

Peter Winch's Idea on the Nature of Human Understanding

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주요어 지식, 회의주의, 토대주의, 개혁주의 인식론, 종교적 믿음,
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요약문

이 글은 실재에 대한 철학적 탐구가 지닌 성격이 어떤 것인지를 밝힌 피터 윈치의 주장을 소개한다. 윈치는 비트겐슈타인의 주장을 따라 실재에 관한 연구란 인간 이해의 본성에 관한 연구와 불가분의 관계를 갖고 있다고 말한다. 다시 말해, 지식이란 담론이 발생하는 상황에 의존하는 것으로써, 지식의 내용은 실재의 객관적인 사실성과 직접적 관련을 맺는 것이라기보다는 지식을 담는 언어의 의미성과 관계한다고 주장한다. 따라서 철학의 과제는 철학적 담론을 발생시키는 어떤 공통 기반을 밝히는 것이 될 수 없고, 담론을 발생시키는 상황에 대한 우선적인 분석일 수밖에 없게 된다. 실재에 대한 이해 가능성과 담론의 상황성이 맺는 깊은 관련성을 밝히기 위해 이 글은 이 주제에 관한 잘못된 이해의 예로서 회의주의와 토대주의, 개혁주의 인식론의 한계를 논한 다음, 윈치의 해결책을 제시한다.

I . *Introduction*

In what sense does philosophy investigate reality? To this question, Rush Rhees says that “the reality of physical objects is their being subject matter of discourse; and the question of whether they can be known.”¹⁾ The Wittgensteinian idea focuses on fundamental philosophical questions about the nature of reality and the possibility of discourse. In the present essay, I will discuss this philosophical position by clarifying the point at which the Wittgensteinian understanding aims and examining Peter Winch’s answer to the question of how human knowledge could obtain any intelligible certainty about living realities.

This essay is largely divided into two parts. In the first part, pointing out a central issue that governs the whole concern of this paper, I investigate various positions such as skepticism, foundationalism, and Reformed epistemology because they reversely show what the Wittgensteinian approach tries to overcome. In the second part, I introduce Winch’s ideas to this philosophical issue and expose the significance of his understanding of such topics as the nature of philosophy, the role of epistemology in social science, and the nature of religious belief.

II. *Possibility of Philosophy: Knowledge and Certainty*

1) Rush Rhees, *Rush Rhees on Religion and Philosophy*, ed. D. Z. Phillips (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 25.

1. Problem Posing

What is reality? This is a question as old as philosophy itself. In its basic interest, philosophy is not concerned with individual realities as world affairs; rather, its concern runs directly to the nature of reality. Such a concern is to ask how to possibly show the real in anything. We know that philosophers in the ancient Milesian city tried to reveal the nature of all things. They started to give accounts of all things, i.e., Thales with water, Democritus with atom, Heraclitus with fire, and so on. They, however, missed a big problem lying in the fundamental philosophical enquiry. That is about the question of “measuring the measure.” Their attempts to give a single account to the magnitude of the diverse world must have been so naïve. Consequently, following philosophers focused on the problem.

Plato is the first person who clearly sees the problem of measuring the measure. Given the problem, what is crucial in his philosophical authorship is not to give an account of all things like the Milesian, but to provide a logical question for the problem of measuring the measure. The question rightly contains the sense of the importance of *differences* so that it could evade the ignorance to try to sublime the whole measures and discard the search for a commonality in all things. The sense of differences asks for the sense of multiplicity of measures. Therefore, a perspicuous philosophical question arises at last: “why should we favor any *one* above others as *the* account of the reality of all things?”²⁾ When there are many measures, then, how could we measure what we mean by the real? With this question, it can not claim to be the unique means by which the nature of reality is arrived

2) D. Z. Phillips, *Philosophy's Cool Place* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1999), 4.

at.³⁾ Now, remains the question: the real what? This is the long lasting quest that most philosophers endeavor to solve.

In this context, we need to know why a question of knowledge of the real and a question of certainty of measurement come into philosophical debates. Wittgenstein is a philosopher who deeply emerges into the questions. For him, philosophy, on the one hand, describes a body of confused utterances and arguments which arises from a misunderstanding of the working of language. On the other hand, it describes an activity of helping people to get free out of the muddling in the philosophical work. Indeed, Wittgenstein differs from many philosophers in his beliefs: A great number of traditionally philosophical problems are the result of philosophical muddling, and the traditional answers and ways in philosophical debates hinder rather than helping us in achieving knowledge and certainty. In the works of Wittgenstein, directly confronted are the critical questions: the possibility of knowledge and certainty in the realm of senses. Then, how have the philosophical questions been dealt?

2. Skepticism

One familiar traditional philosophical problem comes with skepticism. It refers to a view which denies that some positive terms of epistemic appraisal could apply to our beliefs. Thus, the skeptical position holds that none of our beliefs is certain, justified, or reasonable. Again, we cannot rightly claim to know things as physical objects existing independently of our perception. The first nature of skepticism, therefore, is that it simply rejects what we ordinarily sense. It cuts off any certainty concerning the external world. This basic nature of

3) Ibid., 5.

skepticism supplies to philosophers a primary *doubt*—whether we could regard our senses as a reliable guide in the search. According to this skeptical position, we are merely a solitary center which is confined within the vicious circle of our own ideas.

There is a further deep challenge in the conception of skepticism. If we debate with skepticism over the judgment of truth or falsity, the claim might be that there is nothing to be right or wrong about. What is questioned is the *possibility* of talking about physical objects. We should emphasize throughout that the deepest skeptical challenge is related to the very possibility of sense-experience. “The skeptical challenge,” therefore, “is not an interruption *in* the conversations of mankind, but an attempted interruption *to* the conversations of mankind.”⁴⁾ The skeptical challenges do not partly take a form of particular judgments, but directly ask the very possibility of judgments in our lives. What seems to be in the balance, hence, is not the truth or falsity in a conversation, but the very possibility of conversation itself. Our philosophical task is to explicate *forms of life* in which judgments have their sense. And this task for Wittgensteinians is to find the *intelligibility of language* or the relationship between language and a sense of life.

Skepticism prevails over certain forms of solipsism in which there are no convincing arguments for the existence of anything beyond the self. It seems hard to avoid the skeptical impulse, which springs from the awareness of the fact that our beliefs are not based on firm grounds which guarantee their success. How could proper responses arise? The responses to skepticism might often arise from two positions.

4) D. Z. Phillips, *Introducing Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1996), 185.

One argues that we could simply rule out skeptical drives. The other argues that we do not need to be able to rule it out in order to have our enough belief or knowledge. The former is the classical foundationalism while the latter is Reformed epistemology, especially the warrant theory of A. Plantinga.

3. Foundationalism and Reformed Epistemology

A misconception of philosophical works is foundationalism, a view that all areas of discourse are answerable by a common criterion of rationality. In other words, foundationalism insists on a given and permanent foundation for the assessment of meaningfulness, existence, goodness, and beauty in all discourses. Rationally and/or empirically, the position relies on deduction and/or intuition. Philosophy has been enormously dominated by foundationalism from the Enlightenment to the present in its various forms in either ways that it stands in need of evidence or that it provides the required evidence. A chief misconception of foundationalism is that, although it does not arrive at its commitment to the foundational propositions as a result of intellectual investigation, it takes the commitment for granted in its investigations. In the philosophy of religion, therefore, “asking whether belief in God is rational quickly becomes a matter of seeking evidences for the existence of God.”⁵⁾ In fact, foundationalism has been easily combined with evidentialism.

Alvin Plantinga, as one of the most influential figures in the Reformed epistemologist group, criticizes this evidentialism as a spawned form of classical foundationalism. For him, this evidentialist foundationalism is a mere contention that, for the belief in God to be

5) D. Z. Phillips, *Faith After Foundationalism* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1988), 3.

reasonable belief, it has to be shown on the basis of all evidences that can themselves be known to be true on the foundational model. Against foundationalism, Plantinga argues that beliefs are *warranted* without the Enlightenment approved evidences. He says then that such beliefs can themselves be used as an evidence for other beliefs. That is, although believers may hold their beliefs in God without referring to them with evidences, this does not make it groundless. For religious belief is occasioned by religious experience. And, by this experience is its conviction grounded. According to him, therefore, reason does not require us to construe all well founded beliefs as belief that is derived from the starting point which the classical foundationalism endorses. The basic belief of Christians, moreover, is not an offense to reason, but one more manifestation of reasonableness.

To support this position, Plantinga uses against *de jure* objection⁶⁾ to Christian beliefs the idea of *warrant*. For him, “a belief has warrant only if it is produced by cognitive faculties that are functioning properly, subject to no disorder or dysfunction.”⁷⁾ He says that there are religious beliefs which one does not accept on the basis of other propositions. Nevertheless, it can be reasonable to believe them through enlarging our concept of rationality. It is then appropriate, says he, to speak of the rationality of religious belief without anything necessary to provide the kind of evidence or philosophical demonstration demanded by evidentialism and classical foundationalism.

6) Compared with *de facto* objections, an objection to the *truth* of Christian belief, *de jure* objection means any claim to the effect that Christian belief, whether or not true, is at any rate unjustifiable, or rationally unjustified, or irrational, or not intellectually respectable, or contrary to sound morality, or without sufficient evidence. See his book, *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), ix.

7) Ibid., 153.

Despite its explicit attacks on classical foundationalism, however, Reformed epistemology remains within a foundationalist tradition. For both make a final appeal to foundational propositions in that they suggest to the different discourses a metaphysical unity that they do not possess. In this respect, D. Z. Phillips rightly says that “Foundationalists and Reformed epistemologists regard epistemic practices as though they were descriptions of a reality which lies beyond them.”⁸⁾ In fact, Plantinga does not show clearly how one might speak of religious beliefs as true. He operates so gravely with a concept of religious belief that he fails to have conceptualization that the concept is properly used in religious discourses. Plantinga’s approach does not allow for an understanding of basic beliefs as fundamental in the sense that they constitute the framework of individuals. This ignores the depth of philosophical puzzlement.

4. A Brief Talk on the Wittgensteinian Solution

In terms of the philosophical puzzlement, Wittgensteinian ideas suggest that there is an important connection between the understanding of reality and that of language. For the philosophical task to give an account of reality, engaged with the question of the nature of reality, the ideas attempt not to give one single account of *the* reality but to emphasize *differences*. This appeal to differences is, however, not a dead end in philosophical investigation. Rather, such an attempt shows a fundamental fact that it is necessary to go beyond simply noting differences between various modes of discourse without merely assuming that all modes of discourse have a common subject. In Wittgensteinian ideas, therefore, the question of what it means to talk

8) Phillips, *Faith After Foundationalism*, xiv.

about the reality is related to the question of what makes it possible for language to have a meaning.

Wittgensteinians say that there is no common language for bridging words with reality. If we think of a reality of the discussion, the relation of a discourse to the reality does not seem to be a matter of accordance with *fact*. Because none is simply given prior to any context, the notion of an independent reality in philosophical inquiries does not happen. The notion represents only a tendency that a concept should come out of its original context. If there are possible answers to the relation of discourse to reality, hence, there is only a difference between rejecting something as absurd and rejecting it because it would have no place in what we do. All logical principles could not be deduced from a common principle. For Wittgenstein, a basic proposition is not the foundations or presuppositions of the ways we think. Instead, the basic propositions are held fast by all that surrounds them.⁹⁾ Without any given criteria, however, it is difficult for us to let reality be itself in the place where skepticism is haunted. Nonetheless, sound philosophy could not evade this condition in order to pertain properly to the philosophical issues of knowledge and certainty.

Accordingly, we become aware of the open ended nature in Wittgensteinian reflections. This open structure is buttressed with two principles: autonomy and incommensurability. On the one hand, the principle of autonomy shows that discourses are to be judged and justified only by a standard in the form of life. This principle points out a link between discourse and its context and takes a role to put knowledge and certainty out of the reach of skeptical attacks. The incommensurability principle, on the other hand, points out that each

9) Ibid., 123.

language has its own grammar so that no common ground could be applied to it. This principle goes against the problem of foundationalism. A dynamic cooperation of the two principles builds up the framework of Wittgensteinian thoughts and offers them a challenging characteristic. Now, let's see how Wittgensteinian ideas concretize themselves in Peter Winch's case.

3. *Peter Winch's Ideas on the Nature of Human Understanding*

1. Winch's Idea of the Epistemological Nature of Social Science

In *The Idea of a Social Science and Its Relation to Philosophy*, Winch tries to construct a proper understanding both of the nature of philosophy in relation to science and the distinction of human understanding in social science from that in natural science. His arguments are composed of two major criticisms of “extreme” conceptions of social science. The one is “the underlabourer conception of philosophy,” and the other “naturalistic conception of social science.” By these criticisms, he leads us to reject the two concepts and establish an appropriate idea about the nature of philosophy and social science.

According to Winch, “the underlabourer conception of philosophy” was initiated by John Locke and later adopted by A. J. Ayer. The idea stresses the “peripheral philosophical disciplines” in comparison to science. That is, philosophy cannot provide any positive understanding about reality, and its sole purpose is to remove linguistic confusions

and contradictions that prohibit the advance of “empirical scientific knowledge.” The philosophical foundation of this concept, says Winch, is “a reaction against the ‘master scientist’ view of the philosopher, according to which philosophy is in direct competition with science and aims at constructing or refuting scientific theories by purely *a priori* reasoning.”¹⁰⁾ Winch rejects this notion of “pseudo scientific speculation” and points out that this absurd form of understanding is misapplied in depriving philosophy of any sort of “*a priori* philosophizing” concerning the nature of reality. Such a mistake is caused by an assumption that only science could involve in understandings of empirical science. This assumption is erroneous, however, because it confuses the basic difference between science and philosophy. “Whereas the scientist investigates the nature, causes and effects of *particular* real things,” says Winch, “the philosopher is concerned the nature of reality as such and in general.”¹¹⁾ Therefore, he stresses that philosophy should reject both the underlabourer conception and the master scientist view.

Winch suggests a new role of philosophy, a task to understand the function of language, in order to answer the fundamental philosophical question about the nature and intelligibility of reality. Nature of philosophical problems cannot be solved by any easy distinction between the world and language because the world is presented for us through concepts. He says, “Our idea of what belongs to the realm of reality is given for us in the language we use.” Therefore, “there is no way of getting outside the concepts in terms of which we think of the

10) Peter Winch, *The Idea of a Social Science and its Relation to Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 1990), 7.

11) Ibid., 8.

world.”¹²⁾ In order to make clear this new task of philosophy, he argues against Weldon’s empiricist misconception that underestimates *a priori* reasoning. Weldon adopts Humean approach, which regards philosophy as incapable of providing us with real knowledge about the world, and says that all statements about reality must be settled by the empirical research. In this case, conceptual enquiries are mistaken “into what it makes sense to say for empirical enquiries which must wait upon experience for their solution.”¹³⁾ Consequently, the epistemological purport results only in cleansing linguistic meanings, as if positivists suggest, not in clarifying what it means to call reality intelligible. Winch understands that Weldon’s mistake arises from the strict distinction between reality and language. For Winch, our conception of reality is so based on language that we cannot distinguish language from reality in such an absolute way.

Therefore, epistemology has a distinctive role in Winch’s thoughts that it should explain how a particular concept is possible within a particular context. According to him, “the relation between idea and context is an *internal* one” so that the intelligibility of reality is possible only with observation of the context in which language is used.¹⁴⁾ He says that no one grand theory of reality could exist, and all varieties of the notion of intelligibility cannot be reduced to “a single set of criteria.”¹⁵⁾ Therefore, the intelligibility of reality must depend on the clarification of particular “language games” and “rules” that create meaning in particular contexts. Actually, objectives of science, art, religion, and philosophy differ from the objectives of the others. They

12) Ibid., 15.

13) Ibid., 16.

14) Ibid., 107.

15) Ibid., 20.

play different games and follow different rules. However, this Wittgensteinian notion is sometimes misunderstood by such philosophers as Ayer and Strawson who admit the *possibility* “for the judgment of a single individual to be checked by independent criteria.”¹⁶⁾ The discovery of the rule of a game cannot be used in this deterministic way since “a form of human activity can never be summed up in a set of explicit precepts. The activity ‘goes beyond’ the precepts.”¹⁷⁾ Winch stresses the significance of the understanding of “the way of life” in social science. Here, we are confronted with Winch’s second criticism of “naturalistic” conception of social science.

Winch criticizes J. S. Mill’s generalization of all methods that is based on the concept of scientific investigation of the natural causation. According to him, Mill understands that there can be no fundamentally “logical” difference in principles to explain social events and natural regularities.¹⁸⁾ As natural sciences observe *natural causes* by neutral scientific terms, moral (social) sciences could predict *social motives* in the same manner. Therefore, the conception of society becomes a sum of laws of empirical phenomena, and the prediction of social behavior can be achieved by the production of causal laws of social phenomena. Winch rejects this “naturalistic” idea in his study of social science and insists that most methodological problems of the social science are related to “conceptual” issues, not to empirical one. That is, social science should not concern the means by which particular social events are observed, but focus on the *conception* about social reality that the members of a society share. Furthermore, social phenomena become

16) Ibid., 39.

17) Ibid., 55.

18) Ibid., 71.

complex not because of the great number of social factors but because of the complexity of the conceptions that is used in comprehending the phenomena.

In Winch's idea, thus, the understanding of a particular society depends not only on the rules that govern the behaviors of the society but also on the rules that determine the meaning of discourse itself. He considers one of the most fundamental problems in the study of social science as not heeding to the "mode" of discourse. In this sense, he criticizes V. Pareto's "logico experimental approach," according to which a scientific approach to sociology consists in "using only concepts which have a strictly empirical reference, in subjecting one's theories always rigorously to the control of observation and experiment, and in ensuring that one's inferences always follow strict logic."¹⁹⁾ For Winch, such an idea lacks the most fundamental nature of human understanding that "criteria of logic are not a direct gift of God, but arise out of, and are only intelligible in the context of, ways of living or modes of social life."²⁰⁾ Both *internal* relationship between idea and context and between language and reality are the key propositions in Winch's thoughts about the nature of philosophy and social science.

Later, Winch develops the idea in his study of primitive society. He insists that anthropologists should understand the "rules" or "language games" that a primitive society uses rather than attempting to impose their so called scientific rationality. He says, "What is real and what is unreal shows itself *in* the sense that language has. Furthermore, both the distinction between the real and the unreal and the concepts of agreement with reality themselves belong to our language."²¹⁾ Therefore,

19) Ibid., 96.

20) Ibid., 100.

establishing a standard is not a making sense activity to ascribe to any individual in complete isolation. What is crucial is to grasp rules that the individual follows. If the anthropologist has not had experiences of the society and conceived the rules the society shares, he/she would never be capable of understanding the behaviors of the society. Yet, this is not the end in the matter of understanding. Hermeneutical problems of understanding lie not only in ignorance about the internal relationship between language and reality but also in the nature of the 'living' reality itself. He alerts us to escape from "the seductive idea that the grammar of our language is itself the expression of a set of beliefs or theories about how the world is."²²⁾ In Winch's thought, diversity and difference arising from the living situation of reality are enough to extend to radical conflict with our convinced understanding of the reality. In sum, concerning about such fundamental philosophical problems as "the nature and intelligibility of reality," Winch concludes that philosophical investigation of reality should concern with the intelligibility of things. He consistently says that there is no single commonality in given accounts. Therefore, we should see how conversation proceeds in living situation, not within a definite theory.

2. An Application of Winch's Idea to the Issue of Religious Belief

Winch's approach attempts to get rid of "muddling" ideas in the philosophical debates about how to achieve knowledge and certainty of

21) Peter Winch, "Understanding a Primitive Society," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 1 (1964), 310.

22) Peter Winch, "Language, Belief and Relativism," in *Trying to Make Sense* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), 206.

reality. His philosophical significance is found in the emphasis on the inherent connection between understanding the life and understanding language. He relates the task of philosophy to the question about the nature of reality and draws a distinctive conclusion. Namely, the task of philosophy is to emphasize *differences*, different language games, rather than to attempt to give an account of the reality. For Winch, it is necessary to be aware of differences between various modes of discourses without merely assuming that all the discourses have a common subject. In other words, the question of what it means to talk about the reality is related to the idea of this world as what makes it possible for language to have meaning. What is meant by reality is determined by the character of a language, and the notion of the reality is replaced by the conception of ways of living.²³⁾ Philosophical investigations of reality are an investigation of the various senses because realities depend on the place of differences in human life.

To be simple, there is no common language in the relationship between a discourse and the fact of reality. Because anything cannot be given prior to its original context, philosophy cannot directly inquire the fact of an independent reality. That's why Winch criticizes the master scientist view and V. Pareto's logico experimental approach in his book. His opponents represent the tendency that Wittgenstein calls "subliming the logic of our language," that is, "taking a concept out of its natural contexts, and taking of it as if it had an application where none exists."²⁴⁾ Winch's basic concern is to affirm that all logical principles could not be deduced from a common principle. For him,

23) Rhees, *Rush Rhees on Religion and Philosophy*, 24.

24) D. Z. Phillips, *Religion and the Hermeneutics of Contemplation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 291.

there is no inherent validity of logic caused by the possibility of a consistent and complete logical system. As Wittgenstein says, “neither needs logic be complete.”²⁵⁾

Hence, if there is the unity of the language that makes it possible for people to understand one another, the unity is the presence of some sort of *common intelligibility*. Through the common intelligibility, we can pass from one part of it to another. To be sure, the unity of the language is not the unity of a “system,” which foundationalism provokes. “It ought to be clear that there is no antecedent norm of intelligibility to which all discourses are answerable.”²⁶⁾ The point is that there is no principle of language in the way in which the principles of logic underlie the possibility of investigation. Surely, there is no single principle upon which discussion proceeds. If we are interested in the possibility of understanding, it does not mean that there could be a principle that all language games depend on. Basic propositions that Winch discusses are not the foundations or presuppositions of the ways we think. They are not the bases on which our ways of thinking depend, but are basic *in* our ways of thinking. Consequently, if we do not see the connection between language and life, we never see the nature and function of language. For language is connected with all the lives of people. This is the kernel idea of P. Winch. He says, “Neither words nor actions have *per se* any preeminent position.”²⁷⁾ Getting into the lives, without any presupposed criteria, philosophy has its proper task to reveal meanings in the variety and diversity of living things.

25) Rush Rhees, *Wittgenstein and the Possibility of Discourse*, ed. D. Z. Phillips (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 81

26) Phillips, *Introducing Philosophy*, 186.

27) Peter Winch, “Can We Understand Ourselves?” *Philosophical Investigations* 20:3 (July 1997), 197.

Here, it is important to see how Winch evades both challenges of skepticism and relativism. Without any given criteria, how could philosophical speculations evade both of the skeptical doubt, which provokes that none of our belief is certain or justified, and of the relativistic dispute that negates any meaningful philosophical endeavor to seek a truth of reality? Without a preconceived criterion, it is difficult for human understanding to let reality out of the place where skepticism or relativism arises. In relation to this problem, I understand that Winch's reflection remains open ended. He says, "A large part of the difficulty springs from the fact that the distinction is not a clear cut or stable one."²⁸⁾ However, the structure of his argument to answer both challenges can be buttressed by the following critical considerations. On the one hand, discourses are to be judged or justified by the standards in the form of *life*. On the other hand, each language has its own grammar so that no common ground could be applied to it. In fact, Winch suggests that the grammar of language could be realized only in the expression of beliefs in a particular form of life. Although he does not provide any definite criteria, his ideas could never become defiled. For all sensible philosophy could not evade this condition, I believe, at least to pertain properly to the philosophical issues of knowledge and certainty.

Then, we would raise two questions in order to examine the possible application of Winch's ideas to the issue of the intelligibility of religious belief: Is the category of the understanding is all inclusive so that there is nothing that is *necessarily* beyond human understanding? Or, is there much that passes beyond human understanding? Indeed, there are many things that we do not understand, i.e., ignorance or self deception. Even when we work at them in a careful way, there are things we fail to

28) Winch, "Language, Belief and Relativism," 207.

understand. However, this does not mean that what we fail to understand is something which must be beyond understanding. What we fail to understand is in principle within the reach of human understanding. Yet, much crucial is to recognize that there is the very *limit* of human understanding, not merely *limitation* to human understanding which could be overcome. Religious beliefs, which arise from the awareness of the vicissitude of human life, are the chief example of the idea.

Sometimes, the idea that something could be beyond human understanding seems to be intolerable because the idea sounds like the denial of the vocation of philosophy. However, when we come to understand religious beliefs, we need to see an obvious fact that there is a reaction to the limit of human existence. To be sure, religious utterances are not a belief that is based on rationalistic conceptions. Yet, the acceptance of the religious belief is not at all a blind receiving of what is incomprehensible. For instance, Augustine in his *Confessions* elucidates a spiritual method which he possibly possesses, a way of ascent by which he moves step by step from knowledge of corporeal things to knowledge of God. And finally, he confesses that he does not know himself in the way he had claimed. Rather, it is grace that grants the condition of its own acceptance. Here, the religious conception of the divine grace reflects the limit of the human existence in which some things pass beyond human understanding. Then, is there any necessary incommensurability between philosophically rationalistic conceptions and religious coming to belief?

To solve the problem of the intelligibility of religious belief, we must go back to Winch's suggestion that there is no *a priori* guarantee of some privileged set of classifications in terms of which all others must be explained. He says, "The grammar of language has its

concrete realization *in* the expression of particular beliefs.”²⁹⁾ A philosopher may demand *a priori* knowledge of God as a precondition of ascribing grace to the divine, and yet, according to Winch, this is not the proper case to approach to the religious conceptions. For the *a priori* knowledge is impossible. Rather, what we need to understand is that language is connected with a form of life. The unity of language is not the unity of a system but of “common intelligibility.” Therefore, the intelligibility of religious beliefs cannot be verified by any positivistic ideas because philosophy may not offer a direct route to our mutual intelligibility. In order to respond properly to religious conceptions, a philosopher tries to understand the grammar of religious language games. That is, the only correct philosophical response to the sentence, God’s ways are beyond human understanding, is to try to understand what it *means*. In this sense, Winch could justify the religious utterance, even including something beyond human understanding.³⁰⁾ Such a religious conception is commonly intelligible in the religious community where people are engaged in the same language game.

IV. Summary

In this paper, I suggested that philosophy investigates reality in the

29) Ibid.

30) Winch, *The Idea of a Social Science and its Relation to Philosophy*, p. 87. Here, Winch illustrates the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican as an example of the distinctiveness of religious conceptions. To understand the meaning of the two persons’ action, suggests he, we need to start “by considering what is involved in the idea of prayer; and that is a *religious* question.”

sense that it mainly quests both for the nature of reality and the possibility of discourse. I discussed philosophical misapprehensions such as skepticism, foundationalism, and Reformed epistemology, in order to reveal the persuasiveness of Wittgensteinian position. Wittgensteinian investigation of reality focuses on the *intelligibility* of things. It consistently says that there is no single commonality in a given account. The position suggests a way to see how conversations are interwoven with living situation, not stemming from a definite theory.

This Wittgensteinian idea is well illustrated in Peter Winch's ideas. Stressing the internal relationship between language and reality, he maintains a very consistent idea about the nature of human understanding. For him, the basic hermeneutical problem in philosophical conceptions lies in the issue of intelligibility of things, which can be solved only by establishing a proper understanding of the nature and function of language. He severely criticizes the rationalistic myth that expects the achievement of a complete logical system and its possible application to all discourses. For Winch, human ideas cannot be verified by such an *a priori* grand theory, but intelligible only within the context of life without any given criteria.

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Peter Winch's Idea on the Nature of Human Understanding

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This paper examines Peter Winch's Wittgensteinian understanding of the nature of philosophical investigation of reality. To the nature of philosophical inquiry, along with Wittgenstein, Winch suggests that reality can be investigated only through the understanding of the nature of human understanding. That is, because knowledge is shaped by the context of discourse, the content of knowledge is not related to the fact of reality but to the meaning of language that knowledge uses and implies. Therefore, a primary task of philosophy is to reveal the possibility of discourse in relation to its context, not to appeal to a common ground on which every philosophical discourse relies. In order to discuss the deep link between the intelligibility of reality and the context of discourse, this paper examines Winch's understanding of the epistemological nature of social science and of religious beliefs.

Key Words: Knowledge, Skepticism, Foundationalism, Reformed Epistemology, Religious Belief, Wittgenstein, Peter Winch

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