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ESSAYS ON DISCOURSE BY AND ABOUT THE DIVINE

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

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For Erika and Kevin.

For Erika, my first guide to discourse divine.

For Kevin, my very best guide, teacher, and champion.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract…v

Chapter One: Divine Predication, Direct Reference, and the Attributes of Classical Theism…1
- Introduction…1
- The Nature of the Problem and Some Methodological Worries…3
- Semantic Externalism, Kinds, and Properties…13
- Alston and Religious Speech…20
- Theological Reference and Predication…
- Direct Reference and Classical Theism…39
- Some Consequences…44

Chapter Two: Hectoring Hector: A Thoroughgoing Critique of Hectorian Semantics…50
- Introduction…50
- Hectorian Semantics…52
- Yadav's Objections and Varieties of Externalism…55
- Hector and Mental Content…64
- Problems with Theological Applications of Hectorian Semantics…68
- Conclusion…84

Chapter Three: Metaphor and the Mind of God in *Neviʾim*…86
- Introduction…86
- Part One…88
- Hazony, Metaphor, and the s…88
- Textual Evidence from *Neviʾim*…97
- Part Two…101
- God's Perspective in the Prophets…101
- God's Perspective and the Language of Divine Emotion…107
- Predicating Emotions of God in Contemporary Philosophy…116
- Zagzebski and the Emotions of God…125
- Biblical Epistemology, Opacity, and the New Testament…133

Chapter Four: Transitive Speech Acts and Melting Away Wax-Nose Anxieties in Wolterstorff's *Divine Discourse*…137
- Introduction…137
- *Divine Discourse*: Readings the Work of Two Agents…140
- Wisse's Critique…151
- Response to Wisse…155
- An Alternative to Transitive Discourse…165

Bibliography…176

ABSTRACT

Chapter One

Divine Predication, Direct Reference, and the Attributes of Classical Theism

The Church's affirmation of statements predicating certain positive attributes to God is central to Christian doctrine. However, important biblical and doctrinal predications include ascriptions of emotion, mental states and even movement to God. It is contested whether divine predications should understood metaphorically, analogically, or univocally. The situation is further complicated when one takes into account divine attributes such as impassibility (the idea that God cannot be acted upon or suffer due to things external to himself), immutability (the idea that God is unchanging), and aseity (the idea that God is self-caused and only dependent on himself for his existence). If classical theists are right in attributing aseity and impassibility to God, it is difficult to see how predications like "God is loving" or "God is angry" should be understood. In this paper I show that contemporary philosophy of language is a surprisingly good bedfellow for religious language. I argue that language, understood in light of contemporary work on public meaning and direct reference, enables us to make meaningful predications of God while not undermining our commitments to some of the most difficult theological ascriptions. This view of divine predication in light of public meaning and reference turns out to be theory of univocal predication, one I call *predication by attributive univocity*.

Chapter Two

Hectoring Hector: A Thoroughgoing Critique of Hectorian Semantics

Divine predication has long proved a problem for theologians and philosophers of religion. Religious speech acts are difficult to explain, as many doctrinal propositions seem to run aground on the metaphysical implications of divine reference and predication. Determining how words refer and describe God is difficult when one considers the attributes that God orted to have: transcendence, simplicity, and holiness, among others. Theology just is the practice of explaining the nature of God in terms humans can understand, and yet God's nature seems to imply that human language will forever be inadequate to the task of divine description. Attempts to explain theological language have made use of metaphorical, analogical, or univocal predications, and more recently theologians and philosophers have resorted to explaining how theology might be worthwhile even when one accepts that humans cannot, in principle, accurately speak of the divine. Kevin Hector's recent project, *Theology without Metaphysics*, is an attempt to restore theological speech acts' status as meaningful and intelligible. This work has been well-received by theologians and philosophers alike, but it is not without its critics. In this paper, I defend Kevin Hector's *Theology without Metaphysics* against Sameer Yadav's criticisms. However, I ultimately argue that Hector's version of semantic externalism fails; I also argue that Hector's rejection of "essentialist-correspondentist" metaphysics is really not the source of the problems with which he is concerned.

Chapter Three

Metaphor and the Mind of God in *Nevi'im*

In *The Philosophy of Hebrew Scripture*, Yoram Hazony contrasts the uses of metaphor in Nevi'im and the New Testament. According to Hazony, metaphor is employed by Jesus to obscure teachings, but the prophets of the Hebrew Scriptures use metaphor to make teachings intelligible. However, this understanding of metaphor is too simplistic to capture the scope of metaphorical statements made by the Hebrew prophets. In this paper, I suggest that an important set of philosophical arguments are advanced by the prophets in ways not captured by current interpretive methodologies. The paper is divided into two parts. In the first half, I argue against Hazony's assessment of Nevi'im. In the second, I forward my position on the philosophical dimensions of Nevi'im: that prophetic writings reveal important moral facts about God's nature and the ways in which we should respond to him in both action and emotion. Appealing to the works of Dru Johnson, Eleonore Stump and Linda Zagzebski, I show that the writings of the Hebrew prophets may in fact advance certain arguments about the emotions and motivations of God. Through the collected writings of Nevi'im, God functions as an exemplar for those receiving the words of the prophets.

Chapter Four

Transitive Speech Acts and Melting Away Wax-Nose Anxieties in Wolterstorff's *Divine Discourse*

In *Divine Discourse*, Wolterstorff offers five patterns that interpreters can use to deal with problematic passages of Scripture. Two strategies recommended by Wolterstorff include (1) changing the rhetorico-conceptual structure of a text, and (2) interpreting the passage as what Wolterstorff calls "transitive discourse." However, anytime the interpreter takes these steps away from the most likely intended meaning given to the text by the human author, he leaves himself open to what Locke called "wax-nose anxieties." Despite Wolterstorff's best efforts to limit the threat posed by wax-nose anxieties, Maarten Wisse argues that the two aforementioned strategies leave Wolterstorff especially open to wax-nose concerns. In what follows, I will recount both Wolterstorff's view and Wisse's assessment. I will then show that there is no plausible way to save Wolterstorff from Wisse's criticisms and offer an alternative interpretative strategy for problematic passages that are often considered transitive discourse. I argue that one of Wolterstorff's existing strategies is sufficient for dealing with problematic passages once proper attention is given to genre, and it does so without invoking transitive discourse readings or changes in rhetorico-conceptual structure.

CHAPTER ONE

Divine Predication, Direct Reference, and the Attributes of Classical Theism

I. Introduction

In this paper I will address the nature of divine predications in both biblical and doctrinal contexts. The Church's affirmation of predicating certain positive attributes to God is central to Christian doctrine. Important divine predications include ascriptions of emotion, movement, and mental states to God. The way in which such predications should be understood is a subject of much disagreement. Whether statements such as "God is loving" should be understood metaphorically, analogically, or univocally is contested. Further, if we suppose that humans are able to use multiple forms of predication to speak meaningfully about God, there still remains the task of determining which statements should be construed in which sense. Much of this discussion centers on the epistemological status of our predications and what kind of knowledge is necessary to make meaningful predications. There are considerable reasons to doubt that finite humans have the epistemological equipment to ascribe features to a God that theology identifies as transcendent and infinite.

The situation is further complicated when one takes into account attributes such as immutability, aseity, and impassibility. These predicates ascribe to God the qualities of being unchanging, self-caused, and absolutely unaffected by things external to himself. If classical theists are right in attributing aseity and impassibility to God, it is difficult to see how predications

like “God is loving” or “God is angry” could be anything but metaphorical. Such terms appear hopelessly intertwined with the human qualities of emotions, such as passion, bodily states, and causal dependence on the object of the emotion. Many of our terms seem to rely upon our notion of specific properties founded in finite human experience, and these properties are often thought to be incompatible with traditional understandings of God. However, contemporary thought about language, sense, and meaning may yield different results for divine predication.

In what follows, I examine divine predication in light of modern views of language. While medieval thought on predication presupposes that a great deal of conceptual commitments are rigidly connected to language use, contemporary philosophy of language emphasizes the public sense of words and word use instead of the concepts and properties that correspond to words. This is not to say that recent theories are metaphysically neutral by any means. My project will examine metaphysical implications of explicating divine predication according to recent theories of direct reference and public meaning.[1] For the purposes of my paper I assume that theists can affirm statements that include positive predications of God. on the works of William Alston and Linda Zagzebski, I argue that language understood in light of contemporary work on public meaning and direct reference permits us to make meaningful, univocal

[1] See Donnellan’s “Reference and Definite Descriptions” (1966), “Putting Humpty Dumpty Together Again,” (1968), “Proper Names and Identifying Descriptions,” in *The Semantics of Natural Language* (1972) and "Kripke and Putnam on Natural Kind Terms" (2012); Kripke’s *Naming and Necessity* (1980) and *Reference and Existence: The John Locke Lectures* (2013and Putnam’s “Meaning and Reference” (1973), and *Mind, Language, and Reality* (1975

predications of God while not undermining many of the theological commitments of the classical theist.

II. The Nature of the Problem and Some Methodological Worries

Much of the recent work on predication focuses on metaphysical implications of divine predications. Whether or not predication of various attributes indicate that God has multiple properties; the extent to which predication entails shared properties between humans and the divine; and which predications are compatible with God's attributes have been the primary focus of contemporary discourse.[2] Less attention is given to the linguistic importance of sense, reference and public use than to what might be metaphysically entailed by certain (presumptively true) propositions.[3]

Yet theories of language dramatically affect what exactly is involved in making divine predications and affirming doctrinal propositions.[4] If parts of

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[2] For example, Daniel Bonevac (2012) argues for a version of analogy in which analogical statements indicate only structural similarity and need not yield shared properties between the human and the divine. Bonevac also argues that the notion of Turing reducibility provides a possible model for how we can truthfully predicate multiple properties of God while maintaining divine simplicity. Michael Bergmann and Jeffrey Brower (2006) argue against Platonic universals on the ground that predications that ascribe properties to God undermine aseity. Instead, they forward a truthmaker understanding of predication, which they believe has the advantage of being both ontologically neutral and consistent with divine simplicity. Richard Swinburne (2007) uses a "predicate scheme" model of predication and contends that predications can be univocal, analogical and metaphorical depending on the sense of the word.

[3] With the notable exception of William Alston (1989) and Swinburne (ibid), to whom I will turn in a later section of this paper.

[4] It is informative here to contrast Swinburne's view with Aquinas's description of attributive predication. According to Aquinas, analogies indicate a substantial metaphysical relationship. To use Aristotelian terms, words predicated of both God and humans indicate a prior-posterior relationship, in which human "wisdom" follows from God's "wisdom" in an ontologically significant way. Swinburne explicitly distinguishes himself from Aquinas, stating that on his theory of predication the theist is obligated to no such metaphysical positions when she affirms divine predications. For Swinburne, the meaning of words has less to do with our understanding of things like properties and more to do with our understanding of the syntactic and semantic

speech are thought to correspond to discrete metaphysical components, and meaningful language must be able to successfully signify these features of reality, a theory of language that allows for robust religious language, particularly of the sort that will be of interest to a classical theist, will be hard to come by. For example, if a proper name (e.g., "Jesus," "Elohim," "YHWH") is thought to correspond to a particular essence, quiddity, or haecceity, and/or predicates (e.g., "holy," "good," "angry") are thought to correspond to properties, whether these parts of language successfully signify anything will depend in part upon what happens when the word is used among competent speakers of a language, such as to evoke a particular concept, idea, or representation in the minds of linguistic agents. However, in the aforementioned example, many of the properties and essences supposedly signified by religious words are definitionally beyond the comprehension of human speakers. For example, classical theists hold that God is simple, and predicates can only be applied to him in a way that does not violate the divine attribute of simplicity (understood as the claim that God is identical to his attributes and has them all essentially). Such an understanding of divine predicates results in apparent nonsense since simple things do not bear properties, motivating the charge that these predicates are meaningless.

This is only one feature of the many-horned problem that is divine predication. Consider another example, the notions that God is asei, immutable, and impassible. The first predicate, aseity, asserts that God is self-caused: that

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criteria for word use. Like Bergmann and Brower (ibid), Swinburne takes his account to be metaphysically neutral about things like properties.

is, God exists in and of himself. Nothing contributes to or sustains God's existence; nothing is metaphysically prior to his existence. The second predicate, immutability, is precisely as it sounds: God is unchanging. His immutability is thought not only to refer to his character, such as his enduring wisdom and compassion, but his entire being. The last predicate mentioned, impassibility, concerns whether God can be affected by or acted upon by anything.

These predicates are intimately intertwined: He cannot be acted upon because he is wholly self-caused; he is immutable because all of his properties are essential, so he cannot be acted upon by properties external to himself. These properties also render the idea of God as a personal agent inscrutable, as our ways of identifying and describing persons and agency seemingly rely on things that violate these features. Persons act, experience, and perceive. These terms signify concepts that involve ideas of change and being acted upon in their definitions. At the very least, these predicates seem to rule out many biblical propositions about God: He cannot have ephemeral emotional states; he cannot be angry with his people and elsewhere rejoice over them. He cannot relent of anger, and he cannot be moved by the actions of man. When such statements appear in Scripture, it seems they must have metaphorical currency in order to be true alongside divine attributes like those just listed.

The linchpin for the problem of divine predication is the classical attribute of transcendence, the idea that God is wholly other from his creation and supremely excellent. In short, transcendence is traditionally thought to

entail the proposition that human experience, cognition, and faculties will fail to capture (or at least fully capture) the nature of the divine being. God is so different from everything he creates that human resources are inadequate to describe him. Transcendence, it has been argued, bars meaningful religious language by definition, as our words can never successfully signify that which we are incapable of grasping.

Many of those who embrace classical attributes attempt to resolve these apparent conflicts from within a metaphysical system that continues the practice of associating words with a metaphysical system like the one I described above. One in particular bears mentioning. Eleonore Stump's recently published Aquinas Lecture, *The God of the Bible and the God of the Philosophers*,[5] is a short and brilliant work in which she meticulously argues that contrary to superficial appearances, Aquinas's classical theism is not in conflict with the personal depictions of God in the Hebrew Scriptures. Put briefly, Stump argues that Aquinas's God is both *esse* (being) **and** *id quod est* (a being).[6] On this reading, Aquinas merely claims that we do not grasp the quiddity of God; importantly, he does not claim that God is *esse* alone.[7] Such a God can be responsive and active without changing or being acted upon. When he acts, his actions are not his accidents, so he never changes in properties. He acts in the eternal present; therefore, he does not change through time. Further, he can act in response to humans without being acted upon just as humans can

[5] 2016.

[6] Stump 2016, 77-87.

[7] Ibid 88-89.

write in response to the works of a deceased author without being acted upon by the dead author himself.[8]

I am not persuaded that Stump has shown that the God of classical theism can be genuinely responsive while also being asei and impassible for reasons I will not recount here; however, I will note the rather obvious point that Stump succeeds in showing that the commitments to aseity and impassibility found in classical theism can be reconciled to the predications of God found in the Hebrew Scriptures only if we accept Aquinas's complex metaphysical system. Stump herself admits that this is merely one way of going about the project of reconciliation, but it is nevertheless one given by one of classical theism's greatest proponents.[9] While it is helpful to understand how Aquinas made his matrix of theology, metaphysics, and exegesis consistent, the recent revival of interest in classical theism is not merely a historical one. It is a theological endeavor, one through which many are asking whether or not we ought to embrace the central claims of classical theism now, and whether they are in fact superior to the claims of neotheists[10] who ascribe traits like mutability, temporality, finite power, relativity, and potentiality to God.

One way of going about this problem is to see if the best way to do theology involves, like Stump, adopting Thomistic metaphysics wholesale along

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[8] Ibid 91-95.

[9] Ibid 96.

[10] Neotheism is a relatively new term. My use of the word follows Alston's description (ibid, 123). Examples of neotheistic theologians and philosophers include John Hick, John Sanders, Bill Hasker, Alfred Whitehead, and Charles Hartshorne, although many analytic philosophers have a hybrid view of God's attributes (e.g., Richard Swinburne and William Lane Craig).

with classical theology like Stump; others, though, may resist adopting such a position for various reasons. One may simply find scholastic metaphysics (or even neo-Aristotelian metaphysics that might likewise be reconcilable to classical theism) unconvincing. Another line of objection is more worrisome, one I find best expressed by Alan Torrance in his recent lecture exploring the impact of classical theism on systematic theology and Christian and Jewish philosophy. After reviewing some of the difficulties that arise when one tries to reconcile the attributes of classical theism with the language of the Scriptures, Torrance remarks:

> What should also be clear is the extent to which this has resulted from a process of reasoning whereby the 'pressure of interpretation' has been *from* prior metaphysical suppositions and speculations *onto* the Biblical witness rather than *from* that witness *onto* our epistemic base and its attempt to engage in faithful reflection on the (real) kinship with creatures that the eternal has established in time.[11]

If the project of theology—including philosophical or analytic theology—should begin with the Incarnation and revelation of God, one might be reluctant to accept the doctrines of classical theism if they can only be shoehorned into biblical theology by going to great lengths, such as adopting a complex Aristotelian metaphysics that is not obviously recommended by Christian revelation. This is not to say that Aristotelian metaphysics is false, nor is it to say that classical theism and many of the related metaphysical claims are irreconcilable to the Incarnation or other mediums of revelation. It is also not a matter of whether we should even expect to find metaphysical theories, much

[11] Torrance 2015.

less a particular theory that is endorsed, in biblical texts. The concern, I take it, seems to be with what is *primary* in our thinking. When one is engaged in live Christian theology rather than a historical project, certain formal worries emerge that are absent in other contexts. We might, like Torrance above, be worried about our philosophical biases coloring our view of God rather than our view of God coloring our philosophy. Or relatedly, we might be concerned about whether we are unwittingly and unnecessarily marrying Christian theology to a dubious or at least unproven metaphysics, and thereby doom the philosophical appeal of Christianity along with the failing ideology to which it is wed.

I am among those who have the aforementioned concerns about the revival of Hellenistic Christianity. The way we go about making sense of the attributive claims of classical theism is among my worries. On one hand, it is telling that notions like immutability, aseity, and impassibility have endured in the Church. On the other, I am resistant to attempts to justify these theological claims on metaphysical grounds that may strike some as radical or unlikely.

This brings me to the second recent work worth mentioning here in my effort to highlight the problematic relationship between metaphysics and language inherent to the problem of divine predication. Kevin Hector's opus, *Theology without Metaphysics*,[12] made waves in theological discourse because it attempted to explain the linguistic facets of the theological project while eschewing troubling metaphysics. Instead of expecting our language and minds to correspond to something like essences, Hector contends that, when employed

[12] 2011.

in language, a concept merely "orders the manifold of one's experience, and one does so by judging certain aspects of that experience to be relevantly similar to other aspects."[13] These concepts are subject to rules of precedence, public use (or "intersubjective recognition"), and recognized authorities. Theological language demands a particular set of rules: Christ functions as the authority and establishes rules of precedence, and the Holy Spirit "normatizes" intersubjective recognition through the tradition of the Church. Such a view both deflates what is required of theological language by not demanding that our concepts truly capture the reality of God's transcendent nature and sets the high demand that theological language be traceable back to Christ through the tradition of the Church.[14] While Hector's view bears certain similarities to semantic externalism, it ultimately incorporates both Wittgensteinian philosophy and a Barth-inspired account of analogical predication that moves his theory away from a truly externalist view.

Hector's account is notable because it is the most recent attempt to deflate the metaphysics involved in theological predications, and it is arguably the work most sympathetic to analytic philosophers' sensibilities since Wittgenstein's idea of religion as a particular language game or "form of life."[15] As has been pointed out elsewhere and acknowledged by Hector himself, there

[13] Hector (ibid) pp. 100-01.

[14] Hector (ibid) pp. 95, 100-02.

[15] See Wittgenstein 1966, 1980. See also Burley (2012) and Sherry (1972) for nuanced assessment on theological (mis?)applications of Wittgenstein's philosophy.

is nothing genuinely anti-metaphysical about his theory of religious language.[16] It does, however, attempt to reject classical ideas about predication. I argue elsewhere that Hector's theory collapses into exactly the kind of metaphysics he rejects.[17] For now, though, I will simply admit that I do not find Hector's account satisfying, and I do not think it manifests the virtues of semantic externalism at its finest for problems of predication. I think a better argument on this subject is waiting to be had.

Let me recount: Stump and Hector, respectively, represent two different ends of a spectrum.[18] Stump embraces the venerable metaphysics of Aquinas; Hector attempts to do without metaphysics altogether, in part by relying on the metaphilosophy of Wittgenstein. What they share in common is that they are approaching the problem from a theological perspective in which the interpretation of Scripture plays a central role. Arguably these works can be classified as the philosophy of revelation or philosophical theology. This is in contrast to works on religious language in mainstream philosophy of religion, in which no such prior commitments to descriptive theological propositions or meaningful sacred texts are made.[19] Instead, the problem of divine predication

[16] Yadav 2013, p. 124. See also Hector (2013).

[17] I argue that Hector's theory is fraught with several metaphysical problems in my paper, "Hectoring Hector: A Thoroughgoing Critique of Hectorian Semantics" (2017).

[18] Admittedly, this is a narrow spectrum, as there are yet more polarizing views such as *via negativa* and Hick's pluralism, to consider. Given that I am concerned with *positive* theologically descriptive propositions, such as *God is impassible* or *God is good*, I will exclude these views from consideration for the purposes of this paper.

[19] I recognize this distinction between philosophical theology and philosophy of religion is likely to be hotly contested. Certainly the historical authors on whom I will rely in what follows recognized no such distinctions. It is mentioned only to draw out the methodology by which I will approach my subject matter, which is complex and has many implications for human

is approached from a more tenuous position: Is it possible that humans can make *any* meaningful utterances about a being who would qualify as divine or supernatural, and if so, how?

So in addition to the fact that Hector's and Stump's theories are arguably the most influential of the last few years, their approaches also bring to light important methodological distinctions.[20] For the sake of the reader, it will help to directly address the nature of the discussion that follows. My approach will follow the very recent analytic tradition of incorporating few theistic assumptions at the start of my argument. By excluding theological assumptions available to works of philosophical theology, I hope to show how divine predication is indeed possible on an externalist account. For this, I will largely rely on the underappreciated religious language essays of William Alston as a springboard for further investigation.

However, I expect one of the virtues of my view to be that it makes sense of some of the doctrinal propositions central to Christianity, and theoretically, those of the other major monotheistic religions. I approach the subject from the perspective of theological realism: God is only worth speaking about if he exists.

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epistemology and philosophy of mind, theistic metaphysics, as well as religious language and theology. The philosophical landscape in view must be restricted, even if arbitrarily. The role of religious assumptions in philosophical reasoning seemed like as good a place as any to place the intellectual boundary stones, to borrow a biblical idiom.

[20] Prior to Stump and Hector, there have been several noteworthy works on religious language in the last several decades. Wolterstorff's *Divine Discourse* (1995) is excellent and raises a unique set of questions about the relationship between God's words and the words of the authors of Scripture; Richard Swinburne gives a systematic account of his public discourse theory of religious language in *Revelation* (2007); and William Alston deals with a variety of philosophical questions in *Divine Nature and Human Language* (1989). The last of these works will feature prominently in this paper.

If he does exist, I further assume (possibly against the majority of contemporary theologians) that speech about the divine is only really interesting if it can serve as the vehicle for cognitive and phenomenal content about God himself (and not merely about that which is in the confines of natural experience). Put another way, religious speech acts include terms that have uniquely supernatural senses or meanings. One of the major drawbacks of mainline theories of religious predication is that they arguably reduce important dogmatic propositions to nonsense, mystery, or ritual with no correspondent mental content. Even accounts that rely on metaphor have a tenuous relationship with theologically-robust propositions. By my lights, a worthwhile theory will avoid these disastrous consequences while also being metaphysically modest.[21] I think direct reference theory, when modified with semantic externalism, has the potential to do this very thing.

III. Semantic Externalism, Kinds, and Properties

Direct reference and its close kin, semantic externalism, were originally leveraged to explain our notions of natural kinds. In applying this linguistic theory to theological speech acts, I aim to produce results similar to those gained by applying semantic externalism to natural kinds.[22] To be clear, against the likes of Wittgenstein, I do not take "religious language" to be a distinct form

[21] I will say more on this point later.

[22] I have in mind Donnellan's "Reference and Definite Descriptions" (1966), "Putting Humpty Dumpty Together Again," (1968), "Proper Names and Identifying Descriptions," in *The Semantics of Natural Language* (1972) and "Kripke and Putnam on Natural Kind Terms" (1983); Kripke's *Naming and Necessity* (1980) and *Reference and Existence: The John Locke Lectures* (2013); and Putnam's "Meaning and Reference" (1973), and *Mind, Language and Reality* (1975).

of language, just as mainstream semantic externalists do not take language about natural kinds to be a phenomenon unique to the scientists. Rather, they take direct reference and semantic externalism to be an account of language broadly construed.[23] More specifically, Kripke and Putnam thought their respective theories were simply answering questions about and making corrections to philosophical ideas of reference, sense, proper names, and meaning that had been previously raised by philosophers like Mill, Frege, and Russell. It turned out that their theories had fascinating implications for the philosophy of science and philosophy of mind; however, the positions advanced under the banner of direct reference and semantic externalism were simply the results of our common sense intuitions about language. Given the close association between Kripke's and Putnam's views and science, there may understandably be some trepidation when it comes to comparing natural kind concepts to theological ones. It is important to remember that what is at stake at the core of Kripke's and Putnam's arguments is simply the nature of language, and not anything unique to the sciences.[24]

Like semantic externalists, I expect religious terms to consistently track a particular object of reference. While sometimes terms are learned and acquired via description, terms can also be acquired by means of direct reference. Direct

[23] Alston 1989, p. 12. Alston in preferred the terms *speech* and *speech acts* to *language* because he was worried that theologians might misunderstand him along the lines of Wittgenstein, taking him to be describing a unique language that is "religious language." For simplicity, I have not adopted his convention and will instead use what I take to be the common sense, nontechnical meanings of the terms.

[24] One might understandably protest that claims about the "deep structure" of natural kinds entail that direct reference is really about the sciences; this aspect of direct reference will be addressed in due course.

reference can identify individuals, but it can also identify kinds and properties.[25] This begins with ostension, the pointing out of an individual or object. The individual is named: Fred is *that* or water is *that*. In the latter cases concerning kinds and properties, agents make use of an exemplar that is a paradigmatic constituent of a kind or bearer of a property. To identify a kind or property *x* is to refer to a subject and claim, *x* is *like that*. Generally speaking, these terms are expected to map onto actual, existent objects given to us by the world.

We learn more about kinds and properties by studying exemplars. In most discussions of direct reference, this is done using ordinary sense perception and empirical observation in the domain of the sciences. However, more recently, Linda Zagzebski argued that the faculty of admiration and use of reflection can also individuate and facilitate the study of moral kinds.[26] In any case, the primary objects that are taken as potential subjects of direct reference have been natural ones; more specifically, natural individuals, the properties that depend upon or constitute individuals, and the kinds to which individuals and properties are purported to belong.

For illustrative purposes, it helps to consider externalist semantics as applied to natural kinds. Consider terms like "water" and "tiger." One upshot of the direct reference approach to terms is that we do not get bogged down in

[25] As I will explicitly address later, I use "properties" is the most metaphysically-deflated sense: Anything that can be acquired as a concept and predicated or attributed to a subject.

[26] 2017. She remains metaethically neutral on whether this is a purely naturalistic project, or whether nonnatural faculties, properties, and kinds are involved. However, in *Divine Motivation Theory* (2004), Zagzebski gives a metaethical account that involves the supernatural.

disputes about the proper description of difficult and contested terms.[27] Instead, we begin with what has been identified indexically (e.g., *that* or *like that*) and allow descriptive content to follow, much like how experts in the natural sciences have discovered the full (roughly speaking) descriptive content of water after paradigmatic instances of water were already determined.

Another peculiar feature of natural kind semantics is the role of one's linguistic network, the community in which terms are used. Putnam's formulation of direct reference requires that there is a procedure for identifying examples of a kind or property that is recognized by one's community. Just as scientific experts recognize certain procedures as determining what is constitutive of instances of water (and that, further, constitution matters at all), there is a social dimension to terms in externalist semantics. It is clear why this claim is important to the theory: If there is not a generally accepted procedure for picking out paradigmatic instances of a kind or property, then there is no way to discriminate between vernacular users (who might misidentify instances of a kind or rely on inaccurate descriptions) and those experts to whom the linguistic community defers.

This "division of linguistic labor"[28] has significant results for direct reference. First, Putnam contends that individuals talking about water and tigers in the past were talking about the same stuff that today's users of "water" and "tiger" are, despite the fact that today we have significantly different ideas

[27] Indeed, the direct reference of Kripke and Putnam began as a refutation of Frege's and Russell's descriptivists accounts of sense and reference. See the bibliography for more on this.

[28] Putnam 1973, p. 710.

about the constitution of water and tigers. This is because direct reference traces meaning backwards to a "baptism" or "coining" of a word. On Kripke's view, there is a causal chain of communication linking the name to contemporary discourse;[29] on Putnam's, there is division of linguistic labor in which the speaker participates, and this linguistic community allows the speaker to inherit the term.[30] That historical users of the term "water" actually used "water" in the same sense: When Aristotle thought about biological taxonomies, "tiger" meant the same thing for Aristotle that it does for the contemporary user. This is because our changing descriptions of tigers do not change the meaning of "tiger"; the meaning of "tiger" was set the day it was ostensively designated and named. Even if Aristotle did not know that tigers carry the gene *ARHGAP10*, he successfully referred to tigers in virtue of his word's participation in a causal chain or linguistic community. This is because the designation of the word is not set by a psychological state of Aristotle or any other person; the intension of the word (and therefore the extension) is set by the act of reference conjoined with metaphysical facts about the world, and not the epistemological facts about users' concept or description of the word.[31] If something indeed turns out to be a tiger, of the same kind designated at the word's advent, then it belongs to the

[29] Kripke 1970, p. 210.

[30] Putnam 1973, p. 702, 704.

[31] Donnellan later argued that things are not quite this simple, that there is "wiggle room" for the intension of words because reference does not always clearly apply to one natural structure. For example, there may be more than one underlying structural feature that is unique to a kind, or a single reference may in fact identify two distinct kinds. In these cases, a scientific community may get to decide the determiner of reference (which structure, or which of the two kinds) ultimately counts as the object of reference. Donnellan thinks this flexibility will ultimately turn out to be trivial, though. See Donnellan (2012) for more on this.

extension of the term. The intension *just is* whatever actually turns out to be a tiger.

Further, competent language users do not need to know the best available description of a term in their linguistic community because of this division of linguistic labor. When a user invokes "tiger" in a speech act, she need not know about the gene *ARHGAP10*, despite the fact that humans now know that these gene is a feature of what it is to be a tiger. The user's description need not even be enough to uniquely identify tigers; she may simply know that tigers look like big cats and have stripes. This does not uniquely identify tigers; panthers, for example, have stripes that can only be perceived upon close inspection. Still, such a user can successfully use the word "tiger," given that there are experts in her linguistic community who can provide the distinguishing characteristics of the word "tiger." The user merely needs to have mastery of what Putnam calls the "stereotype" of a word, usually consisting of superficial properties of the referent, and experts need to be able to identify paradigmatic examples or samples of the referent.[32] This is why a user of "tiger" who thinks that only the fur of tigers are striped has learned something about tigers when she discovers the skin of tigers are striped: She has not acquired a new word, "tiger*," but rather has acquired new information about tigers. Likewise, the expert who, in evaluating paradigmatic examples of tigers, discovers they care gene *ARHGAP10*, has now expanded her ever-changing definition of tiger to include this new data.

[32] Putnam (1973).

Since intension is not set solely by psychological features but also by the linguistic community and the world, meaning is not "in the head," as Putnam famously remarked.[33] The set of tigers, once the referent for "tiger" has been set, is just whatever tigers exist out the real world. What counts as a tiger, that is, the intension of "tiger," is just whatever *that* turns out to be, when the term "tiger" was set by ostension. This property of language has been dubbed semantic externalism: The meaning of a word is at least partially determined by features external to human minds.

Note that the procedure for identifying that to which a term applies does not have to be perfect in order to be useful any more than scientific procedures have been perfect at various points in the scientific history of discovering the deep physical structure of natural kinds. Further, while it implies the assumption that linguistic means suitable to intentional objects of reference exist and will yield meaningful descriptions of the objects of our experience (just as the direct reference of Kripke and Putnam each assume that scientific procedures yield meaningful descriptions of natural kinds), it does not *require* that such meaningful descriptions exist, nor does it require that we will succeed in our attempts to refer and coin terms for everything in human experience.

Indeed, there are limitations on what qualifies as a successful use of natural kind terms. Most proponents of externalist natural kinds semantics agree that successful users must meet a minimum epistemic threshold of understanding in connection to the term they use; at the very least, users must

[33] Ibid, p.704.

grasp a superficial description, or *stereotype* in Putnam's terminology, for the natural kind in question. The standard for what counts as sufficient knowledge for a word might vary from word to word, and from culture to culture. Most people would think that a vernacular user can use terms like "plutonium" and "quarks" without being able to give much of a description, so long as they can point to some expert who can provide the relevant information.

In contrast, we expect vernacular users to be able to specify some descriptive content for water in order to demonstrate minimal competence. In most cases, we would also expect that they would be able to identify paradigmatic examples of water if given the opportunity. This is because what counts as minimal competence depends on what role the term plays in the linguistic community—"water," for example, is presumably common to socio-linguistic practice in every human context in which it is used. Vernacular users of common terms will usually be able to identify paradigmatic instances of the relevant kind and grasp some descriptive content, although they do not need to be able to do these things so long as they can defer to an expert in their linguistic community who can.[34] It is not that the descriptive content determines the meaning of natural kind terms—this is not a lapse into descriptivist semantics. The experts in a linguistic community may know no more about water than Aristotle did and still successfully refer; however, these experts would know less about that to which they refer than those experts who know that it is H_2O.

[34] Zagzebski 2017, p. 33-4.

IV. Alston and Religious Speech

In my view, the best account of theological language derived from semantic externalism is given by William Alston.[35] However, his account faces an important limitation: His only detailed consideration of direct reference in theological contexts concerns proper names and not predication.[36] Alston discusses the problem of divine predication in other respects, though, but I will not give a detailed treatment of his view of predication here.

Alston identifies several ways in which the upshots of direct reference over descriptivist accounts of proper names produces fortuitous results for theological speech. First, he claims that direct reference is more fundamental to human speech than descriptive speech acts in terms of referential priority.[37] When a speaker offers both a descriptive reference and a direct reference as a means of identification, deference is given to the content of the direct reference. In practice, humans treat direct reference as though it has greater fidelity to the subject of reference than descriptive reference. Alston gives several cases in which this has desirable consequences for religious speech acts. Variations of these cases appear below.

Case 1:

[35] 1989, 2005.

[36] 1989, p. 104.

[37] 1989, p. 109-10. Alston also argues that direct reference is more basic genetically. By genetically, Alston means that direct reference seems linguistically prior to most instances of description (e.g., most uniquely identifying descriptions contain at least one referring expression, and descriptive reference is usually occur in the context of understanding paradigmatic cases of the relevant predicates).

Imagine our subject, Mel, takes herself to have an experience with God in which she received a message. The truth of the matter, though, is that the devil or a false spirit appeared to Mel, and when he did, he represented himself as God. The devil claims to many of the descriptions and names of God for himself: He says he is the all-powerful creator, YHWH-Yireh (יְהוָה), Elohim, and redeemer. This imposter is the sole source of the message Mel receives. Mel reports this experience, stating, "God gave me a message." Alston comments, in this case "most of the operative descriptions...are uniquely true of God, while the direct referential contact is with, say, Satan."[38] Despite Mel's grasp of accurate descriptions of God, most of us share the intuition that Mel is really talking about the creature that appeared to her. She is referring to that thing she experienced, whatever it was that gave her the message. We give preference to this aspect of her speech act over the descriptions that Mel might report. Even though she describes God when saying, "The all-powerful creator gave me a message," the fact of the matter is that she refers to the devil.

Case 2a:

Cases 2a and 2b also concern attempted references to God with mistaken descriptions; however, they fail to involve immediate objects of reference. In this case, Brienne tells us about God. She describes him in detail for our benefit. Unfortunately, her descriptions are not true of God in reality, but rather are true of R'hllor, the fictional deity in *Game of Thrones*. According to Brienne, God demands human sacrifice by fire, commissions witches and priests, and uses

[38] Ibid, p. 110.

shadow demons to accomplish his will. According to direct reference theory, Brienne is talking about God, but she is simply wrong in her description. Alston observes, "Here the mechanisms of direct reference place our talk in the right sort of effective contact with God, but we radically misconstrue His nature, in such a way that most of our descriptions are true of something else."[39] Alston suggests that it is possible that all religions, even if they were founded upon genuine contact with God, distort God's nature and teachings. However, supposing the speaker is in contact with the appropriate linguistic chain of transmission, she is still referring to God despite her mistaken descriptions.

Conversely, if the word has been radically changed, it is possible that a name has been passed through the chain of transmission without the referent, and in this way the term has broken with its original use.[40] The most common example of this phenomenon in the philosophy of language concerns the term "Madagascar," which originally referred to the an area on the continent of Africa but came to refer to the island off of its coast thanks to some confusion caused by Marco Polo. Proponents of direct reference do not see such transmissions as legitimate because at some point in the chain speakers no longer intend to refer to the original object of designation. This is sufficient to constitute a break with the historical trajectory of the term, even though the token word is still the same. In such cases, Alston remarks, "the distortion is so great that most of the

[39] Ibid, p. 111.

[40] Kripke 1980.

descriptions are not true of God it is likely that most of the descriptions are not true of anything, and so they would fail to pick out anything."[41]

Case 2b:

A slightly modified version of this example has similar consequences. Suppose R'hllor actually exists, but is a fallen angel or demon, and not God or a god. In this scenario, Brienne is using descriptions that accurately describe something in the world, but not God. Further, Brienne's linguistic community begins to adopt these descriptions of R'hllor in their descriptions of God. When Brienne exclaims, "God is cruel and kills men with demons!", to whom does she refer? Alston thinks that so long as the relevant linguistic community is sustaining a legitimate chain of transmission in which God was originally designated by reference, and so long as the community has genuine encounters with God along the way (and not R'hllor), they are still referring to God when making mistaken descriptions: "I think we would have to say that the people are referring to, addressing prayers to, worshiping, *God*, but, unfortunately, are radically misinformed about His nature and purposes."[42]

Case 3:

We are still left with cases where description fixes the reference. Alston cites Henry Nelson Wieman and Julian Huxley as examples. Both had naturalistic ideas that arguably apply to God:

[41] Alston 1989, p. 109-10.

[42] Ibid.

> Consider Henry Nelson Wieman, who thought of God as some complex of natural processes that is responsible for the realization of value in the world; or Julian Huxley, with his naturalistic trinity of the basic forces of nature...if their descriptions are the only determiners of reference, they are referring to what uniquely satisfies those descriptions, if anything. But suppose, as may be the case for one or another of these souls, the person is in effective experiential contact with the only true God, but naturalistic predilections lead him to this radically false construal of what he is experiencing.[43]

If there is no intended referent other than that which satisfies the description, incorrect descriptions will not pick out God. However, if Wieman or Huxley observe some phenomena that constitutes an experience of God (perhaps something like natural revelation) and they name this experience, that name *will* refer to God, even if they misconstrue exactly what the experience was. Alternatively,

> ...perhaps, as may be the case with Wieman, he intends to be referring to whatever it is that people in the Christian community are referring to as 'God'...I would say that these people hold wildly heterodox views about God, rather than that they hold views about some being other than God.[44]

In sum, if we interpret these various examples using direct reference, we get precisely the consequences we desire. In case 1, it seems that the agent is actually speaking about an imposter despite her grasp of theological descriptions; according to direct reference, this is precisely who she has identified. The application of direct reference will not force us to conclude that she has received divinely-sanctioned messages given that she has mistakenly

[43] Ibid, p. 111-12.

[44] Ibid.

described something other than the actual object of her reference. Cases 2a and 2b show that mistakes we make in describing the divine do not prohibit us from successfully speaking about God so long as we have an actual encounter with God to ground our reference and we have not made a significant break with the linguistic chain of transmission. Case 3 likewise makes sense of the intuition that those with incorrect beliefs can still talk about God without recourse to correct descriptions.

In the above cases, reference is ultimately set by direct reference rather than reference by description. Ruling out the odd circumstance when the agent explicitly sets the object of some description as his ultimate determiner of reference (whether in thought or speech), direct reference makes sense of the intuitive ways we go about interpreting religious language, much like it complements our intuitions about natural phenomena and scientific language. When the satisfaction of a particular description is not intentionally set as the final decider of reference, our default mode in speech is direct reference and not descriptive reference.

Alston recognizes two advantages to this approach to theological speech. Alston points out that there seems to be individuals "who are incapable of forming putatively identifying descriptions, or of considering them as such, whether by reason of tender years or otherwise."[45] We tend to think such people

[45] Alston 1989, p. 106, 115. John Henry Newman famously expressed similar worries about children and the uneducated in his *University Sermons* and *Grammar of Assent*; however, he came to significantly different conclusions about the nature of theological speech and formulation of doctrine.

can still engage in meaningful speech about God; children and the uneducated are even held up as pillars of faith in some religious traditions. Direct reference allows "the weak and the foolish" to talk about God without having to make use of burdensome theological language.

Additionally, direct reference allows for interreligious discourse on the same God.[46] So long as religious traditions spring from a genuine encounter with God, they share a common referent. Schisms derived from diverging descriptions of God sharing the same baptism and linguistic community may still be worshipping the same deity. In case 2b above, Brienne and her fellow worshippers belong to a religion that traces its linguistic story back to a legitimate ostensive reference to God, and from time to time they have actual encounters with God in, say, prayer, despite the fact that they believe false descriptions of God (that actually apply to R'hllor, or perhaps nothing). We can imagine another community developing a similar religion based on an encounter with the same God, and perhaps they have been more successful in applying accurate descriptions of God. Should Brienne bump into one of the members of this religious sect, they would be talking about the same individual when using the word "God." Like "water" or "tiger," the extension of "God" does not depend on the psychological states of Brienne or her new friend from another faith. It depends on the original ostension and the metaphysical facts. Thus, despite coming from different religions, Brienne and her friend can talk about and indeed *worship* the same God.

[46] Ibid, p. 115.

While Alston's theological iteration of direct reference has these advantages, one might be concerned by certain features of his examples. Theological speech succeeds in Alston's cases only when the speaker has (a) direct access to an experience of God, or (b) indirect access to an experience of God through a genuine religious community (whether the agents are consciously aware of this experience or not). Apart from these instances, agents fail to refer unless they can articulate a uniquely identifying description of God, and the problem of divine predication makes it difficult to see how such articulations are possible. In Alston's examples, those who rely solely on descriptions fail to successfully refer, no doubt because he intends to make the case for direct reference to God and not for divine predication. However, it stands to reason that not all agents necessarily have the kind of access to religious experience that Alston describes in his examples. This is one way in which the direct reference employed in natural kinds semantics is very different from theological cases of direct reference. Genuine experiences of the supernatural are conceivably not as abundant as the natural. Our lives are fecund with the material for natural kind semantics; it does not seem so with the divine.

Even if one concedes that there is sufficient religious experience to refer to God, this is not enough to explain some of the most significant religious language. Speech acts describing God and his character cannot be parsed in terms of identifying an individual. We need to be able to talk about what God is

like. Here predication plays a central role, and direct reference, so described by Alston, does not seem sufficient to get us by.[47]

V. Theological Reference and Predication

Direct reference *can* assist us in our worries about divine predication, though, and this is best seen by analogy with natural kinds semantics. While Alston does not attempt to apply direct reference to divine predications, as I mentioned above, direct reference has been applied to moral terms. Recall that in a prior section ("Semantic Externalism, Kinds and Properties") I described the role of Putnam's "division of linguistic labor" in establishing reference. The competent speaker need only (1) know a stereotype for the term, and (2) be properly connected to experts in her linguistic community.[48] For Putnam, a stereotype usually amounts to a description of a kind's superficial features, like striped and big cat for tigers.

In Zagzebski's exemplarist moral theory, the stereotype content that a user must be able to grasp in order to be a competent vernacular user of a term mentioned in (1) above is not a description per se. This is one of the significant departures from natural kind semantics.[49] As Zagzebski points out, vernacular

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[47] Alston thinks that not only is description of God possible, but that God has more uniquely identifying descriptions than any other being (2005, p. 229). His own account of predication that relies on mind-related predicates ("m-predicates") that are explained using a functionalist account of minds as a model in "Functionalism and Theological Language" (1989; see especially p. 78-9). I do not think functionalism is a promising theory, but more importantly, I do not think it is necessary to resort to functionalism to give a sufficient account of divinely-applied predicates.

[48] See Putnam 1973.

[49] Moral kinds semantics also departs from natural kinds semantics in that role of experts or authorities is not as clear or extensive when it comes to morality. Unlike natural kinds,

users may be hard pressed to give a similarly descriptive account of compassion or honor.[50] Instead, Zagzebski thinks content sufficient to amount to a stereotype can be obtained through narratives. In fact, it is not just that users fall back on narratives in cases where they lack access to a more explicit definition of a moral term. In some cases, narratives appear to communicate more about the meaning of a particular term than a definition ever could. This is because narratives preserve the causal connections to the linguistic networks in which they belong.[51]

Zagzebski thinks that the meaning of moral terms can be lost when trying to move them from one linguistic network to another for this very reason. The extension of Confucian terms like "*ren*" breaks down when the term is imported in linguistic networks that are shaped by Christianity. This is not necessarily the case with terms like "water" or "tiger"—the basic descriptive content is so readily accessible to users that it seems like the terms can (relatively) easily move from one linguistic network to another without a break in extension. It is clear at least some moral kind terms (to borrow Zagzebski's examples, "*ren*" and "sin") are trickier than this. However, it seems as though some analogy to

individuals seem to take their own resources for identifying moral properties (i.e., admiration) to be largely reliable. Further, psychologists, philosophers, social scientists, and religious experts study morality, but experts in these fields are not taken to be the final authority on the subject in the way, say, physicists and biologists are taken to be the final authority of the natural kinds under examination in their disciplines.

[50] 2017, p. 34; ch. 8

[51] Ibid, p. 28-9, 33; ch. 8.

natural kinds can still be made, even if the occurrence of similarly challenging terms in the natural sciences may be infrequent.[52]

Following Zagzebski, consider those moral terms of theological significance, be it "good," "merciful," or "compassionate." These terms, too, seem to result from a similar kind of transmission. These terms are inherited from a religious community tracing back to those who claim to have direct experiences of God. Those whom we take to have genuine experiences of God and legitimate reports, whether Abraham, Paul, or Mohammed, are thought to have significant information that contributes to our understanding of what God is like. It is not that those who used the word "God" prior to Abraham failed to talk about God (assuming they belonged to a linguistic community grounded in genuine religious experiences); it is that Abraham has provided further description to help the community successfully recognize and understand God. Prophets function like "experts" in Putnam's division of linguistic labor, providing further identifying information about God. Religions, insofar as they have reason to believe in the authenticity of the prophets, incorporate this information into the linguistic community's definition of God. This can happen

[52] Alan Ford and David Peat note that terms like "signal" caused a breakdown in communication between Einstein and Bohr due to the different functions these terms played in the network of terms belonging to their respective theory of physics (1988, p. 1234). Ford and Peat contend that there are many words in the sciences that do not translate from one theoretical network to another because the term already has important causal connections in its original network that will not be carried over simply by importing a simple ostensive definition of the term. Eaker also notes that terms in different scientific networks "reveal incommensurable definitions and distinct extensions—sometimes overlapping, sometimes not" (64, 74-5). (She further contends that it is a virtue of Donnellan's version of natural kind semantics that his theory of natural kind terms realistically captures this aspect of scientific theory and practice—a point to which I will return in a later section).

orally via tradition and sacraments, or it can occur through the preservation of sacred texts.

While prophets (and other religious leaders who count as unimpeachable authorities on religious matters)[53] elaborate on what God is like, recall that on direct reference theory definition does not set the meaning of a term. Just as scientists revise their definition of "water" over time based on their improved understanding of water, the meaning of "water" is always whatever anything that counts as an instance of water based on the ostensive definition and the metaphysical reality of what *that stuff*, i.e., water, just *is*. Likewise, when prophets contribute new descriptions to our understanding of God, the meaning of God has not changed because God just is as he is, and our baptism or designation of God has established that we are talking about him.

With this mind, we can now turn to the content of these descriptions of God, in particular, the meaning of theological predications. On the aforementioned understanding of how Zagzebski's moral kind terms sometimes function in linguistic networks, there seems to be a natural comparison to theological speech. First, most of our theological predications are attempts to capture what is revealed in revelatory texts into discrete propositions. When we say, "God is transcendent," we expect our use of this term to correspond to something about what God *is like* given the testimonies of those who encountered him and the narratives containing stories about him. It is not that we expect these testimonies and texts to produce the kind of descriptive

[53] Who counts as a religious authority will be addressed in greater detail below.

information about God that we can easily replicate by drawing on human experiences with the natural. Rather, the agents with these experiences know God is *like that*, and this is what we have dubbed "holiness," "transcendence," etc. Note that if a single report of religious experience in which God is described using the word "transcendent" turned out to be fraudulent, we would likely continue to think this term is meaningful. This is because the idea of transcendence is tied to many experiences of God in which agents describe him using the term "transcendent"; we have many paradigmatic examples of when God was *like that*.

Another way in which we arrive at dogmatic propositions involving divine predication is through narrative. Divine texts often make use of stories instead of theological treatises to communicate ideas about God. Just as Zagzebski points out about moral terms, it may be the case that some features of God's character or essence are more readily understood or described when exemplified in story. Eleonore Stump makes this very argument in her discussion of "Franciscan" or second-personal knowledge.[54] Stump contends that there is a kind of understanding that cannot be relayed via philosophical methodology and definitions; rather, God's answer to the problem of suffering and the nature of divine love require a kind of second-personal knowledge that is only available via second-person experiences and narrative.[55] If Zagzebski and Stump are correct, narrative opens the door to knowledge of things that cannot

[54] 2010. See especially ch. 3 and ch. 4.

[55] Ibid, p. 61-62.

necessarily be defined, or at the very least, defined in full. Rather, narratives convey features of reality, especially features of persons, that we know only through exemplification. That we cannot define them, though, does not mean we cannot name them. Thus, some of terms, like "holiness," may be knowable through stories of God in sacred texts and even *meaningful* though we cannot describe them: In this story, God is *like that*.

It is possible that the theological predications we use can do more than just this. Perhaps embedding terms in narratives, like embedding terms in empirical theories, preserves a framework that is important to preserving the causal connections for a particular term. Zagzebski suggests this in her moral theory. As was mentioned above with reference "*ren*" and "sin," moral terms without an easily accessible description are difficult to move from one linguistic network to another without being situated in a wider context.[56] Narratives can illustrate the function of a term in the absence of an accessible description or paradigmatic example. Does this mean that some terms are incapable of being distilled into an authoritative description by experts in the linguistic community? Here I imagine the analogy with natural kinds and scientific methodology is likely to continue. It is possible that many theological terms that we cannot form a definite description of now are possible to articulate theoretically, but we simply lack adequate familiarity with God to appropriate the necessary information for the description. Conversely, some terms may be

[56] 2017, p. 27-9; ch. 6. In some cases situating terms is impossible until the networks converge, meaning that one network cannot assimilate a term without breaking down its extension. I think it is easy to recognize that such disparity can be found in (historical) scientific theoretical, cultural and moral frameworks, and theology.

persistently difficult to articulate in any way other than by means of a causal role imbedded in some kind of framework—I expect that this is perhaps the way many scientific experts think about terms like "space" or "time." Finally, there may be terms that we simply lack the mental equipment to ever define, even though we can perceive phenomena sufficient to coin a term. Some indexicals, like "now," seem to have this quality.

To see how this theory might work out for religious language, it is useful to follow Alston's lead and apply it to a variety of scenarios. First I will consider religious description and predication broadly construed; in the following section, I will take up the cause of specific predications.

Case 4:

Jon, Rob and Mel each have a genuine experiential encounter with God in a forest. Mel, however, bumps into a witch and priest on the way home and errantly infers that God must be the same as R'hllor, the god described by the witch and priest's religion. Jon, on the other hand, reflects back on his experience and infers that God is transcendent based on his perception of God. Further, he now believes God has compassion because God told him this very thing during his religious experience. Finally, Rob walks away from the experience and infers God is menacing as he reflects back on his experience.

What are we to make of these different descriptions of the same God derived from genuine religious experience? On a direct reference view, we go about verifying the descriptions in a way not dissimilar to our way of going

about our understanding of natural or moral kind terms. Whether these descriptions of God become an accepted part of our definition of who God is will depend in part on whether we believe those who report their experiences are reliable sources. Supposing we take our sources to be reliable, we might further evaluate the grounds upon which they ascribe certain features to God. God's own testimony about himself (in this case, that he is compassionate) might be more readily believed than any inferences made. We might also consider if there were any circumstantial reasons that an otherwise reliable source might have come to the wrong conclusion in their understanding of their own experience. (Perhaps Rob was treating a wound with opium and was therefore not in full possession of his senses!) Finally, we might wait until we have further information about God to see if it confirms or contradicts the reports of Mel, Jon, and Rob, just as we might wait to hear multiple reports of the same natural phenomena if the first few reports are entirely unique to the linguistic community.

One last note about this particular case is in order. It may turn out that the descriptions applied to God are in fact baptisms of new words. It may be that prior to Jon's experience, no one had reported that God is transcendent or holy despite the fact that the word for God existed and, assuming Jon is right, the word "God" has always meant someone who is transcendent (among other things). The referent of the term "transcendent" would just be *like that*, *that* being what Jon has designated as a feature of his experience of God. God would be the paradigmatic bearer of transcendence, and if classical theism is right, it

just turns out that he is also the only bearer of this trait.[57] Relatedly, it may turn out that a predicate with an established sense, like "compassion," actually refers to something different when applied to God. Just as the term "jade" was long used for both nephrite and jadeite because the differences in their underlying structures were unknown, the referent for the term "compassion," when applied to God, may only superficially resemble the compassion we find humans, and thus the terms maybe confused. If it turns out that the reality of God's compassion is entirely different from human compassion, the word "compassion" that is transmitted from Jon's baptism of the term will have always meant what it turned out to be in virtue of its referent.

Case 5:

Jon believes in the Seven-Faced God, and Brienne believes in the Red God.[58] Imagine that (in their fictional universe) these two gods are in reality one and the same because the source of their respective religions are baptisms of names used to refer to actual experiences of God and their tradition has continued to be sustained by genuine experiences, and (as we have already established) this is sufficient to fix the meaning of the names for a community. What are we to make of their differing theological descriptions? The theological descriptions and definitions describing the deity would be subject to the same scrutiny described in case 4. Presumably the descriptions passed these tests

[57] For the moment I am leaving aside the fact that God is the only bearer of his attributes, and I am also remaining neutral on any metaphysical distinctions between trait, attribute, property, feature, etc.

[58] These deities are the object of worship in the fictional world of *Game of Thrones*.

within their communities, and this is why they each have the religion that they do. Nevertheless, it is still possible that one community has better reason to trust their inferences over the other, or that they have sufficient experience with God to reason away the other doctrine. In the absence of discriminatory evidence, though, it may turn out that interreligious dialogue reaches a standstill until further information can be acquired. More cheerful to contemplate is the possibility that the communities find no reason to reject each other's descriptions, and upon properly understanding the claims of the respective theologies, can simply augment their knowledge. When theologies are radically different, though, establishing that both baptisms for God were the product of references to the same being will prove difficult, as we typically expect continuity to surface when we have identified real phenomena (i.e., we expect things to behave as they *are* and to manifest essential features).

Case 6:

This final case is drawn from an example raised by Eleonore Stump.[59] She mentions the difficulty of identifying the "true Church" and, therefore, the authoritative arbiters of true doctrine according to the meta-theologies of many Christians. If we identify true doctrine by deferring to Church authority, we have no way of determining the truth of competing doctrines when they arise within the Church (as they often do). Stump mentions the Donatists, a 4th century heretical sect that taught that members of the Church must be completely morally pure, and that only those who have not sinned (in

[59] 1994, p. 741.

particular, wavered under persecution) could administer the sacraments. Stump points out that at the time of the Donatists, there was not necessarily any way to determine whether the Donatists were in fact the true Church, and if their opponents were the heretics. If the Donatists were the true Church, then the true Church accepted their doctrines. If those opposed to the doctrines were the true Church, then the true Church rejected their doctrines:

> The changes were acceptable to the Donatists and not acceptable to others. Unless we know which group comprised the members of the Church, we can't tell whether the Donatist changes were acceptable to the members of the Church. And no amount of historical scholarship could possibly tell us whether the Donatists or their opponents counted as members of the true Church without using the test of doctrine, But, of course, if we use the test of doctrine to determine the true Church, and use the true Church as the test of doctrine, our tests will run in a very small circle.[60]

Unless we know which group is the true Church and therefore the bearer of Church authority, then, we have no clear means by which to deal with schism and heresy.

Direct reference is of use here, too. According to direct reference, it is not Church authority per se that allows us to adjudicate between contesting doctrines in the Church. Rather, we deal with differences in doctrine based on our best understanding of what God is in fact *like*. This may sound trivial, but it is not. Direct reference explains what the Church already does: It takes its most trustworthy experiences, paradigmatic examples and understanding of God and his features, and it comes up with the best assessment it can to determine

[60] Ibid, p. 741-2.

whether the novel view is consistent or in some way amenable to the existing understanding. It also takes into account the source of the information and whether or not there is reason to think that source is/is not reliable.

The virtue of this interpretation of schisms is that it not only makes sense of extant practices, it also makes sense of times when the religious community has changed positions. For example, many of the doctrines of the Protestant Reformation were at one time considered heresy, and some argue that the ecumenism forwarded by Vatican Council II amounts to a change in the position of the Church. If the Church has in fact changed positions, this would not be surprising on a direct reference view of theology. These changes would simply be the symptoms of improved understanding of many of the existing doctrines.[61] Theology would then be a somewhat tentative project, like the sciences; it would also be forward looking, as terms would be used in hopes of humankind one day understanding much of what God is like. Finally, as I mentioned on the outset, this view only works on a realist conception of theology. If there is no actual God to fix the reference and properties ascribed to him, theology is a fool's errand and direct reference offers nothing to those who use religious language.

VI. Direct Reference and Classical Theism

If the above account is right, there are several desirable consequences for proponents of classical theism. For one, direct reference allows us to identify

[61] They could just as well be mistakes in our understanding of doctrinal propositions. Doctrine, like science, could possibly take some wrongheaded detours on the path to better understanding. Hopefully, though, vicious misunderstandings of doctrine (such as those resulting in terrible abuses) would be explainable as perversions and breaks with genuine predications, and not just "misunderstandings."

kinds and properties without any antecedent commitment to precisely what constitutes a kind or property. Unlike traditional theories of predication that rely upon particular conceptions of essence, accidents, species, and properties, direct reference allows an agent to speak meaningfully of God while leaving much of the semantic content of her predications open to further discovery. She is only committed to there being something *like that* exemplified by God through an experience or narrative.

Further, the theist can remain metaphysically neutral about the constitution of God's attributes while still being able to individuate particular qualities of God. Just as a speaker can say that compassion is *like that*, and that courage is *like that*, while not necessarily being committed to a discrete propositional definition of these virtues, so a theist can individuate between holiness being *like that* and mercy being *like that* without having to explain in virtue of what this difference obtains. It just has to be possible that some authority, whether Moses or a trusted mentor, has the ability to identify God or a particular attribute somewhat reliably when he or she experiences it, and the speaker is properly connected to the expert in her religious community.

It may yet be possible that members of a religious community can successful refer to attributes that they cannot cognize. Some accounts of holiness and transcendence simply rely on these qualities being completely *other* from human experience. Suppose for the sake of argument, though, you ascribe to a view of transcendence such that God is *so* unlike anything else that by definition humans' finite capacities for perception and thought entail that

they cannot have any notion of what God is like. This confounding idea of God's nature has resulted in some rather difficult theological positions, such as *via negativa* (predication by negation), and the transcendental theology birthed by Friedrich Schleiermacher. According to direct reference, humans can still inherit terms they do not understand. If God tells humans that he is transcendent, holy, etc., God himself has fixed the designation. Humans can still use these terms and mean something despite the fact that they cannot possibly know a definition or even approximate description of these terms because of their relationship to linguistic authorities; in this case, the authority is God.

Let us return to the predications of aseity, impassibility, and immutability that were discussed in section II. Aseity is the idea that God exists in and of himself, and nothing contributes to or sustains God's existence. Immutability captures the idea that God is unchanging. Impassibility is the claim that God cannot be affected by or acted upon by anything. Recall that these attributes are extremely difficult to reconcile with our very notions of what it means to be a person or act. Further, they seem in direct conflict with passages of Scripture in which God is described as thinking, speaking, and reacting to humans.

It is my contention that a remaining virtue of theological predication via direct reference resolves some of the thorniest difficulties with classical predications like those just listed. It remains to be described exactly what *kind* of predications the descriptions made by direct reference amount to; that is, when Jon says, "God is compassionate," how is he using this term? Since such

terms refer directly to God regardless of the psychological content in Jon's head (recall that this is the semantic externalism that results from Kripke's and Putnam's direct reference theories), these terms are *univocal*. Jon intends this word to apply directly to whatever God is actually like; the intension and extension of the term is set by the metaphysical reality of God's *likeness*. In this way, "compassionate" is just as univocal as the word "tiger" or "water."

Perhaps most importantly, unlike predications made via analogy or metaphor, the terms we use to describe God do not make their human counterparts linguistically prior. There is no presumption that our predications derived via direct reference have their basis in natural experience. When I observe that God is *like that* in his judgment of the kings of Israel, and I call this "merciful," my understanding of human mercy is not necessarily shaping the divine predicate. Rather, it is a reference to a genuine experience of God, a word given by God, or the second-personal knowledge of what God is like communicated through narrative. For example, when Moses tells us that God is abundant in lovingkindness, we inherit a term, "lovingkindness," that is informed by Moses' encounter with God himself.

It may turn out, as many theologians have speculated, that human lovingkindness (perhaps of the sort described by Zagzebski's virtue theory) is in some way related to divine lovingkindness. In fact, I am rather inclined to think that if God exists, something like her Divine Motivation Theory is right. However, even if this is the case, our lovingkindness would be parasitic on God's lovingkindness. The metaphysical priority of the terms belongs with God

himself, and not with us (regardless of whether our lovingkindness came before our knowledge of God's, epistemologically speaking). As far as I know, this is a new form of predication, one that I have dubbed *attributive univocal predication* given the metaphysical priority given to God as the source of the term.

Further, if God is in fact holy and transcendent, the attributive and univocal aspects of our predication result in God's attributes being rigidly designated along with God himself. Since "compassionate" means *like that*, and *like that* is just whatever God turns out to be like at the moment of that particular baptism or naming ceremony, we have stated what is necessary for something to count as compassionate. It will be the same in all possible worlds. Given that holiness and transcendence entail that nothing else has ever or will ever be like God, *compassionate* is rigidly designated. Furthermore, God's attributes function something like a name. The term "compassionate," so used, will never fail to pick out God. This should be exactly the result we expect: God is the same in all possible worlds.

The applications to classical predications extend yet further. Since my predications are univocal and unique to God, it is unsurprising that attributes like aseity, impassibility, and immutability have certain incompatibilities with my creaturely notion of what it is like to act, speak, and engage with fellow persons. I do not even have to work out the exact difference between God's manifestation of his attributes and similar human attributes to competently use a term. In addition to standing in the proper relation to the term in a causal

chain or linguistic community, I may even grasp a stereotype of God's compassion: like human compassion, but compatible with the other divine attributes. This is not predication by analogy, because the analogy I draw here is simply a useful stereotype; it only gives a superficial description of what the divine "compassion" term in fact means.

That God is asei, immutable, and impassible also has some interesting implications for theology via direct reference. Since God is immutable and outside of time on a classically theist view, our references to God rigidly refer in the most absolute way imaginable. When terms are baptized, it is only by mere appearance that *like that* counts as God exemplifying a particular attribute like compassion at the time the term is coined. In reality, God continues to exemplify that attribute at all points in time, in his eternal present. In ostensively identifying a particular divine attribute then, there is a sense in which the identifying person refers to all compassion, at all times, in every expression of it.

VII. Some Consequences

As the prior discussion indicates, theories of direct reference as applied to both natural and moral kinds are committed to there being facts of the matter about what counts as a paradigmatic example of a particular property or kind—instances of a kind are not determined based on private observations or by majority, but by those who are *better* at distinguishing what counts as an exemplar and what does not. Authorities need not be inerrant any more than scientists are, but it is assumed that the experts are engaged in making

observations about the world (or at least people in the world) that can falsify the claims of others.

Likewise, it is important for my theory that there exist religious experts in the linguistic community who can function something like scientific experts in that they can spot counterfeits and perverted uses of predicates.[62] This is exactly what most religious individuals appeal to when sorting out matters of doctrine. Authoritative texts, traditions, and interpreters help sort out and are given the final word when it comes to theological difficulties. Experts like theologians, textual scholars, and saints are entrusted as guides and teachers to vernacular users of religious language. Just as in the natural sciences, the religious faithful look for features like continuity with prior theory (doctrine) as a sign of truth and indication that something real underwrites designating terms.

For natural kind terms, the natural world is the "robust phenomena" our terms track with continuity—the world provides input and restricts our use of terms in cooperation with the rules of our language. For Zagzebski's exemplarism, the faculty of admiration allows us to identify honest-to-goodness exemplars of virtue—in this way, admirability is anchored in what a good person is, the way the properties of a tiger, so long as they are features only of tigers, are anchored by the existence of real tigers. Theoretically, we would only know about such properties by observing and investigating tigers; their properties are known to us a posteriori. Likewise, good persons are our means by which we

[62] 2017, p. 36.

discover admirability as they are our sole source of contact with this particular set of properties.

Religious language depends upon on revelation of some kind, although it is not necessarily the case that all revelation is a posteriori. I suppose it is possible that facts about God are known a priori; there is certainly a tradition among philosophers to this effect. However, it does not seem to me that this particular theory of religious language has implications for theology of this kind one way or another. So far as I can tell, it only depends upon God disclosing himself to people and these events being transmitted via language.

This tenet of direct reference has considerable philosophical payoff for theists who ascribe classical attributes to God, though, even if it is neutral on the subject of a priori attributes. Recall the earlier stated incentives against importing metaphysical assumptions about God's attributes. Classical theists would be unhappy if it turned out the claim that God is asei was merely the product of human imagination. If our metaphysical apparatus is mistaken and we allow this to inform our theology, it is possible that we have made mistaken inferences about God's nature. On a direct reference account, this need not be the case. The meaning of the terms we can articulate are limited by what actually obtains: For natural kinds, the distinctions and properties the world gives us (gold could not be H_2O but it could be identified with the real underlying structure of gold, or one of the structures should there be more than one), and for God's attributes, authoritative religious experience and with it, human theology, is fixed by the way God actually *is*.

To see the upshot of this position, consider how a theist might interpret variations in the extension of a single term in different belief systems or cultures. There may also be a schism among believers of a religion that recognizes many truths about God and descend from an accurate identification of God and baptism of theological terms. This may be due to one community taking a different path with an extension than another. On a direct reference view of natural kinds, should linguistic communities take diverging paths regarding a natural kind (community A decides jade is only jadeite, and community B decides jade is only nephrite), we would still end up with all kinds and properties accounted for once we have a "completed" science. All that has happened is that one community made a different decision than another regarding exactly what to give theoretical priority in their science. Something similar can be imagined as happening concerning theology: One community emphasizes one attribute or act of God, but that is not to say that another attribute is not present, whether implicitly coexisting (but not contained in the meaning of the term) in the object to which the term refers *or* as a different attribute altogether. It could also be the case that the term "good" does not map onto something as distinct as a natural kind like water or even a genus like *canis* (where specific types of goodness that emerge in communities are species like *canis familiaris, canis trans* and *canis rufus*), but rather something unlike any features of the natural world that we now know.

This outcome for theological speech need not be an obstacle to my view for a realist. A theist has every reason to hope that theological terms will be like

natural kinds and that imperfect human theorizing about God will not ultimately prove problematic. Given the dearth of understanding among humans when it comes to a divine being, it should be unsurprising that such conflicting extensions arise in various contexts and cultures. Theists should seek out the theology that seems to have the most promise and evidence on its side; they may nevertheless find out that other cultures and religions may have enough understanding of God to successfully refer to him, even when they get things wrong. It also may turn out that our culture could have easily prized upon some other real feature of God's character than the one we in fact did. Just as we do not find ourselves disquieted about difficult or even conflicting data among the sciences when very little is known about the subject (but rather use this as impetus for further investigation), so theists should remain untroubled, especially when they carry the hope of further revelation from God that might close the epistemic (and likewise linguistic) gap.

This is not to say that direct reference applied to God leads to religious pluralism. Proponents of direct reference allow that individuals who are not experts sometimes corrupt the meaning of terms by promoting improper use of the terms, e.g., Marco Polo and "Madagascar." Just as there are "quacks" in science and ethics, there may be heretics or apostates in theological semantics that impede or even derail entirely the meaning of a theological term. In the latter, more extreme situation, it seems to me that proponents of direct reference would say that the term has changed its meaning—that it now tracks a different (or imaginary) referent.

Finally, the greatest recommendation for this theory is that I believe it allows God himself to set the agenda for theology. In Alston's words, religious language that begins with description allows our conceptions of attributes to "call the shots." If something does not have the attribute in our description of God, it is not God: "[W]e set the requirements for being God."[63] Conversely, if religious experience and divine testimony is basic, the object of experience is God—whether or not he has all the attributes we expect (or in the way we expect). It could also mean that world religions have more in common, as they may have the same object of experience, even if their descriptions are radically different. My hope is that the theory espoused in this essay will make it clear that meaningful theological language need not be a mere chimera, or at least significantly weaken this chimera's ability to breathe fire on statements of religious doctrine.

[63] Alston 2005, p.231.

CHAPTER TWO

Hectoring Hector:

A Thoroughgoing Critique of Hectorian Semantics

I. Introduction

Divine predication has long proved a problem for theologians and philosophers of religion. Religious speech acts are difficult to explain, as many doctrinal propositions seem to run aground on the metaphysical implications of divine reference and predication. Determining how words refer and describe God is difficult when one considers the attributes that God is purported to have: transcendence, simplicity, incorporeality, and holiness, among others. Consider, for example, the notion that God speaks. What could it mean for God to speak, since God is incorporeal? All of our ideas of speech involve action in time and space, but God is outside of time and immaterial. Since God is transcendent and holy, it is hard to imagine that any descriptions of God would be comprehend by creatures with finite minds, so what kind of things could God tell us about himself that would increase our understanding of him?

Theology just is the practice of explaining the nature of God in terms humans can understand, and yet God's nature seems to imply that human language will forever be inadequate to the task of divine description. Attempts to explain theological language have made use of metaphorical, analogical, or univocal predications; each of these forms of predication, though, pose their own unique problems. More recently theologians and philosophers have

resorted to explaining how theology might be worthwhile even when one accepts that humans cannot, in principle, accurately speak of the divine.[64]

Kevin Hector's recent project, *Theology without Metaphysics*, is an attempt to restore theological speech acts' status as meaningful and intelligible. Hector makes use of Saul Kripke's and Hilary Putnam's respective works in direct reference and semantic externalism, but he also incorporates the views of Ludwig Wittgenstein and Karl Barth to create a theory of speech acts that is entirely his own.[65] His work has been well-received by theologians and philosophers alike, but it is not without its critics.

In this paper, I defend Kevin Hector's *Theology without Metaphysics* against Sameer Yadav's criticisms of the way semantic externalism features in Hector's theory. However, I ultimately argue that Hector's account of theological language fails. This is in part due to his rejection of what he calls "essentialist-correspondentist" metaphysics. This eschewal of metaphysics shapes Hector's position, but unfortunately he has misidentified essentialist-correspondentist metaphysics as the source of the problems with which Hector is concerned. Further complications with Hector's forays into philosophy of

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[64] See, for example, Wittgenstein (1966, 1984, 1995), Patrick Sherry (1972), and Mikel Burley (2012) for Wittgensteinian takes on this position. John Hick, of course, is notable for forwarding his pluralistic theory of religion and religious language (1977, 1989).

[65] See Donnellan's "Reference and Definite Descriptions" (1966), "Putting Humpty Dumpty Together Again," (1968), "Proper Names and Identifying Descriptions," in *The Semantics of Natural Language* (1972) and "Kripke and Putnam on Natural Kind Terms" (2012); Kripke's *Naming and Necessity* (1980) and *Reference and Existence: The John Locke Lectures* (2013); and Putnam's "Meaning and Reference" (1973), and *Mind, Language, and Reality* (1975). See also Barth (1940) and Wittgenstein (1966, 1980). While I am not competent to judge Hector's use of Barth, I have included Burley (2012) and Sherry (1972) as a source for a more nuanced assessment on theological (mis?)applications of Wittgenstein's philosophy.

mind, particularly when it comes to mental content and the role of inference in the development of religious concepts, profoundly undermine his theory.

My essay takes the following structure: First, I recount Hector's particular brand of semantics and explain precisely what metaphysics Hector rejects and why. Second, I will address Yadav's criticisms. This will require significant detangling of some confused metaphysical theories that are woven throughout both Hector's and Yadav's respective writings. Finally, I will turn to the implications Hector's theory of religious language have for the philosophy of mind and explain why we should find these consequences undesirable.

II. Hectorian Semantics

Kevin Hector's opus, *Theology without Metaphysics*, made waves in theological and philosophical circles because in it Hector attempts to explain the linguistic facets of the theological project while rejecting the metaphysics that often complicate religious speech acts. Instead of expecting our language and mental content to factively correspond (whether by representation, propositions, etc.) to something in the word like essences, Hector contends that, when employed in language, a concept is a norm that humans employ that merely "orders the manifold of one's experience, and one does so by judging certain aspects of that experience to be relevantly similar to other aspects."[66] Hector stipulates that such concept use requires that agents have the intention to follow linguistic precedence. Having the appropriate intention in word use

[66] Hector (2011) pp. 100-101.

involves two mental acts[67] on the part of the linguistic agent: First, the agent must recognize important linguistic precedents and authorities for the concept in question, and second, that concept use requires mutual recognition of concepts from one's community, according to which concepts are always being revised. Hector's notion of a concept bears some superficial resemblance to theories of direct reference, as it appears Hector is here involving public use (or "intersubjective recognition," in Hector's words), and recognized authorities as a source of linguistic norms.[68]

The definite relationship between Hector's concepts and semantic externalism will be evaluated in more detail in a later section. For now, though, note that Hector is distinguishing concepts from word use: The concepts moderated here are not synonymous with word intension or meaning per se, but rather with "that which orders the manifold of one's experience," something that Hector considers to be an act of judgment. Further, Hector does not think the content of concepts are set by application to anything in created reality, nor does he think it makes sense to talk about concepts having meanings. Concepts do not "contain" their extensions, and they are not necessarily uniform or predictable.[69] Rather, concepts are part of a social process; they are informed by a community, and this information might be new and surprising.

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[67] *Mental acts* is not here used in any technical sense.

[68] Ibid. See also Kripke and Putnam.

[69] Ibid. Hector calls this uniformity and predictability "univocity," but this strikes me as a fundamental misunderstanding of what univocity actual entails. As such, I will not be using his term here.

Theological language, then, demands a particular set of rules when it comes to concept use. Christ functions as the authority and establishes rules of precedence, and the Holy Spirit "normatizes" intersubjective recognition through the tradition of the church. Religious concepts have a particular trajectory, and this trajectory is appropriated by a the Holy Spirit, guaranteeing that they apply properly to their objects. Meaning, says Hector, is a *product* of this trajectory, and like the trajectories, meanings are constantly changing. Thus, while a concept does not have a *meaning*, it does have *meanings*. According to Hector, such a view both deflates what is required of theological language by not demanding that our concepts truly capture the reality of God's transcendent nature and sets the high demand that theological language be traceable back to Christ through the tradition of the church.

What Hector has in mind in appealing to trajectories is the inferentialism of Davidson and Brandom.[70] Inferentialism is a view of concepts that results from Wittgensteinian rule-following ideas about language when combined with the thesis that concepts are parasitic upon the appropriation of language. On an inferentialist view, concepts are more than mental representations, but also must involve the ability to make inferences and sophisticated discriminations about the concept (an ability usually demonstrated through the use of language). Inferentialist theories of meaning follow Wittgenstein in the sense that they take rules of inference and the use of proofs to constitute linguistic

[70] See Brandom (1994, 2000) and Davidson (2001, 2005).

norms, and the meaning of concepts is just is whatever these rules of inference pick out (via the expression of these concepts in language).

Despite his appeal to inferentialism, Hector's view bears certain similarities to semantic externalism. Hector draws heavily upon semantic externalism's advocates (like Hilary Putnam, Saul Kripke, and Keith Donnellan) in his description of theological reference.[71] The reason we can be sure that our words refer to God in the absence of fixed, accurate meanings that belong to our concepts is that our words are fixed by direct reference. Just as direct reference has shown that definite description secure reference, our concepts are not what secure religious reference. Rather, our references to God are secured via a series of links back to when someone, like the biblical figure Abraham, actually picked out God via ostension.[72] These links are described as both causal in nature, as Kripke would have it, and as a social function, similar to Putnam's view. In any case, Hector insists that religious concepts do not have a veridical relationship to something like God's essence does not undermine his theory because this amounts to relying on description. Instead, theological speech acts can successfully refer to God via direct reference, even in the absence of meaningful concepts.

III. Yadav's Objections and Varieties of Externalism

[71] Hector 2011, pp. 159-169.

[72] Ibid, p. 169-171.

This referential dimensions of Hector's theory make it sound as though he is integrating semantic externalism and direct reference with his inferential view of concepts and concept meaning. Sameer Yadav points out,

> [...]Hector's proposed therapeutic alternative is "anti-metaphysical" just insofar as it denies semantic internalism and embraces semantic externalism. If objects can figure into thought as a causal basis for our inclinations to respond in some ways and not others, and if our discursive norms precipitate out of those responses, then we will have no need to suppose that objects figure into semantic content via concept-free representations, because objects don't enter into thought at all (whether by way of resemblances, forms, essences, etc.). Our relation to mind-independent objects is not intentional and mentalistic but causal and dispositional. Such a conception allows us to picture the causal relation between thought and the world as direct and the intentional relation as irreducibly normative. Our God-talk, therefore, can be seen as directly responsive to God's presence and agency in the world as exhibited in the Church's evolving intersubjective recognition of the normative Spirit of Christ.[73]

On this point, Yadav invokes an objection made by John McDowell in philosophy of mind: Simply appealing to a causal relationship between the mental and the empirical is not enough to set a normative trajectory for human thought about God.[74] Such an account is in danger of Moore's naturalistic fallacy or Sellar's myth of the given, insofar as the view contains assumptions either about the empirical itself or the sensations "given" to us by the world (or in this context, God or the Church). In both cases, it is taken for granted that the important empirical facts about cognition are inherently normative when in fact there is nothing to establish normativity. Experience gives us sensation, and

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[73] "Therapy for the Therapist: A McDowellian Critique of Semantic Externalism in Kevin Hector's *Theology without Metaphysics,"* p. 124.

[74] McDowell 1994, pp. 14ff.

sensation gives us knowledge. The unwarranted assumption in this picture is that relationship between these things *just are* immediate and veridical, without any intermediary mental processes. The causal relationship between objects of experience and the resulting concepts is enough to show that these things are normative in nature. Yadav argues,

> The point is that while reliable dispositions to differentially respond to our environment might constitute a causal constraint on thought and language, they also strongly encourage us to picture our experiences as entirely free of normative constraint by reality. But normative constraint is just the kind of constraint we need if the meaning, reference and truth of what we think and say is determined by the external world itself and not merely by us.[75]

Hector disputes Yadav's characterization of his theory of theological language. First, he contends that his invocation of "Gefühl," Friedrich Schleiermacher's idea that humans exist in a kind of harmony or oneness with their environment, eliminates the supposed gap between the empirical and the mental.[76] Further, whereas Yadav insists that Hector's objection to the imposition of human concepts on concept-free essences entails an objection to internalism, Hector denies that internalism is unavailable to him. According to Hector, he can assume that mental content bears some kind of resembling or right-making feature with causally-responsible reality that generates those thoughts necessary for internalism to obtain while also denying that theological claims necessarily involve imposing human conceptual restraints on "essences."

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[75] Ibid 126.

[76] "Responses to *JAT*'s symposium on *Theology without Metaphysics*," 144-45.

For the sake of clarity, it is helpful to chart out the logical space for the variety of philosophical externalism and internalisms relevant to the above comments, especially given how much both Hector and Yadav rely on these terms. Put briefly, semantic externalism is the view that *meaning* cannot be identified with psychological states or, as Putnam famously put it, meaning "ain't in the head."[77] When an agent uses the word, the meaning of the word is not set by the agent's notion of the word. The intension of the word—that is, qualities of the word that determine what kind of things belongs to the set the word designates—is set by whatever paradigmatic examples count as an instance of the word.

For illustrative purposes, imagine the following example involving proper names. When Brienne uses the word "Jaime," the intension of "Jaime" is not anything in Brienne's head. The intension of "Jaime" was set whenever a person was christened "Jaime." Whatever facts about Jaime actually make Jaime who he is—that is, the metaphysical reality of what it is to be Jaime—sets the intension of "Jaime." In turn, the intension determines the extension of "Jaime," which will just be a set containing only this person named "Jaime." Consider another example regarding kinds: What water actually is was determined whenever humans decided *that stuff* (that is, paradigmatic samples of water) is water. The metaphysical facts about the constitution of water (water's microstructure, or that it is H_2O) sets the intension and, subsequently, extension of the word "water." Regardless of whether Aristotle knew this

[77] Putnam 1973, p. 704.

microstructure of water, the meaning of "water" was the same because he intended to designate the same thing that we now know is H2O. Necessary and sufficient conditions for what it is for something to be water, or even a definite description, were not necessary for Aristotle to succeed in his use of the word *water*. His meaning was not a function of any ideas Aristotle had about the nature of water; rather, the meaning tied to his word use belongs to something outside of his head.

Semantic externalism is ultimately the view that the meaning of words can be set by factors external to the linguistic agent; conversely, semantic internalism is the view that meaning is set solely by internal factors, such as the linguistic agent's intentions, beliefs, and mental representations. When asked *what do you mean*, the answer concerns what the speaker in question intended to communicate, or what ideas or propositions they have in mind when they uttered words. When an agent remarks, *that is a pomegranate,* they declare that *that* is whatever they take to be a pomegranate: The meaning of the word is set by certain psychological states in the agent's mind, perhaps *reddish round thing with a hard exterior and fleshy seeds*.

Note that so far we have only talked about semantics. What is internal or external in these two views is the meaning of words. The remaining positions to discuss follow along a similar pattern; however, they concern significantly different subject matter and involve decidedly different metaphysical entailments. Semantic externalism's important bedfellow, mental content externalism, does not concern the meaning and reference of words, but rather

what it is that determines mental content itself. Mental content externalists hold that the content of certain psychological states are determined by things external to the mind. It is often taken to logically follow semantic externalism: If what I mean by "water" is determined by what water actually is (and not just my description or idea of water), then the content of my cognition—my intention to designate water through a speech act—is actually not just internal to my mind, but also external. Mental content that is determined by things external to the mind of the agent is called *wide* mental content (as opposed to *narrow* content, content that solely consists of psychological states).

In the case of mental content, most philosophers agree that the facticity of truth-evaluable claims about reality are at least partially determined by empirical facts. The belief *a dog sits on the patio* is one such belief: Whether or not my statement is true depends upon whether a dog does indeed sit on the patio. However, mental content externalists contend that at least some intentional mental states and beliefs that we normally do not perceive as depending upon external facts for their veridicality are in fact determined by external factors, e.g., the true nature of the external object that is the subject of one's mental state. These externalists argue that two thinking agents can have type-identical mental states that result in differing truth-conditions as the result of environmental or social factors.

In contrast, internalists believe that only the internal states of an agent determine mental content, e.g., how an agent describes, represents, or reasons about the subject of her thought. Regardless of how the meaning of my words

apply, when I think about water, my mental content is made up of psychological things like beliefs and representations. While this content might be informed by information that is the result of my perceptions of things external to me, the mental content itself has no external features.

There can be considerable slippage between semantic externalism and mental content externalism, and the same is true for the corresponding internalisms. This is no doubt because mental content externalism rose to prominence on the basis of Putnam's twin earth thought experiment,[78] and Putnam himself was an externalist about mental content.[79] Since meanings are not in the head, Putnam posits that thought must also be a "world-involving function" of the brain.[80] Just as semantic externalism is limited to word meaning, so mental content externalism is limited according to Putnam. For example, while Putnam clearly holds the position that *thought* and *concepts* are external, he leaves the subject of perceptual content to be determined by cognitive science.[81] These theses are closely related, but they are not identical.[82]

Given the proliferation of externalisms and internalisms in analytic philosophy, it is important to get clear on what exactly is at issue in Yadav's criticisms of Hector. Yadav uses nonspecific language and seems to be

[78] Putnam (1973).

[79] Putnam 1981, ch. 1. See also Putnam (2013).

[80] Putnam 2013, p. 201.

[81] Ibid, pp. 201-202. See also Putnam 1981, ch. 1.

[82] Yet another form of externalism and internalism has to do with epistemological justification, but it is not necessary to define these here.

conflating semantic externalism and mental content externalism. This is clearly the case when Yadav insists that human thinking must have to accurately represent or reflect the empirical cause if we are going to have genuine semantic content and avoid the "two-ply" objection (in which causal relations between empirical causes and the thinking agent, as you will recall, are the only thing guaranteed in human linguistic processes, and thus mental content for type-identical beliefs in different agents can be nearly anything and radically dissimilar). Likewise, Yadav remarks, "the externalist's key philosophical scruple is to claim that our words and concepts do not represent reality by any mentalistic internalization of our causal relations to reality."[83] A more accurate statement would be that the semantic externalist's key philosophical scruple is to claim that the *meaning* of words[84] does not rely on representations to determine intension, nor are the meaning of words reducible to representations of reality by any mechanism, causal or otherwise.

Semantic externalism, while thought by some to imply mental externalism, makes no such explicit commitments on the subject of mental content. Semantic externalism merely secures the meaning of a term by appealing to the ostensive origin and trajectory of a particular term when it is employed in language. It may guarantee certain that properties (such as water turning out to be H20) are always involved in what we mean when we say a word, even if they are yet unknown to us. In fact, arguably semantic

[83] Yadav p. 125.

[84] I am not aware of any philosophers who think that words *themselves* represent reality.

externalism's clearest consequence for philosophy of mind is what is *not* guaranteed by the meaning of a term: Semantic externalism shows that there does not necessarily have to be anything in particular in the head of the agent in order to successfully refer so long as they stand in the proper social relationship to experts in their linguistic community. Particular varieties of semantic externalism make certain mental states a condition of successful word use in addition to external conditions, like the intention to continue in a certain social chain related to the word, or the grasping of a stereotype.[85] In and of itself, though, the semantic externalism thesis only commits one to the public use and meaning of the word; how this is cashed out in terms of mental content is contested. At bottom, semantic externalism is only a thesis about what *is not* in the head, and not the other way around.

Colin McGinn[86] and Tyler Burge[87] famously extended the arguments of semantic externalism to mental content in addition to Putnam; however, Paul Boghossian,[88] proponents of two-dimensionalist semantics like Brian Loar,[89] and internalists like Gabriel Segal[90] dispute that the arguments leveraged in favor of semantic externalism transfer to mental content externalism. Scott

[85] A stereotype is a minimal definition of a word that establishes use competency, such as *striped* and *big cat* for tiger. Stereotypes do not have to uniquely identify the object of reference, nor do they have to be factive, for an agent to succeed in use. For more, see Putnam (1975).

[86] 1977.

[87] 1979

[88] 1997.

[89] 1988

[90] 2000

Soames[91] contends that while the direct reference claims of semantic externalism may be sufficient to determine the trajectory of a word's public use, it does not seem possible to show that semantic content is metaphysically dependent on mental content. If meaning is not constituted by mental content, it is unclear how facts about semantic content, i.e., that it is external to minds, can transfer to mental content. Further worries, like the competence conditions that many philosophers have found necessary to build into direct reference (e.g., the ability to grasp certain descriptions) and the intuition that brain states must have some kind of type-identical relationship with mental content, have made it clear that the continuity between these two externalist positions should not be taken for granted.

Hector is clearly externalist about semantics. He rejects descriptivism,[92] the thesis that meaning is determined by definite description, and he points to chains of references inherited by linguistic communities in the Scripture (such as "the God of Abraham") as evidence for his account.[93] However, as the above discussion has shown, semantic externalism does not entail that our mental states cannot share some informatively robust and normative relationship with the external world. It only shows that word meaning does not *necessarily* share an informatively robust and normative relationship with mental states; in other words, the meaning of words is not always transparent to competent speakers. It does, however, show that word meaning, properly understood, has a

[91] 1998.

[92] 2011 pp. 167,169.

[93] Ibid p. 172.

normative, even necessary by some accounts, relationship with the world when words are the product of direct reference.

It still remains to be seen what we should make of Yadav's conceptual and mentalistic worries about Hectorian semantics. Just because he is wrong in conflating semantic externalism with mental content externalism does not mean that Hector does not turn out to be externalist in all the relevant ways. If he is, perhaps his mental content externalism is sufficient to justify Yadav's concerns. I will turn to this very matter in the next section.

IV. Hector and Mental Content

Hector provides no explicit account of mental content, and to be fair, such is rarely given in accounts of religious predication. Hector comes close to discussing the mentalistic dimensions of cataphatic language, though, when he briefly addresses intentionality. Analytic philosophers use the term "intentionality" to categorize those thoughts, beliefs, and claims characterized by *aboutness*; that is, humans possess the capacity to have object-directed mental content wherein an agent has thoughts about or represents some subject. Recall this is where Hector locates many of the metaphysical problems that plague theology. According to Hector, philosophers presume that the mental content that precipitates meaningful theological language requires human conceptual apparatus that is incompatible with the nature of God. Hence, we have a problem with theological predications of God.

At bottom, Hector's solution to this problem is that God mediates both perception and concept application.[94] Remember that Hector subscribes to an inferentialist view of concepts. Exactly what constitutes a concept on inferentialism is sticky, but at the very least inferentialism attributes the normative constraints on concepts to the rules of inference exhibited in the use of language. This is not enough, though, as most inferentialists think that some mental states are involved, such as an attitude, phenomenal states, or complex representation that allows for the assimilation of inferential rules.[95]

Thankfully, Hector provides additional information about his idea of concepts to help fill out this picture. As was cited in section II, Hector states that concepts are "that which orders the manifold of one's experience" through the faculty of judgment. The "meaning" of concepts, which clearly amounts to something different than meaning of the semantic externalist variety here, varies over time and among individuals. By the word "meaning," Hector seems to indicate what most philosophers mean by conceptual content, even though he would reject any notion of concepts that likens them to containers.

Describing concepts as something that orders experience sounds tellingly like a psychological state, although Hector falls short of explicitly making this claim. Elsewhere, Hector speaks of concepts necessarily applying to perception.[96] In order to address his position with regard to the essentialist-

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[94] Hector 2011, ch. 4. See especially pp. 186ff.

[95] For examples, see Brandom (1994, 2000) and Davidson (2001, 2005).

[96] Ibid pp. 187-89.

correspondentist thesis, Hector specifies that concepts (and, subsequently, language) do not mediate human cognition in a way that should trouble us because concepts apply immediately to perception. Surprisingly, Hector argues, against mainstream inferentialism, that concepts are not the product of nor inextricably tied to inference.[97] Concepts are learned, but once they are acquired from authorities, they are applied non-deliberatively, without the use of inference. Since some concept use is a variety of "seeing as" and not the result of human deliberation, it does not count as mediate.[98]

This does not mean that inference never occurs. Hector describes a world where agents go about feeling out and revising their concepts.[99] Solipsism, for example, is not supposed to be a problem for Hectorian semantics because linguistic agents are constantly testing the way the concepts of others map onto their own concepts and world. The result is that concepts are always dynamically related to one's environment and other minds.

Taken as a whole, Hector seems to be ultimately committed to narrow mental content. That is, while conceptual content is always in flux and changing due to our ever-changing interaction with the world, concepts still are just

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[97] Ibid p. 187.

[98] Hector writes, "So then: when one has become reliably disposed to respond non-inferentially to certain objects by applying the appropriate concepts, one automatically perceives such objects *as* thus-and-so, without having to deliberate about what concept to apply. Because certain concept applications have become second nature, one sees certain marks as letters, sees letters as words, sees strings of words as making a claim, and so on…Once one has mastered a concept, accordingly, the appearance of whatever it applies to causes one non-inferentially to apply it, in consequence of which one need not think of concept application as introducing an intermediate, inference-like step between an object's presence and one's perception of it" (pp. 188-89).

[99] Ibid pp. 192-94.

something *I have*, something that occurs in the mind in reaction to my linguistic community and the world in which I am involved. While linguistic norms and my intention to defer to authorities determine word use, and while they offer norms by which my concepts can be governed, at the end of the day external factors do not directly determine my conceptual content in a way consistent with mental content externalism.

It is important to clarify that Hector's invocation of "*seeing as*" does not make mental content broad. Even if agents are unconscious of their concept use or if concept deployment somehow inheres in perception itself, this is not sufficient to make mental content broad. Mental content externalism only obtains if the content of my psychological state is somehow determined, at least in part, by factors external to one's mind. In other words, it has to be possible that two individuals can have type-identical mental states but think about two different things based on their relationship to the world. This does not obtain just because concept deployment is automatic or occurs coextensively with perception; all this can be the case all while the relevant concepts and perceptions consist entirely of mental states. Without some element of his theory that necessitates that concepts or other psychological content is directly determined by things external to the mind, Hector's theory of mental content seems internalist even while the trajectory that determines word meaning is external to the mind.

V. Problems with Theological Applications of Hectorian Semantics

With these ideas cleared up, we are free to at last turn to the unique puzzles posed by theological speech acts. Hector elaborates on the way his theory applies to items of religious language. Concepts can be rightly employed with reference to God when:

> ...(a) such concept-use is itself God's work, (b) one can become reliably disposed to respond to God's presence by applying the proper concept, and (c) perception is not relative to incommensurable conceptual schemes.[100]

That agents can use a concept in a way that qualifies as "God's work" is established, according to Hector, by the normative work of the Spirit and the agent's expectation that her use of a concept like "love" is traceable to its authoritative baptism (say, Saint John's revelatory statement that "God is love" in the gospel bearing his name), whatever this may mean for the trajectory and ultimate definition of the term.[101] The fallout of this orientation of theological terms is that concepts and the norms by which one assesses her concept use are internal to God[102] because cataphatic words are coined through divine revelation, and successful uses of these words depend upon the power and authority of the Spirit.

So then, Hector thinks his view dodges problems posed by traditional views of divine predication: Our finite human predications do not involve the mediation of inadequate concepts because the concepts we deploy originate

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[100] Ibid p. 199.

[101] Ibid pp. 94-96.

[102] Ibid.

with and depend upon God himself. It is not that his view avoids the application of concepts to God, nor is it that our language describing God lacks origin in human experience. Our theological language is rooted firmly in human experience, whether theophany, the teachings of the incarnate Christ, or the testimony of prophets and disciples who themselves received revelation by some means or another. According to Hector, he can affirm the role of experience as well as the deployment of human concepts all while insisting that human minds need not make contact with something like essences, or that human concepts come between humans and God.

I have argued elsewhere that I think semantic externalism deserves attention as a theory of theological language; however, my view departs from Hector's due to weaknesses surfacing at the nexus of thought and language.[103] The problem is threefold: The first is one that Hector himself acknowledges in his discussion of Barth concerning the inadequacy of human ideas; the second concerns the formation of concepts; finally, the third has to do with description.

In his discussion of Barth, Hector acknowledges the problem that motivates much of the philosophical discussion about divine predication: In all of our theological efforts, we must not take God to be accurately reflected in our pitiful ideas of him.[104] Before I proceed to my criticisms of Hector, though, it will help to get clear on terms. Until recently philosophical literature on the topic of divine predication consisted almost entirely of medieval writings. Most

[103] See chapter one of this dissertation, "Divine Predication, Direct Reference, and the Attributes of Classical Theism."

[104] Ibid 126ff.

medieval philosophers divided predications of God into two categories: metaphorical and literal.[105] According to the most common medieval taxonomy of terms, metaphorical predications are the most remote forms of predication. These include anthropomorphisms as well as comparisons of God to other parts of creation. Since God is compared to things with essential qualities that are incompatible with God's nature (such as being extended, temporal, imperfect, finite), these predications tell us the least about what God actually is like.

Literal predication, the category of greatest concern for my purposes, includes univocal, equivocal, and analogical forms of predication.[106] Scholastic philosophers tended to favor analogy since it did not commit them to attributing creaturely properties to God. Candidates for predication include proportional analogy or "proper" analogy, attributive analogies, and analogies of imitation or participation.[107] Proportional analogy takes mathematic and logic as models for divine analogy. Attributive analogy is an analogy of metaphysical dependence, according to which one constituent in the analogy is metaphysically prior to the other and the source of the qualities that form the basis of the analogy.

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[105] Freddoso n.d.

[106] When we predicate univocally of God, claims such as "God has knowledge like man has knowledge" mean that God has knowledge of the same species or kind that the term "knowledge" signifies in our ordinary discourse about man's knowledge. Equivocal predication designates homonyms such as "the bar" that exists for the purpose of drinking away graduate student woes and "the bar" that two which lawyers are admitted when they show themselves qualified to practice law: Finally, analogical predication is employed when what is predicated is not identical in two propositions but importantly related in some way. If we predicate analogically of God, then when we say "God has knowledge like man has knowledge" we are not signifying the same form of knowledge that humans have (as is the case with univocal predication); instead we are claiming that while God's knowledge is somehow significantly related to man's knowledge, the two terms "knowledge" are not identical.

[107] Ashworth 1999

Analogies of imitation or participation take attributive analogy one step further so that the quality or qualities that are the subject of the analogy are actually shared between the two constituents rather than just in a dependency relation. Aquinas argued in favor of using attributive analogy to predicate things of God, arguing that our ontological dependence on God necessitates that our words for attributes like "good" indicate a posterior-prior relationship (following Aristotle). In contrast, Cajetan contended that (with the exception of the term "being," which was properly an attributive analogical predication) most theological predications of God should be thought of as proportional predications.[108]

There is an obvious parallel between Barth's objection and the worries that motivated medieval philosophers to favor analogical theories of divine predication. Barth thinks our human words, thoughts, and ideas are inadequate simply due to the transcendent nature of God, and it seems to follow that even if God enables us to use such language by his grace, our words are nevertheless empty when so divorced from their typical, world-derived meanings. If God has to intercede and elevate our language in order to make it appropriate for discourse about the divine, we nevertheless do not understand whatever it is we are saying so long as our earthly ideas remain in their bereft state in respect to the nature of God.

If we take Barth's critique of theological language to heart, the problematic gap between a human agent's theological language and God himself

[108] McIrney 2011

reemerges in Hector's theory. Even the normative trajectory of words guides concept use, and even if the concepts themselves are subject to external norms established by this trajectory, *my* concepts are merely informed by this trajectory as I interact with the world; these norms are not *constitutive* of my mental content when it comes to concepts. I may inherit the concept of *the God of Abraham* from an authoritative source, however, this does not guarantee that the concept I inherit is not in some way limited by facts about human cognition, nor does it mean that errors human inference will not in some way damage the concept as I navigate the world.

Hector further relies on Barth in defending his view of theological language from Barth's objection. When our language serves a theological purpose, these words maintain some continuity with their worldly uses, and in being elevated to theological status, the "use and meaning of ordinary concepts are *fulfilled* by their application to God" and "*restored* to their *original* object" (italics original).[109] In other words, Hector argues that Barth affirmed theology by the analogy of attribution.[110] Hector likens Barth's version of analogy to the Christian doctrine of justification: We predicate only by God's gracious willingness to apply human concepts to himself, and we do so by faith that these inadequate theological concepts are on the right trajectory. Barth's version of analogy is importantly different from someone like Aquinas's by Hector's lights, because this way of looking at predication is not a departure from ordinary

[109] Ibid pp. 130-31.

[110] Ibid p. 140.

human word use.[111] Both theological and ordinary concepts have this forward-looking orientation in a semantic externalist view; it is not that the relevant theological and ordinary terms stand at a distance, with only attributive analogy linking the two. There are not sets of "idea-like meanings" for terms like "wise" or "loving" that are merely connected by analogy; human concepts are applied to God with the expectation that they will be corrected and fulfilled by the very thing that grounds them: God himself.

The problem with Hector's explanation of attributive analogy is that it fails to be substantially different from previous accounts of analogy despite being embedded in semantic externalism. If Hector does indeed take his view to employ analogy of attribution, Hector is indeed positing a metaphysical relationship between human ideas of theologically-relevant terms (e.g., wisdom) and what these terms actually signify when predicated of God. That is, to say our human concepts can be applied to God because God is their cause, they are only derivatively applied to creatures, and these facts manifest a relationship between the two concepts that enable us to meaningfully predicate of God, is to reinstantiate the gappy metaphysical framework that Hector finds so unappealing. Let me explain how.

As I have repeatedly stated, Hector's worries about traditional accounts of theological language have to do with the way our ideas stand at a remove from God and the empirical subjects of our language. Hector patently rejects what he identifies as "essentialist-correspondentist metaphysics," the notion

[111] Ibid pp. 141-42.

that our minds must accurately represent mind-independent essences with ideas and concepts, and he thinks that the best way to do this is to deflate the metaphysical commitments of theological terms.[112] He thinks classical ways of construing concepts are little more than a fantasy, anyway,[113] and advocates instead for a rule-following, inferentialist view of concepts.

Contra Hector, though, if one is a theological realist, semantic externalism *is* "correspondentist" and "essentialist" on his rendering. If the way we can be sure our human concepts successfully allow us to speak meaningfully of God is due to God's position as the ultimate cause or that from which our relevant traits are derived, we are making the metaphysically-robust claim that there is something that God-in-himself is like, and this is what our words refer to despite that fact that we do not have ideas or concepts of God himself. Analogy of attribution only dodges criticism's like Barth's by denying that our earthly concepts are not themselves applicable to God. Rather, our concepts must bear some important relationship to God insofar as our *wisdom*, *goodness*, etc., is attributable to him as the ultimate source of these things.

Neither semantic externalism nor Barth's particular form of analogy save Hector's view from the metaphysical problems found with classical notions of analogy. Even if Hector protests that, unlike classical theologians, semantic externalism offers a forward-looking trajectory for words like "wise," and on his account it is a trajectory that is no less than safeguarded by the Spirit,

[112] Ibid pp. 14-16, 45-46.

[113] Ibid pp. 49-52.

essentialism is still implicit in his view. This is because semantic externalism only guarantees reference: When an agent says, "God is wise," she can successfully refer so long as she is complicit in public use and the authoritative tokening and understanding of that word. On Hector's view, the agent can successful attribute a property to God by merely meaning, "Moses said God has some property x where wise is property x." So far so good. What is *not* guaranteed on semantic externalism is that agent using a term have any understanding of what the term itself means or that he has any particular mental content that reflects the object of reference. At best, on some iterations of semantic externalism, the agent is expected to grasp a stereotype and have the right intention. A stereotype does not amount to an accurate description though, and that there is a precondition of grasping a stereotype does not tell us *how* such a stereotype can be acquired in the first place.

The fact that the terms are protected from being woefully misused or dramatically changing by the Spirit does not supply users of the term with helpful conceptual content; it only guarantees future reference. Even if we claim that such terms will have their "fulfillment" in God as Hector does,[114] semantic externalism does not supply us the content we need unless we first have some sense of what it is that is signified by the word we should expect to be fulfilled. Essentialism in itself, though, is not so bad. Essentialism in its most basic sense is merely the thesis that individuals have an identifying characterization or, in laymen's terms, that to be something means that there is something it is like to

[114] Ibid p. 142.

be that thing. Removed from the technical uses of the term outside of specific metaphysical doctrines, there seems no incentive to deny essentialism in itself.

Semantic externalism was intended, in part, to explain the process by which humans identify kinds. Implicit in a meaningful reference (say, to water), is a commitment to its public use: Whatever *that* is, it is what we call "water." If scientists discover *that* is H_2O, I can identify H_2O with my reference to water because semantic externalism presumes that meaningful talk takes place in a linguistic community with experts. I may not have been able to provide a description of water at the time, but the meaning of the word "water" includes H20 regardless of the state of my mind. Somewhat notoriously, natural kind terms turn out to be necessary on semantic externalism: The moment a term is coined and baptized via ostension, its meaning is determined by the stuff that is *that*.

Relatedly, one would expect that whatever it is for God to be wise is determined by when we receive its authoritative tokening in revelation: The metaphysics of *wisdom* is set, and we may not know yet how to define the term "wisdom." Regardless of the state of our minds, we can refer to God's wisdom and intend for our term to be defined by whatever God's wisdom actually is. We expect our words to correspond to the fact of the matter about what God is like, and although word use requires that one stand in proper relationship to that tokening via chain of transmission or linguistic community consisting of

experts, one can successfully refer without being committed to what the object of one's reference will turn out to be, metaphysically speaking.[115]

Strangely, though, this metaphysically neutral position is not the one Hector adopts with regard to what actually corresponds to our words and ideas for the divine. By adopting attributive analogy in response to Barth's objection, Hector seems to have robbed himself of what it is that makes semantic externalism so helpful in the first place. Instead of appropriating semantic externalism's forward-looking, agnostic position, Hector reintroduces predication by analogy to finite human concepts at this juncture. Such a move is not entirely unwarranted: One would imagine that God appropriated words signifying human concepts for a reason. However, in so doing, Hector can no longer make the claim that he is merely proposing a theory of "rule-following" rather than a traditional view of predication.

To successfully engage in theological discourse, Hector's agent must not only refer and follow rules, but also speculate on the metaphysical relationship between concepts like human wisdom and God's wisdom. Theological words maintain some continuity with both their earthly uses and the human concepts these words signify, and in being elevated to theological status, the "use and meaning of ordinary concepts are *fulfilled* by their application to God" and "*restored* to their *original* object" (italics original). If this is the case, "theology without metaphysics" fails to be a new theory at all. Like classical theologians

[115] See Hector on Janet Martin Soskice's use of direct reference and, by extension, Kripke and Putnam, on pp. 169 ff.

before him, Hector is forced to rely on positing a metaphysical relationship between finite human concepts and what they might correspond to in their divine fulfillment in order to show that that human concepts are indeed appropriate for theological use.

Traditionally, attributive analogy presumes a prior-posterior metaphysical framework. Following the metaphysics of Aristotle, classical theologians claimed that effects always resemble their causes, and since God is the ultimate cause of his creatures, we can expect humanly wisdom to resemble its cause, divine wisdom. This is the basis for the claim that our earthly concept for wisdom is appropriate for application to God: We predicate wisdom of God only with respect to the prior-posterior relationship and resemblance that we expect obtains between the two.

This seems to be the kind of analogy Hector has in mind.[116] Hector quotes Aquinas on God's precedence as the cause and existential ground of creaturely attributes. One can see how this might fit nicely with Hector's insistence that his theory of theological language is more causal and dispositional than intentional and mentalistic: God is the ultimate cause of all the empirical causes that result in us having the reliable responsive dispositions that are the bread and butter of Hector's theory. But this too is a position that is unavailable to Hector, for in his rejection of other forms of analogy, he makes the puzzling claim that all forms of analogy are inadequate for divine predication because analogy itself is a

[116] Hector explicitly rejects the other main form of analogy, "proper" or "proportional" analogy, in which the relationship between human predicates and the divine is thought to be scope, degree, or proportion (see p. 140).

creaturely word.[117] Indeed, the attributive aspect of attributive analogy represents a robust metaphysical claim about existence, causes, and substances that someone like Hector should want to avoid if he wants keep his theory free of "metaphysics." Nevertheless, it is analogy itself that draws Hector's concern. Resultantly, Hector does not posit any particular relationship between theological and mundane predicates and our ideas of them except to state that the relationship between them most closely resembles justification of the sinner solely through faith.[118]

It is difficult to imagine what Hector might intend by this description. Perhaps he means that God extends grace in permitting the predicating human to speak of the divine even though the agent herself is inadequate to the task. The agent has faith that her terms succeed in referring to God and her earthly descriptions do in fact describe God, even though it is not in her power to accomplish on her own. One expects, though, that the classical theologians likewise thought it was through grace and faith that we speak of God; this still does not answer how and in what way our terms apply.

Perhaps instead Hector means to indicate a more modest position than this: We do not know the nature of the relationship between our human concepts to God's actual likeness, but we can have faith that they do apply in some way given the mysterious way God's justification applies to us. But this means we do not necessarily have any understanding of what God is like at all;

[117] Ibid p. 140.

[118] Ibid pp. 139-142.

we cannot even posit the causal and resemblance relationships advocated by the Medieval, and we certainly do not have any mental content by which we represent him since human concepts themselves are unfit for description of God. Hector's theory of theological predication begins to look like apophaticism or agnosticism.

Perhaps Hector did not intend to deny analogy of attribution but only intends his comments about justification to bolster his view. In either case, our efforts at divine predication are as gappy as ever: Either we successfully refer, with no hope of ever obtaining the mental content that allows us to have some idea of what God is like (because of Barth's transcendence objection to human concepts and ideas, including analogy, still hold), or I can predicate of God via attributive analogy and inherit all of the classical "essentialist-correspondentist" problems that come along with it.

So much for Barth's novel solution to the transcendence objection to divine predication. This leaves the reader with yet two more problems: Hector's account of the formation of concepts and the nature of description. Turning to my second point, Hector thinks his view benefits from "*seeing as*" theories of concept use: Since the agent is not making a conscious inference in their theological thinking, but merely "seeing as," there is no mediation between God himself and our language:

> ...a community of skilled musicians, for instance, can hear certain sounds *as* a particular combination of notes; a community of baseball umpires can see certain pitches *as* balls or strikes; a community of wine-drinkers can taste a wine *as* of a certain variety— such that members of these communities apply the relevant concepts without having to think about

> doing so. So then: when one has become reliably disposed to respond non-inferentially to certain objects by applying appropriate concepts, one automatically perceives such objects *as* thus-and-so, without having to deliberate about what concept to apply…in the vast majority of cases, merely paying attention to an object causes one to apply the relevant concept. Once one has mastered a concept, accordingly, the appearance of whatever it applies to causes one non-inferentially to apply it, in consequence of which one need not think of concept application as introducing an intermediate, inference-like step between an object's presence and one's perception of it. (Ibid p. 189)

It is possible, goes Hector's argument, for one to see God "non-inferentially" through the Holy Spirit, much in the way one unconsciously tastes a great glass of wine as a Bordeaux or sees teal instead of blue. This gets inference out of the way, removing an opportunity for human reasoning to interject itself between an experience of God and one's mental content of God.

Contrary to Hector's supposition, this only further complicates the problem, and it is not due to the threat of relativity or solipsism.[119] Even if we assume with Donald Davidson that the world is friendly enough to give us adequately similar conceptual schemes, there is still a problem with Hector's account of inference. The most pernicious issue is whether Hector's agent has in fact avoided inference at all in her act of *seeing as*. Research demonstrates that our brains have many such shortcuts that abridge inferences acquired at some point in long form.[120] Instead of consciously working through lines of reasoning, our brain engages in "system 1" thinking that allows us to reach our conclusion more quickly with relative success. The fact that Hector's agent is not aware that

[119] See Hector's defense against this objection on pp.192ff.

[120] Kahneman 2011.

she is engaging in inference in the moment does not entail that *seeing as* is not predicated upon such inference or perhaps even being processed unconsciously.

Further, the problem for divine predication is not with inference per se, but rather the finiteness and inadequacy of human cognition. Even if an agent does not engage in any kind of inference in her *seeing as*, on Hector's scheme she is still bound by concepts formed and taught to her by other humans. Hector himself acknowledges that many of our mastered concepts are indeed taught. Such concepts will still be inadequate to the task of thinking and talking about God simply due to the gap between God's transcendence and our finite cognition. Further still, concepts themselves are not the only problem but creatureliness broadly construed. Even in perception, the agent is bound by her creatureliness: All finite processes are potential restraints to her attempts to meaningfully predicate of God.

In any case, whether he realizes it or not, Hector is ultimately in agreement with many classical theists in their theories of human cognition. Hector's agent requires concepts, and those concepts are human in nature simply in virtue of being realized in the form of a human mental state. If we cannot see God without prerequisite concepts that are part of our cognition, we cannot identify when our perception ends and our conceptual reconfiguration begins. God himself belongs solely in a noumenal-like realm to which we have no access; it is difficult to see how Hector is in any position to disagree with John Hick and his quasi-realist claims. Surely the humans relaying our theological concepts can be in error, or we may fail to correctly acquire an

important concept, and thus create an even greater gap between God-as-he-is and our clouded understanding of him. And unconscious uses of such concepts may very well employ inferences that we are simply unaware of, as so much of our cognition may be.

Let me summarize: So far I have shown that Hector's use of analogy either eliminates meaningful God talk, or requires him to adopt a metaphysical, "gappy" stance that is problematic for his overall project. I have also shown that Hector's use of concepts is gappy, as human inference and limitations restrict the ways God can be the subject of human intentionality. Hector can maintain that language plays a role in the formation of human mental content, but his view of concepts leaves us with (a) the interjection of human inference mediating our ideas of God, and (b) arguably no sense of what it is about human concepts (e.g., *wisdom*) that finds its fulfillment in God.

My final comments lay at the junction of analogy and inference in Hector's theory. As stated above, Hector seems to both deny and embrace attributive analogy. Nowhere is Hector's employment of analogy of attribution more significant than his discussion of attribution and description. Here he claims that descriptions of God are indeed possible, the "guiding principle of which is that God's attributes must be understood in light of God, rather than God being understood in terms of antecedently constructed categories" and the subject must precede the predicate.[121]

[121] Ibid p. 135.

I have already discussed problems with the predicates and their related concepts that are necessary for human description of God. If we do grant that such description is consistent with Hector's overall view and humanly possible, it still has the result that the theologian cannot extrapolate from divine descriptions because such extrapolation would make the created the guide for our reasoning rather than the Creator. Hector distrusts inference, and even logical constructs like analogy are too pitiful for theological use. By what grounds, then, do we arrive at extra-biblical doctrine?

We would have cause to be very uncertain of many of Christian theology's principal claims and bulwarks against heresy, as these proceed from revelatory statements to conclusions that are guided by our common, everyday inferences. After all, these terms begin as references in which the Church commits to a trajectory of the term. When it comes to fleshing out the term into anything conceptual, inferences are viewed suspiciously on Hector's account, and they are the sort of things that create a gap between our language and what God himself is like. Statements about God that are derived from inference, such as the doctrine of simplicity, immutability, and timelessness, are not the well-founded formulations of God's nature we make them out to be. So goes natural theology and classical theism.

VI. Conclusion

My discussion of Hector in the prior section brings into focus a series of questions. First, predication is not just a problem of language but also mental content. Human mental content is just as limited and finite as human language.

A theory of divine predication, then, must address the following concern: How can we have divine mental content, and what theory can satisfy our theological desires and needs?

Finally, it is difficult to deny the role of inference in the formulation of the attributes that make up many of the classical doctrines central to the major monotheistic religions. One only need to pick up a copy of *Summa Theologica* to see how Aquinas would have us work out our understanding of God with fear and trembling. When the Church commits itself to doctrines and creeds, it takes itself to be clarifying and spelling out what is already contained in and entailed by the terms we already employ. Is this really a product of inference? If so, is that truly so bad?

Cognitive science and philosophy of mind, then, may prove useful resources for philosophers or religion and theologians alike. Theologians have a stake in theories of mental content and intentionality. Future research that brings these respective domains together has the potential to yield considerable insight concerning the problems of religious language.

CHAPTER THREE

Metaphor and the Mind of God in *Nevi'im*

I. Introduction

In *The Philosophy of Hebrew Scripture*, Yoram Hazony contrasts the uses of metaphor in Nevi'im and the New Testament. According to Hazony, metaphor is employed by Jesus to obscure teachings, but the prophets of the Hebrew Scriptures use metaphor to make teachings intelligible.[122] Hazony's treatment of Nevi'im is arguably the most influential assessment of the prophetic writings as a means of philosophical argument. However, his understanding of metaphor is too simplistic to capture the scope of metaphorical statements made by the Hebrew prophets. In the first section of this paper, I explain why Hazony's characterization of Nevi'im fails to adequately address the unique contributions of these writings as a genre. I consider three types of passages that appear incompatible with Hazony's framework. Ultimately, I think the prophets intend rather to *build upon* what is already recognized as the path to the good life by providing further insight into yet a deeper and more complex facet of morality. Prophetic instances of metaphor are used not merely to generate moral teachings about the good life and the consequences of human behavior; they are also used to describe the motivations and dispositions of God.[123] Indeed, these metaphorical statements

[122] See pp. 84-85 in *The Philosophy of Hebrew Scripture* (2012).

[123] E.g., Jeremiah 3:1, 6-13; Isaiah 49:15-16; Hosea 1-2.

often occur in texts that also describe God with what I will argue are non-metaphorical terms signifying emotions like רָחֵם (compassionate) and כָּעַס (angry).

In the section that follows, I give my alternative to the position that the prophets meant to convey moral imperatives and a theory about the good life. Often the prophetic texts purport to give us insight into the reasons *why* God acts as well as the responses from God we should anticipate given the ethical decisions made by humans. Many of these passages can be construed as a kind of moral psychology of God. While Hazony's and Eleonore Stump's respective works on the uniqueness of Hebrew narrative and second-personal knowledge emphasize that narrative is uniquely suited to speak to us about certain aspects of God's nature, a detailed treatment of prophetic writings as a source of second-personal knowledge has not yet been articulated.[124] I suggest that an important set of philosophical arguments are advanced by the prophets in ways not captured by current interpretive methodologies: The prophetic writings reveal important moral facts about God via metaphor and univocal descriptions of God's point of view. One consequence of this view is that, against Hazony, I contend that some prophetic language is intentionally opaque. By employing metaphor and univocal descriptions of God, the prophets disclose information about God's nature and the ways in which we should respond to him in both action and emotion.

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[124] *Scripture and the Authority of God* by Yoram Hazony (2012), and *Wandering in Darkness* by Eleonore Stump (2010).

If Dru Johnson's account of biblical epistemology is correct, the sort of knowledge advocated by Scripture involves reliance on authenticated authorities and participation in ritual.[125] Additionally, Stump contends that Franciscan knowledge is an important type of knowledge that involves "social cognition or mind reading."[126] Appealing to the works of Johnson and Stump, I argue that the Hebrew prophets may in fact be advancing certain arguments about the emotions and motivations of God that are instructive to readers.[127] A moral psychology of God is especially well-suited to promote the moral development of individuals. Drawing on Linda Zagzebski's divine motivation theory and recent work on exemplarism,[128] I contend that the prophetic writings serve the important function of allowing us to see into the ethical life of God. Zagzebski persuasively argues that God reveals both motive and emotion through the Incarnation; in my paper, I augment this claim to include the revelation of the Father through the prophets. Through the prophets, God functions as an exemplar for those receiving the words of the prophets.

PART ONE

II. Hazony, Metaphor, and the Prophets

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[125] Biblical Knowing (2013), pp. 47, 140-149.

[126] Wandering in the Darkness (2010), pp. 71-73.

[127] However, I anticipate that one consequence of my view is that some moral instruction contained in the prophetic writings will only be accessible to readers with important corresponding dispositions and inaccessible to those without them.

[128] *Divine Motivation Theory* (2004), 2015 Gifford Lectures, and *Exemplarist Moral Theory* (2017).

In his recent work on the Hebrew Scriptures, Hazony elaborates on the various types of philosophical arguments given in the Hebrew Scriptures. These arguments roughly correspond to the genre of the biblical work. For example, narratives make arguments via contrasts or typologies; in contrast, the prophetic writings primarily employ metaphor.[129] He illustrates how one might exegete particular arguments and philosophical positions through a series of case studies. From what I can tell, Hazony does not take himself to be giving an exhaustive list of the ways arguments might be articulated in the Hebrew Scriptures. Given the way Hazony aligns argumentative strategy with particular rhetorical modes, though, and the fact that these rhetorical modes occupy the vast majority of the texts, I would be surprised if Hazony did not think that his taxonomy accounts for the greatest plurality of arguments that appear in the Tanakh.[130]

For my purposes, it is best to focus on Hazony's treatment of the prophets. According to Hazony, the prophets typically advocate for particular views or actions in ways that encourage the reader to extrapolate from the prophet's words and take a larger view of the prophet's topic.[131] The

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[129] Hazony 2012, p. 66, 68.

[130] See p. 66, where Hazony aligns modes of argument to particular genres of writing in the Hebrew Scriptures. His discussion the purpose of the Hebrew Bible is similar divided along lines of genre (pp. 47-65, especially 63ff). On p. 84, he introduces the discussion of techniques unique to the prophets as grounds for interpreting them as making particular arguments. Here again, genre is tied to argumentative methodology in a way that suggests while other modes of argument may exist in the Hebrew Scriptures in addition to those Hazony discusses, the very genre on the texts necessitate that they will be flush with the modes of argument Hazony describes (should he be correct in his analysis).

[131] Ibid p. 84.

contemporary reader has trouble identifying these arguments because of the way they are conditioned to approach the Hebrew Scriptures. Today's readers do not recognize the way these ancient writers make arguments, and the poetic form of the prophets is foreign to many of those who want to understand their messages. Further, prophets are assumed to be engaged in some form of future telling or "the revelation of secrets."[132] Perhaps most frustratingly for Hazony, readers even expect the prophets to obscure their own meaning and use metaphors to conceal their messages. Hazony calls this "esotericism," a disposition to the texts for which the writers of the New Testament (and their depiction of Jesus) are at least partially responsible.

Jesus's use of parables in the New Testament should instead serve as contrast to the prophets, as he is depicted "speaking in parables whose meaning is hidden so as to be inaccessible to many or most of those who hear them."[133] Hazony writes,

> ...the association of biblical metaphors with parables and riddles provided a part of the explanation for why the prophetic orations of the Hebrew Scriptures seem, to many readers, to be something quite different from reasoned discourse. But there, too, what is involved is the importation into the older Hebrew texts of purposes that are quite alien to them. As far as I can tell, the use of metaphor to obscure God's teaching from certain segments of the population occurs rarely, if at all, in the orations of the prophets of Israel...Indeed, the constant reliance on metaphor in the Israelite prophetic orations seems to have precisely the opposite purpose: Its aim is to make difficult subjects *easier to understand* for the

[132] Ibid p. 86.

[133] Ibid p. 84.

> broad audiences to whom prophetic oratory was, in the first instance, intended to appeal.[134]

While the prophets' respective audiences might find ethical theory and abstract reasoning challenging, the prophets render these ideas intelligible in their orations by translating important thoughts into the language of analogy and metaphor. The prophets draw on things familiar to their audiences in an effort to place important moral arguments within their reach, where, to apply Hazony's thinking to Isaiah 5, the common sight of a vineyard might stand in for the people of Israel, and the relatable vineyard owner for God.[135]

So far Hazony and I are in agreement. I agree that contemporary audiences are naive to the genre and aims of the prophetic writings. They seem to be aimed at making timely indictments and exhortations to the people of Israel far more than they are engaged in future-telling or mystical teaching. Like Hazony, I think that metaphor is often used to generate moral teachings in the prophets, and I concede that many of these instances of metaphor are intended to render teachings intelligible to their audience. Hazony and I must part ways, though, when he begins his exegesis of the book of Jeremiah.

It is helpful to frame what follows in a comment Hazony makes about *all* of the prophets: "What they are searching for is, in fact, *lawfulness*, in moral order--those laws that are God's will, in the sense that they lead, naturally and

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[134] Ibid p. 85.

[135] Ibid p. 85.

reliably, to the life and the good."[136] Hazony's point here is that the underlying assumption implicit to all of the prophetic writings is that there is some kind of moral law at work. The prophets expect there to be consequences following deeds: deleterious consequences to immoral actions, and whatever consequences amount to the good life following those who embrace the moral law.

In a section tellingly called "Profit and Pain," Hazony writes,

> If the laws given Israel by God are the natural law for men, then these laws will teach us what we must do if we want to attain life and the good, as individuals and as nations, By the same token, if we do not obey these laws, we will quickly begin to feel the pain of disintegration and collapse that will naturally follow.[137]

The picture painted by Hazony in his exegesis of Jeremiah is of a consequentialist or at least teleological moral theory emerging from the reasoning of the prophet. Jeremiah uses a term, יָעַל, which is often translated profit, benefit, avail, and gain. Moral laws are what men need to survive and thrive; ignoring the moral law will result in disastrous consequences because humans need to do what is right just as they need water for survival. The moral imperatives in the prophets are natural laws that benefit humankind. Turning from wrongdoing and living in obedience to God leads to a state of flourishing. The prophetic writings exist to illuminate this important relationship between morality and human nature; thus Jeremiah describes the pagan gods that have

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[136] Ibid p. 89.

[137] Hazony p. 177.

no benefit to humankind and the way in which God is like water to his people. Jeremiah's warnings amount to an argument about those things that profit humans and those that do not.

The centrality of this argument to the text is illuminated by a fundamental misunderstanding Hazony identifies in relation to his point about natural law and human benefit: The common prophetic phrase many translate as the "in the end of days" in fact means "in the course of time." According to Hazony, passages frequently construed as pertaining to apocalypse or judgment are really just about how things turn out, the moral order of things, and the way moral laws order the world so that certain actions produce certain states of affairs.[138] It is unclear in exactly what way Hazony intends us to interpret "in the course of time." He does not specify whether the natural law is good for man because it consists of those things that contribute to human flourishing given the way God made humans, or if God intends humans to enjoy a good life, and he therefore advises a natural law that will result in their good. In other words, it is not apparent whether Hazony reads Jeremiah as making a consequentialist argument about what is beneficial to man, or if he thinks Jeremiah has a eudaimonist view about what it means to be flourishing humans. In any case, what *is* clear is that Hazony thinks the prophets are primarily concerned with axiomatic principles and how they contribute to human wellbeing of some kind or another.

[138] Ibid p. 89.

Indeed, Hazony's position is rather strong compared to those with less optimistic positions (say, a fideist or skeptical theist) concerning the way evils affect humans in the world. He thinks the ills that befall trespassers of the law is sufficient to show that the law is the "path of what is beneficial and good."[139] Jeremiah's argument is interpreted as the thesis that "pain and hardship" follow the violation of God's law.[140] These consequences are not merely external. Ignoring or rejecting the teaching of God and the moral law has psychological consequences, among them the distortion of human thought. The human mind is what Hazony calls "arbitrary," his translation of שרירות לב, where arbitrary means the tendency of the human mind or heart to "walk away from those things that are true human ends rather than towards them."[141] Humankind is bad at identifying the good and those things that are in our best interest. Hazony's Jeremiah argues that violation of the moral law and false ideas about the good render one progressively more insensitive to the truth about the good. Remember, though, that this moral devolution is not the result of an act of God per se, but rather the native consequences that follow false understanding and

[139] Ibid p. 177.

[140] Ibid p. 181.

[141] Ibid p. 171-2.

wicked deeds.[142] The word of God, delivered through the prophets, serves to correct such errant thinking and behavior. [143]

Perhaps the above summary is too drastic a characterization of his position. It is unclear, after all, whether Hazony's claim is that pain and hardship follow the deviation from God's law necessarily, and following God's law only makes such terrible events less likely, or if he holds the stronger view that lack of pain, as well as blessing, necessarily follow obedience to the law. If I my prior summary of Hazony is too radical, it seems Hazony is at least committed to the claim that obedience to the natural law diminishes the occurrence of pain and provides some benefits, and that disobedience results in at least some negative consequences, such as a decreased ability to recognize what is beneficial for humans. In my view, this is also the most charitable reading of Hazony for another reason; namely, the theodicetic elements in Hebrew Scriptures do not endorse a consequentialist ethics such that the moral law is constituted of whatever ultimately leads to our good. Arguably, it does not even endorse the eudaimonist perspective that habituation into good actions

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[142] "One of the more remarkable aspects of Jeremiah's theory of knowledge is the emphasis the prophet places on consequences of maintaining false opinions Jeremiah repeatedly tells us that false opinion has painful consequences, which bear down upon and punish those whose understanding is false" (Hazony p. 183).

[143] "Here, then, is Jeremiah's answer to the question of whether we can escape the false words and false understanding that result from the arbitrariness of our minds. True, the mind is deceitful, and when it fixes on a mistaken way of seeing things, even painful consequences will not suffice to shake them loose. But God's word is like a hammer that shatters rock. It enters the world and takes on a reality so overwhelming that false conceptions, no matter how tightly we cling to them, are destroyed before it. Once freed from these false conceptions, a new understanding can arise in the minds of men, one that reflects the truth. Knowledge, then, may elude the men of a given time and place. But it is coming. And all men, it would appear, have a chance of attaining it 'in the end'" (Hazony p. 186-7).

leads to the good life.[144] (More on this later.) However, it does emphasize painful consequences that follow from the rejection of God and his commands, and it discusses at the length the errors in judgment that lead one to forsake God's way for idolatry and wickedness.

Such means-ends reasoning certainly does permeate the prophets, but even still I am skeptical that this really characterizes the chief aims of any of the prophets, much less Jeremiah. Most of biblical literature includes the theme of moral lawfulness and the importance of obedience to God's will (save, perhaps, Esther and Songs). On Hazony's view, the prophets continue to ponder God's will and the path to the good life, perhaps making these ideas more salient to the people of Israel by driving points home with graphic poetry, personalized rebukes, and often scathing first-personal style.

However, there seems to be ample evidence that explorations of the consequences that follow actions are not the central focus of prophetic writings. The next section examines three types of passages that are not readily reconciled to Hazony's framework. For one, prophets often pronounce detailed criticisms of behavior *after* judgment is already declared and sometimes even after the judgment has already occurred. If the central aim of the prophets is to make moral order and natural law intelligible to their audiences, it seems they undermine their own purposes by addressing those who are too late to turn from their ways and avoid the terrible consequences. Further, things do not always turn out the ways we expect when we examine them as Hazony exhorts

[144] See, for example, the books of Job or Ecclesiastes.

us to, "in the course of time." The prophets describe at length individuals whose treatment does not obviously match their moral status, a strange state of affairs for those who would argue that benefit and harm are closely related to the natural law. Finally, the prophets put much of their writings to the use of exploring how things are for God and *not* how they are for man. While discussion of God's perspective on the state of his relationship to people is certainly interesting, it does not directly contribute to one's understanding of the natural law.

I will briefly address my first two objections before describing the third at length, as I think the final category of passages turns out to be the most interesting for the philosophy of the Hebrew Scriptures. This is because it appears that the prophets *build upon* what their audience should already recognize as the path to the good life by providing further insight into yet a more profound and complex aspect of morality. They illuminate the emotional and intellectual dispositions of the good, embodied by the superlatively good personality: God.

III. Textual Evidence from *Nevi'im*

If prophetic utterances are intended primarily for the moral instruction of its audience, the timing of many prophetic texts undermine the prophets' purposes. (I will focus my comments on the book of Jeremiah since this is the prophetic text chosen by Hazony; however, I think most if not all of the prophetic writings contain content relevant to at least one of my objections.) Prophets often deliver censure once judgment has already been determined and there is no possibility of God relenting if the people repent. For example, God appears to give terms according to which he will rescind his judgment in Jeremiah 3, but Jeremiah appears to be so persuaded that judgment will come that he even accuses the Lord of deception (4.10). The picture painted by the prophets is often that of immediate judgment, such as in Jer. 2 and 6. In fact, in the case of Jeremiah, the explicit expectation is that his audience *will not* heed his warnings about the dire consequences of their actions; in Jer. 7.27-29, we see that Jeremiah will declare God's words to the people, but God advises the prophet in advance that the people will not listen to him. God even goes so far as to tell his people to not bother with praying because he will not listen (11.14).[145]

Perhaps Hazony takes these writings to serve future audiences who will reflect back on the events leading to God's judgments. This strikes me as

[145] See also Jer. 13, in which Jeremiah destroys a belt to reflect the current state of affairs for Judah; Jer. 15.2 in which judgment appears settled; Ez. 2-11, in which preaches judgement on Jerusalem and its leaders. In this last passage, the purpose of the book cannot be to bring about repentance in Jerusalem because Ezekiel is not even in Jerusalem, but far away in Babylon, and yet judgment is imminent.

unlikely for two reasons. First, we would need to ignore the explicit claims the prophetic writers make about their intended audiences. In the case of Jeremiah, orations are often preceded by statements about who the prophet is expected by God to address (e.g., Jerusalem in Jer. 2.1). Second, while the absence of any statement concerning future audiences may not be compelling evidence in itself, the prophets were likely familiar with the historical writings of the Hebrew Scriptures. In some cases, prophets may have even written portions of these historical chronicles.[146] The historical writings, as Hazony himself notes, make use of a unique rhetorical style not employed in the prophetic writings (except in brief digressions, such as Jer. 21 and Is. 36, wherein the latter case Isaiah even appears to draw on the actual relevant historical passages as a source or vice versa), and further contain statements indicating that they were intended to function as a written history for the future people of Israel. Given the change in style and absence of any indication that these works were intended for a future audience (both of which were likely deliberate choices on the part of the prophetic authors), we should err on reading these texts as being directed at those explicitly mentioned in the text.

Even if the prophetic writings are intended for future audiences and not for the prophets' contemporaries, there are other passages that are not obviously amenable to the framework recommended by Hazony. If Hazony is correct, then the prophetic writings are intended to demonstrate what actions

[146] For example, Ezra was long thought to author parts of First and Second Chronicles, First and Second Kings is traditionally attributed to Jeremiah, and the Talmud describes Samuel, Nathan and Gad as authoring First and Second Samuel.

lead to the good life and those actions that result in God's judgment. However, there are many prophetic passages that resemble the seemingly unjust state of affairs in Job more than the teleological teachings of Hazony. Often consequences do not match behavior in the prophets. Jeremiah himself suffers alongside the objects of judgment in Lamentations even though he is an obvious case of someone who has God's approval in his life and conduct. In other passages, God kills the obedient prophet Ezekiel's wife and children (Ez. 24), and yet in the same book God promises rescue and assistance to those who had not yet repented (Ez. 34). The book of Hosea is a tragic case of suffering, and the good prophet Hosea's misery is used to demonstrate that God will woo and love those who are yet unworthy, adulterous, and vile (Hosea 2). Even if one excuses the sufferings of the prophets as a special case, there is ample textual evidence of other incongruous consequences that are not unfortunate exceptions, but deliberate acts of God. In Ezekiel 37, God announces through the prophet not that he will rescue those who repent, but rather that he will rescue the wicked from their own sinful backsliding (v. 23). In Ez. 21, God uses wicked Babylon as his sword and gives them Israel and Judah as plunder. Elsewhere in Jer. 25.9 and 25.27, God calls Babylonian leader Nebuchadnezzar "my servant Nebuchadnezzar"[147] when he was very wicked and idolatrous.[148]

So while there are many passages that are consistent with Hazony's argumentative structure, there is an abundance of passages that cannot be

[147] Unless otherwise stated, all quoted Bible passages are from the English Standard Version.

[148] Is. 44.28 includes a similar statement regarding the pagan king Cyrus.

interpreted using his framework. Hazony's moral-instruction view may be a useful tool to understand a particular passage, especially when the author gives a direct indication that he is presenting his view for a contemporary audience within reach of the prophet, or when he indicates that deleterious consequences can be avoided through repentance. But this tool cannot be applied to large swaths of prophetic literature, and moreover, it cannot be derived from the entire rhetorical structure of the prophetic writings because too much of the content is incompatible with Hazony's view. As I mentioned above, though, there is still another dimension prophetic discourse that is not easily subsumed under Hazony's argumentative structure.

This leads to my final objection to Hazony's assessment of the philosophical status of Nevi'im. The most dramatic and unique contribution of the prophetic writings is undersold by Hazony. Large portions of Nevi'im are dedicated to revealing a God's-eye-view perspective on human events, whether or not this perspective will be of any help to the prophet's stated audience. By God's-eye-view, I mean to single out passages that seem dedicated to revealing God's motivations, assessments, or even emotions. This also includes passages where God singles out the nature of the relationship between man and himself rather than the state of affairs between men. For example, in Jer 2.27, Jeremiah reports God's disapproval that the people have "turned their backs to me and not their faces," and in Jer. 2.31, God reflects on how the people have forgotten how he has treated them with the rhetorical statements, "Have I been a desert to

Israel or a land of great darkness? Why do my people say, 'We are free to roam; we will come to you no more?'"

PART TWO

IV. God's Perspective in the Prophets

Given the variety of passages that do not neatly fit into Hazony's description of the philosophical aims of the prophetic writings, it is worthwhile to look elsewhere for an explanation of what the prophets intended to achieve. The last category of passages discussed, those containing a "God's-eye-view," deserve closer attention as a unique contribution of Nevi'im. I contend that they should feature significantly into our attempts to understand the arguments of the prophets. In the sections that follow, I describe these passages at length and propose that they serve a unique rhetorical function in furthering a distinct philosophical position. More specifically, I explain how these passages provide a moral psychology of God and why such a moral psychology would be especially beneficial to Nevi'im's audience.

One feature of passages containing a God's-eye-view is that God often invites people to reason from his perspective and not their own (Jer. 5.7-9). Surprisingly, when God does so, he does not say, as Hazony's interpretation would indicate, *look where your actions will lead you* but instead *look where I stand in relation to you*. The word "unfaithful," one indicating the state of a relationship between parties, is used repeatedly, indicating that one's standing to God is at issue and not consequences to oneself.

While subtle, it is important to stress that this is no trivial distinction. The difference between these two approaches to moral failing can be

illuminated by comparison to human relationships. Consider a parent who tells a child who recklessly texted while driving, "You could have died." Such an indictment invites the child to consider the consequences of her behavior. Should the child change her behavior based on this reasoning, the motivation would presumably be to avoid future harm. In contrast, consider the parent who tells a child, "I am disappointed in you." This statement does not necessarily invoke any deleterious potential consequences to the child. Should the child care about her parent's opinion of her, then perhaps there is a negative consequence to the child involved. However, the child can just as readily decide that she does not care what her parent thinks (as I imagine many a teenager does) and eschew any negative consequences to herself. Should the child be moved by her parent's judgment, it is likely because of the harm that has come to their relationship: An expectation or trust has been violated, and now the affective state of the parent has changed toward her child. If the trespass is large enough, it will change the way the two parties interact, as well as the way the parent views the child. By acknowledging and changing her bad behavior, the child is moving towards reconciliation or improved standing with her parent.

Consider yet another case that is perhaps even more similar to the language used in the prophets. Suppose a parent prohibits a particular item or activity for a child and does so because it is in the child's best interest. However, the child ignores her parent, and instead listens to a friend who recommends that which was prohibited. The child ultimately comes to harm. A parent might have two concerns. First, the parent might be concerned that if the child

continues in this behavior, she will come be harmed again in the future. The second and arguably the more important concern is that the child did not trust her parent over her friend.

The latter concern might be more troubling because it stands to undermine other things the parent might do in the interest of the child. Further, it may cause the parent to wonder about the state of the relationship between the parent and child given where the child directed her trust and attention. Rather than merely be concerned about obedience, the wise parent would also worry that the child does not adequately know the parent and the extent of the parent's devotion and wisdom. Similarly, when God's people repeatedly ignore his commands for them, he begins to question whether the people know him at all. This lack of knowledge of God's character is frequently brought up in relation to the immoral acts of humans. There are many calls to know God in the prophets, and proclamations of judgments often seem to boil down to God's frustrations that his people do not know him (Jer. 2.5,8, 31; 4.22; 9.24).

Even the descriptions of wrongdoing are frequently parsed in relational terms, as in 6.16-19 where God proclaims the people "have not listened to Me, I said and they ignored" (liberal paraphrase). Moreover, he gives reasons for his acts of judgment and appeals to examples to illustrate his previous actions based on such motivations (e.g. Jer 3,4, and 7.12). In Jer. 14.10, God explains why he is not answering prayers. Jeremiah goes so far as to invite his audience to imagine what it would be like to be God when he records God as asking his

people to contemplate his reasoning about coming judgments in 9.7, 9, "What else can I do but refine and test them? Should I not punish them?"

Additionally, emotional terms are predicated of God throughout the prophets. His fierce anger is described in Jer 4.8, 5.1, 12.13, and 15.14. The people are accused of provoking God to anger in 7.18-19 and 8.19. The people are called God's beloved in 11.15, and "the one I love" in 12.7-13. In the latter passage, God states that the people who were once the object of his love are now the object of his hatred. The anthropomorphisms of Jeremiah are laden with emotionally charged language, such as in 14.17, where God cries out, "My eyes overflow with tears, my virgin daughter, my people" and 15.1, where God announces that "my heart will not go out" to the people and that he has withdrawn love and pity from them.[149] Ezekiel also uses emotional terms like jealous wrath, burning zeal, and concern (e.g., Ez. 36).

Even when passages do not explicitly use terms signifying emotion, they still use emotionally-laden imagery: Jeremiah 2.32 uses a vivid bridal metaphor, and 3.1ff compares the people to a prostitute with many lovers. The language used by the prophets invokes a sense of intimacy and relationships that are characterized by intense passion and emotion, such as a divorced man and his remarried wife in Jer. 3.3,4; sexual imagery in 3.6,19ff; and a grieving father in 3.4, 19. The repeated appearance of metaphors that evoke a visceral emotional response in the reader suggests that strong emotion is an intentional theme of

[149] In some passages it is admittedly not clear if it is God or Jeremiah speaking. See Jer. 4. 18-21 and 9.10.

God's relationships to his people and that the passionate nature of the human-God connection is what the metaphors are meant to recommend to the audience.

It is this particular facet of the prophetic writings that I argue should at least be an important lens through which we read the prophetic genre, if not *the* lens. Note that many other types of passages can be subsumed under the idea of a God's-eye-view: Hazony's moral-instruction passages indicate what leads to a worthwhile life in the eyes of God, if not always in the eyes of man, and the sort of man and actions that amount to the truly good life. Descriptions of the ethically normative dimensions of human events are made salient by God's interjections about how he responds to the decisions of man, articulated through the voice of a prophet. Such passages serve something like a helpful epilogue when the narrator helpfully summarizes the principal lessons in a morality tale or fable. Even when earthly consequences do not seem properly related to the moral qualities of human actions, as in the examples mentioned in my second objection, we can read these passages as expressing what God thinks *ought* to follow such actions or why such suffering is being admitted on the part of his chosen representative. In other cases, God oftentimes mentions purpose for which he is withholding judgment from the wicked, even if just for a season.

If my assessment is correct, the entirety of the prophets serves as a portion of Scripture in which the prophets relate the words that God, as Jeremiah said, "put in [my] mouth" and felt like a "burning fire" that "I cannot (contain)" (Jer. 1.9, 20.9). Jeremiah's feelings of unworthiness, much like

Moses's trepidation to relate God's words to the Hebrews and pharoah, as well as the experience of purification related by Isaiah, reflect the significance of their respective callings as vehicles for a unique expression of God's perspective (Is. 6, Jer. 1). A possible exception is the book of Habakkuk, in which the prophet argues with God about apparent injustices. The book also serves as a vehicle for many of Habakkuk's thoughts. However, many of the prophetic writings reflect similar anxieties and protestations (e.g., Lamentations) of God's judgment, and significantly, Habakkuk also relates God's responses to his prayers, in which God provides his motivations and sizes p the inadequacies of Habakkuk's appraisal of human circumstances. Even this unique contribution to *Neviʾim*, then, manifests an emphasis on literature that describes a God's-eye-view.

Before continuing to why I think this aspect of prophetic literature is important to recognize for those engaged in the philosophy of Hebrew Scriptures, there is one more worry worth addressing here: Maybe I am making too much out of something that is only trivially true. One might protest that *all* of the Hebrew Scriptures purport to show a God's-eye-view, if only by recounting the experiences of those wrestling with God, like Jacob. One might think that pointing out the presence of this element in the prophetic writings is not instructive because it does not show us anything that is *uniquely* true about *Neviʾim* from which we can derive interpretive principles.

It may very well be the case that all, or at least most, of the Hebrew Scriptures are intended to tell us something about what God is like and his take

on human affairs, whether via pronouncements through Abraham or the philosophical derivations of Solomon as he reflects on the nature of life in relationship to the existence of God. My claim that Nevi'im provides a God's-eye-view is not trivial, though, because of the scope and function of the God's-eye-view provided. Prophetic literature is singular in its expression of intimacy with God's thoughts and (so will I argue) emotions. The prophetic writings consists of thoroughgoing recordings of God's words which are often declared by the prophets as their reasons for writing anything at all, and they are transcribed in a first-personal way that only appears in short passages of other genres. The scope of these descriptions have an important function; my next sections are devoted to establishing what this function is. For all of these reasons, I contend that the reader ought to consider this dimension of prophetic literature as importantly unique, and therefore worthy of consideration as to its aims and whether such aims might merit inclusion in our interpretative strategies.

Whether or not my reader agrees that this aspect of the prophetic literature deserves to be our primary framework for reading scriptures in the prophetic genre, I hope that I have convinced her that it at least consumes a considerable portion of the literature and is therefore deserving of the attention of philosophers and theologians reading the Hebrew texts. If she is yet unconvinced, perhaps a discussion of what such passages are intended to reveal might serve as further persuasion.

V. God's Perspective and the Language of Divine Emotion

I mentioned before that this last set of passages expressing a "God's-eye-view" (that is, those in which God expresses his perspective on human states of affairs) turn out to be the most interesting for the philosophy of Hebrew Scriptures. When engaging in the philosophy of Hebrew Scripture and approaching these books as works of reason, I think an important question to ask is *why* writers choose to employ the particular genres they did. After all, the narratives of the Hebrew Scriptures can be read as parables; the prophets could have recorded morality tales that would have just as easily relayed moral principles and engaged in the search for truth Hazony finds so salient in the prophets. This is not to say that I think Hazony is wrong about the way prophetic works are suited to show how God's word cuts through the "arbitrariness" of the human mind. But if this is the central purpose of the prophets, it is puzzling why the prophets frequently purport to record *God*'s voice and inner experience. For example, Jeremiah gives many of his orations from his own perspective (e.g., Jer. 10.17-25, 14.17-22). One could arguably omit entire sections which occur in the voice of God and lose nothing on Hazony's view.

So far as I can tell, the inclusion of the passages upon which my third objection is built accomplish something that none of the other passages in the Hebrew Scriptures are equipped to do. The contribution of these sections provide yet further important moral information that many of the prophets seem to think we need when meditating on the laws of God and the way of man. God's motivations and dispositions are not deemed irrelevant by the prophets,

but rather recorded alongside other orations. They certainly must have possessed incentive to *not* use such language! I imagine these passages--that for simplicity I will henceforth call "Godview passages," despite all of the term's theological infelicities--would be the most daunting to write, as failing to truthfully articulate the perspective of God would be a damning task indeed. And yet here we find them running parallel with more comfortable passages about our human error and immorality. Surprisingly, we find orations from God himself that are in some ways remarkably similar to our own inner experiences of emotion and cognition.

As the above passages illustrate, many of the descriptions of God in the prophets are metaphorical. These are easily recognized by the use of anthropomorphisms (e.g., Jer. 9.12 where God is described as having פֶּה, a mouth). I am not aware of any contemporary philosophers or theologians who read these passages as anything other than metaphorical (although I am sure they are out there). Even Aquinas and Hazony are in agreement on the need to interpret anthropomorphisms as metaphors--a sign of facticity if there ever was one. When we read passages about God's frown or staff or hand, it is doubtful that we should understand the text as making a metaphysical assertion about God's constitution and whether he exists as an extended being, and whether God really does have a celestial staff as Zeus was thought by the Greeks to possess a shield. There is significant disagreement about the exact linguistic function of metaphors, but at the very least they serve to elicit a particular response in which the audience is invited to think of the subject as in some way

similar to otherwise dissimilar object. In the case of Jer. 3.12, the mention of a physical organ like a mouth is intended to bring to mind speech familiar to humans and make a comparison to what God might have done for the people of Judah. The point of the sentence is not the metaphysical constitution of God, but rather whether man understands God. The idea of a human mouth is invoked simply to this end.

It is in this spirit that many passages attributing emotion to God have been interpreted. To gloss over a complex history for the sake of brevity, the medieval philosophers, following a subset of Hellenistic thought from ancient Greece, considered "the passions" to be a physical phenomenon. The early modern philosophers followed suit, with thinkers like Kant making a sharp division between reason and the lower bodily faculty of emotions. In any case, emotions were tied to bodily states, such as the flushing of the face when one feels shame, or the burning sensible experience accompanying jealousy. Further, God's emotions appear to change, and this could not be an accurate literal description of God given the widespread conviction that God is immutable. Emotionally-loaded passages, like Jer. 7.18 in which God is described as כָּעַס, angry or Jer. 12.15 in which God is described with רָחַם, compassion, were thought to be metaphorical.

At the very least, then, we are given some descriptions of what God is like via metaphor, and it is language about God in a unique context: God's self-descriptions of his engagement with the moral facets of human experience. Metaphorical language is vague and unwieldy, but if we take the prophets at

their word, these metaphors are how God would have us think of him when we wonder how he looks upon us in our most backslidden or oppressed states. At most, though, these metaphors function as epistemic placeholders for what God is really like.

Even if one does not find such anthropomorphism instructive, I have yet to argue my most controversial point: It is wrong to treat all of these statements as though they are metaphorical. Some are *not* metaphorical, but literal and possibly even univocal, and these passages provide important information about God's moral psychology. First, though, some philosophy of language is in order.

It is helpful to consider the linguistic reasons why emphasis has not been placed upon the Godview texts I find so important, despite the fact that they are plentiful in Nevi'im. As I mentioned, metaphorical language is not terribly informative. It would be difficult to forward an argument about what God is like on metaphor alone. It is unsurprising then that those who take prophetic language to be largely metaphorical do not recognize that arguments about God's moral psychology occur in the text. Take, for example, the account of the prophetic works we recently examined in the first part of this paper. Most of Hazony's positions on language about God rest on a central assumption about divine predication:

> Theologians have long been of the opinion that human categories cannot describe God directly, so that all of our terms for describing God are necessarily metaphors— terms drawn from other domains and used with reference to God by way of analogy. This is not merely an opinion of later theologians. We can easily see that the prophets and scholars who composed the Hebrew Bible were aware that all terms for God are metaphors from the fact that they freely use multiple and shifting

> metaphors for one and the same aspect of God's actions in the world. Indeed, we can say that the Bible relies upon "mixed metaphor" as perhaps the principal means by which human beings can approach a knowledge of God![150]

Hazony's description of theological perspectives on metaphor is mistaken. There is by no means consensus among scholars of Scripture about the nature of divine predications. While this is not the venue to settle the matter about what forms of predication are available to finite humans who intend to truthfully describe God, I want to at least make the case that we can by no means assume all of this language is metaphorical by way of a more detailed overview of the philosophy of language concerning theistic predication.

First, metaphorical predications have a long history of being *rejected* by philosophers and theologians for many descriptions of God in the Scriptures. The medieval writers divided language about God into two categories: metaphorical and literal.[151] Metaphorical predications were the most remote forms of predication. As is likely clear from the discussion in the prior section, metaphors included the anthropomorphism of God ("God's hand," "God sits on his throne") as well as comparisons of God to other parts of his creation ("God is a lion," "God is our rock"). Since the objects to which God is compared in these statements were thought to be things with essential qualities that are incompatible with God's nature (such as being extended, temporal, imperfect,

[150] "The Question of God's Perfection," 2015.

[151] Freddoso (n.d., n.p.)..

and finite), philosophers thought these predications tell us the least about what God actually is like.

Despite the mention of essences that Hazony would likely reject, the motivations for the metaphorical views of the medievals seem similar to Hazony's: They thought that God's transcendence was so great that anything a human could be acquainted with (and thus attribute to God) would be so imperfect and distant from his actual nature that the proposition would be no more than a metaphor. However, unlike Hazony's assessment of contemporary theologians, the medievals did not universally embrace metaphorical language. For example, Maimonides recognized the use of metaphor in Scripture, but he still rejected metaphor and analogy as means of speech about God.[152] The most significant objection to metaphorical forms of predication is that it does little to provide us with any real understanding of God's nature and may even amount to agnosticism. Once metaphorical language is determined to be the only method for talking about God, it becomes difficult to see how we could know anything about what is salient in our metaphors in helping us to understand God. Many, like Maimonides, came to embrace negative theology because of this very problem.[153]

One alternative for the medievals was literal predication, which for them included univocal, equivocal and analogical forms of predication. Because of a widespread misunderstanding of literal predication that I will turn to in a

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[152] See Benor (1995) and Lahey (1993) in the bibliography.

[153] Broadie 1987, p. 159. See also Buijs (1998) in the bibliography.

moment, it is worth discussing the history of literal predication in more detail. If we take the view of the medieval philosophers, univocal predication is the strongest form of predication. When we predicate univocally of God, claims such as "God has knowledge like man has knowledge" mean that God has knowledge of the same species or kind that the term "knowledge" signifies in our ordinary discourse about man's knowledge.[154] Duns Scotus and William of Ockham both endorsed univocal predications of God.[155]

Equivocal predication designates homonyms, such as "a bow" worn by the neighborhood hipster and "a bow" such as the one Katniss Everdeen used to kill President Coin. This sort of predication uses a single term to signify two distinct things. Finally, analogical predication—historically one of the most popular positions on divine predication—is employed when what is predicated is not identical in two propositions but importantly related in some way. If we predicate analogically of God, then when we say "God has knowledge like man has knowledge," we are not signifying the same form of knowledge that humans have (as in univocal predication); instead we are claiming that God's knowledge is somehow significantly related to man's knowledge, but the two terms "knowledge" are not identical.[156]

Analogy was thought to be a stronger form of predication than metaphor because the nature of the relation standing between the two subjects could be

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[154] See Freddoso (n.d., n.p.) in the bibliography.

[155] See Langston (1979) in the bibliography.

[156] For more, see Freddoso (n.d., n.p.) in the bibliography.

specified. Scholastic philosophers recognized multiple forms of analogy. An analogy based upon proportions was referred to as a proportional analogy or "proper" analogy.[157] This was contrasted with attributive analogies. Attributive analogies distinguished terms on the basis of priority. Aristotle gives an example of attributive analogies when he describes the relationship between various terms related to health (Metaphysics 3.2). "Healthy diet", "healthy complexion" and "healthy person" are all distinct terms, and yet the sense in which diets or complexions are healthy is dependent upon the idea of a healthy person. In this sense "healthy person" is prior to the terms "healthy diet" and "healthy complexion."[158] Finally, medieval philosophers identified an analogy of imitation or participation. This form of analogy indicated that the terms were related by a kind of likeness unique to that between God and his creatures. The attributes of humans are analogically related to God's insofar as they reflect God or participate in his qualities. Aquinas argued in favor of using attributive analogy to predicate things of God.[159] Cajetan further elaborated on Aquinas's

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[157] Ashworth 2011 (n.p.).

[158] Ashworth provides a helpful summary of Aristotle, who was largely responsible for introducing the distinctions between forms of literal predication: "The Categories opens with a brief characterization of terms used equivocally, such as 'animal' used of real human beings and pictured human beings, and terms used univocally, such as 'animal' used of human beings and oxen. In the first case, the spoken term is the same but there are two distinct significates or intellectual conceptions; in the second case, both the spoken term and the significate are the same. We should note that equivocal terms include homonyms (two words with the same form but different senses, e.g., 'pen'), polysemous words (one word with two or more senses), and, for medieval thinkers, proper names shared by different people."

[159] Ashworth (1999, n.p.) helpfully explains Aquinas's reasons for embracing attributive analogy: "Against this background, Aquinas asks how we are to interpret the divine names. He argues that they cannot be purely equivocal, for we could not then make intelligible claims about God. Nor can they be purely univocal, for God's manner of existence and his relationship to his properties are sufficiently different from ours that the words must be used in somewhat different senses. Hence, the words we use of God must be analogical, used in different but related senses. To be more precise, it seems that such words as 'good' and 'wise' must involve a

version of analogy by expounding on the extrinsic/intrinsic distinction of analogical predications.[160]

VI. Predicating Emotions of God in Contemporary Philosophy

This discussion of medieval views of predication is instructive not just as evidence that the relationship between metaphor and literal language is grossly oversimplified in modern discourse. As William Alston points out in *Divine Nature and Human Language*, the term "literal" is often conflated with "univocal" and "empirical" language. Analogical language can arguably be

relationship to one prior reality, and they must be predicated in a prior and a posterior sense, for these are the marks of analogical terms.... he came to place much greater emphasis on agent causation, the active transmission of properties from God to creatures, than on exemplar causality, the creature's passive reflection or imitation of God's properties. In this context, Aquinas makes considerable use of his ontological distinction between univocal causes, whose effects are fully like them, and non-univocal causes, whose effects are not fully like them. God is an analogical cause, and this is the reality that underlies our use of analogical language.: For more on this, see Ashworth in the bibliography.

[160] Cajetan thought that the forms of analogical predication can either indicate that the subject of the predication has the attribute intrinsically as a real feature of the subject, or that the subject of the predication only can only be said to have the attribute extrinsically, meaning that the subject can only be said to possess the attribute "by reference" to some other being. Attributive analogy, according to Cajetan, predicates features of God like goodness or knowledge intrinsically, and creatures possess these attributes extrinsically, due to their ontological dependence upon God for these features. This is because God has the position of ontological priority in attributive analogy, while creatures are ontologically posterior. In contrast proportional analogy predicates some attribute intrinsically to both subjects of the predication—both can rightly be said to possess the attribute in and of themselves, and not just to possess an important relationship to a prior being. What distinguishes the two subjects is the difference in degree, amount, etc., as two mathematical figures may have proportional relationship to each other. Cajetan contended that (with the exception of the term being, which was properly an attributive analogical predication) most theological predications of God should be thought of as proportionally predicating of God. As has been pointed out by Ralph McIrney (2011), Cajetan criticizes Aquinas on the grounds that his analogy of proper proportionality requires univocity. While the extrinsic/intrinsic denominations of attributive analogy permit one to claim that what we predicate of both God and his creatures are of a different kind or species, proper proportionality when applied to God requires that we attribute things intrinsically. If we predicate things of God and man intrinsically we must mean that there is not merely a relationship between God and goodness, and man and goodness, that is preserved by the analogy. Goodness must be found in God and in man—goodness merely differs in degree. McIrney thinks Cajetan is wrong in his criticisms of Aquinas and that one can make proportional analogies while still maintaining that one subject's predicate is of the extrinsic denomination, while the other is of the intrinsic denomination. For more, see Ashworth (1999), Osborne (n.d.), and McIrney (2011) in the bibliography.

literal, and the idea that literal language *must* be empirical, that is, derived from creaturely experience in the natural world, only follows if we are also committed to empiricist theories of meaning (according to which all human experience and cognition features the physically sensible world alone).[161] Theists do not have to embrace such theories, and indeed many do not: One might embrace sensus divinitatis (the idea that humans have a specific faculty for perceiving the divine), or like Alston dispute that human experience is confined to the natural. One can also contest the theories of language that rule out literal predications and, like Richard Swinburne and Kevin Hector, maintain that it is public use (and not features of mental representation and experience) that determine whether language is literal.

For my purposes, I am not sure that it matters which form of literal predication one embraces, but I am inclined to think my reading of the prophets is more suited to one of the stronger analogical positions (e.g, attributive analogy) or univocal predication. I myself have argued in favor of univocal predications following William Alston elsewhere, so it is from this perspective I am going to proceed.[162]

Theologians and philosophers often take terms signifying emotions and affective states as metaphorical, while not doing likewise for terms like wisdom and goodness, because of what is thought to be entailed by particular terms. Often proponents of analogy and univocal predication think that wisdom can be

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[161] Alston 1989, p. 25.

[162] See the final chapter of this dissertation.

so predicated of God because they think there is not anything in the ontology of wisdom that entails properties or states antithetical to the nature of God.[163] While wisdom, so far as we understand it, is realized in humans in a way that requires its subject to possess particular traits, there is nothing about wisdom per se that entails that it cannot be realized in an immaterial, immutable being (or so the argument goes).

Wisdom, goodness and perfection, when predicated of God, entail different things than when they are predicated of humans. If one is a proponent of analogical predication, she might argue that God's wisdom is metaphysically prior to human wisdom, and while God is so transcendent that we cannot fathom what his wisdom is like, we can at least say that our wisdom is dependent on God's wisdom for its existence. Conversely, if one is a fan of univocal predication, she might instead argue that wisdom is being used in the same sense regardless of whether it is predicated of God or man and that differences in logical entailments do not amount to a difference in sense because the entailment is a product of the meaning of the word *God* rather than the predications themselves. In *Revelation*, Richard Swinburne makes a similar argument in favor of univocal predication for some predications of divine attributes: "God is wise" entails that God is *essentially* wise (whereas "Socrates is wise" does not) because we are antecedently committed to certain facts about God: "'*x* is God' by itself entails '*x* is essentially wise', or...it entails 'if *x* is wise,

[163] See, for example, Swinburne 2007, p. 227ff.

then he is essentially wise.'"[164] Put succinctly, suppose that we are committed to all of God's properties being essential properties. Or suppose we take the word *God* to necessitate certain perfections. Swinburne thinks these commitments do not affect the sense of the word *wise* itself.[165] They only affect the sense of the word *God*. It turns out that when we say *God is wise*, he is essentially wise, etc. This is a function of either the sense of the word *God*, or it is a result of what is entailed by two independent premises, neither of which relies on the sense of *wise* having any unusual properties.[166]

Those who deny univocal predication is suitable for statements about God often do so in virtue of God's transcendence. The idea is that the vast

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[164] Ibid, p. 227.

[165] This is because Swinburne argues that words coined in the context of mere human experience can be employed in "new circumstances" while retaining their normal sense (p. 225). Swinburne mentions two examples of such circumstances: a) when the word "diameter" is used for both the 1 metre diameter of a ball and the 300,000 lighter-year diameter of a galaxy, and b) when the word "cause" is used in saying that an explosion causes the collapse of a galaxy and a chatty individual causes those around him to be annoyed. Similarly, just because we use the word "wise" of a dramatically different subject (God) than we would in our mundane uses of the word, does not imply that the word "wise" has undergone any change any more than "cause" or "diameter" has undergone change. The fact that their predicate schemes are preserved shows that the senses are the same.

[166] Here it is helpful to see how Swinburne's view comes apart from more traditional views like Aquinas's. Aquinas denied that doctrinal terms should be understood univocally because of this metaphysical commitments concerning properties. According to Aquinas, if we predicate univocally of God, claims such as "God has knowledge like man has knowledge" mean that God has knowledge of the same species or kind that the term "knowledge" signifies in our ordinary discourse about man's knowledge (Freddoso). (Once again, we find Hazony and Aquinas in agreement, if albeit for very different reasons!) This understanding of univocal predication commits theists to attributing undesirable properties to God, and for this reason Aquinas rejected the notion that we can make univocal predications of God. On Swinburne's view, the theist is obligated to no such metaphysical positions when she makes univocal predications: "Words which denote properties in beings of different genera may be univocal (in my sense of 'univocal'), and how we derive our understanding of the sense of a word does not have such a direct relation to what that sense is. We may learn what a word means by learning the syntactic criteria for its application and observing objects to which it paradigmatically applies; and this may allow us to ascribe it in the same sense to objects which we cannot observe" (p. 228). However, it is not clear that Swinburne can use a word univocally while remaining so agnostic about the metaphysical implications of the word.

difference between God and His creation is sufficient to undermine our ability to know sufficient truth-conditions for univocal predication and the content of words applied to God. Swinburne argues, contra advocates of analogical predication, that the human inability to "know what it is like to be God, how God knows things, or from which (if any) deeper properties of God his wisdom derives" does not put any constraints on our ability to predicate univocally of God.[167] He denies that such lack of knowledge affects our ability to know the relevant truth-conditions for predicates like *wise*. Further, we commonly make predications of creatures whose experiences are very remote from us: We do not know what it is like to be a bat, but we still say *bats perceive*, intending the sense of *perceive* to be univocal with *humans perceive*.[168]

Whether or not one agrees with Swinburne's account of univocal predication, his arguments concerning terms like *wisdom* have similar consequences for terms signifying emotional states.[169] As I mentioned in the prior section, emotions, according to a long history of theologians and philosophers, are necessarily physical, and thus disqualified from any literal forms of predication. However, things are not nearly this clear cut. For one, even our application of everyday predicates to material, empirical objects is incredibly complicated. To use Swinburne's above example, it is not obvious to

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[167] Ibid p. 229.

[168] Ibid.

[169] Swinburne is not himself an advocate for univocal predications of emotion to God. He explicitly argues against univocal predications of emotions for reasons similar to those I will address in this section; as a result, I think his argument fails.

me that we *do* use *perceive* univocally when we say that bats perceive. Consider a more dramatic example: *the caterpillar perceives the leaf*, or *the lobster perceives the boiling water*. In these cases, words that seem obviously univocal given our contact with these animals, upon closer examination appear to be used in an analogical sense. This is because caterpillars and lobsters have radically dissimilar nervous systems from humans. Much of what we think are the relevant states of affairs for determining the truth-values for uses of *perceive* involves certain assumptions about what is required for mental states. In the absence of specific metaphysical commitments to things like caterpillar souls, the fact that caterpillars and lobsters possess different nervous systems (and in the case of lobsters, lack brains altogether) casts considerable doubt on whether such animals *perceive* in the same sense that humans do.

Returning to the example of bats, the sense in which we use *perceive* for life forms that share similar but not identical anatomy is at the very least ambiguous. There is very likely significant disagreement and linguistic ambiguity on exactly what *perceive*, so applied, entails for bats. Those more optimistic about animal intelligence or animal souls might be willing to affirm the exact same predicate entailments for both bats and humans; however, it seems just as possible that a large (if not majority) segment of the linguistic community might think there is only some overlap in our uses and understanding of human and bat perception. They would argue that *perceive*

has two senses or that we are using *perceive* analogically.[170] Additionally, the scope of dissimilarity between humans and bats may turn out to be trivial compared to the dissimilarity between humans and a transcendent God.

Even if we can use "perceive" univocally of bats, using mundane words to predicate of God seems an entirely different matter. Humans and bats share important features: Bats are spatially and temporally situated; aspects of their anatomy are similar to ours; and they manifest certain behaviors that resemble our own. It is possible to predict certain implications of a bat perception given these shared features. However, it is difficult to see how we can anticipate the implications of God's wisdom given our own experience of wise humans. We observe wisdom obtaining in a human agent in spatiotemporal contexts: Wisdom produces certain results over time, implies certain things about their cognitive abilities, etc. We know none of these things for God.[171]

Nevertheless, many of us do not want to abandon literal forms of predication in favor of metaphorical predication for reasons already mentioned. Rather, it seems that at least one of our reasons for discounting terms signifying

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[170] Disagreements about bat perception highlight two important problems for Swinburne's account. What facts are relevant to establishing the sense of a word? Swinburne's use of predicate scheme is promising, but the synonyms, antonyms, determinates, and determinables of a given word are not clearly delineated. When we say that a bat perceives, does our sense of "perceive" include the idea "realized in *x* brain state"? Does "perceive" entail that perceiving comes with a certain set of phenomenal qualities? Swinburne would certainly say no. However, if the sense of a word merely depends on publically agreed upon criteria, it could turn out that the sense of "perceive" carries with it these metaphysical implications.

[171] Swinburne may just deny that any of these things are relevant to the meaning of "wise" and insist that the dissimilarity I just described only affects the sense of the word "God" and not the word "wise". But when making distinctions between analogical and univocal predications, Swinburne helps himself to metaphysical implications that it seems he should ignore if he is to remain consistent with the view he expresses here.

emotion--our familiarity with emotions being realized in a very specific way in humans--is not a good reason to draw a distinction between it and other terms thought to be literal, like wisdom and goodness. Whether *perceives* and *wisdom* are analogical or univocal predicates, they share the propensity to be recognized in subjects that might realize these predicates in significantly different ways.

Returning to the claim that terms like *angry* are metaphorical because they are marked, in part, by their physical manifestations in humans,[172] this could be merely a function of how emotion realizes itself in humans and not a feature intrinsic to emotion itself. Given that we deny that the physical implications of a bat perceiving has bearing on the sense of the word *perceives*, we can also deny that the physical implications of a human's experience of anger has any bearing on the meaning of *anger* itself, and thereby apply it to God. More to the point, why can we not say that *anger* is like *wise*: It is not that the sense of *anger* changes when we predicate it of God, it is that the meaning of *God* and *human* entail different things about anger obtaining in God and humans respectively. Conversely, if bat perception is only perception in the analogical sense of the word due to how it is realized, God's anger should be understood as analogical as well (albeit of a different scope).

To successfully deny that the physical dimensions of emotion are essential, or to use a less metaphysically-loaded word, central, to the sense of

[172] Swinburne argues that the words *pity*, *love*, and *anger* all include desire and bodily sensation in their meanings: "No one is really angry or feels pity or love unless they feel these things in their stomach or breasts or bowels or behind the eyes, and have an urge, hard to control, to vent their anger or show their pity and love" (230).

emotion, one would need some kind of evidence that physical states are tied to emotions ontologically. This is not consistent with current thought on emotions, though; most recent work on emotion affirms the plausibility of my position. Contemporary research on emotion is not in agreement on the relationship between bodily states and emotions even so far as humans are concerned. While some philosophers and scientists do indeed consider bodily states to be an essential component of emotions, others dispute this claim, arguing that different emotions can produce identical physical reactions and that this is evidence that the bodily manifestations of emotion are not identical to the emotions themselves.[173] Linda Zagzebski famously disputed the long-observed distinction between cognitive and emotional states, arguing instead that emotions should be defined as a state that has inseparable cognitive *and* affective content, and further, made the case that emotions play a key role in moral judgment.[174] Psychological studies seem to indicate that humans identify identical physiological states with different emotional states depending on what beliefs or intentional objects correspond with the physiological state in question, suggesting that the emotional content is something over and above a physical state.[175] There is at least reason to doubt that the physicality of emotions is inseparable from emotions themselves rather than the way in which they are realized in humans.

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[173] See de Sousa (2003) in the bibliography.

[174] Zagzebski 2003.

[175] Barrett 2006.

Turning back to the question of divine emotions, if emotions are not necessarily physical as was assumed by the Ancients, Medievals, and Early Moderns, there is no compelling reason to rule them out as divine predicates. It is possible that God has emotions much like we think God has thoughts; his emotions simply do not entail those aspects of emotion that are perceptible in human expressions of emotion but incompatible with his nature. A similar argument is made by Zagzebski: Zagzebski contends that so long as emotions are an aspect of our personhood and not of our nature as humans, it is possible that God has (perfect) emotions.[176] She contends that emotions need not imply passivity or change; rather, Zagzebski contends that godly emotions can be understood much like we understand godly thoughts or beliefs. Many of the qualities of thoughts and beliefs that seem incompatible with divine attributes apply to emotions as well. Thoughts and beliefs strike us as time-bound and mutable just as feelings do, and yet we can imagine God has knowledge that is immutable and eternal. Affective states could likewise be immutable and eternal. She writes, "It can be shown that God has seemingly mutable emotions in the same way that he has seemingly mutable knowledge."[177] If Zagzebski is right, there is no reason to object to statements describing divine emotions, and our traditional reasons for reading such statements metaphorically should be reconsidered. In the absence of textual evidence suggesting prophetic authors intended to speak metaphorically, interpreters of Nevi'im can read Godview statements containing emotion as literal.

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[176] Zagzebski 2004, p. 204ff.

[177] Ibid pp. 208-9.

VII. Zagzebski and the Emotions of God

Zagzebski's work on emotion turns out to be extremely important for her ethical theory, and it is this theory that provides insight into why the prophets may have included so many Godview passages in their writings. Zagzebski's divine motivation theory and exemplarist virtue ethics describe a moral psychology in which emotions play a key role. We are indebted to exemplars for our moral education. These exemplars evoke our admiration when they embody the virtues, and it is through this emotional response that we begin to identify what is good about exemplars and understand the virtues.[178] This emotion of admiration is central to our ability to make moral judgments. Furthermore, like other virtue theories, Zagzebski expects the habituation that is part and parcel of virtue acquisition to shape the emotions of the virtuous. Since moral judgment involves beholding an intentional object through the valence of emotion, those who are truly virtuous will stand in the correct emotional relationship to that which is good and that which is bad. They will feel pity when someone deserves pity; they will feel anger when states of affairs call for anger. When we emulate exemplars and attempt to acquire the virtues they exemplify, we do more than copy those we admire; we try to assimilate both the actions and motivating emotions into our life.[179]

Given the role of such internal states for moral formation, accounts that give us insight into the inner life of moral exemplars are mentioned as an

[178] Zagzebski 2017.

[179] Ibid pp. 219-20.

important source of moral understanding.[180] Among these accounts are biographies, fictional narratives, and studies that rely on data from interviews and diaries. In the Christian predecessor to Zagzebski's exemplarism, *Divine Motivation Theory*, Zagzebski suggests looking to Jesus Christ as the ultimate moral exemplar.[181] The doctrine of the Incarnation provides an unusually fitting candidate for this kind of exemplarism because the moral perfection of the divine is manifested in human psychological states. Biographical content about the life of Christ contributes to our moral education because it permits us to imitate him. His emotions and actions serve as a model for how we should respond to objects of moral evaluation in our lives.

In one explanation of divine motivation theory, Zagzebski makes the interesting claim that God's motivational states are the ontological and explanatory basis for moral properties.[182] According to this view, our motives should resemble God's motives. This does not mean that the set of virtues for humans and God will be identical.[183] Some of our virtues are related to our creaturely nature and therefore inadmissible as virtues of God. Nevertheless, God serves as the basis for all that is good in us; Lev. 19.20 says something to this effect when it exhorts us to be holy as God himself is holy.

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[180] Ibid pp.104-111.

[181] Zagzebski 2004, ch.6.

[182] Zagzebski 1998, p. 539.

[183] Ibid p. 548.

To see how this theory might apply to the genre of prophetic writings, consider Nevi'im in light of Zagzebski's account of moral formation. Passages in which the prophets relay a Godview of human matters, particular those of moral significance, give the reader an idea of God's perfect emotions and motivations. Take, for example, a passage from Jeremiah:

> Thus says the Lord,
>
> "What wrong did your fathers find in me that they went far from
>
> me,
>
> and went after worthlessness, and became worthless?
> They did not say, 'Where is the Lord who brought us up from the
>
> land of
>
> Egypt,
>
> who led us in the wilderness, in a land of deserts and pits,
>
> in a land of drought and deep darkness, in a land that none passes through, where no man dwells?'
>
> And I brought you into a plentiful land to enjoy its fruits and its
>
> good things.
> But when you came in, you defiled my land and made my heritage
>
> an abomination.
> The priests did not say, 'Where is the Lord?' Those who handle the
>
> law did not know me;
>
> the shepherds transgressed against me; the prophets prophesied
>
> by Baal
>
> and went after things that do not profit.
> "Therefore I still contend with you, declares the Lord,
> and with your children's children I will contend.
> For cross to the coasts of Cyprus and see, or send to Kedar and
>
> examine with care; see if there has been such a thing.
> Has a nation changed its gods, even though they are no gods?
> But my people have changed their glory for that which does not

> profit.
> Be appalled, O heavens, at this; be shocked, be utterly desolate,
> declares the Lord,
>
> for my people have committed two evils:
> they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters,
>
> and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that
> can hold no water. (Jer. 2.5-13, ESV)

In this passage, note that God takes issue not only with the actions of his people, but the way in which his people seem to view him. The reasons for God's "charges" against his people are given in explicit terms. They neglected to ask, "Where is the Lord?" Even those who should have been experts when it came to knowledge of God did not know him. By posing the rhetorical question, "What fault did your fathers find in me?", God makes it clear that he has been faultless in his dealings with his people, and yet they have failed in their part of the relationship. God has been good, a "fountain of living waters" in the desert, and yet his people prefer corrupt nations and idols to him.

That God gives an account of the reasons for his judgment is incredibly important. Like the parent whose child heeds the guidance of a friend over parental instruction, knowing *why* God acts is morally informative. A parent who is merely concerned with the obedience of her child will not attempt to amend her relationship with a teenager who is beginning to trust friends over her parents. If she can coerce her child into correct behavior through punishment, her goal will be achieved. However, a parent who uses such an incident to not only modify the behavior of her child, but help her child relate properly to those she should trust (i.e., those who have her best interest at heart

and the wisdom to guide her) is interested in more than the the actions of her child; she is interested in whether her child has certain affective states. Further, the parent's interest in her child's inner life manifests aspects of her own affective states; namely, it shows what she values and finds to be morally significant. The prophetic writings make it abundantly clear that God is not merely interested in getting his people to "behave"; he is interested in being known by his people and relied upon by them. God contends such a relationship will be like a spring of living water to his people; he wants them to continue to draw from this relationship rather than turning to other relationships that will ultimately destroy them. When God acts in judgment, this passage tells us that at least one reason he does so is because of a damaged relationship.

Consider nearby verses in which God describes his people as a bride who is no longer devoted (Jer. 2.2), or as a donkey in heat (2.23-25), or as a disgraced thief (2.26). Such language gives us insight into how disobedience and idolatry are perceived by God. As an object of moral evaluation, God sees his people like we would see such a bride, donkey, or thief. These examples elicit a sense of betrayal and disappointment, revulsion at unbridled lust, and frustration and indignation. This is in addition to passages like Jer. 7.20 and 14.17, in which God expressly attributes emotions like anger and grief to himself.

In these passages God models perfect dispositions towards the subjects of his contemplation. The prophets show us the perfect being's side of his relationship with us, making it clear that he is not unaffected by our moral

states. They allow us to know God as more than just the law giver; we gain perspective on the intensely personal way God is connected to his people. This psychological language serves another closely related function. It models for us how we should respond to our own moral transgressions and the transgressions of others. When we or others cheat the poor, the proper response is intense anger (Jer. 2.34-35). When we fail to seek God, we should feel as though we have neglected or betrayed someone as close to us as a spouse (2.1-3). While some of these responses will be modified due to the unique relational demands God can make of us versus those we can ethically make of each other, many of God's self-descriptions can readily be understood as exemplifying the way a perfect agent evaluates human action on a cognitive and emotional level.

In many ways, this position is in harmony with recent works on biblical epistemology and narrative. Eleonore Stump emphasizes the usefulness of biblical narrative (and narrative in general) in addressing ethical questions (such as the existence of suffering) not easily answered by other realms of thought.[184] She argues that narratives dealing with personal relationships have the capacity to confer what she calls Franciscan (elsewhere dubbed "second-personal") knowledge. This knowledge of persons is not reducible to propositions, and it "enables a person to know the actions, intentions, and emotions of another person in a direct, intuitive way analogous in some respects to perception."[185] Read in this light, by second-personal knowledge we share in

[184] Stump 2010, p. 26.

[185] Ibid pp. 41-2, 47-8, 81.

the explanation God gives to Job, and we know something of what Abraham knew when God gave back his heart's desire, none of which can be stated in propositional form.[186]

One way of understanding my reading of *Neviʾim* is as augmenting the claims of both Zagzebski and Stump. In response to Zagzebski, I suggest that Christians should learn from what I loosely call the moral psychology of God as revealed by the prophets. This moral psychology has important differences from the one provided by the Incarnation: The example of Jesus provides all the virtues realized in human form, and it is therefore more easily observed and emulated. Jesus's life also provides important context for how the virtues are enacted through duties and habits. He "emptied himself, taking the form of a servant" as it says in Phil. 2, and he modeled obedience to his Father and the devotion of a faithful Jew.

In contrast, many of the emotions of God in the prophets would be inappropriate for human emulation, as it would often be prideful to treat a fellow sinner with wrathful anger because of our status of moral equals. The nature of our allegiance to God far outweighs any allegiance another might owe us, making God's expressed feelings of indignation and betrayal incommensurate with those we might be tempted to feel. This does not mean that we can learn nothing from orations about God's emotions and motivations. We see that God is willing to go to great lengths so that his people will know him, even allowing terrible suffering, demonstrating the importance of knowing

[186] Ibid pp. 222-27, 307-8.

who God is and treating him accordingly. We also see those human actions that move God to act in anger, and learn in many cases what should disgust and inflame our moral sensibilities, such as pagan worship, corrupt leaders, and the abandonment of children and widows. We learn more than *what* we should do; we learn *how* we should behold certain actions and qualities, and the motivating emotions that should ultimately compel us to act.

These passages have something important in common with the narratives mentioned by Stump. Their depiction of God's "moral psychology" is a source of instructive second-personal knowledge that gives us insight into who God is. The judgments and complaints issued by God in narratives are made more comprehensible by the emotive orations in the prophets. Even the figurative language, such as that depicting God as an abandoned husband or nursing mother, has an undeniably emotionally-charged tone that makes more sense if we think that emotions are an important part of moral judgment and second-personal knowledge is morally instructive: There is something genuinely relevant about the emotions of earthly mothers and husbands that is relevant to God's cognitive and affective disposition towards his people.

VIII. Biblical Epistemology, Opacity, and the New Testament

One consequence of my view is that not all readers will be able to grasp the entirety of important prophetic messages. This is because one's understanding of the moral psychology of God will vary with one's own moral development. Humans vary in their acquisition of virtues and their relevant motivating emotions. Some will need to practice and observe traits like compassion in others for some time before they have acquired it for themselves. They may be able to comprehend a propositional formulation of compassion, but until they have reflected on it in the lives of others, they will lack important understanding of what compassion is. They may gain yet greater knowledge when they become virtuous themselves.

This consequence is in harmony with a biblical understanding how humans acquire knowledge. According to Dru Johnson, the Hebrew Scriptures take participation and practice to play a central role in human understanding. He forwards a theory of biblical epistemology in which deference to authorities and enactment are key components of what it is to know.[187] Johnson makes an analogy between the acquisition of language and biblical knowledge acquisition: Ritualized practice, like that conducted when learning a language, opens the

[187] Johnson 2013, 2016. Admittedly, Johnson focuses on connection between knowledge and the enactment of rituals, but it is impossible to ignore the parallels with Zagzebski and Stump, especially since the rituals in the Hebrew Scriptures have wisdom and moral qualities like thankfulness as their aims.

gateway to the recognition of truth and eventually what he calls "discernment," a mastery or skillfulness in a domain of knowledge.[188]

Consider how moral education might be understood along this understanding of biblical epistemology. On Johnson's theory, practice of virtue would precedes one's ability to recognize and understand many aspects of virtue. It follows that those with undeveloped moral sensibilities--who have not "tried" to be loving, compassionate, etc.--will not understand some salient aspects of God's moral judgments. His statements will be opaque or unclear because such individuals lack the Franciscan knowledge and moral understanding necessary to fully comprehend the terms He is using. If I am right, it is not that God and the prophetic authors are intentionally making moral claims obscure; it is that they are intentionally making claims they know will be inscrutable to some, and only partially available to others.

In this way, the prophetic writings are "opaque" to some audiences. This explains why God might proclaim on the outset of a message that his words will not be understood or even heard by his people. If the point is merely to communicate instructions about the kind of life that leads to the good, it seems strange or even passive aggressive of God to dismiss his audience so immediately. However, if his point is to exemplify the perfect moral life of God in the way I have described it, these passages are not nearly as puzzling. When Jeremiah proclaims that the people cannot see or hear, it is unsurprising that he appears to draw a connection to stubborn and rebellious hearts (5.21-25). No

[188] Johnson 2016, p. 78-89.

one listens and ears are closed because they do not stand in the proper affective and cognitive state in relation to the word of the Lord; that is, they find it offensive and find no pleasure in it when instead they should love and relish it (6.10). Devotion to idols has so distorted the moral psychology of some that Isaiah compares them to the idols because they cannot see or understand (44.18ff). Such people are "ever hearing, but never understanding...ever seeing, but never perceiving" (Is. 6.9) because understanding increases with the acquisition of virtue and good (rather than vicious) habituated emotions.[189] That means that, by their own blindness, the morally corrupt cannot understand much of what God says, and the virtuous will understand more. This obscurity is built into the nature of ethics and the moral education of persons.

Interestingly, it is this passage--Isaiah 6.9--that Jesus quotes in Mark 4, and this passage has caused many to interpret Jesus's teaching as mystical or obscure. Hazony apparently shares this view, or at least takes it to be the consensus among interpreters of the New Testament.[190] If we take Jesus at his word, though, he intended to do something continuous with the Hebrew prophets. I see no reason why Jesus's many comments about his audience's inability to comprehend him should not be taken in the same vein as the saying of prophets like Isaiah. Like the prophets of the Hebrew Scriptures, Jesus

[189] This passage is interpreted by Hazony as "psychological thesis" about human's lack of understanding obscuring reality (87). His interpretation bears certain similarities to my own, but he fails to apply it to his reading of the New Testament.

[190] Hazony pp. 84-5.

employed language to make his moral teachings accessible. His moral instruction is filled with parables drawing upon the everyday life of his audience. He also built upon passages of the Hebrew Scriptures that would be familiar to the Jewish people. Why, if it is clear that Jesus meant to obscure his teachings, did Jesus make use of these rhetorical devices? Perhaps, like the prophets of Nevi'im, Jesus knew his words would both disclose moral truths to those prepared to hear them, while remaining challenging or even imperceptible to the hard of heart.

If my understanding of Nevi'im is correct, I have shown that the prophetic writings serve the unique purpose of providing a moral psychology of God. This means that the prophetic writings contain important moral content that should inform Jewish and Christian ethics. Further work would involve interpreting exactly what morally relevant psychological states are depicted in Nevi'im and which of these states might be applicable to a human audience. Of particular interest are those passages describing divine wrath that often frighten Christians, who sometimes find it difficult to reconcile wrathful descriptions of God with the example set by Jesus in the New Testament. I have some ideas about how this reconciliation might be accomplished, but that is a task for another project.

CHAPTER FOUR

Transitive Speech Acts and Melting Away Wax-Nose Anxieties

in Wolterstorff's *Divine Discourse*

I. Introduction

In *Divine Discourse*, Wolterstorff offers five patterns that interpreters can use to deal with problematic passages of Scripture.[191] Problematic passages are those that seem inconsistent with what interpreters know about God's nature or passages that appear to be in conflict with other portions of Scripture. When faced with the task of interpreting such a passage, the reader of Scripture may change the rhetorico-conceptual structure of a passage in order to understand the passage in a way that can be reconciled with other texts. A second strategy is to read the troubling passage figuratively rather than adopting the more difficult interpretation. Third, the reader may instead take God to be making a more general point in a passage and attribute unsettling aspects of a text (say, the instruction for women to remain silent or men to have short hair)[192] to the specific context of the human author. According to Wolterstorff, the interpreter may even ignore problematic parts of a text according to his fourth pattern; however, readers may only do this if difficult aspects are in service of a main point that is more readily made consistent with

[191] Wolterstorff 1995, pp. 203-16.

[192] See 1 Corinthians 11 and 14.

the rest of Scripture and/or the divine attributes. Finally, interpreters may construe the passage as what Wolterstorff calls "transitive discourse."[193]

In each of the above cases, the interpreter is taking certain liberties with the text. Due to the perceived problems with the most obvious understanding of a portion of Scripture, the interpreter may have reason to believe that God may expect the audience to understand his speech as saying something different from what the human author of the text intended to communicate. However, anytime the interpreter takes these steps away from the most likely intended meaning given to the text by the human author, he leaves himself open to what Wolterstorff has dubbed "wax-nose anxieties."[194] This phrase is taken from a comment made by John Locke:[195]

> So the Scripture serves...like a nose of wax, to be turned and bent, just as may fit the contrary orthodoxies of different societies. For it is these several systems, that to each party are the just standards of truth, and the meaning of the scripture is to be measured only by them.[196]

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[193] 1995, p. 213.

[194] Ibid p. 226.

[195] To say that something or someone is a nose of wax is to state that they are easily moved, pliant, or untrustworthy. The origin of the phrase is unknown; however, a similar use of the phrase can be found in the famous 1670 trial of William Penn, in which Penn protests a judge's refusal to recognize a not guilty verdict from a jury by commenting, "If 'not guilty' be no verdict, then you make of the jury and the Great Charta [Magna Carta] a mere nose of wax" (Anthony 1889, p. 372). Sir Walter Scott also employed the metaphor in in his novel set in the 1620s, *The Fortunes of Nigel*, writing, "I am neither an untrue man, to deny you the boon whilk I became bound for, nor an Ahab, to covet Naboth's vineyard; nor a mere nose-of-wax, to be twisted this way and that, by favourites and counsellors at their pleasure" (Scott 546).

[196] *Second Vindication of the Reasonableness of Christianity,* sect. C, 295. See also 296-97.

Locke here acknowledges a problem that was recently revived by Nicholas Wolterstorff, as well as Richard Swinburne and Eleonore Stump.[197] He is concerned with the way Scripture is interpreted—and possibly distorted—by a set of fundamentals or assumptions brought to biblical texts. Following John Locke, Wolterstorff describes wax-nose anxieties as the worry that we have in some way shaped the biblical text according to our preference, leaving it "turned and bent" according to our biases and cultural norms. Without something explicit in the text to anchor our interpretation, we may decide that God could not have said something simply because we do not *want* to attribute such speech to him—even if it is, in fact, what he means to communicate to human readers.

For Locke, the answer is to do away with any such assumptions. He thinks that any reader who goes "to the Holy Scriptures, that true fountain of light" will not be hoodwinked by their bad assumptions, for the teachings of Christ and the Apostles will provide all the reader needs to properly interpret the text. Wolterstorff, in contrast, argues that interpretation is simply not that easy: No one can succeed in interpreting Scripture without any assumptions (such as that God will not contradict himself or lie).[198] Wolterstorff maintains that the best the interpreter can do is *minimize* such anxieties by being thoughtful, cautious and epistemically humble in both the convictions with

[197] See Swinburne (2007) and Stump (1994) in the bibliography.

[198] 1995, pp. 226-9.

which one approaches Scripture and in the interpretative strategies one applies.[199]

Despite Wolterstorff's best efforts to limit the threat to the text created by assumptions, some contend that Wolterstorff's methodology actually worsens the interpreter's situation.[200] In a response to Wolterstorff's book, Dutch theologian Maarten Wisse argues that two of Wolterstorff's strategies, the changing of rhetorico-conceptual structure and the transitive discourse reading of texts, leave Wolterstorff especially open to wax-nose concerns.[201] In what follows, I will recount both Wolterstorff's view and Wisse's assessment. I will then show that there is no plausible way to save Wolterstorff from Wisse's criticisms and offer an alternative interpretative strategy for problematic passages that are often considered transitive discourse. I argue that one of Wolterstorff's existing strategies is sufficient for dealing with problematic passages once proper attention is given to genre, and it does so without invoking transitive discourse readings or changes in rhetorico-conceptual structure.

II. *Divine Discourse*: Reading the Work of Two Agents

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[199] Ibid pp. 236-39. This is actually not the entirety of what Wolterstorff advises. His final (and in my view most important) admonishment is to know God well via all the ways God makes himself available to us through devotion and reflection (p. 239). Wolterstorff observes that just as we are often better able to understand the words of a well-known friend than a stranger, so we stand to improve our interpretive position if we come to know God better through means other than biblical interpretation. However, evaluating biblical interpretations on the basis of piety does not lend itself to a philosophical paper, so I will be focusing on the ways of averting the wax-nose anxiety mentioned above.

[200] See also Levine (1998) in the bibliography.

[201] 2002.

In *Divine Discourse*, Nicholas Wolterstorff identifies the complex issues surrounding our understanding of divine speech. In particular, Wolterstorff focuses on the problems that arise given the fact that divine speech is often communicated to those who would listen via the means of either a deputized[202] speaker or appropriated human speech. There are almost always, Wolterstorff points out, two agents involved in divine discourse. In the case of deputized discourse, the two agents are the divine agent and the human agent whom God deputizes to speak on his behalf.[203] In appropriated discourse, the two agents are the human agent who authors the text and the divine agent who appropriates the text as his own. By *appropriate*, Wolterstorff means that one agent adopts another agent's speech as his own so that the discourse counts as his discourse. Wolterstorff notes that given the diversity of the various texts that make up Scripture, it is possible that ways in which biblical texts are appropriated by God may differ from text to text. For example, it does not seem plausible that the prophetic declarations of Isaiah were appropriated in the same way as, say, the erotic poetry of Song of Songs.[204]

Further complicating matters is the important distinction between locutionary and illocutionary acts, a feature of speech first observed by J. L. Austin. Put briefly, locutionary acts are the words spoken or inscribed in order

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[202] On deputation: "If one person is deputized to speak in the name of another, then the deputy's discourse counts as the other person's discourse" (1995, p. 186). The most obvious examples of deputized speech in Scripture are the writings of the prophets.

[203] Ibid pp. 5, 186.

[204] Ibid p. 186-7. Wolterstorff notes that even if Scripture consists of varying kinds of appropriated discourse, this theory of revelation would need to be supplemented by an account of inspiration.

to communicate an illocutionary act.[205] This includes the syntactical structure, phonetic aspects and semantic content[206] of the act. For example, consider the statements *Katy writes philosophy* and *Katy is writing theology*. We can recognize that these two phrases are two different locutionary acts because they have different syntactical structure, phonetic qualities and semantic content.

Consider, in contrast, the illocutionary acts that locutionary acts convey. Illocutionary acts are the things speech acts (as well as other symbols like codes and signs)[207] convey: asking, stating, commanding, declaring, promising, etc.[208] These modes are called the *force* of locutionary acts. The difference between locutionary and illocutionary acts is best conveyed by returning to the above example: One might state, *Katy writes philosophy*, but one might also warn, *Katy writes philosophy*. Notice that in both of these cases the locutionary act is the same. Both utterances (or inscriptions, etc.) contain the same content, structure, and phonetics. The *acts* committed when expressing in these locutions are different, though. In the first case, one merely describes a state of affairs (maybe providing information to a friend who does not know Katy well,

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[205] Ibid p. 13.

[206] What aspects of an agent's use of language actually count as the semantic content is notoriously contested in the philosophy of language. For the purpose of this paper, I will consider semantic content to roughly correspond to propositions. For example, *God save the queen* and *Dieu sauve la reine* share the same semantic content in their respective languages (English and French). Synonyms that share the same definition and not merely the same designates (such as *baby* and *infant*, but not *Hesperus* and *Phosphorus*) also share semantic content, although they fall short of being full propositions.

[207] Wolterstorff gives "producing a blaze, or smoke, or a sequence of light-flashes" as examples of acts that could relay illocutionary content while not requiring an agent to resort to a locutionary act (p. 13).

[208] Ibid p. 13.

or letting her parents know how she is spending her time in college); in the second, one is advising caution (perhaps giving notice to a friend that Katy will be troublesome by engaging in characteristically philosophical behaviors, like asking an endless stream of questions).[209]

The recognition of these distinctions raises questions for hermeneutics. Given that much of Scripture appears to be human discourse appropriated by God, we are left to wonder whether God intended to appropriate the intentions of the human agents, the sense of the agent's words, or just the locutionary act itself independent from any sense or intentions belonging to the human agents. Further, did God intend to appropriate the locutionary act as it is situated in historical context? In other words, is the message God intended to convey through a human agent something that includes the implications and relationships the utterance had for its original audience? Or should we expect the implications and relationships to change over time?

These questions only increase in complexity when we consider appropriated narratives. Do we think God endorses the historical details of these narratives or some more general message that we can extract? Does God mean for us to understand some of these narratives metaphorically instead of (or perhaps in addition to) univocally? If so, does God do this even in cases where the human agent took himself to be making univocal claims in his illocutionary act rather than metaphorical claims? These are just some of the

[209] Austin 1975, pp.94-100.

problems that can arise when trying to understand an appropriated message, divine or otherwise.[210]

In the aforementioned cases, we can have a variety of relevant speech acts that bear on the final understanding of texts or spoken words: The illocutionary act of God, the illocutionary act of the human agent and the locutionary act of the human agent (that God has appropriated to some end). Note that these aspects of a text or message must be settled in addition to establishing what Wolterstorff calls the noematic content. Noematic content is simply the semantic content[211] plus the use (e.g., literal, metaphorical) and mode (e.g., asserting, promising) of illocutionary stance for a speech—act. It is only after these are established—a task challenging in its own right—that one can begin to make sense of the way in which the speech act is appropriated and the illocutionary stance of the one who does the appropriating, and finally the way in which all of these elements might work together to convey the final meaning of a text.

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[210] From this point forward I will often refer to the appropriating agent as the "divine agent" in my analysis even when the statement may be applicable to situations in which both the appropriating agent and original discoursing agent are humans. Since this paper concerns Scripture I will almost always be applying statements about appropriated discourse to cases in which God is the one appropriating a human agent's (or angel's) discourse. Statements which *only* apply to a divine agent or a human agent will be explicitly noted.

[211] See fn. 15. Wolterstorff states that the noematic content is the meaning shared between, say, successful translations of a speech act among various languages, as well as the sense in which the speech act is intended (p. 138ff). This includes modes like metaphor and literal (traditionally considered an aspect of *use* in philosophy of language) and the modes of illocutionary acts given above. It is helpful to think of a speech act as consisting of the categories semantic content, use (in the limited sense specified above), and illocutionary stance, and the noematic content as what fills these categories.

Of course these questions are of central relevance to the understanding of divine discourse in Scripture which we generally take to consist almost entirely of some kind of appropriated speech act(s). However, Wolterstorff argues that contemporary hermeneutics "resists" this kind of philosophical investigation.[212] Indeed, hermeneutics often bypasses the concerns expressed here and moves directly into interpreting a text with implicit assumptions about what parts of the speech act are relevant already built into the interpretative process. Wolterstorff criticizes this approach, arguing that so far as God appears to have used human agents to relay a message via Scripture, would-be hermeneuts must contend with questions about which aspects of the text God intended to appropriate. Note that this is not simply an issue of deciding which speech acts can qualify as divine speech. There remains a further question concerning what aspects of those speech acts constitute God's message and which facts are relevant to our interpretation of his message.

To this end Wolterstorff advises two hermeneutics. The first is to establish the noematic content of the discourse.[213] This includes establishing which is the most likely intended meaning of a sentence capable of expressing multiple meanings; determining if the sentence is literal or a trope (that is, nonliteral, such as the metaphorical or ironic use of a sentence);[214] determining the context and genre in which the sentence appears; evaluating the likely

[212] Ibid p. 15.

[213] Ibid p. 189.

[214] For Wolterstorff, sentences are used as tropes if they are intended to function nonliterally. This includes metaphor, hyperbole, irony, metonymy, synecdoche, personification, etc. (192).

intention and the illocutionary stance of the speaking agent; and identifying the likely objects of any ambiguous designative language.[215] According to Wolterstorff, because of the way the noematic content is established, we cannot properly understand a passage of Scripture without some knowledge of historical facts related to the text, and "interpreters cannot function without beliefs about the discourser."[216]

The second hermeneutic is more relevant to the concerns I will pose here. It concerns the act of appropriation by the divine discourser. First, Wolterstorff takes for granted that at least some of the theological truths of the Bible are parasitic on the details of the text.[217] Close readings and meticulous study of the Scriptures increase our understanding of God's discourse as it is relayed through human agents. Importantly for our purposes, he also thinks that the minutiae of the text work as a kind of barrier to imposed readings. The more we can understand the subtleties of the text, the more difficult it will be to mold the text according to our biases because these details "resist imposed interpretations."[218]

Wolterstorff states at the outset that the default reading of appropriated discourse should be that the divine agent intended to appropriate the

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[215] Ibid p. 189-200.

[216] Ibid p. 196.

[217] Ibid p. 202.

[218] Ibid p. 202.

illocutionary stance and noematic content of the human discourse.[219] However, one of the great challenges of hermeneutics is that sometimes the human discourse in question does not appear to be compatible with what we would otherwise think would be the sort of thing God *would* say.[220] On occasions such as these, Wolterstorff advises the interpreter to look for the likeliest illocutionary stance and content we think God intended to take.

There are a couple of ways the interpreter can come up with the most probable understanding of God's appropriated discourse. Wolterstorff stresses the importance of considering the unity of the entire Bible as a way to come up with the sort of things God is likely to say.[221] He also claims that there are certain assumptions that we can legitimately bring to the text to frame our readings, although he only explicitly endorses one such assumption (that God will not contradict himself).[222]

Once the unity of Scripture and our legitimate assumptions are taken into account, we might still come across passages that lend themselves to undesirable readings. The illocutionary stance we perceive as adopted by the author may be one we are hesitant to attribute to God. On these occasions,

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[219] Ibid p. 204.

[220] Ibid.

[221] Ibid p. 205.

[222] Ibid p. 206-7. He lists some other possible candidates for assumptions that can ground our interpretations: that God will not say something inconsistent with the mandate to love God and neighbor, and that God will not speak a falsehood and that God will only speak on issues of faith and morality (206-7). However, he thinks whether or not these assumptions are licit is debatable.

Wolterstorff thinks we can employ certain strategies to see if there might be an alternate message conveyed by the text other than the one relayed by the human author's combined illocutionary and locutionary act. Uncovering the divine speech conveyed through a human agent's writing requires the use of certain "patterns" or procedures. Wolterstorff suggests five admissible patterns:[223]

1. The interpreter can change the rhetorico-conceptual structure of the text so that the proper designees in the text are preserved. (E.g., "God, whom I serve with my spirit" becomes "Paul serves God with his spirit" instead of "God, whom God serves with his spirit".)
2. The interpreter may jettison parts of the text that are mere instruments to a larger point if we have reasons to think it is unlikely that God intended to endorse certain phrases that are mere means to communicate a main point that it seems he would endorse. (E.g., God appropriates the main point of "He has established the world; it shall never be moved" but not the particular phrases; God therefore affirms his own sovereignty but not false cosmology or astronomy.)
3. When it seems the likeliest interpretation of a text, an interpreter may take God as speaking tropically even if the human author was speaking literally. (E.g., God intends to make a metaphorical statement about his opposition to those who harm Israel when he

[223] Ibid p. 208-216.

appropriates "Happy shall they be who take your little ones and dash them against the rock" even though the author of this psalm was likely speaking literally.)

4. The interpreter may deem it appropriate to understand a text to be transitive, defined as "one act of discourse on the part of a person counting as another act of discourse."[224] Not only may the human agent consider his words to be transitive (as when telling a parable or allegory), but God may appropriate a speech act that the human agent does not intend to be transitive and use it only in its transitive sense.[225] (E.g., though the human author likely intended Song of Songs to be an erotic love poem, God appropriates the book only in its allegorical sense and *not* the illocutionary act by the agent that is an expression of erotic love.) In cases of transitive discourse, locutions are used in ways that resemble allegory; however, transitive discourse is different from allegory. What makes the speech act transitive is the illocutionary act rather than the explicitly stated use or genre inherent in the locution. Some examples might be illuminative on this point. Take, for example, the Song of the Vineyard in Isaiah 5. It is locutionary act that establishes the song as allegory; the semantic content makes it

[224] Ibid p. 213.

[225] From this point on, I will focus on the latter kind of transitive discourse (in which the illocutionary acts of God and the original discourser diverge) rather than the former (in which the human discourser is already speaking transitively before God appropriates the speech act). I will simply refer to this latter kind as "double agency transitive discourse", even though the form kind of transitive discourse is also a form of double agency discourse.

clear that the vineyard represents the people of Israel when it states, "For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are his pleasant planting" (v. 5). Another example is quite different, though: Consider how the narratives of the Hebrew Scriptures might be transitive. While these books are not allegorical, the human author or God's illocutionary act may be such that the speech turns out to be transitive. Perhaps the prophet Samuel compiled I Samuel in order to teach the people of Israel certain lessons, or perhaps God's illocutionary stance is that he intended the history of Israel to function as a series of parables for the church. In both of these cases, there are two illocutionary acts: Samuel is *declaring* the history of Israel, but he is also *teaching* or *moralizing* because he intends this history to establish moral claims; in the latter example, Samuel is still *declaring* the history of Israel, but God is *allegorizing* or *fabling*. Notice that in these cases where there is more than one illocutionary act, the noematic content changes as well: The semantic content and the illocutionary stance are different when Samuel declares the history of Israel and when he is moralizing with it. Finally, sometimes both the locutionary act, illocutionary act of the human discourser, and the illocutionary act of the divine discourser make it such that a speech act is both allegory and transitive, or that both illocutionary acts are transitive. Wolterstorff offers John Bunyan's

Pilgrim's Progress and the book of Jonah as candidates for speech acts of this type.[226]

5. The interpreter may judge that the speech act of a human author is more context-specific than God's speech act in appropriating such a statement. (E.g., Paul may tell women to be silent in the particular context of the first-century Corinthian church, but God appropriates this text not to issue precisely the same injunction to all women in the church; rather, he appropriates Paul's instruction in order to issue a more general principle about order in the church or disrespectful behavior.)[227]

Wolterstorff cautions that we can depart from our original principle—that God intended to appropriate the illocutionary stance of the human discourser—only if we have "a good reason for departing": "Absent such good reason, we interpret the appropriator or deputizer as saying what the person whose discourse is appropriated or deputized said. Appropriation is not license for unbridled play of imagination on the part of interpreters."[228]

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[226] Ibid pp. 213-14.

[227] Interestingly, Wolterstorff (unlike Richard Swinburne, Eleonore Stump and Hans Frei) does not think his methodology for interpretation need include an appeal to church tradition. Rather, Wolterstorff expects that his interpreter will (tacitly or otherwise) incorporate the traditions of the church in his interpretation when he considers which assumptions he will bring to the text prior to deciding which of the five patterns he will use (pp. 221-2).

[228] Ibid p. 237.

III. Wisse's Critique

Wisse criticizes Wolterstorff's hermeneutics on two counts. Both concern the way in which Wolterstorff's strategies allow the reader to change and reshape the text in the process of interpretation. First, as noted in (1) above, sometimes we have to change the rhetorico-conceptual structure of passages when interpreting discourse that is appropriated.[229] But Wisse points out that some forms of literature in Scripture are not as straightforward as others when it comes to modifying the structure of a passage so that it makes sense that God appropriates it.[230] While it may seem right to say that Paul's claim to be God's witness could be changed so that we understand it as something more like "Paul is my witness", the designative content strikes us as largely the same: The state of affairs that *x is a witness of y* is, in both cases, true and meant to be understood as a claim underwritten by God. However, Wisse points out that this is a very simple form a speech, and there are other forms of speech that must also be restructured so that we can understand it as appropriated by God. However, these other forms (Wisse uses prescriptive and commissive acts as examples) are not so straightforwardly restructured. Attempts to restructure them seem to damage the propositional content (whether noematic, designative, or both) of the text or alter the illocutionary act.[231]

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[229] Ibid p. 209.

[230] Wisse 2002, p. pp. 166-7.

[231] Ibid.

Wisse also objects to Wolterstorff's use of transitive discourse. Recall that transitive discourse ((2) above) includes methods of communication like parables and allegories.[232] The idea is that in such forms of discourse, one illocutionary act "counts as" another. However, Wolterstorff does not elaborate on how exactly we should understand this "counting as" relation. Arguably, the meaning of the locution and the noematic content come apart: By telling a parable about the employees of the vineyard (the meaning of the discourse), you are also accusing the Pharisees of ungratefulness, for example (the use of the discourse, set by the noematic content, which is turn determined by your illocutionary stance).[233]

Discourse can be transitive due the illocutionary act and locutionary act of a single agent. In the case above, Jesus likely intended his parable to be transitive. Both the meaning and noematic content are derived from what a single agent brings to the discourse. However, double agency can give rise to unique cases of transitive discourse, according to Wolterstorff. Recall that the definition of transitive discourse is such that the original agent's illocutionary act that led to the locutionary act of recording a narrative or erotic poem may correspond to one set of noematic contents (those belonging to the human agent); however, God's appropriation of it may lend it a second set of noematic

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[232] Wolterstorff 1995, p. 212.

[233] Wolterstorff thinks that sentences, including metaphors, have do not have a "metaphorical meaning" when used as a metaphor. In other words, a tropic statement does not have a metaphorical meaning in addition to a literal meaning. Rather, a sentence always has whatever meaning (or meanings, in the case that the sentence contains homonyms, etc.) it has based on the standing of the sentence within the public domain. It is the noematic contents of the illocutionary act that changes depending on how an agent uses the statement (ibid pp. 192-3).

contents if his illocutionary stance is different, making the discourse transitive.[234]

Wisse argues that Wolterstorff's idea of transitive discourse is especially vulnerable to wax-nose anxieties. He writes that Wolterstorff's methodology is prone to interpretations that are "completely arbitrary and prone to ideological interest."[235] One problem, in Wisse's view, is that Wolterstorff's notion of transitive discourse is too broad. According to Wolterstorff's definition, much of our everyday speech is transitive in nature. Wisse writes, "We constantly perform illocutionary acts in the context of which we perform other kinds of illocutionary acts. For example: We describe a situation before we give instructions (briefings in a military context)."[236] In order to narrow the category sufficiently so that it is meaningful, Wisse argues that the term transitive discourse should be used for speech acts made by a single agent only when one factual claim is being used to make another factual claim. (Wisse uses the example of John Bunyan making a claim about a house in order to make another claim about a soul.) These instances of single agency discourse are notable because it is the illocutionary act that makes these claims tropic. On this view, parables and other fictional stories that are used to make a point would not be considered transitive, as they do not involve two factual claims, and it is not the illocutionary act that makes them tropic.

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[234] Ibid pp. 213-4.

[235] Wisse 2002, p. 160.

[236] Ibid p. 168.

Wisse also criticizes the transitive category because the transition between the two illocutionary layers of the discourse is unclear.[237] This, I believe, is what is primarily at issue when Wisse talks of transitive discourse giving rise to wax-nose anxieties. Wisse acknowledges that the illocutionary acts of two agents will sometimes come apart in cases of double agency discourse involving the appropriation of a speech act. However, Wisse shows that the exact relationship between the illocutionary act of the human author and that of the divine appropriator is unclear. Beginning with Wolterstorff's default position, we can assume that God appropriates both the locutionary and illocutionary act of the human agent. Of course, this is precisely what we are trying to avoid by invoking the category of double agency transitive discourse in the first place. It is intended to be an account that makes sense of passages that are otherwise bizarre if understood as God's speech.[238] Wisse demonstrates this problem with Song of Songs: If we interpret Song of Songs as an expression of Christ's love for the church, following the tradition of many in church history, it does not seem suitable to say that God also appropriated the author's expression of erotic desire for his bride. Similar problems arise when we consider transitive discourse interpretations of angry psalms or historically inaccurate passages.

Wisse considers an alternative account of transitive discourse that might save Wolterstorff here. Suppose instead that God appropriates the locutionary act alone when engaged in double agency transitive discourse. The view still

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[237] Ibid.

[238] Ibid p. 169.

goes awry, according to Wisse, and for three reasons: (1) The illocutionary stance of the original discourser is less significant and possibly even irrelevant to the sense of the passage in question since all that has been acquired is just sounds and structure; (2) the divine agent only superficially acquires the words of the human agent and the relationship between the two speech acts might be incredibly thin; and (3) it undermines Wolterstorff's second hermeneutic, meaning that we are free to assume God must mean something else when we come to an uncomfortable passage—even if the text stubbornly frustrates such interpretations.[239] Wisse notes:

> The fact that interpreting God's transitive appropriating discourse primarily involves attention for the new context in which the speech act is performed on the basis of the appropriated discourse, means that we have to account much more intensively for the role of the discourser 'outside' the appropriated text. Then, the question is: who is this discourser? Wolterstorff might answer, of course, that it is God. The difficulty with this answer is, however, that it bypasses the fact that the very reason why we want to assign a new meaning to the text as part of God's discourse is that we as religious believers want to give the text this meaning, although the text, as it stands, in fact resists it – which is the reason why we interpret it in a transitive way.[240]

Transitive readings, then, leave the reader open to find passages he does not like and reinterpret it through the lens of what he thinks God *would* say. But this is obviously troubling, for it seems our idea of what God would and would not say, when not informed by objective facts in the text of authoritative

[239] Ibid p. 171.

[240] Ibid.

revelation, can quickly be put in service of misguided or even malicious ideologies and preferences.

IV. Response to Wisse

The success of Wisse's criticism rests on whether or not there is a more intelligible way to understand the role of the human author's illocutionary stance in transitive discourse. Wolterstorff's description of the act as "counting as" another illocutionary act is not terribly informative. This could mean anything from the appropriator's use of the discourse completely trumping the original act so that the divine appropriator is in no way responsible for or approving of the human author's illocutionary act, to merely altering parts of the original illocutionary act.

However, Wolterstorff also holds that interpretations should be "anchored" by the human author's discourse.[241] Here he seems to have in view the entirety of the appropriated speech act—noematic and designative content, illocutionary stance and locutionary act. He also thinks that attention to the minutiae of the text restricts the available interpretations. Whatever "counting as" means in the context of transitive discourse will determine the ways in which our understanding of God's speech is restrained by the original text. If transitive discourse is to resist ideologies and impositions on the text, it needs to be in some way limited by some aspect of settled matters in the human author's discourse.

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[241] 1995, p. 187.

Perhaps the situation can be helped by incorporating Wisse's first criticism, that the category of transitive discourse, as it stands in Wolterstorff's work, is too broad. Wisse's suggests that we restrict the category to literal passages that are used as tropes. In tropic discourse the meaning of a sentence is the same, but the illocutionary stance changes so that it produces noematic and often designative contents that are distinct from the meaning. In the context of double agency transitive discourse, the use of the locutionary act (that is, the sentence with a fixed meaning) changes so that the illocutionary act is a metaphorical one; this produces a second layer of content, but it does so by way of not just the meaning of the sentence but by the noematic content of the original discourse.[242]

At first glance, this may not be so troubling. I might say that someone owes me a "pound of flesh." On Wolterstorff's theory, the sentence meaning is not different from the literal meaning despite my using it as a metaphor. Rather, it is the illocutionary stance that has changed—I am using the phrase metaphorically. My illocutionary act is still more complicated than this, though. I may use a sentence metaphorically while also asserting, inquiring or commanding, etc.[243] Perhaps in double agency cases of transitive discourse, the divine agent only appropriates certain aspects of the human author's illocutionary stance.

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[242] Ibid pp. 193-4.

[243] Ibid pp. 154-5.

When we test this modified theory of transitive discourse using Wolterstorff's and Wisse's preferred example, Song of Songs, we see that use of a metaphor is still restricted by some aspects of the original illocutionary stance. The illocutionary stance of much of Songs and Songs is assertive in the original illocutionary act: The human author describes states of affairs, namely his desire for his beloved.[244]

Other more complicated speech acts occur within the larger assertion of the book. The human author makes inquiries and speaks metaphorically in order to accomplish his end of describing his desire for his bride. However, taken as a unit, the book easily lends itself to a reading in which the author asserts a literal and descriptive account of love conveyed by the means of these more complex speech acts. It seems unlikely that the human author took the song as a whole to be metaphorical—to apply to something other than the love between the Beloved and his Bride (or, in the case that these do not refer to specific individuals, beloveds and their brides as a category of relationships), understood literally.

So far the interpretation is unproblematic. However, we still have the task of understanding the way in which God appropriates such language. The default reading should be to adopt the noematic content and illocutionary stance of the human author. As both Wisse and Wolterstorff point out, we

[244] Austin would also categorize assertive language as constative, but I will continue to use Wolterstorff's preferred term. So far as I can tell, the terms are interchangeable for our purposes (even though the terms may not be interchangeable in other contexts). He defines assert as "to make a claim" (p. 35). Both Austin's "constatives" and Wolterstorff's "assertions" involve making a descriptive statement that is either true or false. This is sufficient to use them interchangeably in this context, as Wisse also appears to do.

certainly cannot attribute sensual love to God and be theologically and biblically consistent. We look instead for the next likeliest reading. Following Wolterstorff, we will take the song to be transitive. Following Wisse, we will restrict this to the available tropic readings of the passage. According to Wolterstorff, this means that "the allegorizing discourse belongs to the divine author, the allegorized discourse, to the human author."[245]

God, then, is appropriating the human author's speech act; however, he is appropriating it such that the human author's illocutionary stance "counts as" an allegorical speech act. There does not seem to be any reason to suppose that God's stance has changed from the human author's assertive stance, so we will suppose this is the same. However, the designative content (which Wolterstorff holds is distinct from the noematic content) has also changed as a function of the allegorical use of the original discourse. Instead of the Beloved and his Bride, we now view that language as concerning Christ and the church, or perhaps God and Israel. God then acquires certain aspects of the human author's illocutionary stance (assertion), but not others (literal use of speech, designation).

We already have made a departure with Wisse's evaluation of transitive discourse. Wisse presumes that God must either acquire the entirety of the illocutionary stance of the human author, or he must acquire only the locutionary act, so that "it shares with it only the same sounds, the same words,

[245] Ibid p. 214.

and the same grammatical structure."[246] For example, in the case of the book of I Samuel, God either adopts Samuel's illocutionary stance of declaring, or he adopts the mere locutionary act that is the book of I Samuel: the syntactic structure, phonetic features, and semantic content, but not the force or mode of Samuel's illocutionary stance. Using the same locution, he could be promising, questioning, or performing some other illocutionary act.

Presumably Wisse means slightly more than this—there is no reason to think that the appropriator does not acquire the same sentence meaning (in Wolterstorff's sense of the term) as the original author.[247] In any case, Wisse thinks that the connection to the original discourse will be thin (so thin that the passages will become vulnerable to our ideologies). On my altered use of Wolterstorff's theory, the situation is not so binary: According to my assessment of Song of Songs, God is asserting like the human author, but he is also allegorizing when the human author is not. The divine agent appropriates some aspects of the illocutionary stance, but not others. There remain features of the author's illocutionary stance that restrict the possible meanings of the text; in this way, the work of human author still "anchors" the discourse.

Given that double agency transitive discourse has now been redefined so that it only occurs when either the original agent speaks tropically (and this

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[246] 2002 p. 171.

[247] Recall that for Wolterstorff, meaning is fixed by the sentence, not by the illocutionary stance. However, a sentence may have more than one sentence: "There is a seal" may have a meaning including a bit of imprinted wax or a flippered mammal. There are certainly cases of figurative language in Scripture that rely on synonyms (arguably there are several in the Book of Isaiah), but it is more difficult to argue that these synonyms were unintentional or overlooked by the human author.

language is appropriated by another agent) or when the appropriating agent uses the original agent's literal discourse metaphorically, we still need to investigate whether or not the account we have arrived at seems like a plausible account of a kind of speech act. On this reading, "counting as" is understood as the appropriating agent adopting some aspects of the illocutionary stance of the original agent and not others. This results in a second layer of noematic content and designative content that is distinct from the content of the original discourse. For this version of transitive discourse to succeed, it needs to be a plausible account of discourse consistent with Wolterstorff's theory of metaphor while *also* providing sufficient distance from the original speech act so as to not to commit God to speech acts which we did not want to attribute to him in the first place. It must do all of this while still maintaining sufficient connection to the original discourse so as not to make our interpretations vulnerable to our own ideologies and biases.

Wolterstorff does not provide an exhaustive theory of tropes, but he does give an account of metaphor that is generalizable to most figurative speech.[248] (In fact, Wolterstorff explicitly indicates that he intends his comments to be

[248] It is not applicable to certain figures of speech like hyperbole, etc. However, the kinds of tropic speech it does not apply to are often obviously problematic. For example, hyperbole is must easier to cache out in terms of noematic content and illocutionary stance. It also seems less likely to figure into problematic cases of double agency transitive discourse. This is because such speech acts are often laden tropes in the human author's discourse before being appropriated by God simply in virtue of the nature of the content. In most cases, interpreters who want to interpret a problematic passage of Scripture tropically usually do so by using some kind of metaphor or closely related figurative speech like analogy or simile. Many other forms of figurative speech, like hyperbole, require the affirmation of what has already been said and merely add to it—something that we are often times trying to avoid by invoking a figurative reading.

applicable to tropic language in general.)[249] Accordingly, we can see if our attempt to interpret the Song of Songs as transitive discourse meets the criteria established above. Metaphors are a matter of use rather than meaning. Wolterstorff writes, "The metaphoricity of my use inheres in a certain relationship between the [normative] meaning of the sentence and the noematic content of what I say."[250] There is a contrast, then, between the two parts of the speech act: On one hand, there is the meaning of the sentence, on the other the noematic content of what is said. Metaphors, then, do not involve two sets of noematic content, even though transitive discourse does. What about the other aspects of illocutionary acts? Designative content and the action performed on that content—assertion, command, etc.—have yet to be determined. It seems that in most instances of metaphor, the designative content is made clear by the context of the speech act; that is, the designation is made by the implied relationship between the metaphor and the subject under discussion. The action performed seems to be the same: "Do not look a gift horse in the mouth" is an admonition or possible command regardless of whether it is taken literally or figuratively. "Does it ring a bell?" is a question according to both its locution and the illocutionary acts we tend to attribute to it.

Problematic, then, will be transitive discourse that takes descriptive language as prescriptive, or constative[251] language as commands. This still

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[249] 1995, p. 193.

[250] Ibid.

[251] That is, assertive in Wolterstorff's terminology.

allows for transitive readings of books like Song of Songs: Both the human discourse and divine discourse are understood as assertive under the reading described above. However, it would prohibit some readings of historical, constative passages that transform them into performatives.[252]

Designation, though, seems trickier. If context is supposed to set the designees of a metaphor, we have to suppose that the context of the book, whether within the book or within the whole of Scripture, lends to its figurative reading. However, as Wolterstorff himself notes, "the clues seem to be entirely lacking."[253] The book itself does not suggest a figurative reading—if it did, there would be no need for the special double agency transitive discourse reading that we have applied to it. The presence of "figurative designees" in the book would be evidence that the book is itself a work of allegory, rendering it no longer transitive in the relevant sense. If the book itself is incapable of setting the designees of the text given the very nature of transitive discourse, the interpreter is left to speculate wildly about the designees intended by the divine discourser.

One might dispute that the book is the only place to look for the designees of the transitive reading. Perhaps the entirety of Scripture could serve as the context for the transitive use of Song of Songs. The Bible as a whole, then, would need to make it clear that the book is meant to designate Christ and the church. There does not appear to be sufficient evidence for the allegorical

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[252] I mean "performatives" in the technical, Austinian sense of the term.

[253] Ibid p. 214.

reading, though. While the relationship between Christ and the church is compared to a marriage, nowhere does the Old or New Testament indicate the figurative application of Song of Songs in the way, say, Galatians applies a figurative reading to Sarah and Hagar.[254]

How do we make sense of the two sets of noematic content for transitive discourse, then, one of which selectively chooses features from the first illocutionary act while ignoring others? It appears that, given the parameters of tropic language, we might just as well dispose of the entirety of the illocutionary act of the original speech. All that is required for tropic language is sentence meaning, something derived entirely from the locutionary act, not the illocutionary act.

One clue might be that Wolterstorff also describes locutionary acts as "counting as" illocutionary acts.[255] By this he means that the currency of some illocutionary act is a locutionary act (even though it easily could have been another kind of perlocutionary act like smoke signals or gestures). The illocutionary act is what is responsible for the content of the act; the locutionary act is the way in which it is performed in some cases. Perlocutionary acts more generally are caused by illocutionary acts. The context of the speech act and our acquaintance with the individual speaking is supposed to indicate which illocutionary act is intended when the locutionary act itself is ambiguous or capable of possible meanings.

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[254] Galatians 4.

[255] 1995, p. 33.

However, this is of no help in our situation. Even if one illocutionary act is meant to "count as" another illocutionary act in the case of transitive discourse, the context of the speech is often contained in the initial illocutionary act that is being replaced by the illocutionary act of the divine discourser. We are left with only our acquaintance with the divine discourser to determine the illocutionary act of double agency transitive discourse; there is nothing else to indicate exactly what this illocutionary act is meant to be. However, this once again leaves us vulnerable to the wax-nose anxieties espoused by Wisse in his treatment of Wolterstorff: The interpreter assesses the meaning of the passage in a way unrestricted by the context of the speech act; he only needs to account for what he thinks God *would* say in his interpretation. In some cases, the interpreter is left to speculate wildly about what it is that a transcendent God might have intended to say by co-opting particular speech acts. Having exhausted our options, we are left to conclude that Wisse's suggested modifications to Wolterstorff's theory fail to remedy the wax-nose problem.

V. An Alternative to Transitive Discourse

It seems, then, that if we are troubled by wax-nose anxieties, we would do best to avoid transitive discourse so far as we can. For reasons that I cannot go into detail about here, I think that we should avoid tropic readings of passages that appear to have been intended to be read literally altogether.[256] For one,

[256] For some, interpreting the host of problematic passages in the Scriptures as figurative will strike them as an implausible rendering of passages given our growing knowledge of biblical history and archaeology. It seems as though acts of genocide and atrocities *did* occur among the ancient peoples mentioned in the Old Testament, and those who recorded and continued in the tradition of the Tanakh seemed to understand many of these activities as the product of God's

such methodology seems ill-suited to the first-personal nature of the psalms, a problem only magnified by Wisse's criticisms of interpretations that change rhetorico-conceptual structure of a text. Also worth mentioning is the dubious idea that a loving God would acquire rather horrendous speech to make a figurative point. While some of the idioms we use rather casually are violent and graphic such as my "pound of flesh" example above, this is not quite the same thing as using offensive passages of Scripture to make a metaphorical point. If someone were to tell a detailed and graphic story about incest or rape in order to make a point, we would likely respond with disgust. Such disgust would only be amplified if it turned out the story co-opted for metaphorical use was true, as many of the horrendous acts in Scripture likely are.[257]

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command or wrathful judgment. Even if we discount the way in which the authors of the Tanakh and Jews understood the Tanakh and argue that this is irrelevant to Christian interpretation, we may be suspicious of a God who coopts such stories in order to convey figurative messages to believers. Furthermore, we would hope that our method of interpretation would be in some way reflected in how Christ used the Tanakh in his teachings. Christ does frequently appeal to Old Testament passages or imply their relevance in his teachings. However, notably absent are figurative interpretations of passages that do not already contain language understood as figurative by the author. Even in cases where Christ appears to provide a typological reading of Old Testament passages (e.g., John 6:32-58), it does not appear that he is suggesting that these interpretations take the place of nonfigurative understandings of the relevant passages. Instead, it seems just as likely that Jesus intends the reality of the narratives to serve as evidence for and underwrite his typological claims.

[257] Suppose we are willing to grant that resorting to figurative interpretation of troubling passages is appropriate in many cases. We will still encounter some passages of Old Testament law, prophecy, and psalms resist figurative interpretation. Psalm 137, a passage of Scripture commonly cited for its horrifying elements (calling for the infants of one's enemies to be "dashed against the rocks"), is an unnatural candidate for figurative interpretation. We do not read less disquieting psalms (e.g., Psalm 23, 139) figuratively (except for verses in which the author is clearly intending to use figurative language), and the first-person nature of the psalms suggest the authors are expressing their own experiences, acts of worship and prayers. Deuteronomy 21 and 22 are passages that are similarly ill-suited to figurative readings. Since in these passages God seems to endorse laws that result in cruelty to women and children, those with modern sensibilities would need to interpret these passages as figurative. But the Mosaic Law explicitly purports to proceed from God himself; it is clearly giving directives for living in many of the most offensive passages. Supposing that the whole Mosaic narrative is figurative, and that Mosaic Law fits into a fictional story, still does not help us because we know that eventually the law *was* practiced as though intended for application in the society of the Hebrew

In my view, metaphorical readings of Scripture should be avoided when there is not an obvious indication in the text that human author intends to speak metaphorically. Instead, I would like to use this final section to suggest that Wolterstorff need not invoke transitive discourse at all and that his purposes can be better served by attending to pattern (2) above. This interpretative strategy calls for the interpreter to interpret the text in light of the main point that we think God is likely to endorse. It even gives the reader license to ignore or dispense with passages if they are merely ways to achieve a larger point.

Wolterstorff does not explain in great detail how this methodology is meant to work, but I think we can easily assimilate Swinburne's thoughts on the subject here. Swinburne writes,

> Cultural context is also crucial for distinguishing what is said from the presuppositions in terms of which it is cast. The sentences of the Bible often have false scientific or historical presuppositions. They often, for example, presuppose that the Earth is flat, square, and stationary, covered with a dome across which the sun, moon, and stars travel each day and night. But the cultural context reveals these as common presuppositions of the society, and the social context typically reveals the *main message* as to communicate not these presuppositions but something else by means of them. The falsity of the presuppositions does not, therefore (by the argument of Chapter 2), affect the truth-value of a

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people. Jesus's claim to fulfill the Law (Mt. 5:17) and corrections of its practice by Pharisees (Mt. 23:23) only demonstrates that practice of the Law was expected for a time and that there was a *right* way to follow it. Using figurative readings to reinterpret offensive parts of the Torah, and not the whole civic and religious law, becomes nothing more than an ad hoc strategy for alleviating our discomfort. Figurative readings, then, do not seem to be a particularly desirable strategy for handling bothersome passages. Still, we have not exhausted the resources dynamic conceptual interpretation can offer for dealing with textual issues.

> sentence which uses them. Psalm 104 praises God for many marvels of nature, including that he 'set the earth on its foundations, so that it shall never be shaken'. Now the earth has no 'foundations' in some other body, as the Psalmist supposed. But what he was getting at was that the Earth is not wobbly, it is firm, you can build on it; and he expressed the claim that God is responsible for this, using the presuppositions of his culture. If God is indeed responsible for this stability, the sentence is true.[258]

Swinburne's claim is that when reading passages in which the primary audience or author of a passage possesses false presuppositions, we should *not* take statements implying or inferring these presuppositions as affirming their veracity. They are merely a means to an end. If God's purpose is to talk about his sovereignty, then we need not be concerned about the language he uses that may betray the misunderstandings of his audience.

Note that the point here is *not* the somewhat similar claim that God only speaks on faith and morals, and that details of the text on other subjects may turn out to be false (but these details are not God's speech). According to this view, the only parts of Scripture that we should take as necessarily factive are passages pertaining to faith and morality; other passages should be interpreted by whatever means necessary to yield a plausible teaching on faith and morality. On these grounds, the book of Numbers might receive an allegorical interpretation, despite the fact that large portions of it are clearly constitutive of

[258] 2007, p. 245, emphasis added.

a census, so that its teachings might be understood as in some way relevant to faith and morality.

Rather, Swinburne's claim is that the sentences are true in their own right once properly understood. Biblical passages containing assertions about science or history may still turn out to be false if the sentence's purpose is to convey scientific or historical facts, or if there was a more accurate way to convey the proposition available to the author's language and culture.[259] For example, if the census data in Numbers turned out to be incorrect once understood in light of Israelite census practices and mathematics, then these passages would be false. Conversely, when the human author states that the sun stood still and the moon stopped in Joshua 10, the author's point (presuming that the author intended to speak literally and not figuratively, which is also a likely reading) is that the day endured longer that it should have, or that time seemed to stop. If it turned out that the day lasted a normal period of time and that no miracle occurred, his story would be false; however, his story would *not* be false on the grounds that the sun and moon do not revolve around the earth or move through the sky. This is because the point of the passage is to make a claim about the length of the day and *not* about astronomy.

[259] Ibid pp. 31-2, 245-6.

Interestingly, the psalm referenced by Swinburne above appears to indicate an assertive illocutionary stance. The sentence is a constative (in other words, a declarative statement that asserts a particular state of affairs); it is describing a feature of reality that is either true or false. However, the presuppositions of the author combined with what we take to be the main point of the sentence changes what we take to be asserted. It could be read as a metaphysical and astronomical assertion about the spatial dimensions of the earth. What Swinburne's point demonstrates is that we have reason to think that the metaphysical and astronomical content is not the material claim being communicated by the author of this passage: He is making a point about God's relationship to his creation, something we can affirm as true when we take into account facts about the author's presuppositions.

Swinburne's focus here is on the presuppositions that underlie language and individual propositions. However, a larger point can be made for genres and further, individual books. Just as cultural context and linguistic norms contribute to the truth and falsity of particular sentences, so also genre contributes to how we understand the claims of a particular book. If the genre of a book attaches to it certain assumptions about how the statements within the book should be understood, it will change our reading of the text. Swinburne

uses the example of the Book of Jonah to make an analogous point.[260] He takes it to be a moral fable. If God appropriates a fable, it does not seem that he is obligated to underwrite the historical veracity of the sentences in the fable. Rather, he might appropriate works in the fable genre the way many parents do when they tell a fable to their children, representing it as true: The point of the fable, the moral lesson, is true, even if the story communicated is understood by all parties as fictive.

Somewhat surprisingly, Wolterstorff demonstrates this practice himself with his analysis of narrative, a genre he explicitly states should be read as transitive.[261] According to our revised, narrow definition of transitive discourse under which stories told simply to make a secondary point are no longer transitive, though, narrative turns out not to be transitive per se. Wolterstorff concludes his analysis of gospel narratives by arguing that there is a biographical genre (dubbed "portraits") in which authors are free to speculate about psychological features or interactions that are suggested (but not fully justified) by historical facts.[262] This genre also gives license to the author to organize events in the subject's life in order to draw attention to certain features or themes rather than to document the actual chronology. Should such a genre exist, God's appropriation of the gospels would not require his appropriation of

[260] Ibid p. 251.

[261] 1995, p. 214.

[262] Ibid, p. 259-60.

the historicity of every facet of the gospels.[263] Rather, the relationship between God and the gospels would be something a little bit like God's appropriation of moral fables—although certainly not identical to it given that portraits are still expected to get all of the central historical facts correct.

I am not persuaded that either Swinburne or Wolterstorff are correct in their assessment (or, in Wolterstorff's case, construction) of particular genres. However, the general point is right: When appropriating a text, God's appropriation does not necessarily mean that we always should attribute individual passages to the mouth of God. Genre dictates much of what we take to be God's speech: Fable is God's speech in a way that is distinct from prophecy. Notice, though, this is not because we are interpreting these books in light of what we think God is *likely* to say. Rather, the genre of the book, whether established by the author or by a collector who assimilates various writings into a single book (as is the case for Proverbs, Psalms, and possibly many other books of various genres). As such, I am still adopting the illocutionary stance of a human responsible in some way for the text: The author or compiler, as the case may be.

This means that we are not free to assign historical works like I and II Chronicles to the genre of parable or allegory if there is good reason to think that there is a more plausible understanding of how the person(s) responsible for Chronicles intended it to be understood, like the Jewish genre of historical

[263] Wolterstorff makes a compelling case that this genre does exist, although I am not as inclined as Wolterstorff to think that this is an accurate description of the genre of the gospels.

narrative. Christians who claim that statements about Israel in books like Chronicles have allegorical application to the church would not be reading the work in a manner consistent with our best understanding of the genre, so their interpretations would be ruled out. Likewise, feminist theologians who interpret Scripture as a means of identifying and abolishing patriarchy by centering their interpretations on a few biblical figures like Hannah, Ruth, or the midwives in Exodus would have to find plausible justifications for the claim that their view is supported by the genre(s) that the authors and compilers of Scripture intended.

Taking genre into account is still not enough, though. Books may still have more specific purposes within their genres. Fiction can be used as political critique or be part of a subgenre like satire. *Candide* is at once novel, satire, farce and philosophy. It is not all of these things because of the changing audience or context in which it is read; rather, it was likely intended to be all of these things by the illocutionary stance of Voltaire upon writing the work. Even popular literature like the *Hunger Games* contains this kind of complexity of genre: It is youth science fiction about a young woman living in an apocalyptic future while also being an analysis of war, trauma and nationalism. Some collections of poetry are also journals; for Wittgenstein, writings of philosophy were both poetry and therapy.

We should ask ourselves, then, what purpose a particular book serves within its genre and why it might have a message that God would appropriate for himself. C.S. Lewis models just the sort of interpretative strategy I have in mind in his various comments on the Psalms. Lewis argued that we should read

psalms as writings by close spiritual relatives with whom we have much in common.[264] The most horrifying psalms are psalms any one of us could have authored: "Whenever we have wronged our fellow man, we have tempted him to be such a man as wrote psalm 109."[265] The purpose of such psalms is not to communicate sentiments which God endorses, even metaphorically. In fact, we should expect the inclusion of psalms containing sentiments that God condemns.[266] Instead, we should think God appropriates the psalms for the purpose of modeling the realistic prayer life of persons just like us. They contain both a reminder that God allows "tares" to worship alongside his people, and a reminder that we must approach God in the darkest nights of our souls.[267] The problem the modern reader has with the Psalms is not that we cannot work out how to attribute such ancient and barbaric sentiments to God; it is that we lack self-awareness about our own inner states and the trials Christians may face. We all at least "touch the fringes" of neuroticism, malice, and despair, Lewis observes, and it is wishful thinking to assume that many of those who pray and worship God will not find themselves expressing horrifying sentiments if they expect to approach God honestly.[268]

Understood in this way, it is easy to see how God might appropriate the Book of Psalms. He takes the illocutionary stance of the collector of the book:

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[264] 1995, p. 117.

[265] Ibid p. 119.

[266] Ibid p. 120.

[267] Ibid pp. 121, 126.

[268] Ibid pp. 126-7.

These are examples of prayer and worship that may be useful to use in our own collective or personal acts of worship and prayer. It is unlikely that the human who put together the Book of Psalms shared the hateful or despondent sentiments of the various authors. Instead there is an unwritten, implicit assertion that the book is a model of worship—so determined by the genre of the book. A more specific purpose can be discerned when we think of further historical details surrounding the text, as well as its position within the whole of Scripture: It is an example of how God's imperfect, sinful people address themselves to a perfect God. The statements within the book are true, insofar as they truthfully reflect the reality of how people deal with various dimensions of life through worship and prayer. It still qualifies as an act of discourse because discourse is "the acquisition of a normative standing in the public domain by the performance of an action which is itself publicly perceptible."[269] God is doing just this by appropriating the message of the book for himself.

If we take this to be the illocutionary stance of God, we not only dispense with the ambiguity inherent in attempting a metaphorical reading. We also do not have to bother with making the changes to the rhetorico-conceptual structure that Wisse has shown so problematic: A human in the text, or even the author of the text, can make an assertion with particular designations without the reader having to restructure the sentence so that it is one we can put in the mouth of God himself, so to speak. I think strategies like the ones mentioned above are possible for many of the texts that interpreters find troublesome such

[269] Ibid p. 197.

as the Psalms, Song of Songs, and the more unsettling aspects of the Hebrew narratives. If the strategy is successful enough, it may be that Wolterstorff can do away with the category of transitive discourse altogether. This may not eliminate all wax-nose anxieties, but it surely eliminates one of the most pernicious sources of such anxieties in Wolterstorff's theory.

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