CHAPTER 1

WITTGENSTEIN AND HIS PHILOSOPHICAL BACKGROUND

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Introduction

A person’s life circumstances or situation is closely related to his or her thinking. Coming to the sphere of religious belief, a person’s life circumstances or situations become all the more important. Religious beliefs are taught and developed through the life situations where one finds himself. That is to say, life and religious belief cannot be separated; they are tightly knitted. If so, since I intend to discuss the question of religious belief as found in Ludwig Wittgenstein’s philosophy, it is quite appropriate to shed some light first on Wittgenstein’s life, the factors that influenced him and other related aspects. Therefore, I shall do this briefly in this chapter.

1.1. Biographic Profile

The knowledge of biographic details and historical background for many philosophers and on many topics are not so relevant. However, for Wittgenstein and his philosophy of religion, knowledge of his biographic profile is helpful to highlight the philosophical development in his career and the persons, circumstances and ideologies that influenced him. Because, for Wittgenstein, philosophy is a personal practice and one can see this practice in action in his life. Moreover, Wittgenstein's fragmentary remarks on the topic of religion can be understood in the background of his life (Carroll 6). Hence, the focus will be largely on the circumstances that led him to develop his philosophy of religion.
Early Years of Wittgenstein's Life

Ludwig Josef Johann Wittgenstein, who is hailed as the greatest seminal thinker of the 20th century, was born on April 26, 1889, in Vienna. Wittgenstein was the youngest child of a wealthiest family in Vienna. Though his family from both sides had a Jewish heritage, they had become Christianized a couple of generations before. Nevertheless, his Jewish heritage was an influence throughout his life. His father Karl Wittgenstein was a Protestant and his mother was a Roman Catholic, and he was baptized and brought up in the mother's tradition. He was brought up in an atmosphere of culture and music because his parents and siblings were musically talented. It was his father's determination that his children were to continue his business. He decided to give them private education to train their minds for rigours business rather than academics (Monk 11). The eldest sons Hans and Rudolf rebelled against their father's wish and concentrated in music. Rudolf, who sought job in musical theatre, committed suicide in 1904. Only Kurt followed the father's wishes and became the director of the company. However, later he committed suicide. The impact of the fate of his sons Karl decided to send his youngest sons Paul and Ludwig to school later. Paul was sent to grammar school. Wittgenstein himself did not express any extraordinary musical and artistic talents in the childhood. However he dedicated himself to practical skills and technical interests. At the age of fourteen Wittgenstein was sent to Austrian school where the concentration was on mathematical and natural sciences. Then he was sent to Berlin for studying mechanical engineering for two years. Wittgenstein was registered at Technische Hochschule at Charlottenburg on 23 October 1906, as a student of
mechanical engineering (McGuinness, Young Ludwig 55). In 1908, at the age of nineteen Wittgenstein went to Manchester to do research in aeronautical engineering with an intention to construct an aeroplane of his own design eventually (Wright 528-529).

Wittgenstein was registered as research student in Manchester University from 1909 to 1910 to continue his studies in engineering. However, his interest in mathematics led Wittgenstein to read Bertrand Russell’s Principles of Mathematics. After reading Russell, Wittgenstein began his philosophical career. In 1911, he approached Russell and began his collaboration with him (Mcguinness, Young Ludwig 71-73). All through the year 1913, Wittgenstein remained at Cambridge with Russell, working with problems in logic and philosophy.

Wittgenstein enrolled in the Austrian army not for the sake of patriotism but for his personal sake. He was convinced that experience of facing death would improve his personality and he thought that going to war would offer such an experience. As Ray Monk notes the dairies that he kept during the war witness his conviction. "Now I have the chance to be a decent human being, for I am standing eye to eye with death" (112). When Austria declared war against Russia during the World War I, Wittgenstein was assigned to a military regiment on the Eastern front until he is transferred to a mountain regiment on the Italian front (Malcolm, A Memoir 8).
The Period of *Tractatus*

Wittgenstein, while serving in the army, contemplated on the problems of philosophy and took notes of his thoughts. Towards the end of the war he was captured as a prisoner by Italians. During this time he was able to finish the manuscript on problems of logic and philosophy. He wished to discuss this work with Russell upon his release from the prison. Wittgenstein was released from the prison on August 21, 1919. Soon after his release Wittgenstein approached the publisher Wilhelm Braumuller for publishing his manuscript. At Russell's testimonial, Braumuller agreed to publish the book on condition that Wittgenstein should pay the whole expense. Wittgenstein, who by that time abandoned his inherited property, had no money to meet the cost. However, with Russell's influence it was published under the title *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* in 1921 in German and later in 1922 translated into English by C.K. Ogden and F.P. Ramsey (Monk 204-205).

Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* is universally acknowledged as novel, profound and powerful. The book is carefully ordered and numbered in a decimal notation and covers a variety of topics like philosophy of language, nature of world, self and will, ethics, logic, mysticism and religion. Wittgenstein felt that his *Tractatus* was the complete solution to the problems haunting philosophy at that juncture. Even before the publication of the book, leaving the manuscript with Russell, he retired from his philosophical career. After completing his training as teacher, he went to rural areas of Austria to teach in elementary school in 1920 (Malcolm, "Wittgenstein" 229-230).
However, because of his temperament and arrogance he could not continue as an elementary teacher. Since he was very tough to his students, there developed tension between the villagers and Wittgenstein. Eventually he abandoned his career as school teacher and became a gardener in monastery in Vienna. Then he engaged himself in building a mansion for his sister and completed the work with originality within two years (Wright 535-536).

**The Period of Philosophical Investigations**

Wittgenstein was determined to withdraw altogether from philosophy after the completion of *Tractatus*. However, Wittgenstein had a rethinking that he could do more creative work in philosophy due to multiple reasons, and a few of them are worth mentioning at this juncture. Wittgenstein's teaching experience at the elementary school was not satisfactory due to his unsettled mind, demanding intellect and impatience. His teaching experience helped him to break away from the logical and scientific approach to language and to an informal approach to language in everyday life. His encounter with Fritz Mauthner, who argued that language, is considered as an instrument designed to satisfy a multiplicity of human needs rather than a formal and logical calculi, influenced Wittgenstein in the development of his philosophy. During his teacher-training program, read Wolfgang Kohler's book on Gestalt psychology; this influenced him remarkably. Psychological questions also occupied a place in Wittgenstein's later thought due to the influence of Freud. Another prominent element that paved the way for him to come back to an active philosophical career may be his association with the Vienna Circle. In 1928, his friends in the Vienna Circle took him to L.E.J. Brouwer's lecture on the foundations
of mathematics. Wittgenstein came to Cambridge early in 1929 and initially he tried
to fix certain difficulties of *Tractatus* the colour exclusion problem.\(^2\) Upon his return he was determined to solve these issues.

Wittgenstein's break up with *Tractatus* was gradual with *Some Remarks on Logical Form* and *Lecture on Ethics*.\(^3\) However, some of his *Tractaterian* ethical concepts reoccur in *Lecture on Ethics*. His break up with *Tractatus* occurred with the abandonment of the belief that every meaningful statement has definite logical structure which corresponds to the logical structure of facts pictured by statement. Instead of a unified structure of language, Wittgenstein started to think of the multiplicity of language in its simpler structures. This change of thought was the result of various occasions and confrontations with the academic community of Cambridge especially with G. E. Moore, mathematician Frank Ramsey, Pierro Sraffa as well as his association with Bertrand Russell. In fact, Wittgenstein praises Ramsey and Sraffa in the preface of *Philosophical Investigations (PI IV)*.

Eventually, Wittgenstein had followers, philosophy students such as Norman Malcolm, Rush Rhees and Elizabeth Anscombe. Wittgenstein powerfully influenced the philosophical circle through his lectures and notes taken by his students. The force of his intellect, his passion and seriousness impressed those who attended his discussions. Wittgenstein was able to create a new philosophical outlook through his lectures and discussions. These notes and reflections were preserved and eventually

\(^2\) According to *Tractatus* all logical relations between propositions are explicable in the terms of their truth-functionality. However, the counter examples like color exclusion are not the truth functionally complex.

\(^3\) See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Occasions* 1912-1951, ed. by James Klagge and Alfred Nordmann (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993) 29-35. Hereafter, the abbreviation *PO* will be cited within the text.
published and the lectures Wittgenstein dictated between 1933 to 1935 are known as
*The Blue and the Brown Brook*, preliminary studies for *Philosophical Investigations*.

From the year 1936 on Wittgenstein's thinking was similar to ordinary language philosophy because of the influence of G. E. Moore. He came to think of philosophy as a descriptive and therapeutic practice in the middle period between *Tractatus* and *Philosophical Investigations*.

Wittgenstein was appointed to the chair of philosophy at the University of Cambridge in 1939. However, during the World War II Wittgenstein left Cambridge and wished to contribute to the war by working outside the academic field. He got a job as a laboratory porter in Guy's hospital with help of Gilbert Ryle an Oxford philosopher whose brother John Ryle was helping Guy's hospital to prepare them for the blitz. Later Wittgenstein was transferred to a job as pharmacy technician in the manufacturing laboratory. He preferred to work in a blitzed hospital over teaching at Cambridge University. On February 1944, Wittgenstein returned to Cambridge. He wanted to finish his book before resuming the academic duties as a professor. However, he resumed the duty of a professor at the University without having finished his book. At the end of the year 1947 he resigned from his chair to devout himself to the completion of his book. In the final two years of his life Wittgenstein stayed with his friends and disciples like, Malcolm in Ithica, von Wright in Cambridge and Elizebeth Anscombe in Oxford. In November 1949 Wittgenstein was diagnosed with prostate cancer. The last two months of his life he wrote over half of the remarks now published as *On Certainty*. On April 27 he became seriously ill and he was informed of his impending death and his response
was “good.” His last words before he became unconscious were, “Tell them I have had a wonderful life.” He breathed his last breath on April 29, 1951. Many believe that Wittgenstein had an unhappy life, yet at the end he himself exclaimed that it had been ‘wonderful’ (Malcolm, *A Memoir* 100). Wittgenstein was given a Catholic burial at St. Giles’s Church, Cambridge, though he did not practice Catholicism (Monk 579-580). *Philosophical Investigations* was published posthumously according to his wishes. Later his notes, lectures, conversations with his friends and students were edited and published (Malcolm, ”Ludwig Josef Johann” 329).

**Two Phases of Wittgenstein’s Philosophy**

The major concern of Wittgenstein’s philosophy is the relationship among language, thought and reality. This concern is expressed in two phases, an early phase that is represented by his most celebrated work *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* and a later phase that is mostly represented by his posthumously published work *Philosophical Investigations*. In both phases, he traces the same problem – the problem of meaning. In the earlier stage, he expounded the picture theory of meaning. In this theory, he traces logical form as the foundation of correspondence between language and reality. In the later period, language is founded not on a single comprehensive abstract calculus of formal logic, but is placed in the setting of human life. Here he has a more coherent and holistic approach to language and meaning. Though there is continuity between the two periods with regard to the problem of meaning, there is a major shift regarding the

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4 Mrs. Bevan wife of Dr. Bevan who treated him told Wittgenstein before he become unconscious on 28 April 1951, that his close friends are coming to meet him the following day. His response was ‘tell them that I have had a wonderful life.’ See Monk 579.
solution of the problem (Erling 693). There is a shift from the bedrock of logical form to the riverbed of form of life. The static understanding of language is replaced by a more dynamic understanding of language. The bedrock of language is changed from formal logic to human life (Thiselton 360).

The availability of several lectures and letters originally in German and some of them in English have made Wittgensteinian scholarship more complex. It has become difficult to speak of only early Wittgenstein represented by *Tractatus* and later Wittgenstein represented by *Philosophical Investigations*. Apart from these two celebrated works, there are number of notes and lectures of Wittgenstein that his students published later such as: *Notebooks 1914-1916, Philosophical Grammar, Remarks on Colour, The Blue and Brown Books, Remarks on Foundations of Mathematics, A Lecture on Ethics, Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief, Zettel, Remarks on Frazer's Golden Gough, Philosophical Occasions 1912-1952, On Certainty and Culture and Value*.

The principle source of Wittgenstein's remarks on religion and religious beliefs are those explicitly deal with thoughts on religion and those that have implicit bearing on philosophy of religion (Carroll 15). Wittgenstein's *Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough* and *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Beliefs* and *Culture and Value* have explicit reference to religion. Some of the private dairies and notes of Wittgenstein which were not intended to publish have occasional remarks on the topic of religion. However, Wittgenstein's most polished and celebrated works like *Tractates, Philosophical Investigations*, and *On Certainty* treat topics that are indirectly related to philosophy of religion.
1.2. Philosophical Background and Influences

Though Wittgenstein had no systematic reading in the classics of philosophy, when one traces his philosophical background, one cannot help mentioning some of the important figures who influenced his thinking. In the *Notebooks* Wittgenstein said, “What has history to do with me? Mine is the first and the only world.”\(^5\) He even downplays any importance of the history of philosophy in his philosophical career in the preface to *Tractatus Logico Philosophicus*. "Indeed, what I have written here makes no claim to novelty in detail and the reason why I give no sources is that it is a matter of indifference to me whether the thought that I have had been anticipated by someone else."\(^6\) However, he admitted that he is indebted to the great works of Frege and Russell for stimulating his thoughts (*TLP* 3).

His later collected and published work, *Culture and Value* lists some of the influential figures like Boltzmann, Hertz, Schopenhauer, Frege, Russell, Kraus, Loos, Weininger, Spengler and Sraffa. “I don’t believe I have ever invented a line of thinking. I have always taken one over from someone else. I have simply straightaway seized on it with enthusiasm for my work of clarification. That is how Boltzmann, Hertz Schopenhauer, Frege, Russell, Kraus, Loos, Weininger, Spengler, Sraffa have influenced me.”\(^7\) Of these, Frege and Russell call for more attention, since they provide the essential background of his early philosophy as well as

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important targets of his later thought. Besides these, the influence of logical
positivism is to be traced out at least for the development of his early philosophy.
Since the present study is oriented towards the philosophy of religion, one cannot
help mentioning some of the persons who might have influenced Wittgenstein in
formulating some of his thought in this area, especially Kierkegaard. Direct or
indirect references to Kierkegaard are very rare in Wittgenstein’s writings. However,
recollections of those who were close to Wittgenstein attest that Wittgenstein had
several references to Kierkegaard and references to Kierkegaard appear in the
manuscript materials.

Vienna Circle and Logical Positivism

The concern of the thinkers of the Vienna Circle\(^8\) with the logical and
empirical dimensions of language earned them the name “logical positivists.”
Wittgenstein supported the logical aspect and empirical tendency of Hume
continued by Russell, which contributed to the logical positivist formulation of the
principle of verification - “the meaning of a proposition is the method of its
verification” (Audi 837). Wittgenstein was an active participant of this group,
though he never acknowledged himself as a logical positivist. It is the people of the
Vienna Circle who attributed the principle of verification to Wittgenstein on the
strength of the rejection of metaphysics in *Tractatus*. Though Wittgenstein was not

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\(^8\) In 1920s there was a group of people in Vienna who were actively engaged in discussions of
various subjects like mathematics, logic, science and philosophy. This group eventually came to
be known as the Vienna Circle. Though the name Vienna Circle was first employed in 1929 the
origin of the circle traces back to the early 1920s. The prominent members of the circle are
Moritz Schlick, Rudolf Carnap, A. J. Ayer, Otto Nautath, etc. See Audi 836-837.
an official member of the circle, his influence in the circle was considerably strong (Padinjarekutt 1).

The intellectual relationship between Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle was complex and surely with its conflicts. He never met the Circle in its entirety; rather he met small groups of them including Schlick, Waismann and Carnap in the late 1920s and 1930s. Carnap recalls that in the meetings of the Vienna Circle, the Tractatus was read aloud and discussed sentence by sentence. However, he reminds us that it is not correct to say the philosophy of the Vienna Circle was just Wittgenstein’s philosophy. “We learned much by our discussions of the book and accepted many views as far as we could assimilate them to our basic conceptions” (Carnap, "Intellectual Autobiography" 24-25). Most of the members of the Vienna Circle were influenced by Wittgenstein. The circle devoted nearly a whole academic year to the reading and study of Tractatus, reading it aloud, sentence by sentence (Menger 86). Carnap, in his Logical Syntax of Language, states that “it was Wittgenstein who first exhibited the close connection between the logic of science (or simply ‘philosophy,’ as he calls it) and syntax” (282). A.J. Ayer, in his “Demonstration of the Impossibility of Metaphysics,” stresses that the views expressed in it are not original and that it was inspired by Wittgenstein (335). This would prove to have significant influence on the discussions by the circle. However, some of the members of the circle for instance, Otto Neurath, one of the founders and intellectual cornerstone of the group remained sceptical about Wittgenstein’s views.
It would be more accurate to say that Wittgenstein influenced logical positivism than to say he was influenced by logical positivism. However, it is a fact that he kept himself aloof from it.

**Gottlob Frege and Bertrand Russell**

An understanding of the philosophy of Gottlob Frege and Bertrand Russell would clarify Wittgenstein’s philosophical background and his influence. Wittgenstein set up his theory of meaning against the background of the linguistic analysis of Frege, especially his distinction between sense and reference. Meaning in terms of referent is something central to the early phase of his philosophy. We can also trace out Frege’s influence in the later part of Wittgenstein's philosophy. Frege held the fundamental principle that ‘word has meaning only in the context of a proposition,’ “… never to ask for the meaning of a word in isolation, but only in the context of a proposition. … We must never try to define the meaning of a word in isolation, but only as it is used in the context of a proposition” (qtd. in Erling 695). The use of the word *context* might have influenced Wittgenstein, who is very much concerned about meaning in *context* in his later philosophy. Also the functional aspect of word in the context of proposition might have influenced him. However, the major difference is that there is a shift from the context of proposition to the context of social life in Wittgenstein.

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9 Frege uses the word *sinn* in the sense of meaning and *Bedeutung* in the sense of reference. Both these words appear frequently in *Tractatus* of Wittgenstein. The word *sinn* comes 64 times in the sense of ‘sense’ and the word *Bedeutung* appears 35 times in the sense of reference in *Tractatus*. “Reference is an extra-linguistic notion, in which aspects of the real world play a part and contrasts with the intra-linguistic notion of sense, a property arising from the meaning relations between lexical items and sentences.” See Crystal 329.
Wittgenstein was registered as a research student at University of Manchester. While in the laboratory he conceived the idea of placing a reaction jet at the tip of each blade of a propeller. Subsequently he could design an engine, and tested it successfully. The problems he encountered during designing a the propeller instigated his interest in mathematics. It is this search for foundations of mathematics led him to Russell. Though he was very much influenced by the ‘logical atomism’ of Russell, his influence on this theory is also considerable. There is a sort of mutual influence in this regard, but we could observe a common background for Russell and Wittgenstein in the idea of Frege that the world has the structure of the new logic (Roberts 18).

Russell’s introduction to *Tractatus* helped the positivist to give a positivist reading to the text. After having approached several publishing houses leading up to 1921, the *Tractatus* had been rejected several times. Russell’s endorsement did help in getting *Tractatus* published. However, Russell’s interpretation of *Tractatus* is not accurate. Wittgenstein indicates his disapproval of the introduction in a letter dated April 9, 1920. “There’s so much of it that I’m not quite in agreement with,” ... both where you’re critical of me and also where you’re simply trying to elucidate my point of view” (Waisemann, *Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle* 188).

Russell had benefited from his conversations with Wittgenstein, and he integrated some of Wittgenstein's thinking into his own work. In the series of lectures published as *Philosophy of Logical Atomism*, for example, Russell mentions that the ideas contained in the text “are very largely concerned with explaining

10 Concerning the physical nature of the world Russell’s theory is logical atomism. Accordingly the world in its ultimate analysis can be reduced to atomic facts. See Russell, *Logical Atomism* 35.
certain ideas which I learned from my friend and former student Ludwig Wittgenstein" (35). References to Wittgenstein’s influence are generously sprinkled throughout the lectures.\textsuperscript{11}

Though Wittgenstein owed very much to Arthur Schopenhauer for his mystical ideas, it is also believed that Russell was a considerable influence in this area. The characteristics of mysticism, which are outlined by Russell in his article, “Mysticism and Logic,” are somewhat parallel to Wittgenstein’s idea of the nature of “the mystical.” The first mark of Russell’s mystic was a felt insight into reality that is parallel to Wittgenstein’s inexpressible feeling. Russell’s point is that a mystic has a conviction of the unity of reality which is very much parallel to "feeling the world as a limited whole" (\textit{TLP} 6.45). Finally, Russell’s ideas of timelessness, good and evil are somewhat parallel to Wittgenstein’s idea of the world \textit{sub specie aeterni} and the account of good and evil which he denies in the world (Mcguiness, "The Mysticism" 306-307). A striking similarity could be observed between Russell and Wittgenstein in this regard. By way of inspiration and opposition, Frege and Russell provide the essential background of his early philosophy, as well as important targets of his later thought.

\textbf{Arthur Schopenhauer}

Schopenhauer’s transcendental idealism was taken as the first philosophical position of Wittgenstein. Although he abandoned it later under the influence of Frege’s conceptual realism, the development of the \textit{Tractatus} is very much

\textsuperscript{11} Russell admits that he benefited from Wittgenstein in several places. See Russell, \textit{Logical Atomism} 35, 46, 67 & 91. Further references to Russell’s debt can also be found in the influential set of lectures published as \textit{Our Knowledge of the External World}. See Russell, \textit{External World} 12, 213n.
influenced by Schopenhauer. Anscombe attests that at the age of 16 Wittgenstein had read much about Schopenhauer (11). Schopenhauer’s notion of “representation”\(^\text{12}\) contributed to Wittgenstein’s interest in linguistic representation that is central to the early phase of his philosophy. Wittgenstein combined his logical theory with his reflection on mystical themes, which were inspired by his experiences during the war and heavily influenced by Schopenhauer (Wright 543). Wittgenstein’s “the mystical”, which is one of the prime concerns of the dissertation, might have been inherited from Schopenhauer, who had an idea of direct intuition into reality (Glock 12). Even before turning to systematic philosophy, Wittgenstein had been profoundly moved by Schopenhauer’s thought through *The World as Will and Representation*. During World War I, he revised his interest in Schopenhauer’s metaphysical, ethical, esthetical and mystical outlook, influencing the formation of *Tractatus* (Audi 856).

**Soren Kierkegaard**

Kierkegaard has made a significant influence on Wittgenstein's philosophy of religion especially what appears in *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Beliefs*. Wittgenstein had a great appreciation for Kierkegaard's thoughts. He regarded Kierkegaard as the greatest philosopher of the 19\(^\text{th}\) century. Wittgenstein was aware of Kierkegaard’s position of religiousness as becoming instead of being and the requirements for becoming religious. We can

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\(^{12}\) Schopenhauer started form a Kantian distinction between the noumenal world, the world as it is in itself and the phenomenal world, the world as it appears. Schopenhauer says the world is my representation in the sense that it is what appears to the knowing subject. See Rethy 141.
observe some kind of similarity between Wittgenstein and Kierkegaard as regards religious belief (High, "Religious Point of View" 110).

References to Kierkegaard in Wittgenstein’s writings are rare. However, as the recollections and memoirs of Wittgenstein’s friends attest, he made several references to Kierkegaard in conversations. All the references to Kierkegaard appear in the manuscript material left by Wittgenstein, later published as Culture and Value. Wittgenstein’s first reference to Kierkegaard appears in 1937 manuscript. The remarks in the manuscript indicate considerable knowledge on Wittgenstein’s part concerning Kierkegaard’s view on Christian faith (CV 31, 32). Wittgenstein’s argument regarding religious belief as a personal commitment devoid of historical proof and scientific basis has evolved from the direct or indirect influence of Kierkegaard (CV 33, 37, 38 & 53).

Wittgenstein made several references to Kierkegaard in conversations with friends which have been recorded in various memoirs and recollections of Wittgenstein. The earliest apparent reference to Kierkegaard is in Paul Engelmann’s Letters from Ludwig Wittgenstein, with a Memoir (79). Kierkegaard also is referred to in a letter dated 20 December 1919, from Bertrand Russell to Lady Ottoline Morrell, where he indicates the changes perceived in Wittgenstein by the influence of Kierkegaard and William James (Wittgenstein, Letters to Russell 82). Another reference of Kierkegaard by Wittgenstein can be seen as reported by H.D.P. Lee who attended some of Wittgenstein’s lectures from 1929-131. “He told me that he learned Danish in order to be able to read Kierkegaard in the original, and clearly had a great admiration for him, though I never remember his speaking about him in
detail” (218). M.O’C. Drury, one of Wittgenstein’s students and long time friend, remarked: “When some years later Kierkegaard was translated into English, largely by Walter Lowrie, Wittgenstein was displeased with the poor style of this translator. He completely failed to reproduce the elegance of the original Danish” ("Some Notes" 88). Some other remarks of Wittgenstein regarding Kierkegaard points to his considerable influence in his philosophical thought: “Kierkegaard was by far the most profound thinker of the last century; Kierkegaard was a saint” (87). Drury notes further that Wittgenstein went so far as to call Kierkegaard not merely a great writer but by far the greatest philosopher of the nineteenth century” (Drury, "A Symposium" 70).

From our consideration of Wittgenstein’s references to Kierkegaard in Wittgenstein’s published works and from reports by others, we can conclude that Wittgenstein was familiar with Kierkegaard’s religious philosophy, and this had some sort of influence in formulating his thoughts on religion.

**Piero Sraffa and Frank Ramsey**

A shift of thinking from the *Tractatus* to *Philosophical Investigations* was largely due to the criticism by Frank Ramsey and Piero Sraffa. Wittgenstein himself acknowledges the effectiveness of these criticisms which forced him ‘to recognize grave mistakes’ in the *Tractatus*. Wittgenstein’s pragmatic and functional attitude to language owes much to Ramsey. Piero Sraffa’s idea of the use of gesture in concrete situations might have definitely influenced Wittgenstein, as well as Wittgenstein's departure from *Tractates* to *Philosophical Investigations*. Sraffa brought unceasing criticisms against Wittgenstein's picture theory of meaning - a sentence pictures a
state of affair - as outlined in the *Tractatus* during their conversations. For Sraffa, it is erroneous to hold that the logical form should be same for a proposition and what it describes. Therefore, he argued with Wittgenstein to rethink about the theory. Wittgenstein's awareness of Sraffa's influence made him feel "like a tree from which all branches are cut" during these conversations (Sen 1242). As Brain McGuiness reports, Wittgenstein told Rush Rhees that Sraffa taught him the anthropological way of looking at philosophical problems. "The ethnological or anthropological way of looking at things that came to him from the economist Sraffa" (McGuiness, *Wittgenstein and His Times* 36). This anthropological way of looking at things brought the new theory of meaning, meaning as use embedded in the everyday human activities.

It is Sraffa's unceasing criticism of calculus understanding of language and grammar that initiated the final move towards Wittgenstein's later philosophy. Sraffa's criticism helped Wittgenstein to break with the project of *Tractatus* and come up with anthropological view that plays significant role in his later philosophy. The most fruitful ideas of *Philosophical Investigations* came out of Sraffa's criticism. Wittgenstein himself acknowledges Sraffa's influence in the making of *Philosophical Investigations* in its preface. "I am indebted to the (criticism) which a teacher of this university Mr. P. Sraffa, for many years unceasingly applied to my thoughts. It is to this stimulus that I owe the most fruitful ideas of this book" (viii). Sraffa's critique was useful to shape the final form of Wittgenstein's thought. For the introduction of primitive language and the concept of ordinary language in his philosophy, Wittgenstein is indebted to Sraffa. In order to appreciate the role of
signs in a language one should look to how the signs relate to the form of life. Wittgenstein's broader understanding of use that meshes with life is related to Sraffa's criticism (M.L. Engelmann, *Philosophical Development* 162).

**William James**

Wittgenstein was a reader and critic of William James. He had read James' *Varieties of Religious Experience* and wrote to Russell, "Whenever I have time now I read James's Varieties of Religious Experience. This book does me a lot of good" (Wittgenstein, *Cambridge Letters* 14). The pragmatic attitude that Wittgenstein maintained during his later philosophy has its source in William James. Russell Goodman states that Wittgenstein's pragmatic insights that a sense of interrelation between thought and action trace back to James and human thoughts are rooted in practices or deeds (*Wittgenstein and William James* 19). In fact, Wittgenstein’s notion of family resemblance and his emphasis on circumstance are very closely related to thoughts of James. James anticipated Wittgenstein's conception of family resemblance. Wittgenstein's anti-essentialist position in the later stage of his philosophy has its roots in William James.\(^{13}\)

**Oswald Spengler**

Another important figure who influenced Wittgenstein, especially in 1930s, is Oswald Spengler. Wittgenstein had commented on Spengler's influence in *Culture*

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\(^{13}\) For William James there is no common essence for religion. The word religion does not stand of a single principle or essence rather it is a collective name. The meaning of religion will come out in plurality of practices and experiences. See Goodman, *Wittgenstein and William James* 53-54.
Wittgenstein, in his later thought, has a very pessimistic attitude to culture. It seems that he was heavily influenced by Spengler's *The Decline of the West*. He was doubtful whether his philosophy would be accepted in the current age with its decline of culture and civilization. Spengler's pessimistic attitude towards the modern cultural and spiritual condition has influenced Wittgenstein. However, he strongly believed that philosophy is especially very much rooted in culture and the life of humans. His insight about religious beliefs is rooted in culture and civilization (DeAngelis 3). Wittgenstein was attracted to Spengler's method of philosophizing "Gestalt analysis of history" or the "method of descriptive morphology" rather than the content of his philosophy (Cahill 128). Wittgenstein has appropriated certain aspects of Spengler's method and modified and applied it in his own style.

Reading Spengler, *Decline* etc. and finding, despite much that is irresponsible in specifics, many genuinely significant thoughts. Much, perhaps most of it, touches on what I myself have often thought. The possibility of several self-contained systems which, once one has them, look as though one were a continuation of the other. All of this also connects with the thought that we really don't know (or consider) how much can be taken from or given to humans. (qtd. in Cahill 99)

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14 Wittgenstein explicitly remarks that he was influenced by Oswald Spengler along with Boltzmann, Hertz Schopenhauer, Frege, Russell, Kraus, Loos, Weininger and Sraffa in *Culture and Value*. This is quoted in the beginning of this section. See CV 19.
Wittgenstein's own remarks, later in 1941, substantiate that Spengler had a considerable influence on him. "I just want to say: These people should not arrive at the view that they are making mathematical discoveries - but rather only physical discoveries. (How much indeed I am influenced by Spengler in my thinking)" (qtd. in Cahill 128). The influence of Spengler's methodology is explicit in his *Remarks on Frazer*.

The concept of a perspicuous representation is of fundamental significance for us. It denotes the form of our representation (*Darstellungsform*), the way we look at things. (A kind of "World-view" as it is apparently typical of our time. Spengler). This perspicuous representation imparts the understanding which consists precisely in the fact that we "see the connections," hence the importance of finding connecting links.\(^{15}\)

These philosophical influences have played a considerable role in shaping Wittgenstein's philosophy. We have discussed mainly the influences that are very significant in developing his philosophy of religion especially his development of thought from earlier stage of philosophy to the later stage.

**Other Philosophical Influences**

Now let us consider briefly some of the other names mentioned by Wittgenstein as having influenced his thought. First, we will treat some of those who are outside the academic philosophy but whose works Wittgenstein read as a

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youngster. Karl Krau’s masterful polemical analysis of language influenced Wittgenstein very much. Another influential figure in this category is Fritz Mauthner who first identified philosophy with the critique of language. Otto Weininger’s idea that one has a moral obligation toward oneself, to strive for genius and the intellectual truth and clarity also influenced Wittgenstein. Logic and ethics are ultimately identical; they are no more than duty to oneself. These influenced the making of *Tractatus*. Heinrich Hertz and Ludwig Boltzmann, who were part of a Neo-Kantian tradition of philosopher-scientists, sought the possibility of scientific explanation by reference to the nature of representation. Science forms pictures of reality; the logical consequence of the pictures corresponds to the actual consequence of the external affairs it depicts. These philosophers influenced the picture theory of Wittgenstein (Glock 12-13).

Though Wittgenstein was not well read in the classics of philosophy he did read Plato, Spinoza, Hume, Kant, Augustine, Pascal, Kierkegaard, Dostoevsky and Tolstoy (Glock 53). He opens *Philosophical Investigations* with a quotation from St. Augustine. He read Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* over and over again. He was deeply impressed by the religious attitude of Tolstoy. Tolstoy’s *The Gospel in Brief, Twenty Three Tales*, and *The Three Hermits* were some of the favourites of Wittgenstein (High, "Religious Point of View" 109). Tolstoy's concept of Christianity has impressed young Wittgenstein in the formation of his religiosity. Tolstoy's concept of Christianity is this worldly based on a moral transformation that is distanced from traditional Catholic and Protestant understanding of salvation. For him Gospels were recourses for meaningful life. Jesus for him was one who led a
moral life of love and self sacrifice and preached it. He did not consider the historical authenticity of gospels or its divine origin (Carroll 47). The affinity between religion and ethics that is seen throughout Wittgenstein's thought can be traced back to the influence of Tolstoy who considered Christianity is intend to preach moral transformation and perfection (Tolstoy 24). Undoubtedly, these authors considerably influenced Wittgenstein in the formation of his later philosophy, especially his thoughts on religious beliefs.

1.3. Wittgenstein and Philosophy of Religion

Wittgenstein’s philosophy, especially his more realistic and dynamic view of language, has considerably influenced philosophical theology. Wittgenstein’s characterization of religion and religious belief can be best understood against his larger philosophical inquiry and aims which will be treated in the development of this thesis. However, let us look at Wittgenstein’s attitude toward religion and his religious personality in brief.

The Philosophy of Religion and Wittgenstein

The philosophy of religion is one of the most relevant and much talked about branches of philosophy today. The philosophy of religion, as a science, studies religion in a systematic way. Religion is one of the earliest institutions of culture in human society. It could be looked at both as a doctrine and as a way of life. As a doctrine, religion is theoretical, in the sense that it has well defined concepts of God, proofs for God’s existence, ideas of the relation between God and self, etc. When religion is viewed as a way of life, it deals with the cultivation of moral and spiritual
values, prayer and God realization, coping with evil, and with the actual use of symbols. Philosophers of religion have tried to give a rational footing to religious belief for centuries. The Scholastic philosophers like St. Thomas reached some sort of synthesis between faith and reason. They somehow tried to prove the existence of God rationally. The rationality of religious belief was one of their main concerns. However, this Scholastic philosophy has been eclipsed today. That means that all religions, especially Christianity, lack a proper philosophical footing in this multi-cultural, multi-linguistic and multi-religious world. Therefore, the philosophy of religion is at stake today.

Wittgenstein, the most influential linguistic philosopher of the 20th century, has had a deep impact on the philosophy of religion. Like the rationalists who gave importance to reason and the empiricists who gave importance to experience, Wittgenstein’s emphasis on language has made a far-reaching impact on epistemology and the philosophy of religion. Thus, language has become one of the most important elements in philosophy of religion. Linguistic analysis focuses mainly on meaning rather than existence. Rather than proving the existence of God, Wittgenstein asked: What is the meaning of the term ‘God’? In order to explore meaning, he proposes two theories of meaning. One is the correspondence theory while other is coherent theory of meaning.

**Religious Background of Wittgenstein**

Though Wittgenstein was baptized and brought up in the Catholic religious tradition, he didn’t adhere to any organized religion in particular. Though organized religion played a very little part in Wittgenstein’s family, they admired the
importance of honesty, strict performance of duty, and fulfilment of obligations to servants and dependents. The childhood of Wittgenstein was in the atmosphere of moral, cultural and material superiority (McGuinness, *Young Ludwig* 25).

Wittgenstein was given formal religious instructions. However, he lost his childhood faith under the influence of his sister who rejected the tradition of belief structures. A consciousness of sin and guilt without a ground for hope of redemption ruled the mind of Wittgenstein. It is very difficult to define the personal attitude of Wittgenstein to religion. Our information in this regard comes from his friend’s comments and the memoirs. Though he had a hostile attitude to Christianity, we notice a change in this attitude. Russell, in his obituary note on Wittgenstein, points out the reason for the change of heart as his reading of Tolstoy’s account on the Gospels. ‘He had been dogmatically anti-Christian, but in this respect he changed completely. The only thing he ever told me about this was that once in a village in Galicia during the war (1914-18) he found a bookshop containing only one book, which was *Tolstoy on the Gospels*. He bought the book and according to him it influenced him profoundly.’

Franz Parak, one of Wittgenstein’s friends, believed that Wittgenstein underwent a conversion – a religious conversion – after the war. He recalled that Wittgenstein was not satisfied with Tolstoy’s religion; however, he was greatly impressed with Dostoevsky’s *Crime and Punishment* and *The Brothers Karamazov*, which he read during the time of war. These influenced Wittgenstein to give up all his material possessions and later his own philosophy, and devote himself for inner and religious goals (McGuinness, *Young Ludwig* 273).

Wittgenstein’s Attitude to Religion

“I am not a religious man but I cannot help seeing every problem from a religious point of view” (qtd. in Malcolm, *Religious Point of View?* vii). What was Wittgenstein’s feeling about religious experience? He claimed that he had an experience of being absolutely safe, ‘I am safe, nothing can injure me whatever happens’ (Hudson, *Ludwig Wittgenstein* 7). This feeling of *absolute safety* in many religious traditions is seen as some sort of religious experience. It may be Wittgenstein's experience during the war that prompted him to say that war was welcome because it forced one to realize that one was in God’s hands (McGuinness, *Young Ludwig* 256). Wittgenstein was totally against all sorts of rational arguments for the existence of God and adding rationality to religious belief. Religion or religious belief is not a question of reason. He was against conceptualization in religion and dogmatization of religious belief. He was of the opinion that proofs for the existence of God are nothing but the attempts by the believers to give their belief an intellectual analysis and foundation, although they may not themselves have come to believe as a result of such proofs (CV 85). Wittgenstein's attitude toward religion involves personal and communal aspects.

For Wittgenstein religion has two aspects, the inner aspect - one's spiritual relationship to God - and the outer aspects-one's participation in ceremony, obedience and loving behaviour. Not surprisingly, Wittgenstein's engagement with religion consisted almost entirely of the former. The later is an exile without a
The communal aspect was difficult for him since he was in a way alienated from the community. Wittgenstein spends enormous energy in reading, reflecting, writing and discussing religion in its various modes. He had a great respect for Catholicism and even thought to become a priest. However, he leaned more towards pietism (Monk 158).

**Is Wittgenstein a Religious Person?**

Wittgenstein never accepted any particular religion. Norman Malcolm says:

I do not wish to give the impression that Wittgenstein accepted any religious faith - he certainly did not – or that he was a religious person. But I think that there was in him, in some sense, the possibility of religion. I believe that he looked at religion as ‘a form of life’ in which he didn’t participate, but with which he was sympathetic and which greatly interested him. (Malcolm, *A Memoir* 72)

Malcolm also remembers what Wittgenstein told him that at the age of 21 he was struck by a play in Vienna. "In the play one of the characters expressed the thought that no matter what happened in the world, nothing bad could happen to him; he was independent of fate and circumstances. He was impressed with this thought and found for the first time the possibility of religion" (McGuinness, *Young Ludwig* 94). He was not in favour of the anthropomorphic idea of God which most of the
religious traditions cherish. In the *Tractatus* he says, “God does not reveal himself in the world” (*TLP* 6. 432).

Von Wright says that Wittgenstein had a compassionate heart which is closer to religion though we are not sure that he has anything religious in the trivial sense. Wright continues, “Certainly he did not have a Christian faith. But neither was his view of life un-Christian, pagan, as was Goethe’s” (543). Though we are not sure whether his concept of the mystical has anything to do with religion into which we are trying to make an investigation, Wittgenstein was full of wonder at the existence of the world. Though he seems to have possessed a deep pessimistic attitude, amidst this pessimism we may trace a deep sense of optimism. This is clear from his last words, “Tell them I have had a wonderful life.” Though Wittgenstein was born and brought up in a Western Christian culture and tradition his thought about religion and silence, he leans towards Eastern religious traditions. When we come to the later Wittgenstein we can see that religion is seen more as a way of life than a set of conceptualized dogmas. Though he was not favouring religious dogma he was not against rituals and ceremonies. He never rejected ceremonies in his own life. In fact, he was glad to attend mass while in prison in Monte Cassino (Chail 222).

The subject of religion had a great significance in Wittgenstein's thought; however, his personal relation to any religion is ambiguous. His negative attitude to dogmatic and systematic theology distanced himself from Catholicism. Nevertheless, he had a great appreciation for the rituals and symbols used in religion, and especially in Catholicism. "The symbolisms of Catholicism are wonderful beyond words. But any attempt to make it into a philosophical system is
offensive" (Rhees, *Personal Reflections* 129-130). He could find meaning in religious practices and ceremonies. The essence of religion is not to be sought either in its historical footing or in its dogmatic truths or truths of reason, but in observance and ceremonies of the people who make religious commitment.

In the conventional sense Wittgenstein was not a religious person. However, we cannot consider him as irreligious person. From his childhood to the time of World War I he seems to have adopted certain form of Christianity due to childhood formation and later due to the influence of some of the writers like Tolstoy (Carroll 58).

**Conclusion**

The aim of this chapter was to give an overview of Wittgenstein’s life and his philosophical background. In our discussion, we have seen how Wittgenstein’s thought matured in his later phase of philosophizing. The various philosophers and systems which influenced Wittgenstein were briefly discussed in shaping his thought at various phases. This concise description of Wittgenstein's biographical profile and his attitude to religion is meant to give the orientation for the entire thesis and to prepare the ground for further discussions in the forth coming chapters. Hopefully, this brief account will help us to understand the development of Wittgenstein’s philosophy, especially his thought on religion and religious belief.