

Rationality and Knowledge in Religious Discourse: A Critique of Philosophical Relativism

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Abstract:

The central focus of this thesis is to make a case for the unity of all discourses irrespective of the said peculiar nature of each discourse. Religious discourse which involves concepts of supernatural or transcendental agencies, has presented special problems in the history of philosophical enquiry and it has often seemed to be a unique area of unquestioned or unfounded beliefs, dogma, superstitions, arbitrary assumptions, etc. An apparent failure to make religion stand up to certain norms of rationality has led to the neo-Wittgensteinian philosophy of religion, as epitomized in the central concepts of the works of Dewi Zephaniah Phillips in which an attempt is made to claim special kind of criteria of meaningfulness for religion.

This thesis subjects the neo-Wittgensteinian conception of religious discourse to criticisms. This idea that religious discourse has its own internal criteria of meaning which alone provides a basis for any meaningful discussion of religion is rejected. In particular, the idea that religious discourse is self-sufficient, that is, requires no reference to non-religious discourses to sustain its meaning is criticized; and the idea that religious discourse is immune to meaningful criticism from non-religious arguments is also criticized. The discussion is concluded with a consideration of the relevance of the distinction between 'reality' and interpretation of reality and the important question of the meaning of asserting the existence of God.

Keywords: Religious discourse/ supernatural agencies/ transcendental agencies/ Neo-Wittgensteinian conception

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