Original Article

Wittgenstein Against Frazer (A Comparative Study Between Wittgenstein's and Frazer's Views on the Relationship Between Religion and Scientific Rationality)

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Abstract

Frazer and Wittgenstein had a completely different approach to the nature of religion and rationality arising from science. In Frazer's view, scientific rationality is the standard of everything; therefore, he puts religion aside. The result of Frazer's comparison between magic, religion, and science leads to the denial of religious rationality. Frazer's anthropology is based on scientific and rational explanations. According to him, after centuries of displacement in history, science has finally obtained the golden key that opens the doors of nature's treasure. Wittgenstein criticizes Frazer's opinions based on his fundamental thinking about the meta-rationality of faith. He rejects any rational and scientific explanation of religion. According to Wittgenstein, the language game of religion and the language game of science differ. Frazer cannot compare the rationality of believers' religiosity with the criteria of rationality in science and sees and despises the believers as completely wrong. This study, by analyzing Frazer's and Wittgenstein's opinions and after examining the conflict, will reveal why Frazer's criticisms of scientific rationality failed and how Wittgenstein, using metaphors such as language games and the form of life, freed religious rationality from the trap of Frazer's narrow-minded scientific criteria.

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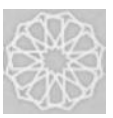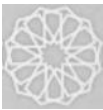
Extended abstract

The prominent thinkers of the Enlightenment era, from Bacon, Descartes, Hume, and Kant to Hegel, John Locke, Rousseau, Auguste Comte, positivists, and empiricists, have all tried to expand and develop science and understand and explain its foundations. The progress, application, and unbridled expansion of science were so bright and influential in human life that the emergence of "authenticity of science" and "scientific rationality" was inevitable. The epistemological and methodological claims of the originality of science were, first of all, directed against religion and, to some extent, limited the authority and influence of religion in the fields of scientific, political, and social human life.

Science is praiseworthy because it brings man prosperity and ease of life and solves his difficulties and sufferings. But just as scientists seek to extract epistemological and methodological tools and results from the path of science and expand it to all the realms of human life, a form of scientific delivery metaphysics or the authenticity of science emerges, which narrows the field to any other type of thinking. The followers' claims of instrumental rationality have reached the form of "authenticity of science" and "extreme rationalism." What is the implication of this type of rationalism for different human fields, specifically for religion and its teachings? One of the philosophers who was concerned with answering this question is Wittgenstein. By reading Frazer's book, he pays more attention to rationality and religion and develops his views.

The point that should be noted about the relationship between "scientific rationality" and "religious rationality" is that throughout history, many philosophers or anthropologists such as Frazer did not accept the responses of religious people for believing in religious beliefs and its basic propositions; in the opinion of philosophers, such answers cannot be a reason for accepting the belief of religious propositions. They are looking for reasons outside the context of religion; such non-religious reasons can be justified for them. Perhaps the origin of this kind of analysis and disregard for the evidence within the religious religion and the search for extra-religious evidence can be considered the belief that propositions such as "God exists" can be proven regardless of the religious "lifestyle" in which belief in God is the main source of life, and only with non-religious rational arguments.

What are the characteristics of this rational basis and reason that philosophers seek to believe in religious propositions? And how should it be achieved? The important thing is that they believe that if they are to believe these propositions and be sure of them, they must be rational. As long as this rationality does not exist, one cannot speak of a reason to believe and be certain of religious propositions. Again, rationality is important, and the difference between rational and irrational beliefs is very important. But is there only one model of rationality that all paradigms follow? The essence of Wittgenstein's words is that we have a variety of criteria of rationality. In other words, the difference between real and original is different in various contexts. Wittgenstein believes that if we pay attention to this issue and its differences, then the criteria of rationality in different fields, such as science and philosophy, will not be spread to the issue of religion, which has a completely different context. Then, talking about God and proving its existence and being sure of such propositions will be understood completely differently. One of the problems and misunderstandings about religion and the rationality arising from it is a point that the likes of Frazer and others who have chosen scientism as their goal

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cannot understand: that you cannot believe in anything unless there is a reason and a basis for it.
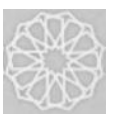
The Golden Bough is the most famous book by James George Frazer, first published in 1890. Frazer's work and thought were trendsetters and had a tremendous impact on the anthropological studies of his time to the extent that he influenced the cultural atmosphere of the 20th century. Frazer's anthropology can be considered entirely based on scientific and rational explanations. The path of his book also starts with magic and then reaches religion and, as a result, science. Frazer believes that when we properly analyze the basics of magic, we find two main elements and laws. First, everything creates something similar to itself, and second, things that were once in contact with each other affect each other after losing contact. Frazer draws our attention to an important point: people who tried to analyze and explain things with magic also believed in the laws governing nature; still, their main problem was that they did not have a correct understanding of these laws of nature. For example, they do not apply the principles of association of meanings correctly, and if the same principles are applied properly, the result is science and not magic. In Frazer's thought, two great and fundamental laws of thought are the same principles of association of meanings: association of meanings based on similarity and association of meanings based on proximity or contact. According to him, if these associations of meanings based on similarity are not used correctly and have a wrong application, it will lead to imitative magic. If those associations of meanings based on proximity and contact are not used correctly or understood, it will lead to contagious magic (Frazer, 1383, p. 117). After much discussion, Frazer finally considers magic a fruitless and wrong art that the people recognize, but despite all this, he does not leave his feeling of helplessness.

After the scandal of the first view, magic, another explanation emerged for the natural world. A person who is still looking for an explanation for things still has a higher power in his heart, and this time, "religion" assumes this role. Religion is a category that is as old as the history of thought, and there are differences in it to the same extent. These differences have come out in different ways in every period of history and affect the body of religion, and of course, there have always been those who defend it. According to Frazer's belief, once a person has tested the subjects and realized that the superior forces he was looking for cannot do anything and rely on vanity, he gives up on magic and religion.

Frazer supports the approach of scientific rationality, while Wittgenstein opposes Frazer's opinions based on his fundamental thinking about the meta-rationality of faith. For Frazer, religion had no place and base, and science was the golden key and the main solution. Wittgenstein could not accept such an understanding of religion, not because he considered religion a rational and scientific matter. He considered any rational and scientific explanation about faith incomplete and incorrect. In Wittgenstein's understanding of religion, the argument has no place. For Wittgenstein, religious faith results from trust, not from reasoning and proof. Therefore, for him, religious faith is not a hypothesis but something like a passionate commitment, and religious beliefs are equally subject to proof and falsification. As a result, religious faith is not only not rational but also does not claim to be rational (Wittgenstein, 1989, p.57).

What Wittgenstein opposes is not science but scientism. Wittgenstein was against the kind of authoritarian scientific

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approach that reduces everything to inanimate matter and discredits the world in a way that leaves no room for other fields of human culture, such as ethics, art, and religion. He considered scientism as a form of idolatry towards science, which, in his view, harms various scientific fields such as philosophy and causes the destruction of culture (Wittgenstein, 1966, p. 27). Wittgenstein believes that Frazer's approach to religion and magic is not convincing. Such an explanation makes these concepts seem wrong. But was Augustine wrong when he read God's confessions on every page? He then answers his question in such a way that it can be said that if he was not wrong, then the Buddhist ascetic or other people who express their religion in the form of completely different concepts were certainly wrong. However, none of them were wrong, except when they put forth theories (Wittgenstein, 1995, p. 1-2). Therefore, according to Wittgenstein and unlike Frazer, magic and religion are not wrong; what is wrong is theorizing about them.

Wittgenstein considers Frazer to be a completely non-spiritual and materialistic researcher who cannot enter the linguistic game of religion and look at issues through the eyes of religious people. Wittgenstein considers Frazer's point of view even more immature than primitive humans and says that Frazer is far behind primitive humans because primitive humans were not so far from understanding spiritual issues as a 20th-century Englishman is. His explanations about the early rituals are much more immature than the meaning of those rituals themselves (Wittgenstein, 1995, p.5-8). Frazer is a researcher and anthropologist who, with a very proud spirit, considers science to be the standard of everything, the kind of measurement by which other eras should also be measured. This attitude is very narrow-minded. A narrow-minded age judges all other ages in an unfavorable manner. Wittgenstein

considers the idea that science should always be the standard of measurement as a stupid superstition of his time and says that man must wake up and science is a way to put man back to sleep (Wittgenstein, 1995, p.5,6).

1. Conclusion

What Wittgenstein opposes is not science but scientism. He was against the domineering scientific approach that reduces everything to a passive substance and leaves the world as a kind of discredit and no place for other fields of human culture, such as ethics, art, and religion. Wittgenstein considered scientism a form of idolatry towards science, which, in his view, is harmful to various scientific fields such as philosophy and causes the destruction of culture.

In Wittgenstein's thought, contrary to Frazer's, religion or religious faith is neither scientific nor rational. Religious faith is not a theory but a certain attitude towards life. Wittgenstein insists that the strongest scientific and logical reasons of the opponents of religious belief cannot cause any wavering in religion because religious belief is not the same as any other belief. The stability and strength of religion have no relation to the stability and strength of scientific beliefs. Religious belief is a way of life different from other ways of life. In other words, the foundation of religion is not based on science, reason, and reasoning, but rather, religious beliefs are based on an image that forms the religious life of people. Religion is a language game. The language game of religion and the language game of science are different, and no one has the right to confuse the criteria of these two. Therefore, Frazer does not have the right to compare the religiosity and the rationality of believers' religiosity with the criteria of rationality in science and sees and despises the believers as completely wrong.

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Wittgenstein believes that Frazer has no right to explain people's religious practices or why they do so by considering the strange behaviors of early humans. He should enter into the language game of their behavior and actions and then pay attention to their relationships and attitudes to analyze them correctly. From this point of view, there is no room for humiliation or blame when we look at people's behavior and actions in religious or primary rituals. Frazer's explanation of the magical and religious concepts of humans is not convincing. Such an explanation makes these concepts seem wrong. Therefore, according to Wittgenstein and unlike Frazer, magic and religion are not wrong; what is wrong is theorizing about them.
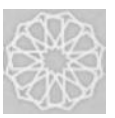
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