The Debate over ›Wittgensteinian Fideism‹ and Phillips' Contemplative Philosophy of Religion

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Sometimes in a philosophical dispute, conflicting parties debate the truth or falsity of a given proposition. ›A fetus is a person‹, ›The meaning of the truth predicate is captured by the disquotational schema‹, and ›Consciousness is an emergent property of complex neural systems‹, are some examples of propositions whose truth and relative warrant are debated in recent philosophical literature. While many philosophical disputes follow this model, not all do. After all, in some philosophical disputes, no uncontroversial framing of the terms of disagreement is available. Indeed, in some such disputes, it is not the truth of or warrant for a proposition that is being debated, but instead the very words used to describe the disagreement itself.

When surveying the scholarly literature over Wittgensteinian fideism, it is easy to get the sense that the principal interlocutors, Kai Nielsen and D.Z. Phillips, talk past one another, but finding the right words for appraising the distance between the two voices is difficult. In this paper, I seek to appreciate this intellectual distance through an exploration of the varying philosophical aims of Nielsen and Phillips, of the different intellectual imperatives that guide their respective conceptions of philosophical practice. In so doing, I seek to show how a contemplative mode in philosophy may be used to appraise a philosophical dispute and the terms of disagreement. In this case, a contemplative approach to understanding the dispute would frame Nielsen's and Phillips' contributions against the backdrop of the ends they conceive philosophy to have.

I contend that the varying philosophical aims of Nielsen and Phillips contribute to the seemingly intractable nature of their dispute, but awareness of these differing conceptions of philosophical practice may help contemporary scholars to understand similar criticisms when they practice or promote a contemplative philosophy of religion. For Nielsen, something akin to the evidentialism of W.K. Clifford and the fallibilism of C.S. Peirce provides the epistemic end of philosophical inquiry, an end Nielsen understands to be disrupted by the possibility of discrete religious and secular

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language-games with variant epistemic standards of justification. For Phillips, philosophical investigation aims at drawing the philosopher's awareness to the complexity of human life with language. Notably, Phillips is keen to object to the idea of Wittgensteinian fideism insofar as he takes it to characterize religious life as being somehow cut off from other aspects of language or life. In this sense, Wittgensteinian fideism – with its commonly associated ideas of discrete language-games and standards of rationality – would seem to foreclose on the possibility of religion being a deep aspect of life (i.e. something that may be thoroughly connected with many aspects of one's life, such as one's moral character, social allegiances or aesthetic sensibilities). The contemplative ideal that Phillips develops from his reading of Wittgenstein is one that vigilantly pursues an appreciation for the diversity and complexity of religious discourses. Phillips aims not only to appreciate the distinctiveness of a mode of discourse, but also to avoid limiting one's conception of that discourse by separating it off from the other aspects of a person's life.

As the debate between Nielsen and Phillips concerns centrally the bearing of the thought of Wittgenstein on philosophy of religion, it would be helpful to say something at this point about the word ›practice‹ and the philosophical weight that is placed on it in the present discussion. My presupposition – one that I draw from my reading of Wittgenstein – is that difference in philosophical aims can be parsed in terms of the notion of ›practice‹ or intentional activity coherent with a tradition. Intellectual traditions perpetuate expectations for what count as good reasons. Philosophy may be thought of as an academic subject, but it is also a social activity. Among other activities, philosophers speculate and comment on, question and analyze arguments, ideas, experiences, and texts. As a social activity then – or better, a variety of social activities – philosophical practice is not any *one* tradition. Different conceptions of philosophy jostle alongside one another. In characterizing philosophical practices in this way, I draw on a passage in *The Big Typescript,* where Wittgenstein writes of meaning in terms of expectations. In the passage in question, Wittgenstein compares the phenomena of language use not so much to moves in games where one is active (acting according to a role) but to the expectations one has when participating in a collaborative endeavor.[1] A realm of possible actions are conceivable to a participant; if one breaks those expectations, then it becomes clear that one either does not know how to play the game, is cheating, or is no longer playing the same game as the others. What I contend is that the disagreement between Nielsen and Phillips is like this;

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[1]   L. WITTGENSTEIN, *The Big Typescript TS 213*, ed. and trans. C.G. LUCKHARDT and M.A.E. AUE (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005). See especially § 76 »Expectation: the Expression of Expectation. Articulate and Inarticulate Expectation«.

they have different conceptions of, and therefore different expectations for, philosophy.

Phillips is perhaps the key philosopher Nielsen associates with Wittgensteinian fideism. It has not always been this way. As Béla Szabados observes in his opening essay for the joint volume by Nielsen and Phillips, *Wittgensteinian Fideism?* (2005), while Phillips goes unmentioned in Nielsen's original essay, Nielsen later came to see Phillips as a classic example of a Wittgensteinian fideist.[2] Yet Nielsen is ultimately ambivalent about the importance of whether any actual philosopher holds the views he associates with Wittgensteinian fideism; for Nielsen, this view is itself a powerful possible problem for his secular ideal of human flourishing. Orthodox theological critics of Wittgensteinian philosophy of religion have also found traction in the ascription of fideism. For example, traditional Christian philosophers and theologians have typically sought realist interpretations of doctrinal statements and faith commitments and thus have been wary of the tendencies of Wittgensteinian philosophers who downplay metaphysically rich renderings of those statements and commitments and focus instead on the practical manifestation, rather than the propositional content, of religious belief.[3] For better or worse, the loose collection of ideas known as Wittgensteinian fideism has dominated much of the thinking about Wittgenstein and the philosophy of religion for the last forty years.

It is ironic then that central to the dispute between Nielsen and Phillips is the fact that they have neither agreed on the criteria of Wittgensteinian fideism, nor have they agreed on the very connotations of ›fideism‹ itself; however, the publication of their joint volume *Wittgensteinian Fideism?* provides an accounting of their respective places in this dispute. It is a virtue of the book that it brings to the surface the problematic nature of the idea of Wittgensteinian fideism. Nielsen considers ›fideism‹ to be a neutral critical term of classification,[4] while Phillips considers it to be a term of abuse,[5] a dynamic registered elsewhere in the history of disputes over the meaning of ›fideism‹. Disagreement of this sort over the connotations of ›fideism‹ is nothing new. From the origins of the term in nineteenth century French Catholic and Protestant theological discourses, to its place within

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[2]   See B. Szabados, »Introduction: Wittgensteinian Fideism 1967–1989. An Appreciation«, in K. Nielsen and D.Z. Phillips, *Wittgensteinian Fideism?* (London: SCM Press, 2005), 4. See also Nielsen's original 1967 essay »Wittgensteinian Fideism«, reprinted in ibid. 21–38.

[3]   Similar theological concerns are present in Klaus von Stosch's critique of Phillips, and specifically the »danger of relativism« in his contribution to the present volume (see p ……).

[4]   See Nielsen, »Wittgensteinian Fideism Revisited«, in ibid. 97f.

[5]   See Phillips, »Wittgenstein and Religion: Some Fashionable Criticisms«, in ibid. 41f.

contemporary academic discourse, ›fideism‹ has been taken by some to be a neutral term of classification and by others to be a pejorative, a brand to be avoided, condemned or defended against. While a few philosophers and theologians have used the term to describe their own thought, most have used the term to label the thought of another.[6] For the purposes of this essay, I do not suppose Wittgensteinian fideism to refer to a single position in philosophy of religion; Nielsen and Phillips use the expression for purposes related to their distinctive philosophical projects. As a brief survey of the history of their dispute shows, their lack of agreement over its criteria reflects the disparate ends of their respective conceptions of philosophy.

For Nielsen, Wittgensteinian fideism is a philosophical stance that uses certain themes in Wittgenstein's thought to defend religious beliefs from various kinds of criticism, whether the criticism comes from evidentialist epistemology, verificationist theories of meaning, or critical theories of religion, be they Marxist, Freudian or social-scientific. Nielsen does not explicitly define ›fideism‹; instead, he alludes to a certain irrationalism or absurdity in Wittgensteinian philosophy of religion that he seeks to identify so as to undermine its appeal, whatever that may be. Nielsen believes that the potential for fideism is present in Wittgenstein's thought as well as in the thought of various philosophers working under his influence. As we will see, Nielsen is primarily concerned with challenging a possible philosophical viewpoint, less so the specific views of a particular philosopher.

What are these tendencies towards fideism in Wittgenstein's philosophy? The central tendency is the rejection of an ›Archimedean‹ – or universal – point of view for assessing the meaningfulness of religious language or justification of religious belief; this rejection of an Archimedean point of view leads to the localization of justification and intelligibility to language-games and forms of life. According to Nielsen, when these tendencies are exploited for the purpose of protecting religious beliefs, Wittgensteinian fideism is produced. The original eight theses that make up Wittgensteinian fideism for Nielsen in the 1967 article are as follows:

1. The forms of language are the forms of life.

2. What is *given* are the forms of life.

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[6]   I explore some of the history of this dynamic in »The Traditions of Fideism«, *Religious Studies* 44 (2008) 1, 1–22. Because of this diverse history of usage, I argue that scholarly use of the term should also scrupulously acknowledge the tradition of use that informs the scholar's own use of the term. It is interesting to observe that John Bishop describes his own view as a version of fideism in his recent book *Believing by Faith: An Essay in the Epistemology and Ethics of Religious Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

3. Ordinary language is all right as it is.

4. A philosopher's task is not to evaluate or criticise language or the forms of life, but to describe them where necessary and to the extent necessary to break philosophical perplexity concerning their operation.

5. The different modes of discourse which are distinctive forms of life all have a logic of their own.

6. Forms of life taken as a whole are not amenable to criticism; each mode of discourse is in order as it is, for each has its own criteria and each sets its own norms of intelligibility, reality and rationality.

7. These general, dispute-engendering concepts, i.e. intelligibility, reality, and rationality are systematically ambiguous; their exact meaning can only be determined in the context of a determinate way of life.

8. There is no Archimedean point in terms of which a philosopher (or for that matter anyone else) can relevantly criticise whole modes of discourse or, what comes to the same thing, ways of life, for each mode of discourse has its own specific criteria of rationality/irrationality, intelligibility/unintelligibility, and reality/unreality.[7]

As one might notice, the lack of an Archimedean point of view is a recurrent theme in Nielsen's early characterization of Wittgensteinian fideism. However, other themes also emerge. Key among them is the conception of religions as language-games or forms of life. For Nielsen, the absence of an Archimedean standpoint when it comes to identifying meaning or justification is a central aspect of Wittgensteinian philosophy. Attributions of linguistic meaning and the giving of reasons are each confined to the sphere of their intelligibility, a region circumscribed by the language-game or form of life.

   For the joint volume with Phillips, Nielsen returned to these ideas in »Wittgensteinian Fideism Revisited«. In response to Phillips' criticism,[8] Nielsen includes textual citations in framing the theses that express Wittgensteinian fideism. The five new theses Nielsen lists are:

1. »Within a language-game there is justification and lack of justification, evidence and proof, mistaken and groundless opinion [and the same obtains for forms of life or for what Peter Winch calls modes of social life], but one cannot properly apply these terms to the language-game [or form of life or mode of social life] itself.« (Norman Malcolm)

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[7]   NIELSEN, »Wittgensteinian Fideism«, 22.

[8]   See »Wittgenstein and Religion: Some Fashionable Criticisms«, Phillips' preface to *Belief, Change and Forms of Life* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1986), reprinted in *Wittgensteinian Fideism?*, 39–52.

2. »Our religions, for example, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, are either themselves forms of life or (as Phillips sometimes prefers to say) *in* forms of life, each with their own distinctive clusters of language-games and practices. But how the language-games […] are taken depends on their connections with other things […]. This larger context of human life, in which we see how a language-game is taken, Wittgenstein calls a form of life.« (D.Z. Phillips).

3. »Beliefs, utterances, conceptions, concepts ›are only intelligible in the context of ways of living or modes of social life as such‹ – that is in the contexts of forms of life or of being in forms of life.« (Peter Winch)

4. »Science is one such mode, morality another and religion still another *or* they are each distinctive clusters of practices in a form of life. [See notes 2 and 3.] ›Each has criteria of intelligibility peculiar to itself […] within science or religion actions can be logical or illogical‹, rational or irrational, reasonable or unreasonable, justified or unjustified, worthy of acceptance or not worthy of acceptance. ›But we cannot sensibly say that either the practice of science itself or that of religion is either illogical or logical; both are non-logical.‹« (Peter Winch)

5. »Because of the above (1–4), it makes no sense, Wittgenstein has it, to try to justify modes of social life or forms of life or distinctive clusters of practices, for example, science or religion, as such […]. There is neither a showing nor establishing that religious beliefs must be taken to be true nor that they must be taken to be false. Neither is there, on the one hand, a showing or establishing that they must be, or even are, worthy of belief nor that, on the other hand, they are to be set aside, if we are to be non-evasive, as not being worthy of belief. Justification cannot, given what justification is, have such a reach, such a purchase.«[9]

The textual support in the more recent list lends greater interpretive credibility to Nielsen's idea of Wittgensteinian fideism. Without specific references to the views of particular thinkers, it is hard to disagree with Nielsen's critics who maintain that Wittgensteinian fideism is a pejorative and thus unacademic term of abuse. Yet Nielsen remains ambivalent about the philosophical propriety of referring to the views of actual philosophers.[10]

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[9]   Nielsen, »Wittgensteinian Fideism Revisited«, 100–101. The Norman Malcolm text in question is *Thought and Knowledge* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), the D.Z. Phillips text is *Belief, Change and Forms of Life*, and the Peter Winch text is *The Idea of a Social Science* (London: Routledge, 1995).

[10]   Nielsen writes: »I have come to see, or at least to think I see, that it is a mistake to go around asking who are the Wittgensteinian fideists. What is crucial to give, as I hope I have just done, a clear characterization of Wittgensteinian Fideism and show that it yields some plausible grounds for being called Wittgensteinian even *if* no Wittgensteinian on record ever held *exactly* that position, took *exactly* that stance […]. What matters is the position itself and its claims and implications. What matters is whether (on some reasonable reading) it is recognizably Wittgensteinian and whether it has force and is not an arbitrary view.« (See Nielsen's essay »On the Obstacles of the Will«, in *Wittgensteinian Fideism?*, 322).

He is concerned with Wittgensteinian fideism insofar as it is a possible threat to secularism.

It seems to me that Nielsen's critique over the decades comes down to just three central ideas that he holds to constitute Wittgensteinian fideism when applied to the understanding of religions: (1) justification is internal to a language-game or form of life, (2) the meaning of terms is intelligible only within the language-games or forms of life out of which the terms come, and (3) it does not make sense to question the justification or the intelligibility of language in general; both of these concepts only properly apply within language-games and forms of life. Absent from the 2005 account is reference to the loss of an Archimedean point of view. In the original 1967 paper, Nielsen placed considerable emphasis on the idea that for Wittgensteinians there was no Archimedean point from which justification or intelligibility could be universally assessed. At times, Nielsen has even written as if the rejection of such a »view from nowhere« (to borrow Thomas Nagel's phrase) were itself enough to establish Wittgensteinian fideism; however, what I think he means is that this tendency is palpable in Wittgenstein's writings and through his influence in philosophy. Interestingly, Nielsen holds that one need not be religious to be a Wittgensteinian fideist; he takes the view to encapsulate a philosopher's stance towards the issue of the localization of intelligibility and justification of religious belief and not essentially a religious philosopher's appropriation of Wittgenstein to stave off secular critique.

These early remarks on the absence of an Archimedean standpoint resonate with Nielsen's more recent remarks on Wittgensteinian fideism, and this suggests to me that they are what he takes to be central in the older characterization as well. Indeed, in his final contribution to the joint volume with Phillips, Nielsen characterizes the hypothetical Wittgensteinian fideist view thus: »There are no context-independent and form-of-life independent practice-transcendent criteria of rationality by which our modes of social life can be assessed or criticized for they supply our very standards of assessment or criticism and criteria of intelligibility.«[11] The rejection of the Archimedean standpoint in philosophy is one of those philosophical principles Nielsen sees in Wittgenstein's thought that allows for the possibility of fideism. I interpret the central thesis of Nielsen's conception of Wittgensteinian fideism to be the rejection of the public contestability of the reasonableness of religious belief. An Archimedean criterion of justification or meaningfulness would secure an objective means of public contestability, but Nielsen would welcome an intersubjective, fallibilist conception of public contestability in its place. Nielsen's problem with Wittgensteinian philosophy of religion is that he understands it to foreclose on both

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[11]   Ibid. 321.

notions of public contestability; in rejecting an Archimedean measure for intelligibility and justification, he takes Wittgensteinian philosophy of religion to reject the possibility of any objective or intersubjective measure.

Nielsen's critique of Wittgensteinian fideism may perhaps be better understood against the background of other developments in his philosophical work. In such work, he develops his fallibilist, intersubjective conception of public contestability. Nielsen's 1998 essay »On Being a Secularist All the Way Down«[12] may be instructive for this purpose. In the essay, Nielsen subscribes to what he calls »social naturalism«: a view that »takes human beings to be irreducibly social beings and the human animal as being a self-interpreting animal«.[13] Nielsen's view of human nature is such that human social life is partly constituted through the practice of numerous language-games, no one of which – be it physics, anthropology or poetry – has a privileged grasp on truth. Nielsen thus eschews an Archimedean point of view, and yet he finds an intersubjective means of improving and expanding one's belief-system. His secular ideal of cooperative human flourishing involves the pursuit of what he calls »wide reflective equilibrium« (an epistemic goal he borrows from John Rawls' *A Theory of Justice*): the coherence of our beliefs and practices both within a larger web of belief and practice and in relation to theories of human nature, society and psychology (to name a few). For Nielsen, wide reflective equilibrium is the aim of education and, one might say, philosophical activity. Nielsen's secularist ideal is also centrally fallibilist: »We can, however, never reasonably expect firm closure; we will at best get something that for a time obtains, knowing full well that this will always be only for a time […]. The reflective equilibrium will, sooner or later, be upset and another will need to be forged.«[14] In the essay, Nielsen holds religions to be problematic because they shun fallibilism in favor of an epistemic goal of certainty. Wittgensteinian fideism is problematic for Nielsen because it characterizes religions in such a way that they are enclosed within language-games or forms of life; it excludes religions from the public conversation over the viability of beliefs and practices Nielsen takes to be critical for our collective flourishing. Wittgensteinian fideism thus protects religious beliefs and practices from public contestability.

Nielsen draws on the fallibilism of Peirce in forming his secular ideal of human flourishing. While ultimately, Nielsen agrees with W.K. Clifford's evidentialist measure for belief, »[i]t is wrong always, everywhere, and for

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[12]   Nielsen, »On Being a Secularist All the Way Down«, in Idem, *Naturalism and Religion* (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 2001), 56–76.
[13]   Ibid. 57.
[14]   Ibid. 69.

every one, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence«,[15] Nielsen's evidentialism is tempered by his pragmatism. Nielsen seems to agree with the intellectual imperative Clifford formulates but sees pragmatist fallibilism as a good means to the evidentialist end. Nielsen recognizes that proportioning one's beliefs to the evidence is a matter of achieving coherence in one's worldview (i.e., one's patterned set of beliefs and practices) and achieving coherence between that worldview and current scientific theories. It may not be obvious that a belief or a practice is incoherent with one's worldview. In an essay, »Wittgenstein and Wittgensteinians on Religion«, originally written for his *Naturalism and Religion* but included in the joint volume, Nielsen writes:

There are many situations, perhaps most situations, in which we have no need ›at all‹ to explain a practice. The practice seems to us – and sometimes rightly so – unproblematic. But then, as C.S. Peirce and John Dewey stressed, circumstances might arise in which we need, or at least want, an explanation for one or another specific pragmatic purpose – political, moral, sociological, or some combination of them – or perhaps because the practice does not seem for some reasonably specific reasons to be working so well and indeed might not be working well.[16]

It is when the irritation of doubt occurs that it becomes necessary to »fix« one's beliefs.[17] A matter that is implicit in the epistemic goal of wide reflective equilibrium is that there is no view from nowhere by means of which one may measure the justification of one's set of beliefs and practices. But Nielsen favors pragmatist fallibilism to what he understands to be the metaphysical and epistemological quietism of Wittgenstein and Wittgensteinian philosophers. Later in the same essay, Nielsen writes: »There is no Archimedean point, *independent of all practices,* from which to criticize any of them. But from this – to make a good Peircean point – it does not follow that *any* practice is immune from or beyond criticism.«[18] These remarks seem to suggest that Nielsen's considered view is that it is not so much the rejection of an Archimedean sense of justification and intelligibility that leads to Wittgensteinian fideism as the quietism that follows on localizing justification and intelligibility to language-games and forms of life.

   The rejection of an Archimedean sense of justification or intelligibility in favor of metaphysical quietism can be perhaps fairly ascribed to Nor-

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[15]   W.K. Clifford, »The Ethics of Belief«, reprinted in *The Ethics of Belief and Other Essays* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1999), 77.

[16]   Nielsen, »Wittgenstein and Wittgensteinians on Religion«, in *Wittgensteinian Fideism?*, 252.

[17]   See C.S. Peirce, »The Fixation of Belief«, *Popular Science Monthly* 12 (November 1877), 1–15.

[18]   Nielsen, »Wittgenstein and Wittgensteinians on Religion«, 275.

man Malcolm and Peter Winch.[19] According to P.F. Bloemendaal, Malcolm makes two critical moves in the early essay »Anselm's Ontological Arguments« (1960), that would prove influential in early Wittgensteinian philosophy of religion. First of all, Malcolm directs special attention to the use of ›religious language‹. Second, in perhaps his most influential move, Malcolm treats religions as language-games. Bloemendaal also observes about Winch, »it is difficult to avoid the impression that *The Idea of a Social Science* presents social practices, traditions and institutions as more or less isolated and self-contained, each going its own, fairly autonomous, way − a necessary ingredient, one might say, for a fideist philosophy«.[20]

However, it remains to be seen just how well this criticism would tell against Phillips. Admittedly, the tone of Phillips' writing is such that it emphasizes genre differences between religion, philosophy, and science.[21] Philosophical sympathy between Phillips and Winch is obvious in Phillips' early essay »Philosophy, Theology and the Reality of God« (1963).[22] Phillips writes: »Theology cannot impose criteria of meaningfulness on religion from without. Neither can philosophy […]. The role of philosophy in this context is not to justify, but to understand.«[23] As an interpretive matter, it is an open question whether Phillips rejects an Archimedean point of view. Phillips, instead, can be something of a provocateur in his writings. He seeks to upend conventional ways of thinking about philosophical problems or clichéd aspects of religious or ethical life and wishes to instigate critical thought on concepts such as meaningfulness or justification by confronting the interlocutor or reader with the sense that philosophical and religious practice are not as closely connected as some philosophers of religion have argued. For example, in *The Concept of Prayer* (1965), Phillips is at pains to show the distance between language used in the practices of prayer or liturgy on the one hand and language used in disputations of epistemology or metaphysics on the other.

There are subtleties to Phillips' views that are not registered in Nielsen's critique. For example, Nielsen makes a much bigger affair of both the notions of ›language-games‹ and ›forms of life‹ in his critique of Phillips

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19   See N. Malcolm, »Anselm's Ontological Arguments«, *Philosophical Review* 69/1 (1960), 41–62, and P. Winch, *The Idea of a Social Science.*

20   See P.F. Bloemendaal, *Grammars of Faith: A Critical Evaluation of D.Z. Phillips's Philosophy of Religion* (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 115–118.

21   Note, however, that this appreciation for genre difference is something that Nielsen, too, recognizes.

22   Reprinted in Phillips, *Wittgenstein and Religion* (London: St. Martin's Press, 1993), 1–9.

23   Ibid. 5.

than Phillips himself makes of these notions in his own writings.[24] About this dynamic, Phillips wearily observes: »The most unfortunate aspect of discussions surrounding Wittgensteinian Fideism was that they diverted attention from much deeper philosophical issues.«[25] Indeed, I take this to be an important motivation to a more contemplative appraisal of this dispute, so as to disrupt uncharitable, and therefore superficial, depictions of the views of the interlocutors.

Phillips' views have gone through notable development over the decades. While Phillips' early philosophy of religion did emphasize the concepts of language-games and forms of life, Phillips' views on Wittgenstein have evolved over time. Consider the following remark from his (relatively early) 1971 essay »Religious Beliefs and Language-Games«:

I write this paper as one who has talked of religious beliefs as distinctive language-games, but also as one who has come to feel misgivings in some respects about doing so.

What do these misgivings amount to? Partly, at least, they amount to a feeling that if religious beliefs are isolated, self-sufficient language-games, it becomes difficult to explain why people *should* cherish religious beliefs in the way they do. On the view suggested, religious beliefs seem more like esoteric games, enjoyed by the initiates no doubt, but of little significance outside the internal formalities of their activities. Religious activities begin to look like hobbies; something with which men occupy themselves at week-ends. From other directions, the misgivings involve the suspicion that religious beliefs are being placed outside the reach of any possible criticism, and that the appeal of the internality of religious criteria of meaningfulness can act as a quasi-justification for what would otherwise be recognized as nonsense.[26]

Phillips recognizes that the way he characterizes religious belief in some early writings invites some of the concern and criticism others have offered. While not repudiating his earlier work, he instead offers in the passage above a corrective to his earlier tone.

Phillips argues that isolationist conceptions of religious life make religions into esoteric practices that are practically cut off from the rest of a person's life. Phillips likens such a characterization of religion to a hobby. By »hobby«, I take it that Phillips means an amusement or diversion. The

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[24]　It should be noted also that purveyors and critics of Wittgensteinian philosophy of religion make too much of language-games and forms of life (at least insofar as they seek to interpret, rather than draw inspiration from, Wittgenstein's philosophy. See P. Sherry, *Religion, Truth, and Language-Games* (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1977) and I.U. Dalferth, »Wittgenstein: The Theological Reception«, in *Religion and Wittgenstein's Legacy*, eds. Phillips and M. von der Ruhr (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005).

[25]　Phillips, »Introduction«, in *Wittgenstein and Religion*, xii.

[26]　Phillips, »Religious Beliefs and Language-Games«, in *Philosophy of Religion*, ed. B. Mitchell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 121–142.

major aim of Phillips' philosophy is to show how religion is a far more complex phenomenon than many philosophers suppose it to be. Religion is a phenomenon that infuses a person's life; it is something within which a person's life may be immersed. Contrary to critics who suggest Phillips holds an isolationist view of religious life, Phillips maintains that his work, as exemplified in *The Concept of Prayer*, seeks to explore »the connections which do exist between prayer and the events of human life«.[27] Phillips continues:

The fact of such connections is not contingently related to the meaning of prayer. How could God be thanked if there were nothing to thank God *for*? How could confessions be made to God if there were *nothing* to confess? How could petitions be made to God in the absence of purposes and desires? So far from denying the connections between prayer and these features of human life, I argued that if such connections are severed, the religious significance of ›prayer‹ becomes problematic.[28]

Although this may not be a vital concern for naturalist critics of religions such as Nielsen, it shows that Phillips appreciates that an isolationist conception of religious life, especially when taken as part of a comprehensive theory of religion, is not quite right. This would seem to suggest that both Nielsen and Phillips agree (although for different reasons) that language-games are not to be thought of as isolated from each other or from other areas of human emotional and intellectual life. An absurdity to the debate over Wittgensteinian fideism is that both principal disputants agree that the view under consideration – variously understood – is to be avoided. What is interesting in their disagreement is why they each reject the view they label ›Wittgensteinian fideism‹, for their reasons differ and point to their preferred conceptions of philosophy.

Since Phillips' considered view is that language-games overlap and combine within religious ways of life, it seems odd to saddle his later thought with the internalist, language-game conception of religion that is characteristic of some early Wittgensteinian philosophy of religion and the ideas of Wittgensteinian fideism. Furthermore, in more recent writings, Phillips has continued to develop his Wittgenstein-inspired contemplative approach to the study of religions, but emphases have shifted in terms of what aspects of Wittgenstein's thought are now taken as most helpful for philosophy of religion. Consider the following remark from *Religion and the Hermeneutics of Contemplation* (2001):

I want to demonstrate the need to go beyond the hermeneutics of recollection and the hermeneutics of suspicion to the hermeneutics of contemplation. The last is simply an application to religion of the more general contemplative character of philosophy itself. This philosophical contemplation waits on the role concepts play in human

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[27]   PHILLIPS, »Wittgenstein and Religion«, in *Wittgensteinian Fideism?*, 44f.
[28]   Ibid. 45.

life. In doing so, it faces head-on the fundamental conceptual issues separating the hermeneutics of ›recollection‹ and ›suspicion‹. Can religion be explained in non-religious terms? Is religion a surface phenomenon which can be analyzed in terms more real and fundamental than its own? Does religion have anything to say which is irreducibly religious?[29]

Phillips here characterizes the dominant theoretical approaches to the study of religions under the rubrics of the hermeneutics of suspicion and the hermeneutics of recollection. The former class includes various critical theories of religion that explain the phenomena of religion through appeal to natural phenomena (e.g. Feuerbach's criticism of religion as the fear of death, Marx's analysis of religion as the product of class struggle, and Freud's criticism of religion as an alternate expression of desire for a providential father). The latter class includes various approaches seeking to reveal the underlying truth behind religious phenomena. Phillips understands the hermeneutics of recollection to include movements such as Reformed Epistemology (e.g. Plantinga), refurbished natural theology (e.g. Swinburne), and continental hermeneutics (e.g. Ricœur), which each seek to bring readers to a »second naiveté«[30] regarding the truth-claims of religions.

Phillips wants to locate his approach in a third category, the hermeneutics of contemplation. He seeks neither to prove the truth of a religion, nor explain its illusory quality; instead, he takes the proper project of the philosopher to be to clarify the ›grammar‹ of religious expressions and practices. But this should not be interpreted as a return to a language-game conception of religion (i.e., to a rigid identification of religions as language-games or forms of life). One wonders if clarification of the conditions of the possibility of religious discourses may involve a wide variety of interpretive practices (historical, sociological, aesthetic) working in concert to present the philosopher with a rich portrait of those religious discourses.

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[29]   Phillips, *Religion and the Hermeneutics of Contemplation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 4–5.

[30]   I borrow this expression from Paul Ricœur to refer to religious belief that comes after criticism. For Ricœur, the hermeneutical process aides in this reorientation towards religious symbols. Ricœur writes in *The Symbolism of Evil*: »Does that mean that we could go back to a primitive naiveté? Not at all. In every way, something has been lost, irremediably lost: immediacy of belief. But if we can no longer live the great symbolisms of the sacred in accordance with the original belief in them, we can, we modern men, aim at a second naiveté in and through criticism. In short, it is by *interpreting* that we can *hear* again. Thus it is in hermeneutics that the symbol's gift of meaning and the endeavor to understand by deciphering are knotted together.« (P. Ricœur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, trans. E. Buchanan (New York: Beacon Press, 1967), 351.

Phillips notes that this approach may appear to some to be apologetics in disguise, a veiled version of the hermeneutics of recollection.[31] After all, does not this approach leave everything as it is? Does not this preclude criticism as Nielsen would argue? Phillips writes:

Philosophical contemplation rescues atheism, as much as belief, from distortions of itself. We still need not deny that there are unbelievers who see no sense in religion, and religious believers who see no sense in atheism. An appreciation of the virtues of philosophical contemplation would lead to a different attitude towards such blindness. Just as there is a difference between saying, ›I do not appreciate chamber music‹, and saying, ›There is nothing in chamber music to appreciate‹, so there would be a difference between someone's saying that they cannot see any sense in either religion or atheism, and the claim that there is no sense in either to be appreciated.[32]

As Phillips observes in *Philosophy's Cool Place* (1999), contemplative philosophy recognizes both the ideas that »(a) Philosophy is an attempt to give an account of Reality«, and »(b) If one provides any measure of ›the real‹, one can always, in turn, pose a question about the reality of the measure. No measure offered can avoid this difficulty«.[33] Yet contemplative philosophy does not generalize from these two observations; it does not carry on into skepticism, nihilism, or, dare one say it, fideism. It stops short of these generalizations. Contemplative philosophy's task is dialectical; it inquires into accounts of reality.

What Phillips is after, as a conception of philosophy of religion, is a manner of understanding that appreciates aesthetically, psychologically, imaginatively (i.e., deeply and thoroughly) the many dimensions of religious life, as well as atheism, on their own terms. One may well subsequently judge religious or secular ways of living to be unappealing, or quite attractive, but what one judges after contemplation is grasped with intellectual charity or empathy. If a critic, such as Nielsen, is not satisfied with Phillips' contemplative philosophical practice, it is because Phillips conceives of different ends for philosophical inquiry than would be found with Nielsen's evidentialist, naturalist ideal of human flourishing. For Nielsen, the aim of philosophy is to answer the intellectual imperative to achieve as much coherence in one's belief system as one's historical circumstances allow, in the effort to promote the cooperative venture of human social life. Philosophy of religion that does not aid and may indeed preclude dialogue and cooperation would seem then to run counter to the spirit of Nielsen's

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[31]   Indeed, this is precisely what Nielsen as well as Wayne Proudfoot contend. It is ironic that a viewpoint might be described as apologetic insofar as it is fideistic. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Catholic and Protestant theologians criticized as fideistic religious viewpoints that eschewed or otherwise undermined natural theology, the traditional means for apologetics.

[32]   Ibid. 5–6.

[33]   PHILLIPS, *Philosophy's Cool Place* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999).

philosophy. For Phillips, philosophy, and thus philosophy of religion, is also a response to an intellectual imperative; in this case, it is the imperative to understand a mode of philosophical or religious discourse as clearly and dispassionately as one is able.

Both Nielsen and Phillips conceive of philosophy in terms of what its proper ends should be, in terms of response to intellectual duties. While Nielsen's model of philosophy draws inspiration from the more empirical variants of American pragmatism, Phillips' view of the ends of philosophy are drawn from Wittgenstein's overarching desire to search out clarity for its own sake. For some in philosophy, it seems implausible that a searching clarity, or perspicuity, might be a legitimate goal in itself for philosophy. For many more practically-minded philosophers, the clarity that is the result of philosophical analysis is pursued for what it may enable one to do (say, build a theory about the subject matter in question); however, Wittgensteinian philosophers have been drawn – especially recently – to view the clearing away of confusions or equivocations as a proper end to philosophy.

There is some debate over whether these ethical, therapeutic or contemplative readings of Wittgenstein's import for philosophy amount to the same thing. Stephen Mulhall and Phillips disagree over the value of Stanley Cavell's and James Conant's work on the putatively therapeutic dimensions of Wittgensteinian philosophy.[34] Mulhall counsels greater consonance between the contemplative and therapeutic readings of Wittgenstein, while Phillips demurs.[35] Does searching for perspicuity transform not just the philosopher's awareness of the object of study, but also the philosopher her- or himself. While ethical-therapeutic readings of Wittgenstein would emphasize the effects of working through a text such as, say, the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* or *Philosophical Investigations* on the reader, Phillips' contemplative philosophy demarcates the personal from the philosophical.[36] In this sense, Phillips' contemplative philosophy remains more rational philosophy than spiritual contemplation. The personal gain that may come from contemplative philosophy, no matter how admirable, is not for Phillips philosophy.

The problems that Nielsen and other critics find in what they call Wittgensteinian fideism stem essentially from the idea of religions being iso-

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[34]   See S. Mulhall, »Wittgenstein's Temple: Three Styles of Philosophical Architecture«, and Phillips, »Locating Philosophy's Cool Place – A Reply to Stephen Mulhall«, in *D.Z. Phillips' Contemplative Philosophy of Religion*, ed. A.F. Sanders (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 13–28, 29–54.

[35]   See Patrick Horn's contribution to the present volume for more on this topic.

[36]   This latter demarcation is yet another area of disagreement between Mulhall and Phillips. See Mulhall, »Avoiding Nonsense, Keeping Cool: Nielsen, Phillips and Philosophy in the First Person«, in *Wittgensteinian Fideism?*

lated language-games or forms of life. For Phillips, however, the problem with Wittgensteinian fideism, aside from the pejorative connotations of the label, is that what Wittgensteinian fideism suggests about religion is a distortion of what Phillips understands religious life to encompass. The compartmentalization of religious belief robs religious practice of its deep connections with a person's life (with a person's moral life, for example). Phillips wants to rescue religions not from critique but rather from distortion, a distortion that both practitioners and outsiders may well be prone towards making. Here is where I see in Phillips' later thought a particular affinity with Wittgenstein. For Wittgenstein too, a searching clarity, or perspicuity [*die Durchsichtigkeit*], may be thought of as a proper end for philosophical practice. Indeed, the ideal of perspicuity as the end of philosophy runs through Wittgenstein's corpus, from his earliest writings to his last. Wittgenstein's model of philosophical practice deters the philosopher from temptations towards equivocation.

From Wittgenstein's writings, it is easy to see that he considered his pursuit of perspicuity to be very demanding. Consider the following from 1931: »I believe that what is essential is for the activity of clarification to be carried out with COURAGE; without this it becomes a mere clever game«.[37] The fact that Wittgenstein occasionally referred to it with moral imagery suggests he saw the pursuit of a searching clarity to be difficult, perhaps something that goes against aspects of our human condition. Contemplation is thus a practice to be cultivated. It is because of our tendencies to see similarities where they may not be and to equivocate where it is unjustified that good habits of contemplation are needed. Although contemplative analyses of philosophical disputes may not resolve them, these analyses provide accounts of where the disagreement lies. This is especially important when the debate in question is not over the relative merits of a proposition (the mere description of which may be uncontroversial), but instead concerns itself with questions of hermeneutical charity, obstinance and the intellectual duties of a philosophical vocation.

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[37]   L. WITTGENSTEIN, *Culture and Value*, Revised Edition, ed. G.H. VON WRIGHT (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1998), 16e.