CHAPTER-VI
WITTGENSTEIN ON RELIGIOUS LANGUAGE

August Comte propounded that “the human mind passes through three stages - or employs three methods of philosophising: The theological, the metaphysical, and the positive, each of which has its practical value and its corresponding social institutions...”1. Each of these stages has different approach to the explanations of natural occurrences. In the theological stage - the natural occurrences are explained with reference to divine or supernatural forces. At the metaphysical stage, explanation is through abstract metaphysical principles. At the third stage i.e. positive stage, which is the modern stage of thought- the method of enquiry is that of science and all natural occurrences are explained by observation, without any appeal to either supernatural forces or abstract metaphysical principles. And I think out of this positive stage, the term positivism is born. This positivism in all its forms rejects religious language as being unscientific and having no place within philosophy.

The position of the positivists will be of interest and concern in this chapter. And so, before coming to discuss Wittgenstein, I shall first discuss the point of view of positivists.

Although the positivistic sort of thinking has its roots in the traditional empiricist philosophy, the first organised formulation of the theory, to be known as verifiability theory, was given by Moritz Schlick in his famous statement, 'the meaning of a proposition is the method of its verification'. That is, to understand the meaning of a proposition is to understand the circumstances which could support it, if it is true. Though, this theory was formulated by Moritz Schlick, it was first developed by Wittgenstein in his book *Tractatus- Logico-Philosophicus*. Wittgenstein strongly believed in the 'Picture Theory' of language. According to Wittgenstein, language is nothing but a picture of facts. By facts is meant 'actual state of affairs'. According to this theory, to know the meaning of a sentence is to know 'the state of affairs it stands for. Or to understand a proposition means - what is the case if it is true. It should be noted here that Wittgenstein changed his views on the picture theory meaning and in his later works like *Philosophical Investigations*, he talks about the use criterion of meaning and language games which is definitely different from the picture theory of meaning.

There are many Philosophers who contributed towards the development of Logical positivism. And, in a very short span, the theory of verification underwent many changes due to its in built inconsistencies and problems. The discussions on all aspects of this theory will be beyond the scope of this theses, however, I shall make an
endeavour to discuss the position with reference to one of the foremost proponents of Logical Positivism namely, Sir Alfred Ayer.

Sir Alfred Ayer has been the foremost exponent of logical positivism. In his book ‘Language, Truth and Logic’ he discusses in detail about the meaningfulness of sentences. He strongly puts forward his views about the purpose of philosophy. He says, “the traditional disputes of philosophers are, for the most part as unwarranted as they are unfruitful. The surest way to end them is to establish beyond question what should be the purpose and method of a philosophical enquiry.” He emphatically says that the traditional views of philosophers which consider metaphysics as indispensable part of philosophy is wrong. He proves that all metaphysical problems and their solutions are mere nonsense. He says, “metaphysical utterances are due to the commission of logical errors, rather than to a conscious desire on the part of their authors to go beyond the limits of experience.”

Logical positivists put forward a standard criterion as yardstick to which all propositions must conform. This criterion they call the criterion of meaningfulness of sentences or the principle of verification. “The principle of verification is supposed to furnish a criterion by which it can be determined whether or not a sentence is literally meaningful... that a sentence had literal meaning if and only if the

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3. ibid. P-45
proposition it expressed was either analytical or empirically verifiable.”

According to this principle either the proposition shall refer to something verifiable in experience or the proposition should express a tautology. This criterion leaves out the sentences which are neither analytical nor are empirically verifiable. Ayer being aware of this difficulty, modifies his principle of verification. In the modified form, he introduces a new term ‘statement’- “...and for this purpose I shall make use of this familiar word ‘statement’ though I shall perhaps use it in a slightly unfamiliar sense... any form of words that is grammatically significant shall be held to constitute sentence and that every indicative sentence, whether it is literally meaningful or not shall be regarded as expressing a statement... any two sentences which are mutually transferable will be said to express the same statement. The word ‘proposition’ will be reserved for what is expressed by sentences which are literally meaningful.”

This criterion takes into consideration only the factual sentences. Thus it overcomes problems faced by the previous criterion. It also segregates the statements which belong to the class of propositions from those which don’t. And thus, in this form the principle of verification states, “a statement is held literally meaningful

4. ibid. P-7
5. Ibid. P-11
if and only if it is either analytic or empirically verifiable.”6 That is to say, “2+2=4”, ‘a bachelor is unmarried.’ These propositions are true because they are analytic or tautologies. The reverse of them becomes false as it becomes self-contradictory. And the empirically verifiable propositions are true or false because they can be judged to be so in experience, for example, ‘it is raining outside of this room.’

As to the nature of verification, Alfred Ayer draws a distinction between ‘practical verifiability’ and ‘verifiability in principle’. Here, what he says is that a proposition may not be verifiable in practice as we may lack means and material for its practical verification, but it does not mean that it is not verifiable in principle. A proposition to be significant - it must be verifiable at least in principle. He gives an example of the propositions of this nature, “There are mountains on the farther side of the moon.”7 In this proposition though we have not seen the farther side of the moon or no body has yet given an account of this but if we happen to go and make an observation we can know that this proposition can be termed as true or false as per the observation and this is what is meant by verifiable in principle and this is significant. He contrasts this with a metaphysical proposition which he calls ‘pseudo-proposition’- the absolute enters into, but is itself incapable of evolution and progress. This proposition according to this criterion is not even verifiable in principle and is thus insignificant.

He makes further distinction between 'weak' and 'strong' sense of the term 'verifiable'. "A proposition is said to be verifiable in strong sense of the term, if and only if its truth could be conclusively established in experience,... it is verifiable, in the weak sense, , if it is possible for experience to render it probable."8

Ayer admits that conclusive verifiability cannot be taken as the criterion of significance of propositions for no general proposition of law can be conclusively verified. For example - 'All men are mortal', 'bodies tend to expand when heated', 'Arsenic is poisonous.' He says that it is the very nature of these propositions that their truth cannot be established with certainty by any finite series of observations. So, he admits that 'no proposition other than a tautology can possible be anything more than a probable hypothesis? So, since the criterion of conclusive verifiability is too strong, he switches over to the weaker sense of verifiability. He says that, "... the question that must be asked about any putative statement of fact is not, that would any observation make its truth or falsehood logically certain? But simply, would any observation be relevant to the determination of its truth or falsehood? And it is only if a negative answer is given to this second question that we conclude that the statement under consideration is nonsensical".9 He formulates the criterion in the following way, “ let

8. ibid. P-12
9. ibid. p-53
us call a proposition which records an actual or possible observation an experiential proposition... it is the mark of genuine factual proposition...not that it should be equivalent to an experiential proposition or any finite number of experiential propositions, but simply that some experiential proposition can be deduced from it in conjunction with certain other premises without being deducible from these other premises alone.”10

Ayer claims that by this criterion we can rule out the significance of the utterances of certain kind which are literally nonsensical. He gives the following examples as being not even false but non-sensical - “... the world of sense experience was altogether unreal ... that senses sometimes deceive us, just because the expectations to which our sense experience give rise do not always accord with what be subsequently experience. That is, we rely on our senses to substantiate or confute the judgements which are based on our sensations. And therefore the fact that our perceptual judgements are sometimes feared to be erroneous has not the slightest tendency to show that the world of sense experience is unreal. And, indeed, it is plain that no conceivable observation or series of observations could have any tendency to show that the world revealed to us by sense experience was unreal.”11

10. WD Hudson : Wittgenstein and Religious Beliefs: P-129
11. AJ Ayer : Language Truth and Logic: P-53
Coming to the meaningfulness of religious beliefs, Ayer says that, "the existence of a being having the attributes which define the god of any non-animistic religion cannot be demonstratively proved. To see that this is so, we have only to ask ourselves what are the premises from which the existence of such a god could be deduced. If the conclusion that a god exists is to be demonstratively certain, then these premises must be certain, for, as the conclusion of a deductive argument is already contained in the premises, any uncertainty there may be about the truth of the premises is necessarily shared by it... no empirical proposition can ever be anything more than probable. It is only a priori propositions that are logically certain. But, we can not deduce the existence of a god from an a priori proposition... why a priori proposition are certain is that they are tautologies. And from a set of tautologies nothing but a further tautology can be validly deduced. It follows that there is no possibility of demonstrating the existence of god." 12

He further says that we cannot prove the existence of god even probable. Because if we bring in the probability then the existence of god will become a matter of empirical hypothesis. And then applying the criterion of verification, it would be possible to deduce from it, and other empirical hypothesis, certain experiential propositions which were

12. ibid. P-151-152
not deducible from those other hypothesis alone. He says that if ‘God’ be taken as a metaphysical term, then it cannot be even probable that a god exists, as metaphysical terms are neither true nor false and therefore have no literal significance. He even goes to the extent of saying that ‘utterances about the nature of god are non-sensical.’

So, we find that the logical positivists give a strict criterion for the meaningfulness of all types of sentences. But, this criterion, though seems at the outset a complete and useful, has some commonsense problems and logical difficulties. In the introduction of his book ‘Language, Truth and Logic’ he accepts some of the problems. First of all the main force of this criterion is directed towards refutation of metaphysics and theology. But, in fact what they have done is that they have exposed the prejudice of their minds against theology and metaphysics. It is whimsical to define meaningfulness in terms of empirical verifiability. Because, what we generally understand is that the meaning is not verifiability. The meaning of a proposition is presupposed to any attempt of its verification. Until a proposition is meaningful or is intelligible, the question of its verification does not arise. The question of verification arises in relation to establishing the truth of a claim and not in the ‘sense’ of a claim. Though a proposition may not be verifiable but it can be meaningful. The question of truth if at all, should come after the meaningfulness of a proposition and not before that.
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Even if we grant that the verifiability with reference to experience is a necessary condition for meaningfulness, still the positivists cannot be freed from the charge of arbitrariness. Because, they do not ask for verifiability of statements by any experience but by sense experience only. Why limit the word experience only to sense experience when people have many other kinds of experiences?

In the last analysis, the verifiability principle has reached to a point where, as we find, it can claim only that metaphysical and theological statements are not verifiable in that way and therefore they are not ordinary factual or scientific statements. And in achieving this, the logical positivists have achieved nothing new. Kant has pointed out long ago that metaphysics could not be a science. And perhaps no man has ever claimed that metaphysical statements or theological statements are scientific statements or are factual in the ordinary sense.

The most crucial observation against the logical positivists is made by John Wisdom. The principle of verification aim at refuting metaphysics and theology. But it is itself fundamentally based on the metaphysical pre-suppositions of logical atomism, which is itself a kind of metaphysical theory. Wisdom says, “well, shall we accept the
verification principle? What is it to accept it? When people bring about with a dashing air the words ‘the meaning of a statement is the method of its verification’, like one who says, ‘The value of a thing is really simply its power of exchange’, in what sort of way are they using words? What is the general nature of their theory? the answer is, ‘it is a metaphysical theory’”. 13

The other observation is that Ayer concludes that the ‘Utterances about the nature of god are non-sensical. This seems to be a very paradoxical conclusion. In commonsense view the religious beliefs are such that the people may say, for example, the atheists, that the belief in god is false but none will say that it is outright non-sensical. Thus, the logical positivists’ claim that religious beliefs are non-sensical and meaningless is unjustified. Because the ‘meaningfulness’ of a proposition is presupposes to any attempt of its verification. Until a proposition is meaningful or is intelligible, the question of its verification does not arise. The question of verification arises in relation to establishing the truth of a claim and not in the ‘sense’ of a claim. Though a proposition may not be verifiable but it can be meaningful. The question of truth if at all, should come after the meaningfulness of a proposition and not before that.

Further, for a religious believer, what counts as relevant for

13. Metaphysics and verification, p. 454-55
verification is not same as what would count so for a scientist. For example, religious believer already sees certain things as ‘miracles’ or certain loss as ‘punishment’ etc. These ordinary events will be relevant for verification for a religious believer. So, a religious believer uses a language in which events are already described in a way such that they appear meaningful. Their meaning, it seems, cannot be translated in non-religious language. This is a point which I shall discuss with reference to Wittgenstein.

What is said in religion, Ethics, Aesthetics and Poetry is already meaningful though not in the same way as propositions of science. The subject matter of all the said subjects is not verifiable in the same way as proposed by the logical positivists and we cannot simply discard these subjects as meaningless. In this context, it shall not be out of place to quote Aristotle when he says, “it is the mark of an educated man to look for precision in each class of thing just so far as the nature of the subject admits; it is evidently equally foolish to accept probable reasoning from a mathematician and to demand from a rhetorician scientific proof.”14

To conclude this discussion about logical positivists and to start with ‘Wittgensteinian theory of language’, I shall say that the language seems to transgress all sort of limitations and boundaries set for it and it

is simply meaningless (as thought by logical positivists) that certain kinds of discourse are not meaningful just because these discourses do not fit into their criterion of meaningfulness. This point I shall discuss at length in the following discussion.

The logical positivists' criterion lost acceptability because they tried to judge the utterances of empirical and metaphysical nature with the same standard yardstick and same is true about all the debates on the historical proofs of god's existence. The nature of the debate is such that not only that no conclusion is reached in these arguments, but that no conclusion can possibly be reached in this sort of debates. The problem at hand, to say more specifically, is such that we use the concepts in religion and moral spheres without their teleological contexts.

Moral and religious philosophers in recent times have rightly come to reach at the roots of the problem. Alasdair MacIntyre in his book 'After Virtue' rightly says - how the crisis in moral sphere arises and the enlightenment project of justifying morality was bound to fail. He says, "... moral judgements are linguistic survivals from the practices of classical theism which have lost the context provided by these practices. In that contact moral judgements were hypothetical and categorical in form.... But take away from them that in virtue of which they were categorical and what are they?" 15 It is due to this reason
that in modern times we find the interminable status of moral debates and confusion in the moral sphere.

The same inspiration seems to be working behind Wittgenstein’s stand. As to the nature of language in general and religious language in particular, Wittgenstein’s theory of language games is enlightening. So, a brief description of this theory shall help in a great way in understanding the nature of religious language.

Wittgenstein in his book *Philosophical Investigations* propounded the theory of “language games and forms of life.” This theory puts forward the ‘use-criterion’ of meaning. According to this, “the meaning of a word is its use in the Language”16 The concept of “language games’ is basic to the whole theory of meaning. A language game is described by Wittgenstein as, “a whole consisting of language and actions into which it is woven... to imagine a language is to imagine a form of life.”17 Here we find that the language games and the forms of life are inseparable or interwoven. These wholes, consisting of languages and actions provide the intelligibility and justification to us within a particular language game.

17. Ibid. PI-19
Wittgenstein talks of the multiplicity of language games. This is due to the multiple usage to which a language is put, 'to imagine a language is to imagine a form of life'. Again the forms of life are 'the given' and have 'to be accepted'.

Another important point in language games is the 'modal component' which is illustrated by Wittgenstein with the help of an example of a 'picture of a boxer in particular stance'. This picture of the boxer can be interpreted in different ways. Wittgenstein being aware of these difficulties involved in interpretation makes a distinction between 'surface grammar' and 'depth grammar'. The importance of this distinction is apparent in the use of language, for example, the sentence-'You will go there' can be put in different ways:-

(a) by an officer to a subordinate during army maneuvers;

(b) by a friend to a man who had just said that he could not make up his mind whether to go such and such place or not;

(c) by an actor to another in a course of a play, etc.

In case of the 'surface grammar' the construction of sentences is the same in all the cases. But the sentence, 'you will go there' has multiple use - used for the purpose of request, and order etc. Wittgenstein says that in order to get at the meaning of an utterance, it is always necessary to penetrate below its 'surface grammar' to its 'depth grammar'. This refers to the point that meaning of an utterance is
‘context’ based. Until we get the context we cannot get at the meaning of an utterance. Here again A C MacIntyre’s suggestion that the context which is missing is to be supplied and this can be done by the ‘depth grammar’. In order to get at the meaning of a sentence we have to understand it as a ‘move’ in a particular language game which forms its context.

Language games are dynamic in nature. This is due to the fact of the requirements in a form of life. To meet these requirements new words and new language games come into existence and some of them become obsolete and are forgotten. This is made explicit by the following analogy:

“Our language can be seen as an ancient city: a maze of little streets and squares, of old and new houses, and of houses with addition from various periods, and this surrounded by multitude of new boroughs with straight regular streets and uniform houses.”18

The analogy of ‘language games’ plays an important part in understanding the different aspects of language. The words in language are like the pieces in chess. A piece in chess has a meaning attached to it by virtue of the part it plays in chess moves. Until it is used in chess it has no meaning. So, is the case with the words - the meaning of a

18. ibid. p.18
Word is its use in a language game. Until a word has been given a place in the language it does not acquire any meaning. Rather, I shall say the words are labeled with the particular meanings and apart from this label it is nothing. Once a word is given a place in a language game it continues to have that place. Even if the bearer of the label dies or ceases to exist. For example as Wittgenstein says, if Mr. N.N. dies, it does not mean that the name ceases to have meaning. If this had been the case then there will be no sense in talking about Mr. N.N. whether he was a good person or a bad one. Wittgenstein says that "... the word meaning is used illicitly if it is used to signify the thing that 'corresponds' to the word, that is to confound the meaning of the name with the bearer of the name. When Mr. N.N. dies, one says that the bearer of the name dies not that the meaning dies. And it would be nonsensical to say that, for if the name ceased to have meaning, it would make no sense to say 'Mr.N.N is dead.'19  So, the word still has meaning in the language games even if the bearer of the name ceased to exist. But, the name which has never been used in a language game - cannot have any meaning. This brings us to the further point of private language. Wittgenstein rules out the possibility of private language. By a "private language is meant one that not merely is not but cannot be understood by anyone other than the speaker"20. In order to answer this question we will have to look into the working of a language. A public

19. ibid. Pl.40
language means an agreement between the words and their uses. It is this aspect of language which makes communication possible, enables us to say something meaningfully and also to understand others. For example, if I say that the cover of the book, I am reading now, is ‘black’. this will not convey anything to you if we do not agree in calling it black. If we do not use the words in a language in a particular/regular way, it will be impossible to undertake any sort of discourse. If the words are not given a regular meaning, the question of their being used right or wrong will not make any sense.

“What would it be like if human beings shewed no outward signs of pain (did not groan, grimace, etc)? Then it would be impossible to reach a child the use of the word ‘tooth ache’... But what does it mean to say that ‘he has named his pain’? - How has he done this naming of pain?! And what ever he did, what was its purpose? - When one says ‘He gave a name to his sensation’ one forgets that the great deal of stage setting in the language is presupposed if the mere act of naming is to make sense. And when we speak some one’s having given a name to pain, what is presupposed is the existence of the grammar of the word ‘pain’, it shews the post where the new word is stationed.”

This shows that that if the act of naming is to make any sense, it has to be within a form of life, where it will be used in future. It can make
sense only in a language game. Supposing this act of naming be a fully private activity, and the child or for that matter any body instead of using the word pain uses some sign, to take Wittgenstein’s example ‘S’. Wittgenstein says, “what reason have we for calling ‘S’ the sign for a sensation? ‘For sensation’ is a word of our common language, not of one intelligible to me alone. So, the use of this word stands in need of a justification which every body understands - And it would not help either to say that it need not be a sensation; that when he writes 'S', he has something and that is all that can be said. ‘Has’ and ‘something’ also belong to our common language. - So in the end when one is doing philosophy one gets to the point where one would like just to emit an inarticulate sound. - But such a sound is an expression only as it occurs in a particular language game, . . .”

Further, when we say that we have given a private definition of a word, we must find out its particular use or we shall be able to say inwardly that the word will be used in this particular way. Does this mean that we have invented a technique of using the word? Once we find out what the word stands for we know its whole use. Since the words have meaning only in language games - the possibility of a private language is ruled out. By private language is meant a language which only the user can understand. By a “private language is meant
one that not merely is not but cannot be understood by anyone other than the speaker."23 This language is not possible because there is no way of checking its proper use. Since the meaning of the words can only be understood in the language games and forms of life, private language is devoid of this aspect. Further the language must have the quality of communication - spoken or used by one person and understood by the other. This is the basic requirement of any language. "Words are connected with the primitive, the natural expressions of the sensations and used in their place."24 And it is in this way that we teach and learn the language. It is in this way that a child replaces crying by the verbal expression of pain.

The problems in understanding language arise when we do not command the clear view of the use of words and try to interpret them in different ways than they should actually be linked and understood. "A main source of our failure" says Wittgenstein is that "we do not command the clear view of the use of words - our grammar is lacking in this sort of perspicuity. A perspicuous representation produces just that understanding which consists in seeing connections." 25 So, "the confusions which occupy us arise when language is like engine idling, not when it is doing work."26 "... when language goes on holiday." 27 Also, the misunderstandings are out of the illusion that the language at

23 George Pitcher: Modern Studies in Philosophy: P.66
24. Wittgenstein, Ludwig. Philosophical Investigations: P. 244
27. PI-38
our disposal is, as if not very exact and we want to have a very complete language. As if whatever we said is vague and not clear. “When we believe that we must find the order, must find the ideal, in our actual language, we become dissatisfied with what are ordinarily called ‘propositions’ ‘words’ and ‘signs’...” 28 “...to see that we must stick to the subjects of our everyday thinking and not go astray and imagine that we have to describe extreme subtleties, which in turn we are after-all quite unable to describe with the means at our disposal, we feel as if we have to repair a torn spider’s web with our fingers.” 29

What we have to do is to look at the working of our language. Language is a vehicle of thought and means of communications. If this purpose is achieved, it suffices our purpose. We must not strive after the illusive ideal. What can be said can be said clearly. “...It is clear that every sentence in our language is in order as it is that is to say we are not striving after an ideal, as if our ordinary vague sentences have not yet got quite exceptionable sense, and a perfect language awaited construction by us - on the other hand it seems clear where there is sense there must be perfect order- so there must be perfect order even in the vaguest sentence.” 30

Language is governed by rules like the rules in the games. We learn these rules from our elders as a specific training in learning
language and games or by watching them use these rules. Just as a man watches the game being played and from that he infers the rules of the game. These rules stand as sign posts to guide our working in language-games. They do not stand in our way to obstruct our use of words. They only guide us as per our requirements. There is no fixed meaning of the word ‘rule’. It is used differently in different games. Every game is played according to certain rules. “To obey a rule, to make a report, to give an order, to play a game of chess, are customs.”31 and “not a hocus-pocus which can be performed by the soul.”32 “To understand means to understand a language. To understand a language means to master a technique.” 33 And so the questions of meaning, of understanding, of following a rule are to be treated by taking into account the use of signs with in a certain language game.

The essence of the matter concerning the meaning of language games lie in the remarks of Wittgenstein, “... look at its use and learn from that.”34 “Grammar tells what kind of object anything is.”35 and the injunction: “one must always ask oneself: is this word ever actually used in this way in the language game which is its original home?”36

As to the questions of explanations and meaningfulness, Wittgenstein says that, “our mistake is to look for an explanation where...
we ought to look at what happens as a ‘proto-phenomenon’. That is, we ought to have said: this language game is played”.37 “The question is not one of explaining a language-game by means of our experiences, but of noting a language-game”38.

“... Look on the language game as the primary thing.”39

Wittgenstein regarded the language games and their associated forms of life as beyond explanations. The inescapable logic of this conception is that the terms ‘explanation’, ‘reason’, ‘justification’, have a use exclusively within the various language games. The word ‘explanation’ appears in many different language games and is used differently in different games. An explanation is internal to a particular language game. There is no explanation that rises above our language games, and explains them. This would be a super concept of explanation - which means that it is an ill-conceived falsity.

Now, coming to the ‘religious language’. Religious language is rejected by logical positivists on the grounds that the words used in such a language do not refer to any public object i.e. verifiable objects. The words like ‘God’ do not stand for any object which the user and

37. PI. 654
38. PI. 655
39. PI. 657
others can observe. This is so because God by definition is beyond the empirical level. It does not make sense to say that the word ‘God’ refer to such and such an object. Similarly, the sentences containing the words ‘God’, ‘soul’ etc are not verifiable and hence are meaningless. Secondly, it is not possible to check application of rules: if the words are used rightly as by nature the sentences are not verifiable.

But, we see that these objections of the logical positivists do not hold ground. Because the strict criterion of meaningfulness as propounded by the logical positivists is too strong as we have seen in the preceding discussion. I shall come back to this point after the brief discussion of the nature of religious language and religious beliefs.

In Lectures Wittgenstein took lot of pains to place the religious utterances in their original and native inhabitat and made it clear that these utterances are basically different in nature than the scientific expressions and hence the nature of enquiry and its justification totally changes. We cannot put the two under same method of enquiry. Concepts employed in religious language do not admit of ordinary empirical verification. The ‘being’ that is approached is that in which the subject concerned has an essential involvement. Religion for believer is more a way of life that a way of knowledge or truth. Thus the utterances in religion must be understood as move in ‘religious language
games'. If they are isolated from the context, they make no sense. In lectures Wittgenstein makes it explicit by contrasting the religious beliefs with the scientific hypothesis. Both the subjects deal in altogether different fields. The confusion arises out of the 'bewitchment' of our intelligence by means of our language. That is to say we try to understand or analyse the different sentences in the same way without considering their 'depth-grammar'. For example as Wittgenstein says -(I) suppose some one were a believer and said: "I believe in a last judgement", and said: "well, I am not sure. Possibly." And (II) if he said, "there is a German Aeroplane over head", and I said "possibly, I am not so sure". To treat these expressions on the same level is to commit a mistake. Because though the sentences in (I) and (II) are apparently same pattern but are not really same kind. (II) is empirical fact and can be confirmed. The question of confirmation is easy. We know that there is an aeroplane overhead and need to confirm only whether it is a German aeroplane or not. Where as the case in expression (I) is totally different. The question of aeroplane is a contemporaneous with the speakers, while referring last judgement is not. The question about 'last judgement' is belonging to different language game from the language game of material objects. "What ever believing in 'God' may be, it cannot be believing in something we can test, or find means of testing." Some

40. Wittgenstein, Ludwig, Lectures, LRB, P.60
people reject religious language and religious beliefs on the grounds that the expressions of religious beliefs are self contradictory. For example “Suppose some one, before going to China, when he might never see me again, said to me: “We might see one another after death” or “God’s eye sees everything”. Wittgenstein says that these statements express use of pictures and are unverifiable or verifiable in quite a different way than the scientific statements or commonsense statements. For example ‘if I shall survive death’ means ‘I cannot evade this responsibility’. And when we say ‘God’s eye sees everything. The entailments drawn are not that God’s eye brows, there shape etc but that God’s eye sees not only the external world but also what we think and do. He asks - “Are eye brows going to be talked of in connection with the eye of God?” 41. What one has to discover the ‘technique’ of using the pictures. A believer does not draw the conclusions that since God has an eye, he must have eye brows.

Further, a believer’s use of pictures is comissive. He regulates his life according to these pictures which are always at the forefront in his judgements and actions. He risks things for the sake of them. For example, he takes the pains and losses as punishment for his may be bad deeds. In brief, he understands his whole life in this particular context.
Lastly, the language used in religion is ordinary day to day language. “When religious believer speak of dead meeting in heaven, they must mean by ‘dead’ what we all mean at least to a degree which justifies their use of this word rather than any other”.42 As Wittgenstein said that any believer who claimed to have his own private idea of death, must be told that if this has nothing in common with the public idea that is “the game played with ‘death’ which we all know and understand”, then it is of no interest. It must ‘become part of our game’ and once it does so, it must confirm, to some degree, to the rules of that public game. So, the language of religion is not a totally idiosyncratic language. The central idea of justification and intelligibility can be expressed in the following quotation:-

“There are grounds for claiming that religious belief is one such ‘given’ form of life. There is, so to speak, an ultimacy of intelligibility and justification in religious utterances. There comes a point at which to the questions ‘why do you say this?’ or ‘why do you argue this way?’ The only reply which a religious believer can give is ‘this is what we do’. Attempts to make sense of religious beliefs into non religious terms is inevitably to take away their meaning. To base religious claims on non religious grounds is inevitably to surrender them.”43

Now, coming back to the objections raised by the logical

42. Wittgenstein and Religious Beliefs: P-185
43. LRB, p-156
positivists against the untenability of religious language. Firstly, the statements using words like ‘God’ etc are not verifiable as they do not refer to any public object or observable object. These objections can be repudiated. First of all as seen above we must put these utterances to their original inhabitat and see that they are meaningful. Secondly, since the religious language is not an idiosyncratic language, the words used in it are the words of normal day to day language. What, I mean to say is - the people sharing ‘religious form of life’ can well understand each other and also can be corrected and guided by each other - that is what happens in ‘religious gatherings’. But, not only the people sharing this form of life understand each other but also the people those who are against the religion understand it, though their understanding is not of the same nature. For example - a religious believer is commissive where as a non believer is not.

The crux of the whole point is that religious beliefs are distinctive language-games and these language-games have the criteria of intelligibility within them. And also, the criteria of intelligibility of one language-game cannot be applied to another. This leads us to conclude that a religious believer can say anything he wishes and their is no check on him for whether he says something right or wrong. DZ Philipps has rightly come to mark this problem in his article ‘Religious beliefs and Language-games’. He says, “… so a believer can commit blunders within his religion. But this observation might satisfy the
critics, since they might argue that a set of pointless rules could have an internal consistency. People can follow, and therefore fail to follow, pointless rules. In that way they may make mistakes. But the possibility of their being correct or incorrect would not fail of itself confer a point on a set of pointless rules. To argue, therefore, that religious beliefs are distinctive language-games with rules which their adherents may follow or fail to follow does not, of itself, show that the rules have any point.”44

Phillip says that the problem as mentioned above is due to the ‘strain in the analogy between religious beliefs as games’. He says that “... the misgivings I have outlined are justified. They point to a strain in the analogy between religious beliefs as games. The point of religious beliefs, why people should cherish them in the way they do, cannot be shown simply by distinguishing between religious beliefs and other features of human existence. What I am saying is that the importance of religion in people’s lives cannot be understood simply by distinguishing between religion and other modes of social life, although, as we have seen, there are important distinctions to be made in this way... if religion were thought of as cut off from their modes of social life it could not have the importance it has...” 45

Phillips maintains that, “Wittgenstein took it for granted that

44 Religious beliefs and Language games Ch. V, p-93
45 ibid, p-93-94
same language is being spoken in the different language-games. But if this is so the sameness or unity of that language cannot be explained by describing the way in which any particular language game is played. The problem becomes acute when Wittgenstein says that each language-game could be a complete language in itself. . . . the different games do not make up a game, and yet Wittgenstein wants to say that a language, the same language, is a family of language-games - that is, that is the kind of unit a language has. At this point their is a strain in the analogy between language and a game.”46

Phillip also refers to the paper of Rush Rhees “Wittgenstein’s builders” where Rhees talks of the example of ‘Builders’ in the beginning of the investigations. Rhees says that, “But I feel something wrong here. The trouble is not to imagine a people with a language of such limited vocabulary. The trouble is to imagine that they spoke the language only to give these special orders on this job and otherwise never spoke at all. I do not think it would be speaking a language.”47

Taking this example and comparing it with the worshippers, Phillips makes it follow that Religion is also linked with other aspects of human life. And most of the religious beliefs will drive their meaning

46. ibid, p-94-95
47. ibid, p-95
from the practices or aspects of life other than religious beliefs. He says, “. . . so far from it being true that religious beliefs can be thought of as isolated language-games, cut off from all other forms of life, the fact is that religious beliefs cannot be understood at all unless their relation to other forms of life is taken into account. Suppose someone were to object to this, ‘NO. What you need to understand is religious language,’ what would one think of it? One could not be blamed if it reminded one of those who think that all will be well if an acceptable liturgy is devised - a piece of empty aestheticism. Religion could then be described literally as a game, a neat set of rules with ever-increasing refinements in their interpretations and exclusions. It would be impossible to distinguish between genuine and sham worship . . .”

So, we find Phillips rightly makes it follow that religious beliefs have a link with other forms of life and apart from this link we cannot distinguish the right and wrong beliefs. Also, the most of the beliefs draw their meaning from the other forms of life. And, I think he makes the religious form of life free from the charge that it is esoteric and self contained.

Here again a question arises, - by doing this whole exercise of relating the self contained form of life to other forms of life, what is achieved? The achievement is simply that it is broadly a justification to

48. ibid, p-97
understand the religious form of life in relation to the world as a whole. But, intrinsically this whole justification is from a believer's point of view. And, if it is that then I think nothing significant is achieved. The question that need be answered is that how a non-believer can take part or understand a religious form of life?

Here, an important question comes to my mind - Is religious language 'simple' or 'complex'? I think we can take two positions - if it is simple like the word 'red' the consequences are - we cannot talk of asking for any justification or the question of asking for justification of religious belief is misconceived and is out of place. Because the meaning of simple terms like 'red' is understood in terms of ostensive definitions and the matter ends. But, if the language and religious belief is a complex term like the term 'game' - then we can ask for its justification in secular terms. For example, as Wittgenstein says that it is not possible to give an exhaustive definition of the word game. If someone does not know what the word game means, we can make him understand by explaining him some of the features of the games. But, 'red' cannot be explained like that. It is nothing more than 'red' and we can only point to the 'redness'.

But, if this view of religious terms is true then the consequence of it is that, religious beliefs are the beliefs which only can be understood by the people who are trained in that form of life and an outsider has no
approach to them. But, if again this is true it will not be accepted by the religious believers themselves as it may be anything but religion. Because in general, religious people try to convert 'others'. The assumption is that the 'other', who is so far a secular person would understand the religious beliefs to which he is supposed to adopt. But, he cannot so far understand it purely in religious terms. Because ex-hypothesi he does not belong to that form of life. So, it is expected that he will understand it in terms of his own secular meanings of these terms. if This is so, then religious terms are complex like the word 'game' and the question of their truth in any particular use can be raised. So, the question is how far religious language is amenable to non-religious interpretations. This can be more clearly stated with the help of an argument from the debate between Hanfling and Brown. Hanfling says, "... I donot want to say that what Wittgenstein says about autonomy is less true of religious language than of other kinds of language. But I'd like to make a distinction here between what we might call 'simple' and 'complex' terms. Let us take 'red' as an example of a simple term. Now, red is simple in the sense that the only feature that a thing must have in order for you to call it red is just its being red. By contrast, take the word 'game'. Now, as Wittgenstein showed, it isn't possible to give an exhaustive definition of a word like 'game'. Nevertheless, there are a number of features that an activity has on account of which you call it a game. These features could be named and given as reasons, or as a justification, for calling something a game.
Again, if someone did not know what a game is, you could explain it to him by mentioning these features. And this sort of thing does not make sense with the word 'red'. There aren't any features I could name on account of which I could call something red, except just its redness.

Well now, are religious terms like the word 'game' or are they like 'red'? if one says that they are like 'red', then I think one could argue that the demand for justification is misguided. On this view the non-religious person would be someone who literally doesn't know what he is talking about. He'd be rather like a blindman - a man born blind, that is- arguing about the word 'red'. In this case religious scepticism could not really get a foot hold. But I doubt that if religious believers would want to think of their language as being like that.49

It is true that some of the terms in religious language are complex and can be translated in non-religious language but this not true of the fundamental terms. For example how can one explain the term 'holy' in non-religious language. This again is explicable from the Brown's position in the above said debate, "I think I would agree with you that what gives the sceptic about religious language a foothold, if any thing does, is the connection between that language and non-religious language. To the extent that religious terms can be explained in non-religious terms, the application of religious terms will be open to

49. vesey, Godfrey (ed), Philosophy in the open, p-126-127
assessment in non-religious terms for instance, on one account of the term 'miracle', a miracle involves an event which is contrary to laws of nature - an event which, if you like, is 'naturally impossible'. Particular claims to the effect that some event is a 'miracle' could, in this use of the word, be shown to be false by an explanation of that event in terms of natural causes. Furthermore, any basis there may be for belief that no event occurs which is contrary to the laws of nature must also be a basis for scepticism about miracles in this sense of the term 'miracle'. To the extent then religious terms do permit an explanation in terms of familiar to the un-believer, this is the way in which the sceptic might raise his doubt whether those terms do indeed apply to anything.

However, it is not obvious to me that such an explanation of religious terms is always, or even characteristically possible. Let's take another example. One of the fundamental distinctions of religion is between the 'sacred' or 'holy', one the one hand, and the 'profane' or 'secular', on the other. I do not see how one could explain that distinction in non-religious terms. On the contrary, I should be inclined to say that some one who has no appreciation of the distinction between the sacred and the profane has not begun to understand what religion is about. Perhaps this is a distinction in the language of religion which neither has nor needs justification".50

50. ibid. p-127
Hanfling rightly points out that the religious people will be disinclined to claim autonomy for religious language at the cost of treating it as esoteric but as Brown points out that even if religious language is represented as esoteric it need not lose significance for non-believer. The non-believer can imaginatively put himself in the situation of the believer and can acquire an understanding of religious concepts from the point of view of the believer himself. And this capacity has significance for non-believer's life. It would make a difference to his way of life if he could appreciate religious concepts. We can compare it with the case of classical music, for example, at any given time only few actually appreciate classical music and some people may never be able to appreciate. In this sense the language of classical music remain esoteric but the common man can and does come to understand it if he makes the right kind of effort. So, the existence of classical music has significance for every man's life even though in actual fact everyone does not and probably will not come to appreciate it.

This question, to my little understanding has been overlooked by the Wittgenstenians. The most of the questions that are asked or answered in this context are from the believer's point of view. Where as it is non-believer who needs to be convinced.

In order to answer the question under consideration - I think we need to extend this account a little further. And the answer, I feel is
embedded in Wittgenstein's Lectures on Religion. To quote Wittgenstein, "The word 'God' is amongst the earliest learnt - pictures and catechisms, etc. But not the same consequences as with the pictures of aunts. I wasn't shown (that which the pictures pictured).

The word is used like representing a person - God sees, rewards, etc. . . If the question arises as to the existence of a god or God, it plays an entirely different role to that of the existence of any person or object I ever heard of. One said, had to say, that one believed in the existence, and one did not believe, this was regarded as something bad. Normally if I did not believe in the existence of something no one would think there was anything wrong in this." 51

I think this point has been completely missed by the scholars. The explication of the above quotation shows that every or almost every individual has a training in the basic religion in his family and this training must be as per the religion of the family. Here the religion of the family becomes the form of life in which the training is imparted to the children. And, hence it is implicit that every person is a part of religious form of life at a particular stage of life. And, it is only at the later stage that the question of his shifting to other form of life, e.g. non-believer, arises.

51. LRB, p-59
By this what I want to say is simply that the non-believer is fully conversant with the religious form of life, at least to the extent that he understands as to what connections a believer makes when he talks in a particular way. A believer's conversion to a non-believer or vice-versa are different events in the life of an individual. For example to take the example from Phillips article, “... suddenly, one has to face the death of one's child.” Such shocks in the life of a believer may change the life of the believer and he becomes a non-believer. But, same sort of shocks can convert a non-believer to a believer.

Now, to me it seems that the whole idea of religious form of life and its meaningfulness is culture based. It is the culture at home which teaches the meaningfulness of different religious statements to the child. This understanding in the form of cultural theory of meaning of 'Religious form of life' gives us better insight into the working of religious beliefs.

The important aspect of this understanding is that it covers the multitude of world views which different religions hold. And the difference between a believer and non-believer in this type of understanding will be that- it is just a matter of commitment. A believer has a commitment towards his belief where as a non-believer is not committed. This makes all the difference.