## WITTGENSTEINIAN FIDEISM: KAI NEILSEN'S REMARKS ON FEW WITTGENSTEINIANS

Mrinalini Giri
Research Scholar, Department Of Philosophy,
University Of Lucknow, Lucknow, U.P., India.

ABSTRACT

This paper features the remarks of well-known atheistic philosopher Kai Neilsen to the Wittgensteinians- juxtaposed as if in anticipation of a confrontation of apocalyptic proportions. There is a contest between Wittgensteinian fideism and its critics as the question mark in its title suggests a latter-day clash between faith and reason. "Wittgensteinian fideist"- a term coined by Neilsen is not a label that Wittgensteinians accept mainly D.Z.Phillips. Indeed, it seems that no one who uses the term- with its connotations of irrationalism and religious conservatism- has ever claimed to be one. Thus, contrary to what one might initially expect, the debate between Neilsen and Phillips-while titanic-is not over the validity of this way of thinking, but about whether it is a way of which Wittgensteinian philosophers of religion are in fact guilty.
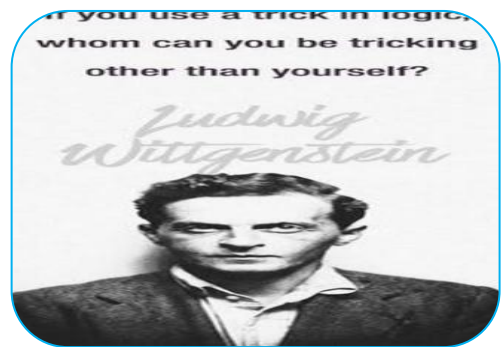
The main focus of the debate is whether or not Phillips and many of his co-Wittgensteinians are fideists, but equally interesting is the way that they keep arguing that their opponent has not understood them properly. Neilsen believes that ontology and epistemology are co-extensive and that it does not make any sense to talk about something being both real and beyond human understanding. Phillips, on the other hand, believes that the real exceeds the knowable and that human language has adapted tools to point beyond what it can actually say.

KEYWORDS: *Wittgensteinian fideism?, apocalyptic proportions.*

INTRODUCTION

The earlier thoughts of Wittgenstein regarding philosophy of religion is not found. But certain strands of his later thoughts lend themselves to fideistic interpretations. Although no text of Wittgenstein's view on philosophy of religion Neilsen found to made remarks on but gave his remarks on few Wittgensteinians such as Winch, Malcom, Hughes, Geach, Cavell, Cameron and Coburn as they have interpreted Wittgenstein's thoughts or statements and drawn conclusions which are absurd. This leads Neilsen to inspect of their arguments which point towards fideism.

Paul Ziff claimed that these philosophers were concerned with linguistic regularities concerning 'God'. They stress that to understand religious concepts a participant must have an insider's grasp of this form of life. As Norman Malcom puts it, the very genesis of the concept of God grows out of a certain 'storm in soul'. And only within this phenomenon and form of life participant can have deep understanding of the concept of God. Without having some inclination to partake in that religious form of life, the very concept of God will seem 'an arbitrary and absurd construction'.

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Malcom's view is unquestionably true and is supported by anthropologists who have stressed that one cannot gain a deep understanding of the distinctive features of tribe's culture. Concepts cannot be adequately understood apart from a grasp of their function in the stream of life. Swedish Philosopher Axel Hagerstroin asserts that the concept of God is 'nothing but creation of our own confused thought' growing out of our need to escape 'from the anxiety and wearisomeness of life'. Neilsen examined only the above contention of Malcom i.e. Wittgensteinian claim and he called following cluster of dark sayings, when they are accepted tends to generate Wittgensteinian Fideism:

1. There are different forms of life.
2. Ordinary language is all right as it is.
3. Philosopher's task is to describe forms of life to the extent necessary to break the perplexity concerning it.
4. All forms of life have distinctive modes and all have a logic and ethics of their own.
5. Each mode of discourse sets its own norms of intelligibility, reality and rationality.

Any Wittgensteinian Fideist who accepts such contentions could argue that religion has its own distinctive criteria as it is a unique and very ancient form of life. Any participant who have understanding of this mode of discourse could criticize it and that to be in a peacemeal way. Neilsen and C.B.Martin argues that this first-order discourse of this form of life is irrational and nothing but confusion that sets its own criteria of rationality. Philosophy only can display the style of functioning and working of religious discourse; religion cannot be relevantly criticized by it. Neilsen agrees with these Wittgensteinians that participants understanding is must for understanding religious discourse. But it does not entail that the one who accepts or believes in religion is actually a participant. Neilsen disagrees with this view that first order discourse of religion and philosophy can't criticize this form of life. Hereafter Neilsen examines some Wittgenstinian defences of this approach to religion. Neilsen remarks at the outset that he is not sure to what extent Wittgenstein himself have accepted WF but his works had been interpreted as such approach is helpful in giving deep grasp of religion and shallownessof skepticism might get exposed.

Nielsen started with Hughes who presents the most direct confrontation with him. Hughes criticizes C.B.Martin on his views of Religious Belief in his paper "Non-existence of God". Hughes insisted that philosophers job is to understand the category of logic or categories of statements or expressions which are said to make sense. And the most important job is to display that category of logic where it does conform to rather than reducing that category of logic to the logic of some other preferred type of discourse. That should not be interpreted in terms of some ideal language like that found in *Principia Mathematica*. Hughes emphasized that in doing philosophy of religion we should adopt an alternative program for metatheology. That allows the actual usage of religious terms and statements to determine their logic, rather than forcing an alien logic upon them. Hughes remarks that this programme would be helpful in seeing our philosophical arguments in a quite different light. These arguments will also be seen as showing some of the peculiarities of their own logic. Hughes illustrated that Martin argues in his religious belief that 'God' may be used in either of two ways: as a proper name referring to a particular being or as a descriptive term. Martin tries to show that using it in both ways at once leads to a contradiction.

Hughes contends, for God is not thought of as a 'particular thing' within orthodox Jewish and Christian thought. It is as sensible to speak of God as a particular being, as it is to speak of the perfect moral virtue as a particular being. Among the orthodox this one piece of metatheology which won wide acceptance is that 'God' is not a substance- word (Aquinas in the formal mode) is worth remembering.

Martin's approach that the fact that the pattern of usage of a term 'God' does not accord with that of other non-theological terms with which it is taken to be analogous, is made a basis for the charge that the use of the term is logically incoherent. But for Hughes and other Wittgensteinian fideist – the 'same non-accordance is regarded as showing that the terms are not as analogous as they have at first appeared, and the actual usage of religious language is taken as normative for the logical type and kind of meaning they have.' So, the Hughes remarks that the most important question for all meta theorizing arises as 'which of these programs is preferable?'

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Hughes have defended his Wittgensteinian methodological preference on the ground that religious language does a job which no other segment of language can do. He is of a view that it is a long –established *fait accompli.* The reason behind this kind of thinking of Hughes is that religious statements are in their own kind of order, and, as a whole, in a coherent order. With a brief sociological remark Nielsen counterpose against the fact that religious language is a fait accompli. Taking another fact that at all times and at all places, even among the most primitive tribes, there have been people who though perfectly familiar with religious game played in their culture would not play the religious game played in their culture would not, but because they found it incoherent. Even though they had an insider's understanding as well as they were perfectly familiar with it.

There are people who can and who want to go on playing language game of religion, but they cannot continue this activity because their intellects not their natural sympathies, make assent to Jewish or Christian doctrine impossible. Even educated people find the religious game they have been taught as children either falderal or at best 'moral poetry'.

The most troubling consideration of Hughes i.e., religious language does a job which no other segment of language can do could be challenged. Nielsen simply point out that in a culture like ours, religious discourse is failing to do its distinctive tasks because many people do not find its distinctive tasks because many people do not find it coherent. Perhaps it is considered as perfectly coherent mode of discourse, but given their beliefs that such a language game is played is not enough. They very well know that it has a distinctive role in their culture and how to play the language game, their perplexity is over the apparent incoherence of just this familiar discourse.
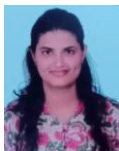
At any rate they are puzzled primarily about the very first-order God talk itself and secondly about the theologies or philosopher's chatter about this chatter. Range of practices that have counted as religions, one finds functioning in cultures, and very ancient cultures at that, religions that in term of our religions (not just in terms of our theologies) are atheistic or agnostic. So, it is perfectly possible that if given certain cultural conditions certain *Ersatz* religions (Spinoza's Fromm's) become religious.

Hughes could reply that what is really alive in religion is that the part of religious talk that is in order just as it is. This is essential to religion infact constitutive of True Religion, that which is shared by all religions and by *Ersatz* religions as well. This can lead us to end up with a very unWittgensteinian essentialist bogeyman and with treating religion or True Religion as little more than 'morality touched with emotion'. Such a conclusion would not be most unwelcome, and in effect could be a capitulation to the meta theologian who claimed that Christian discourse as it stands, is incoherent and not a vindication of the meta theological claim that the bulk of Christian language is perfectly in place if only metaphysicians and theologians would not tinker with it.

Nielsen have only tried to show that there is something to be settled and that could not be taken this short Wittgensteinian way with the concepts of religion. The central considerations which need a careful investigation are- the First- order God talk for the most part actually is in order as it is or is it in some way fundamentally incoherent and how could this issue be decided?

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Research Scholar, Department Of Philosophy, University Of Lucknow, Lucknow, U.P., India.

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