LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS AND THE
TRANSCENDENCE OF GOD

Linguistic analysis is sometimes spoken of as if it were a regular philosophy with an established body of doctrine. This is a bit misleading. The unifying element in this movement, now dominant in the English speaking world, has been a devotion to a methodology of philosophical inquiry centering on an analysis of the meaning and use of language and the significance this has for some basic philosophical questions. This devotion, in turn, tends to shape the views the devotees have on the nature of the philosophical enterprise. One could make a rough distinction between two wings of this movement usually labeled "ordinary language analysis," favored by the Oxford analysts and by others influenced either by Oxford or by the techniques of G. E. Moore and the later Wittgenstein, and "formal language analysis," where the focus of interest is on logic and the philosophy of science.

In recent years this movement has rather forcefully impinged on theology for a variety of reasons. Some analysts, primarily ordinary language analysts such as Wisdom, Flew, and MacIntyre contended that religious language is ultimately meaningless and developed more subtle arguments than the simple dismissal favored by the earlier logical positivists.[1] More disturbing, in the eyes of many theologians, were the responses of the "Left-wing" theologians

[1] John Wisdom's article, "Gods," reproduced in various anthologies, e.g., in A. Flew, *Logic and Language,* I, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1951) initiated the contemporary discussion of the cognitive character of religious language. For further stages of the discussion see A. Flew and A. C. MacIntyre, *New Essays in Philosophical Theology* (London: Student Christian Movement Press, 1955); John Hick, ed., *The Existence of God* (New York: Macmillan pb., 1964); and Anthony Flew, *God and Philosophy* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1966). An evaluative bibliography of most of the pertinent works on this problem may be found in P. Edwards and A. Pap, *A Modern Introduction to Philosophy* (New York: The Free Press, rev. edit., 1965), pp. 500-502.

who conceded the essential validity of those arguments and attempted to explain how religious language has some significance, though it is not cognitively significant.[2]

In my opinion most of the arguments offered, both pro and con, are essentially inadequate. By this I mean that on analytic grounds alone the considerations offered are inadequate to the problems under consideration. This criticism requires a more precise specification. The conclusion that any discourse about a transcendent being, God, can not be cognitively meaningful, is reached by judging religious discourse in the light of theories of what empirically meaningful language must be. The adequacy of such theories must be judged, at least in part, by their success in explaining discourse already accepted as empirically meaningful, i.e., scientific discourse. Here, I believe, the theories under consideration fail, and they fail precisely on the question of transcendence. They can not even explain the limited transcendence proper to scientific discourse. If a theory of language is essentially incapable of explaining the real meaningfulness of scientific language then the norms of empirical meaningfulness supplied by the theory can not be considered an adequate basis for judging and rejecting theological language as not cognitively meaningful.

Rather than develop this argument in a negative way, by analyzing and criticizing positions I consider inadequate, I would like to present a more positive treatment, to use linguistic analysis as a means of clarifying the meaningfulness of discourse about a transcendent God. The necessary negative criticisms can be embedded in this positive framework. To accomplish this in the finite time allotted it will be necessary to begin by listing—but not justifying—some current positions which are, in my opinion, both valid and pertinent.

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[2] Different defenses of theological statements as significant, though not cognitively meaningful, may be found in R. B. Braithwaite, *An Empiricist's View of the Nature of Religious Belief* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1955); T. R. Miles, *Religion and the Scientific Outlook* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1959); Paul Van Buren, *The Secular Meaning of the Gospel* (New York: Macmillan pb., 1966).

I. PHILOSOPHICAL BACKGROUND

The ideas I wish to summarize come chiefly from rather recent developments within the analytic movement. They can be listed under three headings.

1. *The Public Meaningfulness of Language*

Since the publication of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* there has been a growing consensus that the meaningfulness of language is essentially public and only derivatively private. Unless this were so language could not serve as a vehicle for inter-subjective communication. The meaning of a term, accordingly, is explained chiefly by clarifying its use, or the family of usages associated with it. This requires an analysis both of the way terms function within language, or a study of syntax, and also of the extralinguistic contexts in which its use is appropriate, or questions of semantics and pragmatics.

A consequence of this position, one which I was quite reluctant to accept at first, as are most philosophers with a scholastic background, is that the meaning of a word is not explicable by reference or reduction to private mental acts. The usual scholastic doctrine is that words have meaning *because* they express concepts. Meanings are primarily in concepts, private mental acts or states, and then derivatively in language which expresses such a concept. Within this view of language, transcendence does not present too formidable a linguistic problem. A word, such as "God" can mean a transcendent being, if this is what one intends in using the word. Comforting as such a simple solution might be, it, unfortunately, will not work.

Perhaps a simple example may clarify the significance of this point. A child first learns the term "uncle" by associating it with definite objects, Uncle Joe and Uncle Bill. Then, to his confusion, he learns that his friend next door has uncles who are neither Joe nor Bill. Eventually, in the process of learning language, he assimilates the public meaning of the terms and accommodates his own usage to this. The meaning of his concept, "uncle" is derivative from this public meaning. With respect to an individual "x," another individual "y" is an uncle if and only if he is a brother of x's father or mother, or husband of one of his parent's sisters.

Some analysts, notably Gilbert Ryle, have drawn the further conclusion that any terms referring to mental states or acts, terms such as "concept," "judgment," "perception," "insight," etc., can only be explained behavioristically.[3] They do not refer to such states because the referents of meaningful terms must be public, at least in principle, and intersubjectively verifiable. This objection can be answered, though I will not attempt to answer it here.[4] I mention it only to introduce a caution. One cannot convincingly handle the present difficulties by a reliance on scholastic philosophy, even when developed in such a sophisticated form as cognitional analysis, without a critical justification of the way language is used to refer to and describe such mental acts and states as experience, insight, conceptualization, reflection, and judgment.

2. *Descriptive Metaphysics*

The meaningfulness of language is essentially public and derivatively private. What are the pre-requisites for such public meaningfulness? In his highly influential study, *Individuals: An Essay in Descriptive Metaphysics,* Strawson argued, convincingly I believe, that language cannot function as a means of intersubjective communication unless it contains, in an implicit way, a conceptualization of the world to which it refers. Thus for me to speak and you to understand, I must be able to refer to particulars, to objects, situa-

[3] Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (New York: Barnes and Noble pb. ed., 1962).

[4] The basic position I am following on this point is that ordinary language treats mental acts in terms of a theory, albeit a low-level theory long ago absorbed into ordinary language, in which overt speech supplies a model for understanding, discussing, and referring to mental acts. Thus a concept is understood as an inner word so that the syntactical rules and semantic categories proper to concepts are derivative from those developed for overt speech. It is on these grounds that we use the terms 'conceptual' and 'linguistic' almost interchangeably. This view is developed in Wilfred Sellars, "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind" reproduced in his *Science, Perception and Reality* (New York: Humanities Press, 1963), pp. 127-96; and by Peter Geach in *Mental Acts* (New York: Humanities Press, 1957), esp. pp. 75-125. The standard Thomistic doctrine is that the meaningfulness of word, and presumably such formal properties as syntactical rules and semantic categories, is derivative from the meaningfulness of concepts. However, St. Thomas insisted that the concepts through which the soul, its properties and distinctive activities are categorized are derivative from concepts proper to sensibly perceived objects. See his *De Veritate,* q. 10, a. 8.

tions, and events, which we can both identify. This in turn presupposes a space-time framework.

Rather than extend this analysis I shall simply outline the conclusions that flow from it, the descriptive metaphysics implicit in the ordinary language we speak. This is not really a theory of reality, it need not be explicitly affirmed by language users. But it is used. The descriptive metaphysics of ordinary language is, essentially, the natural philosophy of the first great linguistic analyst, Aristotle. The world is conceived as a collection of mobile, relatively enduring objects endowed with both primary and secondary qualities, or proper and common sensibles. The extension, perdurance, and interaction of these objects grounds a space-time framework. Man is an irreducibly distinct type of object, one of whom both corporeal and intentional attributes and states may be predicated.

Again, I should caution against a possible misconception. The preceding sketch was not intended to be a description of what the world really is. It is an explication of what our language implicitly says it is. To make this clear let us consider a simple and familiar example, the status of secondary qualities or proper sensibles. Suppose a philosopher, conscious of a science-common sense conflict, were to say that this drape is not really red. It just looks red. This solution may seem adequate until one inquires into what it means for something to look red. White paper seen under a red light looks red, that is, it looks the way red things look when seen under normal circumstances. More generally, the concept of something looking x necessarily presupposes the concept of something being x. Ordinary language, accordingly, is committed to the reality of proper sensibles.

The relation of these considerations to the problem under discussion may not be immediately obvious. It can, perhaps, be put most succinctly by adapting Lonergan's terminology. In *Insight* he developed a doctrine of positions and counter-positions. The basic argument was that his positions on being, on knowing, and on objectivity invite development while his corresponding counter-positions invite reversal. Because a counter-position involves an im-

plicit contradiction between what is intellectually accepted and the intellectual activities involved in this very acceptance a counter-position either leads to its own reversal or disguises its incoherence in a spurious pseudo-profundity.[5] We may, I believe, meaningfully speak of a zero-order position and counter-position. The position is that what is said must, to be meaningful, be consistent with the logic—in the broadest sense of the term—of the language in which it is said. The counter-position exemplified in such sentences as, "Roses are not really red, they just look red" either invites its own reversal through further analysis or disguises its incoherence in such ultimately untenable pseudo-profundities as sense-data theories of knowledge.

Language can not be used to refer, describe, narrate, or explain unless it implicitly contains some conceptualization of the reality treated. To say something coherent and meaningful this conceptualization must be self-consistent, at least in its fundamental features. Strawson, accordingly, argues that this descriptive metaphysics forms the indispensable core of the conceptual equipment of even the most sophisticated thinker and that any revisionary metaphysics is ultimately at the service of descriptive metaphysics.[6] Similarly, Maurice Merlau-Ponty, whose general views are similar to Strawson though developed by phenomenological rather than linguistic analysis, stated that scientific views of the world are naive and hypocritical if they pretend to be more basic than the view of the lived, immediately experienced world that sustains them.[7]

I leave any further discussion of phenomenology in Father Richardson's capable hands except to note a basic similarity in the strategy of the arguments that concern us. Extensions of knowledge are dependent upon ordinary knowledge, a dependence that is particularly manifested in the question of the meaningfulness of language. If this dependence is such that our ordinary view of the world

[5] B. Lonergan, S.J., *Insight* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1957), pp. 387-90.

[6] P. F. Strawson, *Individuals: An Essay in Descriptive Metaphysics* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday pb., 1963), Introduction.

[7] M. Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la Perception* (Paris: Gallimard, 1945), p. iii.

is, and must remain, normative, then it is impossible to speak of any transcendent reality in a meaningful way. It is possible to transcend the ordinary language conceptualization of reality and develop a different view without falling into the zero-order counter-position and the incoherence it entails?

3. *Extension of Linguistic Frameworks*

At first glance any question of the possibility of extended linguistic frameworks embodying conceptual revolutions would seem to be rather easy to answer. It has happened, therefore it is possible. This simplicity, however, is deceptive when the question at issue is not just language but the conceptualization of reality implicit in language. Two types of arguments could be given for the interpretative primacy of ordinary language and, consequently, for the meaninglessness of any language about a reality completely transcending the ordinary language framework. The first argument is based on the dependence of extended language on ordinary language. Unless an extended language, e.g. the language of a scientific, metaphysical, or theological theory, is rooted in ordinary language it could be neither meaningful nor capable of being understood. If one grants an essential dependence of extended languages on ordinary languages and also grants the indispensable role that an implicit conceptualization of reality plays in ordinary language then the question is: how can any extension of language contradict an essential pre-requisite for meaningful discourse, this conceptualization, and yet be coherent.

The second argument, which we will not develop, comes from certain philosophies of science, especially positivism and operationalism, according to which scientific statements are considered meaningful only when they are either translated into ordinary language statements by means of correspondence rules or interpreted as inference mechanisms leading from one ordinary language statement to others. It is interesting to note that religiously well disposed philosophers of science, such as Braithwaite or Miles who are in this sort of empirical tradition also hold that theological statements are not cognitively meaningful.

I have attempted to develop an alternative point of view else-

where.[8] Here I'll only indicate the key feature, the one we need to keep our argument going. In scholastic terminology it is the primacy of judgment over conceptualization in a complete act of knowledge. The judgment in question, however, is not a judgment made within a particular conceptual framework, but a judgment about the acceptability of such a framework. Thus a scientific theory, such as thermodynamics, may exhibit a methodological dependence on ordinary language in the meaning of such key terms as "temperature," "pressure," and "volume," yet be judged more basic in regard to giving explanations.

Though analysts generally do not discuss judgments in this sense some of them are beginning to reach similar conclusions by a somewhat different route. Originally, logicians focused on the individual term as the unit of meaning. With symbolic logic the emphasis shifted to propositions. But propositions are only meaningful in a conceptual context. So analysts, at least those interested in science as well as ordinary language, gradually came to regard the system as the unit of meaning. This is clearest in the case of a formally developed scientific theory where the precise technical meaning of terms and sentences is so system dependent that to change the meaning of a key term is to change the system. But there are competing systems, differing theories, and one must choose among them. The emphasis on systems, accordingly, leads to a realization of the role of decisions or choices in the process of knowing. This is usually treated in terms of external questions or a pragmatic theory of choice. But what is at issue is the role of judgment in knowledge, a role that cannot be explained by simply reducing judgments to the acceptance of propositions. While this reduction may seem adequate in discussing judgments made *within* a system, it is clearly inadequate when the point at issue is judgment *about* a system.

II. The Language of Transcendence

Against this background we may consider the problem of the meaningfulness of language concerned with transcendence. Here I'm

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[8] For further developments of this point see W. Sellars, *op. cit.*, pp. 106-26 and E. MacKinnon, S.J., "Epistemological Problems in the Philosophy of Science," *The Review of Metaphysics* (to be published).

more concerned with developing a positive approach then in pointing out the difficulties entailed in judging this problem on the basis of inadequate theories of meaning and reference. To treat the general problem of transcendence before proceeding to the particular problem of the transcendence of God the argument will have three steps: the transcendence of objects; the transcendence of subjects; and the transcendence of God.

1. *The Transcendence of Objects*

To transcend means to go beyond. In the present context the crucial aspect of this is going beyond the presuppositions and limitations of a given conceptual or linguistic framework. Since this topic has a rather indirect relation to the present problem it may be well to explain the use I'm making of it. The principles that have led some philosophers to deny the meaningfulness of theological language have also led to positions in the philosophy of science that are currently being criticized as radically untenable. An understanding of why these principles are inadequate and how they must be supplemented is of some help in treating the corresponding theological problem.

A meaningful language involves an implicit conceptualization of reality. In scientific languages the core of this conceptualization is the ontic commitments of a theory, the postulated or presupposed entites the theory speaks about. Thus, in atomic physics one speaks about such theoretical entites as electrons, mesons, and baryons; in biology, of genes and chromosomes; in economics, of the gross national product. These are labelled "theoretical entities" because they are not directly observed and are not a part of the ordinary language framework.

Philosophers who focused on the problem of meaning and tended to ignore or slight the role of judgment in knowledge tried in various ways to explain the meaningfulness of language about theoretical entites by reducing it to ordinary language. For positivists this was done by correspondence rules which served to interpret propositions in scientific language by a correlation with observation statements. For operationalists a scientific theory was interpreted as an inference ticket rather than a formalized body of

substantive claims. Ordinary language analysts, the few who didn't simply ignore the problem, were usually content with some general observations on varieties of language games. All logically shared a common conclusion. Any postulated entites that transcended the ordinary language framework or that were not allowed by observation-centered theories of meaning were not to be listed as part of the furniture of the universe. They may be fertile theoretical constructs, but they could not be real entities.

The untenability of such positions is increasingly being realized on both epistemological and scientific grounds. The way out of the analyst's impasse is, I believe, along the lines indicated earlier in discussing the extension of linguistic frameworks and the role of judgment. Accepting a theory as explanatory and as not reducible to a more basic theory entails accepting as real the theoretical entites presupposed by the theory. In Husserl's terms, this is ontology within a naturalistic or pre-critical framework. But this is the best that can be done on the level of anlyzing meanings and ontic commitments. And it is, I believe, sufficient to show that vertificationist or falsificationist theories of meaning are a radically inadequate basis for judging any problem of transcendence. Any principles that logically lead to a denial of the real existence of atoms logically preclude any discussion, whether positive or negative, of the real existence of God.[9]

9 Brief evaluative summaries of these new trends, their reasons and consequences, may be found in my articles, "Analysis and the Philosophy of Science," *International Philosophical Quarterly* VII (1967), 213-50 and "The New Materialism," *The Heytrop Journal* VII (1967), 5-26. In this connection it is interesting to note that philosophers who have rejected observation-centered (or positivistic) interpretations of scientific theories and yet defend atheism do not rely on the argument that religious language is meaningless. Thus E. Nagel writes, "The versions of the verifiability theory commonly used to show that theism has no cognitive meaning also exclude most scientific theories (e.g., theories about the atomic constitution of matter) as meaningless, and are unacceptable for at least this reason. More generally, I do not find the claim credible that all theistic statements are meaningless nonense, and I believe that on the contrary theism can be construed as a doctrine which is either true or false and which must therefore be assessed in the light of the arguments advanced for it." This is from his article, "A Defense of Atheism" in *Edwards and Pap, op. cit.*, p. 462. Similar views are presented in the articles by N. R. Hanson and P. Feyerabend in the symposium on atheism presented in *Continuum* V (1967), 5-117.

2. *The Transcendence of Subjects*

This is a problem which has not been adequately treated within the analytic tradition.[10] In discussing it here I'll be drawing on insights derived from phenomenological analysis and transcendental Thomism to structure and supplement some questions arising out of linguistic analysis. The most fundamental feature of language is not its implicit conceptualization but the fact that it is used. A consideration of actual usage involves something like the subject-horizon polarity of the phenomenologists. It could be called a speaker-linguistic framework polarity. An explicitation, à la Strawson, of how we speak of persons does not get to the heart of the problem, for a conceptualization of persons is a representation of persons as objects, rather than as subjects. But how, then, does one get at the problem?

Wittgenstein had an abiding realization of the transcendental character of this problem. In the *Tractatus* he wrote "The subject does not belong to the world: rather it is a limit of the world."[11] In his posthumous *Philosophical Investigations* he rejected many of the basic features of the *Tractatus,* especially its reliance on the normative role of a perfectly logical language. But his awareness of the speaker-linguistic framework polarity was manifested especially in the logical priority he attributed to forms of life as a basis for the meaningfulness of language. As one commentator summarized it: "The notion of speech involves the notion of someone ('I') standing back of the words (including intentionality and heuristic powers) and the possibility of the disclosure of the self to the hearer."[12]

[10] A notable exception is F. Copleston, S.J. who is trying to work from ordinary language analysis through the transcendence of the subject to a metaphysics of transcendence. For a preliminary sketch of his argumentation see his article, "Man, Transcendence and God," *Thought* XLIII (1968), 24-38.

[11] L. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus,* trans. D. Pears and B. McGuinness, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961), 5.632.

[12] Dallas M. High, *Language, Persons and Belief* (New York: Oxford University press, 1967), p. 124. This book presents an enlightening discussion of the role of the subject in Wittgenstein's later thought and the implications of this for the meaningfulness of religious language.

To pursue this problem in depth is to become entangled in the neo-Kantian problem of the transcendental deduction of the Ego. Here I'll content myself with an indication of the transcendent character of the subject *qua* subject. This is most clearly seen by reflection on the role of judgment, particularly what we have called external judgments. The idea that positing a judgment is not essentially different from drawing a conclusion from premises has a *prima facie* plausibility when one is speaking of affirming a proposition within a given linguistic framework. Most judgments of this sort are simply routine applications of concepts already acquired.

But what of external judgments, of the decision to accept or reject a particular conceptual framework? This obviously is not a conclusion drawn from premises within the framework in question. Nor can it be explained as a conclusion drawn from premises formulated within a larger framework, a theory of theories, without running into an infinite regress when one tries to justify acceptance of the larger framework.

A computing mechanism must draw conclusions in accord with programmed instructions. On its highest operative level it is a slave rather than a master of the rules that govern its functioning. Not so for man. He requires conceptual systems to frame and express any judgment. But he could not develop, deploy, and discriminate between such systems unless he were, in some sense, above them.

Man, who uses yet transcends language, is a subject in a way a computing machine is not. This is the deepest meaning of the term "person." But a person speaks, in a proper sense, only to other persons. Recognizing another as a hearer involves recognizing him as a person, as another conscious subject. Language need not directly say this; its usage implies it.

3. *The Transcendence of God*

Is language about a transcendent God meaningful? In a minimal sense the answer is an obvious and non controversial "Yes." Believers can certainly understand each other. But this has little real significance. Believers in astrology can also understand each other. The real question is, can theological language have the meaning its

users intend it to have? Can it communicate some understanding of God: that He is, what He is like, how we are related to Him? Can it serve as a vehicle for true statements? To answer "Yes" to these questions is to put ourselves in the paradoxical position of speaking about God while insisting that what He is cannot be said.

In attempting to answer these questions I would like to make a distinction between the language of faith and the language of theology. Though the distinction is too facile it does serve to bring out a basic difference. Faith is essentially a belief in God and only secondary an acceptance of propositions about God. A consequence of this faith is that one speaks to God. One does this directly through prayer and indirectly through actions animated and informed by the desire to please God, to do His will. It is similar to the way a husband and wife can communicate moods, desires, and feelings through their actions. Wittgenstein, the patron saint of analysts, insisted that the meaningfulness of language is ultimately grounded in a way of life. The language of faith, discourse with God, is grounded in the orientation which a faith commitment gives to one's life.

In this case God is understood, not as an object, but as another subject, as the term of an I-Thou relation. This neither requires nor builds on a theory of subjectivity. I need only recognize God as one who does exist, who can hear and respond. In understanding God as a subject I understand Him as transcendent. But this does not require a theory of transcendence. It merely requires an awareness of myself as subject and through this some realization of what it means to be a subject.

By the language of theology I mean language in which one speaks *about* God rather than speaks *to* God. Ideally, the use of this language is grounded in a living faith. But theological language, like any language, has a relative autonomy. It is a quasi-public object whose meaningfulness must be essentially public. The meaningfulness of theological language, accordingly, can not be reduced to any private mental act, even to the act of faith. We will consider this language in its purest form, theological language as used by professional theologians.

In theological language God is treated not as a subject, but as an object, i.e., as the principal subject matter of a theory or conceptual system. Here a comparison with the study of man is helpful. Though we recognize man as a subject we can treat him as an object of constructing a theory about man. This requires a model, a conceptualization of what man is, adequate to represent the aspects of man being discussed. Thus we have the Freudian model of man, the behaviorist's model, the cybernetic model, or, for that matter, the Thomistic model.

Similarly, to discuss God as an object of knowledge we must conceptually create a surrogate God. This is not blasphemy, but an explicitation of how any conceptual system necessarily functions. Thus, the surrogate God conceptually created by man can be: a pure act of existence, the wholly other, the ultimate Ground of Being, or the One who calls man to achieve a truly authentic existence. With this as a basic ontic commitment we can have a conceptual framework in which meaningful propositions can be formulated.

In formalized languages one can make a sharp distinction between syntax, semantics, and pragmatics. Though theology is not a formalized language in the logician's sense, those distinctions are still useful, though their boundaries are fuzzy. Syntax is the simplest. Most theological formulations rely on the syntactical structures of ordinary language, the subject-predicate form. If we use the term in a broader sense a syntactical analysis should be concerned with the internal consistency of a particular theological system, a task we will relinquish to professional theologians.

Semantics is concerned with questions of meaning and reference, a far more problematic area. In discussing this we should first distinguish between meaningfulness and meaning. The meaningfulness of theological language is grounded in ordinary language usage, for theological language is essentially an extension of ordinary language. But the precise meaning a term has comes from, and in a sense is equivalent to, the way a term is used within a system. Thus "heat" has an ordinary language usage but can acquire a technical meaning in thermodynamics. Though the two usages are

part of a family of meanings, they differ in scope and precision. Similarly, theology can take such ordinary language terms as "person" "nature" or such distinctively theological terms as "grace" and "Trinity" and sharpen or specify their meaning by fixing the role they play within the system.

The crucial point to be noted is that the meaning of a word is not a relation between a term and an object. The word 'table' does not have meaning by virtue of its relation to this table or to tables in general. Unless the word already had a definite meaning it could not be used to refer to this or any other table. However, a necessary condition for the term to have the meaning it does have is that it can be used to refer to tables.

Similarly, language about God does not have meaning by virtue of a relation between key terms and God. Theological language could be meaningful even if God did not exist. There have been meaningful languages concerned with caloric, the four elements, phlogiston, the lumeniferous aether, and the lost continent of Atlantis. This is not too different from the Thomistic doctrine that the question of real existence is settled, not by concepts or conceptual systems, but by existential judgments, or the affirmation of propositions as true of reality.

The first requisite for such judgments is that one must have linguistic means for referring to extralinguistic objects, a requisite that raises the question: how does reference function in theological language? We refer to God by using the term "God" or equivalent terms such as "First Cause," "Creator," etc. Such terms can serve a referential function only if they have meaning. But the meaning of these terms does not come from a relation to the object denoted. Thus, to refer to God by the title "Maker of heaven and earth" we must know, at least in a global way, what is meant by "heaven and earth," the universe, and we must also know what it means to make something. The meaning of such referential terms does not come from a relation of these terms to God, but from an understanding of things distinct from God. The way in which these terms are used implicitly sets boundary conditions or consistency

standards for what we can say about God. In this sense reference is internal to the linguistic system employed.[13]

The final question, and the really crucial one, is pragmatics or, in Thomistic terms, the role of judgment. In our earlier discussion of theories we indicated that acceptance of a theory as explanatory and irreducible logically entails acceptance of the entites postulated or presupposed by the theory. Actual practice, however, is rarely as simple or as straightforward as logical entailment. The scientist develops a theory of atoms because he already believes in their existence. Similarly, one rarely comes to believe in the existance of God because he finds a particular theological theory acceptable, though this may be a contributing factor.

In the present case there are two different judgments involved. The first is a judgment concerning the real existence of God. A clarification of the meaningfulness of theological language does not settle this question. It is not a demonstration of God's existence. However, such a clarification does have some function in this context, since a rejection of theological language as meaningless is clearly an obstacle to religious belief. The second question concerns the acceptance of a theological system. Here we can distinguish between particular systems and a minimally determined theological language that serves as a vehicle for expressing shared beliefs. This would aso count as a theory, a background theory, in the sense of the term "theory" used in this paper.

How does such a theological theory, with its conceptual creation of a surrogate God as a ontic commitment, relate to the real God, the transcendent object of belief? A surrogate God was necessary because we do not know what God is; we do not know His inner nature in any direct sense of "know". The meaningfulness of our conceptualization comes, not from its relation to God, but from its relation to the world of ordinary experience and our understanding of it. This is what it means to say our knowledge

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[13] The technical significance of the difference between internal and external reference and its crucial bearing on the critical problem is discussed by James W. Cornman in *Metaphysics, Reference, and Language* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966).

of God is analogous. Yet, this conceptualization can serve as a vehicle for the formulation of propositions which we accept as true, provided we already believe in the existence of God. In this sense it does serve as a means, an indirect, partial, analogous, yet indispensible means of knowing the living God who transcends whatever we can think or say of Him.

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