WITTGENSTEIN AND "RELIGIOUS" LANGUAGE

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SCOPE AND CONTENTS:

Briefly, my thesis centres upon the following
four considerations:

(1)   a presentation and analysis of Wittgenstein's
work in the philosophy of religion.

(2)   a series of replies to a number of criticisms
of Wittgenstein's position.

(3)   an examination of how the techniques of
"ordinary language" philosophy function in
the philosophy of religion.

(4)   a suggestion as to a possible relationship
between the current work being done in the
philosophy of language, and the linguistic
problems in the philosophy of religion.

PREFACE

I have recently been encouraged by Professor
Albert Shalom and Professor James Noxon to supplement
my original work on this topic. After lengthy discus-
sions of my text, I have come to see that it readily
lends itself to misinterpretation. Accordingly, in
order to offset such a real possibility, I have decided
to preface the central themes of my discussion by means
of the following presentation.

Part I

It is obvious that a Christian's view of the
world is different from that of an atheist. If ques-
tioned as to what is involved in this difference, our
usual response would be to state that a Christian be-
lieves in the existence of a God, while an atheist
holds no such belief. But this, of course, is not all
that the Christian believes in. Upon further questioning,
we would go on to give a list of entities which the
Christian believes to exist, and which the atheist does
not believe to exist. Our list would probably include
such entities as a Three Person Godhead, immortal souls,

heaven, and possibly, angels, devils, and a hell. The atheist, for his part, does not recognize the existence of any of these entities.

In general, it seems that the theist's universe is considerably more populous than that of the atheist. The philosophical question at this point would be whether or not the atheist _can_ refuse to admit the existence of the theist's entities without in some sense positing their existence. For prima facie it would seem that in order to deny the existence of supernatural entities, the atheist, by the very act of denial, must admit some sort of reality to these entities.

Initially, (and I stress the initially) it would seem that the differences between the theist and atheist come down to simply another version of the old platonic riddle of nonbeing. One of the most influential attempts to solve this riddle has been that of Willard van Quine in his article "On What There Is". I am not, of course, suggesting that we can look to Quine's work as a means of resolving the disagreements between the theist and the atheist. Rather, I think that Quine's analysis very suc-cinctly states just what, from a philosophical point of view, is involved in such a disagreement. Accordingly, I should like to begin my discussion by offering a brief summary of Quine's views.

Part II

Section 1

Quine's discussion opens with the question of the existence of Pegasus. He presents the position of his hypothetical adversary in the following way; "If Pegasus were not, McX argues, we should not be talking about anything when we use the word; therefore it would be nonsense to say even that Pegasus is not. Thinking to show that the denial of Pegasus cannot be coherently maintained, he concludes that Pegasus is."[1]

Now the above line of argument immediately calls forth the question as to in what sense of the word "exist", can Pegasus be said to exist. Quine's hypothetical opponent suggests that Pegasus can be said to exist as an unactualized possible. Upon analysis this comes down to saying that the reality of the entity which is named "Pegasus" is not subject to question. It is simply an empirical fact that this entity does not have the special attribute of existence.

Quine detects in this move an equivocation on the word "existence". For ordinarily when we say that Pegasus does not exist our justification for the

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[1] Willard Van Quine, "On What There Is", in From a Logical Point of View, ed. W. V. Quine (New York: Harper and Row, 1963) P. 2.

truth of this statement comes from the fact of there simply being no such entity in space and time. But now Quine's opponent is denying our right to take the question of Pegasus' existence as being completely specifiable in terms of an empirical dimension.

But why should we not take the question of Pegasus' existence as being decidable in terms of the rather obvious spatio-temporal connotations of the name "Pegasus"? Quine holds that his opponent's sole motivation for advocating the existence of unactualized possibles amounts to our presumably having to admit that Pegasus must in some sense be, for otherwise it would be nonsense to say that Pegasus is not. Clearly, this is the presupposition upon which the entire discussion turns.

Section 2

Quine offers Russell's theory of singular descriptions as a means of evading this presupposition and all of its rather bizarre consequences. I will not offer a presentation of Russell's theory, but rather simply state its central achievement.

Russell's theory enables us to translate a troublesome name such as "Pegasus" into a descriptive phrase. The objective reference which the word

"Pegasus" was said to have is now taken over by a
variable of quantification such as "something", or
"everything". These variables cannot be construed as
the names of specific entities, but are nonetheless in
this context quite meaningful. As Quine sums up;
"When a statement of being or nonbeing is analyzed by
Russell's theory of descriptions, it ceases to contain
any expression which purports to name the alleged entity
whose being is in question, so that the meaningfulness of
the statement no longer can be thought to presuppose that
there is such an entity."[2]

Quine holds, and I think quite correctly, that
there is an elemental confusion at the basis of the
Platonic riddle of nonbeing. The confusion stems from
our mistaking the object for which a name stands as
being the meaning of that word. As the riddle is put
to us the word "Pegasus" is held to stand for some sort
of entity -- which entity is implicitly held to constitute
the meaning of that word. But clearly, as Wittgenstein,
Austin, and others have pointed out there is a wide gulf
between meaning and naming. To take Frege's classic
example the phrases "Morning Star", and "Evening Star"
name or stand for the same object, but we would hardly
want to say that the two phrases have the same meaning.

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[2]Ibid., 7.

Section 3

Quine next raises the question as to what sorts
of things are meanings. His opponent on the basis of
the above argument can no longer maintain that a general
word such as "red" is meaningful insofar as it is the
name of a universal entity. Accordingly, Quine's opposi-
tion now counters by asserting that meanings simply are
universals. In the face of such an assertion, Quine
simply refuses to admit that there are meanings. This
refusal does not entail him denying that words and state-
ments are meaningful. Rather, it simply entails him
denying that the meaningfulness of a word or statement
is to be explained in terms of that word or statement's
possession of some abstract entity called a meaning.
As Quine notes; "I am free to maintain that the fact
that a given linguistic utterance is meaningful is an
ultimate and irreducible matter of fact; or I may under-
take to analyze it in terms of what people do in the pres-
ence of the linguistic utterance in question, and other
utterances similar to it."[3]

Quine's latter alternative is obviously quite
in accord with the work of both Wittgenstein and Ryle.
Troublesome philosophical concepts such as knowledge and
belief are analyzed on a behaviouristic model in terms

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[3]Ibid., 11.

of the actual uses to which these words are put in con-
crete situations. The type of behaviouristic analysis
found in both the Philosophical Investigations and The
Concept of Mind has I believe shown that the significance
of such concepts can be fully analyzed without our having
to retreat to those questionable entities called "meanings".

Section 4

Let us sum up Quine's results. First, by means
of Russell's theory of descriptions we have seen how
singular terms can be used significantly without our pre-
supposing that there are the entities which those terms
purport to name. Secondly, with regard to the meaning of
general terms, Quine has suggested that we forgo an appeal
to abstract entities in order to explain their meaningful-
ness. In lieu of such an appeal, Quine offers a behaviour-
istic model. This model would involve us in concentrating
on the actual uses of the utterances under examination.

The question now arises as to how we are to de-
termine our ontological committments. It is at this
juncture where Quine offers the formula that "To be is to
be the value of a variable". This formula is said to
follow from Russell's work on singular descriptions, and
his own position on meaning. Essentially, the formula
denies the role if names as being our ontological criterion.

The basic medium of reference becomes the bound variable, "There is something". The entities that are constitutive of our universe are now reckoned with as the value of a variable. As Quine concludes; "The variables of quantification, 'something', 'nothing', 'everything', range over our whole ontology, whatever it may be; and we are convicted of a particular ontological presupposition if and only if the alleged presuppositum has to be reckoned among the entities over which our variables range in order to render our affirmations true."[4]

Part III

The central problem which Quine's paper leaves us with is the question as to how we are to adjudicate between competing ontologies. Quine suggests that the general problem of the acceptance of an ontology is similar in principle to the question of our accepting a scientific theory. He maintains that one of the criterion on the basis of which we might decide between competing ontologies would be that of simplicity. But this criterion, Quine quickly points out, is unclear and accordingly of questionable value in actual practice.

The decision problem is of obvious concern in the philosophy of science to-day. But the results which

[4]Ibid., 13.

have been achieved are far from uncontroversial. For my part, I know of no single criterion, or for that matter, set of criteria which have met with the unqualified approval of the philosophical community. Moreover, some philosophers of science, in particular Paul Feyerabend have set themselves against such a program. It is Feyerabend's contention that there are no such criteria and that the search for them is a futile one. However, this controversy may turn out, it is clear that we cannot at present look to the philosophy of science for a means to decide between competing ontologies.

Turning now to my own work. It has been one of the central purposes of my thesis to set forth the adjudication question as being the central question in the philosophy of religion to-day. In order to make good this contention, I have first had to argue for the position that the theist's conceptual schema attempts to constitute if not a competing ontology, at least a radically different one from that of the non-believer. My support here lies with Wittgenstein's work on meaning, use, language games, and forms of life, as these central notions find his expression in his lectures on religious belief.

In the course of my presentation of Wittgenstein's views I attempted to respond to two criticisms. The first

comes from Stephen Toulmin. Toulmin believes that
Wittgenstein's lectures do not give an answer to the
question as to whether or not religious discourse con-
stitutes a system of legitimate language games. I have
maintained that they do answer this question with a
qualified affirmative. The second objection I consider
criticizes Wittgenstein's position as being inconsistent.
This charge, I hold, is based on an erroneous interpre-
tation of the notion of a form of life.

The second stage in my presentation presupposes
that I have consolidated the position that in a religious
conceptual schema we are involved with rather distinctive
ontological committments. In this second stage, I have
attempted to classify the current literature in the
philosophy of religion into two roughly distinguishable
groupings. The basis for my distinction here is whether
or not the analysist is willing to recognize that there
are distinctive linguistic practices, and accordingly
ontological committments which are idiosyncratic to a
religious community. Kai Nielsen is one analysist who
refuses to make such a concession. I have in my final
chapter attempted to show that his position cannot be
maintained.

Turning to those analysists who grant that there

are at least proferred religious uses of language, we
can distinguish between those who criticize and those
who defend such uses. At the basis of their disputes,
I am suggesting that what is fundamentally at issue is
Quine's adjudication question. This question is not
directly spelled out in the controversy, but it is I
believe clearly presupposed. The critics hope to jeopar-
dize the theist's conceptual schema by pointing out
certain crucial incoherencies. The suppressed premis
here I suggest is that an incoherent use of language
cannot presume to make ontological claims. The defenders
for their part have been confined to the rather suspicious
task of offering ad hoc argumentation in favour of the
consistency of religious language.

In my thesis I have not attempted to come to
any sort of decision in this dispute. I have indicated
that I am in complete agreement with those methodological
axioms which happily both the critics and the defenders
are basing their argumentation upon. However, in my third
chapter, I suggest an enlargement of the context in terms
of which the current discussion is being waged. Calling
upon Peter Winch's notion of epistemology, I have advocated
a search for those epistemological conditions which must
be satisfied before a set of linguistic practices can be
said to admit any criteria of intelligibility. The reason

for this suggestion's being made in the context of the
philosophy of religion is a consequence of that discipline's
inability to make out whether theistic discourse actually
does posses any criteria of intelligibility.

INTRODUCTION

The word "religious" is placed in quotation marks in
my title in order to characterize the controversy to which
this thesis will direct itself. Essentially the dispute
centres around two questions: first, is there a religious use of
language?; and secondly, if there is such a use of language,
is it a legitimate one?

Contemporary philosophers of religion are approach-
ing these questions using the methods laid down by Wittgen-
stein in his _Philosophical Investigations_. Wittgenstein's
own work on these problems is quite limited, covering a
space of only some nineteen pages. In fact, the material
which we have available to us was not originally intended
for publication. It consists merely of a series of lecture
notes which were taken by Wittgenstein's students during
the summer of 1938. But given these limitations, I nonethe-
less believe that the lectures are worthy of our study.
For, to my mind, Wittgenstein's work here holds not only an
historical interest, but also a relevance to the current
discussions in the philosophy of religion.

Historically, I think the work is of value in that
we are here presented with one of the founding fathers of

ordinary language philosophy, applying its methods to the
realm of religious discourse. But surprising as it may seem,
Wittgenstein's position in the lectures has recently come
under attack by even those who profess an adherance to the
basic axioms of this method of doing philosophy. It will
be one of the two central purposes of this thesis to attempt
to show that such criticisms are based upon a mistaken in-
terpretation of Wittgenstein's actual views.

I think it is generally true that contemporary lin-
guistic philosophers view Wittgenstein's work as containing,
above all, a _method_ for coming to grips with philosophical
problems. This method has been found to be invaluable not
only in coming to terms with the questions of epistemology,
but also for problems arising in the philosophies of art,
science, religion, etc.. Now, as noted above, philosophers
of religion have come to apply this approach to the question
of the legitimacy of religious language. I cannot hope,
within the limits of this thesis, to set forth the linguistic
approach and the premises upon which it operates. This task
has already been done by others who are considerably more
competent than myself. Rather, it will be the second major
concern of this thesis to bring out certain aspects of this
method which have, as yet, to be employed in the philosophy
of religion.

My thesis will accordingly have two main lines of
thought running throughout. On the one hand, I will be

attempting to defend Wittgenstein's lectures against a
number of varied criticisms. On the other, I have hopes
of being a little more constructive. For I will be attempt-
ing to draw from Wittgenstein's methods a number of implica-
tions which I believe are of significant relevance to the
philosophy of religion. Through both phases of my presenta-
tion, I will of necessity be presupposing a knowledge of,
and in my case, an agreement with, the methods and principles
which Wittgenstein has offered in his Philosophical Inves-
tigations.

CHAPTER I

On the most cursory study of the history of thought
it soon becomes obvious that the conflict between the phil-
osopher and the theologian has been characterized by their
inability to agree upon a common basis for discussion. This
confrontation is complicated by the fact of its essentially
paradoxical nature. For philosophers generally have held
that it was their foremost responsibility to ground their
reasonings upon premises which would command a universal
assent. Their subsequent critiques of religion have accord-
ingly been felt to be both uncontroversial and final. A-
gainst such charges the theologian has traditionally refused
to admit in an unqualified form the truth of the philoso-
pher's premises. The theologian's position could here be
criticized as being unreasonable if the philosopher's prem-
ises were as uncontentious as he would have us believe. But
since philosophers themselves have been unable to come to
any substantial agreements, the theologian's misgivings appear
to be quite in order.

In the present century philosophers have come to
disdain the search for that which is self-evidently true.
They have been more concerned to understand what is in-
volved in the process of doing philosophy. The motivation

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for this most recent self-appraisal has come from the recog-
nition that there are some "assertions" which, although they
appear to be meaningful, are in fact simply disguised non-
sense. Philosophers had come to see that some of the utter-
ances which we take for assertions are either meaningless or
else mean something other than that which we think they mean.
This discovery has led philosophers to the realization that
the basis of their incessant disagreements could be found in
the deceptive nature of language. Only by a close analysis
of language could the philosophical community guard itself
against confusion and useless disputation.

Since the philosophers had found a means of coming
to agreement it seemed that at long last the communication
barrier between the philosopher and the theologian could
finally be removed. Needless to say, in its initial stages
the linguistic approach instead of uniting the two, seemed
to be driving them farther apart. In the 1930's the logical
positivist's approach to language had led them to the view
that the factual meaning of a statement was to be found in
its method of verification. The theologian had always felt
that he could make assertions about supernatural facts. But
to this, positivism now replied that in so far as theological
language succeeds in asserting anything at all, it fails to
refer beyond natural phenomena. Although the terrain has
been changed, it quickly becomes obvious that with positivism

we have yet another version of the long standing search for a common basis for discussion.[1] This impression is further justified by the philosophical community's subsequent misgivings about the coherence and adequacy of positivism's epistemology.

Contemporary philosophers have all but given over the positivist's program for what has come to be called ordinary language philosophy. It is a central tenet of this version of analysis that in order to become clear as to the meaning of an assertion one must see how it functions in everyday discourse. For only by coming to see how our words and sentences are used can we hope to know their real meaning. At first glance it would seem that philosophy and theology have finally found a meeting place. For ordinary language philosophy, as it relates to the philosophy of religion, demands that the analyst come to see the special uses and accordingly the unique meanings of the believer's assertions. By first having understood the meaning of theological language, the philosopher of religion believes that he has finally grounded himself on a basis which the theologian must respect.

I believe that such an approach more so than any other does give the philosopher and the theologian the opportunity

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[1] See A. J. Ayer, _Language, Truth and Logic_, (New York: Dover, 1961).

to engage in a meaningful dialogue. Some linguistic phil-
osophers have used this approach to attempt to show the
basically incoherent nature of religious discourse. It is
their view that upon a close scrutiny of the theologian's
linguistic practices one will discover fundamental, but well-
hidden inconsistencies.[2] Others have maintained that such a
charge cannot be substantiated. It is their belief that a
sympathetic and adequate approach will show just how distinc-
tive religious language turns out to be. Apparent inconsis-
tencies if placed in the context of the entire theistic
conceptual scheme will be shown to be ultimately unreal.[3]

In what follows I will not attempt to offer any
final pronouncement on this issue. Rather, I think that the
above dispute can be put in a different and possibly more
profitable light by considering the implications of Ludwig
Wittgenstein's work on the meaningfulness of religious lan-
guage. Now it should first be noted that Wittgenstein is
generally recognized as being one of the founding fathers
of ordinary language philosophy. His Philosophical Investi-
gations stands as probably the most penetrating statement of
both its aims and methods. Both those philosophers who defend

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[2] See C. B. Martin, Religious Belief, (Ithaca N.Y.: Cornell
University Press, 1959).

[3] See F. Ferré, Language, Logic and God, (New York: Harper
and Row, 1961).

·and those who oppose the meaningfulness of religious language are using tools which were originally forged by Wittgenstein. Accordingly, it seems appropriate to consider Wittgenstein's own views on this question. This seems all the more required since, as of late, some philosophers have claimed that Wittgenstein's position here is (1) inconclusive, (2) inconsistent, and (3) leads to conclusions which are obviously absurd.

My purpose in this thesis is not merely to dispel the misgivings and objections which have come to be associated with Wittgenstein's writings on religion. For I believe that implicit in the method which he used to settle the question of the meaningfulness of religious language one can discern a new means of bringing the theologian and his critics together. The common basis which I hope to point to will consist essentially in a greater understanding on the part of the philosopher of religion as to just what is involved in both there being a religious language and a religious way of life. It will be my view that an adequate appreciation of religious language must ultimately be grounded on an understanding of what is involved in there being a religious community. In Wittgensteinian terminology, only by coming to see what is involved in the religious "form of life" can one hope to adequately come to terms with the religious community's "language game".

But before we can hope to be in a position to deal

with these considerations we must first attempt to answer
Wittgenstein's critics. In the remaining section of this
chapter I should like to raise Stephen Toulmin's question
as to whether or not, for Wittgenstein, religious language
could stand as a meaningful language-game. It is Toulmin's
view that Wittgenstein's lectures on religious belief do
not decide the issue one way or the other. "They give no
explicit answer to the central question whether religious
discourse, too, comprises a legitimate system of meaningful
language-games."[4] Accordingly, he concludes that Wittgenstein
remained until the end, "as puzzled as ever" about the nature
of religious language.

Toulmin does not present a discussion of the lec-
tures in question. Rather, he argues for this conclusion
by stating and defending a number of theses which run counter
to the usual views of Wittgenstein's work. It should be
noted at the outset that without an analysis of Wittgenstein's
lectures, one cannot but feel hesitant about acquiescing in
such a conclusion. In my second chapter I will offer a dis-
cussion of these lectures with the purpose of showing that
the doubt which Toulmin finds in Wittgenstein's mind is quite
without foundation. But since Toulmin feels that he can maintain

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[4]S. Toulmin, "Ludwig Wittgenstein", Encounter, XXXIII (Jan.,
1969), 70.

this position without recourse to the lectures themselves,
we must first hear him out.

In all fairness the reader must be made aware of the
fact that Toulmin's article, "Ludwig Wittgenstein", is not
directly related to the problem of the meaningfulness of
religious language. Rather, in this work Toulmin offers
an assessment of the philosophical significance of both
Wittgenstein's earlier and later writings. I will not here
offer a summary of Toulmin's paper. Part of it is biogra-
phical, while large sections of its more philosophical
aspects are unrelated to the question under consideration.
Those segments which will concern us centre around Wittgen-
stein's relationship to logical positivism and Toulmin's
central theme that throughout his philosophical career
Wittgenstein was essentially a "critical" philosopher.

With regard to positivism, Wittgenstein's _Tractatus_
was taken up by the Vienna school as being their most pene-
trating statement of anti-metaphysical doctrines. The
mystical remarks at the end of that text were felt to be
unrelated to the more strictly logical arguments which lead
up to them. Toulmin begins his discussion by attempting to
place these seemingly divergent aspects into proper perspective.

Wittgenstein's anti-metaphysical position is put forth
on the basis of our language's inability to give the meta-
physician's expressions any cash value. This was not to

deny the presence of those intensely human states which lead
most men to, at times, ask meaningless and yet seemingly pro-
found questions. This point is forcefully made in his 1930
lecture on ethics. In this lecture, he maintains that we do
have experiences which seem to be of the greatest significance,
but which are incapable of a verbal expression. In the class
of such experiences Wittgenstein cites our wondering at the
existence of the world, and our experience of feeling perfectly
safe. About these moments he states; "And there, the first
thing I have to say is that the verbal expression which we
give to these experiences is nonsense! If I say, 'I am
wondering at the existence of the world' I am misusing lan-
guage."[5]

Paul Engelmann in his recently published memoir feels
that by disregarding the "mysticism" contained at the end of
the Tractatus the positivists had failed to see the works
wider and more traditionally philosophical aspects.

A whole generation of disciples was able to take Wittgenstein
for a positivist because he has something of enormous impor-
tance in common with positivists: he draws the line between
what we can speak about and what we must be silent about just
as they do. The difference is only that they have nothing to
be silent about. Positivism holds -- and this is its essence --
that what we can speak about is all that matters in life.
Whereas Wittgenstein passionately believes that all that
really matters in human life is precisely what in his view we
must be silent about. When he nevertheless takes immense pains
to delimit the unimportant, it is not the coastline of that

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[5] L. Wittgenstein, "Wittgenstein's Lectures in Ethics",
Philosophical Review, LXXIV (1965), P. 8.

island which he is surveying with such meticulous accuracy, but the boundary of the ocean.[6]

I think that on this question we can, with Toulmin and Engelmann, safely conclude that unlike positivistic philosophers, the Wittgenstein of the Tractatus was sympathetic to the needs which religious and ethical languages attempted to fulfill. Wittgenstein saw in such verbalizations mankind's desire to express that which was felt to be of central importance in the life of a human being. But our language here, upon analysis, can be shown to be meaningless. Hence, if the doctrines of the Tractatus were correct, humanity would be forever in the paradoxical position of trying to say that which the logic of our language is incapable of expressing.

The other aspect of Toulmin's article that we will be concerned with has to do with his contention that Wittgenstein should be viewed as a critical philosopher. By "critical" philosophy here Toulmin has in mind the writings of Immanual Kant. Toulmin feels that there is a great similarity between Kant's and Wittgenstein's conception of the role of philosophy. Kant wanted to bring out just where the boundary lies between those questions our reasoning powers were capable of dealing with and those questions which through our reason's own inherent

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[6] P. Engelmann, Letters From Ludwig Wittgenstein, trans. L. Furtmuller, ed. B. F. McGuiness, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1967), P. 97.

limitations, we could never hope to be able to answer. The state of confusion which metaphysicians found themselves in was a result of their trying to resolve questions for which there were simply no answers. For Toulmin both the Tractatus and the Investigations have essentially the same purpose. The significant difference with Wittgenstein is that instead of examining our reason, he concentrated his attention upon our language. This leads Toulmin to remark; "As a result Kant's philosophical tasks were restated yet again: (1) exploring the scope -- and the intrinsic limits -- of language; and (2) demonstrating the consequences of our irrepressible tendency to run up against, and attempt to overleap those unavoidable limits."[7]

In order to substantiate this view Toulmin offers what I believe to be a number of basically unobjectionable arguments. As his discussion relates to our topic, I hope that the following will stand as a fair representation of his line of reasoning. On the basis of his position in the Tractatus, Wittgenstein felt that both religious and ethical language had transgressed the boundaries of the sayable. But in the Investigations, Wittgenstein rejected the Tractatus view of meaning. In his latter work, Wittgenstein holds that

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[7] Toulmin, op. cit., 63.

in order to become clear as to the meaning of our words and sentences, one must attend to their actual uses in everyday language. So it seems that the Wittgenstein of the Investigations had found it necessary to change his method on how to become clear as to just where the sayable-unsayable boundary actually lies. With regard to our purposes the central question will be whether or not this new method will reveal that religious language can, after all, stand as a legitimate language-game.

Toulmin's remarks at this point give one the impression that a positive response to this question may jeopardize those of his findings which were used to vindicate a critical interpretation of both the Tractatus and the Investigations. He seems to be saying that if even religious language turns out to be unobjectionable, would this not wreak havoc on any attempt to show the inherent limitations of our language? As Toulmin formulates the problem;

In this second phase, Wittgenstein apparently implied that ethics and religion have 'forms of life' of their own, within which our ethical and religious 'language-games' become -- in their own ways -- as verbalizable, as meaningful and even as true-or-false as any others. So was he not compelled by his own later arguments to abandon the dichotomy between the expressible (or factual) and the transcendental (or ethical)?"8

8Ibid., 70.

Toulmin does not offer an answer to this question, but rather immediately goes on to say that Wittgenstein's lectures on religious belief do not decide this issue one way or the other. As stated, for my part I feel that such an answer does exist.

CHAPTER II

In this chapter, I will attempt to answer Toulmin's question as to whether or not for Wittgenstein religious discourse can stand as a system of meaningful language games. I shall also try to bring out why his lectures on religious belief may give one the impression that he was here unable to come to some sort of decision. But my first concern will be to construct a criticism of the text which may appear to be justifiable and then go on to show how it can be resolved.

The tasks which I have here set for myself will necessitate a very close textual analysis. An analysis of the kind which I am proposing will probably gain in accuracy that which it loses in coherence. This result does not necessarily have to follow, but when we bear in mind the style of Wittgenstein's writings, it seems highly probable that it will. Accordingly, in order to offset what may appear to be a chaotic presentation, I will begin with a brief summation.

The lectures consist basically of an attempted dialogue between Wittgenstein and a hypothetical theist. Wittgenstein first presents the theist's views, and then goes on to state what his responses would be. But after each

exchange, Wittgenstein tries to bring out the nature of those linguistic problems which stand in the way of _his_ being able to enter into any type of meaningful communication. So it _seems_ that we are presented with a discussion. But upon closer inspection, we discover very real hidden difficulties which, when unearthed, would probably make us hesitate to call such an exchange a true dialogue.

In the first section, Wittgenstein attempts to characterize the position he holds as it is related to a man who professes to be a theist. Our central concern here will be whether or not Wittgenstein can maintain this position without being open to the charge of inconsistency. It will be my task to point to a means of evading such a charge. In the second section, Wittgenstein through linguistic analysis, attempts to show what is at the basis of his differences with the theist. The third section deals with this same question in a more abstract form. Here Wittgenstein wants to bring out what is involved in people using the same words to mean different things. At this juncture, I will attempt to show why Wittgenstein's entire position might conceivably be taken as being inconclusive. But let us now leave this rather sketchy outline for Wittgenstein's actual writings.

Section I

The lectures open with the question regarding the belief in a resurrection after death. The theist

believes that there will be such a resurrection. If asked whether he believes in this, Wittgenstein answers that he does not, and that this is not to be taken as a contradiction of the theist's belief. Similarily some theists believe that illness is a result of earlier moral failings, whereas, for Wittgenstein his own sickness holds no such significance. As he states; "I think differently, in a different way. I say different things to myself. I have different pictures."[1]

Just how are we to characterize Wittgenstein's position as it is related to that of the theist? The problem may, at first glance, appear to be capable of being presented in terms of the following formalization: if "X is true" for individual A, then does it not follow that it must be similarily true for individual B? If sickness is the result of our moral failings, then would it not be contradictory to assert that it is not such a result? But what would it mean to say that illness is associated with morality? What would it mean to say that the body will be resurrected after death? Taken without reference to the doctrines of Christianity, and the Christian way of life, such notions would appear absurd. Wittgenstein is here pointing to the simple linguistic truth that one must understand what is being said before one can hope to be in a position to offer a contradiction. With

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[1] L. Wittgenstein, Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology, and Religious Belief, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967), P. 55.

regard to the theist's beliefs, Wittgenstein does not profess

to have such an understanding. He states; "And then I give

an explanation: 'I don't believe in ...' but then the re-

ligious person never believes what I describe. I can't say,

I can't contradict that person."[2]

Wittgenstein is here pointing to the presence of a

communication break down between himself and the theist. In

one sense Wittgenstein maintains he does understand what the

theist says in that he understands the words the believer is

using. But, in another, and more profound sense, he does

not understand the theist, for he does not make the connec-

tions which the theist makes. That is, he cannot see the

theist's assertions in relation to the Christian way of life,

and this way of life's own relationship to its theological

foundations. Accordingly, failing to fully understand the

theist's meaning, he cannot hope to contradict him.

Wittgenstein wants his listeners to see that a

Christian's religious assertions are part of a very dis-

tinctive language-game. We must come to appreciate that

"reasons" in the case of religious language are to be taken

in a sense which is quite different from the sense which they

ordinarily possess. Also, those things which would count as

"evidence" in everyday life have little cash value in terms

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[2]Ibid., 55.

of the true believer's way of life. For, suppose, says Wittgenstein, that the theist and atheist were confronted with the verified fact that in the future there was to be a Judgment Day. If the atheist were to believe in this fact, this would not make him classifiable as now being a theist. Belief in this fact, and the subsequent changes that it may cause him to make in his way of life, is a belief in a verified fact. The theist's belief here is not to be taken as being of the same order as those beliefs that most people claim for scientific facts. If a religious man is confronted with scientific evidence about the inevitability of a Last Judgment, Wittgenstein holds that it is not inconceivable that this may cause him to feel that his belief must now break down.

At this point in my presentation, I should like to begin to formulate a charge of inconsistency against Wittgenstein. The charge will have the following basis: if Wittgenstein cannot fully understand the meaning of the theist's assertions, then he cannot presume to be able to say that scientific considerations are irrelevant to the faith of the believer. For it seems obviously true in principle that if individual A maintains that consideration X is irrelevant to the subject-matter Y, this statement presupposes some knowledge of Y on the part of A.

As the argument progresses we find Wittgenstein ruling out of court not only verified future events, but also historical

facts. In speaking of Christianity he maintains; "It doesn't rest on an historic basis in the sense that the ordinary belief in historical facts could serve as a foundation."[3]

Wittgenstein goes on to play down a certain Father O'Hara's attempt to give religious belief a scientific justification. He feels that, in this, O'Hara is being "unreasonable", and that he is "cheating himself". But if the gap between himself and the theist is as great as he makes it out to be, then how can he, Wittgenstein, presume to have such a knowledge?

In effect, we are here criticizing Wittgenstein for bringing into being the same type of situation he found himself in at the end of the Tractatus. It will be remembered that towards the end of his earlier work, Wittgenstein had recognized that on the basis of the principles he had set forth the language of his text was unacceptable. Does not Wittgenstein's position in the lectures involve him in the same type of contradiction? He wants on the one hand to say that he is not a participant in the religious "form of life", and on that basis its language is all but meaningless to him. But at the same time, on the other hand, he maintains that scientific considerations are unrelated to the truths of Christianity. It seems that he cannot possibly have it both ways.

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[3]Ibid., 57.

But here we must tread very carefully. We seem to be coming perilously close to making a reification out of Wittgenstein's phrase "form of life". Our charge of inconsistency is based on there being no communication on religious matters between those who adhere to the Christian way of life and those who do not. Both ways of life are made to stand like compartments which are completely sealed off from one another. The theist thinks and organizes his life in terms of a Christian conceptual environment, while the atheist works in terms of another. Such a portrayal, although it may appear attractive to a Protagoras, is essentially the result of our playing with words, and is ultimately untrue to reality.

Must a man be religious himself in order to know the meaning of a religious assertion? Most of us in our youth, and Wittgenstein is no exception, received some type of religious training. Some in the course of their later years have gone on to repudiate their earlier beliefs. They have given up their religious practices and would now classify themselves as atheists or agnostics. But if they were confronted with a man who claims to be a Roman Catholic, and at the same time is engaged in the act of adultery, they may validly maintain that this man's actions contradict his belief and that he is deserving of the religious community's moral censure. How can the atheist, in this case, presume

to know what is consistent or inconsistent with Catholicism? His knowledge is valid, because, other things being equal, his assertion would be acceptable to the members of the religious community. This implies that a man's knowledge of a form of life of which he is not a participant, is contingent upon the acceptability that his assertions would be met with by the members of that form of life.

From the above, it should be obvious that the validity of our charge of inconsistency ultimately lies in the hands of the religious community. If Wittgenstein's remarks as to the relevance of science to religion are to have a real cash value, they must be seen as being acceptable by the religious community as a whole. But from the text it seems obvious that in this Wittgenstein felt he was on solid ground. As he says; "Anyone who reads the Epistles will find it said: not only that it is not reasonable, but that it is folly. Not only is it not reasonable, but it doesn't pretend to be. What seems to me ludicrous about O'Hara is his making it appear to be reasonable."[4]

Section II

In this section, Wittgenstein is concerned to show that questions of meaning should go hand in hand with questions

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[4]Ibid., 58.

of use. He is here hinting at those notions which were to

form the basic premises of his Philosophical Investigations.

As an historical note, it should be remembered that at the

time he was delivering these lectures, Wittgenstein was in

the process of formulating those ideas which were to be

finally incorporated into his Investigations. It is, there-

fore, hardly surprising that some of the central considerations

of his major work should find their way into his discussions

of religious language. It is my belief that if we keep in

mind the content of this larger work, we will be able to gain

a finer appreciation of the significance of the points Wittgen-

stein is here raising.

At the heart of this section, we find Wittgenstein's

attempt to bring out the distinctive nature of the words

"belief" and "evidence" when used in a religious context. He

considers a number of cases where an individual maintains a

belief, even after he has been given evidence to the contrary.

In such cases we cannot say that this individual is basing

his belief on insufficient evidence. The reason why such a

charge cannot be validly laid is that the normal use of the

word "evidence" does not apply in these contexts. Wittgenstein

takes the case of an individual whose belief in the Last Judg-

ment is based upon a dream. In itself this dream cannot in

any ordinary sense of the term be said to be evidence. It can

function as evidence if placed in the context of a man's hopes

and fears, and attitudes towards life and death. This is

consistent with the method used in the <u>Investigations</u> for getting clear on the meaning of words. The words "evidence" and "belief" can have very different meanings on the basis of the different roles they have to play. Thus, when Wittgenstein is confronted with a theist using these words in a religious framework, he recognizes that the normal rules of usage do not apply. As Wittgenstein states; "I would not say: 'If a man said he dreamt it would happen tomorrow', would he take his coat? etc..."[5]

Accordingly, in this section it would seem that Wittgenstein is pointing out that his differences with the theist come down to their different uses of the same words. In order to fully understand the theist's meaning he would have to be able to use religious language in the way in which a theist does.

Section III

In the above section we saw Wittgenstein encouraging his listeners to come to recognize that a theist's assertions are meaningful in terms of a religious language game. He is here largely unconcerned with the actual constituents of any particular language game. Rather, by bringing two distinct language games into conjunction, he hopes to throw some light

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[5]<u>Ibid.</u>, 52.

on those unifying factors in each which justify the applica-
tion of the phrase "language game". Needless to say, this
is a very large question. An answer on the scale that we
would desire would, I believe, take us to the core of his
Philosophical Investigations. I can only hope that in con-
sidering the analysis to follow the reader will keep in mind
the central notions of his larger work.

In order to come to terms with these issues, I will
follow Wittgenstein in his attempts to become clear on what
is involved in people having different ideas about the same
subject. As this question relates to our discussion, we have
seen that the theist's assertions must be placed in the con-
text of a religious language game. If they are not, considered
from an ordinary language stand point, they are either absurd
or meaningless. But we must now consider how it happens that
the presence of such a language game can protect them against
such charges. As Wittgenstein raises the problem; "What's it
like to have two different ideas? What is the criterion for
one man's having one idea, another man having another?"[6]

Wittgenstein does not immediately start off by treat-
ing these "ideas" as if they belonged to two different lan-
guage games. Rather, he begins the inquiry in terms of a
single language game -- that of ordinary language. He wants

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[6] Ibid., 66.

his listeners to note that the relationship between our pro-
positions and the world is one that is established by con-
vention. In learning the language of our society we come to
master these conventions. That is, we have learned the tech-
niques involved in using language in accord with these con-
ventions. But there is, of course, always the possibility
that we may misuse this technique. The results of such errors
are usually labelled "nonsense". There are semantical and
syntactical rulings which regulate the types of sentences we
can formulate. Our assertions are taken to be meaningful or
nonsensical on the basis of their adherance to or divergence
from these rulings. Accordingly, we can test the meaning of
a questionable assertion by invoking our rules of proper usage.
As Wittgenstein states; "'Well, I know what I mean...' as
though you were looking at something happening while you said
the thing, entirely independent of what came before and after,
the application (of the phrase). It looked as though you
could talk of understanding a word without reference to the
technique of its usage."[7]

Wittgenstein takes these considerations and applies
them to persons who have different ideas about death. He
begins with the instance of an individual who claims that
his idea of death is not affected by the use to which that

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[7]Ibid., 68.

word is put. Wittgenstein here simply denies this individual's

right to say that he has an "idea of death". His antagonist

must make some linguistic use of his "idea" if it is to stand

as being meaningful. The opponent might counter by saying

that his idea is private and does not have any public use. To

this, Wittgenstein states that if his notion of death is not

found in our common language, then his notion does not merit

the title "death". As he says; "If what he calls his 'idea of

death' is to become relevant, it must become part of our game."[8]

    Wittgenstein next goes on to consider the theist.

His idea of death entails his maintaining that upon a person's

death his soul will separate from his body. Now, Wittgenstein

says that, upon hearing this, he has some general thoughts

about what was said, but he does not know exactly what is

meant. He feels that he must see what further consequences

are drawn. He must, in other words, see this assertion's

relationship to its natural home in religious discourse. It

would be overly rash to condemn such an assertion as mean-

ingless or to immediately attempt to contradict it before

one has appreciated its full significance.

    But how are we to know when we have fully understood

what is said? Wittgenstein felt that the understanding he

desired was intimately bound up with the theist's ability to

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[8]Ibid., 69.

use religious language in the way he does. The true believer
when discussing the Last Judgment or the soul's separation
from the body after death is using words in a way that Wittgen-
stein is not totally familiar with. He understands part of
the theist's assertions, but does not see those implications
which the theist sees. More importantly, Wittgenstein does
not organize his life in the way in which such notions cause
the theist to organize his. Confronted with an illness, the
theist immediately begins to talk about questions of morality.
But when he is sick, Wittgenstein says he would not even
think about questions of morals. The theist here acts and
thinks in a way which is foreign to Wittgenstein. The extent
of this foreignness becomes manifest when they begin to talk
about religion. It is through religious language and the dif-
ferent uses they both make of it, that Wittgenstein comes to
see how very far he is from truly understanding the meaning
of the theist's remarks.

Wittgenstein is here implicitly telling us that the
first and final check which confirms him in his ignorance of
religious discourse is his inability to use religious language
in the way in which a theist does. If he could go on to make
the type of conceptual connections that the theist makes, and
if he could go on to treat new experiences in the way in which
a theist does, then he would have found the understanding that
he desires. But his inability to "go on" shows him the
limits of his understanding, just as the presence of this

ability would indicate his complete comprehension.

Let us now turn to the considerations with which I opened this section. It was there stated that in this section Wittgenstein would come to grips with the fact of there being different language games. He has, I believe, adequately shown that the presence of a religious language is contingent upon the members of the religious community agreeing to use their language in a certain way. He has proved this point by his own inability to use religious language in the manner it is used by a representative of this community. As noted earlier, ordinary language guards itself against illicit uses by de- —manding of its practitioners that they accord their use with accepted syntactical and semantical rulings. Similarily, religious language has its own rulings. These rulings, Wittgenstein has come to see, must likewise be mastered before one can profess to understand its meanings. Accordingly, it seems that the existence of a language game, either religious or otherwise, demands both the presence of such rulings and a people's willingness to accord with them. In my next chapter I will attempt to offer an elaboration on these points.

But before I leave this chapter I would like to for- mulate an answer to Toulmin's question. It will be recalled that Toulmin held that the lectures on religious belief in- dicated that Wittgenstein was undecided as to whether or not religious language constituted a legitimate language game.

On the basis of the foregoing discussion, it should be apparent
how the lectures readily lend themselves to this interpreta-
tion. Since Wittgenstein was unable to use religious language
in the way in which a theist does, he did not have an insider's
grasp of the significance of this mode of discourse. But he
did not deny the presence of not only a distinctive language
game, but also of a unique way of viewing one's life. Re-
ligious discourse does stand as meaningful for Wittgenstein
in that he was not in a position to say that on its own grounds
it was meaningless.

CHAPTER III

Contemporary thinkers who are engaged in the phil-

osophy of religion and who utilize the linguistic approach

have, unlike Wittgenstein, claimed to know the uses to which

religious language is put. As opposed to positivists, these

philosophers feel that it is their foremost responsibility

to come to see how religious language actually functions.

They have learned from Wittgenstein that criticism, from

outside of the religious community's conceptual scheme,

has no cash value. The theist could justly reply that his

critics have grossly distorted his meaning, and hence their

subsequent attacks are quite irrelevant.

As stated in Chapter I ordinary language philosophers

have been unable to agree about the legitimacy of religious

discourse. Some have felt that the theist is claiming things

which he cannot possibly hope to be able to substantiate.

They have also held that a close inspection of a theist's

linguistic practices will reveal fundamental inconsistencies.

Others have countered by saying that the theist's claims are

valid in the light of his unique metaphysical basis. They

have also maintained that the critic's charge of inconsistent

usage is based upon an inadequate understanding of the logic

of theological discourse. Let us very briefly consider an

example of these differing lines of argument.

Some theologians have felt that by means of a religious experience, the existence of God is made manifest to the believer. Against this position, it has been held that from the fact of there being such experiences one cannot either deductively or inductively infer the existence of a supernatural being. In reply to this charge, theists have countered by saying that such experiences are self-verifying, "that is, ... this one kind of experience is capable of providing a foundation for ontological claims despite the lack of predictive power or testing procedures that are usually required for vindicating an existential claim."[1]

C. B. Martin claims to have "lived through" a number of forms of Christianity, and feels that he is quite capable of speaking to the theologian on his own ground. He demands that we must first come to appreciate the significance of the theologian's arguments before we can show their invalidity. After a close, and what he believes to be a fair presentation of the theist's position, Martin concludes that the theologian's arguments do not have the ontological force which is claimed for them. Martin states; "Because 'having a direct experience of God' does not admit the relevance of a society

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[1] F. Ferré, Language, Logic and God, (New York: Harper and Row, 1961), P. 106.

of tests and checking procedures it places itself in the com-
pany of other ways of knowing which preserve their self-
sufficiency, 'uniqueness', and 'incommunicability', by making
a psychological and not an existential claim".[2]

Martin's position here has come under attack by phil-
osophers who claim to have a better understanding of the
theologian's actual views. Frederick Ferré finds that the
"testing procedures" Martin has in mind are "sense observa-
tions made by independent observers".

Now we find that the paradigm for the meaning of the word
"existence" which is tacitly employed in this argument is
"thing open to relevant sense observations". Thus, for
Martin the phrase " existent reality" entails by definition
"open to test by sense observation". When it is discovered
that theological claims are not so open to test, Martin is
able to conclude by modus tollens that these claims are not
about "existent realities".[3]

But this definition of existing beings is obviously one with
which a theologian would not agree. For he wants to say that
God is not of a nature such that sense observations could be
used as a testing procedure.

I will not in this thesis attempt to come to some
sort of decision on the above dispute. Nor will I have re-
course to any of those other arguments which ordinary lan-
guage philosophers have used to both support and to attack
the legitimacy of religious language. I will say, however.

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[2]C. B. Martin, "A Religious Way of Knowing", in New Essays
in Philosophical Theology, ed. A. Flew (London: SCM Press,
1955), P. 85.

[3]Ferré, op. cit., 110.

that it is my view that this approach to religious language is substantially the correct one. I say this in full awareness that such an approach has all the appearances of being inconclusive. For it may appear that for every charge of inconsistency, there is the possibility of the counter-charge that such a criticism is based on an inadequate understanding of the full significance of religious discourse. It seems that by advocating this method we have inadvertently made it impossible for the philosopher ever to know if religious language constitutes a system of legitimate language games.

It will be recalled that I had opened this thesis by noting that the dispute between philosophy and theology over the ages was essentially characterized by their mutual inability to find a common basis for discussion. I believe that by employing the methods of ordinary language philosophy we will have gone a long way to finding such a basis. If our criticisms of theological language are met with the charge of inadequacy, then at least we will have impressed upon the theologian the need for conceptual clarity. This need should appear all the more urgent in that our criticisms are couched in terms of a language which he both accepts and uses. Now if these criticisms go unanswered, the philosopher can take pride in the fact that he at least tried to meet the theologian half way.

But how can the writings of Wittgenstein be of any more

assistance than they already have been? It seems that philosophers owe a large debt to Wittgenstein in that he has furnished them with the methods they have come to use. But we have seen that Wittgenstein confessed himself to be ignorant of the uses of religious language. So should not the philosopher of religion simply pay his respects, and then go on to deal with those subtle linguistic questions which Wittgenstein would have been unable to even formulate?

I think that in view of their generally agreed upon quest for a greater understanding of religious discourse this would constitute an oversight. For there is, I believe, an aspect of religious language which, as yet, has received little attention. This aspect is hinted at in the third section of Wittgenstein's lectures. It will be recalled that towards the end of his lectures we saw Wittgenstein engaged in the process of comparing two relatively distinct language games -- ordinary language and religious language. From this comparison we were given an insight into some of their unifying factors. More significantly, we were, I believe, obliquely coming to see some of those conditions which must be satisfied before there could be a language game at all.

We had come to see that certain assertions which would be meaningful in the context of religious discourse would be all but meaningless in terms of ordinary language. To use an analogy with games, certain moves in game X would not be allowed

to _stand_ as moves at all in terms of game Y. But by com-
paring these two games we can come to see some of those
general features that each game must possess if it is to be
classed as a "game" at all. To put this in a slightly dif-
ferent way, there are certain conditions which must be satis-
fied before each can be taken as being a "game". By confining
ourselves exclusively to one game these conditions would pro-
bably go unnoticed. But by placing two rather dissimilar
games into conjunction we would come to see that behind all
of the differences, there are, nonetheless, certain similarities.
Football and chess, for instance, are played according to very
different rulings, but, nonetheless, they are both played ac-
cording to rulings.

I think that in the case of language games we are
confronted with the same type of situation. We can, I believe,
for purposes of analysis, draw a distinction between those
rulings in terms of which an assertion can be taken as mean-
ingful, and those conditions which have made such rulings
possible. The point which I am here trying to make finds its
most concise expression in Peter Winch's _The Idea of a Social
Science_. I will now offer a brief summation of those aspects
of his work which relate to our topic of discussion.

In _The Idea of a Social Science_, Winch attempts to put
into proper perspective the relationships that exist between

philosophy, the natural sciences, and the social sciences.
His major antagonist throughout is that school of thought which
feels that the social sciences must adopt the methodology of
the natural sciences. For the purposes of this thesis we will
be primarily concerned with his views on philosophy in general.
More specifically, we will attempt to bring out the relation-
ship that Winch finds between epistemology and the philosophy
of religion.

In presenting his view of philosophy, Winch begins by
contrasting it with what he calls the "underlabourer conception
of philosophy". According to this approach, our understanding
of the world is furthered by developments in science. Phil-
osophy is concerned merely with the dissolving of linguistic
confusions. On this interpretation, epistemology and meta-
physics are incapable of making any real knowledge claims.
They simply provide us with the tools that will be used in the
clarification of conceptual muddles -- muddles which arise in
other non-philosophical disciplines. Against this view, Winch
maintains that it is fallacious to hold that our knowledge of
reality is limited to our knowledge of matters of fact. Tradi-
tional philosophical problems, such as the nature of reality,
cannot be dealt with by the means used in the empirical sciences.
Such questions are to be taken as requests for conceptual eluci-
cations. It is to these considerations that the philosopher
may justifiably direct himself.

But how can a conceptual elucidation increase our knowledge of the world? This question is a request for a statement as to how our language is related to the world. In answering this, Winch relies heavily on Wittgenstein's work on private language in the Philosophical Investigations. Essentially, Winch wants to show that our knowledge of the world is correlated with our ability to use a language. For in order to know that you have had experience "X" you must be able to describe this experience either to yourself or to others in terms which have been accepted by the members of the society of which you are a part. In the absence of such a formulation the individual is not denied having an experience, but he is denied having any knowledge of this experience.

But how queer for this to be the logical condition of someone's having such and such an experience! After all, you don't say that one only has 'tooth-ache' if one is capable of doing such and such -- from this it follows that we cannot be dealing with the same concept of experience here. It is a different, though related concept. It is only if someone can do, has learnt, is master of such and such, that it makes sense to say he has had this experience."[4]

Accordingly, Winch maintains that the conceptual elucidations which the philosopher has to offer are to be construed as increasing our understanding of the world. The conceptual muddles which the philosopher is called upon to resolve will

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[4]L. Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1953), Part II, Section XI.

still arise from the work done in other intellectual disciplines. But the philosophers of science, religion, art, etc. will have as their central concern an appreciation of how the world is made intelligible in terms of scientific concepts, religious concepts, artistic concepts, etc. Because the concepts in such studies are in many ways radically distinct, the subsequent understanding of the nature of reality will also be distinct. But what of the epistemologist who is concerned with the problem of the knowledge of reality as such? Winch states that the epistemologist will be concerned "to describe those conditions which must be satisfied if there are to be any criteria of understanding at all."[5] I would like to now conclude my exposition of Winch's text with the following question. How would the epistemologist go about discovering these conditions?

Part of the answer, I believe, may lie in the approach taken by Wittgenstein towards the end of his lectures. By comparing two distinct language games and concentrating upon their common features, Wittgenstein had come to see some of those conditions a Winchian epistemologist would be in search of. For it will be recalled that Wittgenstein was here stating why he was unable to know the full significance of a theist's assertions. He was not telling us how the world is made

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[5]P. Winch, The Idea of a Social Science, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958), P. 21.

intelligible in terms of religious language. Rather, he was
pointing to the presence of certain conditions which he
could comply with in the case of ordinary discourse, but
which he could not satisfy in the case of religious lan-
guage. His inability to meet these conditions justified
him in his ignorance of religious language.

But what relevance would these considerations have
for the philosopher of religion? He might readily agree to
there being such conditions, but then go on to say that ob-
viously these conditions have been satisfied in the case of
religious discourse. This fact, he would claim, has been
confirmed by the presence of an ongoing religious language.
The epistemologist's work, although interesting enough, would
appear irrelevant to the attempt to get clear on the uses of
this language. For prima facie it would seem that the clari-
fication of the conditions for there being criteria of under-
standing should be held apart from the attempt to discover
what these criteria are.

This objection on the part of the philosopher of re-
ligion would be valid if it did not contain the premise that
there is an ongoing religious use of language. As I have
noted at the beginning of this chapter, the central question
in the philosophy of religion to-day is whether or not the
religious uses of language are legitimate. The question of
the legitimacy of religious language would seem to be prior

to the admittance of there being such uses. For the critics
believe themselves to be justified in denying that there is
a religious use of language insofar as they have shown that
such uses are basically incoherent. Of course, one might
maintain that an incoherent use is a use nonetheless. But if
it became generally agreed upon that such a use was incoherent,
I think one would have a hard time making a case for its con-
tinuance. In the light of such a consequence, I believe one
should be rather hesitant about acquiescing in labelling recog-
nized incoherencies as being "uses" of language. At least,
one should be unwilling to label them "uses" in that sense of
"use" which would be predicated of our more unobjectionable
linguistic practices.

Accordingly, it seems to me that the central question
in the philosophy of religion should be couched in terms of
the very existence of a religious use of language. Now it
is my contention, on Winch's instigation, that such a question
should be construed as admitting of two dimensions, i.e. (1)
in terms of the criteria of understanding, and (2) in terms
of the conditions for there being criteria. In the contem-
porary writings of philosophers of religion this problem has
been approached solely in relationship to the actual uses of
religious language. It is of course possible that the legiti-
macy question can be completely resolved in terms of this
approach. But it is my suggestion that the inconclusive

nature of the current discussions may possibly be circumvented by a widening of the context of our analysis.

To repeat. As Winch has pointed out in the discussion of the uses of a language there are two separate questions which can be asked. We can ask either (1) how is the language being used? or (2) what are those necessary and sufficient conditions for there being such uses. To my knowledge both the critics and the defenders of the religious uses of language have confined themselves to question (1). This question has the inestimable value of bringing the philosopher and the religious man closer together. But the charge of illegitimacy, and the subsequent inability to satisfactorily make it out one way or the other, should I suggest, lead us to consider question number (2).

My reason for suggesting this transition is basically one of methodology. For it seems evident that if we were to discover that religious discourse is epistemologically unsound, then we would have implicitly answered the question as to the legitimacy of the uses of such language. On the other hand, if religious language can accord with the demands of the epistemologist, the current debate in the philosophy of religion will have thereupon been placed on a solid foundation.

My purpose in this chapter has been to show that in the writings of Wittgenstein we do find evidence for the existence of this epistemological dimension. But I am afraid

that neither Winch nor myself have been able to do much more than simply point to the presence of such a dimension. We have been unable to offer a clear formulation of just what these epistemological conditions are. Accordingly, my remarks so far can only be construed as the initial sketches of a program -- a program which I cannot in this work attempt to fill in.

I should like to conclude this chapter by outlining a series of steps which would lead the philosopher of religion to the recognition of both the existence of this epistemological dimension, and its relevance to the problems he is addressing. My discussion will be aimed at bringing to light the presuppositions of his analysis.

What follows will be largely a reformulation of the essential components of the line of reasoning which I have already presented. The rationale behind my re-introducing them, is to attempt to underline their cogency. Again, I must admit that in the following I will do little more than point to both the existence and the significance of such a dimension.

Let us begin by reminding ourselves of the nature of the interchange occurring between the defender of religious discourse and his critics. The critic usually attempts to demonstrate the inherent inconsistencies in the theist's use of language. The defender counters with the charge that the

critic's attack is based upon an inadequate grasp of the dis-
tinctive nature of religious language. He then goes on to
broaden the critic's model of the theist's conceptual schema
in order to take account of this apparent inconsistency. I
am not saying that the discussion always takes this form, but
rather that this is generally the case.

Confronted with the above situation our exasperated
critic may very well go on to ask just what would count as
an inconsistent usage in the realm of religious discourse.
This would not be an unreasonable request, particularly when
considered in the light of the ad hoc nature of the defender's
argumentation. This question is fair in a far more interesting
sense for obviously a use of language which cannot be shown to
permit of inconsistency can hardly be called a use of language.

The critic should be very careful of the response
that the defendant has to offer. For whether he is aware of
it or not, our critic has really asked two quite independent
questions of the defender of religious discourse. The first
question has to do with the actual criteria of intelligibility
present in religious language. But implicit in this first
question is the epistemological question as to the justifica-
tion of there being these criteria. A positive response to
the first question presupposes that the defendant knows what
is to stand as a criterion of understanding. The second
question is a challenge to this very knowledge claim. That

is to say, question number two asks in virtue of what justification can the defendant be said to know what is to stand as a criterion of understanding.

The critic, as best as I can make out, has contented himself with the search for inconsistencies in the theist's use of language. These inconsistencies may well be there. But so far his charges have not gone unchallenged, and in some cases have been evenly met. While this type of interchange is productive, I believe that we have illicitly presupposed the defendant's ability to answer our epistemological question. In all fairness it should be noted that not only would the defendant presume to such a knowledge, but that the critic, in the context of say our ordinary use of language, would make a similar presupposition.

But of course the point at issue is not the possibility of there being incoherencies present in our ordinary use of language. Rather, the point centres on the actual charges of illegitimacy which have been brought to bear against the religious uses of language. These charges, as I have maintained, rightfully exaggerate the relationship of epistemology to the philosophy of religion.

CHAPTER IV

I think it is generally true that philosophers in
their approach to the uses of religious language have been
consistent with Wittgenstein's views in both his lectures
and his Philosophical Investigations. They have rightfully
abstained from attempting to criticize that mode of discourse
until they have completely familiarized themselves with it.
Moreover, the critic will usually condemn his remarks as
irrelevant if the religious community has not guaranteed the
soundness of his appreciation of their linguistic practices.

In this chapter I propose to treat a work which is op-
posed to the foregoing methodological axioms. Nielsen, in his
"Wittgensteinian Fideism", maintains that criticisms of reli-
gious language need not be stated in terms of a context which
is acceptable to the Christian community. For he holds that
religious discourse can be criticized on independent grounds.

It is particularly appropriate that we should consider
Nielsen's article, for his work is indirectly related to
Wittgenstein's own approach to religious language. I say
"indirectly" for at the time of the writing of Nielsen's
article, Wittgenstein's Lectures and Conversations on
Aesthetics, Psychology, and Religious Belief was not avail-
able in print. Therefore, Nielsen's arguments are not di-
rected against a position which was held by Wittgenstein.

Rather, the Wittgensteinian fideism which he calls into question is attributed to a number of philosophers who have felt that such a position is consistent with Wittgenstein's work in the Philosophical Investigations. But as to the consistency of this position with Wittgenstein's own, Nielsen states that it is his view "that the fideistic conclusions drawn by these philosophers from his thought are often absurd". Nielsen expresses the sentiment that he can only hope that Wittgenstein, himself, would have disowned any such extension. He singles out as his opposition the position taken by Winch in his, The Idea of a Social Science, and his, "Understanding a Primitive Society". Now, on the basis of his lectures on religious belief it has been my view that Wittgenstein was far from condemning religious language as being meaningless. Moreover, it has been my belief that only by using the methods laid down by Wittgenstein in both his Investigations and Lectures can the philosopher hope to engage in a meaningful dialogue with the theologian. Nielsen recognizes the soundness of this approach, but believes that Peter Winch is pushing it too far.

Nielsen does not want to deny that the theologian's use of language is quite unique. Rather, he wants to maintain that for all of its uniqueness, religious discourse does bear certain similarities to everyday language. On the basis of these similarities it can be subject to those lines

of criticisms which ground themselves on our ordinary use
of language. Now it might seem that the dispute between
Winch and Nielsen comes down to simply whether one is going
to stress the uniqueness of a language game as opposed to
its similarity with other language games. If this was all
their disagreement involved we would hardly call it a "dis-
pute".

What Nielsen really wants to do is to deny religious
discourse its status as a distinct "language game" encased
in a unique "form of life". His line of argument will, I
believe, be shown to suffer from its lack of a clearly de-
fined opposition. This is not simply the result of the fact
that Winch has not offered an explicit statement as to how
he would view the religious way of life in the context of
Western society to-day. Rather, I believe it is a result of
Nielsen's arguing against the "conclusions" of his opponents'
position, instead of starting at the premises. When Wittgen-
stein implicitly calls religious discourse a unique "language
game" he does so after noting quite distinct uses of such
key words as "faith", "belief", "death", etc.. Also the re-
ligious way of life is allowed to stand as a "form of life"
because, among other things, the theist views his experiences
in a way which is quite different from the way the atheist
views his. The phrases "language game" and "forms of life"
are, it seems to me, convenient labels, which are used to

note the presence of these types of differences. There
being such labels does not guarantee that the theist's use
of, say the word "verification" will be different from its
use in a non-religious context. Only by first examining
his linguistic practices can we be justified in claiming
such a difference. The differences that we find, may, as
Wittgenstein had found, guard the theist's use against the
charge of inconsistency. On the other hand, if we find that
no such difference exists, then the theist's use is subject
to those rulings which ordinarily govern the term's use.
In such a case the theologian, just as well as the ordinary
man, may be susceptible to the charge of incoherent usage.

We must, I believe, first ascertain where our re-
ligious use of language overlaps with our ordinary use before
we can hope to have a solid foundation upon which to base
our criticisms. Only after completing such an analysis will
we be able to mount effective criticism. Nielsen's failure
to take account of the need for such a clarification seems
to be at the basis of my disagreement with him. But let us
now leave these introductory remarks for a more concrete
treatment of his text.

Nielsen opens his formal discussion with an example
of the type of controversy that is at present occuring over
the status of religious discourse. He begins by considering
a series of criticisms which G. E. Hughes has brought to

bear against one of the central theses which C. B. Martin has put forth in his Religious Belief. In this text, Martin argues that the religious community uses the word "God" as both a descriptive term and as a proper name. The term can validly be used in either of these two ways. But by attempting to use the term in both ways at the same time the religious community's usage turns out to be logically incoherent. Hughes states that this charge would be valid if the word "God" does function as a descriptive term and as a proper name. But he maintains that in the context of the religious way of life this word functions in neither of these two senses. Since God in the Jewish and Christian tradition is not thought of as a particular thing, the use of this term cannot be analogous to the use of non-theological terms.

Hughes defends his position by the fact that religious language is part of an established form of life, and as such it must, therefore, have a coherent order. Against this, Nielsen notes that in every age there have been persons who have had a participant's understanding of the uses of religious language, but have, nonetheless, rejected it as being basically incoherent. Nielsen recognizes that both he and Hughes are basing their positions upon an argumentum ad populum, and accordingly is led to remark; "This seems to me to count heavily, though surely not decisively, against thinking that

at rock bottom such talk must have a coherent order."[1]

At this point in his discussion, Nielsen offers a brief summary of some of the central notions which Peter Winch has put forth in both his "Understanding a Primitive Society", and his The Idea of a Social Science. In the course of my last chapter I have already touched upon many of these ideas. But by now following Nielsen's discussion, I think we will be able to present them in a considerably more coherent fashion. Let us begin with Winch's "Understanding a Primitive Society".

In this article Winch attempts to bring out some of the difficulties with E. E. Evans-Pritchard's approach in his Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic Among the Azande. Evans-Pritchard recognizes that in order to make sense out of cultural practices other than our own these practices must be understood on their own terms. In the case of the Azande's magical practices we can only appreciate their significance after we have seen the role they play in the Azande culture. But although Azande magical beliefs may be logically coherent in that they are presented in accord with the rules of thought, these beliefs may, nonetheless, be untrue to reality insofar as what is real is determined by the scientific method. Against this position, Winch is urging that what is

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[1]K. Nielsen, "Wittgensteinian Fideism", Journal of Philosophy, XLII (July 1967), 196.

"real" cannot be meaningfully determined outside of the language where that term and others which are related to it are given their sense. As Winch maintains; "Evans-Pritchard, on the contrary, is trying to work with a conception of reality which is not determined by its actual use in language. He wants something against which that use can itself be appraised. But this is not possible, and no more possible in the case of scientific discourse than in any other."[2]

Winch argues that the Azande culture and the language which is used in that society enables its members to agree upon that which is real as opposed to that which is unreal. This position, he believes, does not entail his accepting as rational "all beliefs" couched in magical concepts. Magical practices in our own society can be validly said to be "irrational". This is justifiable since rational behaviour in our own society is established by criteria which magical practices not only do not satisfy, but in many instances actively oppose. But in the Azande culture, where that which is real is intricately tied with magical practices, such a charge cannot be validly laid.

In the course of setting forth his position on the Azande's approach to reality, Winch uses a metaphor involving

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[2]P. Winch, "Understanding a Primitive Society", _American Philosophical Quarterly_, I (October 1964), 309.

a theistic community. In order to understand what is meant by God's reality one must approach this question from the context of "the religious tradition in which the concept of God is used". Nielsen readily agrees with Winch in that the question "What is real?" is meaningless unless it is asked in relation to a particular form of life. As Winch has noted; "Reality is not what gives language sense. What is real and what is unreal shows itself in the sense that language has. Further, both the distinction between the real and the un- real, and the concept of agreement with reality themselves belong to our language."[3]

Evans-Pritchard wanted to maintain that the Azande's magical practices were untrue to reality. This was presumed to follow because of the Azande's ignorance of the scientific method. But to believe that science will open the door to Objective Reality as such, is to fundamentally misconstrue the inherent limitations of this approach. Nielsen himself has probably offered the most succinct summation of Winch's posi- tion on this point.

If we have been brought up in a certain tradition, and under- stand scientific discourse, we can, while working in that discourse, ask whether a scientific hypothesis agrees with reality. We can, given an understanding of science, test this claim; but when Evans-Pritchard makes the putative

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[3] Ibid., 309.

statement that 'criteria applied in scientific experimenta-
tion constitutes a true link between our ideas and an in-
dependent reality', he has <u>not</u> asserted a scientific hypothesis
or even made an empirical statement. His putative assertion
is not open to confirmation or disconfirmation; and if 'true
link', and 'independent reality' are explained by reference
to the scientific universe of discourse, we would beg the
question of whether scientific experimentation, rather than
magic or religion, constitutes a true link between our ideas
and independent reality."[4]

In <u>The Idea of a Social Science</u> Winch had stated that

it was the central task of the philosophers of religion,

science, art, etc. to see how the world was made intelligible

in terms of religious concepts, scientific concepts, artistic

concepts, etc. We were given to understand that because of

the, in many ways, radically distinctive concepts employed

in each of these disciplines, we would discover correspondingly

unique approaches to reality. From our analysis of Wittgen-

stein's lectures on religious belief, we had come to see that

valid criticism of religious language must be put in terms

which are acceptable to the theistic community. If our criti-

cisms are based on criteria which are appropriate to, say, the

realm of scientific discourse, our attacks will prove to be,

by and large, simply irrelevant. Now Nielsen accepts this,

but goes on to attack a position, which to my knowledge, was

never held by Winch. He states that Winch is simply mistaken

if he is saying that religious discourse stands in the same

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[4] Nielsen, <u>op. cit.</u>, 200.

relation to scientific discourse as the Azande magical prac-

tices are related to our twentieth century scientific prac-

tices. No such parallel exists, because as Nielsen notes;

There is no "religious language" or "scientific language".
There is rather the international notation of mathematics
and logic; and English, French, German, and the like. In
short, "religious discourse", and "scientific discourse"
are part of the same overall conceptual structure. More-
over, in that conceptual structure there is a large amount
of discourse which is neither religious nor scientific,
that is constantly being utilized by both the religious
man and the scientist when they make religious or scientific
claims. In short, they share a number of key categories.[5]

Now I think the first thing that should be noted is

that Winch has not said that the order of difference between

the religious uses of language and the scientific uses was

of the same order as the differences between the Azande

magical rites and our modern scientific practices. Secondly,

I don't believe that either Winch or Wittgenstein would

object to the point that if in certain areas a theist's use

of language can be shown to overlap with our ordinary uses,

then the theist's use is there susceptible to those non-

religious rulings which would govern such a usage. Finally,

as I mentioned at the outset, I think that Nielsen is here

working under a monolithic interpretation of the phrases

"language game" and "form of life". This should become

even more apparent as we examine the next steps in his argument.

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[5] Ibid., 201.

In the next section of his discussion Nielsen ex-
presses a point of view which is strikingly similar to
Wittgenstein's own. He is talking about his recent reading
of Simone Weil's Waiting for God. He states that on the one
hand he finds her use of language almost completely unintel-
ligible, but on the other he does seem to understand what
she is getting at. As he says at one point; "She blithely
accepts what I find unintelligible."[6] But, then, a little
later on, he goes on to remark; "Miss Weil is not to me like
the Azande with his witchcraft substance. We both learned
'the language' of Christian belief; only I think it is illusion-
producing while she thinks that certain crucial segments of it
are our stammering way of talking about ultimate reality."[7]

As we have seen in Chapter II, Wittgenstein found him-
self in almost exactly the same position in his conversations
with a theist. But Wittgenstein was there intent on having
his listeners note the presence of those distinctively re-
ligious uses of our language. Nielsen is not unaware of such
differences, but through all of the differences he sees cer-
tain similarities. As I had remarked above, this is com-
pletely unobjectionable. But whereas Nielsen will go on to
accuse Winch of placing too much stress on the differences

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[6]Ibid., 202.

[7]Ibid..

between "language games", I think that we will in turn find Nielsen trying to make too much out of their similarities.

Nielsen himself recognizes the failure his first attempt to note a convergence between a religious use of language and our ordinary use. He had wanted to say that if first-order religious statements are supposed to be taken as factual assertions, then they are immediately subject to certain non-theological testing procedures. He then went on to apply such a test. He noted that on the basis of the verification principle, because such statements as "God exists", "God created the world", etc. are not "confirmable or disconfirmable in principle", then these statements are devoid of factual content. As he states; "They are not actually part of that type of discourse we call a fact-stating type of discourse. Thus, they lack the kind of coherence they must have to make genuinely factual claims."[8]

But Nielsen recognizes that, of course, the theist at this point would claim that neither he nor his religious community view their statements as being factual assertions. The verificationist's attack would go to show just how, in this area, the theist's use of language differs from our ordinary use.

It is at this juncture in his presentation that we

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[8]Ibid., 203.

find Nielsen almost reifying the phrases "language game" and "form of life". His argument here proceeds in two directions at more or less the same time. First, he wants to argue that religious language is susceptible to criticism, not only internally, but also in terms of that "universe of discourse" of which it is a part. Secondly, he wants to show that since the religious way of life is merely one aspect of our culture, it can, as a "form of life", meaningfully be asked to give an account of itself.

In order to substantiate his first position, Nielsen begins by recognizing that before any criticism can be raised, the critic must have a participant's understanding of the religious way of life. Granted this appreciation, it is then possible for him to go on to show that the theistic community's use of language is incoherent. The essential question, of course, centres around the grounds upon which this charge can be based. Nielsen feels that the criticism can be lodged (1) in terms of the "very practice" of that form of life, and (2) in terms of the theist's distortion of those concepts which are not exclusively religious. It is obvious that Winch would agree with (1). But Nielsen feels that by arguing for (2) he is coming into confrontation with the very heart of Wittgensteinian fideism.

In fact, the confrontation at this point is not a real one. Not only does Nielsen fail to offer any arguments to

show the incoherence of religious discourse, but more importantly, the ground rules upon which he believes any attack must be based are rules which would be acceptable to both Winch and Wittgenstein. Nielsen takes the position of the outsider looking in at the workings of religious language. He wants his reader to feel how the language which he uses everyday is here being distorted. But once he has achieved this effect, he goes on to note that although the usage appears to be incoherent considered in terms of the religious way of life, it _may_ very well turn out to be quite consistent. As he states; "When fully stated and understood in terms of their distinctive contextual uses, what _appears_ to be contradictory or paradoxical may turn out to be straight-forward and non-contradictory."[9]

It seems to me that Nielsen's argument at this point can have no more force than making us feel the oddity of religious discourse when put into contrast with that "universe of discourse" which is the everyday language of our society. On the basis of this oddity, Nielsen holds that it is the theist's responsibility to show that his use of language has only the appearance of incoherence. But he follows Winch when he says that this question can only be decided in terms

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[9]_Ibid._, 207.

of those distinctively religious uses of language.

In his second line of argument, Nielsen takes exception to Winch's view that a form of life as such cannot be questioned as to its rationality. In describing Winch's position, Nielsen remarks; "The forms of life, he argues, have a conceptual self-sufficiency; operating with them we can say that something does or does not make sense, is logical or illogical, e.g. that was an illogical chess move. But we cannot say of the whole activity itself that it is illogical, irrational, unintelligible, or incoherent, eg. chess is illogical."[10]

In opposition to this, Nielsen maintains that such evaluations can be made on the basis of "everyday discourse". For as he states; "'An ongoing but irrational form of life', most certainly does not appear to be a contradiction."[11]

It should be noted at the outset that the phrase "form of life" as used by both Wittgenstein and Winch is a technical one. For Winch this phrase is equivalent to (1) the language of a society, and (2) those epistemological conditions which must be satisfied before there could be such a language. Nielsen's failure to take account of these factors seems to me to be at the basis of his confusion at this point.

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[10] Ibid., 206.

[11] Ibid.,

Now it seems obvious that the "irrational form of life" that
he here has in mind is the religious way of life. But he
is here granting to Winch that which he was previously arguing
against. That is, he is now admitting the existence of a re-
ligious "language game" and its correspondent "form of life".
As a result, his own position becomes confused. Let us try to
unravel some of its threads.

To begin with, if Nielsen is going to allow the re-
ligious way of life to stand as a "form of life", and then
go on to condemn it as being irrational, he is tacitly admit-
ting his failure to grasp the full significance of that
phrase. On Winch's terms, it is simply impossible to say
that the whole way of life of the members of a particular com-
munity is irrational. It is obvious that certain aspects of
a person's behaviour may at times be said to be "irrational".
The charge is valid insofar as his actions are in opposition
to those agreed-upon standards of acceptable behaviour. But
to attempt to call all of the activities of the members of a
society "irrational" is to deny there being any standards of
rational behaviour. To put it in a slightly more sympathetic
way, one would here be saying that the standards for rational
behaviour which the members of a society try to live in terms
of are not in fact the "real" standards. It should be ap-
parent that if we continue to argue in this way we will come
to a position which is similar to the one taken by Evans-
Pritchard, and which will turn out to be just as unacceptable.

Now Nielsen seems to be aware of this danger. What he wants to say, I believe, is that the standards for acceptable behaviour which a religious community invokes may, in the light of society's standards, be shown to be irrational. This position, I believe, can be argued for, but not in the way that Nielsen does. For it seems to me that he is here equivocating upon the phrase "form of life". On the one hand, he seems to be taking this phrase as applying to our society as a whole. The religious way of life is simply one aspect of societal living. In the history of our culture we have had large numbers of people who believed in witches and fairies. But, over the years, such beliefs have generally become untenable. Accordingly, says Nielsen, why should religious beliefs not suffer the same fate? For my part, I see no good reasons as to why this might not in fact occur. But when Nielsen goes on to call the religious way of life itself a form of life, he has inadvertently radically altered the entire situation. For, as stated above, on Winch's use of the phrase, it is impossible to have a form of life which, considered in itself, can be said to be irrational. And if the way of life of the members of a religlious community is allowed to stand as a form of life, then it cannot be criticized as being irrational.

The foregoing analysis may suggest the following

question. Can the religious way of life be viewed as a form
of life? The question presupposes that we follow Nielsen,
and demand that the phrase "form of life" have a definite
reference. If the phrase is to be taken as having a definite
reference, then I believe that the reference should be that
of the culture as a whole. For my part, I think that if we
demand a referent we are misconstruing the actual signific-
ance of the phrase. For it seems to me that Wittgenstein
used the phrase more as a methodological metaphor than as a
label.

As I have noted at the outset, I think that Nielsen's
confusion on this point is characteristic of his entire dis-
cussion. By concentrating almost exclusively upon the phrases
"language game" and "form of life" he has isolated them from
the actual roles they play in both Wittgenstein's and Winch's
writings. Instead of viewing them as methodological devices
used to map out large areas of a community's linguistic prac-
tices, he has taken them as being the conclusions of highly
complex and inter-related arguments. Such an interpretation
has led him to the paradoxical position of having to condemn
a set of "conclusions" which are supposed to be based on a
number of premises with which he completely agrees.

CONCLUSION

Let us begin with Wittgenstein's critics. In Chapter I, we raised Toulmin's question as to whether or not for Wittgenstein religious discourse could stand as a system of legitimate language games. Toulmin believed that Wittgenstein's lectures did not decide the issue one way or the other. But he did not offer an explicit discussion of the lectures. Rather, on the basis of his "critical" interpretation of both Wittgenstein's Tractatus and Investigations it seemed likely that religious discourse should not be allowed to stand as a legitimate language game.

In my second chapter, I presented an analysis of the lectures. On the basis of our findings there, I put forth the view that Wittgenstein did not deny the existence of a legitimate religious discourse. His foremost intention was to have his listeners come to see that the meaning of words will vary depending upon the context of their usage. He wanted to show that there were distinctively religious uses of language. He could not, however, present a lengthy description of these uses because of his confessed ignorance of them. Hence, it may appear that he was undecided as to the legitimacy of these uses.

This impression, I believe, is mistaken for it is based upon our confusing two distinct questions. On the one hand, there is the biographical question as to whether Wittgenstein lived his life in accordance with a belief in a Christian God. On the other, there is the philosophical question as to the meaningfulness of religious discourse. The lectures give evidence in answer to the biographical question, that Wittgenstein was not an active participant in a Christian community. Accordingly, Wittgenstein denied himself a complete understanding of the linguistic practices of such a community. But these personal considerations did not lead him to the philosophical position of condemning such practices as being illegitimate. Nor did they lead him to doubt there being distinctively religious uses of language.

In the course of my second chapter, I stated that Wittgenstein's method of proceeding may possibly have left him open to the charge of inconsistency. For it seemed that he was arguing in two contradictory directions at the same time. At one point in his presentation he wanted to bring out the fact of his being unable to enter into a meaningful dialogue with a member of a Christian community. While at another juncture, he was presuming to be able to speak authoritatively about the relation between religion and science.

The charge of inconsistency that I went on to construct

was based on an inordinately strong interpretation of the phrases, "language game" and "form of life". I placed Wittgenstein in a non-religious form of life and had him organizing his experiences in a way which was radically different from the way in which a theist would order his. Although they were using the same words, I had the theist speaking a language with which Wittgenstein was totally unfamiliar. Of course, on such a basis it would be impossible for Wittgenstein to say anything at all about the religious community's use of language.

The fatal flaw with such a line of attack is that it is ultimately untrue to Wittgenstein's actual position. What I have done is to first present Wittgenstein's thought in a reverse order. I then went on to set forth as a conclusion that which in fact stands as a methodological device. Let us here rehearse my steps.

Wittgenstein had told his listeners that he had at best a limited appreciation of the theist's assertions. Now because the full contextual meaning of the theist's remarks escaped him, I immediately went on to imply that there was a break down in communication. But the justification for this implication was based on one very large assumption. I had presupposed at the outset the existence of "forms of life" and "language games". Moreover, I had implicitly held that these phrases stood for completely unique

societal compartments. That is to say, a form of life X was believed to be radically different from a form of life Y. This categorical difference was presumed to be made manifest from the fact that linguistic practices in X were completely different from the linguistic practices in Y.

But this interpretation seems counter to the spirit and actual practice of Wittgenstein's method of doing philosophy. The foremost objection that can be brought against it is that throughout his Investigations and Lectures, Wittgenstein has encouraged us to "look and see" how our words actually function. For only by means of such a close inspection will we be able to grasp their full meaning. Now, my criticism is based on the presupposition that such an analysis has revealed radically distinct language games and forms of life. And, of course, this conclusion is not forthcoming since no such complete analysis has been done. Moreover, it seems highly improbable that such an order of difference will be discovered.

The real difficulty with this line of criticism is a methodological one. We have begun by thinking in terms of language games and forms of life instead of concentrating upon concrete instances of linguistic usage. This approach would be anything but Wittgensteinian. For we have already laid claims to those results which can only be gotten by means of a close and careful conceptual analysis. Moreover,

when we actually do engage in such an analysis, I believe these phrases will be seen to function merely as helpful signs pointing to some of the differences and similarities we should be looking for. Accordingly, they would be employed primarily as teaching devices having little real value to the working analysist.

Nielsen's article in many ways suffers from this same type of interpretative error. Although in Nielsen's case he is arguing against there being any such societal compartments. As mentioned earlier, I think that both Winch and Wittgenstein would agree with him about this. But in the process of denying the existence of such compartments, Nielsen works himself toward the position of almost denying there being distinctively religious uses of our language. The confusion at the end of his article is a result, I believe, of his attempting to both affirm and deny such uses. He gives the impression of thinking that only by denying the existence of a distinctively religious use of language will he be able to destroy that type of compartmentalization which he believes is implied by the phrases "language games" and "forms of life".

In his second thrust against Wittgensteinian Fideism, Nielsen treats the phrase "form of life" as if it had the same status as any other phrase in our language. On the basis of that interpretation he goes on to maintain that

it is not an obvious contradiction to call a form of life
irrational. But by completely isolating that phrase from
the role it plays in the writings of both Wittgenstein and
Winch, his argumentation here is simply irrelevant.

On the more constructive side, it should be noted that
my discussion was not aimed at settling any issues, but rather
at raising further questions. The admittance of these ques-
tions is based upon a prior adherence to the methods and aims
of ordinary language philosophy. For my part, Nielsen's
criticisms aside, I have (1) attempted to sharpen and (2)
advocated the use of these methods in our analysis of the re-
ligious uses of language.

This approach in general has, in the past twenty
years, caused a revolution in the doing of philosophy. Phi-
losophers, following the lead of Wittgenstein, Ryle and Austin,
have been keenly attentive to the subtle differences in the
uses of such words as "knowledge", "meaning", "the same", etc..
But their work, with some minor qualifications, has been con-
fined to the descriptions of the workings of our language.
The results have been invaluable, particularly in the philoso-
phy of mind. In the philosophy of religion, on the other hand,
this descriptive analysis has, as I have attempted to show,
led to somewhat contradictory conclusions.

Of course, this state of affairs need not be construed

as final. In one light the basis of this disagreement is
rather elemental in character. For essentially it comes
down to the critic's and the defender's inability to agree as
to just what is to count as their data. In opposition to
Nielsen, I suggested that this empirical consideration can
only be resolved by consulting that religious community
whose linguistic practices are under analysis.

But implicit in this empirical consideration I have
suggested there lies an epistemological question. Baldly
stated, the question asks for that justification in terms of
which we can be said to have criteria of intelligibility. My
third chapter was devoted to the raising of this issue. My
discussion there is without doubt far from satisfactory. I
did not go on to directly address the question as to how we
would go about discovering these epistemological conditions.
Moreover, I had not dealt with the prior consideration of the ex-
act sense in which this type of question can be meaningfully
asked of the users of a language.

With this latter question we are I believe coming close
to what Toulmin would call "the limits of the sayable". And
it seems to me that this is exactly where the current dispute
in the philosophy of religion is centred. It has been my
rather limited purpose to suggest that whether he is aware
of it or not, the philosopher of religion is working on the
boundary of our linguistic terrain.

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