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WITTGENSTEIN AND TOLSTOY: THE AUTHENTIC ORIENTATION

Many philosophers as well as many non-philosophers assume that there is no problem about just what religious belief is. They assume that it is something its adherents would like treated along the lines of (if not wholly in the same way as) any other form of belief. But because religious belief does not relate to any empirical entity or person then the belief element in it is conceived of as directed to some trans-empirical or metaphysical realm.

Both Tolstoy and Wittgenstein conceived of religious belief in a very different way from this. They conceded, I believe, that some forms of religious belief do seem to be directed at some apparently trans-empirical Being. However, for them, the *genuine* religious spirit involves something else. We can best appreciate their shared conception in terms of what I shall call an 'authentic orientation to the world'.

My purpose in this paper is to elucidate just what this 'authentic orientation' consists of and to show how it can be said to be something that both Tolstoy and Wittgenstein had essentially the same view of.

My pursuit of this purpose should not be taken as an indication: (1) that Wittgenstein's view in this respect was solely the result of the direct influence of Tolstoy's writings *or* (2) that both had the same degree of commitment themselves to the religious orientation. With respect to (1) it is a widely held idea that Wittgenstein was, in various respects, influenced by Tolstoy. Monk has explored in some detail Wittgenstein's practice of a form of Tolstoyan Christianity. McGuinness has stressed Wittgenstein's feeling for Tolstoy's writings during the First World War.[1] But I shall not be seeking to trace whatever direct influences are traceable through an examination of what Wittgenstein knew of Tolstoy's writings and how he reacted to particular elements in them. Rather, I shall look at the similarity in the structure of the model of authentic religious belief which both shared. With respect to (2), a number of commentators, notably Norman Malcolm and Philip Shields, have drawn attention to the religious character they see as permeating Wittgenstein's entire philosophy.[2] That view implies that Wittgenstein was

[1] Ray Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius* (London: Vintage, 1991); Brian McGuinness, *Wittgenstein. A Life. Young Ludwig 1889–1921* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

[2] Norman Malcolm, *Wittgenstein: A Religious Point of View?* (London: Routledge, 1993); Philip Shields, *Logic and Sin in the Writings of Ludwig Wittgenstein* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

committed to the religious orientation. I shall say more about this point in the conclusion to this paper.

In pursuit of the earlier mentioned purpose, this study will attempt to provide a systematic model which captures the character of the authentic religious orientation to the world in Wittgenstein. Then, turning to Tolstoy's writings, it will show that a comparable structure can be seen to reside in them. In the next three sections three fundamental elements in Wittgenstein's conception of the genuine religious stance will be outlined. For convenience these will be termed: the Absoluteness-Element, the Perspective-Element and the Independence-Element. In subsequent sections it will be shown that these three elements occur related together in the same way in Tolstoy's thought.

A final point to note is that, in what follows, reference to examples pertaining to ethics will be employed where this is helpful in capturing Wittgenstein's and Tolstoy's sense of the authentic religious orientation. Further, the terms 'religious', 'ethical' and 'ethico-religious' will be used interchangeably. This will avoid repetitive use of the one term 'religious'. It will also be in keeping with the character of the notion of the authentic orientation to the world. For in both Wittgenstein and Tolstoy the 'religious', as an orientation to the world, is something much broader than it is in traditional accounts which depend on notions of belief, denominations, particular traditions or particular sets of moral principles.

I

What I refer to as the Absoluteness-Element in Wittgenstein is the idea that ethics and religious belief involve that which is an absolute.

In his 'Lecture on Ethics' Wittgenstein distinguishes between an *absolute* and a *relative* judgement of value.[3] When we make a relative judgement of value we assess something's fitness relative to some further end. Thus a chair is good if it fits a certain predetermined purpose. But, in contrast, an absolute judgment of value implies no reference to any further end at all. It is itself an end, one which admits of nothing further.

Let us isolate some further key points in Wittgenstein's idea of absoluteness.

The first point concerns how something comes to be absolute. For Wittgenstein there is no prospect of the subject endowing something with absolute value by some interior act of will. How something comes to be absolute is perhaps best understood through the analogy of the fundamental beliefs which emerge in Wittgenstein's later thought. Justification of beliefs is not secured through coming to some propositions which are 'seen immediately

[3] *Philosophical Review* 74 (1968), 4–14. Subsequent references to this work will be made in parentheses within the text accompanied by the letters LE.

to be true … (rather) it is our *acting*, which lies at the bottom of the language-game'.[4] It is as a consequence of the myriad forms of acting that language emerges in the form it does. And it is from there that we come to place certain things as more fundamental than others. 'Language – I want to say – is a refinement, *im Anfang war die Tat* ("in the beginning was the deed")'.[5] We are not neutral contemplators of an external world of discrete elements unaffected by our viewing of them. Rather, the world for us is mediated in and through our categorisations, categorisations which in turn are derivative from and moulded by our action in the world.

Religious and ethical reactions are not necessarily as fundamental, or fundamental in exactly the same way, as the fundamental beliefs Wittgenstein isolates in his later thought. The point is that they cannot be captured in a paradigm involving observer-neutral contemplation of the world but are more fruitfully to be understood by comparing them to fundamental beliefs as elucidated in *On Certainty*. For religious beliefs have to do with the way one is orientated with respect to everything else. They determine the configuration of the believer's world.

A second point to note is that the distinction between absolute and relative value is clearly Kantian in its terminology, something we shall also note in connection with Tolstoy.

Thirdly, Wittgenstein's notion of absolute value relates to the reactions of the particular human subject – his or her orientation towards the world – rather than an objective grounding in reality that supports it. This is particularly well illustrated in the 'Lecture on Religious Belief'.[6] There the main example emphasises the subject's *regulation* by the religious picture of the Last Judgement. This picture involves an 'unshakeable belief', a belief that '… will show, not by reasoning or appeal to ordinary grounds for belief, but rather by regulating for all in (the believer's) life' (LRB 54).

A fourth aspect to the idea of absoluteness, closely connected to the latter point, is the way the individual lives in subjection to such a value. Parallel to Kant's subjection of the subject to the moral law there is Wittgenstein's view of the believer's submission to the religious picture being such that it involves 'forgoing pleasures' or taking risks that would never be taken for other beliefs that may even be '… far better established for him' (LRB 54). Religious belief as a picture is, for Wittgenstein, something the self subjects itself to, to the extent that everything else is coloured by it. It 'carries' a sense

[4] *On Certainty*, eds. G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright, trans. Denis Paul and G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1969, no. 204). Subsequent references will be given in parentheses in the text accompanied by the letters OC.

[5] 'Cause and Effect: Intuitive Awareness', ed. Rush Rhees, trans. Peter Winch, *Philosophia*, VI, nos. 3–4 (September–December 1976), 391–445.

[6] See *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief*, ed. C. Barrett (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978). Subsequent references will be made within parentheses in the text accompanied by the letters LRB.

of what is valuable that determines the value and regulates the individual's assessment of everything else.

A fifth point we should note is that holding something as an absolute requires, for Wittgenstein, a type of endurance which puts aside all sense of personal benefits. It is useful to recall that in the practice of the Christian life Kant says

> … everything remains disinterested and based only on duty, without the basis being placed in fear or hope as incentives, which, if they became principles, would destroy the entire moral worth of the actions.[7]

For Wittgenstein, a truly absolute ethical or religious response is similarly devoid of any consolations such as the 'warm-glow' of self-congratulation. Thus we find him saying: 'If you offer a sacrifice and are pleased with yourself about it, both you and your sacrifice will be cursed'.[8] When Wittgenstein does talk of consolations associated with religion, he makes it clear that this is something incidental. For example, he says that participation in religious rites

> … aims at satisfaction and achieves it. Or rather: it *aims* at nothing at all; we just behave this way and then feel satisfied.[9]

Wittgenstein is averse to any idea that something can be held as a genuine absolute and also be an avenue to personal consolation. What is absolute pushes aside the self's natural aspirations and desires. It often demands painful sacrifices and is far from being a soothing consolation. 'The edifice of your pride has to be dismantled' (CV 26).

The religious picture inspires total regulation of the self's reactions. This means that religious belief determines what the believer takes to be worthwhile. Consolation is not some separable end, something to be bolted on as a consequence of living religiously. Any consolation is *infused* into that subject's way of life. The orientation of the subject in that way of life is such that a consolation is what religion sees as worthwhile. The authentic religious orientation has no place for any motivation separable from what the religious framework sanctifies as permissible.

A final point to note is that Wittgenstein sees no place for relative judgements of value in ethics or religion. 'Every judgement of relative value is a mere statement of facts … [therefore it] … can never be, or imply a judgement of absolute value' (LE 8). For him, seeing something as having absolute value is incompatible with having an explanatory, scientific-analytical attitude toward it. Shields interprets Wittgenstein by claiming that once an object '… of wonder and awe has become a riddle to be solved, an object to

[7] I. Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason* (London: Hutchinson, 1948), p. 230.

[8] *Culture and Value*, ed. G. H. von Wright, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980), 26. Subsequent references to this work will be made in parentheses within the text accompanied by the letter CV.

[9] 'Remarks on Fraser's "Golden Bough"', ed. C. G. Luckhardt, *Wittgenstein: Sources and Perspectives* (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1979), p. 64.

be placed within a scientific system, our respect for its immediate and intrinsic value is lost'.[10]

II

By the Perspective-Element I mean to refer to the emphasis on *seeing* in Wittgenstein's thought about the ethical. An ethical stance involves not a kind of intellectual comprehension – something that involves relative value judgements – but an entirely non-verbal, non-articulative apprehension of the world as a whole.

This idea of seeing the world as a *whole* is very explicit in the so-called 'early Wittgenstein'. In the *Notebooks* the entry for 7.10.16 includes the claim that 'the good life is the world seen *sub specie aeternitatis*'.[11] Whereas the usual way of seeing things is from the midst of them, the view *sub specie aeterni*tatis is from outside. Things are seen with the *whole world* as their background. In *Tractatus* 6.45 it is said:

> To view the world sub specie aeterni is to view it as a whole – a limited whole. Feeling the world as a limited whole – it is this that is mystical.[12]

The *Tractatus* can be understood as a work aiming to get us to *see* the world aright (TLP 6.54).

A holistic form of seeing is also found in the later writings. We should recall that in the 'Lecture on Religious Belief' it is something visual – orientating one's life around a *picture* – that is given as the paradigm example to illustrate the nature of religious belief.

Such a non-articulative stance, as well as being expressed in terms of a *seeing* of the world, is also expressed as a form of knowledge that is too fundamental to be reflected upon or to be ordinarily subject to deliberative assessment. In the idea of primitive reactions Wittgenstein highlights an unreflectiveness in which nothing intervenes between the person confronting a certain situation and reacting to it in a certain way. One such primitive reaction is that towards other human beings: 'My attitude towards him is an attitude towards a soul (*eine Einstellung zur Seele*). I am not of the *opinion* that he has a soul'.[13] Here Wittgenstein is contrasting *attitude* with *opinion*, and, by implication, with *belief*. Some things which are commonly taken by many philosophers to be beliefs, such as the belief that another human being is not an automaton, are really derivative of primitive unreflective reactions which are intimately bound up with the emergence of language.

[10] Philip Shields, *Logic and Sin in the Writings of Ludwig Wittgenstein*, p. 112. Hereafter page numbers are given in parentheses in the texts accompanied by the letters LSLW.

[11] *Notebooks 1914–16*, ed. G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright (Oxford: Blackwell, 1961). Subsequent references will be accompanied by the letters NB.

[12] *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. D. F. Pears & B. F. McGuinness (London: Routledge, 1961). Subsequent references will be made in brackets in the text, accompanied by the letters TLP.

[13] *Philosophical Investigations*, eds. G. E. M. Anscombe & Rush Rhees, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1953), II, iv. Subsequent references will be made in parentheses in the text, accompanied by the letters PI.

Wittgenstein's later thought is imbued with the sense that our place in the world is largely an unreflective stance which, if we try to justify, we merely end up in a process of circular argument. 'In the beginning was the deed' (CV 31). Genuine religious belief is to be understood along the lines of such a non-articulative orientation to the world. For Wittgenstein, the term 'God' is not to be thought of as any kind of designation of an entity or a being. 'The way you use the word "God" does not show *whom* you mean – but rather what you mean' (CV 50). The sense of this 'what' shows itself in the course of a person's life, in his or her reactions, values, actions, hopes and fears.

III

The third element I want to highlight in Wittgenstein is what I call the Independence-Element. For Wittgenstein the genuine ethico-religious response involves the subject being regulated by the absolute value in question; he or she sees the world according to the perspective of that value. Finally, this stance means that the subject is 'independent of the world'. In the words of the *Notebooks* this means that the subject is able to 'renounce any influence on happenings' and yet can master the world (NB 11.6.16).[14] Despite the outward condition of being completely powerless to determine happenings and in no causal sense able to be independent of fate, a way of living is possible which enables the subject to continue through despair and hopelessness.

Tractatus 6.45 equates the mystical with 'feeling the world as a limited whole' and with, in turn, the ability to view the world *sub specie aeterni*. The difference this form of viewing makes is to enable the subject to live in the present. For '... the man ... fulfilling the purpose of existence ... no longer needs to have any purpose except to live' (NB 6.7.16). This is what it means to be '... living in eternity and not in time' (NB 6.7.16). In the 'Lecture on Ethics' this is expressed in the idea of absolute safety: 'I am safe, nothing can injure me whatever happens'.

It is worth saying a little more about just what independence enables a person to do. Independence involves a capacity to do the following: (a) accept the finality of death and the non-survival of the self beyond it; (b) accept pointless suffering; (c) accept life as it comes without trying desperately to manipulate events; (d) accept this world and not hanker for some metaphysical realm transcending it.

With respect to (a), Wittgenstein says in the *Tractatus* that the idea of surviving death presents us with a problem: if this life is only meaningful in terms of another, what is it that makes that other life meaningful? In TLP

[14] I offer one way of understanding the link between the idea of seeing the *whole* of life according to a particular perspective and the idea of independence from the world in more detail in my paper 'Wittgensteinian Perspectives *Sub Specie Aeternitatis*', *Religious Studies*, XXXI (October 1995).

6.4312 we are told that the idea of the temporal immortality of the human soul fails to accomplish the purpose for which it has always been intended. 'Is not this eternal life itself as much of a riddle as our present life?'. He opts, it seems, for an acceptance of the end of the self at death. This is why, in his diary written during the First World War, Wittgenstein exhorted God to help him not to *lose* himself in the face of death.[15] By this he seems to have meant a desire not to break down in the face of an externally imposed fate which would end his own existence. Being able to live in the present enables the self to be independent of fate, to have no fear, even in the face of death (NB 8.7.16).

With respect to (b) we find one example in the way Wittgenstein admired Schubert. McGuinness remarks that Wittgenstein admired Schubert chiefly because of the way 'in which the ethical and the aesthetic were intertwined: the contrast of the misery of his life and the absence of all bitterness'.[16]

With respect to (c) we have already noted the stress on accepting what we cannot manipulate in the *Tractatus*. In this connection A. Phillips Griffiths says that the *Notebook* entry for 13.8.16 about renouncing the amenities of the world is not about beating certain wants out of one.[17] Rather, he claims, it is a matter of learning to be content to want without having. In other words, it involves the ability to accept the intrusions of fate without them being seen as any less an intrusion, and without our being overly dependent on mitigating that intrusion by trying to manipulate it away. Tilghman says, in his discussion of Wittgenstein's views, that 'one becomes independent of… (the world) … by accepting the world as it is…'.[18] It is useful here to recall Wittgenstein's view of prayer. In the *Notebooks* he says: 'To pray is to think about the meaning of life' (NB 73). This suggests that *genuine* prayer is a non-petitionary contemplation of what makes life meaningful. Presumably, prayer that is petitionary is either a reflection of a sub-standard religion, or, some forms of petitionary prayer are best understood as not a matter of a literal request for the course of events to proceed in a particular direction. An interpretation of Wittgenstein developed with great subtlety along the latter lines is to be found in D. Z. Phillips' *The Concept of Prayer*.[19]

With respect to (d), we should realise that for Wittgenstein eternity is not infinite temporal duration but 'timelessness … our life has no end in just the way in which our visual field has no limits' (TLP 6.4311). Eternal life 'belongs to those who live in the present' (TLP 6.4311). Religious proposi-

[15] See Ray Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein*, p. 116.
[16] Brian McGuinness, *Wittgenstein: A Life. Young Ludwig 1889–1921*, p. 124.
[17] 'Wittgenstein, Schopenhauer and Ethics', in ed. G. Vesey *Understanding Wittgenstein*, Royal Institute of Philosophy Lectures 1972–73 (London: Macmillan, 1974), p. 111.
[18] *Wittgenstein, Ethics and Aesthetics: The View From Eternity* (London: Macmillan, 1991) p. 74. Further references will be made in the text, accompanied by the letters WEA.
[19] *The Concept of Prayer* (London: Routledge, 1965).

tions are not literal; religious belief is 'a way of living, or a way of assessing life' (CV 64). It relates to the here and now and not to some future or metaphysical realm. This is why seeking a literal construal of the Scriptures is inappropriate: the Biblical narratives are not polished for precisely the reason that the letter is not intended to be believed more strongly than the spirit (CV 31). It is the spirit in which life is lived that is important. Sound doctrines are all useless – you have to change your life (CV 53). The difference between the believer and the unbeliever is, in the 'Lecture on Religious Belief', a matter of drawing sustenance from different pictures rather than about picturing reality. Wittgenstein himself refused to worship a God viewed as directing a grand design, a metaphysical design in which evil has a place.[20] This is, of course, also Ivan Karamazov's refusal to worship the sort of God whose grand plan includes the murder of children. For Wittgenstein, genuine religion is orientated to the present and not to some metaphysical schema.

IV

We can now turn to an examination of how the three elements unearthed in Wittgenstein's conception of the ethico-religious orientation to the world are also to be found in Tolstoy. In this section we shall look at the Absoluteness-Element. In the next two sections we shall turn to the Perspective-Element and the Independence–Element respectively.

As in Wittgenstein, we also find the distinction between absolute and relative value in relation to ethics in Tolstoy. The latter makes an explicit reference to the Kantian framework. To appreciate the context of this we need first to understand Tolstoy's idea of a person's 'position in the world' or, as he also terms it, 'relation to the universe'.

In his essay 'What is Religion, Of What Does its Essence Consist?', Tolstoy says that a

> … person acts according to his faith not because he believes in things unseen, nor because he works to achieve things hoped for … but because, having defined his position in the world, it is natural for him to act according to it …[21]

Religion is not about factual beliefs related to quasi-empirical states of affairs. It is something that naturally springs from a particular 'position in the world'.

The phrase 'relationship to the universe' is used in this connection in Tolstoy's essay 'Religion and Morality (C 129–150). He there claims that there are three, and only three, forms of relationship to the universe. The first consists in a person existing in the world for the purpose of attaining the

[20] See M. C. O'Drury, 'Conversations with Wittgenstein' in ed. R. Rhees, *Recollections of Wittgenstein* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp. 107–108.

[21] See *A Confession and Other Religious Writings*, trans. Jane Kentish (Harmonsdworth: Penguin, 1987), 97. Further references to this and other essays in this volume will be made by way of page numbers in brackets in the text accompanied by the letter C.

greatest possible personal well-being. The second relationship involves recognizing the meaning of life not in the well-being of one individual but in that of the family, the tribe, the state or some other aggregate of people. The third relationship to the universe – the Christian, which was also found among 'the Pythagoreans, Therapeutae, … Buddhists, Brahmins …', Epictetus, Seneca and Marcus Aurelius and not always seen in official Christianity (C143; C 140) – consists 'in man no longer recognizing the meaning of life in the fulfilment of personal ambitions, or the ambitions of any aggregate of people, but solely in service to the Will that created him, as well as the entire universe' (C 136).

Tolstoy insists that *every* person has a relationship to the universe and therefore a religion. Religion concerns the fundamental form of our engagement in, and orientation to, the world. The absoluteness of each relationship to the world is seen in his insistence that philosophy and science cannot establish man's relationship to the universe. It is not possible to prove to a person whose life is lived within another type of relation to the world that the Christian relationship to the universe is superior and 'that he must deny himself … simply because it is necessary and worthy and a categorical imperative' (C 97).

The idea of a 'relation to the universe' implies something strikingly similar to Wittgenstein's view as to how something becomes absolute. Absoluteness is given to us through the 'position in the world' which we occupy. That position is not optional. Nor is it something we can move to or from through intellectual analysis. Rather, the way we are engaged in the world – and the type of ethical stance which results from this – determines what we take to be absolute.

Note that in the last quotation from Tolstoy he, like Wittgenstein, uses Kantian terminology associated with the categorical imperative to characterise the nature of the ethical. A genuine ethical stance arises from one form of relation to the world and is absolute in that it is not subject to assessment or justification in terms of further ends, ends which would naturally relate to some *other* relation to the world.

Another clear similarity with what was earlier isolated in Wittgenstein is that the particular relation to the universe that a person is in determines his entire reaction to contingencies in a way comparable to Wittgenstein's idea of religious belief as akin to subjection to and regulation by a religious 'picture'.

A further similarity with Wittgenstein concerns how the good can only ultimately be traced to and said to exist in the individual. It requires a particular form of endurance on the part of the individual subject. '(A)ll the things which are commonly considered good are worthless' (C 391). What has genuine value cannot exist as something socially valuable because people's self-interest would arise and pollute it. It would become something

that was merely valued as a means to socially esteem and prestige. What is of absolute value must exist within the individual and be mediated through that individual's relationship to the universe as a whole.

As in Wittgenstein, that relationship to the universe precludes using religion as an end for the self's consolation, sense of security or feeling of self-enhancement. Tolstoy says: 'We are not attracted to genuine belief by the wellbeing the believer is promised but by something which manifests itself as the only recourse to deliverance' (C 220).

It would be a mistake to interpret this latter passage as implying that the believer is motivated to get something – namely *deliverance* – out of believing. For Tolstoy is not talking about a range of options from which the potential believer chooses the most attractive. He is talking about someone who comes to a particular relation with the universe, a relation in which the usual worldly standards are seen as exposed and hollow. For such an individual there is *only one direction he can follow*: the stance of an absolute acceptance of the claims deriving from his relation to the world. In other words, *deliverance* is not a matter of the most acceptable among a set of options set out in terms of a series of propositions. Rather, deliverance for Tolstoy is that absolute response which derives from a particular relation to the world.

One illustration of this can be got from the story 'Master and Man'. It is a story of how the exploitative merchant, Vasili Andreevich, and his meek peasant servant Nikita, become lost in the snow. Gradually, as their plight becomes ever more hopeless, Vasili Andreevich's entire relationship to the world changes. His motivation for undertaking the dangerous journey was the hope of making money on a good deal. The life of his servant was something superfluous to him. But in the confrontation with the inevitability of death Vasili Andreevich undergoes a change in his entire relationship to the universe. Ensuring his sick servant survives the terrifying cold becomes the meaning of his life. There is no reference to any afterlife whereby Vasili Andreevich can recoup some benefit for the sacrifice made. In accepting religion and the claim of serving his fellow man, Vasili Andreevich cannot be said to seek consolation. The initial terror at the impending loss of everything he had hitherto lived for has unsettled him; it has brought him to a new relationship to the world. *But that relationship is not something sought in order secure consolation*. Rather, any sense of peace he gets from the new relationship to the world is merely a consequence of that realignment to the world. It is not the motivation for it.

A final point to note is that Tolstoy, like Wittgenstein, views relative values as only concerned with matters of fact and therefore unable to change a person's relationship to the world.

> Neither philosophy nor science is able to establish man's relationship to the universe, because this relationship must be established before any kind of philosophy or science can begin (C 139).

Consider also the following:

> A person cannot discover through any sort of movement the direction in which he ought to move … In just the same way it is impossible in philosophy to use mental effort to determine the direction in which such efforts should be made … (C 138).

It is in the nature of movement that it is carried out in a direction; but movement is not itself the determinant of what that direction should be. It is useful to recall the words of Peter Winch, a prominent Wittgensteinian, who says that philosophy is unable to tell a man what he should believe just as geometry is unable to tell him where he should stand.[22] Similarly, mental effort inevitably has a direction; but the particular course that takes cannot be used to adjudicate or judge the adequacy of mental effort. Mental effort *automatically* proceeds to establish the self's relation to the world. But no amount of linguistically enshrined analytical mental effort can assess that relation.

In summary we can say that Wittgenstein's idea of the absoluteness of the ethico-religious response is directly comparable to Tolstoy's in terms of the following key elements: the Kantian terminology used in connection with the idea of absoluteness; the way absoluteness is something related to the orientation of the subject to the world; the way what is absolute determines the assessment of everything else in the subject's view of the world; the way absoluteness requires a kind of endurance that puts aside all dependence on consolatory benefits; finally, the way absoluteness excludes all relative judgements of value in the ethico-religious life.

V

We have previously noted that the Perspective-Element in Wittgenstein refers to his view that a genuine ethical stance involves a non-verbal, non-articulative apprehension of the world as a whole. Wittgenstein sought to see the world *sub specie aeternitatis*, to see it as a whole from the viewpoint of eternity rather than that of a discrete series of individual events. Tolstoy similarly insisted that we view things in terms of wholeness.

> We … must do integration: that is, establish a relationship to the immediate issue of life, a relationship to the entire infinite universe in time and space, conceiving of it as a whole (from 'What is Religion and of What Does its Essence Consist?', C 87).

For both Tolstoy and Wittgenstein what motivates, and also determines, the nature of their understanding of religion is this relationship to the whole of life and the consequent alleviation from suffering and meaninglessness that it provides.

Tolstoy frequently uses visual terms such as 'view of life', a phrase he

[22] *Ethics and Action* (London: Routledge, 1972), p. 191.

is particularly fond of. For example, in the novel *Resurrection* he takes great pains to explore the view of life found in a range of characters. Every relation to the world is forged through a *view* – not an intellectual analysis – of things.

The genuine religious view of things involves a state of *oproshchatsia*, of inner simplicity.[23] *Oproshchatsia* involves an unreflective apprehension of things in order for the self to be most truly absent. One illustration is the Father Sergius story. Sergius' doubt is a form of reflection which is the expression of concern for self. Genuine religion involves an unreflective relation to the world as a whole. As it is unreflective, there is no scope for deliberative meditations which are essentially avenues to secure the self's advantages. When he succumbed to temptation, Sergius' faith *had* become a matter of 'an object to be achieved'. It had become an avenue to his own satisfaction which, through reflection, allowed him to weigh it against other such avenues, in this case the seduction of the young girl who had been sent to him.

As in Wittgenstein, so too in Tolstoy we find this non-articulative stance expressed in a form of knowledge too basic to be part and parcel of normal deliberative assessments. Just as Wittgenstein could cite the fundamental status of the *deed* (CV 31; OC no. 402), so also could Tolstoy say: 'No arguments could convince me of the truth of [the peasants'] faith. Only deeds … could convince me' (C 58). Any reflective linguistic attempt at understanding defeats the prospect of achieving the selflessness that is sought.

Tolstoy, like Wittgenstein, has no place for religion conceived of as a system of beliefs because such a conception is seen as thoroughly given to self-orientation. Tolstoy stresses how religion held as a system of *beliefs* involves *pride*. Consider the following from *The Gospel in Brief*, a work that captivated Wittgenstein when he read it during the First World War:

> (I)t is a supreme degree of pride … to assert that a particular event is a divine revelation … (N)othing more arrogant can be said than that the words spoken by me are uttered through me by God … (It is) … the avowal of oneself as in possession of the sole indubitable truth …[24]

Being in the right relation to the universe is not a matter of adopting a particular belief-system concerning a supernatural Being. For Tolstoy insists that to try to justify the superiority of one form of relation to the universe to another through reason is an expression of self-interest.

In sum, we find the Perspective-Element in Tolstoy. Firstly, he too saw the genuinely religious stance as an unreflective view of the world as a whole. Secondly, he saw this as involving a form of knowledge too fundamental to be reflected upon or to be subject to deliberative assessment. Thirdly, he saw the notion of God as some sort of entity conceived within a belief-system as an inherently self-affirming notion.

[23] See E. B. Greenwood, *Tolstoy: The Comprehensive Vision* (London: Methuen, 1980), 37.
[24] Reproduced in ed. W. Gareth Jones, *I Cannot Be Silent: Tolstoy's Writings on Politics, Art and Religion* (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 1989), 65.

VI

The first facet of the Independence-Element is that of accepting the finality of death. Tolstoy believed that the peasants possessed a superior knowledge to that of the Russian upper classes. This was supposedly manifested in the peasants' ability to live without attachments to pleasures and without concern for the fact that individual life ends in death and total oblivion. Their right relationship to the universe is an expression of such knowledge. The story 'What Men Live By' (1881) is about the wisdom found among the peasants, the wisdom that 'all men live not by care for themselves but by love'. Genuine love is directed to persons encountered in this life. It is not about some imagined afterlife. But does this mean that it involves accepting that there is nothing beyond death?

For Tolstoy, the capacity to accept the self's finality at death is fundamental sign of the self's capacity to be independent of the world and to be able to live in the present. In *War and Peace* Pierre's realisation that there is nothing in life to be dreaded involves accepting death as a complete finality to life. That sense of finality is particularly clear in the great story 'The Death of Ivan Illych'. Illych, a proud and powerful civil servant, is struck down by a terminal illness. The story records in detail his gradual decline, his fears, his aloneness, and his agonizing pain. At the end he comes to see that to his question 'Why?' '… there was no answer and could be none …'. With that realisation he has come to accept the finality of death. That same finality is also what Vasilii Andreevich in 'Master and Man' comes to accept before his death in the snow storm. In his preface to *The Gospel in Brief* Tolstoy wrote: 'The true life is independent of time; it is in the present'.[25] Like the Wittgensteinian idea of living in the present, this involves accepting the finality of death.

A further facet of the Independence-element, namely the capacity to accept pointless suffering, is also found in Tolstoy. In *War and Peace* Tolstoy shows us how Pierre secures an '… inner freedom, independent of external circumstances' (WAP 1307). He learns that

> … (M)an is created for happiness, that happiness lies inside him … that all unhappiness is due not to privations but to superfluity … that there is nothing in the world to be dreaded …[26]

Pierre can accept pointless suffering through having secured an independence of the world and an awareness of absolute safety in which nothing is dreaded. Though he feels that '… blind force … had him in its clutches … he felt too that the harder the fateful force strove to crush him the more did his

[25] In *A Confession and What I Believe*, trans. Aylmer Maude (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 118.

[26] *War and Peace*, trans. Rosemary Edmonds (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1957), 1255. Subsequent references will be made in brackets in the texts accompanied by the letters WAP.

own individuality assert itself in his soul' (WAP 1206). Pierre can accept pointless suffering because ultimately he holds to the proud hope that it cannot crush him, whatever happens. Again, this reminds us of Ivan Illych's final reconciliation with the acute agony and loneliness that he faces as all the soothing adornments of privilege, rank and civilized dignity are torn away from him by the unstoppable encroachment of death.

A further facet of the Independence-element is involving the acceptance of things without seeking to manipulate the course of events to one's own favour. In *War and Peace* Tolstoy describes Pierre's acquisition of a 'personal power and strength'. In that power he finds '… an inner freedom, independent of … external circumstances' (WAP 1307). But Tolstoy is also aware that people, especially historians, frequently think of 'power' as something very different from this. They all too often view it as some kind of force implanted into the world by strong leaders. But, says Tolstoy, the use of 'power' and 'genius' in connection with supposedly influential historical figures '… do not denote anything that actually exists … (but) … indicates a certain degree of comprehension of phenomena' (WAP 1342). Moreover, it is a comprehension which fails to realise that really all life is a 'concatenation of circumstances' (WAP 1141) which no individual can control or influence in any significant way. The genuine religious realization is that we are victims of whatever happens. This realisation enables Pierre – and a whole range of other Tolstoyan heroes – to attain a state of acquiescence in the face of life's vicissitudes.

Another facet of the Independence-Element consists in a lack of dependence on the idea of a metaphysical realm. A genuinely ethical orientation involves a sense of the self's integrity such that it can accept all things without reference to any metaphysical dimension, be it a metaphysical being or a metaphysical realm.

This idea is clearly found in Tolstoy. The Tolstoyan self is unaffected by the course of events in the world. It has within itself the capacity for detachment from dependence on outcomes. Indeed, it is unaffected by anything external to the self. Not only are outcomes in the world inconsequential to it, but so also are outcomes and situations external to the world. 'External to the world' here means things 'above, beyond or behind' the world, that is, things metaphysical. In the preface to *The Gospel in Brief* the true life is said to be independent of time and 'in the present'. True religion does not seek nor revolve around anything beyond the proper appreciation of the present.

VII

This study has sought to isolate structural similarities between Wittgenstein and Tolstoy, rather than piecemeal points of comparison. In both Wittgenstein and Tolstoy we find a view of religious belief as characterized by an

absoluteness that involves the individual believer having a *perspective* on life as a whole. This perspective in turn leads to the believer's reaction being one of *independence* of the world. We can thus conclude that there is a clear structural similarity in the model of authentic religious belief as an orientation to the world found in both Wittgenstein and Tolstoy.

It must be stressed that this paper's purpose has not been to trace the direct influence of Tolstoy on Wittgenstein. The central issue concerns the depth of similarity in the way both Wittgenstein and Tolstoy share a common model of the authentic religious orientation to the world. Nothing in the above discussion should be construed as a diminution of the claims of any other figure or figures to have influenced Wittgenstein. Rather, it is hoped that something in the way of clarification of the world-view to which Wittgenstein was attached through cultural *milieu*, temperament and background has been achieved.

In the introduction the issue of the degree of commitment of Wittgenstein to the religious orientation was briefly alluded to. For Tolstoy, there is only one genuine orientation to the world and he sought to attain it. The religious stance is, for him, the only genuine stance. But for Wittgenstein things are far less clear. Certainly there there is an attempt in his overall philosophy to get us to see the world differently (particularly in the *Tractatus*) and to disengage ourselves from certain pictures which our naive view of language forces us into (particularly in the later writings). Moreover there is a moral tone in his warnings against our impulse to go beyond what can meaningfully be said. How far this amounts to adherence to a single, coherently expressible, orientation to the world is less than clear. Perhaps the descriptivist vein in his work eventually precluded the greater degree of immersion in a religious world-view that we find in Tolstoy. If this is right, they are separated by how close they stand to the religious orientation. But, more fundamentally, they are united in what they take that orientation to be.

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