

Wittgenstein and Interfaith Disagreement

Gorazd Andrejč

This project explores the possibilities of interpreting interfaith disagreement, either in the spirit of or in dialogue with the philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein.



It is not uncommon to draw on Wittgenstein's thought in contemporary and recent theological and philosophical approaches to interfaith disagreement, or at least to criticize a "Wittgensteinian approach". Beyond the mischaracterizations of Wittgenstein's thought which abound also in this field, the positive engagement with Wittgenstein in interpreting interfaith disagreement has been attempted in markedly different ways. Some approaches take Wittgenstein as a major or even the principal guide in this endeavour, whereas others borrow from Wittgenstein a few selected remarks which are meant to do only a limited interpretive job. Also, while some interpretations draw strongly on one strand of Wittgenstein's thought on language or religion and marginalizing other strands, others do the opposite.

The project identifies and examines four recognizable ways in which Wittgenstein's work has been interpreted to elucidate interfaith disagreement in Christian theology, with four authors as representatives. George Lindbeck represents the *post-liberal* interpretation, David Tracy the "*liberal non-Wittgensteinian*" engagement with Wittgenstein, David Burrell the *Grammatical Thomist* approach, and Klaus von Stosch the *liberal Wittgensteinian* one. At the end, a constructive approach is proposed which builds on the strengths and repairs the weaknesses of the four examined approaches.

Both Lindbeck and Burrell have very fruitfully drawn on the grammaticalist strand of Wittgenstein's understanding of religion, but in markedly different ways: Burrell's whole project is a thoroughly philosophical theology steeped in Wittgensteinian philosophy of language, whereas Lindbeck's interpretation of Wittgenstein is decisively marked by his opposition to liberal and "expressivist" theology. On the other hand, Tracy's engagements with Wittgenstein explore the existential-

experientialist elements in Wittgenstein's thought, while von Stosch is uncovering strands of Wittgenstein which allow religious belief to be understood as inherently contingent and dubitable – strands which are either underemphasised or ignored by the grammaticalist approaches. The account proposed here will attempt to do justice to these different strands in Wittgenstein's thought when interpreting interfaith disagreement, building on the strengths of the examined approaches but going beyond them. Recent Wittgenstein scholarship will be engaged with, and possibilities of application of this approach examined on a selected number of examples of interfaith disagreement among Abrahamic faiths.

The continuation of the project will include examination and comparison of the use of Wittgenstein's thought in understanding interfaith disagreement also in Jewish, Muslim and secular-philosophical thought.

For further information contact Dr Gorazd Andrejč:
ga344@cam.ac.uk