RELIGIOUS BELIEF, LANGUAGE GAMES AND POSTMODERN NARRATIVES

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Abstract. This paper is centred on the question of objectivity of religious truth-claims in the Wittgensteinian perspective and explains how the evidentialist standard model of rationality leads us nowhere except putting us in a flyglass wherein like distraught flies we hopelessly flutter and flutter without finding the way out. This flyglass was manufactured by the Cartesian epistemology which demanded proofs in order to establish the cognitive validity of a truth-claim. Wittgenstein rejects this standpoint as wholly mistaken and misguided. There is no objectively neutral place from which the philosopher can have a critical look on a particular mode of discourse. The question of true/false depends on forms of life and language games. This line of argument has been followed by D. Z. Phillips, Peter Winch and Norman Malcolm. They also denounced the claim that there must be a common paradigm of rationality for all modes of discourse. Indeed, there are many difficulties in Wittgensteinian criteriology. But it is a fact that evidentialism fails to take account of diversity in modes of discourse. Likewise, the scientism suffers the fallacies of generalization and exclusivism. Rationalist ontology fallaciously promotes the idea of transcendental truth which Prof. Stuhar rejects as a system of delusion. Taking lead from Wittgensteinianism, postmodernism lays emphasis on equality of different cluster of meaning and affirms that there is no objective point of view that gives us access to a global truth. Hence, what is temporary, immanent and historically particular is accepted.

In this paper, I propose to discuss the Wittgensteinian approach to religious belief and matters pertaining to the question

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of objectively demonstrable Truth in the perspective of Post Modern parameters. We can start our deliberations on this topic from a standard model of disagreement between a believer and an evidentialist nonbeliever. This standard model of disagreement historically emerged in 1950s and gained fame through falsification and theology debate; yet its importance and relevance in connection with knowledge and truth is still undeniable. Though in new perspective issues have extremely changed due to redrawn religio-cultural map of the world, a legitimately rational dialogue is required more than ever. We live in an age of globalization when the rigid boundaries of nationality and race are eroding and marginal voices are getting a say in debate on politics and power. Societies having divergent world-views are coming closer making it easier for intellectuals to have a free space tolerant enough for open dialogue. People are raising different voices on issues cultural as well as religious. In this heated discussion, neo-cons and fundamentalists have a louder voice than of those who plead for a pragmatic approach to such matters as diversity and pluralism.

In this backdrop, it would be helpful to employ the old model standard of disagreement in order to understand the question of truth and knowledge. This will enable us evaluate the significance of anti-essentialism and relativism in postmodern theory and practice. Now, it is generally claimed by the exponents of religious evidentialism that their belief is based on truth and have proper justifying grounds. For example, Thomas Aquinas, William Paley, Richard Swinburne and many others, are of the strong opinion that there exists a complete harmony between reason and religion and that God can be known through creation and by the natural light of reason.[1] Many rational arguments have been formulated to furnish well justified proofs for the existence of God who is by definition hidden and unknowable. Even those who do not agree with the project and agenda of natural theology, talk of personal experiences as evidence that there is a God out there. For them, a caring God who answers prayers and helps in grief, distress and sufferings is a veridical reality in their experiential life. The evidence of religious experience combined with rational arguments, according to Swinburne, makes theistic

hypothesis more probable than its rivals.[2] Whereas, the detractor involved in this discourse, not agreeing with this claim has many things to say in rebuttal. For example, Prof. Keith Ward, though he is theist par excellence, refuses to buy the idea that religious belief is a matter of probable inference or that religious belief could be established on the grounds of arguments or evidence. J. L. Mackie, after rigorously examining the theistic arguments along with new approaches, has reached the conclusion that these arguments do not build a strong case of theism. In his view, the arguments against theism outweigh those in its favour. Some Protestant thinkers claim that instead of helping the believer win the debate, rational arguments have the ability to turn the tables in favour of the interlocutor. Further, there is a question of empirically validity of proofs. A. J. Ayer argues that knowledge-claims which cannot be experientially verified are meaningless and false. To use flew's language, the sceptic may inquire that if there is a gardener at all, he is very much elusive, intangible and invisible. This leads him to argue that how does this kind of gardener differ from the imaginary gardener.[3] Thus, our dialogue about some tangible evidence and good grounds, consequently, ends up in hard talk ensuing fierce controversy, which lead us no where except putting both of the interlocutors in the flyglass wherein like distraught flies they hopelessly flutter and flutter without being able to find the way out.

Wittgenstein tried in his own way to provide us with an exit from this flyglass manufactured by Cartesian epistemology. Indeed, it was the great achievement, a splendid philosophical feat which changed the course of philosophical history of ideas. Wittgenstein throughout his life remained hostile to the type of philosophy which demands proofs and makes request for providing foundation of religious beliefs in order to establish their cognitive objectivity. To liberate belief statements from the clutches of self righteous evidentialists, he replaced epistemology with hermeneutics. In his view, the project of philosophical criticism or defence of religious beliefs is fundamentally misguided because religion as structure of beliefs is an autonomous framework not subject to external proofs or refutation. There is no objectively neutral place from which the

philosopher can start examining the religious mode of discourse. One must not ignore the fact that religion as a form of life has its own internal criteria of rationality. If one wants to understand a form of life like religion, one must participate. To understand means to follow the rules and play the game. If you do not play the game, then you do nothing except flutter and flutter in the flyglass.[4]

Prominent philosophers who follow the general insight of their master (Wittgenstein) are Norman Malcolm, Peter Winch and D. Z. Phillips. Though they differ among themselves on some points and also some issues of focus, they all hold the same epistemic claim that the religious mode of discourse has its own internal logic and criteria of rationality. They have rigorously followed this approach in their works on the meaning of faith and belief statements.

Wittgenstein's view regarding the question of justification and evidence in connection with belief statements is contextual and hermeneutical. Explaining his standpoint, he says: "Suppose we give a general description as to what you say a proposition has a reasonable weight of probability. When you call it reasonable, is this to say that for it you have such and such evidence and for other you have not."[5] He is of the opinion that different people treat this evidence in different ways. The criterion of reliability and evidence is rightfully used in science, but religious belief falls outside of the purview of this criterion. Since religion is a matter of faith and trust, it would be unreasonable to provide reason and justification for religious beliefs. The belief exercises unconditional control over the believer's action; it is a matter of unshakable faith or dogma – "a sort of commitment which can be compared with the struggle of a person trying to escape the fire."[6] If someone tries to be reasonable in such matters, he actually commits blunder. For example, if someone like Father O'Hara claims that religious belief can soundly be based on scientific evidence "I would say if this is religious belief, then it is all superstition."[7] Of O'Hara's unreasonable belief, Wittgenstein shows ridiculing attitude by saying "here is a man who is cheating himself."[8] O'Hara has fallen into a misunderstanding of his own belief. Belief has its own reason which is entirely

different from the normal reason. Religious beliefs are so central in the lives of those who hold them that there is nothing more certain that could be put forward in the evidence of them.

By simply rejecting the request for foundations and verification, he would say: "The point is that if there were evidence, this would destroy the whole business."[9] It is a matter of thinking differently in different way and thinking of a different picture. In 'On Certainty' he develops this idea by asking such pertinent questions: "Is it wrong for me to be guided in my actions by the propositions of physics? Am I to say that I have no good grounds for doing so? Is not precisely this that we call good grounds."[10] Wittgenstein holds that faith is so fundamental in believer's cognitive life that "it is inappropriate (or at least unnecessary) to appeal to anything else to justify it. He is entitled to believe in the external world, the reality of the past and other mind, not because that it is a conclusion for which he can give cogent reasons, but because it is one of the basic beliefs by which he lives his entire life.

Another thing Wittgenstein dislikes is some peoples' obsession with explanations. Because according to him, every explanation – being hypothetical in nature – is too uncertain and leads us to nowhere. The solution to our difficulty lies in description. The philosophical problems can be solved not by amassing of new empirical knowledge, but by the rearrangement of what we already know.[11] The temptation to go beyond a certain point in a search for explanation, justification and foundation is a bewitchment which we need to get rid of. In a passage in 'The Investigations' he states: "Philosophy may in no way interfere with the actual use of language; it can in the end only describe it. For it cannot give it any foundation either. It leaves everything as it is."[12] Thus the view that (*i*) the idea that philosophy should provide some general argument for either the acceptance or rejection of religious beliefs and that (*ii*) the belief that the meaning fullness of religious statements may be tested by a general theory or criteria for determining the significance or otherwise may lead the distraught flies to the wrong end of the bottle.

Following this line of argument D. Z. Phillips claims that many philosophers have understood the difficulties involved but there exists a strong craving for generality which makes them guilty of arbitrary linguistic legislation.[13] He claims that philosophy must leave everything as it is and those criteria which are used in one context, for instance, that of experimental science, to disciplines within which they are inappropriate. For example, the notion of 'existence' may be unproblematic in one sphere but not in another one. "If the same concept is transferred simpliciter to the sphere of religious belief, we have an instance of 'an alien grammar' being introduced."[14] The implication of this statement is that if we wish to understand religion, the grammar appropriate to religion should be used. The meaning of religious language lies precisely within the context of a particular language that is being engaged in our discourse. According to Malcolm "Religion is a form of life. It is a language embedded in action – what Wittgenstein calls a language game. Science is another. Neither stands in need of justification.[15] The question of true/ false logic depends on forms of life and language games.

Forms of Life and Language Games

To identify the meaning of the phrase Form of Life, it is important to throw light on the following questions: (*i*) what does Wittgenstein mean by this term? (*ii*) What are the criteria for its application? How does it apply to religion? It may be mentioned that here that we find several expressions in Wittgenstein's earlier work which lie behind the concept as it appears in the 'Investigations'.[16] This phrase has been used in following way:

(*a*) 'to imagine a language means to imagine a form of life.'[17]

(*b*) 'the speaking of language is a part of an activity or form of life.'[18]

(*c*) 'It is what human beings ay that is true and false; and they agree in language they use. That is not agreement in opinion but in form of life.'[19]

(*d*) 'the phenomena of hope are modes of this complicated form of life.'[20]

(*e*) 'What has to be accepted, the given, is – one could say – form of life.'[21]

The whole array of these expressions shows that there is an indissoluble connection of language with human actions. Language is an activity which penetrates all forms of life and activities. Pole elaborating upon this point of view says:

> "Our language activities are part of that pattern of things that makes us what we are and determine our relation with other fellows. That men have, within limits similar proclivities, that certain patterns of behaviour come naturally to almost all of them, is the condition of the emergence of society and language. It is within that general framework that particular linguistic activities go forward. We do not make things true or false by agreement. It is of particular statements that truth and falsehood predicated; but it is clear that unless we agreed, not as to particular beliefs but in some fundamental orientation, the language in which the terms true and false occur could never have existed at all."[22]

Therefore, it may rightly be pointed out that the concept of form of life is the ultimate basis of all linguistic activities and communication system. One cannot penetrate behind the form of life. It is what has to be accepted. In other words, we have to accept it as the indubitable basis of our understanding. H R Smart explains this view thus:

> "Form of life evidently plays the role, in Wittgenstein's own language game, of a metaphysical ultimate in terms of which the functioning of language is to be understood. They must be accepted, and they are given – that is to say, they are regarded as an indubitable basis, a rock of certainty, like the Cartesian Cogito."[23]

D. Z. Phillips and Religion

There is a controversy about the application of this term to religion. There is also difference of opinion about whether religion itself is a form of life or it contains a form of life. P. J. Sherry argues that "by form of life Wittgenstein meant basic

activities and responses like hoping, feeling certain, meaning, giving orders, asking questions and greeting people and indeed using language generally."[24] On the basis of this definition, Sherry is of the opinion that religion contains form of life. This view is against the widely held theory that religion is a form of life. Religious belief in its totality is 'the given' which must be accepted. Wittgenstein's followers like Malcolm, Winch and Phillips strongly recommend that religion should be held as a unique and very ancient form of life having its own distinctive criteria of rationality. As a universe of discourse it has its logic within its own domain.

The first sign of Wittgenstein's comparing certain linguistic phenomena to a game are found in the 'Moore letters'. Here in considering the problem of meaningfulness in propositions, he remarks that when we say "This makes no sense," we all means "This makes no sense in the particular game." The expression 'game' here signifies the specific total context in which a particular proposition is used. This linguistic use is continued in the Blue and Brown Books. However, the concept of language game in its present form came to the surface in "The Philosophical Investigations". Wittgenstein has pointed out different types of language games which can be classified in different groups on the basis of linguistic performance, acts, and use and sign rules of the language. In short Wittgenstein extends the world "language game" to the whole activity of language and what consists of language and into which it is woven. In talking of language games he has not only broken up every day language into small generalized compartments but has also drawn our attention to the different shades of sense and nonsense which may apply to spatio-temporal phenomena of language in different cases.

Religious beliefs fall under a group of language games which include such linguistic activities as asking, thanking, cursing and greeting and praying. Some Wittgensteinians think that religion is a distinctive language game having particular use of language quite different from other uses. It revolves around a particular proto-phenomenon which is there like our life and draw our attention to a world picture that is based on a particular vocabulary of words like God, heaven, hell, sin, the last

judgement and on the ideas of resurrection and punishment. Here it must be remembered that since linguistic phenomena implies multiplicity and diversity, it is wrong to assume that when Wittgenstein speaks of language game, he is necessarily associating it exclusively with one particular practice or activity of everyday language.

D. Z. Phillips employs the language game approach very successfully in philosophy of religion. He is of the view that distinctive language games run through many and varied practices including religion. The example of religious belief as a language game is the belief in last judgement. This belief plays a particular role in man's life, if a man has this before his mind when he takes any decision of importance. In this way his attitude towards life is determined. But this religious belief cannot be taken to be a hypothesis. There are certain language games like forming a view and testing a hypothesis which cannot be the part of the framework of religious belief. Phillips draws our attention to the religious activities of a boxer crossing himself before a fight, a mother placing flower before a statue of the virgin Marry and parents praying for their lost child.[25] We may ask whether these activities are blunders or meaningful expression of faith and trust. According to Phillips, if these activities are taken as testable hypothesis, then they are blunders because they contradict what we know about causal connections.[26] It is quite wrong to understand them as testable hypothesis. The fact is that by introducing this kind of approach to religious beliefs, we indulge in distorting the picture. The boxer may be dedicating himself, the mother may be thanking God for his gift of the child, and the parents may be asking God that they be able to meet their loss. The beliefs involved, says Phillips, are not testable hypotheses but ways of reacting to and meeting such situations. They must be understood as expressions of faith and trust.[27]

In "Religion without Explanation" Phillips insists that significance of religious beliefs must be understood as a human activity emerging from a particular form of life. The job of the philosopher is not to apply some criterion to religious context; his job is to try to understand them, to look and to describe them in their own terms without imposing a foreign criterion appropriate

to some other context.[28] In "The Concept of Prayer" Phillips argues that prayer is not in any sense an attempt to manipulate what may happen, it is an acceptance of the given things as they are. When Phillips speaks of God giving something to the believer, he does not point to some heavenly agent. There is no giver in that sense. The believer receives the gift through contemplation.[29]

Norman Malcolm and Framework Principles

Now we come to take a view of the suggestion that religious beliefs are so central in the lives those who hold them that there is nothing more certain that could be put forward in the in the evidence of them. This fideistic view is indeed very debatable. One can raise the objection that a belief can be utterly central for a believer and be nonetheless entirely irrational, for example, the view that the earth is flat and that racial segregation is a virtuous activity. These views are not only foolish but also fanatic. They can be psychologically fundamental but are not epistemically privileged. Analogically, why should not we think that same is the case with religious beliefs?

Norman Malcolm finds the answer to this question in the framework principles theory. According to him, any question about the justification of belief must be raised within the system that provides boundaries, within which we ask questions, carry out investigation and make judgement.[30] The boundaries imposed by a system are defined by its framework principles. Those propositions are taken for granted which derives justification from within the system. Malcolm defines the framework principle as a belief that "familiar objects do not cease to exist without some physical explanation."[31] According to Malcolm, there are number of examples which can be pointed out as framework principles such as that there is a continuity of nature, that calculations are sufficiently checked once certain procedures are carried out, that we live on the earth and variety of beliefs about our inner states. Given the role of framework principles in a system, there is no sense to ask for justification of these principles. What he means to emphasize is that the framework principles are not put to the test, not backed up by evidence.[32]

Malcolm writes: "The framework propositions that we accept, grow into, are not idiosyncrasies, but common ways of speaking and thinking that are pressed on us by our human community."[33] It means that the system and framework principles are normative for the language game of the community.

Applying these considerations to religious belief, Malcolm asks us to recognize that the basic tenets of religious faith are framework principles for a language game. This does not mean that there is no such thing as unwarranted or false religious belief. Religious language game involves standards of justifications that can be used to discredit or support various views. "Within a language game there is a justification and lack of justification, evidence and proof, mistakes and groundless opinions, good and bad reasoning, correct measurements and in correct ones."[34] Within each system there is criticism, explanation and justification. Each religious system has its own spiritual conditions pertaining to the demands of the creator, saviour, judge and mentor. This view does not suggest that religious beliefs as such have some peculiar immunity from rational evaluation.

Malcolm's standpoint can be attacked from two angles. The first objection is concerned with the question whether Malcolm is proposing some kind of anti-foundationalist approach in religious matters. Does he mean to say that he agrees with an anti-foundationalist claim that justification must stop with propositions not themselves self-evident or otherwise self-justifying. The difficultties of giving an account of knowledge as based on incorrigible foundations seem insurmountable, and if the alternative seems to be a sceptical denial of the possibility of knowledge, then we had better rethink our understanding of knowledge. The second line of attack accepts Malcolm's general epistemological approach but objects to the way he applies it to religious beliefs. Just because that the very process of justification requires groundless beliefs and religion involves process of justification, it does not follow that such propositions as "God loves us," Bible is a God's word, etc., are properly believed without grounds. For a particular mode of justification may itself require justification via more justificatory procedures. A framework principle in Malcolm's sense must not only provide a basis for a process of justification,

it must also not itself within the scope of some more basic process of justification. In this sense, the system specified by a set of framework principles must be autonomous.

This suggestion has been rejected by many a critics. Especially, Kai Nielson is of the view that the proposal for the autonomy of framework principles in religious matters is neither acceptable nor applicable. The critics argue that this conclusion looks counter-intuitive. To begin with there seem to be clear examples of 'system' with no obvious impropriety, called 'religious' and that is apparently grounded upon beliefs for which evidence might be sought. To make but one example, Christianity at least seems to be grounded upon beliefs to which evidence seems relevant, *e.g.*, the belief that there in fact existed a person called Jesus, who said and did certain things and to whom certain things in fact happened. For this reason Saint Paul, to mention but one, clearly believed that Christianity would be unjustified, were the falsity of these beliefs as matters of fact to be discovered. For if there was in fact no person called Christ, the Christ did not die upon the cross: and if the Christ did not die, then he was not raised. And, then, as Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "If Christ be not raised, then your faith is in vain. We have here a clear statement from within religion of the dependence of faith upon a matter of fact."[35] This statement not only fails the idea of groundlessness of religious beliefs and but also negates the assertion that religion as a system of framework principles is autonomous. But the question is: should we take such religiously exhorting statements as literally true and meaningful statements?

Peter Winch and grammar of Religious Belief

Peter Winch is primarily concerned with the meaning rather with the truth or existence. In trying to understand the grammar of religious beliefs and question of the intelligibility of God-Talk, Winch has made a thorough study of Azande Primitive Society – their magic and witchcraft The main purpose of his study is to contradict the epistemology which assumes that there is a certain standard use of language which is the norm of meaningfulness for all uses of language. As a result of its application, religious language is described as meaningless, or meaningful but false. In

this regard, Winch makes a critical scrutiny of Evans Prichard methodological remarks concerning Azande magic and witchcraft. It has been rightly observed Azande conceptions must understand in terms of how they are taken by the Azande themselves and in their own social structure. But it is wrong to conclude that Azande are plainly labouring under an illusion. We know that our scientific culture does not recognise this kind of phenomena. Witchcraft and magic are rejected as superstitions of the underdeveloped mind. This view leads us to conclude that we with our scientific approach are right and the Azande beliefs are wrong. Scientific approach insists that what is in accord with objective reality is true and what goes against this criterion of objectivity is false. Winch vehemently disagrees with this approach.

In Winch's view, Evan-Prichard is crucially wrong in his attempt to characterise the scientific in terms of that which is 'in accord with the objective reality'. Evans-Prichard – in fact holds that 'reality' must be regarded as intelligible and applicable outside the context of scientific reasoning itself, since it is that to which scientific notions do, and unscientific notions do not, have a relation. "Evans-Prichard, although he emphasises that a member of scientific culture has different conception of reality from that of Azande believing in magic, wants to go beyond merely registering this fact and making the differences explicit, and to say, finally, that the scientific conception agrees with what reality actually is like, whereas the magical conception does not."[36]

Winch contends that the comprehensive agreement with the reality has become unwieldy and misleading. Actually when we talk of agreement with reality, we under the spell of scientific reality, adopt it as a paradigm against which we measure the other concepts of reality. On the basis of this paradigm, we challenge the respectability of other modes of discourse. The concept of what is real and what is unreal is only given and only intelligible within a particular form of life. We cannot distinguish the real from the unreal without understanding the way this distinction operates in the language.[37] Azande magical rituals and their efficacy is only intelligible within the Azande' form of life in which Azande magical rituals are practiced. The same is the case

with the religious concept of reality and related notions such as God, Immortality, sin, salvation and Free will, etc. What these notions amount to could be understood only in the concerned religious context. Quite obviously, the religious context is very unlike a scientific context in which we speak of theoretical entities. God's reality, thus, is only intelligible within the religious form of life. We do not have the concept of reality which could be used as a yard stick with which to appraise any or every form of life. This argument receives more force from Winch's essay "The Idea of a Social Science" in which he describe a formal theory of order that systematically display the form of order found in the modes of social life. What can and cannot be said, what follows from what, is dictated by the norms of intelligibility embedded in the modes of social life. These modes finally determine the criteria of logical appraisal. Since this is so, one cannot apply criteria of scientific logic to modes of social life. Science is one of many modes of life. Religion is one of the equally valid modes. Each mode has its own criterion of intelligibility. Within each mode discourse an action can be logical or illogical, intelligible or unintelligible, true or false.

Kai Nielson, rejecting this compartmentalization of social and scientific modes, insists on the view that distinctive philosophical knowledge can give us the true grounds of religious belief. He thinks that difficulties about religious belief are not uncalled for. These difficulties do not arise from metaphysical perplexities. The question 'what does God stand for' is not a pseudo question, but is a significant question. It should be answer properly. This question is raised by the people from within the same theistic tradition playing the same language game. People quarrel with each other on the question of justification of such beliefs as there is a God whose existence can be proved with the help of rational argument. This is not a question of metaphysical hunger. Some common people – the genuine participants of the same language game show their perplexities "about to whom or to what we could be praying or supplicating or even denying when we talk in this manner."[38] Neilson contends that questions asked by the plain people indicate that we do not know what we believe in when we speak of believing in God. From this he concludes

that scepticism about religious belief is well founded whether or not a religious belief needs justifying grounds. He further contends that is wrong to believe that a form of life is immutable and unchangeable reality. Certainly, forms of life undergo changes with the passage of time and sometimes become so irrelevant and logically outmoded that they are rejected altogether. We come to know about them in mythological stories or fairy tales.

The other thing Nielsen is the compartmentalisation of reality into different pigeon holes. In this regard he is of the view that there is no separate religious language and that religious discourse is a part of overall universe of discourse. Religious beliefs, *e.g.*, "God is three in one" and "God is a person that one encounters in prayers but God is utterly transcendent" are on a par with belief in fairies. Again religious language is not something isolated sufficient unto itself. It "shares categories with, utilises the concept and contain the syntactical structure of profane discourse."[39] Therefore, it is quite reason able to bring out the difficulties we face in religious language and points at what seems to be contradictory and incoherent in belief structure. The criteria of discourse involved in religion is not just limited to religious discourse but is related to the discourse as a whole that is language in general. Then there are similar difficulties with the question 'what is real'? Nielsen agrees with Winch that reality is a context dependent notion. But the problem with the claim is that "Reality may be systematically ambiguous, but what constitutes evidence to test for the truth or reliability of specific claims, is not simply idiosyncratic to the context or activity we are talking about."[40] The criterion which determines the reality is: whether various entities, including persons, are or not part of the spatio-temporal world of experience. People came to give up believing in fairies and witches because this belief was not part of the spatio-temporal experience of the world. Thus any assertion that a certain identifiable state of affairs obtains must be factually intelligible. "To say that witch refers to a unique kind of reality is only intelligible within a distinctive form of life is an incredible piece of evasion."[41] The believer is required to be realist and non evasive. He should see reality in light of the meaning of 'fact' and 'evidence' in overall discourse of religious belief. Kai Nielsen,

thus, takes us to the same model standard of disagreement based on context free facts and neutral objective evidence with great emphasis on rationalist view that logic constitutes the a priori order of the world. It means we are being persuaded to enter the same flyglass which was manufactured by the modernist epistemology.

Kai Nielsen's critical approach is based on essentialism which demands that there must be a general account of (logos) of concept or principle at the foundation of a theory which claim to make the world intelligible. Philosophy should work strictly under a well defined set of necessary and sufficient conditions. There must be necessary truths or meaning and universal notion of rationality. This foundationalist and essentialist epistemology has been rejected by many highly reputed philosophers. From Wittgenstein, Quine, Dewey, Davidson to Derrida all have come to anti-essentialist conclusion that things have no intrinsic properties in themselves. Things have only relational properties. The meaning of a word is based on the way and the context in which it is used. Peter Winch has elegantly put it. "Reality is not what gives language sense but what is real and unreal shows itself in the sense which the language has.[42] A word does not derive its meaning from its kink to some unmediated external reality as opposed to its use within stream or form of life. Wittgenstein strongly condemns the tendency to look for a common element. He links it to a sort of bewitchment and craving for generality. Both Winch and Phillips rejects single concept of reality or all pervasive truth or Platonic logos which purports to give a general account of different concepts. It is an abstraction which only exists in the minds of Philosophers. According to Prof. John J. Stuhr, such epistemology of knowledge and truth is a system of delusion. It is a dream which cannot be fulfilled.[43]

Nielsen's criticizes the Wittgensteinian theory of language games for ending up to compartmentalisation of reality. Keith Ward has also made this criticism when he claims that Wittgensteinian criteriology reduces the expression "language game" into neat pigeon holes[44] or water tight compartments without having any kind of interactive link among themselves. The other objection, the detractor is bound to raise is that by

rejecting some common paradigm of rationality and talking of religious beliefs as human activity within a form of life, Wittgensteinians propagate cognitive relativism in religion. Here, one can repeat the question that if a criterion of reality is regarded as internal to the form of a particular religious life what about those modes of religious life which centre around witches, trolls, ghosts, phantoms, spectres, or spirits, etc. In this case, could we agree with the claim that refers to a unique kind of reality only intelligible within a distinctive form of life?[45] If the answer is in the negative as a irrational claim, it means that in order to react to putative claims, we are somehow or the other in need of making reference to something outside the particular form of life. The Wittgensteinian position prima facie, relegates religious belief to mere interiorization of the traditional picture of the religion. Accordingly, God can be found within a particular linguistic web, but outside this web the term God does not have any application or significance whatsoever. Thus, Wittensteinian picture not only negates the traditional concepts of God, prayer, immortality, redemption and salvation, but also suggests that religious experiences are nothing more than transporting oneself to the make-belief world of autosuggestion.

Postmodernism, under the influence of Wittgenstein's philosophy of language games and forms of life, lays emphasis on equality of different clusters of meaning.[46] Since there is no cognitive universalism available to the interlocutors and since there is no context-free stand point, it is impossible to evaluate the world and give judgement on religious practices of different forms of life. What is real and what is not real should be decided by the language game we play. This position may lead us to ethno-centric and communitarian truth – a predicament which make people to accept self-contradictory claims about the same object.

That much is not in doubt. It is true that there are many difficulties and weaknesses in Witgensteinian criteriology. But it is also true that standard model of rationality, which scientism employed to give a cogent and coherent picture of the world, suffers the fallacies of generalization, absolutism and exclusivism. It is a built on the principle of Platonic ontology that

leads us to believe that reality is one and everything emanates from the same immutable and omnipresent one. Every theistic approach is Platonic in one sense or the other. Mostly, religious believers belonging to West Asian religious traditions are led by the idealist ontology to claim that it is reasonable to adopt an exclusivist approach. This monolithic world-view has given birth to a great number of dogmatists, absolutists and fundamentalists who gave this world nothing but a lot of dogmatism, fanaticism and sectarian conflicts. Generally illusion has taken the place of truth. Hence, the result is that this morbid outlook ends up in coercion, persecution and theopathic self-torment. Logically, speaking, it is impossible to decide as to what the ultimate truth is. Epistemology has so far failed to define what true belief is and which religious tradition is the nearest to the ultimate truth.

I do not agree with the view that Wittgensteinian language game theory is a matter of narrow outlook based on some divisive or evasive mentality. Rather, I think it heralds openness and broadness in our thinking and provides enough space for developing pluralistic attitude toward reality and truth giving enough space to different ethno-politico-religious communities to coexist in harmony and peace. The pluralist thinking does not believe in the dominance of one metaphysical theory over the other. Lyotard in his book "The Postmodern Condition" has rejected such metaphysical theories as hopeless myths which he calls meta or grand narratives The philosophy of positivism belonging to colonial/ imperialist age worked under the metanarrative that humanity can achieve transcendental truth. The positivists thought that every aspect of the natural and social world is accessible to the demystifying and rationalising operations of the knowledge machine.[47] But the question is that what metanarratives, both social and scientific, have given to humanity except wars, ecological disaster and danger of collective death by developing chemical and nuclear weapons. Therefore, it is wrong to claim that science is carrying out a project for the benefit of human race.

Lyotard has pointed out that the world is ineffably unstable and endlessly defined by doomed particularity. We are in the midst of social and cultural disintegration. Issues cannot be

resolved in terms of the ruling ideas of the scientific modernism. There are, it is said, no metanarratives that can single handedly explain history and guide us to a vision of a desirable future. Postmodernism argues that grand theories has led human thought to doctrinal imperialism which has ultimately ended in terrible dictatorships. For instance, Marxist fantasies to bring about emancipation and liberation on the basis of grand socio-economic principles have terribly failed. The view that theory grounded on truth will bring about a free, fraternal and egalitarian society has also collapsed. Nietzsche mocks the notion of truth *tout court* and says when God is dead, anything is possible. Hence, Leotard's attitude of incredulity towards metanarratives[48] carries a lot of weight. We are only left with narratives (language games) founded on the notions of ordinariness, relevance, coherence and necessity without claiming to have any transcendental authority to determine and impose views about what is ultimately true and what is wrong. According to Derrida, there is no objective point of view which gives access to a global truth. All theories, arguments, text, etc. rest on abstract systems of relationships. What is temporary, immanent and superficial is preferred. For Baudrillard, there are only images (simulations) out there and these images bear no relation to any reality whatsoever.

Posmodernism under the influence of Wittgenstein's later philosophy (language games and forms of life) lays emphasis on equality of different clusters of meaning affirming the values of different belief systems and cultural entities with purely nonconformist outlook. It aims at promoting cultural pluralism for providing humanity hope for tolerance and good will through dialogue and discourse. Foucault's point of view is that discourses are what counts as legitimate and illegitimate statements. They put a limit on what is sayable at any one time.[49] It is emphasised that all our judgements and belief claims are always historically particular and variable from culture to culture, and subject of change. This is the way to pragmatic and relativist approach to resolve issues related to the highly fragmented but closely knitted global village we live in.

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