

# **'Discuss the relationship between Wittgenstein's rejection of the anti-metaphysical stance of logical positivism and his account of religious language in his later philosophy.'**

Wittgenstein stands amongst those rare 20<sup>th</sup> century philosophers whose work has profoundly influenced the work of practitioners in fields as diverse as both analytical and continental philosophy<sup>1</sup>, psychology<sup>2</sup>, theology<sup>3</sup>, anthropology and literary theory<sup>4</sup>. To his detractors, he has had no lasting influence<sup>5</sup> and yet there is a begrudging acknowledgement of his continuing personality and presence in philosophy. For example, Quinton, writing as a philosopher critical of both the content of his philosophy and its methods<sup>6</sup>, clearly felt the unwelcome presence of his ghost. His lengthy study proceeds that Wittgenstein had “[a] circle of profoundly self-abasing disciples” during his lifetime, presently enjoyed an “energetically devotional cult”<sup>7</sup> and finishes with the dismissive, ‘could have done so much better’ assessment “the attempt of an eagle to make a career in a cuckoo clock”<sup>8</sup>. His pejorative tone is illustrative of the intense controversy surrounding Wittgenstein’s work and is perhaps a reference to the numerous corrective memoirs published by those next in the “apostolic succession”<sup>9</sup> such as Brian McGuinness<sup>10</sup>, Norman Malcolm<sup>11</sup>, Paul

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<sup>1</sup> Ray Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein – The Duty of Genius* (London: Vantage, 1991), pp281-297

<sup>2</sup> C.B. Dobson, M. Hardy, S. Heyes, A. Humphreys and P. Humphreys, *Understanding Psychology* (London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson: 1990), p2

<sup>3</sup> John Hyman, ‘Wittgensteinianism’ in *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion*, Philip L. Quinn and Charles Taliaferro (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), pp150-158

<sup>4</sup> A.C. Grayling, *Wittgenstein – A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p.ii

<sup>5</sup> Grayling (2001), pp126-134

<sup>6</sup> Anthony Quinton, ‘Wittgenstein’, in *Social Research* Vol. 49, No. 1, Modern Masters (Spring 1982), p4

<sup>7</sup> Quinton (1982), p4

<sup>8</sup> Quinton (1982), p31

<sup>9</sup> Grayling (2001), p129

<sup>10</sup> Brian McGuinness, *Young Ludwig – Wittgenstein’s Life 1889-1921* (Oxford, Oxford University Press: 2005)

<sup>11</sup> Norman Malcolm, *Ludwig Wittgenstein – A Memoir* (Oxford, Oxford University Press: 2009)

Engelmann<sup>12</sup> and Oets K. Bouwsma<sup>13</sup> in response to perceived misrepresentations of his work. He had a tiny published output, a disdain for academia and a lack of formal philosophical training. His published work amounted to just one book review (1913), one article and one book (1922) in which he believed he had “*solved*”<sup>14</sup> the problems of philosophy and, consistent with his belief, had taken up another career. His doctorate was awarded in 1929 on the basis of work he had *already* repudiated after returning to Cambridge deciding he had not, after all, solved the problems of philosophy<sup>15</sup>.

Thus, what is immediately clear is that Wittgenstein’s thought in both its phases represented a radical assault on the central understanding of what philosophy *is* and *how* it should be undertaken and this can be problematic when using his work philosophically but there are reasonable grounds to assert that he is sensibly described as a “*philosopher of language*”<sup>16</sup>. Wittgenstein’s central concern was with the nature of language, including the special case of mathematical language, and its relationship with philosophy. This essay proceeds on the basis we can class Wittgenstein’s philosophy as within the analytical tradition and so his principle ideas can be identified and understood. As Grayling states, “*unsystematic in style does not mean...unsystematic in content*”<sup>17</sup> which illustrates Wittgenstein’s concerns were resonant with other analytical philosophers but his manner of approaching the problems was radically different. The essay first investigates why his early work, which was so hugely influential for the positivist movement such that he was once

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<sup>12</sup> Paul Engelmann, *Letters from Ludwig Wittgenstein (with a Memoir)* (New York: Horizon, 1968)

<sup>13</sup> Oets K. Bouwsma, *Wittgenstein – Conversations 1949-1951* (Indianapolis, Hackett Publishing Company: 1986)

<sup>14</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (trans C.K. Ogden) (New York, Cosimo: 2007), p28

<sup>15</sup> Ray Monk, *How To Read Wittgenstein* (London: Granta, 2005), p62

<sup>16</sup> Dobson et al (1990), p2

<sup>17</sup> Grayling (2001), p.ii

described by the leader of the Vienna Circle as the “*founder of positivism*”<sup>18</sup>, proved to be a complete misunderstanding of it and in the context of this discussion, a complete misunderstanding of Wittgenstein’s view of religious language and belief. It then examines some of the concepts of the later philosophy, the “language game”, “forms of life” and “private language” and why these were so significant for a more accurate perception of his view of religious discourse and finishes by discussing whether his views constitute a legitimisation of a spiritual way of knowing.

Wittgenstein’s early work is plausibly an example of the revolution in philosophical thought that began with the analytical philosophy of Russell and Moore at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Russell asserted that philosophical knowledge differed from *other* scientific knowledge only in the *a prioricity* of its propositions<sup>19</sup> and his key doctrine was that of “logical atomism”. The “atoms” were formed from sense data and the logically perfect words that stand for them, combining to form “molecular” propositions corresponding with the complex relations and perceptions of real life. Wittgenstein’s was “*profoundly influenced*” by this logicism and it is even asserted the *Tractatus* and Russell’s *Logical Atomism*<sup>20</sup> were their respective interpretations of the collaboration<sup>21</sup>. The Wittgenstein of 1912 was the “*one who we [Russell and the Cambridge school] expect to make the next great step in philosophy*”<sup>22</sup> and Russell’s project with Wittgenstein was to solve all other problems with the application of logic to the problems of philosophy generally<sup>23</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup> McGuinness (2005), p315n

<sup>19</sup> Bertrand Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy* (New York: Cosimo, 2007[1912]), p109

<sup>20</sup> Bertrand Russell, ‘Logical Atomism’ in *Logic and Knowledge – Essays 1901-1950*, Robert Charles Marsh (ed.) (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1956), pp175-282

<sup>21</sup> Grayling (2001), p68

<sup>22</sup> Monk (2005), p5

<sup>23</sup> McGuinness (2005), pp312ff

Consequently, he extended Russell's theory of logical relations and atomism into the linguistic realm:

*"(2.19): The logical picture can depict the world"*

*"(3) The logical picture of the facts is the thought...The totality of true thoughts is a picture of the world"*

*"(3.01) true propositions form a picture of the world"*

Proceeding on this logical basis, Wittgenstein's conclusion was that because there is an underlying logical structure to language that correlates directly with reality, it was therefore an impossibility for a metaphysical proposition to say anything about reality. What contravened the laws of logic could not be expressing meaning. He believed that he had demonstrated that there was a clear limit as to what could be *meaningfully* said and where *"everything 'said' about language applies to every possible language"*<sup>24</sup>. This effectively delineates a general logical theory of language<sup>25</sup> after the manner of science. Thus, Wittgenstein's solution to the problems of philosophy were in their *"vanishing"*<sup>26</sup> on the basis of a logical demonstration that what had been considered as philosophy was simply a linguistic confusion. He thus concluded the *Tractatus*:

*"what can be said at all can be said clearly; and whereof one cannot speak [clearly] one must be silent, [to speak] the other side of this limit will be simply nonsense...when someone...wished to say something metaphysical [you] demonstrate to him that he had given no meaning to certain signs in his propositions...whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent".<sup>27</sup>*

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<sup>24</sup> Engelmann (1965), p99

<sup>25</sup> Michael Morris, *Wittgenstein and the Tractatus* (Routledge, London: 2008), pp114-203

<sup>26</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (trans C.K. Ogden) (New York, Cosimo: 2007), p27; *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, proposition 6.5ff

<sup>27</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, 'Preface', *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (trans C.K. Ogden) (New York, Cosimo: 2007), p27; *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, proposition 6.53.

This radical rejection of the metaphysical resonated with Moritz Schlick<sup>28</sup>, a leader in the early positivist movement and it is asserted that a “*generation of positivists*”<sup>29</sup> were inspired by Wittgenstein. This view is challenged by some scholars<sup>30</sup> in light of the testimony of other Circle members. However, the assertion by Schlick as a leader of the movement that Wittgenstein was the “*founder of positivism*”<sup>31</sup> and that the positivist principle of verification was in fact called “*Wittgenstein’s Principle of Verification*”<sup>32</sup> within the Circle, suggests that their reticence expressed after the fact, aimed at minimising his influence, was because of his later contradiction as a fundamental misunderstanding, their appropriation of his work.

The basis of a positivist interpretation of Wittgenstein was this assertion of a perfect logical foundation for language that delineated a meaningful proposition. Wittgenstein had written “*the method[s] of formulating [the ‘problems’ of philosophy] rests on the misunderstanding of the logic of our language*”<sup>33</sup>. Similarly, Ayer, who made the first definitive statement of positivism in the English language was to write, “*the propositions of philosophy are not factual, but linguistic in character*”<sup>34</sup> and that “philosophy” should be considered a part of science<sup>35</sup>. Wittgenstein was to boldly assert that he had “*solved...in essentials*”<sup>36</sup> the problems of philosophy because the problems of philosophy are “[*solved*]

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<sup>28</sup> Grayling (2001), p68

<sup>29</sup> Lesley Chamberlain, ‘The philosophers home from home’, <http://www.editor.net/BWS/docs/FeatureWittgensteinLesleyChamberlainStandpointOctober.pdf>, 26/02/2014

<sup>30</sup> Grayling (2001), pp68ff

<sup>31</sup> McGuinness (2005), p315n

<sup>32</sup> Monk (1991), pp286-7

<sup>33</sup> Wittgenstein (2007), p27

<sup>34</sup> A.J. Ayer (1952), *Language, Truth and Logic*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (New York, Dover: 1952), p57

<sup>35</sup> Grayling (2001), p68

<sup>36</sup> Wittgenstein (2007), p28

in the vanishing of the problem”<sup>37</sup>. The propositions of metaphysics, ethics and questions of value were to be removed from philosophy on the basis their content was aesthetic or emotional with no cognitive aspect, “It is clear that ethics cannot be expressed. Ethics is transcendental. (Ethics and aesthetics are one.)”<sup>38</sup>. Similarly, Ayer asserted that traditional metaphysical propositions in the philosophy of religion, such as talk of a transcendent Being, vanish from philosophy as literally “nonsensical ...entirely false”<sup>39</sup>. The metaphysical proposition cannot express an empirically verifiable proposition or be re-posed in such a way that it *could* do<sup>40</sup> and so cannot be classed as genuine knowledge, “metaphysics [is not] philosophy...because it is not a branch of knowledge”<sup>41</sup>.

The positivist claim on Wittgenstein would thus seem strong at this point. However, as early as 1919, Russell, an important member of the Circle, was to call Wittgenstein, his “dream student”, as “nearly mad” and “that what he likes best in mysticism is its power to stop him thinking”<sup>42</sup>. Russell’s criticisms are elucidatory for they highlight the enormous misunderstanding of Russell and the positivists in Wittgenstein’s answers to the “problems” of philosophy. It was Russell who had written the Introduction to the *Tractatus* and been so influential in its dissemination first at Cambridge and then to the Vienna Circle. Yet, Wittgenstein had, in 1929, in light of Ramsey’s critique of the *Tractatus*, completely rejected its Russellian logicism within six months of his return to philosophy. In his review, Ramsey had fundamentally challenged Wittgenstein’s concept of logical relations which excluded all

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<sup>37</sup> Wittgenstein (2007), proposition 6.521, p107

<sup>38</sup> Wittgenstein (2007), 6.421

<sup>39</sup> Ayer (1952), pp56-57

<sup>40</sup> This was a concession made by Ayer in the second edition of *Language, Truth and Logic* as described in his updated introduction. This was to permit certain types of scientific theory and hypotheses.

<sup>41</sup> Alfred Jules Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic* (New York, 1952[1946]), pp51-52

<sup>42</sup> Monk (2005), pp23-24

relations in a sentence except objective *fact-fact* relations in contrast to subjective *person-fact* relations. By insisting on just the “fact-fact” relation within a sentence, where each element of a sentence corresponded to an object, Wittgenstein was able to reduce semantic meaning to a purely logical one of relations between these atomic elements of a sentence<sup>43</sup>. However, Ramsey demonstrated that propositional meaning was not simply a composite of atomic objective relations in this way. In his review of the *Tractatus* he was to write, “*the sense is not completely determined by the objects which occur in it; nor is the propositional sign completely constituted by the names which occur in it.*”<sup>44</sup> This analysis was sufficient to provoke Wittgenstein to return to Cambridge as an advanced student with Ramsey as supervisor. The attempted revision of the *Tractatus*’ logical atomism in cooperation with Ramsey he described as “*worthless*”<sup>45</sup> and his work in preparing what were to become the *Philosophical Investigations* began.

What the positivists had failed to discern correctly was that the *Tractatus* had a fundamental mystical premise, “*the meaning of the world was not in the world*”<sup>46</sup>. Whereas Russell had written in his *Introduction* to the *Tractatus* “[Wittgenstein shows] the totality resulting [is] a mere delusion, and in this way the supposed sphere of the mystical would be abolished”<sup>47</sup> Wittgenstein, in demonstrating the inability of a proposition to convey a metaphysical sense, nevertheless affirmed a belief in the mystical: “*Not how the world is, is the mystical but that it is... There is indeed the inexpressible. This **shows** itself; it is the*

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<sup>43</sup> Morris (2008), pp257-258

<sup>44</sup> Frank Ramsey, ‘Critical Notice of *Tractatus Logicus Philosophicus* by Ludwig Wittgenstein’ in *Mind* Vol 32 (Oxford, Oxford University Press: 1923), pp465-473

<sup>45</sup> Monk (2005), p58

<sup>46</sup> Wittgenstein, *Tractatus* 6.41

<sup>47</sup> Bertrand Russell, ‘Introduction’ to *Tractatus* (2007), p23

*mystical.*"<sup>48</sup> This is shown particularly strongly in the final section of the book and in its final proposition, "*whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent*"<sup>49</sup>. This was asserting a fundamentally mystical conclusion, for he had written, "[my conclusion] *shows how little has been done when these problems have been solved... We feel that even if all possible scientific questions be answered, the problems of life have still not been touched at all.*"<sup>50</sup>

The "being silent" permits the space allowing the "manifestation" of what is expressed non-linguistically by the linguistic sign:

*"The poet's sentence...achieve their effect not through what they say but through what is manifest in them...the same holds for music, which also says nothing."*<sup>51</sup>

Thus he was completely opposed to the empiricist sense of the verification principle as held by the positivists<sup>52</sup>. He described the preface written by Russell, with whom he had spent a week going through it line by line, as "*a brewed up...mixture with which I don't agree...I could not bring myself to have it published with Russell's introduction*"<sup>53,54</sup>. Monk further demonstrates that one of the most common phrases in his engagement with Schlick and Waismann as leaders of the Circle as early as 1929 was "*I used to believe*"<sup>55</sup>. Engelmann illuminates the remarkable nature of his engagement with the Vienna Circle which seemed to be emphasising the *real* message of the *Tractatus* was about what it did *not* say, "*at meetings with Schlick and one or two others Wittgenstein would often not discuss philosophical topics but preferred to read out poetry, particularly the poetry of Tagore.*"<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Wittgenstein (2007), pr6.44, 6.522

<sup>49</sup> Wittgenstein (2007), pr7

<sup>50</sup> Wittgenstein (2007), p28; pr 6.52

<sup>51</sup> Paul Engelmann, *Letters from Ludwig Wittgenstein (with a Memoir)* (New York: Horizon, 1968), p83

<sup>53</sup> Paul Engelmann, *Letters from Ludwig Wittgenstein (with a Memoir)* (New York: Horizon, 1968), p31

<sup>54</sup> Engelmann (1968), pp31-32

<sup>55</sup> Ray Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein – The Duty of Genius* (London, Vintage: 1991), pp284-285

<sup>56</sup> Engelmann (1968), p47n

This was a truly remarkable rebuttal to the positivists. Tagore to the positivists no doubt specialised in “nonsense”. To the positivists, “all” was done once science was done as reflected in the title of their manifesto, *‘Die Wissenschaftliche Weltauffassung’* (trans. ‘the scientific view of the world’) and Wittgenstein was not reticent in his criticisms of the publication of it<sup>57</sup>. He was later to explicitly reject the new mythical role of the scientist expressed by the Manifesto of the Circle, being recorded in 1938 addressing students at Cambridge *“this [expression that the Universe is mysterious in itself] I would call misleading [it] includes a kind of idol worship, the idol being Science and the Scientist”*<sup>58</sup>.

Wittgenstein’s post *Tractatus* work through the entire 1930s, the “Blue” and “Brown” books, were dictated versions of lectures for his students and illustrate his way of *doing* philosophy according to his new principles, it was non-dogmatic and anti-theorising, it was the constant stream of development, *“I believe I summed up where I stand in relation to philosophy when I said: really one should write philosophy only as one writes a poem.”*<sup>59</sup>

The most important development at this stage in his philosophy was the language game<sup>60</sup>.

It was introduced by Wittgenstein in a series of lectures entitled ‘Philosophy’ (1933-4):

*“to show by means of language-games the vague way in which we use ‘language’, ‘proposition’, ‘sentence’...Since what we call a proposition is more or less arbitrary, what we call logic plays a different role from that which Russell and Frege supposed.”*<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Monk (1991), p283

<sup>58</sup> Monk (2005), p68

<sup>59</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, revised 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), p28

<sup>60</sup> The use of the term “game” may seem to trivialise the concept. However, Wittgenstein uses this word with a technical meaning – a game has “rules” which the participants agree to abide by (or believe that they are abiding by).

<sup>61</sup> Alice Ambrose, *Wittgenstein’s Lectures Cambridge 1932-1935* (London: Prometheus Books, 2001), pp12-13

Taken together, these two statements are of course a complete and total rejection of his previous theoretical approach to philosophy and in reality, *any* theoretical approach to philosophy, “*what we say will be easy, but to know why we say it will be very difficult*”<sup>62</sup>.

Whereas Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus* had presented a difficult theory but a theory nevertheless, he now saw himself guilty of theorising after the method of philosophising which within the *Tractatus* itself he had condemned *and* also completely mistaken about language. For rather than trying to abstract the meaning of any particular word from its *specific* contexts and then generate a universal theory as he had done in the *Tractatus*, the notion of the “language game” was to firmly contextualise meaning in the actual use within our language as a *whole*:

*“...the function of the word ‘now’ is entirely different from that of a specification of time – This can easily be seen if we look at the role this word really plays in our usage of language, but it is obscured when instead of looking at the **whole language game**, we only look at the contexts...A primitive philosophy [that of the *Tractatus*] condenses the whole usage of the [now] into the idea of a[n] inexplicable [temporal] relation.”*<sup>63</sup>

The language game was where “*language is used for some tightly defined practical purpose...what is essential is that...the language cannot be described without mentioning the use to which it is put.*”<sup>64</sup> The primary philosophical point here is that to ignore the real life situations of the word would lead to an inevitable generalisation and abstraction of what the verbal sign we call the “word” means and how it then functions in its final semantic context. The consequence of this ignorance will be the formulating of linguistically ambiguous philosophical propositions and the consequent general philosophical theories

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<sup>62</sup> Ambrose (2001), p77

<sup>63</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, ‘The Brown Book’ in *Major Works* (New York: HarperPerennial, 2009), p300

<sup>64</sup> Monk (1991), p330

about the world would thus, Wittgenstein believed, be rarefied accounts of “*darkness and metaphysics*”<sup>65</sup>.

So for Wittgenstein, the method of the new analytical philosophy, which took its inspiration from science, was destructive to gaining a true understanding by ignoring the “*connections*” or “*internal relations*”<sup>66</sup> between verbal propositions that alter the semantics in complex manners, “*logical constants could [not] be laid down [because of] the inner connections of [verbal] propositions*”<sup>67</sup>. In the name of the theoretical generality of the new scientific epistemology, connections were easily obfuscated and ignored because the scientific view privileged the deterministic model of language which was championed by logical positivism. Thus the difference in his new philosophical approach with the extreme determinism of the *Tractatus* is the disappearance of the general theory that can describe everything and its replacement with the principle that “*not all meaningful uses of language are meaningful in the same way*”<sup>68</sup>.

The manner of seeing connections that construct meaning by compiling descriptive, situational data had been the basic methodology presented in “*the Brown Book*” and Wittgenstein called the comparative framework of understanding gained from it *Übersicht* which translates as “synoptic view”. He referred to this way of doing philosophy analogous to the *process* of Freudian psychoanalysis and went so far as to call himself a “*disciple of Freud*”<sup>69</sup>, not because of Freud’s founding of the “science” of psychoanalysis but because

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<sup>65</sup> Wittgenstein (2009), p107

<sup>66</sup> Monk (2005), p72

<sup>67</sup> Monk (1991), p285

<sup>68</sup> Monk (2005), p73

<sup>69</sup> Monk (2005), p74

Freud's methods had generated "a new mythology, a new way of looking at ourselves and the people around us, a way that allowed us to see connections that we had not seen before."<sup>70</sup>

Ayer was to call this phase of Wittgenstein "therapeutic positivism" but Wittgenstein reacted strongly to this<sup>71</sup>. It seems to Wittgenstein that there was, despite his insistence on philosophy as "descriptive" alone, far more to the "language game" than just therapy, unveiling or description. The language game was not just "psychiatry" as Ayer had suggested. It does appear Wittgenstein has maintained an epistemological *function* for the process which was to provide a thought space for the "manifestation" of the unspoken of the *Tractatus* but within an elaborate new understanding of the way language formulates propositions that create the conditions for the inexpressible to manifest in novel linguistic signs. Whereas the *Tractatus* relied on a direct appeal to mysticism to provide this space, the *Investigations* lead inevitably to it as an implicit function of the developing language game. This latter philosophical point is one which Wittgenstein desires to establish on principle:

*"Why shouldn't I apply words in opposition to their original usage?...Where is the difference? In the scientific approach the new use is justified through a theory. And if this theory is false then the new extended use has to be given up too. But in philosophy the new use is not supported by true or false opinions about natural processes. No fact (experience) justifies it and none can overturn it."*<sup>72</sup>

He is proposing an overhaul of the view of language in which words have a fixed set of meanings that are independent of their context, "the *speaking* of a language is part of an

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<sup>70</sup> Monk (2005), p74

<sup>71</sup> Monk (1991), pp356-7

<sup>72</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, Revised edition, G.H. von Wright (Ed.)(Oxford, Blackwell: 1998), p50e

*activity, or a form of life*<sup>73</sup> (emphasis mine). To Wittgenstein, the entire notion of a fixed semantic domain will generate what he now calls the “darkness” of the metaphysical grand theories of everything and it is now rejected.

The concept of a language game in which the linguistic rules are constructed internally by a community, a “form of life”, has been compelling for disciplines that have wanted to maintain the legitimacy of non-scientific forms of understanding. The common argument might run, each “form of life” has its own language game within which it defines its rules:

*“the [form of life] is the underlying consensus of linguistic and non-linguistic behaviour, assumptions, practices, traditions, and propensities which humans, as social beings, share with one another...meaning is conferred on its expressions by the shared outlook and nature of its users.”<sup>74</sup>*

Thus, the “religious” form of life with its associated language game may be seen as complete within itself and may only be legitimately criticised by those who understand and *live* that language game. For example, a dominion theologian asserting “in this life, we reign with Christ on Earth!” will not be refuted by the historical language game “but Christ was crucified!” The historian has not understood the language game and therefore has uttered a factual statement but one’s whose meaning has no application to the dominion theologian’s form of life<sup>75</sup>. The argument is strengthened by noting that the rational concepts of evidence to establish “truth” and “falsity” are completely irrelevant for Wittgenstein’s concept of religious *belief*:

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<sup>73</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, Peter Hacker & Joachim Schulte - revised fourth edition (eds.) (Chichester, Wiley-Blackwell: 2009), p15e

<sup>74</sup> Grayling (2001), p97

<sup>75</sup> John Hyman, ‘Wittgensteinianism’ in *A Companion to the Philosophy of Religion*, Philip L. Quinn and Charles Taliaferro (eds.)(Oxford, Blackwell: 1999), p153

*“the historical accounts of the Gospels might, in the historical sense, be demonstrably false, and yet belief would lose nothing through this, but not because it has to do with ‘universal truths of reason’! Rather because...the historical proof game...is irrelevant to belief. [The Gospels] are seized by a human being [lovingly]...The believer’s relation to these messages is neither a relation to historical truth (probability) nor yet that to a doctrine consisting of ‘truths of reason’”<sup>76</sup>*

Thus, the religious life is anchored irrevocably in the inner life of the believer and the language game of that community rather than in any doctrinal formulation<sup>77</sup> and the ideologies have their islands of discourse, safe from the scientific mainland.

The fundamental problem with this argument is that it validates religious (or any other) discourse by promoting a view, described variously as a “fideistic”<sup>78</sup>, “cognitive relativism”<sup>79</sup> or “an absurd form of relativism”<sup>80</sup> where islands of language games are forever insulated from one another, immune from criticism from the outside<sup>81</sup> and objective “truth” is impossible. However, to this author, this seems to be a fundamental misunderstanding of Wittgenstein’s intention. In introducing language games he explicitly warns against the “*craving for generality [which] leads the philosopher into complete darkness*”<sup>82</sup> by being “*tempted to ask and answer questions in the way science does*”<sup>83</sup>. Rather, the language game is a method of “seeing” the connections, allowing meaning to emerge and a form of life is established *de facto* by the community of users. The “language

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<sup>76</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value* (revised edition) (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), p36e

<sup>77</sup> G.H. Von Bright, ‘Biographical Sketch’ in *Ludwig Wittgenstein – A Memoir*, Norman Malcolm (Oxford, Oxford University Press: 2009), p18

<sup>78</sup> Kai Nielsen, ‘Wittgensteinian fideism’ in *Philosophy 42* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press), p201

<sup>79</sup> Grayling (2007), pp117-122

<sup>80</sup> Michael Martin, ‘The Verificationist Challenge’ in *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion*, Philip L. Quinn and Charles Taliaferro (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), pp204-211

<sup>81</sup> Monk (2005), p72

<sup>82</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, ‘The Blue Book’ in *Major Works* (New York: HarperPerennial, 2009), p107

<sup>83</sup> Wittgenstein (2009), p107

game” in Wittgenstein’s usage was hardly conceptual at all but rather *explanatory*<sup>84</sup> for Wittgenstein states, “*Philosophy really is ‘purely descriptive’*”<sup>85</sup>. This would seem to be Ayer’s point about “therapeutic positivism” but Wittgenstein’s objection to his view reinforces the idea of subsidiary epistemic element present in the language game, a mystical component, not a theoretical one. Fideism or relativism is even harder to maintain when considering that Wittgenstein also proposed that there was crossover and collaboration between language games which he described as “*family resemblances*”<sup>86</sup> and which he elaborates on in some length<sup>87</sup>.

Wittgenstein’s point is not that there cannot be external description or perhaps even critical analysis of a language game as indicated by the intense discussion of Wittgenstein’s associated concepts of “rules” and “rule following”. These are central concepts in a more general argument applied by him first to mathematical language and so is not considered here other than in his granting the *possibility* he was assigning an analytical role to an aspect of linguistic discourse. The main point of relevance here is the rules of a language game can generate a profound complexity resisting *accurate* description, “*How did we learn the meaning of this word?...From what examples? In what language games? Then it will easy for you to see that the word must have a family of meanings*”<sup>88</sup>. The analysis is so easily flawed unless one can see the nuances and strength of the language game both in its internal relations *and* within its semantic family, “*the strength of the thread resides not in*

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<sup>84</sup> Monk (2005), p74

<sup>85</sup> Wittgenstein (2009), p107

<sup>86</sup> Wittgenstein (2009), p36e

<sup>87</sup> Wittgenstein (2009), p36e-p41e

<sup>88</sup> Wittgenstein (2009), p41e

*the fact that some fibre runs through its whole length but in the overlapping of many fibres*<sup>89</sup>.

The fideist, in contrast, maintains there is little or no value of a rational defence or understanding of faith, it is a “single-threaded” semantic framework based on a received wisdom or text which is held to be normative. In radical fideism even *rational expression* of belief is seen as destructive to true belief<sup>90</sup>. The language, thought and experience is totally private to the individuals within the believing community<sup>91</sup>. In the fideist view, the strength of the belief is in its self-contained purity and its non-rationality<sup>92</sup>. All these seem contrary to Wittgenstein’s intention of unveiling and making public the framework of meaning.

The fideistic thesis can also be viewed as further argued against<sup>93</sup> in Wittgenstein’s ‘*Private Language argument*’<sup>94</sup>, which although highly complex and the part of his philosophy that has generated more commentary and interpretative clashes centring most recently on the work of Kripke<sup>95</sup>, it is generally agreed that he is refuting the idea that language can be purely private in this way. The force of the argument is seen in that language by definition is a public shared activity and that purely private meaning and

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<sup>89</sup> Wittgenstein (2009), p36e

<sup>90</sup> Terence Penelhum, ‘Fideism’ in *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion*, Philip L. Quinn and Charles Taliaferro (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), pp376-382

<sup>91</sup> Y. Huang, ‘Foundation of religious beliefs after foundationalism: Wittgenstein between Nielsen and Phillips’ in *Religious Studies* 31 (1995), p252

<sup>92</sup> Penelhum (1999), p379

<sup>93</sup> Further refutation of the accusation of fideism is explored at length in Stosch with respect to D.Z. Phillips’ application of Wittgenstein to the philosophy of religion. D.Z. Phillips was constantly defending himself against the accusation of fideism. See Klaus Von Stosch, ‘Wittgensteinian Fideism?’ in *The contemplative spirit : D. Z. Phillips on religion and the limits of philosophy*, Ingolf U. Dalferth and Hartmut von Sass (Eds.), Religion in Philosophy and Theology 49, (Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck: 2010).

<sup>94</sup> Wittgenstein (2009), paragraphs 243-275. There is substantial debate as to whether this is a “sustained argument” (e.g. Monk (2005), p92).

<sup>95</sup> Saul Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984)

reference is “*incoherent*”<sup>96</sup>. As mentioned previously, his notion of the “language game” was to make the meaning *publicly* own-able, in the context of the *totality of language games* and the “belief” is anchored in a “form of life” rather than a psychological state<sup>97</sup>. The “private” language game is really no game at all for if it were *really* private, it could never be joined and the belief, if it cannot be linguistically expressed, is not part of a “form of life” and so does not constitute a *real* belief.

An objection does need to be considered here though. It is often argued that the grammatical “rules” of a language game are what defines its “public” aspect and so these may be restricted, fideistically, to a particular language game. However, this is ignoring the crucial point he is making about the *totality* of language games. The individual “language game” is necessarily delimited by its public interaction within the “*total[ity of] language game[s]*” which constitutes the “*form of life*”<sup>98</sup>. The *totality* itself has a context with a grammar that provides a strata of meaning that *can* semantically link the individual language games: “*it is one thing to say, with Wittgenstein, that different language games have different logics, and quite another to say, with the fideist, they are private and can be understood by their respective users only*”<sup>99</sup>. For example, in translating Wittgenstein’s work, Anscombe “*invented an English equivalent for Wittgenstein’s distinctive style [finding] English analogues [for] stylistic idiosyncrasies*”<sup>100</sup>. This demonstrates that as Europeans, we have sufficient commonality to intercommunicate with one another. A form of life is by

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<sup>96</sup> Monk (2005), p92

<sup>97</sup> Wittgenstein (2006), p59e

<sup>98</sup> Wittgenstein (2009), p300; McGinn, pp51-52; Wittgenstein (2009), p15e, p79e

<sup>99</sup> Y Huang, ‘Foundation of religious beliefs after foundationalism: Wittgenstein between Nielsen and Phillips’, *Religious Studies* 31 (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press: 1995), p252

<sup>100</sup> P.M.S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte, Editorial preface to the Fourth edition of Wittgenstein (2009).

definition *living* and *growing*, it is never static in its knowledge and the semantic domain is not fixed in direct contrast to the fideistic culture. Though there are problems with our communication with extreme ideologies of subcultures within the nations, that proselytization occurs implies a commonality amongst language games. Language games can grow in their understanding of one another by co-opting rules.

So, in summary, it is proposed here that an analytical approach to Wittgenstein is to distort Wittgenstein and “to make it appear that his writings were easily assimilable into the very intellectual milieu they were largely a warning against”<sup>101</sup>. An early draft of the preface to the *Investigations* is where Wittgenstein requires he should be read “right spirit” which was *not* to read him as if he was doing philosophy after the pattern of science in generating hypotheses and theories from the data to finally “solve” philosophical problems<sup>102</sup>. This anti-theoretical approach represents the primary interpretative problem regarding Wittgenstein’s work and was one of which he was keenly aware and he felt “frequently misunderstood and watered down” versions of his work were in circulation<sup>103</sup>. In the final version of the preface (c.1946), he had written:

*“I make [this work] public with misgivings. It is not impossible that it should fall to the lot of this work, in its poverty and in the darkness of this time, to bring light into one brain or another – but, of course, it is not likely. I should not like my writing to spare other people the trouble of thinking. But, if possible, to stimulate someone to thoughts of his own. I*

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<sup>101</sup> Monk (2005), p96

<sup>102</sup> Monk (2005), pp94-98

<sup>103</sup> Wittgenstein (2009), p4e

*should have liked to produce a good book. It has not turned out that way, but the time is past in which I could improve it”*<sup>104,105</sup>

Wittgenstein rarely advanced coherent arguments<sup>106</sup> for a “philosophy of language” or a “philosophy of mind” though this is frequently how his later work is represented<sup>107</sup>. Thus, the application of the way the concept of the “language game” as islands of discourse has been applied by all manner of social scientists and theologians to validate “God-talk” is rather suspect. The subtlety of his thought is lost in such fideistic expositions and so it is too strong to say that he “validates” religious or spiritual discourse in the form of a logical or apologetic proof but he does legitimise it as a “form of life”.

This view, the author believes, is supported by Wittgenstein’s own spirituality which was unmistakably derived from his wartime encounter with Tolstoy’s *Gospel in Brief*<sup>108</sup>, his permanent companion so much that he was known within his regiment as the “*man with the Gospels*”<sup>109</sup>. As seen in his wartime diaries, he maintained Tolstoy’s positive view of “*religion as something known to us through inner experience*”<sup>110</sup>. He was to write of spiritual experience:

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<sup>104</sup> In fact, Wittgenstein never published the work, sought to improve it, preferring not to publish rather than to publish and to be misunderstood by his peers and students. Infamously, he refused to allow Alice Ambrose to publish a summary of his work on the philosophy of mathematics after she worked with him closely receiving his dictations. When she, with the encouragement of Moore, published in a professional journal, he abruptly ended their collaboration. The result of his further reflection but still only posthumously published, was the epistemological *On Certainty* which is sometimes perceived as a distinctive third phase. See Danièle Moyal-Sharrock, *Understanding Wittgenstein’s On Certainty* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p165.

<sup>105</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations – Revised 4th Edition*, P.M.S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte (eds) (Chichester, Wiley & Blackwell: 2009), p4e

<sup>106</sup> Monk (2005), p91

<sup>107</sup> David Pears, ‘Wittgenstein’s Philosophy of Language’, ‘Wittgenstein’s Philosophy of Logic’, ‘Wittgenstein’s Philosophy of Mind’ in *Oxford Companion to the Mind*, Richard Gregory (ed) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp811-816

<sup>108</sup> This was Tolstoy’s ‘stripping’ from the Gospels of what he viewed has been additions by the Church. It was a synthetic amalgam of the four gospel accounts drawing on the emerging discipline of textual criticism.

<sup>109</sup> Brian McGuinness, *Young Ludwig – Wittgenstein’s life 1889-1921* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp224-225.

<sup>110</sup> Tolstoy (1987), p87

*“recognition of sin’ is an actual occurrence and so is despair and so is redemption by faith. Those who speak of it...are simply describing what has happened to them; whatever [doctrinal or theological] gloss someone may want to put on it.”<sup>111</sup>*

His renunciation of his fortune, the ascetic tone of his letters with Engelmann, his disdain for academic affectation, his keen moral sense all consolidate his view of meaning being grounded in the *form of life* to be publicly shared rather than a private, fideistic view of spirituality. His philosophy inverted Descartes’ primacy of the inner mental life resituating it in the *“distinctive grammar of our psychological language game”<sup>112</sup>* which is a *public* activity. Meaning and the sense of the world does not derive from the egocentricity of the Cartesian “I” but the family “we”. The need for a theory and even the possibility of a general one, is redefined by this “we”. By re-examining the presuppositions of philosophy, Wittgenstein perceived a beguiling by a philosophy built on Cartesian introspection and *“logical tricks”<sup>113</sup>* with the end result of, though rejected by Descartes personally<sup>114</sup>, the scientism implicit in the philosophy of logical analysis.

It is the final argument of this author that his philosophical project was legitimising to faith not in any theoretical manner but in the sense of his best mystical instincts received from his reading of Tolstoy, the grounding of life in a true, inner yet public faith and his demonstration of a class of proposition that is neither analytic or synthetic that fits faith

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<sup>111</sup> Wittgenstein (2006), p32e

<sup>112</sup> Marie McGinn, *Wittgenstein and the Philosophical Investigations* (London, Routledge: 1997), p115

<sup>113</sup> Wittgenstein (2009), p131e

<sup>114</sup> Michael Macneil, *“Descartes showed there was no need for God in philosophy.” With reference to Descartes’ key philosophical ideas and with particular reference to Descartes’ Discourse on the Method and related metaphysical works, discuss and critically assess this statement.* (Unpublished: Bangor University, 2014)

well. He successfully resists the scientism of positivism (in our context, the “*more plausible*”<sup>115</sup> naturalism) that sees “God-talk” as having no cognitive content.

**Word count: 5007**

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<sup>115</sup> Alvin Plantinga, ‘Christian Philosophy at the End of the Twentieth Century’ in *The Analytic Theist – an Alvin Plantinga reader*, James F. Sennett (Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans, 1998), p330

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