

# Wittgenstein: language games and religion in wittgenstein's mirror

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I. Wittgenstein's notion of language game Wittgenstein's notion of language game was intended to provide answers to two interrelated philosophical issues: Is it possible to arrive at an objective view of the external world given that our individual experiences dictate our worldview, and if so, in what way could this be attained? As for the first issue, Wittgenstein posited two essential concepts. First, that although objective reality exists, we will never be able to obtain an absolute and perfect knowledge given the limitability of our perspectives (OC). Such limit is influenced primarily by the openness of our senses to errors. Thus, while one person can be certain in his proposition that all apples are red, this cannot be taken as an absolute truth since another person may claim apples to be blue, given, say, a certain malfunction in his eyes. In this regard, Wittgenstein separated psychological from epistemic certainties (OC). Psychological certainty is one's belief about a given object (i. e. that apples are red, skies are blue which may vary according to the physical state of the ' gazer') while epistemic certainty is the collective belief about an object given its role in human lives (i. e. hands exist because we see them being used by people in all occasions and their reality cannot be just made up in our heads). The second and more important concept of Wittgenstein highlighted two ideas: (1) that given the differences in people's culture, habits, and upbringing, people will always have various perspectives about the external reality (our physical and social circumstances shape our view of the world); and (2) each perspective or worldview is true. The second idea captured Wittgenstein's radical view of certainty in a sense that to him, all perspectives have specific values that must be taken to be true for themselves alone. Going back to the example of

two people claiming apples to be red and blue, we cannot say that the person claiming apple to be red is correct while the other one wrong since their realities are different. What if all people had optic malfunction and only one person could see apples clearly to be red, could we then assume that the person claiming the apple to be red is wrong? The reasoning above could be said to be Wittgenstein's language game which he used to shed light on what certainty is and its supposed role in people's lives. In a nutshell, Wittgenstein wanted to impart that by recognizing all perspectives or worldviews to be true (process of acceptance coming from the understanding of things in a practical and commonsensical sense), we could attain social order. And this is also the reasoning that Wittgenstein used in arguing that the nature of religious and non-religious beliefs should not be individually compared as they utilize various tenets that all have individual worth, as based on and as influenced by the individual experiences of the people involved. Since the very foundations of objective reality differ, who are we to tell whether one's religious belief is 'more right' than the others'?

II. Religion in Wittgenstein's Mirror If philosophy is to be formally defined as the love for wisdom, then it should follow that philosophers ought to search for the ultimate truths about human life. Indeed, philosophers must not only be able to understand the essence of humanity and what it means to live, but also be able to educate people on these essential things. To Wittgenstein, the problem lies on how philosophers analyze human experiences and impart such analyses to people. Thus, philosophers seem to have a strong fascination toward the 'ideal state of things' and how it is crucial for us to strive for that 'ideal state'. In this light, transcendent

reasoning to explain human experiences (as concretized by the use of lofty ideas and intricate thinking) does not help in providing answers to life's deepest questions. In this regard, people get more confused instead of being enlightened, as they are presented with ideas that seem to be devoid of any practical value (Phillips 243). This served as the main impetus behind Wittgenstein's philosophical mirror. Philosophy, according to Wittgenstein, must focus on explaining things and scenarios as they truly are (thus, mirroring human life) (Phillips 242). In the context of religion, the philosopher's primary task must not dwell on discussing religious tenets as if they were academic subjects (the essence of God, the immortality of the human soul, the reality of angels), but more on providing deep insights on how religious beliefs can guide people in their everyday lives (how to live morally, why people should strive for an ethical life). With this, Wittgenstein was able to reinforce the purpose of philosophy in religion—that it must encourage people to not only critically analyze the things they believe in, but to also apply such beliefs in their individual lives. Given the various things that people believe in, it is simply illogical to compare religious beliefs since: (1) they are recognized and understood by people differently; and (2) they are applied by people in ways that they will only appreciate (Phillips 245). Indeed, through his philosophical work, Wittgenstein was able to reset people's mindset on the essence of religion—that it is not merely a concept that must be understood critically, but more significantly a guide on how people may (emphasizing freedom to choose or not) live their lives. After all, how could we judge if one's religion is true or not if: (1) we could not even arrive at an objective standard, and (2) if in the end such religion makes the

follower morally better? In this regard, Wittgenstein wanted to underscore that the true purpose of religion in people's lives banks not on explaining a bunch of deep and confusing concepts about God and supernatural life, but on using such concepts to instill specific life lessons to people. Indeed, it is the positive change in one's way of life that makes religion what it truly is.

Bibliography "Wittgenstein's Lectures on Religious Belief". Infidels. org. The Secular Web, 2001. Web. 18 December 2012. "On Certainty". Enotes. com. Enotes, 2011. Web. 18 December 2012. Phillips, Dewey Zephaniah. Wittgenstein and Religion. California: St. Martin's Press, 1993. Print.