

Chapter Two

Religious Language as a Form of Life

It has already been stated in the earlier sequels that Wittgenstein takes a different approach of religious language and religious experience in his later writings. As compared to *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, Wittgenstein has adopted a different kind of language known as ordinary language in his *Philosophical Investigations*. Here in *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein says that language is rule-following and following a rule is a practice in our society or community or within forms of life. Thus, language is nothing but different forms of life or different language-games that practice in our society. Thus, Wittgenstein in his *Philosophical Investigations* anticipates various forms of life or various language-games among which religious language appears as *a form of life* or *a language-game*. Thus, for Wittgenstein, “religious beliefs must be recognized as distinctive language-games.”⁷⁶ These religious language-games are cut off from all other language-games that we practice in our forms of life, according to Ronald Hepburn, John Hick, and Kai Nielsen. In this regard, Hepburn says, “Within traditional Christian theology...questions about the divine existence cannot be deflected into the question, “Does ‘God’ play an intelligible role in the language-game?”⁷⁷ Like Hepburn, Nielsen reveals excessive compartmentalization of moods of social life involved in saying that religious beliefs are distinctive language-games. In this regard, Nielsen says, “religious discourse is not something isolated, sufficient unto itself.”⁷⁸ For Nielsen, religious discourse or religious game is nothing but activities and hence are not

⁷⁶ Phillips, D. Z., *Wittgenstein and Religion*, California, New York, 1993, p. 56.

⁷⁷ Hepburn, R. W., ‘From World to God’, *Mind*, Vol. LXXII, 1963, p. 41.

⁷⁸ Neilsen, K., ‘Wittgensteinian Feideism’, in *Philosophy*, July 1967, p. 207.

isolated. If religious beliefs are isolated, self-sufficient language-game, then it becomes difficult to explain why people should cherish religious beliefs in the way they do. According to Phillips, religious beliefs seem more like esoteric games, enjoyed by the initiates but of little significance outside the internal formalities of their activities. For Phillips, religious beliefs begin to look like hobbies - something with which men occupy themselves at week-ends. Thus, to talk about religious belief as a distinctive language-game has created several misgivings.

Phillips then says that in the face of misgivings that talk of religious beliefs as distinctive language-games may make them appear to be self-contained esoteric games. Many philosophers do not agree with this philosophical standpoint. People must be given reasons why they ought to believe in God. In his *A Lectures on Ethics* Wittgenstein emphasizes the difference between *absolute judgments of value* and *relative judgments of value*. For Wittgenstein, words such as, 'good', 'important', 'right', have a relative and absolute use. For example, if we say that this is a *good* chair, we may be referring to its adequacy in fulfilling certain purposes. If we say it is *important* not to catch a cold, we may be referring to the unpleasant consequences of doing so. If we say that this is the *right* road, we may be referring to the fact that it would get me to my destination if we follow it. Wittgenstein attempts to make it clear with the help of the following remarks:

“Supposing that I could play tennis and one of you saw me playing and said, ‘Well, you play pretty badly’, and suppose I answered, ‘I know I’m playing badly, but I don’t want to play any better’, all the other man could say would be: ‘Ah, then that’s all right’. But suppose I had told one of you a preposterous lie and he came up to me and said, ‘you’re behaving like a beast’, and then I were to say, ‘I know I behave

badly, but then I don't want to behave any better', could he then say, 'Ah, then that's all right' ? Certainly not; he would say, 'Well, you ought to want to behave better'. Here you have an absolute judgment of value, whereas the first instance was one of a relative judgment."⁷⁹

When it is thought that religion is important to believe in God, are they making a relative or an absolute judgment of value? We are told to believe in God because God is the most powerful being. We are told to believe in God because only those who believe in God will flourish in the end. We are told to believe in God because history is in His hand, the final victory is His. All these are founded on relative judgments of value. However, relative judgments are reversible because if it would be the case that belief in God is pointless then historical development goes in one direction rather than another. It is indeed true to say that belief in God is represented as a means to a further end. The end is all-important rather than means. Belief in God has a point only if certain consequences follow. This seems to falsify the absolute character of many believers. They would say that God's divinity cannot be justified by external considerations. Rush Rhees made a similar observation when he compared an absolute judgment of value in morality with a relative judgment of value.

The intension of making such distinction between the relative and absolute value is of course avoiding misgivings about treating religious beliefs as esoteric games. It can lead to an attempt to show why religious beliefs are important which distorts the nature of the values involved in such beliefs. For Wittgenstein, the misgivings about the philosophical characterization of religious beliefs as distinctive games not only lead to attempts to give an external justification of religious values but also to lead

⁷⁹ See Ludwig Wittgenstein, 'A Lecture on Ethics', *Philosophical Review*, January 1965, p. 5.

attempts both by philosophers who are sympathetic and by philosophers who are unsympathetic to religion to show that their conclusions are rich by criteria of rationality which their opponents do or to accept. Unless believers and non-believers use common criteria of rationality, the misgivings about religious beliefs as esoteric games cannot be avoided.

Wittgenstein himself anticipated the question of whether, in relation to religion, the non-believer contradicts the belief when he says that he does not believe what the believer believes.⁸⁰ If one man contradicts another, they can be said to share a common understanding, to be playing the same game. For example, the man who says that the Sun is 90 million miles away from the Earth contradicts the man that the Sun is only 20 million miles away from the Earth. The man who says that there are unicorns contradicts the man who says that there are no unicorns. In these cases, the disputants have participated in a common understanding, namely, the method of calculation in astronomy, used in the case of the distance of the Sun from the earth. Likewise, the disputants about the unicorn share a common understanding, namely, a method of verifying the existence of various kinds of animals. The disputants differ about the facts but they are one in logic, i.e. they appeal the same criteria to settle the disagreement. But, what if one man says that handling the ball is a foul and another says that handling the ball is not a foul? Are they contradicting each other? Surely they would be contradicting each other *only if* they are playing the same game, and also referring to the same rules. In the light of these examples mentioned above, what are we to say about the man who would believe in God and the man who does not? Are they contradicting each other? Are two people, one of whom says that there is a

⁸⁰ Wittgenstein, Ludwig, *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology, and Religious Belief*, (ed.) Cyril Barrett (Basil Blackwell, 1966).

God and the other of whom says that he does not believe in God, like two people who disagree about the existence of unicorn? Wittgenstein does not think so. For Wittgenstein, the main reason for the difference is that God's reality is not one of a kind. He is not a being among beings. The word 'God' is not the name of a thing. The reality of God thus cannot be assessed by a common measure.

If we say that something exists, it makes sense for us to think of that something ceasing to exist. But, religious believers do not want to say that *God might cease to exist*. For them, God will exist forever. There is no question of ceasing the existence of God. It is meaningless to speak of God's ceasing to exist. According to the theologians, it is a terrible thing not to believe in God. But, if believing in God is to believe in the existence of a thing, one might wonder why it is so terrible to say that the thing in question does not exist. Religious believers *only believe* that God exists is true. That is why, belief in God or faith about God would be treated as the basic and fundamental religious statement from which religious journey is started. Without this basic proposition, there is no relevance to a religious discussion.

It should be noted here that in the case of religious belief, it is said that when they are brought into relation with the relevant criteria of assessment, they are shown to be mistakes, distortions, illusions, or blunders. Thus, there is no scope of assessment or verification about religious faith on God or the existence of God. In matters of empirical fact, one can easily verify or assess them, but it is unlikely in the case of religion. For Wittgenstein, such conclusion arises, partly at least, *from a deep philosophical prejudice*. One characteristic of this philosophical prejudice is the *craving for generality*. That means the use of 'existence' and 'belief' in religion is the same in all contexts. What Wittgenstein shows us in his remark on religious belief is

why there is good reason to note the different uses which 'belief' and 'existence' have, and to resist the craving for generality. Wittgenstein was completely against the plea to a craving for religious generality.

Wittgenstein takes religious belief to be a hypothesis. According to Wittgenstein, like various language-games or like various forms of life there may have various religious beliefs. There is no uniformity or generality among all religious beliefs very similar to that there is no uniformity or generality among all language-games. For Wittgenstein, there is something common, something uncommon, similarities, dissimilarities, and overlapping features among all language-games. If it would be the case then there is no point of invoking religious generality among religious beliefs. In philosophical discussions of religion, nothing can be believed unless there is evidence or grounds for that belief. Of course, where certain religious beliefs are concerned, for example, belief in the authenticity of a holy relic-grounds and evidence for the belief is relevant. But, from this one cannot conclude that it makes sense to ask for the evidence or ground of every religious belief. Wittgenstein adequately considers belief in the *Last Judgment*, what evidence is there for believing in the *Last Judgment*? One could imagine *degrees of belief* concerning it. In such a case, some say that they are sure about it and others say that possibly there will be a *Last Judgment* and some others perhaps do not believe in it. Despite this disagreement, we can say after Wittgenstein, that the disputants are *one in logic*. Regarding *Last Judgment*, those who feel sure that it might occur, and those who think it might possibly occur, and those who do not think it will occur, are all logically on the same level. They are all playing the same game. They are expressing their belief, half-belief, or unbelief in a

particular game or hypothesis. Thus, “religious belief in one sense may be taken to be a hypothesis.”⁸¹

Does it then lead us to assume that religious beliefs would always be hypothesis? Wittgenstein does not think so. Wittgenstein says that the word ‘God’ is amongst the earliest learnt. We learn it through pictures, stories, catechisms, etc. But, Wittgenstein wants us that this does not have the same consequences as with pictures of aunts. Later Wittgenstein illustrates the point as follows:

“Take ‘God created man’. Pictures of Michelangelo showing the creation of the world. In general, there is nothing that explains the meanings of words as well as a picture, and I take it that Michelangelo was as good as anyone can be and did his best and here is the picture of the Deity creating Adam.

If we ever saw this, we certainly wouldn’t think this the Deity. The picture has to be used in an entirely different way if we are to call the man in that queer blanket ‘God’, and so on. You could imagine that religion was taught by means of these pictures.’ This is rather queer...I could show Moore the pictures of a tropical plant. There is a technique of comparison between picture and plant. If I showed him the picture of Michelangelo and said, ‘Of course, I can’t show you the real thing, only the picture’...The absurdity is, I’ve never taught him the technique of using this picture.”⁸² If we carefully go through the insight of the above-stated remarks of Wittgenstein we can outline the difference between a man who does and a man who does not believe in God. For Wittgenstein, the difference is very similar between a

⁸¹ *Wittgenstein and Religion*, by D. Z. Phillips, California, New York, 1993, p. 63.

⁸² Wittgenstein, Ludwig, *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology, and Religious Belief*, (ed.) Cyril Barrett (Basil Blackwell, 1966) pp. 59-60.

man who does and a man who does not believe in a picture. The question is of course - what does believing in a picture amount to? Is it like believing in a hypothesis? For Wittgenstein, certainly, it would not be the case. Wittgenstein in this context says, "The whole weight may be in the picture."⁸³ For Wittgenstein, a man's belief in the *Last Judgment* may show itself in a way a man has this belief before his mind when he takes any decision of importance in the way it determines his attitude to his aspirations and failures. While talking of these features of the religious person's belief, Wittgenstein is, according to D. Z. Phillips, is stressing the grammar of belief. As a result of that, he does not involve the weighing of evidence or reasoning to a conclusion. He insists on how religious belief regulates a person's life. What then are we to say of those who do not use the picture while believing in God? Do they contradict those who do? Wittgenstein does not think so. In this regard let me quote Wittgenstein:

Suppose someone is ill and he says: 'This is a punishment,' and I say: 'If I'm ill, I don't think of punishment at all.' If you say, 'Do you believe the opposite?' - You can call it believing the opposite, but it is entirely different from what we would normally call believing the opposite.

I think differently, in a different way. I say different things to myself. I have different pictures.

It is this way: if someone said, 'Wittgenstein, you don't take illness as punishment, so what do you believe?' - I'd say: 'I don't have any thoughts of punishment.'⁸⁴

⁸³ Ibid, p. 72.

⁸⁴ Ibid, p. 55.

Thus, it seems clear from Wittgenstein that those who do not use the picture cannot be compared with those who do not believe in a hypothesis. For Wittgenstein, believing in a picture means putting one trust and faith in it, sacrificing for it, letting it regulate one's life, and so on. Thus, believing in a picture of God is trust on God, faith on God, sacrificing everything to God, and moreover to practice the same in everyday life and regulating the life. To disbelieving in a picture is just the opposite. Wittgenstein brings out the differences between these and disputes over a hypothesis just by saying, 'suppose someone was a believer and said: "I believe in the Last Judgment," and I said: "Well, I'm not so sure. Possibly." You would say that there is an enormous gulf between us. If he said "There is a German airplane overhead," and I said "Possibly. I'm not so sure," you'd say we were fairly near.'⁸⁵

According to Wittgenstein, beliefs, such as belief in the Last Judgment, are not a testable hypothesis, but absolute for believers in so far as they predominate in and determined much of their thinking. The absolute beliefs are the criteria but not the object of assessment. The point is that if there were evidence, this would in fact destroy the whole business. In such a case, the absolute religious beliefs would turn out to be mistakes or blunders. Wittgenstein remarks whether a thing is a blunder or not - it is a blunder in a particular system just as something is a blunder in a particular game and not in another.⁸⁶ Some blunders, Wittgenstein opines, may be fundamental; some others may not. However, what has gone wrong if when asked to go in the same way? Wittgenstein says, 'If you suddenly wrote numbers down on the blackboard, and then said, "Now, I'm going to add," and then said,' "2 and 21 is 13," etc., I'd say:

⁸⁵ Ibid, p. 53.

⁸⁶ Ibid, p. 59.

“This is no blunder.”⁸⁷ Here, we cannot say that the person has made a blunder in adding. Here, we can refer to the *category mistakes* of Gilbert Ryle. I think that the concept of blunder may be compared with the *category mistake* of Ryle. To say that the cat is on the mat is not to commit a blunder or in Ryle’s sense not to commit a *category mistake*. But, instead of that ‘to say that Saturday is on the bed’ is to commit a blunder or is to commit a *category mistake*, according to Ryle. In Wittgenstein’s sense, I can say that even though there are various language-games but to use one language-game in place of other would be a blunder even though there remain family resemblances among all language-games.

For Wittgenstein, there are many language-games just like there are many forms of life and among various language-games religious belief is supposed to be a distinctive language-game. As a language-game, religious beliefs are important in the same way as one might show a certain course of action to be prudential. However, one cannot rule out the possibility of absurdities in religious language-game. Such a reaction is strengthened when philosophers talk of language-games as having criteria of intelligibility within them. T. H. McPherson once remarked, “Religion belongs to the sphere of the unsayable, so it is not to be wonder at that in theology there is much nonsense (i.e., many absurdities); this is the natural result of trying to put into words - and to discuss - various kinds of inexpressible “experiences”, and of trying to say things about God.”⁸⁸

While reflecting upon McPherson’s aforesaid remark, Passmore comments that ‘one difficulty with this line of reasoning is that it saves religion only at the cost of leaving

⁸⁷ Ibid, p. 62.

⁸⁸ McPherson, T. H., ‘Religion as the Inexpressible’, in *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*, (ed.) A. Flew and A. MacIntyre (SCM Press, 1955), p. 142.

the door open to any sort of transcendental metaphysics.’ As a result of that, religion, according to Passmore, would be treated as superstition and nonsense of the most arrant sort. Passmore further contends that by calling religious belief a distinctive language-game, McPherson commits a philosophical blunder. Within the religious practice, there will be criteria for what can be said and cannot be said. A religious believer may commit blunders within his religion because there are a set of pointless rules those could have internal consistency. People can follow and even fail to follow such pointless rules. In this process, they may make mistake. Therefore, to argue that religious beliefs are distinctive language-games with rules which their adherents may follow or fail to follow does not show that the rules have any point. Thus, one may be a little cautious about the analogy between religious *beliefs and games*. I think that the point of religious beliefs cannot be shown simply by distinguishing between religious beliefs and other features of human existence. In fact, the importance of religion in the human domain cannot be understood simply by distinguishing between religion and other modes of social life. If religion were thought of as cut off from the other modes of social life, it could not have the importance as it has.

In the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, Wittgenstein thought that all propositions must *have a general form*. Rhees says that although Wittgenstein had given up the idea of ‘all propositions’ in the *Philosophical Investigations*, he was still interested in human language, i.e. ordinary or natural language. Thus, when he says that ‘any language is a family of language-game’ and that any of these might be a complete language by itself, he does not say whether people who might take part in several such games would be speaking the same language. Rhees says, “I find it hard to see on this

view that they would even be speaking a language.”⁸⁹ Rhees’ motive behind this saying would perhaps be the case that Wittgenstein takes it for granted that the same language is being spoken in the different language-games. The problem becomes acute when Wittgenstein says that each language-game could be a complete language-game in itself. Here, Wittgenstein actually wanted to rid us of the supposition that all propositions have a general form. The different language-games do not make up one big game.

Let me explain this further. Wittgenstein in his *Philosophical Investigations* asserts that language is rule-following and following a rule is a practice or to follow a rule is to practice language in our form of life. There are different forms of life just like there are different language-games. Every language-game or every form of life is somehow or other differs from another form of life or other language-game. There is no common uniformity or inherent structural isomorphic relationship among all language-games or all forms of life. Rather there are similarities, dissimilarities, something common and something uncommon, overlapping and crisscross relationship among all language-games. Even though different games do not make up a game, yet Wittgenstein wants to say that a language is a family of language-games. Of course, one may think that this is the kind of unity a language has. However, the concept of unity among language-games can be comprehended in two different senses. In one sense, the unity may be comprehended concerning the inherent defining characteristic that is invariably common to all language-games. And in the second sense, the unity among language-games can be comprehended about the concept of family resemblance. In the first sense, the concept of Essentialism is established and it is denied by Wittgenstein in his *Philosophical Investigations*. I think that Wittgenstein

⁸⁹ Rhees, R., *Discussions of Wittgenstein* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), p. 253.

conceives the unity among language-games not based on commonness or common properties among language-games, but based on family resemblance among language-games.

In this regard, Wittgenstein in his *Philosophical Investigations* brings the concept of builders where Wittgenstein says that the language of orders and responds, one man shouting 'slab' and another bringing one, could be the entire language of a tribe. Rhees says, "I feel that there is something wrong here. The trouble is not to imagine a people with a language of such vocabulary. The trouble is to imagine that they spoke the language only to give this special order on this job and otherwise never spoke at all. I do not think it would be speaking of language."⁹⁰ What Wittgenstein describes, Rhees argues, is more like a game with building stones and the correct methods of reacting to signals than people actually building a house. For Rhees, learning a language cannot be equated with learning what is generally done. It is more to do with what it makes sense to answer or what it makes sense to ask. The expressions used by the builder cannot have their meaning entirely with the job.

Wittgenstein held a therapeutic and anti-scientific concept of philosophy with deep underlying ethico-religious intent. While doing this philosophy of religion, Wittgenstein certainly does not intend to deny logic, metaphysics, epistemology, or semantic analysis. Wittgenstein even does not confuse his philosophy of religion with such disciplines. Wittgenstein anticipates different disciplines of philosophy very similar to his cryptic remark of different *forms of life*. Wittgenstein thought that philosophy itself was bad for human beings since its stance in a way of our coming to grips with our lives. Religion since coming to grip with our life had nothing to do

⁹⁰ Ibid, p. 256.

with philosophy. Logic, epistemology, metaphysics, etc. all are doing serious philosophy by way of developing various theories. Religion, on the other hand, is no longer associated with theories or doctrines; rather religion in Wittgenstein's sense is *an activity*, a therapeutic activity that is deeply associated with the meaning of life or the values of the world which in turn would determine the meaning of life. In a sense, philosophical perplexities are misleading pictures of the workings of our language that are generating our perplexities and we get in philosophical trouble. We catch the philosophical disease. In such a case, we are extremely puzzling as we do not know the way of just like the fly in a fly-bottle does not know how to come out from the bottle. This so happens because we do not have a command or we do not have a sufficiently clear view of the working of our language when we try to think about consciousness, thought, sensations, truth, warrantability, intentionality, and the like. For Wittgenstein, all these are troublesome issues to religion because all these are deeply associated with philosophy and also associated with developing philosophical theories. This idea, of course, Wittgenstein claims is not to provide some general descriptive account of language along with the line of P. F. Strawson or some formal scientific account of the Semantics of our language as presumed by Carnap rather to provide where we are experiencing mental cramps.

In *Philosophical Investigations* (1958), the central work of his later philosophy and most particularly in his last work *On Certainty* (1969), Wittgenstein articulates his methodological changed conception of how to proceed in philosophy and applies it to a range of philosophical problems. Here, Wittgenstein is talking a kind of language known as a natural language which is a historically and culturally contingent *form of life*. Here, we come to have practices in which *words and actions are interwoven*. In this activity, in learning to play this language-game, in different forms of life, we

come to understand words by coming to know they are uses in the *stream of life*, and with this, we come to know how to use words in the course of our various practice - embedded activities. In fact, this is how Wittgenstein has abandoned his earlier formalist account of language developed in his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. Instead of *Tractatarian* demand of language, now Wittgenstein is talking in favour of a kind of language which is seen as an activity having many different functions, embedding in different practices. This language, for Wittgenstein, is suitable to religion. He conceives religious language as a form of life among various forms of life or a religious game among various games. If someone to understand a word is not sufficient to bring the learner face to face with its putative reference while repeating the word. Wittgenstein put it in an oft-quoted remark from his *Philosophical Investigations*, ‘for a large class of cases - though not for all - in which we employ the word “meaning” it can be defined thus: the meaning of a word is its use in language.’⁹¹ Thus, I find a methodological shift from Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* to his *Philosophical Investigations*, and this methodological shifting actually reflects the formation and the function of language. In the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, the connection between language and reality has been made by picturing the facts of the world by means of language and the whole program is structural and mechanical in nature. Moreover, the discourse of ethics and religion was outside the pictorial relationship between language and reality. However, in his *Philosophical Investigations*, I rather understand one concept by coming to understand their use in our life activities. Here, Wittgenstein understands that concepts are aspects of our *forms of life*. They are not items on us by the world; rather understand a concept is to understand the *use of words* expressing it as they function

⁹¹ Wittgenstein, 1958, p. 43.

in our language and in our lives depending on the particular concept, as part of the varied concepts and the various purposes we have. For Wittgenstein, these varied activities and ways in which we talk form our practices and they build together into our forms of life.

In this regard, Wittgenstein finds the distinction between religious belief and factual belief; between religious form of life and factual form of life. For Wittgenstein, like factual belief, we do not find any sort of assertion or prediction in religious belief or in the religious form of life. When, for example, a religious person says 'I believe that there will be the Last Judgment,' it is a complete mistake according to Wittgenstein. Here, by making this utterance the religious person actually is making a prediction. That is not the use or even anything like the use; it has in religious language-games or religious forms of life. In believing in the Last Judgment, a person is not, Wittgenstein opines, thinking that there will be a certain kind of extra-ordinary event that will occur sometime in the future. Wittgenstein's religious portion, according to Nielsen (1982), 'is not thinking any such thing'.⁹² Here, Wittgenstein's religious portion is not trying to make any kind of prediction at all. Instead, Wittgenstein equates having religious belief with using a certain *religious concept* and having the emotions and attitudes that go with this concept. In this regard, Wittgenstein remarks that *a religious belief could only be something like a passionate commitment to a system of reference*.⁹³ For Wittgenstein, religious beliefs are no longer associated with any prediction or any sort of assertion, rather religious belief is deeply associated with the meaning of life or the meaning of the world. The meaning of life or the meaning of the world can neither be true nor be false. The question of their truth and falsity

⁹² Nielsen, 1982, pp. 43-44.

⁹³ Wittgenstein, 1980, p. 64.

cannot even meaningfully arise in the case of religious belief. That is why Wittgenstein has rightly pointed out that the sense of the proposition which can be either true or false is no longer associated to determine the meaning of life or the meaning of the world. Religious beliefs, for Wittgenstein, are neither reasonable nor unreasonable. To say that religious beliefs are reasonable or unreasonable is to say either for or against religion. In this way, religious belief can be tested. But, for Wittgenstein, religious belief cannot be tested; cannot be shown to be either true or probably true or false or probably false by evidence or by argument grasped by reason. For Wittgenstein, *those who view like that, he regards as ludicrous.*⁹⁴

Wittgenstein in his *Philosophical Investigations* asserts that philosophy simply puts everything before us, and neither explains nor deduces anything.⁹⁵ While reflecting on this remark, Norman Malcolm in his book *Wittgenstein: A Religious Point of View?* states that Wittgenstein by making the above remarks actually brings a radical change in our conception of philosophy. According to Malcolm, while claiming that philosophy does not seek to explain anything is certainly not a true description of philosophy as it has been practiced. Many philosophers express their serious concern about doing philosophy without seeking an explanation. For them, doing philosophy without explanation is simply ridiculous. For them, the traditional aim of philosophy has been to seek an explanation as to the essential nature of doing justice, right and wrong, duty, the good, beauty, art, language, rules, thought. Malcolm says, “A philosopher may well ask: What am I supposed to do if not explain?”⁹⁶ However, Malcolm reveals that there is a specific answer of what has been sort above in

⁹⁴ Wittgenstein, 1969, p. 58.

⁹⁵ *Philosophical Investigations*, p. 126.

⁹⁶ Malcolm, Norman, *Wittgenstein: A Religious Point of View?*, 1994, p. 74.

Wittgenstein's later thinking. Wittgenstein in his later thinking asserts that the task of philosophy is to describe concept. How does one describe a concept? In this regard, Malcolm on behalf of Wittgenstein responds that by describing the use of the word or of "those words that express the concept that is what philosophy should put before us".⁹⁷ Malcolm in this regard intends to say that there is no language - independent access to concept and Wittgenstein in his *Philosophical Investigations* has maintained it. In this regard, Malcolm says, 'The description of the use of a word is called by Wittgenstein describing the "language-game" with that word.'⁹⁸ Malcolm thus portrays his faith in Wittgenstein's therapeutic conception of philosophy. In this regard, Malcolm says that it is not the task of philosophy to describe the use of a word in its totality, but only those features of the word that in certain determinate context give rise to philosophical perplexity. According to Nielsen, we assemble reminders to break a certain perplexity where we have mental cramps concerning *the working of our language*. According to Nielsen, describing the use of an expression is called describing the grammar of the expression in Wittgensteinian sense. The point of speaking of language-game is to bring into focus, and clear prominence, the fact that the speaking of a language is part of an activity or a form of life.⁹⁹ While illuminating the remark of Wittgenstein, Malcolm rightly takes this to mean "that is describing the language-game, of some part of the language-game with a word; one is describing how the word is embedded in action and reactions - in human behavior."¹⁰⁰ For Wittgenstein, words have meaning only in the flow of thought and life. Our talk "gets

⁹⁷ Ibid, p. 74.

⁹⁸ Ibid, p. 74.

⁹⁹ *Philosophical Investigations*, p. 23.

¹⁰⁰ Malcolm, Norman, *Wittgenstein: A Religious Point of View?*, 1994, p. 75.

its sense from the rest of our action.”¹⁰¹ Our language-game as they are in *forms of life* they provide us a place for explanations, for giving reasons, and for justifications inside the framework of this language-game or form of life. However, Malcolm reads Wittgenstein by saying that Wittgenstein here does not admit any explanation or justification for the existence of these forms of language-games themselves.

Language-Games and Forms of Life:

While illuminating the function of language-game, Malcolm links language-games with *forms of life*. In this regard, Malcolm brings the use of *motive*. Malcolm contends that the motive of people is important here. What is highly interesting is that if he does disclose his motive his acknowledgement of it will not be based on any inference from the situation, or from his own behavior or previous actions. Here he tells us his motive without inference.¹⁰² It thus seems that Wittgenstein’s language-game works just by its sheer existence and contingency. This is true not only with the language-game we play with a *motive*, but also with an *intention* or with any other language-game. Here, we have contingency rather than necessity. Reflecting on how Wittgenstein is reasoning and how Wittgenstein thinks we should reason if we would be realistic. We cannot explain why this use of language exists. All we can do here is to describe it - and behold it. In this regard, Malcolm quotes Wittgenstein from *On Certainty*, where Wittgenstein makes a general comment about language-games: You must bear in mind that the language-game is, so to speak, something unforeseeable. I mean it is not based on grounds. Not reasonable (or unreasonable). It stands there like our life.¹⁰³ Malcolm continues that religions, i.e. Judaism, Christianity, Islam,

¹⁰¹ Wittgenstein, 1969, p. 229.

¹⁰² Malcolm, Norman, *Wittgenstein: A Religious Point of View?*, 1994, p. 76.

¹⁰³ Wittgenstein, 1969, p. 559.

Hinduism, Buddhism, etc. etc., are *all ancient and complex forms of life*. That over time they changed myriad of ways with their distinctive, but purely contingent language-games. However, it should be kept in mind that the Christian religion or Judaism does not use the term *language-game* and Wittgenstein does not refer to these religions in this regard. However, Malcolm reveals that Judaism and Christianity contain language-games embedded in their practices and are not understandable without reference to them. Within these language-games, there can be the *giving of reason, explanation, and justification*, but for the language-game and forms of life themselves; there can be no explanation or justification and no foundation for them either. For Malcolm, they are human activities that are just there and religious forms of life, like other forms of life, are neither reasonable nor unreasonable. In fact, they do not rest on some deeper metaphysical or theological foundations or any kind of grounding theory. They neither have some foundationalist epistemological grounding nor any other kind of grounding nor do they require such grounding, rationalizing, or theorizing.

Religious Forms of Life is Endless:

For Wittgenstein, *they are in order just as they are*. They are just they are, like our lives. There can be internal criticism within religious language-games. Some expressions of faith are less adequate than others, but there can be no intelligible standing outside these forms of life and accessing them. Wittgenstein comes against any sort of justification about religious matters. For Wittgenstein, *justification comes to an end*. A theory based on justification has ended in a certain point. A doctrine based on justification has come to an end. But, religious language-game or religious form of life has no end. Religious form of life or religious language is not a theory, is

not a doctrine, but is an activity having no end-point. As it has no end-point, it has no relevance for justification. It cannot be theorized. This is true for all forms of life including religion. In this regard, Malcolm represents Wittgenstein by saying, ‘Wittgenstein regarded the language-games, and their associated forms of life, as beyond explanation. The inescapable logic of this conception is that the terms *explanation, reason, justification* have a use exclusively *within* the various language-games.¹⁰⁴ Alternatively, it can be said that an explanation is internal to a particular language-game. No explanation arises above our language-game and explains them. This would be a super concept of explanation. Philosophers’ task is not to seek explanation, but to observe and to discuss language-game instead of explaining language-game. We will come to see more clearly the use of the term or of language-games and the role they play in our lives. For Malcolm, the kind of therapeutic philosophy that Wittgenstein and Wittgensteinians, namely, Conant, Diamond, Rhees, and Winch practice enters when we become entangled in our concept - the use of our terms. In this regard, Kai Nielsen remarks, ‘There, in such particular situations, philosophy can, by assembling reminders for a particular purpose, enables us to command a clearer view of our use of these terms and it can dispel our confusions about them. Philosophy, Wittgenstein has it, as do neo-pragmatists as well, cannot explain why anything happens or exists’ and it cannot reveal the essential nature of anything for there are no such essential natures.¹⁰⁵ For Nielsen, we normally can operate with them without difficulties, but we very often fall into confusions, we very often suffer from mental cramps when we try to operate upon them. All of these apply to our religious concepts. Following Wittgenstein, we can say here that when the

¹⁰⁴ Malcolm, Norman, *Wittgenstein: A Religious Point of View?*, 1994, p. 77.

¹⁰⁵ Nielsen, Kai, p. 244.

engine is not idling; when we work with them - operate with them rather than upon them - we understand them, well enough, if we have been enculturated into such forms of life, but when we think about them, we think about other concept, Wittgenstein opines, we almost irresistibly fall into confusion about them. Therefore, for Wittgenstein, the task of philosophers is to dispel such confusions by providing *in situ* a perspicuous representation of this concept. In this regard, we move about on grammar, in our everyday practice. But, in thinking about what we do with words we not infrequently fall into perplexity. To remove our misconception, Malcolm following Wittgenstein says, there is no theorizing in called for, neither scientific nor philosophical. What is mostly required here is only that *we look carefully at the grammar which is at our command*. In this regard, Wittgenstein's comment is: 'Don't think, but look!'¹⁰⁶

Don't think but look!

I think the aforesaid remark of Wittgenstein gives an insight of his philosophical position of *PI*. From a religious perspective, we can say that the sense of religion cannot be grasped in the process of thinking. Religion is not a matter that can be comprehended through thinking. Thinking is deeply associated with humans' cognition. It is rational and here everything can be justified concerning reason. Based on the rational account, philosophical theories have been developed. For Wittgenstein, the concept of philosophical theory in religion is otiose. Religion is no longer associated with theories. It is not associated with philosophical doctrines as well. Philosophical theories and doctrines are the outcomes of religious thinking. It is an integral part of religious epistemology. Wittgenstein does not think that there is the

¹⁰⁶ *Philosophical Investigations*, p. 66; *Wittgenstein: A Religious Point of View?*, pp. 79-80.

scope of religious epistemology in religion. His interpretation of religion is nothing but an activity, a way of looking at society, community. To assert that religion is the outcome of the thinking process is to assert that there is a *private mental activity*. Wittgenstein then said that nothing is more wrongheaded than calling meaning a mental activity.¹⁰⁷ That means to think of meaning as some essentially occult state or act inside one's consciousness, radically inaccessible to anyone else is to succumb to the appealing thought that the self is concealed inside the man. Hardly any modern philosophers would suppose that the soul is self-conscious entity lodged in the flesh. Like many of his contemporaries, Wittgenstein equally detected arguments and assumption that fed parasitically on the continuing vitality of the ancient religious myth of the soul. In a lecture given in the early 1930s, he spoke of trying to convince the class of just the opposite of Descartes' emphasize on *I*.¹⁰⁸ For Wittgenstein, the word 'I' was already on the list of words that needed to *be brought back from their metaphysical application to their home in everyday conversation*.¹⁰⁹ From the first-person perspective, it is very easy to generate a sense of oneself as a thinking thing this shows obvious kinship with the representation of the infant Augustine's travails. However, a philosophical account of the self outlines in a textbook easily becomes a topic for analysis and refutation. Accordingly, the Cartesian conception of the 'I' might seem so innocent in a philosophical text that it's most insidious attractions escape notice.

Therefore, just by calling the aforesaid remark, Wittgenstein prefers, for the most part, to leave aside the standard texts, and seldom name his contemporaries when he

¹⁰⁷ Wittgenstein, Ludwig, *Philosophical Investigations*, op. cit., paragraph: 693.

¹⁰⁸ Ambrose, Alice (ed.), *Wittgenstein's Lectures Cambridge 1932-1935*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1979, p. 63.

¹⁰⁹ Wittgenstein, Ludwig, *Philosophical Investigations*, op. cit., paragraph: 116.

follows them. This was not because he had not read them; rather he desired to show how the picture of the self that appears in the standard texts infiltrates reflection far beyond their confines. He strives to examine almost anyone in the Western tradition. In this regard, Wittgenstein asserts, “The simile of ‘inside’ or ‘outside’ the mind is pernicious. It is derived from ‘in the head’ when we think of ourselves as looking out from our heads and of thinking as something going on ‘in our head’. But then we forget the picture and go on issuing language derived from it. Similarly, man’s spirit was pictured as his breath, then the picture was forgotten but the language derived from it was retained. We can only safely use language if we consciously remember the picture when we use it.”¹¹⁰ Thus what Wittgenstein intends to say above is that the very inclination to think of meaning or any other mental or spiritual activity that is radically private ‘in our head’ is explicitly related to the ancient religious myth of the soul. This is nothing but a sort of *epistemological solitude* in the phrase used by J. M. Cameron.

However, this epistemological solitude or loneliness to which the soul is mythological condemned reappears explicitly in Wittgenstein’s later writings, particularly in his *PI*. Here Wittgenstein says, “A man’s thinking goes on which his consciousness in a seclusion in comparison with which any physical seclusion is an exhibition to public view.”¹¹¹ Wittgenstein wants to expose the temptation to think of ‘the total solitude of the spirit within itself’. For Wittgenstein, the soul is more secluded than any hermit because it is given to man to converse with himself to total seclusion.

Wittgensteinian Fideism:

¹¹⁰ Ambrose, Alice, (ed.), *Wittgenstein’s Lectures Cambridge 1932-1935*, op. cit., p. 25.

¹¹¹ Wittgenstein, Ludwig, *Philosophical Investigations*, op. cit., paragraph: 222.

What does *Wittgensteinian Fideism* essentially mean? *Wittgensteinian Fideism* is seen as a position in the philosophy of religion, with associated premises and arguments, a theory that challenges and competes with other theories. Hence it is subject to evaluation. Nielsen explicitly speaks as if what we have here is a new theory in the philosophy of religion and he proceeds to map it by invoking some of the characteristic thought maneuvers of Wittgenstein's work of *PI*. According to *PI*, there is a plurality of distinct forms of life with their associated language-games. Accordingly, to understand these different ways of living and speaking, *we need to look and attend*. What has to be accepted are forms of life. These need no philosophical justification by giving them a foundation. The language-game is not based on grounds. It is not reasonable or unreasonable. It is there like our life.¹¹² Good philosophy is descriptive of these language-games. It does not provide theses, theories, and justifications. Instead it leaves everything as it is. A Wittgensteinian fideist argues that religion is an ancient and ongoing form of life. It works with its own distinctive discourse, practices, and criteria of meaning and rationality. Accordingly, religious life and speech can only be understood and criticized from the inside by someone who has a participant's understanding of this discourse. A philosopher's task is not to criticize or evaluate religious language-games and ways of life in terms of some alien norm, but to describe them where necessary. Thus in a sense, Wittgenstein's fideism is seen as a position in the philosophy of religion with associated premises and arguments, a theory that challenges and compares with other theories. In this regard, it has been comprehended as a subject to evaluation. For Nielsen, to grant the fideist requirement, to start from the inside does not necessarily imply agreement with religious beliefs. More importantly, Wittgenstein's Fideism

¹¹² Ibid, paragraph: 559.

compartmentalizes religion. As a result of that, it fails to notice that it, like other facets of our culture, is open to critique. The critique came from insiders who engage in its practices. However, this objection has been withdrawn partly because of a deepened understanding of Wittgenstein due to the many works relevant to religion. It has been reflected in many writings of Wittgenstein, namely, *On Certainty*, *Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough*, and *Culture and Value*. Having said this Nielsen finds some limitation in Wittgenstein's religion as he thinks that Wittgenstein's philosophical outlook is ethically and politically irresponsible, as its attitude of quietism leads us to a malicious disengagement from the world and in turn robs us of the critical tools to assess our culture and change it for the better. Alternatively, it can be said that a philosophy that leaves everything as it is hinders the struggle for social justice and human flourishing. It is an obstacle to human solidarity.

Unlike many others, Wittgenstein's approach towards religion is innovative. He has given importance to tradition and culture embedded in our language what he termed as *the grammar of the language*. He also emphasizes to circumstances and needs. The aim was to appreciate our forms of life by clarifying concepts and discourse, by devising different methods to tackle problems as they arose for us. It is adequately reflected in his work, especially in his lectures, notes, and conversations with friends and students about religion. His remarks are expressive of an acceptance of, and respect for, the variety of expression in religious life. The imprint of William James is discernable here, as it is in Wittgenstein's rather pragmatic reaction to Drury's regret that he has not lived a religious life, possibly due to Wittgenstein's impact. Wittgenstein said, "I believe it is right to try experiments in religion. To find out, by trying, what helps one and what doesn't ... Now why don't you see if starting the day by going to Mass each morning doesn't help you to begin the day in a good frame of

mind.”¹¹³ Since religion is an activity, experiment and practice in religion is the order of the day. About his Catholic student, Wittgenstein goes on to say that he does not believe what they believe about religion. Religious disagreement is an integral part of the religion because religion is embedded in language and culture. It is the outcome of passion, compassion, faith and it has been cultivated through language and nothing else. Accordingly, the recognition of religious difference plays an important role in religion. There are similarities and differences among various religious forms of life.

Among many Wittgenstein’s fideists, Rush Rhees is the most important one. He approached religious discourse in the light of Wittgenstein’s legacy. His reflections on this issue are expressed in letters to friends, in the discussion, and several addresses to students’ meetings. It is revealed through these contexts that philosophical activity is a real force in life, encountering actual tensions, clarifying them, helping participants to come to grips with them. Very similar to Wittgenstein, Rhees acknowledges religion as the grammar of a language. For Rhees, to talk of the existence of God, we have to give special emphasize on *the grammar of this language*.¹¹⁴ In this regard, Rhees remarks, “‘God exists’ is not a statement of fact. You might also say that it is not in the indicative mood. It is a confession or expression of faith. This is recognized in some way when people say that God’s existence is ‘necessary existence’, as opposed to the ‘contingency’ of what exists as a matter of fact; and when they say that to doubt God’s existence is a sin, as opposed to a mistake about the facts.”¹¹⁵ Wittgenstein holds the same position. For Wittgenstein, to talk of the existence of God independent of language is nonsense. The concept of God if there be any is

¹¹³ Rhees, Rush, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Personal Recollections*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981, p. 179.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 132.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 131-32.

embedded in language. Rhees finds similarities and differences between religious discourse and the language of love. The question of *what God is* could only be answered through *coming to know God* in worship and in religious life. Thus for Rhees, *to know God is to worship him*.¹¹⁶ To say that we could come to know God without knowing that he was the Creator and Father of all things, without knowing his love and forgiveness, is like saying that I might come to know Winston Churchill without knowing that he had a face, hands, body, voice or any of the attributes of a human being. Thus, the fault lies in thinking natural theology as the foundation of the rest of religion. The sense of 'foundation' is badly confused in religion because some people cannot imagine religion or so to speak cannot talk of religion without a religious foundation. For them, the faith on the existence of God is the basis of religious belief that may be taken up as the foundation of religion. Those who hold to a rational theology seem to argue that a man might be brought to a belief in God and also to a belief in the immortality of the soul.

Malcolm like Wittgenstein took anti-foundationalist approach of religion. In this regard, Malcolm argues against the traditional philosophical view that religious belief requires a rational foundation that would justify the religious way of life. According to Malcolm, seeking rational justification for the existence of God would be treated as an artificial construction of philosophy of religion. Religion is a form of life. It is language embedded in action. That is why Wittgenstein calls it a *language-game*. It needs no rational justification.¹¹⁷ The concept of God has a place in the thinking and lives of human beings. Hence, it is presumptuous to think of it as self-contradictory.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, p. 127.

¹¹⁷ Malcolm, Norman, 'The Groundlessness of Belief' in his *Thought and Knowledge*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell, 1977, p. 212.

There cannot be a deep understanding of the concept without an understanding of the phenomena of human life that gives rise to it. Thus, an account of belief must take the distinction between existence and eternity seriously. Thus, the religious value is actually based on removing philosophical scruples that stand in the way of faith. According to Malcolm, at a deeper level, all Wittgensteinian fideists are secular philosophers. Nielsen, for example, writes that *The Concept of Prayer, Faith and Philosophical Enquiry* and *Death and Immortality* amount to a detailed paradigmatic statement of *Wittgensteinian Fideism*. Here Wittgenstein remarks “Speak the old language, but speak it in a way that is appropriate to the new world, without on that account necessarily being in accordance with its taste.”¹¹⁸ Philosophical theism views God as a metaphysical entity, construed as a Being among beings. It is bad philosophy, partly because of its epistemological foundationalism, partly because of its meaning-essentialism, partly because of its scientism - letting one method elbow all the others aside. Thinking of ‘God exists’ as a factual proposition, as making some kind of ontological claim about the furniture of the universe.

Wittgensteinian Fideism is based on the following assumptions:

- (i) The forms of language are the forms of life.
- (ii) What are given are the forms of life.
- (iii) Ordinary language is all right as it is.
- (iv) A philosopher’s task is not to evaluate or criticize language or the forms of life, but to describe them where necessary.
- (v) The different modes of discourse which are distinctive forms of life, all have logic of their own.

¹¹⁸ Wittgenstein, Ludwig, *Culture and Value*, (ed.) G. H. Von Wright, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980, p. 60.

- (vi) Forms of life taken as a whole are not amenable to criticism. Each mode of discourse is in order as it is, for each has its own criteria and each sets its own norms of intelligibility, reality, and rationality.
- (vii) These general concepts are systematically ambiguous and their exact meaning can only be determined in the context of a determinate way of life.

Based on this, a Wittgensteinian fideist could readily argue that religion is a unique and very ancient form of life with its own distinctive criteria. It is this very form of life that sets its own criteria of coherence, intelligibility. Philosophy thus cannot relevantly criticize religion. Instead, it can only display for us the workings, the style of functioning of religious discourse. Thus to understand religious discourse, one must have a participant's understanding of it.

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