, in later years he did not deny their sense, but he did not assign them any special role either. What he considered especially important in religious life was the appropriate attitude to God and other people, and words were primarily important insofar as they served to focus others on such an attitude:

Is speech essential for religion? I can quite well imagine a religion in which there are no doctrines, and hence nothing is said. Obviously, the essence of religion can have nothing to do with the fact that speech occurs – or rather: if speech does occur, this itself is a component of religious behaviour and not a theory. Therefore, nothing turns on whether the words are true, false, or nonsensical.

(Waismann, 1965, p. 16)

This assertion seems to suggest an idea that must have been close to Wittgenstein for many years. As a rule, statements of religious discourse cannot be verified in terms of correspondence with reality, due to the way language functions and to the limits of human cognition. Using such statements is a particular linguistic behaviour that is subject to moral judgements like any other form of behaviour. Irrespective of their logical value, religious statements can significantly influence the lives of the people they are addressed to, and decide about what those people do for themselves (potentially against themselves) and for others (potentially against the will of those others). If certain activities, encouraged by religious statements, are subject to moral judgements, then it seems that these judgements should also pertain to earlier linguistic behaviours that inspired them.⁵

At more or less the same time, that is around 1930, Wittgenstein also discussed religion with his student, Maurice O'Connor Drury.⁶ Talking to him, Wittgenstein repeated that he considered himself a Christian in a sense, although both he and his student had to learn to live 'without the consolation resulting from belonging to a Church' (Drury, 1981a: 129). He was of the opinion that the religion of the future would do without priests and would be a matter of relations between the individual and God (Drury, 1981a, p. 117). He also confessed that he was not capable of believing in Christ as the Saviour.

Drury's memoirs show that, according to Wittgenstein, the essence of the religious way of life should be appropriate action rather than prayer.

But remember that Christianity is not a matter of saying a lot of prayers; in fact, we are told not to do that. If you and I are to live religious lives, it mustn't be that we talk a lot about religion, but that our manner of life is different. It is my belief that only if you try to be helpful to other people will you in the end find your way to God.

(Drury, 1981a, p. 129)

⁵ Wittgenstein appears to have a negative view of the preaching of far-reaching doctrinal statements, as he seems to support 'wordless faith'. He is attributed such a faith (*der wortlose Glaube*) by Paul Engelmann, see Somavilla, 2006, p. 133.

⁶ M. O'Connor Drury arrived in Cambridge with the intention of becoming an Anglican priest. However, he later changed his plans, to a high degree because of Wittgenstein. He left the university and for a year, as suggested by Wittgenstein, he worked as a manual labourer and took up medical studies later. He became a psychiatric doctor and published his memories of Wittgenstein with detailed accounts of their conversations.

In his journals, Wittgenstein makes repeated references to an idea that was central to Kierkegaard, namely, the paradox of the eternal God existing in time.

God as a Historical Event in the world is so paradoxical; just as paradoxical as that a certain action in my life was sinful then & there. That is, that a moment of my history has eternal significance is no more or less paradoxical than that a moment or span of time in world history has eternal meaning.

(Wittgenstein, 2003, p. 141)

But now if you believe in providence: that is, if you believe that nothing that happens, happens any other way than through the will of God, then you must also believe that this greatest thing happened through the will of God, namely that a human being was born who is God. Mustn't this fact then be of "decisive significance" for you? I mean: mustn't it then have implications for your life, commit you to something? I mean: mustn't you not enter into an ethical relation with him?

(Wittgenstein, 2003, p. 223)

Kierkegaard's reflections on the paradox of Christianity clearly made a major impression on the young Wittgenstein.

Together with a change in the concept of language, statements about the paradox of thrusting against the limits of language and about the boundaries of reason, lost their merit. In the late 1930s, Wittgenstein no longer agreed with Kierkegaard's position that the fact of the eternal God coming to exist in time was a paradox of thinking and reason. He now considered Kierkegaard's statements about the paradox misguided, if not harmful.

I believe: the word "believing" has wrought horrible havoc in religion. All the knotty thoughts about the 'paradox' of the eternal meaning of a historical fact and the like. But if instead of "belief in Christ" you would say: "love of Christ", the paradox vanishes, that is, the irritation of reason.

(Wittgenstein, 2003, p. 247)

3.2 Faith and an attitude to the world

To some extent, Wittgenstein's views on religion are in line with Kierkegaard's concept of subjective truth as the proper relation of the human to God and the world, and also of faith as a subjective truth (Kierkegaard, 2009a, p. 167f.).

The idea of the appropriate attitude of the subject to the world, close to the idea of subjective truth, is already present in *Notebooks*. The will discussed in *Notebooks* 'is an attitude of the subject to the world' (Wittgenstein, 1961, 4.11.1916).

The metaphysical subject (in the transcendental sense) does not belong to the world and makes no impact on particular states of affairs. However, it does make an impact on the world as a whole:

If the good or bad exercise of the will does alter the world, it can alter only the limits of the world, not the facts – not what can be expressed by means of language.

In short, the effect must be that it becomes an altogether different world. It must, so to speak, wax and wane as a whole.

(Wittgenstein, 1961, 5.07.1916)

When is the will good? Wittgenstein writes that a person of good will is happy. A happy person doesn't know the fear and hope that accompany thinking about the future. He lives in harmony with the world, in accordance with his own conscience. And peace of conscience is ensured by a life devoted to knowledge.

Interpretations of the note from 5 July are, however, quite risky. It should be remembered that, according to Wittgenstein's philosophy in the *Notebooks*, there can be no describable characteristic of a happy life (Wittgenstein, 1961, 2.08.1916), and 'happiness and unhappiness cannot belong to the world' (Wittgenstein, 1961, 30.08.1916).

The category of the individual's proper attitude to God and the world (or, to being in subjective truth, as Kierkegaard would say) also plays an important role in the thoughts of the late Wittgenstein (only that the essence is no longer the attitude of the transcendental subject, but rather, probably, of a subject understood as a psychophysical unity). A comment on the relationship between preaching truth and being in truth can be found in Wittgenstein's notes collected in the book *Culture and Value*.

One *cannot* speak the truth; – if one has not yet conquered oneself. One *cannot* speak it – but not, because one is still not clever enough.

The truth can be spoken only by someone who is already at home in it; not by someone who still lives in untruthfulness, & does no more than reach out towards it from within untruthfulness.

(Wittgenstein, 1998, 41e).

There are comments emphasising the decisive significance of the proper attitude to be taken: 'If life becomes hard to bear, we think of improvements. But the most important & effective improvement, in our own attitude, hardly occurs to us, & we can decide on this only with the utmost difficulty' (Wittgenstein, 1998, 60e).

Wittgenstein also understands his religious faith as a particular attitude: 'My faith is too weak. I mean, my belief in providence, my feeling "everything happens through the will of God". And this is no opinion – also not a conviction, but an attitude toward the things & what is happening' (Wittgenstein, 2003, p. 225).

Wittgenstein's notes contain the texts of his prayers. Sometimes, in these prayers, he asks God for help in becoming a better human being, in achieving the proper attitude towards Him. For example, he writes: 'God! let me come into a relation to you in which I "can be cheerful in my work"' (Wittgenstein, 2003, p. 181).

Kierkegaard's influence on Wittgenstein is clearly visible in his remark of 11.10.1946:

Amongst other things Christianity says, I believe, that sound doctrines are all useless. That you have to change your life. (Or the direction of your life.) That all wisdom is cold; & that you can no more use it for setting your life to rights, than you can forge iron when it is cold. For a sound doctrine need not seize you; you can follow it, like a doctor's prescription. – But here you have to be seized & turned around by something. – (i.e. this is how I understand it.) Once turned round, you must stay turned round. Wisdom is passionless. By contrast, Kierkegaard calls faith a passion.

(Wittgenstein, 1998, 61e)

We might also say: wisdom merely conceals life from you.

(Wittgenstein, 1998, 64e)

In the quoted remark, Wittgenstein opposes faith to wisdom, and Christianity to science. He quite likely believed that being a good Christian does not mean embracing convictions corresponding to a religious doctrine but rather is based on a passionate attitude to God and the paradox of His existence in time, involving the whole person. What is crucial is the individual's attitude and not the acceptance of secondary religious arrangements and participation in religious rituals. Christianity is no 'good science', theory,

or doctrine but the religion of those who live in truth, taking an appropriate attitude to the Creator and Saviour.

Wittgenstein often juxtaposed religion to theory. *Tractatus* can be construed as a philosophical theory concerning the relationships between language, thought, and reality. However, soon after writing it, Wittgenstein emphasised his anti-theoretical attitude. In his conversation with neo-positivists in 1930, Wittgenstein remarked that he spoke in the first person in the final section of the *Lecture on Ethics*.

If anybody offers me a theory, I would say: No, no, that doesn't interest me. Even if the theory were true that would not interest me – it would not be what I seek. The ethical cannot be thought. If I needed a theory in order to explain to another the essence of the ethical, the ethical would have no value at all.

(Waismann, 1965, p. 16)

The ethical cannot be described or explained by theory. However, you can guide others towards specific experiences and change their attitude towards the world and the inexpressible, as Wittgenstein does in his *Lecture on Ethics* and Kierkegaard does in *Either/Or* and his other books.

In his journals and in *Lectures on Religious Belief*, Wittgenstein addresses the specific nature of religious faith and how it differs from scientific and empirical convictions. In his views on the specific nature of religion, he is similar to Kierkegaard. The Dane also juxtaposes science, which aims for objective truth, with religion, in which a person seeks subjective truth.

Our attitude to a religious message differs from our attitude to scientific content. We learn and understand scientific content, considering it to be true; however, our propositional attitudes towards it are, one might say, free from passion. Usually, scientific convictions do not significantly impact our lives as a whole. The situation is different with religious truths. Someone who knows and accepts religious statements does not necessarily have to be religious. According to Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein, an authentic Christian accepts religious truths wholeheartedly and takes a 'passionate' attitude towards them. This passion can be expressed through the believer's actions. According to Wittgenstein, actions demonstrate the importance that a person attributes to religious truths and their attitude towards them. Two people who accept the same religious truths may lead different lives. In the religious form of life, beliefs and actions are closely interwoven.

Faith shapes religious practice and the foundations of the system of beliefs, providing justification for other beliefs and for actions, and defines the world-picture of the religious person.⁷ For an agnostic or a non-religious person, empirical content, for example concerning history, is more trustworthy than religious content and is an important point of reference when assessing somebody's religious beliefs. The religious convictions of the faithful person are, however, not supported in a similar way by historical truth.

Christianity is not based on a historical truth; but presents us with a (historical) narrative and says: now believe! But not, believe this report with the belief that is appropriate to a historical report – but rather: believe through thick and thin & you can do this only as the outcome of a life. *Here you have a message! – don't treat it as you would another historical message! Make quite a quite different place for it in your life.* There is no paradox about that!

(Wittgenstein, 1998, 37e)

Like Kierkegaard,⁸ Wittgenstein believes that the knowledge of historical facts has usually only a small impact on religious convictions. These are the religious convictions that lie at the foundation of the system of beliefs of the religious person. They define such a person's way of life, the goals they set, and the values they try to attain. The realms of knowledge and religious faith are to a great extent autonomous, mutually independent.

Both Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein opposed investigating religious questions as if they were scientific issues. Religious claims cannot be verified using scientific methods and are not usually accepted based on arguments of the kind used in science. Some arguments used in religious discourse appear weak from a scientific point of view. In his *Lectures on Religious Beliefs*, Wittgenstein refers to the idea of a scientific investigation of religious questions as superstitious. Different criteria apply to the correctness of statements and errors in religion than in science. Evidence in favour of religious beliefs is not usually considered scientific; it is difficult for non-religious people to evaluate. Neither a person with a scientific point of view nor

⁷ 'World-picture' is an important notion in Wittgenstein's comments that make up the book *On Certainty* (remarks 93–95, 162, 167, 262).

⁸ See e.g.: Climacus's reflection on the disciple at second-hand in *Philosophical Crumbs*, chapter V.

a non-religious person can judge the accuracy of religious testimonies and beliefs. ‘The mere fact that someone says they believe on evidence doesn’t tell me enough for me to be able to say whether I can say of the sentence “God exists” that your evidence is unsatisfactory or insufficient’ (Wittgenstein, 1967, p. 60).

This statement proves that Wittgenstein seriously considered the truth of certain religious convictions in the late period of his philosophical activity. He did not rule out the possibility that the religious experiences of believers could provide sufficient support for such convictions. This quotation is worth attention, since Wittgenstein’s statements on religion used to be interpreted as expressing the position of a particular emotivism, noncognitivism, or irrationalism.⁹

In his late reflections, Wittgenstein does not seem to have appreciated Christianity as a valuable form of life only – and that independently of the truthfulness of fundamental Christian convictions. (Earlier, he probably found the Christian attitude valuable and the truthfulness of religious content insignificant). The Christian attitude is closely connected to convictions; the two cannot be separated. A Christian lives in a specific way, because he believes in the truth of his religious convictions. At times, Wittgenstein depreciated the verbal expression of faith to draw attention (as did Kierkegaard) to the fact that it is not enough to accept religious content to be an authentic Christian. A religious way of life (like Kierkegaard’s participation in the religious stage) requires appropriate convictions but also commitment; at times – it is necessary to change your life.

3.3 The philosophical method

Religion is no science. Therefore, it is hard to change someone’s religious convictions by referring to facts, through rational argumentation. The arguments used in religion are weak and have hardly any value for the non-religious person.

Religion says *Do this! – Think like that!* But it cannot justify this and it only need try to do so to become repugnant; since for every reason it gives, there is a cogent counter-reason.

⁹ An interpretation popular in English-language philosophy of religion. See e.g.: Braithwaite (1955), Trigg (1973).

It is more convincing to say: 'Think like this! – however strange it may seem. –' Or: 'Won't you do this? – repugnant as it is. –'

(Wittgenstein, 1998, p. 34e)

Kierkegaard believed he would encourage religious awareness in others by applying indirect communication. Wittgenstein did not intend to convert anyone. However, he quite likely agreed with Kierkegaard, who, in his *Journals*, pointed to the confusion caused by the fact that what is to be communicated as an art is communicated as a science and the other way round (Kierkegaard, 1968, VIII², B 81, 5).

Wittgenstein believed that philosophy is not a science either and that in philosophy arguments should be similar to those used in aesthetics rather than to those used in science. For this reason, he developed an 'aesthetic' method of philosophy (see Edwards, 1982, pp. 131f.) akin to Kierkegaard's method of sharing religious beliefs, known as indirect communication. Wittgenstein's late philosophy creates a message characterised by an anti-authoritarian and non-systemic approach, and a descriptive and (to a certain extent) subjective nature; thus, his message shows features characteristic of Kierkegaard's indirect communication. The purpose is different, however. In Kierkegaard, the method of indirect communication served to fight illusions concerning Christianity, and Wittgenstein's method, used among others in *Philosophical Investigations*, was intended to fight illusions concerning the functioning of language.

The 'aesthetic' method of late Wittgenstein could have been inspired by Kierkegaard's philosophical method. Anyway, there are notes attesting to the fact that Wittgenstein was preoccupied by the method of indirect communication. Here are two of them, from *Denkbewegungen*:

There is something teasing about Kierkegaard's writings, & that is intended, of course, even though I'm not sure whether they are intended to have precisely that effect that they have upon me. There is also no doubt that one who teases me forces me to deal with his concern & if that concern is important, this is good.

(Wittgenstein, 2003, p. 131)

On Kierkegaard: I represent a life for you, & now see how you relate to it, whether it tempts (urges) you to live like that as well, or what other relation to it you attain.'

(Wittgenstein, 2003, p. 83).

In his note of 22 October 1937, enclosed in *Culture and Value*, Wittgenstein suggests an interesting understanding of religious communication and the status of the Gospel in Christianity, inspired by the reading of Kierkegaard:

God has *four* people recount the life of the incarnate God, each one differently, & contradicting each other – but can't we say: It is important that this narrative should not have more than quite middling historical plausibility, *just so* that this should not be taken as the essential, decisive thing. So that the *latter* should not be believed more strongly than is proper, & the *spirit* should receive its due. I.e.: What you are supposed to see cannot be communicated even by the best, most accurate, historian; *therefore* a mediocre account suffices, is even to be preferred. For that too can tell you what you are supposed to be told. (...)

(I am not sure how far all this is exactly in the spirit of Kierkegaard.)

(Wittgenstein, 1998, 36e–37e).

In Kierkegaard, the use of the method of indirect communication was connected to the concept of stages on the life's way: the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious. Wittgenstein knew the concept well. Referring to the last, in which the readiness for renunciation is of great significance, he said:

Concerning this last category, I don't pretend to understand how it is possible. I have never been able to deny myself anything, not even a cup of coffee if I wanted it. Mind you, I don't believe what Kierkegaard believed, but of this I am certain, that we are not here in order to have a good time.

(Drury, 1981, pp. 102–103)

Perhaps Kierkegaard's concept of the stages of life, and the method of indirect communication, suggested to Wittgenstein that religious doctrines and communication should be nuanced depending on who they are addressed to.

In religion it must be the case that corresponding to every level of devoutness there is a form of expression that has no sense at a lower level. For those still at the lower level this doctrine, which means something at the higher level, is null & void; it can only be understood wrongly, & so these words are not valid for such a person.

(Wittgenstein, 1998, 37e)

It seems that this comment may also be interpreted in the following manner: The more precisely the churches define their interpretation of the holy scriptures, the more people remain beyond their realm. According to Wittgenstein, it is not especially important whether you consider yourself a Catholic or a Protestant, or what position you take on specific issues concerning doctrine. It is important to find the spirit of the Gospels, which they convey in an indirect manner, and to act in line with it.

Conclusion

Wittgenstein's considerations of Christianity were inspired by the works of the Danish existential philosopher he read. Traces of those inspirations are visible in many remarks made at different moments of his life. Closing the article, I allowed myself to note that many articles on the connections between the views of Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein on religion concern the questions of the limits of language, and absurdity or paradoxicalness of religious expressions; these include articles by Conant (1989, 1993, 1995), Mulhall (1999), Ferreira (1994), Lippitt and Hutto (1998), Ruud (2005), and Turnbull (2012). Often, the subject of books and articles on Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein is the method of indirect communication or, more broadly, the similarity of their ways of practising philosophy, which is the case with e.g. books by Janik and Toulmin (1973), Creegan (1989), Nientied (2003), and Schönbaumsfeld (2007). A range of unique and interesting interpretations have been developed in these areas. In turn, little has been written about the proper attitude of the subject to the world (or God) as an ethical category.

The comments on the attitude to the world contained in the *Notebooks 1914–1916* are convergent with Climacus's concept of subjective truth. Wittgenstein's later notes include other comments on the attitude of the subject to the world and God. This category was important to Wittgenstein, who, nonetheless, did not develop a credible concept of such an attitude. It seems valid to look at the remarks of Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein to investigate this question carefully.

This article has benefited from the comments and criticism of Gordon Marino and Joel Rasmussen.

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Citation

Ziobrowski, J. (2026). Wittgenstein and Kierkegaard on Religion. *Analiza i Egzystencja*, 73 (1), 5–37. DOI: 10.18276/aie.2026.73-01.