

# Wittgenstein's fideism in opponents and follower's view

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## ABSTRACT

**Objective:** The term "Wittgenstein fideism" belong to Nielsen, who attributed a position to pupils or followers of Wittgenstein and later to Wittgenstein himself. **Methodology:** "Wittgenstein fideism" have, more than anyone else religion current, stressed the relativity of beliefs and their relation to the forms of life in which they originate. **Results:** Thus; religious belief is neither rational nor irrational absolutely and logically; but they have unique trait because of their relevancies to special to language - games and form of life. Wittgenstein's fideism believes the logical discourse is sui generis and therefore cannot be understood and judged in terms other than its own. The present study will aim to investigate this claimant using by few opponents and followers view. **Conclusion:** The limit of Wittgensteinian fideism, which is ultimately a form of religious relativism, is that it cannot hope to be universally valid. It applies only, if at all, to that specific form of life, which is the religiosity of Wittgensteinians.

## 1. Introduction

Ludwig Wittgenstein is known as the early and late Ludwig Wittgenstein because of passing two different thought periods. His different views regarding theology and religious thought have attracted people's attention.

His early ideas were gathered in his logical-philosophical thesis including the picture theory of meaning. According to this theory, language has only one function that is visualization. In Ludwig Wittgenstein view, language visualizes the facts and facts are those that can be said; i.e. "sayings".

The picture theory of meaning mentions that not only language is a picture of the facts in the world and derives from the facts, but also it is the world's structure that determines the language structure. The late considered the untold including theology as a part of the supernatural and invited people to be silent in this regard. "What can be said is said clearly and those that cannot be told should be left unspoken" (Akvan, 2005). In addition, Ludwig Wittgenstein talked about the mysteriousness of religion and his remark led to the idea that he rejected theology like the positivists. Nevertheless, in the late period he rejected his ideas stated in the early period and based on his Language- Game Theory he considered religion as a form of life with its own characteristics. In fact, Ludwig Wittgenstein accepted that there is not a single and unique language game and there are a lot of such games such as scientific, mystical, artistic, philosophical, and verbal each of which follow their own rules and characteristics. Based on this theory, language has suctions and it is not restricted to visual function merely. This shift to religious thoughts that is called Wittgenstein fideism turned to one of the influential philosophical thought about theology and aroused different feedbacks among the scientists. Some accepted the view and developed it others criticized it. In this paper, we first discuss the ideas of its followers like Malcolm, Phillips, and Huang and then we refer to its critics such as Nielsen and Hick.

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## 2. Materials and Methods

### 2.1. Languages – games

The late Ludwig Wittgenstein considered that he has found the single and unique nature of the language and has made clear the boundary between meaningfulness and meaningless by visualization criteria. However, this time he talks about the different functions of language or language -game not one language. Therefore, we have language boundaries not language boundary.

There is no a single and absolute criteria for meaningfulness and when we say a speech doesn't have any meaning, we mean that it is meaningless in its particular language game (Fan, 2003). It is said that when Ludwig Wittgenstein was watching a football game he conceived that we do the thing with the words as the football players do with the ball, hence: the idea of the languages- games passed his mind. We pass words, as is the case in an a football game or chess play, move them forward and backwards as a whole or as specific activities each of which has their own rules, purpose, and benefit (Hudson, 2009).

Learning each language is the same as the learning a game that is called language -game by Ludwig Wittgenstein. He considers language - game as a whole which is consisted of language and interconnected activities in a language.

Words are like chess-men. Likewise, we can say that the meaning of a word is its status in a language- game. In other words, it is the grammatical rules dominating the proper use of the words that determines the meaning of a single word.

So, according to the rules, moving a chess-man is comparable to using a sentence. "A movement in a chess game is not merely going from somewhere to another but it includes the conditions that we call it "chess playing" "solving a chess problem", and so on "states Wittgenstein. We can say that a language includes a set of actions and interactions, which are defined by specific rules, the rules that dominates all different functions of words. (Fan, 2003). In Wittgenstein view, language - games are not the same as natural games such as Arabic or Persian, but it refers to technical terms and different verbal styles that are used in specific fields such as discourse, methodology, and the like. Discourse followers and methodology fans have their own language and use specific technical terms. When discussing a science, its specific terms should be used and deviation from this can lead to confusion and miss understanding (Lnhavzn, 2000).

## 3. Results and Discussion

### 3.1. Wittgensteinian fideism

Faith Interpretation of Wittgenstein's philosophy is rooted in his later period .Among the various English philosophical currents that have dealt with religion, "Wittgensteinian faddists" have, more than anyone else, stressed the relativity of beliefs and their relation to the forms of life in which they originate (Bottone , 2001).

The term " Wittgensteinian fideism" belongs to Kai Nielsen, who attributed a faddiest position to pupils or followers of Wittgenstein, philosophers such as Winch, Hughes, Malcolm, Cavell, Phillips himself ( Nielson,1967). What these thinkers have in common is the idea that theological discourse issue generis and therefore cannot be understood and judged in terms other than its own; the truth and meaning of a religious world view should not be understood on the basis of the object that it wishes to represent but only on the basis of the tradition or the community within which the view has emerged and in which it has its function himself (Nielson, 1967). In order to recognize the meaning of a term it is needed to understand the language- game in which it is used and to do so, we should participate in a form of life and learn its rules. Wittgenstein claims that the meaning and justification of theological believes is different from that of ordinary ones because theological believes are dependent to language games and their specific lifestyles. He asks why shouldn't one form of life express and accept the belief in doom and the day of punishment. But if you ask me about the day of day of punishment I can't say "yes or I'm not sure".

In Wittgenstein opinion, the meaning of a term is attained by the rule dominating its meaningfulness. The rules are not absolute; they find their meaning in different lifestyles. Therefore, according to the variety of lifestyles, the words gain several meanings and create language structures that are mentioned as language - games. In Wittgenstein view, the theological form of life is different from the scientific life and this difference derives from different theological and scientific views regarding a problem. He brings examples for these differences. He says imagine two individuals. One of them thinks of the punishment of doing a behavior when making the decision, the other not. One of them tends to consider each happening as a reward or punishment while the other doesn't have such an idea.

The former may ask him what I have done when he becomes sick. This is one way of thinking about the punishment. In general, when he is ashamed of himself, he says I will see its punishment. Wittgenstein states that one of these individuals relates his behavior and occurrences to the day of punishment, the other not. They think completely differently.

#### 3.1.1. Norman Malcolm

Malcolm one of Wittgenstein's fideism followers maintains that Religion is the form of life "implanted, grafted unto action" like science, and the first needs no more be justified than the second. If many academic philosophers prefer science to religion it is only because they do not participate in this form of life and do not understand its character, a problem compounded by their tendency to assume that their role as scholars requires a strictly objective and detached attitude. Malcolm, along with all other faddists, shows a marked aversion for any effort to elaborate a theology which, starting from the observation of the natural world would arrive through reasoning to the definition of the characteristics of God or, on the basis of the same criteria, would strive to evaluate religious doctrines. For him, it is impossible to theorize a single epistemological approach to different subject matters; rather one must

each time use the approach appropriate to the investigated object, thus acknowledging the limitations and ultimate failure of any effort to study the religious phenomenon through reductionist approaches and with methods borrowed from other disciplines. The typical reductionist mistake would be that of seeking to play the game of religion according to the rules of science, psychoanalysis and philosophy. There are various language games, various Sprachspiele, and while we can ask for guarantees within a given game, it is a mistake to ask for guarantees on games in themselves, indeed the very notion that we must justify our language games is one of the first pathologies of language.

Hypotheses and verifications occur within a given system, a system that has its limits; the desire to examine, to find justifications, can only go so far. This is not a sign of a human weakness, indeed not accepting certain limitations would mean not having learned the language game. We do not choose to live on earth, nor do we choose to learn our native language; in the same way, we grow up within a framework of beliefs and worldviews that, in practice, we never question. Religious belief is a language game, a form of life that establishes its own internal criteria of meaning and of rationality. “It may, however, be said to be ‘groundless’, not in the sense of a groundless opinion, but in the sense that we accept it, we live it. We can say, ‘This is what we do. This is how we are’ (Malcolm, 1977).

The religious person sees his beliefs as absolutely certain not because their truth has been properly established but because they form the basis of that which can be said, thought or done within a religious life. This attitude, which many modern philosophers would decry as dogmatic and superstitious, is common to all human activities, even while more prominent in religious or even purely ritual ones. (Malcolm, 1984).

Malcolm also uses the “tu quoque” argument, that is, he shows that the arguments of the critics of beliefs are also ultimately unfounded, insofar as they are based on a framework of unfounded principles. Malcolm maintains that events such as miracles, supernatural events, resurrections and the like have a religious import insofar as they are seen from a religious perspective, within a Weltbild, a conception of the world that cannot be understood by somebody who does not at least partially share that view. Only within a religious atmosphere can evidence have meaning, there must be at least some degree of common experience. The atheist who argues against the existence of God cannot understand the issue and therefore express himself properly; those who are strangers to the game of religious language are unable to understand it (Bottone, 2001).

### 3.1.2. D. Z. PHILLIPS

Phillips agrees with Malcolm, arguing for the autonomy of religious expressions, which can only be judged as warranted through implicit standards, that is, standards that are internal to religious life (Bottone, 2001). In Phillips’s opinion, a great limit of those who criticize believers is the fact that they do not examine the concepts in the contexts from which they draw their significance. They lack an essential existential component since there is no understanding of religion without passion and participation; if philosophers were to understand this they would abandon their skepticism (Phillips, 1970). One cannot ask religious language to satisfy criteria of signification that are foreign to it because there is no paradigm of rationality from which all discursive modes can be derived (Phillips, 1970).

Indeed, a necessary premise of the philosophy of religion is acknowledging the existence of differing criteria of rationality. The significance of religious expressions is in the function they have for believers. Unlike scientific language: “Religious language is not an interpretation of how things are, but determines how things are for the believer” (Phillips, 1970).

Scientific language has an explicative function, whereas religious language has a regulating one: it guides the community of believers. Each language restructures its discursive world: religious death is different from the one familiar to doctors. Referring to one of Wittgenstein’s famous examples, Phillips argues that if the idea of the Last Judgment has no role in one’s life, he or she cannot participate in the language game of those who believe in the Last Judgment; it is therefore incorrect to say that the non-believer contradicts the believer, rather they live within two different forms of life and give different meaning to the same expressions. (Phillips, 1970).

When the believer speaks using words that belong to common language, he attributes different meanings to them. An example is the expression “God exists,” in which the verb to exist is used in a very different sense from when the verb is applied to everyday objects. Religious language has its own concepts of truth and reality. The relativity of language forms is the manifestation of the diversity of forms of life (Phillips, 1970).

### 3.1.3. Huang

He maintains that different languages may imply different logics but this does not mean the same person cannot know more than one and know when and how to use them; the fact that they are different does exclude the possibility of their pertaining to different aspects of the same form of life. Huang agrees with Phillips that, unlike scientific language, religious language determines what things are for believers; but, he adds, religious beliefs, besides regulating life, are also an interpretation of the world, though different from the scientific one. As the world influences our religious convictions, so do our religious convictions influence our understanding of the world. He acknowledges not only the expressive and regulative aspects of beliefs but also the cognitive ones.

According to Huang’s interpretation, Wittgenstein’s position was that beliefs form a system where nothing can be understood except in relation to the other parts and the whole.

“When first we begin to believe any thing, what we believe is not a single proposition, it is a whole system of propositions ... It is not single axioms that strike me as obvious, it is a system in which consequences and premises give one another mutual support “. We may question or justify any proposition on the basis of the others but not the system as a whole. Though it is impossible to justify our system this does not mean, however, that we can support any system of beliefs, so long as it has certain minimum prerequisites such as, for example, non-contradiction. What then could serve as a test, as verification in these situations? The justification of beliefs is found in the unwarranted behavior that is at the basis of the language game. “But the end is not a ungrounded presupposition: it is an ungrounded way of acting“... “Giving grounds, however, justifying the evidence, comes to an end; - but the end is not certain propositions’ striking us immediately as true, i.e. it is not a kind of seeing on our part; it is our acting which lies at the bottom of the language-game “ (Bottone, 2001).

### 3.1.4. Kai Nelson

Nelson is one of radical critics' Wittgensteinian Fideism' for the first time the term is used. Kai Nelson was the first to use the term 'Wittgensteinian Fideism'. Nelson's position in his article 'Wittgensteinian Fideism' is that Wittgenstein himself did not give any fideistic theory and such a theory has originated from absurd readings of Wittgensteinians. He says, "The fideistic conclusions drawn by these philosophers from his (Wittgenstein's) thoughts are often absurd"(Nelson, 1967). Further Nelson maintains, "Let me remark the outset that I am not sure to what extent Wittgenstein himself would have accepted a Wittgensteinian Fideism. But later on Nelson concedes that Wittgenstein himself is a Faddist. Kai Nelson himself is an atheist, non-believer and skeptic. He says, "I can say that I honestly feel not the slightest need for religious beliefs and I am not alone in that feeling .... There is no good anthropological or psychological evidence to believe that man must despair or remain basically unsatisfied until he can come to believe in God. We are not all hounded by the hound of heaven "(Nelson, 1967).

Against the Wittgenstein a faddists, he points out that if religious discourse, as they say, belongs solely to the believer it is to be viewed as a private discourse, something that can only be understood by the person who uses it. Any effort to establish a dialogue, to make comparisons, to produce judgments is therefore bound to fail. Fideism is the perspective of believers who are tired of arguing.

Nielsen also argues that a single conceptual structure can include both science and religion and that in this case, concepts of truth, evidence, and knowledge allow us to criticize and discard Specific forms of life, as is the case of witchcraft, for example (Nielson,1967).

### 3.1.5. John Hick

John Hick, in his book Faith and Philosophers, has elaborated the notion of Wittgensteinian Fideism under his terminology' Autonomy view' in religion. The application of language-game and form of life into religion, for Hick, actually results in Autonomy position which emphasizes upon a self authenticating divine revelation which neither seeks nor permit who has a use for, and accordingly fends meaning in, distinctively religious language and who engages in distinctively religious practices"( Hick,1964). Further, according to Hick, this view holds that "there are no connections of logical implication between the realms of religious and philosophical language... Religious language is autonomous, as the linguistic aspect of a distinctive form of life; and modes of question, distinction, affirmation and denial which have their proper places in other 'language-games'(for instance those of sciences) will, if intruded here, only give rise to false problems. The religious life, including its appropriate modes of speech, observably exists, and the external observer must be content to say, with Wittgenstein: 'this language-game is played,'" (PI §654). One effect of this position is to make religious utterances immune to philosophical criticisms. It is now not appropriate to ask for grounds for religious beliefs. "Neither it is appropriate to ask for the meaning of 'God exists.'" And," Again, it is not appropriate to ask how religious beliefs might be verified or falsified; for they are not that kind of belief.

The basic picture which results from these features of the autonomy position, for Hick, is that "religious language is autonomous, so that statements made within it are invulnerable to external criticism" (Hick, 1964).

## 3.2. Critics of fideism

Apart from Kai Nelson, other critics of fideism such as Cook, Copestone, Hick, Kenny, Mounce, Pasmore, Patrice Sherry and others raise questions against Wittgenstein's view which holds that religion has its own language-game and form of life. The basic points of fideistic criticism of Wittgenstein's religious views are as follows: (Pandy, 1970).

(1) To say that religious assertions have their own language game and form of life is to indirectly accept the relative existence of religious realities such as God, soul, immortalityetc. As then there will be no ground to show the universal is ability of these entities.

Thus, Hick reiterates, "The unacceptable feature of the position is that by treating with its own rules, or a speech activity having meaning only within its own borders-it deprives religious statements of 'ontological' or 'metaphysical' significance" (Hick, 1964). And "The logical implication of religious statements do not extend across the borders of the Sprachspiel in to assertions concerning the character of the universe beyond that fragment of it which is the religious speech of human beings. Religious language becomes a type of 'protected discourse', and forfeits its immemorial claim to bear witness to the most momentous of all truths." It forfeits its ontological and metaphysical claims because once this view is accepted then in the realm of atheism, which is beyond the particular religious tradition, no question arise about the existence of these entities. Thus, there is no significance of relative existence of ontological! Metaphysical entities (Hick, 1964).

(2) According to Nelson, the stronger argument against Fideism that is: 'religious language - game and form of life are distinct and hence they cannot be examined as per the criterion of the non-religious meaning fullness but as per the criterion of religion itself', is inadequate because the so called religious. Language-game and form of life are not relative truths but are such that holds for 'all mankind'. For Nelson religious language-game and form of life cannot be treated to be a subjective truth as they entail some kind of universal objectivity. Nelson grants that religion has its own language which is different from 'secular' usage of language. But he still maintains that even religious language has some kind of universal appeal as 'Christ is truth' holds for all mankind. To quote Nelson, "My point is that once he recognizes the (Nielson, 1971).

(3) Another basic critique of fideism/ relativism is that it supports skepticism about religious claims or beliefs. Thus, if fideism is accepted then I1 one cannot correctly and intelligibly say of a whole mode of social life that it is either logical or illogical or irrational. There is simply no way appraising the practices themselves. "Nelson argues that there is no scope for the justification of religious beliefs in fideism. For him if religion is 'subjective truth' and personal and thus, "if we take very seriously such relativity-that is, if we really take what is involved in such conceptions to heart we will end up either as skeptics... or reductionists committed to a form of belief that is so transformed that it is in substance atheistic"(Nielson,1971). Thus, although fideism is interpreted as the protective shield of religious beliefs and practices, it actually questions religious beliefs and practices as it fails to justify a particular religious form of life (Nielson, 1971).

(4) Another point of criticism of Wittgensteinian Fideism is that it fails to differentiate between Superstitions and genuine religious beliefs as relatively both are justified in their own contexts (Nielson,1971).

(5) Not only the application of language-game and form of life into religion has been questioned, but the veracity of these concepts has also been criticized on the ground of their support to relativism. Nelson in his book *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* points out: "I think there is also much to question and to criticize in Wittgenstein's account. In particular, his claims about the autonomy and uncritical ability of the forms of life need to be examined. We should also look with a cold eye at the very notion of 'a form of life'. Does it become in Wittgenstein's hands and in the hands of his followers an ill-defined term of art that leads us into the very kinds of conceptual confusion and philosophical evasion that Wittgenstein would have us avoid? Similar considerations apply to 'language-game'. What are we talking about here? And why should we accept the claim of conceptual sufficiency for all the forms of language? Indeed, we must take as given the forms of language, but why exactly must we believe that such for most language with their forms of life are beyond philosophical criticism? Why can't a given language-game be incoherent or absurd or simply the carry-over of superstitious beliefs?" (Nelson, 1982).

(6) Kai Nelson along with their general criticism of religion also question fideism from the pragmatic point view. Nelson says, "However, even if we accept religion as one of our units for 'a form of life', a Wittgensteinian faddist will still continue to encounter grave difficulties, for we can and should argue, as did J.S. Mill and William James, about the 'utility of religion'. We are not simply limited to neutrally characterizing that form of life. Philosophers can and do ask: Do we or do we not need religion? Would our lives be pointless or even impoverished, would morality topple, would life together in society become impossible, if people ceased to be religious? Is some religious belief essential to give sense to a person's life or can, and should, people learn to live, as Marx and Freud thought, without religious beliefs? These are difficult questions, unclear questions, but no adequate grounds have been given by Wittgensteinian Faddists that no arguments at all can be given concerning these questions. Likewise Ayer expresses surprise as to how religious beliefs as a distinct language game satisfy believers (Pandy, 1970).

(7) Nelson's another basic objection to fideism is that it comport mentalists social life as it judges institutions and practices in their language-game and form of life (Pandy, 1970).

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#### 4. Conclusion

Wittgensteinian faddists is characterized by several ambiguities, as for example when they speak of being "in" or "out" of the language game, without being able to clarify the way these terms are used. The faddists' mistake is that of relying on the notions of language games and forms of life, which are open concepts without clear limits, in order to draw boundaries, to differentiate, something that Wittgenstein never does. Since there are no criteria that allow one to establish the boundaries of language games, it is meaningless to speak of in and out, of internal criteria; these expressions seemed to be ultimately used by faddists in an instrumental and improper way.

The same holds for forms of life, a concept that can be extended or shrunk according to the whim of the speaker; not having any distinctive value, anything can be included in or excluded from it. It is said that religious language must be judged according to internal criteria, but this could mean that the criteria for Christian language are different from that of the Hindu religion, but also that the language of Catholicism is different from that of Protestantism, or that of twentieth-century Catholicism is different from that of fifteenth century Catholicism, and soon.

Which, in a way, is certainly true, but, if taken literally would mean that each community and indeed, each believer, has his own language, his own personal grammar. This particularizing process may be a useful methodological precaution against neo-positivist tendencies to hyper-assimilate and generalize languages, tendencies common to all forms of foundationalism, but cannot be certainly treated as an epistemological maxim, insofar as it does not allow us to tell where boundaries can be legitimately drawn if identity is a product of differences, the concepts of language game and form of life do not allow us to ascertain identities because they do not allow us to differentiate, to say what is in and what is out: is religious language a single language game or does it include more than one? is prayer a language game different from thanking or praising the Lord? The notion that a language game can occur independently of all others has no basis in Wittgenstein's work, who on the contrary speaks of language games as interconnected activities, which often come into conflict. Conflicts are overcome also through people's ability to reason (something that faddists would be reluctant to admit, because of their hostility to any theological systematization). (Bottone, 2001).

We can decide to abandon or embrace a faith after having evaluated it; if this were not the case we would be faced with the paradox of a convert who did not know what he was considering believing in until he actually believed in it. If the criteria were really, internal they would be unintelligible for those on the outside and therefore no conversion would be possible, if not for motivations lying outside the rational sphere.

The valuable aspect of the faddists' arguments is that they highlight the way certain religious practices and expressions will never be fully understood until one does not take into consideration their expressive and behavioral aspects, but this is far from saying that religious language is solely expressive. Indeed one can lose one's faith through one's ability to think rationally, for example because of the impossibility of providing a logical answer to the problem of evil. Furthermore, the dichotomy of regulative versus explicative religion is a false one: something can serve as a guide in our lives because it has an explicative value, as Huang rightly notes. Any religious form presupposes at least the idea of man, of his capabilities, of the world he lives in, etc., which it expresses in a doctrine.

The faddists' strategy seems designed to avoid confrontation by eliminating the common ground between languages that allows different forms of life to engage into dialogue.

The limit of Wittgensteinian fideism, which is ultimately a form of religious relativism, is that it cannot hope to be universally valid. It applies only, if at all, to that specific form of life, which is the religiosity of Wittgensteinians.

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