Tolstoy’s Religious Influence on Young Wittgenstein

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Abstract: The paper is an attempt to explain the tremendous influence which Tolstoy's Gospel in Brief had on young Wittgenstein. Factors enabling the ‘religious conversion’ of Wittgenstein are investigated together with the Tolstoyan themes discussed in the Notebooks, 1914-16, and the ethico-religious final part of Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus.

Key words: Tolstoy, young Wittgenstein, Gospel in Brief, rationality, religion.

… and that he [Wittgenstein] was above all a person in search of spiritual salvation.
Fania Pascal (Pascal 1984: 44)

When young Wittgenstein, aged 25, serving as an ordinary soldier in the Austrian-Hungarian imperial army on the war ship Goplana in Galicia, bought Tolstoy’s Gospel in Brief and read it for the first time, he was stunned and gripped by the feeling of the book’s existential importance for him. In 1919 in the Hague at the meeting with Russell he must have so eloquently conveyed the influence Tolstoy had on him during the war years that Russell could not help retelling the whole story in a letter to his ex-mistress Ottoline Morrell:

“… during the war a curious thing happened. He went on
duty to the town of Turnov in Galicia, and happened to come upon a bookshop which however seemed to contain nothing but picture postcards. However, he went inside and found that it contained just one book: Tolstoy on The Gospels. He bought it merely because there was no other. He read it and re-read it, and thenceforth had it always with him, under fire and at all times.” (Bertrand Russell to Lady Ottoline, December 20, 1919)

According to Klagge Wittgenstein’s ‘near-obsession’ with Tolstoy’s book during his wartime service is well documented. (Klagge 2011: 10) He read the book in the first week of September and ever since always had it at his side; for him the book became a “talisman” which protected his life. His fellow soldiers nicknamed him “the one with the Gospel.”

Wittgenstein left another strong evidence of the huge influence of Tolstoy’s Gospel on him. A year later in July 1915 he received a letter from Ludwig von Ficker, one of the prospect publishers of the Tractatus, in which Ficker was expressing doubts that he would hardly survive under the hardships at the front. In his reply Wittgenstein advised him to read Tolstoy’s Gospel in Brief adding that at the time “this book virtually kept me alive.” These words we have to take literally: Wittgenstein truly believed that the book could ‘save lives’, and not only his but Ficker’s too. And the salvation is contained in the solution Tolstoy offered to the universal existential problem of how to live.

Tosloy’s influence can hardly be overstated. It came in the right time and under the right circumstances to save the life of the future author of Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus. Not only that: Tolstoy is in complete agreement with what von Wright remarked about young Wittgenstein: Ludwig was most influenced not so much by philosophers per se but by writers, religious writers included, and poets who had broader approach to life and valued language. Tolstoy was definitely among them and no doubt contributed to Wittgenstein’s masterly style of writing which
made von Wright state: ‘It would be surprising if he were not one day ranked among the classic writers of German prose.’ (von Wright 2018: 9)

The unusual praise of *The Gospel in Brief* on the part of Wittgenstein by itself calls for broader investigation of this extraordinary influence on the author of one of the most amazing philosophical works ever produced.

In the pages below I shall present a short account of the roots and overall effect which Tolstoy’s *Gospel in Brief* had on young Wittgenstein. Tolstoy’s ideas can be sensed in the final part of the Tractatus and in the pages of Wittgenstein’s *Notebooks* during WWI. In accordance with the focus of the paper I shall first give *my picture* of the mental and emotional state of young Wittgenstein at the time he bought and read Tolstoy’s book; then I shall offer a description of several aspects of the book which influenced young Ludwig the most, and shall try to detect their traces in the Notebooks and the Tractatus.

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Why did Tolstoy’s *Gospel in Brief* so significantly influence Wittgenstein?

To get a somewhat immediate answer one has to be clear about the mental and emotional state of Wittgenstein around August – September 1914. This is key to understanding deeply (and better) Tolstoy’s influence. It is also important to consider Wittgenstein’s attitude to religion and see how it changed from the time of his childhood until September 1914. This attitude was indeed controversial and ‘evolutionary’ but very indicative of the spiritual pursuits of young Wittgenstein.

Being the youngest son of Karl Wittgenstein, the richest steel and iron tycoon of the Austro-Hungarian empire, hardly presupposes that in your family atmosphere religion will be given ‘pride of place’, to use Frege’s famous expression. It was indeed
art, mainly music, that dominated the lively atmosphere of the Wittgensteins in their Viennese palais. As a practical man, aiming at the better integration of his family into the Viennese elite, Karl in compliance with his father’s move was known to belong to Protestantism, while his wife was Catholic. (Ludwig Wittgenstein was baptized in the Catholic Church (Von Wright 2018: 4). During his service in the Great War he always declared his faith to be Catholic and was given a Catholic burial in Cambridge in April 1951.)

The air in the house, however, was also permeated by Karl’s relentless desire to educate his sons in engineering and management sciences so that one day he could hand over to them all burdens of the industrial empire he successfully built within some fifteen years (Monk 1991, ch. I; Lozev 2019: 28). This second aspect of the family atmosphere proved to be fatal for two of Ludwig’s elder brothers: they could not withstand their father’s will and so, left with no other choice, decided to commit suicide. The family did their best to overcome and conceal both tragedies but Ludwig was old enough to have sensed the depth of what had happened.

Did he turn to religion for support and consolation? This we do not know for sure. However: which religion was ‘his’? Ray Monk describes an interesting episode from the family folklore when uncle Louis, Karl’s brother, tells Ludwig’s sisters that they are Jewish pur sang (which they never fully believed until March 1938 when they had to face the provisions of the Nuremberg racial laws of 1935 (McGuinness 2018: 346)). The second suicide happened at a time when Ludwig was a schoolboy in Linz where his father had sent him to finish high school. It is known that in those years, following conversations (or rather confessions he made) with his sisters Mining (Hermine) and Gretl (Margarete), Ludwig ascertained the fact that he had lost his religious faith (Kanterian 2007: 20, Monk, ch. I).
What we also know, however, and what Wittgenstein’s biographers with curiosity emphasize, is that in the Realschule of Linz Ludwig did not do well on the serious subjects but had the highest marks in Religion. Did this fact had anything to do with the suicide of his brothers? Such questions now can be left only to guesses. What is unquestionable, however, is that young Ludwig obviously took interest in religious topics.

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Some of the years before the ‘apprenticeship with Russell’ (Gregory Landini) Wittgenstein considered as ‘wasted time’. His concentration on Aeronautics and Engineering studies had taken such hold of him that for a while he completely turned his back on his personal spiritual development. The studies under Russell seem to have strengthened this tendency: now logic became his absolute obsession and master. Wittgenstein excelled in this field with all might of his youth and intellectual powers. But he excelled in something else too: Bertrand Russell, then the famous Cambridge don, never hid his outright aversion to religion and at first ‘the young successor of his mantel’ strictly followed in his footsteps. An interesting episode, conveyed in a letter Russell wrote to his mistress at the time Ottoline Morrell, speaks by itself: ‘He [Wittgenstein] is far more terrible with Christians than I am. He had liked Farmer, the undergraduate monk, and was horrified to learn that he is a monk. Farmer came to tea with him, and Wittgenstein at once attacked him – as I imagine with absolute fury.’ (BR to OM, 1912, March) (Griffin 2002: 405).

The studies in logic and philosophy were hard and Wittgenstein, being a typical Wittgenstein and still under the spell of Weininger, worked incessantly on the problems which according to Russell might drive one crazy. The strain, unfortunately, both intellectual and physical drove young Wittgenstein to the abyss of suicide. Russell, judging probably from his own experience,
feared it the most.

In these days it was him, assisted occasionally by Ottoline Morrell, who literally saved Ludwig from madness. Fearing the worst from his devoted *apprentice* Russell did all within his power to protect him from going to the extremes. He stayed with his student late at night sharing with him the silence (sometimes for hours) or discussing logic and Wittgenstein’s sins. (Russell 2000, ch. 9).

The intellectual strains badly affected Wittgenstein’s nervous system and there appeared the awful fits of deep depression. Lugwig was raised as a very sensitive child and it now showed itself in its worst form. (The unusual sensitivity had always been substantial integral part of Wittgenstein’s character. It is interesting to read how Carnap describes the efforts of Schlick to emphasize this aspect, in Carnap’s words ‘the hypersensitive and easily irritated’2 Wittgenstein, and how he instructs the members of the Vienna circle whom Wittgenstein chose to meet with that they ‘should not interrupt him and not insist on giving answers or oppose his opinion’ (Carnap 1999: 52).)

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The vacations between Cambridge semesters were for Wittgenstein true salvation. He would always spend them with his family in Vienna or in their country house. It is interesting that in 1912, while in Vienna, watching a mediocre theater play Wittgenstein expressed an interesting thought. The play, he said, had allowed him to see a *possibility for religion*. In his words, it is the feeling of ‘absolute safety’ which is in the basis of religion. Years later, in 1929, he would discuss and develop this thesis in his famous *Lecture on Ethics* but it is obvious that in his mind he bore the thesis for a long time and thoroughly thought it through. What is also obvious, however, is that now, in 1912, he was desperately longing for the feeling of absolute safety.
Related to our topic of religion are other interesting developments taking place in 1912. It was Russell himself who recommended to Wittgenstein to read William James’ *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. The book immediately took hold of the student and Russell soon received his letter from Vienna (22.6.1912): ‘This book does me a lot of good. … but I am not sure that it does not improve me a little in a way in which I would like to improve very much’, wrote Wittgenstein. (quoted in McGuinness 2008: 30) The letter reveals how much Wittgenstein hoped for a change.

At that time, and also in Vienna, prompted by ‘the intellectual of the family’ Gretl, Wittgenstein began reading the German translations of Kierkegaard which first appeared in Karl Kraus’ journal *Die Fackel*. (cf. Schoenbaumfeld 2013)

Reading James and Kierkegaard proved of crucial importance: we shall hardly over-exaggerate if we say that these two writers, and Tolstoy in 1914, induced young Wittgenstein to turn his eyes on himself, to scrutinize his own life and the way he was living and perhaps ‘sinning’. All this led him to realize the need of self-transformation, of becoming ‘a good person’.

From this time on Wittgenstein’s attitude to religion, ethical principles and values changed. What followed in 1913 was the tragic but resolute breaking up with Russell, the mentor he admired just a year ago. Wittgenstein was undergoing a painful re-invention of himself, he wanted to reject all connections with his past and start a new life as a new person. The secluded life he led in Norway was devoted to solving the difficult problems of logic but he was also constantly and very intensely reflecting on his inner life expecting a change to happen but never knowing which side it would come from.

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Up to the moment of his voluntary enrolment in the Imperial army young Ludwig was eager to transform himself, not much aware that the very expectation of the transformation was transforming him. His sisters were feeling the intensity of his inner struggles: Wittgenstein, Hermine wrote, ‘had the intense wish to assume some heavy burden and to perform some task other than purely intellectual work’ (quoted in Kanterian 2007: 62).

There is undoubted truth in McGuinness’ interpretation of young Ludwig’s motives to enlist in the army. Patriotism? Yes, but not only: in the thrill of being a soldier and fight for his country he saw the possibility of self-transformation come true. However, the very first days spent within the environment of his future soldier comrades led him to total and bitter disillusionment reflected in his diaries.

Wittgenstein’s wartime diaries recorded that he read Tolstoy’s *Gospel in Brief* in the beginning of September 1914. The book immediately arrested his attention and made him constantly read it. To quote again Russell’s (though these were obviously Wittgenstein’s) words: ‘He read it and re-read it, and thenceforth had it always with him, under fire and at all times.’ (see above)

Wittgenstein scholars pay close attention to the overwhelming Tolstoyan force of influence when they analyze *the second*, and *more important part* of the Tractatus (‘that I have not written’, as Wittgenstein declared), its *ethical point*, as so described in the second famous letter of Wittgenstein to von Ficker in 1919 (cf. Ware 2011: 596).

Many different factors were at play which could account for Tolstoy’s influence on Wittgenstein, but we shall focus only on some of them.

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*I always carry Tolstoy’s ‘Statements of the Gospel’ around with me like a talisman.*

Wittgenstein, Diary, 12 Sept 1914

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Throughout this year, when almost every minute I was asking myself should I take my life with a loop or a bullet, all this time, along with those thoughts and observations that I spoke of, my heart was languishing with a painful feeling. This feeling I can call no other than the search for God.

Leo Tolstoy, *A Confession*

The 50th anniversary is a special age in the life of every person, a substantive reminder that life has an end.

Abdusalam Guseynov (Guseynov 2008: 802)

First and foremost, Tolstoy’s *Gospel in Brief*, captivated young Ludwig with the irresistible feeling that the author is a *kindred soul*. This feeling became a conviction which must have seized Wittgenstein instantly upon reading the pages of the Preface. As Tolstoy himself explains in the Preface the book itself is a kind of ‘extraction’ of a huge manuscript. Tolstoy’s intention must have been to ‘To retell the evangelical texts in the most simple, people’s language… so that it should primarily be understandable to the working Russian people.’ (Gusev 1957a: 974). For the first time the book was published in England in 1885, and its first publication in Russia was in 1906. However, it circulated underground in manuscript form and as lithographs and became known as the *New Gospel* or *Tolstoy’s Gospel*. (Gusev 1957b: 1002)

In the Preface of his *Gospel in Brief* Tolstoy summarizes some of the ideas in his previous works *A Confession* and *The Four Gospels Harmonized (United) and Translated*. In 1914 Wittgenstein surely knew who Tolstoy was. In his school years he was more or less acquainted with his great novels and perhaps knew about Tolstoy’s religious torments and painful search for the *meaning of life* in his last three decades, which led in the end to
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Reading Tolstoy’s book gave Wittgenstein a vivid picture of the author’s deepest doubts and fears, of his paradoxes and frequent bouts to kill himself (which Ludwig very well knew from his own experience in his previous civil life), of Tolstoy’s despair ‘in the abyss’, alone with the cursed questions of how to continue living when everything is so meaningless and impossible to bear.

Reading the religious Tolstoy at the front was for young Ludwig like conversing with him on the most important issues of life and death. It was as if Tolstoy was assuring him that he knew how he, private soldier Wittgenstein of the Imperial army, must be feeling. It was as if Tolstoy was saying: yes, when I was your age I was really a bad man, much worse than you feel yourself to be, and “I cannot think of those years without horror, loathing and heartache. I killed men in war and challenged men to duels in order to kill them… Lying, robbery, adultery of all kinds, drunkenness, violence, murder -- there was no crime I did not commit… So I lived for ten years.“ (Tolstoy 2018: 36) I was then blind, Tolstoy continued, to the important questions which torture you now. They came to me at the age of fifty… You speak of being lonely, wretched and ostracized by your fellow soldiers, ‘this pack of rogues’, as you call them in your diary, ‘rude and coarse’, ‘stupid’, ‘wicked’ and audacious (cf. Kanterian 2007, ch.
3), but my situation was more terrible than yours since I was lost and lonely amidst my own family, the people I loved and the people who loved me but never understood me. At the age of fifty, twice your age now, this started my inner transformation, my ‘second birth’, my return to Christianity, the way I now understand it - with all impossible struggles, ultimate unhappiness, frustration and disgust on the part of my wife and some of my children together with friends from my closest circle... Yes, my younger friend, we are kindred souls and we are both in transition, but you should never even hope of coming to an end or finding peace and calm... ‘Since calm is spiritual meanness.’ (quoted in Tolstoy 2018: 1104).

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A magnificent work. But it’s not what I expected.  
Ludwig Wittgenstein, Diary, 2 Sept. 1914  

Wittgenstein’s Geheime Tagebuecher (secret notebooks) reveal that at first Tolstoy’s Gospel in Brief surprised him. The book turned out to be something ‘not expected’: the word ‘Gospel’ in the title suggested a strictly religious text but instead what he began to read was a kind of ‘rationalized fusion’ of the four Gospels which Tolstoy was interpreting from the perspective of his own view of Christianity as being not so much a religion and divine revelation but a teaching, a teaching not of the God but of a great man. Comprehending the true nature of Tolstoy’s book must have thrilled young Wittgenstein and he must have quickly read and reread the book to the extent to write down in his diaries passages of it by heart: he often used to repeat to himself that man is weak in his flesh but free in his Spirit.  

Young Wittgenstein was both surprised and attracted by the book. The feeling that Tolstoy is a kindred soul was the first aspect of the book which quickly took hold of him but the further he read
and re-read the book the more he was taken by its *rationality*. Yes, *Tolstoy’s Gospel* was an attempt to set forth Christianity as a purely rational comprehensive system. This fascinated and most impressed Wittgenstein. The rationality went hand in hand with the *critical spirit* of the book and they both comprised its *second* most appealing and impressive feature.

There is a clear analogy between Tolstoy’s *Gospel in Brief* and the Tractatus with respect to the *structure* of both books. Like the Preface of Tolstoy’s Gospel which is the most substantial and influential part of the book where the main ideas are laid down, Wittgenstein wrote his Preface with similar intention. Both Prefaces claim to contain the truth, unassailable and final, the *solution* of the crucial problem which had driven both authors to write the books. These solutions were so important that radical changes in the lives of the authors were brought about: Tolstoy was ‘reborn’ and started to live observing the ‘true’ teaching of Jesus (‘distilled’ after six years of investigation and translation from Koine Greek and Hebrew of the original manuscripts of the Gospels and the other Christian sacred texts) while Wittgenstein gave up philosophy believing that his ‘solution’ put an effective full stop to it, and became a primary teacher in several rural villages of the Austrian Alps.

There is another analogy concerning the chapters of both books. Tolstoy begins each chapter by explaining it in his own words, making it absolutely clear how he understands the text related to the corresponding aspect of Jesus’s teaching. In his Tractatus Wittgenstein did the same: although he was very sparing of words, his seven ‘chapters’ began in fact with a general short statement, elucidated as the text proceeds by more concrete and specifically numbered statements. (In his later years he made the well-known remark that in fact all statements of the Tractatus sounded like chapter titles.)

It is also interesting to note that in the Preface of his Tractatus
Wittgenstein emphasized that the value of the book consists in the fact that it contained thoughts: in this we can ‘hear’ an echo of Tolstoy’s rationality and Tolstoy’s belief that in matters of the Christian teaching (and more broadly – in matters of faith) we are bound to apply reason, arguments and common sense. It is well known that the Tractatus contains a strong element of mysticism (Russell) and in this Wittgenstein can well be likened to Kostjja Levin, the famous character in Anna Karenina (and no doubt a self-depiction of Leo Tolstoy himself), whose soul in the last part of the novel underwent the anguish of the everlasting struggle between rational knowledge and religious (Christian) faith.

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Но тогава защо не вярва? Сигурно защото много мисли. (But why does he not believe then? May be because he thinks too much.)

Levin/Tolstoy, Anna Karenina, part 8, ch 17

From its outset Tolstoy’s project of translating and fusing (harmonizing) of the four Gospels was a rational effort. In fact it started as a result of his aversion for what was then being preached inside the Russian churches. In 1877 Tolstoy’s ‘religious awakening’, or ‘second birth’, first led him to embrace Christianity as a source, or rather a ‘way’, of finding the true meaning of life. Tolstoy wholeheartedly embraced the official Church doctrine but the utter disappointment came very soon (according to Gusev this happened in 1878). At the end of 1878 he finally imposed on himself the task to go back to the original Gospels and through to re-examining and re-translating them to find out the ‘true meaning’ of Christ’s teaching.

The rationality of Tolstoy’s re-construction of the Gospels can best be seen in the fact that in his translations/interpretations he bluntly rejected all irrational Gospel verses, all miracles and
episodes contradicting common sense. Tolstoy writes that he had excluded the following verses: ‘the conception and birth of John the Baptist, his imprisonment and death, the birth of Jesus, his genealogy, his mother’s flight with him to Egypt; his miracles at Cana and Caperaum; the casting out of the devils; the walking on the sea; the blasting of the fig-tree; the healing of the sick; the raising of the dead; the resurrection of Christ himself, and the references to prophecies fulfilled by his life.’ (Tolstoy 1957: 802-3; Tolstoi 1896/1943: 5)

Emblematic for the rational approach of Tolstoy is also the way he translated the Greek word logos in the Gospel of John. This central term Tolstoy translated into Russian not as ‘слово’ (word) but as ‘разумение жизни’ (understanding of life, knowledge of life, both available in the English translations of Tolstoy). Wittgenstein was perhaps surprised at first but reading and re-reading the book he must have found the expression concurring with the overall spirit of Tolstoy’s interpretation of Christ’s teaching.

It hardly surprised any reader of The Gospel in Brief that the official Orthodox Russian Church ex-committed Tolstoy and never pardoned him even after his death. (Today Tolstoy is still held responsible for his ‘extremist Weltanschauung’ and for ‘having inflamed religious animosity and hate within the meaning of Article 282 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation’.)

Tolstoy clearly foresaw what is in store for him after his well-grounded criticism of the official Orthodox Church doctrine. At the end of the Preface of his Gospel he writes: ‘For such readers there are only two ways out: humble confession and renunciation of their lies, or a persecution of those who expose them for what they have done and are still doing.

If they will not disavow their lies, only one thing remains for them: to persecute me-for which I, completing what I have written, prepare myself with joy and with fear of my own weakness.’
This powerful statement of Tolstoy no doubt appealed to Wittgenstein. His *Geheime Tagebuecher* give abundant evidence of how often he prayed to God to give him strength and courage. Like Tolstoy he prayed to God not to save his life but to save his soul and in the brave hour he hoped that God would be with him. Young Ludwig was obviously in constant preparation to meeting with death and this was the decisive factor which turned him into a religious man.

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„Какво съм аз и де съм, и защо съм тук?“
„....Освободих се от лъжата, познах господаря.“
("What am I, and where am I, and why am I here?")

Levin/Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*, part 8, ch 19

Perhaps the most powerful influence which Tolstoy’s Gospel exerted on young Wittgenstein came from the fact that the small book contained a ‘solution’. For Wittgenstein it was *the solution* of the questions how should I live in the right way and what is the meaning of my life (in Levin’s words ‘Why am I here?’). This third, and most important, aspect of the influence of *The Gospel in Brief* on young Wittgenstein was the *most needed* one and he unequivocally got the message which Tolstoy, this *lost soul*, this *man in transition*, was sending to him. Tolstoy was saying that he finally found the solution of the fateful existential questions asked by Wittgenstein. This solution, Tolstoy (and Levin) explained, is grounded on observations of the life ordinary people live: they live happily, they live in the right way because they observe the teaching of Christ. Tolstoy’s solution was Christianity, the unshakable belief in the *true teaching* of Jesus Christ. *How should I live in the right way* Tolstoy best explained in the preamble of
his Chapter four where its content is summarized. His answer was simple: obey the following five commandments:

‘The first commandment: Do not offend anyone and do not do anything to provoke evil in anyone, because evil gives birth to evil.

The second commandment: Do not be charmed by women and do not abandon the woman that you’ve united with, because abandoning women and replacing them gives rise to all the debauchery in the world.

The third commandment: Do not swear oaths over anything because it is impossible to promise anything since man is entirely in the hands of the father, and oaths are judged as evil acts.

The fourth commandment: Do not oppose evil, but tolerate insults and do even more than people require of you: do not judge, and you will not be judged. All that man can teach by taking vengeance is vengeance.

The fifth commandment: Do not make distinctions between your homeland and that of others, because all people are the children of one father.’ (Tolstoy 1957: 838; Tolstoy 2012: 58-9).

* Young Wittgenstein fully embraced Tolstoy’s solution and this obviously was the strongest element in his thinking and behavior which led to his survival and preservation of his own life, and the decoration of his breast with orders of valor.

References:


Notes

1 Weininger was one of the strongest influences on young Ludwig mainly with the uncompromising motto of his austere ‘artistic’ philosophy which roughly preached that you have to be either a genius or nothing; in the latter case the sensible thing to do is to commit suicide. To prove allegiance to this central thesis of his philosophy in 1903 Weininger killed himself on the stairs of the house where Beethoven died in Vienna. (In Hitler’s circle Weininger was regarded as the best and most decent Jew.)

2 When I met Wittgenstein, I saw that Schlick’s warnings were fully justified. But his behavior was not caused by any arrogance. In general, he was of a sympathetic temperament and very kind; but he was hypersensitive and easily irritated. Whatever he said was always interesting and stimulating, and the way in which he expressed it was often fascinating. His point of view and his attitude toward people and problems, even theoretical problems, were much more similar to those of a creative artist than to a scientist; one might almost say, similar to those of a religious prophet or seer. When he started to formulate his view on some specific problem, we often felt the internal struggle that occurred in him at that very moment, a struggle by which he tried to penetrate from darkness to light under an intensive and painful strain, which was even visible on his most expressive face. When finally, sometimes after a prolonged arduous effort, his answer came forth, his statement stood before us like a newly created piece of art or a divine revelation. …The impression he made on us was as if insight came to him as through a divine inspiration, so that we could not help feeling that any sober rational comment or analysis of it would be a profanation.

3 As Chover (Chover 2010) shows, that there is a problem as to which one of the two then available German translations of Tolstoy’s book Wittgenstein bought in Tarnow and later read.
Notes

1 Weininger was one of the strongest influences on young Ludwig mainly with the uncompromising motto of his austere ‘artistic’ philosophy which roughly preached that you have to be either a genius or nothing; in the latter case the sensible thing to do is to commit suicide. To prove allegiance to this central thesis of his philosophy in 1903 Weininger killed himself on the stairs of the house where Beethoven died in Vienna. (In Hitler’s circle Weininger was regarded as the best and most decent Jew.)

2 When I met Wittgenstein, I saw that Schlick’s warnings were fully justified. But his behavior was not caused by any arrogance. In general, he was of a sympathetic temperament and very kind; but he was hypersensitive and easily irritated. Whatever he said was always interesting and stimulating, and the way in which he expressed it was often fascinating. His point of view and his attitude toward people and problems, even theoretical problems, were much more similar to those of a creative artist than to a scientist; one might almost say, similar to those of a religious prophet or seer. When he started to formulate his view on some specific problem, we often felt the internal struggle that occurred in him at that very moment, a struggle by which he tried to penetrate from darkness to light under an intensive and painful strain, which was even visible on his most expressive face. When finally, sometimes after a prolonged arduous effort, his answer came forth, his statement stood before us like a newly created piece of art or a divine revelation. …The impression he made on us was as if insight came to him as through a divine inspiration, so that we could not help feeling that any sober rational comment or analysis of it would be a profanation.

3 As Chover (Chover 2010) shows, that there is a problem as to which one of the two then available German translations of Tolstoy’s book Wittgenstein bought in Tarnow and later read.
Chover gives preference to the translation of 1892. We are faced with the same issue regarding the English translations of the book. This happened perhaps because at the time of its creation *The Gospel in Brief* could only be published abroad (Gusev 1957b: 1002) and we should not exclude the possibility that Tolstoy made changes to the text when revising the translations in the different languages. Whatever the case may be, I shall consider that the original Russian text of the book is the one we find in volume 24 of the *Complete Writings* of Tolstoy of 1957 (Tolstoy 1957). Below I shall sometimes quote from the original Russian text in my own translation.

4 The sentence is taken from a letter written in 1857 by Tolstoy to his aunt countess Alexandrin Tolstoy.