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A Philosophical Investigation of Religious Language: A Study of the Identity, Meaning and Semantics of Religious Utterances

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A Philosophical Investigation of Religious Language

A Study of the Identity, Meaning and Semantics of Religious Utterances

by

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my father, Albert Charles Ellis.
Half of me wishes you were here to see this; the other half knows that you are.

Acknowledgements

<u>Declaration</u>

I hereby declare that this thesis is the results of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. All other sources are acknowledged by bibliographic references. This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree unless, as agreed by the University, for approved dual awards. I confirm that I am submitting this work with the agreement of my Supervisor(s).

Yr wyf drwy hyn yn datgan mai canlyniad fy ymchwil fy hun yw'r thesis hwn, ac eithrio lle nodir yn wahanol. Caiff ffynonellau eraill eu cydnabod gan droednodiadau yn rhoi cyfeiriadau eglur. Nid yw sylwedd y gwaith hwn wedi cael ei dderbyn o'r blaen ar gyfer unrhyw radd, ac nid yw'n cael ei gyflwyno ar yr un pryd mewn ymgeisiaeth am unrhyw radd oni bai ei fod, fel y cytunwyd gan y Brifysgol, am gymwysterau deuol cymeradwy. Rwy'n cadarnhau fy mod yn cyflwyno'r gwaith hwn gyda chytundeb fy Ngoruchwyliwr (Goruchwylwyr).

<u>Abstract</u>

If we want to critically engage with religious belief then we must thoroughly understand the language which those beliefs are expressed in, and to these ends the study of religious language is a study of the sentences which posit religious entities and properties. The goal of the study is to develop a general account for the meaning of those sentences which appear to be relevant for our understanding of religious belief, and it is therefore expected to include answers to questions about cognitivism, verification, truth-status and referring expressions. However, it is one thing to explain the meaning of a religious sentence and quite another to explain how that sentence is religious, and the contemporary study is more concerned with explaining meaning than classification. This thesis argues that this is a problem which needs to be resolved for the study to progress.

The contemporary study should be reminded that it has two components which require equal consideration. The first being the *identity* of religious language (what makes a language religious, how do we locate them, are they all the same etc.,) and the second being the *meaning* of religious language (are they cognitive, non-cognitive, literal etc.,) and a robust account for the latter will struggle to remain silent about the former. Indeed, we can only study the meaning of a religious language after identifying one, and this presupposes knowledge about what constitutes as a religious language. The contemporary study does not have a well-established account for what constitutes as a religious language, and this is a problem because the cognitive form of the study depends on 'religious language' being a referring expression for something which is apt for the sort of analysis which is found in discussions about its meaning.

This thesis proposes an alternative approach which links the identity and meaning of religious language with our grammatical use of the term 'religious language', and this offers innovative solutions to some central problems. Specifically, it will avoid epistemological problems like *the field linguist paradox* and *the problem of the criterion*, it will accommodate for religious and linguistic diversity, it will be mindful of theological views and shown to be more reliable than alternatives like religious realism. The goal of this thesis is not to provide a definitive account for the identity and meaning of religious language, but to identify currently overlooked issues and propose some solutions which have the potential to improve the study and lead towards a more robust account. If successful, this thesis will motivate the study to put discussions about the meaning of religious language on hold, and to pick up and seriously engage in discussions about what religious language *is*.

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Introduction

The study of religious language is occasionally phrased as addressing a 'problem'.[1] Some say that God is entirely ineffable and beyond human language[2] and others say that God can be spoken about but only indirectly,[3] and the problem of religious language is how we balance meaningful speech *about* God with the belief that God is beyond the grasp of human understanding.[4] To these ends, 'religious language' is the medium through which people speak about God and other religious subject matters, a 'religious sentence' is token of that *type* of language, and it is encountered in the form of spoken or written utterances (Scott 2017). The study of religious language investigates this problem by examining the function, linguistic content and meaning of religious sentences by answering questions about their truth-aptness, truth-conditions, attitudes and interpretations. At first glance, the study of religious language is a philosophical study of the meaning, truth-status, content and purpose of sentences composed in English which are associated with Western religions, but on closer examination there is an important though neglected additional element to the study; what constitutes as 'religious language'.[5] This is reflected in the two reasons for studying religious language in the first place.

There are two main reasons for studying religious language – the religious want to understand the nature of their own faith, beliefs, practices and teachings, whilst philosophers want to understand the epistemology of religious belief. The two can and often do overlap, but 'religion has always had a concern for language that has outstripped that of the philosophical tradition', meaning that there are at times as if two studies taking place within the same environment and each has their own presuppositions, interests and goals (Stiver 1996: p. 1). Philosophers want to know if religious sentences are truth-apt, and if they are, what are their truth-conditions and do any of them obtain. The religious are of course interested with these things, but in virtue of already having some sort of belief they are less inclined to ask about whether a sentence is truth-apt and more inclined to ask about how to make sense of their belief or interpret their scripture. Where philosophers are interested about whether religious sentences are cognitive, non-cognitive, or both (and if so, whether a Moderate Attitude Theory sufficiently accounts for how), the religious are typically

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[1] Cf. 'Problems of Religious Language' in *Philosophy of Religion* (Hick 1963: pp. 78-93), 'The problem of Religious Language' in *Analytic Philosophy of Religion* (Harris 2002: pp. 28-76).
[2] Cf. (Hick 2000).
[3] As found in Apophatic Theology, particularly the principle of *via negativa* (Helsel 2010).
[4] Cf. 'Problems of Religious Language' in *Philosophy of Religion* (Hick 1963: pp. 78-93), 'The problem of Religious Language' in *Analytic Philosophy of Religion (*Harris 2002: pp. 28-76).
[5] This is not to say that the question has never been addressed or considered, but rather that the dominant approaches within the last two decades of study has placed far less attention to it than to questions about sentence meaning.

interested in their language for *religious reasons*. What does it mean to read the Word of God; can reading scripture lead to revelation; indeed, some religions believe that their language is *literally religious* and therefore a study of it can lead to spiritual purity. Where the majority of philosophers are mostly interested with the philosophical challenges which the problem of religious language raises and only a few are particularly interested in the *religious domain of meaning*, vice versa is the case when we consider theologians.

It is one thing to discuss whether sentences like 'Jesus died for our sins' are truth-apt, but another to discuss whether those sentences are *religious*. A brief study of religion will reveal that the religious are usually less concerned about the philosophical aspects of their sentences and far more concerned about its religious qualities, such as one's *religious experience* of hearing the Word of God. This thesis argues that the study of religious language must be broken into two parts and any sufficient theory must address both: what the term 'religious language' means and what religious sentences mean. This thesis shows that most current accounts for the meaning of religious sentences are insufficient because they fail to sufficiently address *both* elements.[6] As such, this thesis does not contain a dedicated Literature Review Section which is as if isolated from the remainder of the text, but instead draws from relevant literature throughout its development. Moreover, as this thesis does not simply identify a problem within the literature but proposes a solution and in turn prompts the study to reconsider its methodological approaches, there is in this regard a general lack of literature to review. The dominant contemporary approaches of the study focus on the meaning of religious sentences and rarely considers what *makes* those sentences 'religious' in equal depth or rigour.[7] Instead, there is a general assumption that identifying a sentence as religious is easy whilst explaining what it means is tricky, and so the latter is the real target of the study. The problem with this is that any sufficient account for the meaning of a religious sentence must presuppose a criterion for what constitutes a religious sentence, and this will set the parameters and influence the shape of the study.[8] Even then, trying to establish a criterion for what constitutes a religious sentence or language is in effect a variation of *the Problem of the Criterion* –

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[6] E.g., Face Value Theories, Non-Cognitivism, Expressivism and Moderate Attitude Theories.
[7] Emphasis is here placed on *dominant contemporary* approaches as there has historically been attention on what constitutes as a religious language.
[8] Consider Benjamin Nelson's warning that most sociological studies of religion have 'treated religion as a derived – *epiphenomenal* – rather than as a prime and primary spiritual – *noumenal* – reality. If Bellah is right, Marx, Durkheim, Freud – and there were many others – sought to explain religion without first getting hold of the reality of religion.' (Nelson 1970: p. 107).

> To know whether things really are as they seem to be, we must have a *procedure* for distinguishing appearances that are true from appearances that are false. But to know whether our procedures is a good procedure, we have to know whether it really *succeeds* in distinguishing appearances that are true from appearances that are false. And we cannot know whether it does really succeed unless we already know which appearances are *true* and which ones are *false*. And so we are caught in a circle. (Chisholm 1973: p. 3).

There are also practical aspects to this contention which must not be overlooked, such as how it would be frustrating to discover that each proposed account for the meaning of a religious sentence understands that sentence as being religious for different reasons and are in essence talking about different things. So, instead of asking 'what does religious language mean?' we should first ask ourselves, as Peter Winch did, 'what do *we* mean by 'religious language'?' (Winch 1977). To which this thesis answers: 'religious language' means to pick out any medium of communication which captures the religious domain of meaning.

Let us begin with three terms which will be used throughout this thesis: metalanguage, object language, host-language. The metalanguage is the language used to conduct a study, the object language is the language being studied, and the host-language is the language which a religion utilises in their speech (Parkinson 1996: p. 897). For example, the metalanguage of this study is the English Philosophical dialectic, the object language is *that* which 'religious language' references (e.g., the Christian religious sentence, or the utterances spoken during Muslim prayer), and the host-language is the *English* in which the Christian Bible is written or the *Arabic* in which the Muslim prays. The study of religious language is not to be confused with the study of a religiolect[9] or a form of theolinguistics,[10] but instead a philosophical study of how (and whether) a 'religious meaning' is communicated through language. Inspired by Woodfield's observation that the philosophy of mind is 'built upon a realization that philosophers can contribute more by investigating discourse about mental states than by investigating the mental states themselves', this thesis contributes by investigating the metalanguage discourse *about* the object language and in doing so makes two critical observations (Woodfield 1982: p. ix). Firstly, that the real problem of religious language is the *study* of religious language, secondly, that the solution to this problem is already contained in language, we just need to bring it to attention. More technically, we are asking about the intensional and extensional aspects of the metalanguage term 'religious language', where

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[9] Benjamin Hary proposes that we adopt the term 'religiolect' to better mark the distinction between a language *associated* with a religious group and a 'religious language' – 'A religiolect is thus a language variety with its own history and development, which is used by a religious community' such as how Yiddish is commonly associated with the Jewish community or how Latin is associated with Catholicism, but this is not to say that Yiddish or Latin are 'religious' nor that the study of religious language is a study of those *host*-languages (Hary 2009: p. 12).
[10] As explored in detail in S4. C1.

intension marks the conditions under which it is considered appropriate to use the term and extension marks the object which the term references (Hanfling 2003: p. 223). It is cruicial for us to know what the study has in mind when it talks *about* 'religious language' because if we cannot 'pick out' the same extensional object nor offer a common intensional description then the study of religious language is evidently a study of nothing in particular.

It would be uncharitable to present the dominant form of the study as exclusively concerned with truth-conditions because there is a difference between whether a sentence reports a religious belief and whether the religious belief is true. Thus, 'for modern analytic philosophers, the question of the meaning of religious belief comes before the problem of its truth or falsity' which is to say, religious beliefs are complex and possess several plausible interpretations with their own different truth-conditions (Keightley 1976: p. 18). Consider how a prima facie reading of the belief claim 'God loves me' understands it to state that the object designated by the term 'God' *loves* the person who uttered the sentence, whilst a psychological interpretation might lead us to think that the person is reporting a belief *about themselves* – that they *believe God loves them*.[11] The speaker could of course be saying both at the same time, and they might be saying it more to themselves than anyone else for the sake of self-assurance. Hence the meaning of religious belief coming before its truth or falsehood and knowing the meaning of the sentence which reports the belief would aid both pursuits. With that in mind, there are three characteristics with the dominant study of religious language which come together as a significant problem:

(i)   There is no definition or criterion for 'religious language',

(ii)   The Western philosophical study of religious language is almost exclusively focused on Western religions hosted in Western languages, and,

(iii)   We seem able, though for no obvious reason, to commonly agree about whether a sentence is religious ('God forgive me') or merely *about* religion ('Christians go to Church on Sundays').

These three characteristics lead into one another as follows: despite recognising there is no universally agreed definition for 'religious language'[12] or general account for what an object must be like to warrant it being called 'religious' and a 'language',[13] the study hinges on our shared

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[11] This mode of interpretation is most apparent in the views of Feuerbach, cf. *The Essence of Christianity* (Feuerbach 1881).
[12] Cf. (Vainio 2020).
[13] Cf. (McClendon and Smith 1973).

intuiton that sentences like 'God forgive me, a sinner' are religious whilst those like 'God probably exists' are not, but our intuion is limited to our immediate and most likely *Western* contexts.[14] There is some intuitive appeal to the observation that atheists and theists alike can *recognise* that some sentences are religious[15] whilst others are merely *about* religion,[16] however there is no shared explanation for what that recognition is based upon. One explanation could be that the sentences possess some observable religious property which we are detecting without realising, whilst another explanation could be that we are just conforming to some standard of language use which has nothing to do with the sentences themselves. The question of what *makes* a sentence religious addresses the aforementioned neglected element of the study, and we can start to see how a lack of an answer hinders the success of any account for the meaning of its token sentences.

Heeding calls for a thick and inclusive philosophy of religion, we need to balance targeting those things which we *intuit* as warrenting the term 'religious language' with our awareness that a reliance on our intuition can hinder the representation of religious diversity (Ryle 1968) & (Burley 2018). Several popular theories about the meaning of religious sentences, including Attitude and Face Value Theories alike, presuppose that 'religious language' references a *use* of language,[17] but this can mislead us into thinking that there are no religions which assert the existence of an actual language which is endowed with religious or magical power[18] or that there is some overlap between the two.[19] Alternatively, supporters of the *use* position warn that the phrase 'religious language' or 'object language' deceives us into thinking that it is a name for an actual thing rather than a term in reference to an identifiable use of a host-language (Alston 2004: p. 220). A thick and inclusive philosophy of religion would put time and effort into exploring the classification marked by the term 'religious language' such as to ensure that no possible language or theory are prima facie excluded from consideration. However, the dominant approach within the contemporary study almost exclusively examines the meaning of sentences rather than the classification of a 'religious language', hence how part of the problem with the study is that it leapfrogs over discussions about

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[14] Chatterjee, for example, claims that the religious identity of Indian religious languages are not captured by Western philosophical concepts like 'God-talk' (Chatterjee 1974: p. 478).

[15] E.g., 'For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.' (John 3:16).

[16] E.g., 'Muslims pray five times a day'.

[17] Cf. (Alston 2004: p. 220) & (Dawes 2016).

[18] 'According to the mainstream of Hindu religious philosophy, the Vedic scriptures, and by extension the Sanskrit language, are eternal entities. Depending on which particular school of philosophy one looks at, these entities were either created by some divine agency, or were always there, uncreated and eternally self-existent.' (Deshpande 1985: p. 122).

[19] The overlap between religious language as the use of symbols and the belief that religious symbols possess an inherent magical power is considered in *Symbols and Religious Language* (G. Richards 1995: pp. 181-182).

identity and enters discussions about the meaning of those sentences *which fit the description* for what religious sentences usually look like.

The study of religious language does not seek a list of translations or explanations of what individual sentences say, but rather some theory or account which can be broadly applied and capable of consistently providing explanations. This presupposes that we can identify a broad range of religious sentences and can consistently apply a particular theory to them, but without having a robust criterion which stipulates what constitutes a religious language or sentence, we must instead rely on descriptions and conventionally used examples. This is ultimately insufficient because a description is not equivalent to a definition – it is one thing to *describe* a religious sentence as talking about God but quite another to say that the sentence is religious *because* it talks about God.[20] The fact that descriptions come after identifications – that we must first identify a sentence as religious before treating a description of it as a description of religious language broadly – means that we must have some prior ability to *pick out* religious sentences fit for description. This is not to say that there must be some religious property inside certain words or phrases which we have a natural ability to perceive or detect,[21] but it is to point out the temporal sequence more generally at play. In short, although a criterion for what constitutes 'religious language' is necessary and would unavoidably influence the shape of the study, the dominant approach within the study not only lacks a criterion but has little interest in trying to find one. Instead, the study rests on the intuition that we can all recognise a religious sentence when we see one, and although there is some credence to this, it is hardly sufficient to prop up a robust philosophy of religion.[22] The best way to address these three problems is by reordering what it already laid out in front of us – rather than presuming to know what religious sentences are descriptively like or what religions typically do, we should imagine ourselves learning about religion and religious language for the first time. This could be achieved through a combination of Quine's presentation of a field linguist along with Ryle's distinctions on knowing-how and knowing-that.

Quine describes humans as having the unfortunate habit of approaching languages with the unfounded assumption that they are all more or less the same, when in reality language is not like

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[20] Consider the seven characteristics which are described of religious sentences including Hick's proposed eighth, and how it is not clear whether these characteristics are what *make* something religious or simply correlated with religious sentences (Binkley and Hick 1962).
[21] Although some religions do propose this, as will be explored in following chapters.
[22] It is well acknowledged within the social sciences that 'without a subject-matter, there can be no science' (Ryan 1970: p. 8).

that at all (Quine 1960). In consequence of his observations, Quine hypothesises a field linguist, someone who has discovered an uncontacted tribe in a jungle and are tasked with learning their language so to translate it into a more familiar one, like English (Morris 2007: p. 195). However, the caveat is that the field linguist is limited to the *bare minimum* of presumptions necessary to allow them to identify that the object language is a language. We make a similar observation: humans have the unfortunate habit of approaching religions with the unfounded assumption that they are all more or less the same, when in reality they are incredibly diverse and part of that diversity *matters* for 'religious language'.[23] The study currently approaches the topic with some degree of presumed knowledge about *what* a religious language/sentence is insofar as the study describes what they look like, where they are found, and what they might do, but in doing so the study offers little to no explanation for *how* those described features 'make' something 'religious'. This is problematic because it presupposes some unsubstantiated standard which determines what are and what are not 'religious languages' which is then applied broadly to all religions hosted in all languages. To avoid this, we should approach the study from the perspective of a field linguist who holds the bare minimum of presumptions about the object of their study, thus before trying to *explain the meaning* of 'God loves you', the field linguist must first be shown that the sentence is relevant to their study, which is to say, they must be shown that is has a religious identity. At a later stage we will question whether the presumption that 'religious language' names (i) a language which is (ii) religious, constitutes a *bare minimum presumption*, but before we reach that degree of complexity it is worth appreciating the merits of the method at hand. This will spotlight the neglected second element of religious language (the religious domain of meaning) by revealing what I call *The Field Linguist Paradox.*

This is our paradox:
a) if the identification of a religious language requires knowledge of the religion, and
b) if knowledge of the religion is only gained through understanding its language,
c) then the field linguist will never come to know anything about the religion or its language.

This shows that in addition to needing to know what it is we are tasked with studying so to be able to find examples to study, we will struggle to identify the language under investigation if our ability to recognise it depends on us *already* knowing things which can only be known through an understanding of it. More specifically, the study targets the object which the term 'religious

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[23] As will be shown in S2. C3.

language' references and so we need to have some idea as for *what that object is* if we are to practically participate in its study. We therefore need to know what the term 'religious language' references, and the *Field Linguist Paradox* claims that if we do not know *what* religious language is and are currently unable to make sense of it, then we will face a serious problem if the only way to learn about religious language is *through* religious language. This can be presented as a type of Private Language Argument – if my understanding of German first depends on my ability to identify a sentence as German, and if my ability to identify a sentence as German depends on me having knowledge which can only be expressed by a German sentence, then the German language would essentially be private from my perspective and beyond my comprehension (O. R. Jones 1971). Yet, we do not want to render the study impossible or hopeless – we do have *some sense* to what we mean to pick out in the world when we say things like 'religious sentences can be found in the Bible' or 'Hinduism has a religious language which is just as legitimate as the religious language found in the Old Testament'. This brief examination of the philosophical discourse about the object language shows that the term 'religious language' is a metalanguage word which we know how to use and yet not know that it has a specific definition or criterion. This lends itself to something resembling Ryle's distinction between knowledge-that and knowledge-how.

According to Ryle, knowledge-that is propositional such as the knowledge that London is in England, whilst knowledge-how is like a skill or talent such as the know-how involved in archery (Ryle 1990: pp. 28-32). A field linguist is prevented from having more than the bare minimum number of presumptions (knowledge-that) required for identifying something as a language, and so although they do not know what makes a language religious nor what its sentences mean, they nonetheless know-how to use the term 'religious language'. The field linguist's knowledge for how to use the term 'religious language' could come from one (or both) possibilities: their familiarity with the philosophical literature within the study – they are accustomed to how Scott, Hick or Alston uses the term and can copy it; or their familiarity with *English* – they can look up 'religious' and 'language' in a dictionary and piece together the sort of thing 'religious language' might mean. The dominant contemporary approach within the study is accountable to the first possibility, which is to say contributors like Scott acknowledge that most of the discipline's focus has been on the meaning of sentences 'with *putatively* religious content' – which can be broken down as saying, religious sentences are those which posit an entity or property of the sort *which is customarily taken as being religious* (Scott 2017). This thesis suggests that the link between the *English* of the metalanguage and the *English* of a religion's host-language could act as a bridge where one's *know-how* of English in one context can transfer into the other. Consequently, investigating the English

metalanguage discourse about the object language might cast light on the nature of the object language itself if it were also hosted in English.

What might at first appear to be an intuition or perceptual capacity which allows us to identify religious languages and sentences might under further scrutiny be seen as a manifestation of the know-how involved in using the term 'religious language'. It is not that we possess some hidden knowledge-that an object language must be such-and-such to be religious, but that the intensional aspects of our linguistic know-how causes us to consistently pick out similar extensions. We know-*how* to use the term 'religious language' such that we can deploy it in a consistent and meaningful way, but because we do not have knowledge-that the criterion is such-and-such we cannot be certain that we are all necessarily meaning the same thing. This also acts as an explanation for why the study of religious language targets those sentences which fit the description of what we usually take a religious sentence as appearing like – because we have no knowledge-that such-and-such *makes* the sentence religious, we can only describe what they appear like when our know-how informs us that they warrant the use of the tern 'religious language'. Therefore, we should approach the study of religious language with the aim of discovering what *we mean* by our use of the term 'religious language'. We do not know what an object must be like to be religious or a language, neither do we know what religious sentences mean, but our know-how nonetheless provides common consistent guidance.

Once it has been shown that there are two elements to religious language and the study's dominant approach leapfrogs discussions about the religious domain of meaning and enters discussions about the meaning of sentences which resemble what religious sentences are customarily taken as being like, we shall begin to examine the semantic value of the term 'religious language'. As the term is used as a metalanguage referring expression, an analysis of its semantic type should yield fruitful results for our enquiry – if we were to discover that it is a disguised description accountable to Russell or Frege then the term should be informative about its referent, whilst a Millian or Kripkean interpretation of rigid designation would offer alternative insights. It will be concluded that there is no decisive answer to this question, but there are some general observations: if it is a referring expression then whatever it picks out must be shared amongst the world's religions, and although the term does not necessarily describe nor guarantee that it possesses an object, it would be empty if it did not and so too would the study be empty without an object to target. It is of upmost concern that the study, as currently understood, identifies its *object* language and if we want this

identification to be evidenced and justified, then we should expect to be offered a methodology for how we can identify it for ourselves.

This leaves us in unchartered waters: we have a keen *sense* or *intuition* for what the object of our study is, and we seem (broadly speaking) able to agree which sentences are religious, which are not, and which are ambiguous. However, when asked for a detailed explanation of *what* a religious sentence or language is; how we can detect them; and what justification or evidence we possess to support our answers, we find ourselves stuck. If we are confident that we use the term 'religious language' as a referring expression and yet are not certain what *kind* of expression it is, then we should perhaps consider what sort of thing a 'religion' is; and in doing so we find that in their answering of this question, the sociology of religion has faced the same challenges as the study of religious language. The sociology of religion, broadly speaking, has two methodological approaches – it can begin with a definition of 'religion' which is then applied to the world, or it can begin without a definition and instead assumes that the essence or 'stuff' of religion is so obvious and self-evident that it goes without saying and can be identified and studied without any deeper analysis. Although there are strengths and weaknesses to each (and alternatives), it is useful to see that it, like the study of religious language, finds itself with some ability to *identify* the 'stuff of religion' (or the religious stuff of language) without knowing what exactly it is. Moreover, we find ourselves willing to refer to an extraordinarily vast variety of diverse beliefs, practices, customs and languages as 'religious', and so if 'religious language' means to refer to an object language which is religious then we must be willing to say that the 'religious stuff' of language is commonly found amongst the breadth and depth of human civilization.

Once we have outlined the extent of religious and host-language diversity, we shall examine whether religious realism can theoretically and/or practically provide the study with an ideal foundation. In theory, religious realism provides the study with a 'real object language' which can be discovered by the field linguist, but in practice it excludes more religions than it could ever account for, making it an incredibly disruptive and therefore unacceptable account. This will be evidenced by using error theory to draw out several non-negotiable commitments which a religious realist has for how they conceptualise the ontology, metaphysics and epistemological accessibility of a religious reality. Once equipped with the benefits of this insight, we shall put religious realism into practice by applying it to the religious languages found in Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism and Buddhism. Although it has some limited *theoretical* success with the religious languages found in Judeo-Christianity, it is demonstrably *incompatible* with the religious languages of Hinduism and

Buddhism. Moreover, as religious realism could only account for the identity and meaning of religious language as found in this world on the condition that there is currently a mind-independent religious reality, then in practice it renders more religions false and their languages meaningless than it can account for. This thesis proposes a novel solution to these challenges by combining Ryle's knowledge-that and knowledge-how distinction with both Quine's field linguist approach and Wittgenstein's surface/depth grammar distinction. It will be concluded that a robust account for religious language will include an explanation of what religious language is and what its sentences mean by also explaining what *we mean* by the term 'religious language' as revealed in our use of it as a referring expression. Our ability to identify religious sentences will be shown as accountable to our grammatical know-how of English supplying sufficient grammatical skills to detect cases of 'depth grammar', and in the depth of grammar we find the religious domain of meaning.

Section One – The Problem of the Study of Religious Language

S1. C1. The Field Linguist Hypothesis

At first glance, when someone tells us 'God exists' and 'there will be a Judgement Day' we understand the person as reporting a potential fact which they might express a belief in, and we respond with comments like 'I agree', 'I disagree', or 'I am unsure'. However, Wilson concludes that these responses are wrong because we do not actually know what the speaker initially meant when they said that God exists, something endorsed by D. Z. Phillips who writes 'that philosophers who do not believe that God exists assume that they know what it means to say that there is a God' (Wilson 1968: p. 16) & (D. Z. Phillips 1967a: p. 67). The challenge is that we can in some sense understand exactly what has been said and yet there is another important sense which we have doubt about,

> In one sense, I understand all he says – the English words "God", "separate", etc. I understand. I could say: "I don't believe in this," and this would be true, meaning I haven't got these thoughts or anything that hangs together with them. But not that I could contradict the thing. (Wittgenstein 1970: p. 55).

In one sense, we understand English well enough to recognise that a belief claim is being made but we also recognise that something more is going on, that although we can reply by saying that we do not have that sort of belief we are not able to engage with the belief at the level which it is expressed (Wittgenstein 1970: pp. 53-54). But if I cannot respond at the same level, how am I to say that I understand what was initially said? It quickly gets to a point where 'my normal technique of language leaves me. I don't know whether to say they [we] understand one another or not' (Wittgenstein 1970: p. 55). Whatever the *religious* mean when they say those sorts of things, assuming that it is communicated by language and that we are failing to see it, is what we mean by the religious domain of meaning in language. The religious domain of meaning is linked to the host-language but that is not to say that an understanding of it provides us with an understanding of what the religious sentence means. For example, we can translate a German sentence into English because the two languages capture a common domain of meaning which is to say that we can count objects just as well in English as we can German, or we can write a shopping list with equal efficiency. The question then follows: can we likewise translate religious languages? Let us take the following as an example of a religious sentence:

¹⁸ Oblegid y gair am y groes, ffolineb yw i'r rhai sydd ar lwybr colledigaeth, ond i ni sydd ar lwybr iachawdwriaeth, gallu Duw ydyw. (1 Corinthians 18).

A person might be able to identify the sentence as 'religious' if it was translated into English but putting it in English does not guarantee that the English speaker will understand what the sentence *means*. This implies that we need to understand the host-language in order to judge whether a sentence is religious (that is to say, if we cannot understand English then we cannot notice whether it *hosts* anything 'religious') but noticing that it hosts something religious does not mean that we will understand the sentence. This however supposes that the 'religious' element of a sentence can transfer between host-languages through translations, but this is incredibly contentious. Some religions are more open to host-language translations than others, e.g., the fact that the Bible is the most translated text in the world implies that the Christian religious language can transfer between host-languages (Wendland and Noss 2012). Contrarily, Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall specifies in his Translator's Forward for *The Meaning of the Glorious Qur'an*, 'The Qur'an cannot be translated' and that his project of translation and explanation does not result with,

> the Glorious Qur'an, that inimitable symphony, the very sounds of which move men to tears and ecstasy. It is only an attempt to present the meaning of the Qur'an – and peradventure something of the charm – in English. It can never take the place of the Qur'an in Arabic, nor is it meant to do so. (Pickthall 2000: p. 3).

So, although there is debate about whether any given language can satisfactorily *host* the religious language of any given tradition, there is broader agreement that the religious domain of meaning cannot be featured in *non*religious language.[24] The most obvious reason for this broad agreement is definitional; in what sense can we say that a sentence captures the religious domain of meaning whilst not being religious? It would be like saying that a sentence captures the moral domain of meaning whilst not being moral. It could be objected that there is no religious domain of meaning and subsequently no analogous object language, resulting with the study being without a coherent subject matter or in need for a different explanation.[25] Nevertheless, such an objection would still be treated as a successful outcome of this thesis's project because it would require the study to discuss what constitutes 'religious language' in ways which are currently absent.

Irrespective to whether we think that the object language marked by the term 'religious language' is more of a *use* of a host-language than it is an actual divine language, it is still essential for us to

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[24] Cf. 'translation proviso' (Habermas 2006).
[25] Cf. (Ryan 1970: p. 8).

understand the host-language if we are to plausibly understand the religious language. The study does not want a list of sentences and interpretations which haphazardly try to paint every religious sentence with the same brush, but rather desires a robust account for the religious *type* of language which has the explanatory power to apply to token sentences. Thus, we must identify the object language of the study for two reasons. First, it must be granted that 'before undertaking the task of learning language, the learner can identify objects in the environment as things fit to be named', which is to say that we need to identify the *object* called 'religious language' as well as the objects spoken about *in* religious language before we can meaningfully learn it (Morris 2007: p. 301).[26] Secondly, we need to verify that we are all meaning to pick out the same object language for the same reasons by the term 'religious language' (we need to share the same extension and intension) or else risk the study being essentially a study of a beetle in a box (Wittgenstein 1994: §293). If we follow our intuition that 'religious language' means to pick out languages which are associated with religions for specific religious purposes,[27] then we must ask whether we should expect all religious languages to be the same.

There is no specification for what makes a religion a religion, a language a language, and thus a religious language a religious language; and yet still there is some degree of truth to the claim that we can intuit 'Forgive them father' as religious but 'God necessarily exists' as not. This should make it apparent that religious language has something to do with a reported religious domain of meaning, yet the dominant approach within the study focuses on the meaning of sentences which fit the description of being religious *even if* they do not capture the religious domain of meaning.[28] The proper starting place for the study of religious language is that intuition – what do we mean by 'religious language', and does our answer presuppose that there is something which religious language is like? In terms of our expectations, Uhlenbeck and Wittgenstein argue that we should not approach words or sentences as individual objects which can be removed from their context and examined as if they contain their own inherent meaning, but that their meaning and identity are inseparable from their contextual environment. This suggests that the 'religious' aspect of 'religious language' might exist within a broader spectrum of beliefs, practices, customs and contexts, which a narrow study of language or linguistics struggles to access. Uhlenbeck observes that,

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[26] We need to be able to identify both the object language which we are tasked with learning (religious language as opposed to moral language) as well as objects which can be named by religious language (such as the objects of religious belief).

[27] This presumption will be scrutinized in S1. C3 & C4.

[28] If religious sentences are described as 'talk about God', then we should expect everything said *about* God to be religious, but that does not seem to hold e.g., 'God is 6ft tall' or 'if God does not exist then there should not be a universe either'.

> Every sentence needs to be interpreted in the light of various extra-linguistic data. These data are (1) the situation in which the sentence is spoken (2) the preceding sentences, if any (3) the hearer's knowledge of the speaker and the topics which might be discussed by him; in other words the hearer must know the frame of reference of the speaker in order to arrive at the correct interpretation, that is the interpretation intended by the speaker. (Uhlenbeck 1963: p. 11).

Thus, the study cannot be performed as an isolated activity where each individual sentence is treated as its own self-contained utterance. Instead, we must approach each religious sentence with the appreciation of it being part of a broader system; we must know about the context in which the sentence is uttered, the other sentences which exist around it (both before and even after it), and the topics, interests and opinions which the speaker might have as their subject. Hence why religious sentences are described as being found in religious situations like ritual or prayer, in religious locations, or due to having a religious topic such as a religious belief, attitude or opinion (Scott 2017). Wittgenstein also emphasises the importance of knowing the context in which a sentence is located, especially in terms of hearing the sentence amongst those which precede it – indeed, when removed from that context 'I don't know what it's about. But all the same I should know how this sentence might perhaps be used; I could myself invent a context for it.' (Wittgenstein 1994: §525). These views are not limited to linguistics or the philosophy of language, or as if developed separately to the study of religious language and then haphazardly applied, for even Ninian Smart emphasises that, 'it is impossible to understand a given religious utterance or belief without paying attention to the range of utterances or beliefs it goes with, and these in turn have to be understood in the milieu of religious practice, etc.' (Smart 1969b: p. 226).

Due to the overlapping nature of language and context, if someone claims to know the meaning of a religious sentence then they are unavoidably claiming to know something about the situation, the sentences which exist around it, and what the speaker might want to talk about. This raises a different kind of problem – if our understanding of a religious language depends on our identification of it; and if identification depends on us having knowledge about its situations, context and purpose; and if our knowledge about those things can only come in consequence of understanding the language, then we will never understand the language. To better appreciate this paradoxical outcome, we should consider whether it is appropriate to base the identity of a sentence on the nature of its domain of meaning. We can describe this domain in several ways and indicate its existence, and in doing so we should demonstrate that this identification process is compatible

with how we currently identify sentences as religious. To do this, we need to explore Ryle's knowledge-that and knowledge-how.

Ryle distinguishes two kinds of knowledge: knowledge-*that* London is the capital of England and the knowledge-*how* to ride a bicycle, the former being propositional and factual whilst the latter is dispositional and more like a skill. Developing on Gardener's initial work, Ryle distinguishes language from speech, where language is the system, 'stock, fund or deposit of words, constructions, intonations, cliché phrases and so on', whilst speech or discourse is the activity of doing things with language (Gardiner 1951) & (Ryle 1971: p. 54). In combination, one's capacity to speak a language or meaningfully use a word involves (but is not reducible to) knowledge-that it possesses *this* definition or *that* grammatical feature; it is in fact more accountable to a know-how which we pick up when mastering language (Ryle 1971: p. 55). This allows us to approach the question of what 'religious language' means to pick out in the world with the perspective that the answer may be found in our know-how of metalanguage and not our knowledge-that 'religious language' is defined as such-and-such. The term 'religious language' is an English philosophical term which is used to refer towards the object language of our study, making it a term of the metalanguage. Therefore, an analysis of how we use that term might cast light on what an object must be like to warrant its use. But as we cannot divorce the meaning of 'religious language' from the context in which it is used, then it is likely that we only know how to use the term within a familiar contextual environment. In effect, if studying our knowledge for how to use the term 'religious language' is informative about what constitutes a religious language, then the fact that we only know how to use the term within a Western English speaking analytic philosophical contextual environment significantly limits the range of candidate object languages which we could apply the term to. Ideally, we would have a method which maintains our know-how but avoids excluding those religions and languages which we are not familiar with, and Quine's field linguist is featured in *Word and World* is arguably the most plausible route to take towards these ends (Quine 1960).

Quine suggests that we should imagine ourselves amongst a tribe who are speaking an unrecognised language which we are tasked with learning, and we are not permitted to assume any knowledge or facts about the language other than those which are necessary for us to recognise it as a human language (Morris 2007: p. 195). Unlike Quine who has an unknown *host*-language in mind, we are targeting the *hosted* language and not the language *which hosts*, and so although the field linguist is not permitted to assume anything about the object language, they are permitted to assume some things about the host-language. For example, if we were to inform the field linguist

that the following sentence is religious 'God made the World' then in virtue of understanding English they can make some limited observations of it appearing to report a fact, that 'made' is a verb, 'the' is a denominator, 'world' might mean 'earth' etc., but they cannot assume that the reason for why it is religious is because it talks about 'God' or that the creation of the world would be a religious event.

As we want to avoid presuming that all religions and languages are essentially the same, the field linguist cannot assume that all religious languages are like Christianity's; that every religion prays and uses language in the same way whilst praying; that all religious use religious language cognitively or non-cognitively; that all languages are religious for the same reasons or have their meaning accountable to the same theories. The purpose of the field linguist hypothetical is to prevent us from applying those sorts of beliefs, presumptions or opinions onto the subject matter *prior* to having reason to think that those factors make an object language deserving of the reference 'religious language'. Even if the field linguist knew that content makes a sentence religious, they have no idea what that content might be like (Winch 1977: pp. 198-200). The field linguist does not want to be told which sentences are religious and which are not, but rather taught *how to find out for themself.* They seek something which we call 'discoverability' – they seek some method which allows them to 'discover' the religious aspect of a sentence or language, and if they already possess it then they want to have it brought to the forefront of their mind. The hypothetical reveals that any description of 'religious language' which depends on possessing either (i) prior knowledge about the religion and its language or (ii) the ability to understand the language, is insufficient for the field linguist because it does not lead them to *discover* the religious element of the language in question. Call this the *Field Linguist Paradox*:

a) if the identification of a religious language requires knowledge of the religion, and
b) if knowledge of the religion is only gained through understanding its language,
c) then the field linguist will never come to know anything about the religion or its language.

This paradox also highlights that we implicitly presuppose a criterion for what constitutes as a religious language or sentence whenever we claim to have located one and have an account for its meaning. There are at least two cooccurring presupposed criterions: one which we must possess to identify an example in the first instance, and another which comes about during the development of an account for the sentence's meaning. Ideally, the two will correspond but there could be occasions where the presupposed criterion which allowed us to identify a sentence as religious is

challenged by the presuppositions which an account for its meaning may carry. For example, I might initially identify 'Jesus died for our sins' as religious because of its cognitive content, but after further study I might adopt a non-cognitive theory for its meaning and find myself at odds with the reason I had for its identification. I must establish a method for *discovering* the 'religious' element of language which lets me identify and explain the meaning of token sentences *without* falling victim to the field linguist paradox.

The most plausible way of doing this is to use what we already have: we have knowledge-that a religious language can be hosted in the same language as is used for a metalanguage, and so we can infer that our know-how of it is broadly applicable. For example, if the sorts of sentences which are currently described as being religious are religious, then we also know that those sentences are hosted in English and typically studied in English, meaning that we might know enough English to make some limited sense of it (Wittgenstein 1970: p. 55). To these ends, the field linguist's understanding of English allows them to understand some of the following:

> The following sentence is a religious sentence – 'hqiwrh wevbcuw qnvkr;q'.

Quine observes that despite not knowing that 'gavagai' means rabbit the field linguist has sufficient know-how to associate an object with a word when a person consistently points it out and makes the same sound, and so too can our field linguist understand that 'hqiwrh wevbcuw qnvkr;q' has been pointed out and called 'religious' (Quine 1960: pp. 28-29). The field linguist cannot make sense of that sentence for two reasons: they cannot understand the *host*-language and they cannot understand its 'religious meaning', but this does not mean that they will never know why the sentence is religious. It could be religious because of how it looks, who said it or where it is located, factors which are involved with language and can be noticed by those who cannot understand the language.[29] But if the chief determiner for whether an utterance is religious is its putatively religious content, then not only is an inability to understand the host-language a serious barrier for detecting its religious status, but the presumption that *such-and-such* is a word which references a religious subject matter falls victim to the field linguist paradox.[30]

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[29] E.g., my knowledge-that I am in France or Germany does not depend on my understanding of French or German, in fact my knowledge-that I am in Paris or Berlin is likely part of the reason for why I have identified these unknown languages as French and German in contrast to Mandarin and Norse.

[30] This is particularly pertinent because the content of a sentence is arguably the most popular method for judging the religious status of a sentence.

Naturally, things would be different if the field linguist knew the language which *hosts* the religious sentence, and there are two notable ways for how this can happen – that the metalanguage and the host-language are the *same* language (i.e., both are English), or the metalanguage and the host-language are different languages which the field linguist can nonetheless understand (e.g., Latin and German). As a language can be deeply associated with a religion whilst not being what we mean to mark with the term 'religious language' (such as the *religiolects* of Yiddish and Judaism, or Pennsylvania Dutch and the Amish),[31] we need to avoid any unfortunate overlaps between the religious language and the religious connotations of a religiolect which is used as a host or metalanguage. For example, Solomon begins his introduction to Judaism with the pertinent reminder that,

> The English language is not neutral. It evolved in a Christian civilization; it comes ready loaded with a cargo of Christian concepts and assumptions. As Christianity was born out of a conflict within first-century Judaism, and defined itself as against Judaism, it is difficult from within a Christian culture and language to look at Judaism with the innocence you might look at, say, Shinto or Buddhism… If you find yourself asking questions like, 'What do Jews believe about Jesus?', or 'What is more important in Judaism, faith or works?', you have got off on the wrong footing; you are approaching Judaism with cultural baggage imported from Christianity. You will find answers to some questions of this kind in this book, but they will not help you to comprehend Judaism *as Judaism understands itself*, from within. (Solomon 2000: p. 1).

Solomon's warning also underscores that one's know-how of English cannot be entirely separated from religious language because religious terms, metaphors, phrases and expressions are so common and deeply entrenched in everyday language that it is almost a fool's errand to try and pull the religion out. Moreover, we must respect the limitations and implications of translating the Hebrew which *hosts* the Jewish religious language into English, as well as utilising English rather than Hebrew for a metalanguage. Similar caution must be taken to avoid using the terms of a different religion when one translates between host-languages, for example, we should not mistakenly think that 'soul' is the English translation of 'Atman' or than 'Heaven' is the English for 'Nirvana' – a translation like that is more a shift in religion than it is a shift in linguistics. The very concept of religion and language varies between religious and philosophical systems of thought, and if we want to study the breadth and depth of religious language (and not just English-speaking contemporary Christianity), then we need to be as inclusive to religious diversity as possible. Accordingly, we need to recognise that the field linguist is not always *within* the language

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[31] Cf. Frey for a detailed discussion about the 'triple-talk' of the Amish religious community featuring Dutch, English and High German, and their occasional struggle to distinguish them apart (Frey 1945).

community which they are tasked with studying but are instead *outside* of it, and this raises its own advantages and disadvantages as outlined in Pike's emic-etic distinction –

> an Emic [standpoint] is in essence valid for only one language (or one culture) at a time... It is an attempt to discover and to describe the pattern of that particular language or culture in reference to the way in which the various elements of that culture are related to each other in the functioning of the particular pattern, rather than an attempt to describe them in reference to a generalized classification derived in advance of the study of that culture. (Pike 1954: p. 8).

An emic approach is therefore a study of the *internal affairs* of a culture or language, where, for example, the terms, ideas, concepts and traditions are understood in their own context without need to classify them through a preconceived system of thought. Whilst,

> An etic analytical standpoint ... might be called 'external' or 'alien', since for etic purposes the analyst stands 'far enough away' from or 'outside' of a particular culture to see its separate events, primarily in relation to their similarities and their differences, as compared to events in other cultures, rather than in reference to the sequences of classes of events within that one particular culture. (Pike 1954: p. 10).

As 'the emic standpoint represents the view from within the foreign system (language or culture) i.e., an intra-cultural understanding, while the etic represents the view from outside i.e., an intercultural understanding', the field linguist can be described as caught between both (Gothóni 1981: p. 30). They are not a member of the object language community but they are a member of the host-language community, and so they are an outsider (etic) to the religious language but an insider (emic) to the common host-language. If it turned out that a language can only be identified as religious from *within* the context of the community of speakers (an emic perspective), then a field linguist will be hard pressed to ever offer a satisfying account – they are in no place to *see* it as religious, less still understand it. As put by Nielsen,

> The *emic* (inside) *meaning* of a religious tradition is a description of that tradition by its adherents using their own language and their own categories and systems of organization… In practice, most investigators use *etic* (outside) *interpretive categories* devised within their scholarly disciplines in addition to emic categories… Emic and etic approaches can be complementary and mutually corrective. (N. Nielsen 1983: p. 6).

Whatever the 'religious' element of language is, it is likely to be emic – it would be odd to suggest that the religiousness of a language is not an *internal* feature of the community – and so the question is whether that element can be identified, accessed and understood from an etic perspective. If we can identify religious sentences without being able to describe them in advance (that a person *knows* 'Have peace, for God forgives the sinner' is religious despite being unable to

describe its religious elements) then we have good reason to believe that we already possess the means to identify it. Hence, our 'problems are solved, not by giving new information, but by arranging what we have always known' and once we 'arrange what already lies before us in a certain way' we should *discover* what it is we have meant all along (Wittgenstein 1994: §109) & (D. Z. Phillips 1976: p. 111). A satisfying account will offer a criterion for what constitutes 'religious language' which tracks our already presupposed standards as revealed in the commonality of our descriptions, and the most plausible avenue for reaching this is via our grammatical know-how of English and its use in meta and host-languages. To see this, let us re-examine the following sentence –

'The phrase '*Dead to Sin, Alive in Christ*' is an example of a religious sentence.'

The fact that the whole sentence is in the same language reveals that there is some linguistic consistency which is shared by the meta, host and object language; but there is more than just *linguistic* consistency – 'Dead to Sin, Alive in Christ' makes sense *as* an example of a religious sentence. Our know-how of English provides a grasp for what 'religious sentence' could mean as a term and 'Dead to Sin, Alive in Christ' seems to comply with that; there is something *about* that phrase which matches what the grammar of the proposition 'this is an example of a religious sentence' implies. This is in effect an expansion of Wittgenstein's remark that, 'Grammar tells what kind of object anything is. (Theology as grammar)' (Wittgenstein 1994: §373). Wittgenstein observes that the *way* by which we speak reveals the way by which we think of any given subject matter, therefore studying the grammar of religious language provides information about the objects which token sentences talk about, likewise, studying the grammar of the metalanguage discourse *about* religious language provides information about the object language called 'religious language'. This shares Bambrough's interpretation that,

> Wittgenstein says that grammar tells us what kind of object anything is. 'Theology as grammar' therefore presumably tells us what kind of object God is, and what it is for God to will or create or to answer men's prayers. (Bambrough 1977: p. 16).

To better explore this, let us begin with two remarks by Wittgenstein in *Zettel*:

> The soul is said to *leave* the body. Then, in order to exclude any similarity to the body, any sort of idea that some gaseous thing is meant, the soul is said to be incorporeal, non-spatial; but with the word "leave" one has already said it all. Shew me *how* you use the word "spiritual" and I shall see whether the soul is non-corporeal and what you understand by "spirit". (Wittgenstein 2004: §127).

And,

> '"You can't hear God speak to someone else, you can hear him only if you are being addressed".--That is a grammatical remark. (Wittgenstein 2004: §717).

§127 identifies two things: *if* we say that the soul 'leaves' the body then the grammar of that sentence forces us to presuppose that the soul is associated with, though separate from, the body within which it exists. Second, the speaker notices these grammatical presuppositions and questions whether they want to endorse them or reject them as beliefs. In this example, they want to reject the implication that in order to 'leave the body' the soul must be corporeal, physical, gaseous or biological, and so they specify that the soul is in fact incorporeal and non-spatial. This shows that the link between the grammar of a sentence and the beliefs which an individual has about the object which the sentence speaks about is so prevalent that we often reveal what we believe about an object by endorsing or avoiding certain grammatical implications rather than speaking directly about the object itself. For Wittgenstein, hearing a person say that the soul 'leaves' the body tells us more about their beliefs than their clarification that the soul is non-spatial – it tells us that their beliefs are *not* like ordinary beliefs.

§717 proposes a much stronger link between the grammar of a sentence, the belief which the sentence expresses, and theology – it makes grammatical sense *in English* to say such a thing about you hearing what God said to someone else, but Wittgenstein clarifies that it makes no *religious sense*. It is not false but *nonsensical* to say that you can hear what God has said to someone else, just like how it is nonsensical to say that you saw what I dreamt last night – it is not that I can prove you wrong, it is that what the term 'dream' means is something which *cannot be spoken of in that way*.[32] The unique feature of Wittgenstein's interpretations is that they possess a method of discoverability – it is *not* that Wittgenstein presupposes facts about religion in order to identify a religious sentence, but that our understanding of the host-language provides us with the means to see for ourselves when something unusual is happening with language. Hence, we know how to speak English well enough to recognise that someone is saying something extraordinary about the implications of the sentence 'the soul leaves the body' when they specify that *despite* what that means they mean something else by it. What exactly this 'else' is must be assumed as the 'religious domain of meaning', and if there is some sensible way to access that domain within that sentence

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[32] For the sake of the reader, it may be fruitful to appreciate that the point being made here has been made elsewhere regarding similar topics, particularly by Cora Diamond who claims that part of what we mean to mark by the term 'human' is *something which we do not kill and eat* (C. Diamond 1978).

which we seem to be blind to, then we are saying that there *is* a religious language accountable to a peculiar use of a host-language. We could in effect summarise this view as follows: our grammatical know-how of the English host-language allows us to notice when there is an extraordinary use of grammar and this is taken as indicative of it capturing an equally unusual domain of meaning – therefore we can say that our know-how of *surface grammar* allows us to identify cases of *depth grammar*, and the latter is the business of religious language (Wittgenstein 1994: §664) & (D. Z. Phillips 1967c: p. 2).[33]

By 'grammar' Wittgenstein does not mean to be understood in the general linguistic sense which involves talk about adverbs etc., but in a more narrow sense in terms of the relationship between words and their meaning – the grammar of a language is the 'logic' or 'meaning' or 'sense' behind it (Grayling 2001: pp. 80-81). To ask for the grammar of a sentence is to ask for the reasoning which makes the sentence make sense – and there is a distinction between surface and depth grammar. Surface grammar is the immediate face-value logic of a sentence like 'I own a house' whilst depth grammar captures a more complex and sophisticated sense of meaning in part due to its contextual role in the life of the speaker, such as seen in the sentence, 'you have a house, but I have a home'. The notion of *home* is more complex than that of house because, broadly put, the aesthetic appearance of houses changes across culture whilst their function remains constant, but what we *mean* by a home is far more deeply rooted. A great deal of philosophical confusion, in Wittgenstein's opinion, results from mixing surface and depth grammar together, such as where we *fail to grasp* a deeper message within an utterance, or contrarily believe that more is being said than what is. The reasons for why Wittgenstein describes the utterance in §717 as a grammatical remark rather than a scientific fact is because he acknowledges that there is a grammar (a logic) to the language which deals with God, and unless one is aware of that logic then one is unable to appreciate how the sentence is grammatical rather than factual. Being unable to hear God speak to someone else has *nothing* to do with one's eavesdropping skills but everything to do with the logic of the language. Similarly, §127 observes how the implications which arise from a surface grammar reading of the word 'leaves' is at odds with the depth grammar behind the religious language tradition – spirits are *not* treated as some gaseous substance and yet 'leaves the body' implies that it is. Here we might say that a person is running up against the boundaries of their own language, and in this respect the study of religious language is a study of those boundaries.

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[33] This will be detailed in the following chapters.

The best reason we have for suspecting that such a domain of meaning exists which is linked with the grammar of a host-language is the fact that despite us not know what it is, we can nonetheless discover it in virtue of knowing-how to talk about it. This is vividly expressed by Howard Lesnick;

> When we attended Mass as a family for the first time with Carolyn's parents, and I suddenly felt the need to say something explanatory to our children when their grandparents rose to join most of the others present, but not us, at the Communion rail, I was able - because I gave the question no prior thought at all - simply to say, "Catholics believe that, at the moment that they take the cracker and the wine, they come into contact with God." I immediately thought to myself, is *this* the doctrine that has for centuries been so profound a source of alienation and rancor, so tragic a source of oppression and death? (Lesnick 1993: p. 321).

Lesnick presented a simplified explanation for what people were doing around him and his children because he believed that his children would not be able to understand the complexities of such ancient rituals, but this caused him to realise that there *is more to it* than drinking wine and eating crackers. Lesnick could not *see* the deeper meaning; he had reason to suspect that it was there, but he couldn't directly grasp it. His suspicion of there being more meaning than what he was accessing came in response to the triviality of his talk juxtaposed with the seriousness of the actions of those around him: the word 'cracker' falls so short of capturing the meaning which we think others are accessing that it appears comical and the thought that eating a cracker and drinking some wine can establish a cosmic connection with a divine entity is equally absurd. This forces Lesnick to decide what is more likely; that these otherwise sensible people are acting so seriously and willing to cause such conflict over *the crackers and wine which Lesnick can see*, or that they can see something more than what Lesnick can? This is a question of honesty and not 'truth' per se; short of calling these people liars and proposing that billions of people for thousands of years throughout hundreds of civilizations have concocted various schemes which they all know are *false and make-believe*, we have no alternative but to conclude that these people *must* be experiencing something different, something more serious than what talk about crackers and wine captures. This domain of meaning, experience and belief is at least part of what we mean to mark by the term 'religious', thus religious language is the medium of communication which captures this domain. This avenue of thought leads to similar conclusions as reached by people like Winch. For example, we say that music means nothing to some people whilst it means the world to others, and we also say that talk about music can fall on deaf ears for those who do not care, likewise, 'there are many to whom the language of religion means nothing' and many more who happily wave it away as nonsense (Winch 1977: p. 204).

Lesnick is not a person to whom religion means nothing – he describes himself as open to various religions and having experienced the spiritualities of Judaism, Catholicism and Buddhism – but he does recognise that there is something more to Communion than what he could seriously claim to know about (Lesnick 1993: p. 322). To say that there is more than what Lesnick can access is to say that there is a domain of meaning which he can identify but not understand; he identifies it because he knows that such oppression, terror and pain has been caused due to Communion, but he cannot understand it because he only sees crackers and wine. There must, then, be more to it – our surface grammar allows us to *notice* when more needs to be said but we cannot say it, and that is a matter of depth grammar. The same can be said about the field linguist – that our identification of the object language is gained in virtue of our know-how of the host-language. But in any case, without knowing what exactly constitutes a religious sentence we cannot directly analyse its grammar – we can however study the grammar of the metalanguage discourse *about* the object language and if Wittgenstein is correct, this will reveal what the object language must be like. This appears to be a plausible route for the field linguist to take because their know-how of English should allow them to identify grammatical changes such as to signal that something in *addition* is going on. The best way to show this is by noticing how the current theories for the meaning of religious sentences presuppose some additional standard which is most plausibly accounted for through our know-how of the grammar of the shared host and metalanguage.

The crux of this thesis is that the study of religious language has failed to reach a satisfying account for the meaning of religious sentences because each proposed theory fails to capture what is meant by the term 'religious language' or 'religious sentence' – in essence, the theories fail to justify the identity of the objects of its study. To evidence this diagnosis, we will examine how the study of religious language has presupposed a criterion for what constitutes a religious language without having clearly laid it out. The remedy for this is to lay out what we already have before us so that we can see what allows us to identify a sentence as religious, and in doing so we shall discover that it is accountable to our grammatical know-how of the host-language.[34]

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[34] Our know-how of the host-language's surface grammar allows us to notice sentences which appear to express more meaning than what surface grammar can capture, and this domain of meaning is the depth grammar of religious language. It is still an open question as for whether the depth grammar *is* what religious language is, or whether depth grammar is merely associated with religious language.

S1. C2. Religious Language: Content and Context

This thesis asks, 'what do *we mean* by 'religious language'?' and argues that any answer which presupposes knowledge about the religion and its language is unsatisfactory. Religious sentences are generally taken to possess a subject matter which is commonly supposed as being 'religious'. As a subject matter is typically determinable to the content or the context of and utterance, the dominant approaches within the study target sentences due to what they say and how they say it. This presupposes some standard for what constitutes 'religion' as well as some ability to read the sentences so to access its content, things which the field linguist paradox and the problem of the criterion are known to challenge. The problem is that the study does not directly address this presupposed standard and instead aims to explain the meaning of sentences which fit that *type* of description. This does not deny anything – religious language might be language used to talk about religious topics – but this needs to be proved and not assumed or based upon common supposition and custom (Winch 1977: p. 200). This chapter shows that the contemporary study tries to form a general account for the meaning of sentences which are commonly supposed as being religious without any further explanation for that classification, and in consequence, Face Value theories, Non-cognitivism, Expressivism and Moderate Attitude Theories fall short of being sufficient general accounts. We will conclude that what *we commonly suppose* a 'religious sentence' to be is in fact our *know-how* of English guiding us to reference the religious domain of meaning with the term 'religious language'.

If the study does not analyse what makes a sentence religious but instead relies on common supposition, then we should expect to find the study targeting sentences which have been deemed religious only because they fit some commonly shared supposition. Moreover, assuming that the descriptions on offer are accurate, that religious sentences usually talk about such-and-such in this context and for that purpose, then we should expect any sufficient account for what constitutes a religious sentence to consistently track the descriptions on offer. The field linguist paradox, the need to be inclusive for religious diversity and the problem of the criterion require an account to have minimal presuppositions and the power to lead one to discover not merely what makes something religious but what it means to be religious. If our know-how of surface grammar lets us notice when a sentence begins to host an additional domain of depth grammar meaning which is what we intend to mark with the term 'religious', then upon discovering this dimension within a sentence we are also discovering that this sentence is token of a religious type. With this in mind, we find that the study attempts to explain the meaning of only those sentences which fit some

commonly supposed description, and we find that out grammatical know-how of English allows us to notice when a sentence's grammar alters and thereby indicates the presence of an additional domain of meaning and when this happens, the sentences fit the commonly supposed descriptions. Finally, if it is the case that a sentence is said to be religious when it is discovered to possess a religious dimension of meaning as noticed on account of one's grammatical know-how then it should be compatible with the field linguist paradox, in possession of 'discoverability', and avoids the problem of the criterion; we shall see that it does all these things, making it a robust position.

Scott summarises that 'the principal aim of research on religious language is to give an account of the meaning of religious sentences and utterances', thus it is evident that the classification of a sentence as religious is of paramount importance (Scott 2017). The sort of thing which Scott reports himself and others to have in mind when they speak of religious sentences are captured by the explanation,

> Religious sentences are generally taken to be have [sic] a religious subject matter; a religious utterance is the production in speech or writing of a token religious sentence. In principle, religious subject matters could encompass a variety of agents, states of affairs or properties—such as God, deities, angels, miracles, redemption, grace, holiness, sinfulness. Most attention, however, has been devoted to the meaning of what we say about God. (Scott 2017).

Scott's phrasing that religious sentences are *generally* taken to possess a religious subject matter leaves room for alternative classifications based on context, function or attitude, however the study's focus on the meaning of talk *about God* is indicative of the sorts of motivations which lie behind the study. Furthermore, those who take part in the study of religious language

> are looking to give a general account of the meaning of religious sentences. Religious sentences are sentences with a religious subject matter, i.e. they concern supernatural agents (God, other deities, angels, etc.), the actions of such agents (miracles, creation, redemption, etc.), and supernatural properties and states of affairs (holiness, heaven and hell, etc.). (Scott 2010: p. 505).

Most of the study's attention has been directed towards sentences which talk *about* God, and this indicates the sort of sentence which the discussion understands to be 'religious' as well as the sorts of goals which the study has.[35] We can talk about God in several ways, and if the only thing which makes a sentence religious is that it is about God then anything said about God would be deemed

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[35] Indeed, some authors use the term 'God-Talk' rather than 'religious language' for this reason e.g., (Blackstone 1966), (Daher 1976), (K. Nielsen 1970) & (Dann 2002).

religious, perhaps even this sentence, but this is likely not what Scott means to say. Scott most likely has sentences like 'God is Love' (1 John 4:8) and 'The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding' (Proverbs 9:10) in mind, but there is some uncertainty as for whether the following would be deemed *religious* –

> The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully. (Dawkins 2007: p. 31).

Dawkins is talking about the object referred to as 'God' in the Old Testament and so his talk must count as 'talk about God', but it does not appear to be deserving of the reference 'religious' in the way which 'Lord forgive me, a sinner' does. In further detail, Scott breaks down religious language, sentences and utterances as follows – a religious utterance is 'the production in speech or writing of a *token* religious sentence', and therefore a religious sentence is *token* of the religious *type* of language. Now, if what makes a sentence *token* of a religious sort is the subject matter as expressed by its content then any talk about God is definitionally religious but this is not what we (nor Scott) means by the term 'religious language', hence the claim that the *true* object of our study is *that* which is implied by our grammatical know-how of the term[36] (Lacey 1996: p. 370) & (Wetzel 2018). This is voiced by Nielsen who declares it a linguistic fact that 'utterances are not religious simply because words like 'God' are used in them', and this leads towards two interpretations (K. Nielsen 1982: pp. 1-3). Firstly, and most obviously, there is more to classification than content, such as context, function, intention or sense; secondly and less obviously, there is more to a religious sentence than its observable features, which is to say that there is a *quality* to a religious sentence in comparison to a sentence about religion.[37] However, we can ask each interpretation as for whether Nielsen *means to be understood as saying* that there are other descriptions of what religious sentences look like which do not focus on the term 'God' and whether there is something which a religious sentence is like and inclusion of the term 'God' is not necessary. In the case of Nielsen, it seems evident that he will reject the belief of there being a 'special religious language with its own special dimension of meaning' in virtue of believing that,

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[36] It would be untimely to conclude at this point that the object language is a grammatical construction of metalanguage, but it is sufficient to acknowledge that the description of a religious sentence *comes after* the initial identification, and descriptions are not accounts nor explanations for how we have made the identification.

[37] Similar to Lesnick's sensation of there being more to Mass than what he was accessing, we might also be 'sensing' that there is more to 'religious language' than what a nonreligious speaker can access – but there is a great deal of contention about *what* is being sensed and *how* we 'sense' it.

it is not merely the case that there are no sound arguments for the existence of God and that the claims of religious experience give us no good evidential grounds for belief in God but that no such arguments or evidencings [sic] could do anything of the sort, for the very concept of God, where 'God' is construed non-anthropomorphically, is incoherent. (K. Nielsen 1989: p. 2).

And yet, Nielsen supports the so called 'Wittgensteinian Fideists' insofar as he agrees that utterances like 'there are twenty-three, or thirty-one, or thirteen Prime Movers' are *not* religious despite being about God and not being meta-statements e.g., they are not statements about statements about God (K. Nielsen 1982: pp. 2-12). This thesis proposes that the sense of Nielsen's point is best appreciated when we treat a religious sentence as an utterance possessing a religious domain of meaning.[38] Sentences like 'there are twelve Prime Movers' are not religious and the reason for this being so is *not* accountable to it failing to talk about God or somehow falling outside of the religious context, but because there is no discernible 'religious' dimension to its meaning. Chatterjee's distinction between religious language and theological discourse expands the meta-statement category and helps us better grasp the sense of identifying a sentence as religious due to it having a religious dimension of meaning:

> The first mistake [of the study] was the identification of religious language with theological discourse. The theologian needs to clarify his own discourse and this is something which in fact theologians do themselves, in each generation. This leaves the philosopher of religion 'religious language' in senses outside the realm of theology. (Chatterjee 1974: p. 474).

According to Chatterjee, theological discourse is the specialist language used by the religious to study their own faith and potentially their own religious language, and it makes use of terms like 'Benediction' and 'sensus divinitatis' which are unique to the religious community but are not themselves 'religious'.[39] Victoria Harrison all but acknowledges this where she opts to refer to 'religious language' as first-order and 'theological discourse' as second-order; theological discourse is the discourse *about* the religious language in an equivalent metalinguistic sense (Harrison 2007: ft. 2). In this system, the following would be classified as metalanguage theological discourse *about* the study's object language – 'God should not be said to be ineffable, for when this is said something is said. And a contradiction in terms is created, since if that is ineffable which cannot be spoken, then that is not ineffable which is called ineffable' (Augustine 1958: pp. 10-11). Although the utterance is obviously not 'religious' it is not obvious whether that is because all talk about religious language is theological and irreligious, or whether it just so happens that most religious do

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[38] Cf. (Ellis 2021) for a more detailed description of this domain of meaning and its direct relevance for our understanding of religious belief, faith and language.
[39] Cf. S4. C1.

not use religious language to talk *about* their religious language. Harrison shares a similar view and describes religious language as Scott does,

> "religious language", as employed by religious scholars in the everyday sense, refers to the written and spoken language typically used by religious believers when they talk about their religious beliefs and their religious experiences. The term also covers the language used in sacred texts and in worship and prayer. (Harrison 2007: pp. 127-128).

This certainly captures what the study treats 'religious language' as being and its emphasis on how the term is deployed by religious scholars in an everyday sense underscores its metalinguistic context, but in virtue of this it cannot be understood as a sufficient criterion for what constitutes as a 'religious language'. Harrison's description would not suffice as the sort of explanation which we are after because its need to presuppose features of religious belief falls victim to the field linguist paradox and the problem of the criterion (Harrison 2007).[40] Moreover, Harrison's summary of religious language (as understood in the everyday *metalanguage* of the religious scholar) can be applied to sentences which are not religious because of their content but potentially because of their context, function or utility. This examples the most obvious interpretation of Nielsen whilst furthering Scott's additional description of 'religious language' being applicable to a broader scope of utterances, like '*The Song of Songs* [which] has little in the way of distinctively religious content, [but] it could be included in the field because of its place within a religious canon.' (Scott 2017).[41] But utterances like these are rarely studied because they are not expected to offer any information which addresses the philosopher's primarily epistemological interests. Although the *Song of Songs* and sentences like 'please kneel' are rarely studied for those reasons, there might be historical, cultural or anthropological factors which are relevant to their reportedly religious identity and meaning which are lost on contemporary readers, and so we should be mindful of this as well as other linguistic features of host and metalanguages. For example, if a philosopher is interested in belief claims about religious subject matters, then it is important for them to know the linguistic conventions which surround a language's use of divine names, referring expressions and nouns.

A host and/or metalanguage can have religiolectical features which are relevant to the identity and understanding of a religious sentence, and to illustrate, consider how the Torah was initially written

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[40] Harrison's first sentence comes with a footnote clarifying that she is presupposing a Semitic God, and so she means to be understood as discussing the religious language *which treats it* (Harrison 2007: p. 127).

[41] Benjamin Hary writes in support, observing that 'all of the Hebrew Bible is considered sacred, but its holiest part is the Torah, or the Five Books of Moses. Further, the Ten Commandments are more sacred than other parts of the Torah. Similarly, Genesis, the first book of the Torah, is more sacred than the Song of Songs, but the Song of Songs is still part of the Hebrew Bible, and so derives its sanctity from its inclusion in the sacred canon.' (Hary 2009: p. 54).

in Biblical Hebrew without vowels between consonants, causing the reader to take on the task of identifying the correct vowels for each word (Barton and Muddiman 2001: p. 7) & (Suchard 2020: p. 18).[42] The absence of written vowels is neither uncommon for Semitic languages nor a serious cause of confusion for fluent speakers who are aware of context and have an established reading culture, for example, although missing vowels, 'th ct n th mt' is easily understood as *the cat on the mat*. However, as the speaking population of Biblical Hebrew decreased the uncertainty about which vowels are inserted into which sentences began to increase, and debates sprung up as for whether 'th ct n th mt' was in fact, *the cut in the meat*. During this period, Hebrew scripture became taught on a word for word and passage by passage basis by experts called *Masoretes*, who went on to develop a written vowel system to help maintain an accurate reading and pronunciation of scripture (Suchard 2020: p. 18). This leads to the question of *which* version(s) of the Torah are the most authoritatively religious – those with or without the vowels, those of the oral or the written traditions, those in the Biblical Hebrew or Modern Hebrew etc.[43] Indeed, translations of Hebrew to English raise social-cultural challenges such as seen in the translation of Jeremiah 4:19. For the ancient Hebrew speaking community, one's bowels or intestines were the seat of the emotions (where the stomach is for English speaking communities), and so the *King James Version* which writes 'My bowels, my bowels!' although true, fails to convey the *sense of meaning* to the English speaker as seen in the *Revised Standard Version* of 'My anguish, my anguish!' (Craigie 2019: p. 28). Where Harrison speaks about the religious scholar's deployment of the term 'religious language' in the everyday sense, we should consider the everyday sense of the term as deployed by the *practitioner*. Take Bahnsen's specification that the religious speak religiously *all the time*, and so they have an 'everyday sense' of the term as well –

> [religious] discourse involves *talk* about God, immortality, miracles, salvation, prayer, values, ethics, etc. To speak of the existence or attributes of God, for example, is to make religious *utterances…* Christians are always talking "religiously" – in sermons, prayers, confessions, didactic lessons, catechisms, personal testimonies, songs, exclamations, counsel and encouragement, etc. (Bahnsen 2011: p. 127).

Although there are questions about whether Bahnsen understands religious language to be different from theological discourse due to him saying that an utterance about God *is* religious, the diverse scope of environments in which Bahnsen finds religious sentences to exist is considerable. Deeming *The Song of Songs* as religious only on account of it being in canon applies to other sentences like 'please kneel' or 'Amen', it does not so obviously apply to those utterances in the

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[43] These specific questions are addressed by Benjamin Hary in S3. C1.

context of giving counsel or encouragement. Bahnsen is considering the role of religious language in the context of the speaker's life rather than their physical location.[44] Religious subject matters are not closed off to a particular area of life or physical location in the world but are encountered throughout the entirety of each and so talking religiously is not reducible to talking about religious topics with theological terminology, but encompasses other realms of that individual's life, such as politics, law and economics.[45] Bahnsen's reminder of the everyday use of religious language by the language community furthers the Wittgensteinian approach[46] of this thesis which Mikel Burley sympathises with, 'if religiosity is a dimension of our everyday lives, then the study of religion too will involve such a return to the everyday.' (Burley 2012: p. 2). There is a sense, then, to saying that religious language and belief is 'special' in comparison to other modes of language and belief, but that does not require us to say that religious language is something magical or that religious beliefs are themselves mystical. This provides us with a better response to Wilson's question,

> The first thing to think about is what religion is supposed to *be*, and the best question to ask is, 'When Christians (or other religious believers) say that there's a God, or that God answers prayer, or that we ought to do what Christ tells us, what *sort* of thing are they saying?'. (Wilson 1968: p. 15).

The religious are saying an *emic* sort of thing when they speak religiously, or at least there is some meaning which cannot be captured by etic statements like 'Christians go to church on Sundays' or 'there are six Prime Movers'. Our skills in English are not letting us down – in fact, it's those skills which allow us to suspect that something more is being said by 'God exists' than 'the object referenced by the following designator is in a positive state of being' – rather, it is that English skills alone do not provide access to the *emic* domain of meaning (Wittgenstein 1970: p. 58). Once more we find a relationship between distinguishing surface and depth grammar with nonreligious and religious meaning. Our (and Wilson's) know-how of English surface grammar lets us notice when a sentence is uttered in a grammatically atypical manner whilst still maintaining some discernible degree of meaning. For example, Wilson is not concerned with sentences like 'green clouds dream furiously' because *surface grammar* quickly reveals that the utterance is nonsensical – we say that *it is nonsensical to speak of those things in that* way; but the sentence 'God answers prayers' leaves us in doubt – we do not know whether it is grammatically sensible to say such a thing, and this causes us to question whether there is some depth grammar at play. The sentence

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[44] Cf. (D. Z. Phillips 1967a) & (Burley 2012: p. 3).
[45] Cf. (Wuthnow 2011: p. 3) for a good summary of sociological studies into the role of religious discourse in nonreligious settings.
[46] 'What we do is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use'. (Wittgenstein 1994: §116).

'God answers prayers' on the one hand holds surface grammar coherence – the object named 'God' performs the function signalled by the verb 'answers' in respect to the concept referenced by 'prayers' – but unlike 'green clouds dream furiously' where surface grammar shows it to be meaningless, we do not know whether it is meaningful or meaningless to speak of God *like that* because we do not know *the logic of the language* (Grayling 2001: pp. 80-81).

Part of the difficulty with understanding what people mean when they say 'God exists' or 'there will be a Judgement Day' is that the beliefs themselves do not appear to be like ordinary beliefs, and speakers appear to be doing more than assenting to their truth (Robinson 1968: p. 2). Robinson suggests that there is something performative to the religious sentence, akin to a proclamation, confession or declaration, things which people do not do when they say that they believe in Pythagoras's theorems.[47] Hick identifies a similar sort of link between the religious status of an utterance and the status of the belief which it reports, and asks 'do those religious statements which have the form of factual assertions (for example, "God loves mankind") refer to a special kind of fact – religious as distinguished from scientific fact – or do they fulfil a different function all together?' (Hick 1963: p. 78). It is for the moment unclear whether religious beliefs or facts are 'special', but they are understood as having a different kind of meaning, like how when someone says '"The Lord spake unto Joshua", it is not meant that God has a physical body with speech organs through which he sets in motion sound waves which impinged upon Joshua's eardrums' (Hick 1963: p. 78). The matter at hand is whether the additional domain of meaning which we suspect as present is separable from the words themselves,[48] because if they are separable then we should question the extent to which the religious domain of meaning is identifiable with language, but if they are not then we should question the sense by which we say (i) we can discern religious meaning whilst (ii) not knowing what the religious mean. The difference is not captured if we clarified that 'God spoke to Joshua through a non-natural non-human divine telegram which does not make use of bodily organs or particles', indeed saying *that* seems to miss the point. Perhaps *what it means* to say that God has spoken or that bread has become flesh, *is* the transition from the nonreligious to the religious domain of meaning hence the performative element to the declaration. The most compelling reason to suspect this is that the meaning of the religious sentence and its

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[47] This can be seen as a variation of *Attitude Theory*, which holds that the meaning of a religious utterance is at least in part accountable to the expressing of an attitude, disposition, feeling or opinion, and Robinson's observation of there being a performative element to speaking the utterance is indicative of this, such as how one may *declare judgement*, *cry out in celebration*, or *brazenly confess belief*.

[48] 'You say: the point isn't the word, but its meaning, and you think of the meaning as a thing of the same kind as the word, though also different from the word. Here the word, there the meaning. The money, and the cow that you can buy with it. (But contrast: money, and its use.)' (Wittgenstein 1994: §120).

belief are linked in such a manner that a shift in the grammar of the utterance is indicative of a shift in meaning. To see this as a plausible account as well as something which already occurs behind the scenes of the study, consider Wilson's question of whether the word 'changes' changes in the following sentences:

'Water changes to ice'

'The bread and wine changes into the body and blood of Christ'. (Wilson 1968: p. 17).

In one respect, we can read both sentences as essentially the same – such-and-such transforms into something else – but in another respect we acknowledge that the meaning of the two sentences appear quite different. The kind of change reported in the first sentence is natural, accountable to science and so common that we struggle to imagine a person to whom it would be informative for; the kind of change reported in the second however, is *not* natural, nor accountable to science and certainly informative for most people. Even if we were to treat the second sentence as *not* religious, we would nonetheless regard it as reporting something extraordinarily unusual and, potentially, disprovable – but such a reading seems to be of the mistaken variety which Hick speaks of in terms of understanding God as having speech organs. Although it is true that the word 'changes' seems to take on additional meaning when found in sentences like 'the bread and wine *changes* into flesh and blood', it is unclear whether it gains additional meaning *because* it is in a religious sentence or whether the sentence is religious because of the word's additional meaning. In consideration, Harrison asks that we

> Compare the word "passion" employed in the phrase "the passion of Christ" to its usage in the phrase "the passion of Henry for Annaïs." Notice that even if "passion" has two quite different meanings (or more), it is nevertheless one word.[49] (Harrison 2007: p. 128).

This is supported by the fact of it having a *host*-language and that the religious meaning of the sentence is accountable to the use of its own words, and not necessarily the creation of new ones. Harrison goes on to emphasise that there is no special 'religious' feature of language but rather a 'special' use of ordinary human language:

> Use of the term "religious language" might suggest that there is a special "religious" component of natural languages, which is easily distinguishable from the normal, secular component of these languages. This, however, is clearly not the case. For when believers

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[49] However, this awkwardly implies that a word is *not* what it means; so, although 'park' can name a place with trees or something which one does with their car, it is still 'one word'.

employ "religious language," they do not use completely different words to those uttered by their nonreligious contemporaries. (Harrison 2007: p. 128).

Harrison finds traction with Alston's claim that religious language is a *use* of a host-language and should not be allowed to mislead us into thinking that there is some 'magical language' out there in the world, whilst MacIntyre agrees that the religious mean to use the same host-language and often adopts the nonreligious meaning of those terms. Alston makes it explicit that,

> The term "religious language" is a special case of the bad habit of philosophers to speak of a special language for each terminology or broad subject matter… This evinces neglect of the crucial distinction between language and speech. The former is an abstract system that is employed primarily for communication, and the latter is that employment. What is erroneously called religious language is the use of language (any language) in connection with the practice of religion—in prayer, worship, praise, thanksgiving, confession, ritual, preaching, instruction, exhortation, theological reflection, and so on. (Alston 2004: p. 220).

This distinction between language and speech is like Ryle's where language is a conceptual system of symbols, standards, and phrases which are deployed in speech, and so 'religious language' is in fact a collection of stock phrases which are deployed in speech in certain contexts. This, though, is problematic because it fails to seriously address the field linguist paradox because it assumes that we all know what counts as a ritual, prayer, theological reflection and so forth, and can grasp the *religiosity* of it, but our field linguist cannot. Moreover, there is a questionable cycle with saying that an utterance is classifiable as religious because it is said in a prayer whilst also acknowledging that a prayer is religious because it is spoken in religious language. So, although we can agree that religious language makes use of a host-language and our know-how of that host-language allows us to identify sentences which meet certain descriptions as outlined by Scott and others, we cannot agree that that is the proper starting place of the study. MacIntyre takes Harrison's observation about 'passion' being the same word in English to its logical ends, describing that,

> the vast majority of such expressions, derive their sense from their use in other and nonreligious contexts. To praise, to love, to recount great deeds, to express awe: all these employ expressions which find their place in the fabric of everyday language. Nor does religion confer on such expressions a new and esoteric meaning. That this is so is shown by the insistence of theologians that certain particular expressions should be used in religious utterance, and not others. God is our Father, but not our Mother; loves us, but does not hate us; we are bound to obey him, not defy him; and so on. Father-Mother, love-hate, obey-defy: these conceptual contrasts are transferred with all their familiar meaning into our speech about God. (MacIntyre 1970: p. 165).

Showing his sympathies for Alston's stipulations, MacIntyre reaffirms that,

for most theological and biblical expressions there is not even a problem of decoding. Because most religious language utilizes familiar words with familiar meanings their sense is equally apparent to believer and unbeliever. Talk about 'the language of the Bible' or 'religious language' must not conceal from us that such language is nothing more nor less than Hebrew or English or what you will, put to a special use. (MacIntyre 1970: p. 166).

According to MacIntyre, although there are some unusual features of the religious *use* of language it is still the case that the religious have the same host-language as us: their English is the same as our English, and Hebrew is Hebrew. There is here a more pertinent point – even if there was a religion with its own exclusive language which is only used by priests in secret etc., that would still *in principle* be a host-language *unless we say that the language is inherently religious*. MacIntyre's position in this regard is limited because Catholic Dogma spells out that God *can* be meaningfully spoken about as a Father as well as a Mother, whilst in contrary to his second point, not only is it generally recognised amongst the world's religions that 'divine mystery cannot be fully contained in human words',[50] but there is a potential risk that MacIntyre's description of familiar words and familiar meanings might mislead us into thinking that a religious word *cannot* be familiar[51] (Catholic Church 2012: §239) & (Schaefer 2018: p. 29). As we know that MacIntyre is aware of at least some of these views it would be uncharitable to interpret him as saying that such views do not exist, and so we should instead understand him as saying that such views are somehow mistaken. That despite what some religions claim, Hebrew is Hebrew; religious language is not 'special' – it is ordinary, human language used in a special sort of way. Hick is willing to engage with MacIntyre on those terms, where he agrees that,

> It is also clear that in all those cases in which a word occurs both in secular and in theological contexts, its secular meaning is primarily in the sense that it developed first and has accordingly determined the definition of the word. The meaning which such a term bears when it is applied to God is an adaption of its secular use. Consequently, although the ordinary, everyday meaning of such words as "good", "loving", "forgives", "commands", "hears", "speaks", "wills", "purposes" is relatively unproblematic, the same terms raise a multitude of questions when applied to God. (Hick 1963: p. 79).

As such, 'it is obvious that many, perhaps all, of the terms which are applied in religious discourse to God are being used in special ways, different from their use in ordinary mundane contexts' but it is not obvious *how* that change happens or *how* we come to see it (Hick 1963: p. 78). When we look at those sentences which are described as being religious, we can see that something unusual is happening with their grammar, but we cannot see the sort of meaning which we suspect

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[50] Also consider how Otto 'uses language in order to explain what cannot be said in language' (McPherson 1969: p. 136).
[51] Surely, we are just as familiar (or perhaps more so) with 'sin' or 'heaven', than 'dark energy' or 'neutron star'.

accompanies that sort of grammar; we notice a shift in language, but we cannot quite catch the shift in meaning. Thus, when Wilson asks the following, he should recognise that he faces a similar dilemma to what Lesnick faced –

> The real difficulty isn't to know whether it is true or false, but what it can possibly *mean*. You can ask religious people what they mean, but I personally don't think that they have given any clear reply on this point. This may show that they don't mean anything – that they're just stringing words together for their own amusement – or it might show that they mean something different from what they appear to mean. This is the problem. (Wilson 1968: p. 17).

What is more likely; that the religious do not know what they mean (and if they don't, does that mean that they don't have a 'language?'), that they do mean something with an object language, or that they are just stringing words around for their amusement? The heart of the matter seems to really be found between the first two possibilities and certainly not the last; there is no reason to think that the religious are playing around with language (or if they are, that they all *know* that that is what they are doing). Our confusion comes in consequence of trying to account for the meaning of sentences which are considered religious for reasons which escape us; that is not to say that we cannot give descriptions, but that a description presupposes the existence of an object fit for description, and we spend little time considering that object or our method of measuring it. In this manner we can accept everything which we have seen – that religious language is a method of language *use* as seen in speech, that it has a peculiar meaning linked with unusual forms of belief, and that there are no magical or special languages at play – but none of this informs us of what *makes* a language or sentence religious.

If the study of religious language has the general aim of accounting for the meaning of sentences which are commonly regarded as being religious and neglects accounting for how those sentences are initially identified, then every proposed theory for the meaning of religious sentences will *fail to apply to religious language broadly*.[52] With this in mind, we can revisit Scott's description of the study of religious language being an attempt to form a general account for the meaning of religious sentences as being on the one hand *historically accurate as a description*, whilst on the other a proof of this thesis's diagnosis of its problem.

> A general account of their meaning will include: (i) the truth conditions for religious sentences (are there defensible reductionist or subjectivist accounts?); (ii) whether indicative

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[52] Understanding the meaning of several *Christian* sentences will not help us understand the meaning of a Shinto sentence unless we suppose that the two religions and their languages are similar in that respect.

religious sentences are truth-apt or have propositional content (or do they express beliefs or merely attitudes?); (iii) if indicative religious sentences are truth-apt how should we construe the truth for which they are apt? (iv) The meaning of religious terms and how they combine to form meaningful sentences (is 'God' a referring expression?). (Scott 2010: p. 1).

The order of these questions is likely arbitrary[53] and are indicative of the motivations which lie behind the scenes; the study is not concerned with what constitutes 'religious language' but is concerned with explaining the meaning of token religious sentences which appear to express beliefs. Hence why three of the four areas included within a general account are explicitly concerned with truth-conditions, and despite the fourth area considering the *meaning* of words and their relations, the fact that Scott's example is also concerned with truth-conditions goes to show that 'in fact, interest in the meaning of religious utterances is largely subservient to our interest in the truth or falsity of religion or religious beliefs.' (K. Nielsen 1982: p. 1). Moreover, the fact that the general account is not concerned with the epistemic and normative training or skills which would be required to accurately intuit or perceive token religious sentences further evidences the case that the study leapfrogs discussions about what 'religious language' is and dives straight into interpretations because of its assumption that 'we know it when we see it'. As a general account has not been described as needing to include answers to questions like '*what* is religious language?', 'what *makes* a sentence religious?', and '*how* we can come to identify them?', many of the proposed theories[54] which purportedly provide general accounts *fail* to tell us (i) what a religious language *is*, (ii) what *makes* a sentence 'religious', and (iii) *how* we can identify them. The absence of these sorts of discussions in a general account limits the number of sentences to which the account can apply to only those which are already treated as religious.[55] But what sort of sentences are called religious if there is no account for what constitutes them; how should we take religious sentences as being? Scott writes,

> I take religious sentences (unless otherwise indicated, I discuss indicative religious sentences) to be ones that posit a religious entity, such as God, or a religious property, such as holiness. I take a religious utterance to be the production in speech or writing or otherwise of a token religious sentence; utterances are not tied to verbal communication. The scope of religious language and discourse could be construed more widely or narrowly… [this] captures the scope of religious language and discourse as it has traditionally been addressed in the philosophy of religion and theology. (Scott 2013: p. viii).

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[53] It would be odd to explore reductionist or subjective defences for truth conditions *prior* to questioning whether religious sentences possess propositional content.

[54] Such as Face Value Theory, Non-cognitivism, Expressivism, and Moderate Attitude Theory.

[55] Face Value Theory, as it will soon be shown, cannot inform us of whether a never-before-seen sentence is religious without presupposing some fact about what counts as a religious subject matter, making it useless to a field linguist because it lacks *discoverability*.

This explains why any general account for the meaning of a religious sentence is occupied with questions about truth – a religious sentence is taken as one which posits a religious entity or property, and this implies that it is making a positive assertion of fact. Furthermore, in clarifying that he takes religious sentences as being ones which posit religious entities and/or properties, Scott gives us some insight into why a general account for religious language is expected to address questions surrounding truth conditions and referring expressions. This shows that what little attention has been exercised on the question of what constitutes a religious sentence is of second concern, as it is taken for granted that 'God exists' *is* a religious sentence, and so the task of identifying religious sentences is over, so to speak, and the task of explaining their meaning is underway. Scott distinguishes religious sentences from *indicative* religious sentences, which appears to be a distinction between actual religious sentences and sentences which only *appear* to be religious, and it is worth noting that he does not spell-out what that distinction is based upon nor how one could come to practice it.[56] Scott takes religious sentences as ones which posit religious entities or properties, and we can interpret this to include sentences which directly posit them (God is real) as well as those which indirectly posit them (I went through Hell to get here),[57] and so perhaps a sentence is indicatively religious when it looks like a religious entity or property is posited but it is not always obvious whether this is happening, such as with sentences like 'there's someone upstairs who is looking out for me' or 'count your lucky stars'.

Scott's choice of words in the phrase 'I take a religious utterance to be the production in speech or writing *or otherwise* of a token religious sentence' raises two important questions: what else is there other than verbal speech or written word which could communicate a religious sentence, and what features must an utterance possess in order to say that it is communicating a 'sentence'?[58] These questions are somewhat beyond the scope of Scott's work because he only intends to present an overview of how the study operates and he is right to say that the study is almost entirely concerned with what appear to be truth-apt sentences regarding religious subject matters. This demonstrates that it is the case that the dominant approach within the contemporary study has the goal of establishing a general account for the meaning of those sentences which have been commonly treated as religious, and these sentences are described as positing a religious entity or property. Scott also adds that some of the sentences which are taken to be religious are also apt for

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[56] We shall observe in Section Three that the distinction between actual religious sentences and sentences which only appear to be religious proves disastrous for almost all proposed theories.
[57] '[25]As Peter entered the house, Cornelius met him and fell at his feet in reverence. [26] But Peter made him get up. "Stand up," he said, "I am only a man myself."' (Acts 10:25-26).
[58] This will be detailed in Section Two.

being considered moral,[59] political[60] or economic,[61] and this is because 'the prevalent theological concern has been with the truth status of religious cognitive claims in relation to various scientific, ethical, and sometimes metaphysical theories of meaning and truth.' (Tracy 1978: p. 91).

Finally, there is some discrepancy between what Scott takes a religious sentence as being (that which posits a religious entity or property) and what Nielsen considers as being a linguistic fact (that 'utterances are not religious simply because words like 'God' are used in them') (K. Nielsen 1982: pp. 1-3). Scott does not want to be understood as saying that he takes religious sentences as ones which simply feature the words 'God' or 'Varna', but he instead emphasises the role of positing the referents of 'God' and 'Varna'; religious sentences are sentences which talk about the objects of religious belief, be them entities, properties, actions, historical events etc. Scott would agree with Nielsen in that respect – simply saying 'Jesus' does not make a sentence religious, however Nielsen arguably goes further and states that it is a linguistic fact that talking about *the object* of those words is also insufficient to make a sentence religious. There are at least three plausible responses to this discrepancy.

First, that Nielsen has misunderstood the study's metalanguage insofar as it is a fact that terms like 'religious sentence' are used in the philosophy of religion and theology in reference to utterances which posit a religious entity or property. Second, that Nielsen is right to say that we should not take a religious sentence as being one which posits religious entities or properties because we know that sentences like 'there are twelve prime movers' as well as those found in theological discourse are not religious *despite* positing such things. Scott might adopt the first response and reaffirm the conventions of the study, but the intuitive strength to Nielsen's point that sentences like 'God is 6ft tall' and 'this table is omnipotent' are not religious *despite* what they posit is a compelling counterfactual.[62] This might mean that the two responses are equally balanced and so we should consider a third response which embraces the best of each. Third, Scott's description of the study treating the term 'religious sentence' as a reference for sentences which posit religious entities or properties is true (that *is* how the study operates) hence why the study seeks a general account for the meaning of religious sentences which explains their truth-conditions, but Nielsen is also right to remark that not all sentences which posit religious entities or properties *carry the same sense of*

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[59] 1 John 2:9-11.
[60] Romans 13:1-7.
[61] 1 Timothy 6:10.
[62] It could be objected that these sentences fail to be religious because the things which they say are false, but such a position is revealed as self-defeating in Section Three onwards.

meaning – some capture a philosophical meaning whilst others capture a *religious* meaning.

This is proportional with what this thesis has proposed – that there is a religious domain of meaning which some sentences capture, and although those sentences *conventionally* posit a religious entity or property, it is its domain of meaning which makes it religious, not the positing itself. This strikes a balance between Scott's presentation of the study and Nielsen's observed linguistic fact, and it puts us in a good position to see how the most popular approaches in the study fall short because they *fail* to account for how a language or sentence is religious and what it takes to be able to detect them. If Scott is outlining what *makes* a sentence religious rather than describing what he and most others take them as being like, then we should say that a sentence is religious when it posits a religious entity or property. This goes against Nielsen's observed linguistic fact in ways where a compromise becomes less likely or double-downed (that Nielsen is either wrong or talking about something else), as well as the field linguist paradox and the problem of the criterion. If a field linguist does not know what religious entities or properties are then they would not know when a sentence posits one, and if the act of positing one is what makes a sentence religious, then they would also not know which sentences are religious. Moreover, if there is no distinction between religious language and theological discourse, where the former communicates a religious meaning and the latter does not, then in virtue of religious sentences being ones which posit religious entities or properties, there can be no nonreligious sentence which can describe what a religious entity or property is like. The field linguist would not be able to use meta-statements either because no amount of talk *about* religious sentences can tell us anything about the things which religious sentences are talking about (assuming religious entities and properties exist outside of the sentences).[63] We should seriously doubt whether any current theory for religious language succeeds, indeed, we should seriously consider whether a theory could succeed without also identifying the object language which it means to account for. For sake of clarity, let us directly observe this in action.

Vainio asks 'What kind of language is religious language, then?' and instead of offering a criterion, definition or method for coming to see the religion in language, Vainio lists four general accounts for religious language meaning which he says capture the basic options available and credits to having originated with Scott (Vainio 2020: p. 5):

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[63] Something which is explored in S3. C2.

> *Face value theory*. Religious sentences represent religious facts and are conventionally used to express beliefs that those facts obtain.
> *Noncognitivism*. Religious sentences do not represent facts and are not conventionally used to express beliefs; they express noncognitive attitudes.
> *Expressivism*. Religious sentences do not represent religious facts but do conventionally express noncognitive attitudes; insofar as they represent nonreligious facts (if they represent any facts at all), they may be used conventionally to express belief in those (nonreligious) facts.
> *Moderate attitude theory*. Religious sentences represent religious facts and are conventionally used to express belief in those facts, and they conventionally express noncognitive states. (Scott 2013: p. 9).

There are two ways for how we can interpret this as a response to Vainio's question. Firstly, we can interpret Scott as outlining a series of theories *about* religious sentences – they mean to report facts about what religious language is like, how their sentences work, and what the speaker intends to be understood as doing, they are in effect truth-apt beliefs about the object of our study. The second interpretation understands Scott as listing four *definitions* which explicitly categorise what makes a sentence religious, e.g., a sentence is religious *if and only if* it is accountable to expressivism, non-cognitivism, symbolism etc., which is to say any cognitive sentence is definitionally not religious and therefore not the object of our study. As we have seen, Scott is best understood in the first interpretation where religious sentences are taken as being ones which posit religious entities or properties and are best understood at face value, non-cognitively, expressively, etc., and yet Vainio's question seeks something more akin to the second interpretation. But the fact that we compare Face Value Theory with non-cognitivism by applying them to token religious sentences implies that we have some prior existing capacity to detect them.

Consider how we challenge non-cognitivism by identifying seemingly *cognitive* religious sentences like 'God is real' which are then presented as counterfactuals – if religious language is non-cognitive, then how is it the case that *this* religious sentence is cognitive? We also point out that plenty of well-read religious philosophers and theologians explicitly state that they intend to be understood as speaking cognitively when they are speaking religiously, and these people are unlikely to be mistaken about what cognitivism is and what their intentions are. Once more this is taken as a powerful counterfactual, and its legitimacy depends on the legitimacy of the presupposition that we can commonly *identify* religious sentences when we see them. Testing whether a theory is a sufficient general account for the meaning of a religious sentence presupposes two things: that we can identify which sentences are religious so to apply the theory to them, and that the theory in question is prevented from *stipulating the definition*. We are acquainted with the

first presupposition but are less so with the second, the second means to mark how it would be unreasonable for any supporter of any theory to simply assert that the *term* 'religious language' only references *that* which their theory accounts for, rendering them immune to any criticism.[64] The only thing stopping the non-cognitivist from declaring that it is *definitionally* true that 'religious sentences do not report facts (religious or otherwise) and do not conventionally express beliefs (let alone religious beliefs); they instead express only non-cognitive states' and thus conclude that non-cognitivism is necessarily correct, is that we *know-how* to use the term 'religious language' and thus *know-that* it is not restricted to just non-cognitive sentences (Scott 2013: p. 5). We would want to stop the non-cognitivist and say, 'that is not how we use the term and so it is inappropriate to answer our questions like that'. These are compelling reasons to believe that Vainio and Scott share the first interpretation because of how unreasonable it would be for anyone to just assert that they are right, and this goes some way to demonstrate the importance of identifying a religious language, especially when one considers its meaning at this level of complexity. We need to know *how* to identify a sentence or language as religious if we are to have the sort of study which we seek and as we already seem able to do it, we first seek an account for how it is currently done rather than the development of a new method. Once we know how we are currently detecting religious languages, we will be in a better place to ask whether it is legitimate, accurate or reliable. Another reason for why we need to account for how we currently identify religious sentences and languages is that we need to conform with what Vainio, Scott and others have already observed, and to these ends we can conclude that the above four proposed accounts are insufficient because they fail to explain how a sentence or language has been identified as religious.

The study of religious language has been seen to be a study of the meaning of those sentences which are taken as being religious in virtue of them positing some religious entity or property, and the main concern for any general account of their meaning is addressing questions about their truth-status, conditions and values. This presupposes some standard, idea or method which allows us to identify a sentence as religious so that we can apply candidate accounts to them so to examine their applicability and explanatory power, and despite this presupposition being evident and essential for the study, the general account is not believed to include any explanation for it. As far as we can see, a religious sentence is taken as one which posits a religious entity or property either directly or indirectly, and the sentence is encountered in the form of an utterance which is either spoken or

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[64] For those in doubt of this, consider MacIntyre's comparable warning that 'if the believer wishes to he can always claim that we can only disagree with him because we do not understand him. But the implications of this defence of belief are more fatal to it than any attack could be.' (MacIntyre 1964: p. 133).

written. A sentence can be taken as positing a religious entity or property based on its content (such as by using divine names), context (such as being found in a hymn), or both. If we were to approach the study as a field linguist who knows nothing about religious entities or properties and less still about the words and sentences used to posit them, then so long as we take a religious sentence as being one which posits religious entities and properties, the field linguist paradox demonstrates that we would never come to understand the language because we would never come to *know* what makes it religious. This, coupled with the Problem of the Criterion and Nielsen's linguistic fact leads us to suspect that whatever allows us to 'see' the religion in a sentence is something discoverable and likely based on the *meaning* of the sentence itself, and the most plausible way for this to happen is through our know-how of the host-language's grammar which is also adopted as the study's metalanguage.

Our know-how of English allows us to notice when it is used in a grammatically odd way which is indicative of it expressing an equally odd domain of meaning; that the English is *hosting* an additional sort of language. As the metalanguage can also be English, we can apply our grammatical know-how and infer that if 'religious language' or 'religious sentence' is used as a referring expression associated with a unique type of meaning, then we know that there must be an object fit for reference which possesses meaning sufficient for the referring expression to have a positive semantic value. This lets us associate: (i) our grammatical ability to *spot* when an English sentence is doing something grammatically odd, (ii) our suspicion that part of the reason for that grammatical oddity is the communication of an analogously odd domain of meaning, and (iii) our know-how that if 'religious language' is a referring expression then it could mean to refer to sentences which communicate a religious domain of meaning. Let us put this to the test and explore whether 'religious language' is a referring expression, and if so, whether it takes the form of a proper or common name (or something else), and whether we should take a Millian, Fregean, Kripkean or Russellian interpretation.

S1. C3. 'Religious Language' in Metalanguage

The previous chapters argued for why and how a study of religious language should begin with a study of the discourse *about* religious language. When we say things like 'religious sentences are cognitive' or 'we can only speak apophatically when we speak religiously', we seem to be saying something cognitive about the object which is referred to by the term 'religious language'. It is therefore reasonable to expect that we can specify the referent of the term 'religious language' and thereby show that it is sensible to use the term as a proposition's subject. We are supposing that 'religious language' is a referring expression when we ask *about the sort of thing which the term refers to*, and so we should first verify that the term is indeed used as a referring expression, and if so, then ask whether we can classify the sort of referring expression it is, such as a proper or common name. This will lead us into a discussion about what names are and how they work, concluding that the answer which we give fundamentally changes the sorts of questions which we can ask in the study of religious language. But first, let us begin with a question and a hypothesis.

Should we understand metalanguage sentences like 'religious language is cognitive' and 'a religious sentence intends to express attitudes and opinions' as truth-apt belief claims which could be conceivably true or false? If not, then we are forced to seriously reconsider what the study of religious language is if it is not cognitive, and so assuming that the study either is cognitive or at least *attempts to be*, then we are forced to assume that terms like 'religious language' and 'religious sentence' are treated as referring expressions which act as the subject of propositions. It is obvious that for a general account for the meaning of religious sentences to be successful it must target the correct object language, which is to say that it must account for the meaning of *religious* sentences, and not merely *moral* or *political* ones. Moreover, as it is accepted on all sides that, 'if one professes certain beliefs it seems that one ought to be willing to map out, roughly at any rate, the extent of the claims one is making by saying what is compatible and what is incompatible with them', then anyone who professes a belief in the success or failure of a proposed general account should be expected as willing to map out the extent of their claims, and part of that involves demonstrating that they have accurately targeted *religious* sentences (Crombie 1971: p. 23).

This thesis proposes that our know-how of English grammar lets us notice two things which join together such as to allow for the production of an account which combines the identification of a religious sentence/language with an account of its meaning. Firstly, it lets us notice when the grammar of a sentence shifts so to host a religious domain of meaning; secondly, it lets us notice

that metalanguage terms like 'religious language' are used as referring expressions towards those sentences, this subsequently allows us to combine our identification of a religious sentence with our account for its meaning. This position resembles MacIntyre's,

> It is not that we have private experiences and invent words for them. But we learn the words and find their application in our experience. The language is in a sense prior to – and even, although this could be misleading, in a sense formative of – the experience. This is as true of religious language as of any other. (MacIntyre 1970: p. 167).

By this MacIntyre makes the Wittgensteinian point that religious language does not come before the religious belief system, but that language and belief develop together – or, perhaps we can say, the religious belief system is *written in the religious language*. Someone might have an extraordinary experience which we may be willing to call 'religious' and unless this provides the individual with a new language, they are forced to speak in the languages which they know. A religious experience is not a private experience which one must have in order to understand religious language, as if we can only *see* what the religious see when God decides it is right to ordain some magical perceptual skill upon a person or offer up some divine revelation,[65] instead, according to MacIntyre, religious language is *human language* and religious experiences are *human experiences*, just of a bizarre kind. As the meaning of language cannot be set by prelinguistic events because that would suppose that the meaning of a word comes *before* the word, MacIntyre supports the view that religious language is *not* meaningful *only after* a religious experience but rather that one can only grasp the object of the discussion once they are familiar with that object (MacIntyre 1970: p. 167).

For example, it is not linguistically impossible for a blind person to talk about the colour blue (they could tell us that 'blue is different to red, but as a matter of resemblance it appears more like green than yellow'), but there is some intuition that they cannot mean what we might want to mean, chiefly, the visual appearance of the colour (hence why we would take it as a grammatical nonsense for a blind person to say 'you should have painted your house yellow because this green looks ugly'). But it is not as if *language* would change if this person were to suddenly be able to see, but rather that they can grasp the object of the discussion and can make better sense of how sentences are functioning, and something similar might be happening with religious experience and language. In this sense, the building blocks of even the most complex and elaborate religious languages are to be found in the language which preceded it, thus one's awareness of the host-language equips them

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[65] Something which MacIntyre criticises Barth for implying (MacIntyre 1970: pp. 165-166).

with the same tools as the speaker initially had when they developed their religious language. The field linguist could therefore *learn* religious language if they were to access the objects of the discussion. To see this, let us question whether the following metalanguage sentence is cognitive in form, and if so, how: 'religious language can be found in the Bible'.

If this sentence reports where *the object* we reference by 'religious language' is located, then we are in principle classifying 'religious language' as a referring expression. Returning briefly to Scott, it is to be expected that if we take religious sentences as ones which posit religious entities or properties then we will develop a study which construes the task of accounting for their meaning with the task of accounting for their truth-value. For example, consider Scott's question of whether 'God' is a referring expression and how 'the semantic value of any expression is *that feature of it* that determines whether sentences in which it occurs are true or false' (Miller 2002: p. 10). Therefore, asking whether 'God' is a referring expression, a common name, a proper name etc., is to ask for its meaning in respect to its semantic value and its truth-conditions, and this is applicable to the task of judging whether 'religious language' is a metalanguage referring expression. For example, if the semantic value of the proposition 'religious language can be found in the Bible' is its truth-value, then we need to demonstrate that 'religious language' and 'the Bible' are referring expressions for objects in the world which could be understood as existing in ways where it is conceivable for the claim to be verified as true (Miller 2002: pp. 11-12). However, if we were to agree that there are referring expressions *in* religious language as well as in the metalanguage about religious language, then we would still have a great deal of work laid out ahead of us. As Phillips notes,

> By all means say that 'God' functions as a referring expression, that 'God' refers to a sort of object, that God's reality is a matter of fact, and so on. But please remember that, as yet, no conceptual or grammatical clarification has taken place. We have all the work still to do since we shall now have to show, in this religious context, what speaking of 'reference', 'object', existence', and so on amounts to, how it differs, in obvious ways, from other uses of these terms. (D. Z. Phillips 1995b: p. 138).

This is a field linguist contention: although we are to have minimal presumptions about religion and its language, we are allowed our host-language presumptions which in our case are those of English. We need to balance our English know-how of gesturing, referencing and speaking about objects and existence with the limitations imposed on us by the paradox, and this is the same balance which we must strike between our etic referencing towards an object language and our inability to grasp the *emic* meaning of referencing within that language community. Clarifying

whether 'religious language' is a name (as names are referring expressions) is the same task of asking whether 'God' or 'Krishna' are names, and if the answer requires us to learn *what it means for the religious to gesture* then we must acknowledge that it cannot be at odds with the gesturing being performed in the English. After all, the religious might point for different reasons than the nonreligious but the action itself is one of the same, and if the action is being hosted in English and not itself separate to the host-language then it is pointing within English, and the question is whether *they* point like *we* point.[66]

In general terms, a name is a symbol which references a given object and acts as if a label attached to a thing[67] – it has no further meaning than its function of *referencing* the object which it is attached to when used in a sentence (Searle 1958). Although there is debate about the complexities of how names reference, how they are created, and how they are learned and used, 'There is a fairly general consensus that names are Millian (or Russellian) genuine terms, that is, are singular terms whose sole semantic function is to introduce a *referent* into the propositions expressed by sentences containing the term' (McKinsey 2010: p. 325). Therefore, a name is more specifically the linguistic device utilised in conversation for the sake of introducing a referent into a sentence so that when I say 'I have a cat with three legs', I mean to say something *about objects*. However, there are several types of referring expressions and names within language, and the shape of our study depends on which sort of referring expression or name 'religious language' is classified as.

Edward Jonathan Lowe suggests distinguishing proper names from common names on the criteria of the former being the name of an *individual* (London; Napoleon) and the latter being the name of a *type* of individual (city; man) (Honderich 1995: pp. 601-603). Consequently, the meaning and cognitive value of the sentence 'religious language can be found in the Bible' shifts depending on whether we take 'religious language' as the name of an *individual* or the name of a *type*. Under one reading, an individual is said to exist within a specified location whereas the other reading has that a *token of a type* is said to exist within a specified location, and each is open to slightly different inferential interpretations.[68] We shall briefly consider the implications of each classification and then turn our attention towards the task of identifying which is the 'correct' classification.

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[66] Cf. Rush Rhees's *Could Language Be Invented by a Robinson Crusoe?* for a detailed consideration of the ritual of pointing (Rhees 1954: pp. 61-75).

[67] 'It will often prove useful in philosophy to say to ourselves: naming something is like attaching a label to a thing.' (Wittgenstein 1994: §15).

[68] E.g., the first reading might cause us to think that there is only one *thing* called 'religious language' and so there is no use looking in other Bibles, whilst the second reading might lead us to think that the type of thing which meets the classification of 'religious language' could be found in other Bibles.

John Stuart Mill was the first analytic thinker to suggest that names are linguistic devices which *only reference objects* and have no additional meaning such that if the object named were to alter the 'meaning' of the word remains as *solely* the reference of that object (Mill 1862: V1, C2, §5, 33). In essence,

> A proper name is but an unmeaning mark which we connect in our minds with the idea of the object, in order that whenever the mark meets our eyes or occurs to our thoughts, we may think of that individual object. (Mill 1862: V1, C2, §5, 37).

Therefore, if 'religious language' is a proper name as Mill envisions, then the fact that the name says *religious* and *language* should not mislead us into thinking that its referent must meet the description of a language which is religious.[69] Granted, we might name a person David because of it being a traditional name for that family or a place *Dartmouth* because it is on the river Dart, but,

> If sand should choke up the mouth of the river, or an earthquake change its course, and remove it to a distance from the town, the name of the town would not necessarily be changed. That fact, therefore, can form no part of the signification of the word; for otherwise, when the fact confessedly ceased to be true, no one would any longer think of applying the name. Proper names are attached to the objects themselves, and are not dependent on the continuance of any attribute of the object. (Mill 1862: V1, C2, §5, 34).

According to Mill, a name *is just* a reference to an object and the object bares no influence on the status of its name, and so although 'religious language' *sounds* like a description of an object, it isn't (or, it does not have to be). This means that the advantage of gaining the status of a name (meaning that there is an 'object') comes with the weakness of losing the intuition that the name *describes* the object which it references – we cannot have it both ways. This fundamentally challenges the most basic presumption held within the study of religious language – that 'religious language' references a language which is religious – but if it is a proper name as Mill understands, then there is no assurance that it names *anything which we have in mind*. Hence Cooper's comment that 'there are some expressions which obviously have a use, but which do not so obviously have a meaning; proper names, for example'; on the one hand it introduces a referent into a sentence but on the other it severs any *descriptive sense* of what the object is like (Cooper 1973: p. 39). Is the presumption that 'religious language' names an object language which is religious *off limits* for the field linguist? One way to approach this problem comes in consequence of the field linguist's

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[69] Scott has brought this point to bear on the names *in* religious language, and we do the same towards 'religious language' *as a name* (Scott 2013: pp. 87-88).

know-how of grammar, as reflected in Bertrand Russell's thoughts.

Bertrand Russell modified this position for a combination of technical metaphysical, logical, semantic and epistemological reasons, but the most important reasons, arguably, is to address the balance between Mill's point and our base intuitions. On the one hand, it is true that if something mysterious was to happen overnight to the object named Dartmouth such as to make it no longer located on the mouth of the River Dart, we would not all wake up *aware* that something has happened to that object based on the name 'Dartmouth' having dropped from our language. However, if a name was only a reference to an object and had no descriptive sense whatsoever, then we would face several practical issues about identifying that a word is being used as a name when we do not know the object which it names.

Russell presents the base intuition that names are references for objects and nothing more, he calls this 'object words' – words of the most basic form which exist at the foundations of language and are more typically identified as the noises and sounds, as much as the words themselves, which we teach children for referencing objects like papa, dada, dog, cat (Russell 1940: pp. 25-29). At the start of language such object-words are used *solely* to reference things of experience – a child sees such-and-such and says *dog* – but as the child develops and matures, so too does their use of language and names gain more complex functions. Names begin to function as the subjects of propositions, which is to say, we begin to talk *about* objects and not simply remark their presence – names begin to be associated with properties, attributes, contexts, circumstances, feelings, memories etc., and it becomes more difficult to separate one's understanding of the object from their *descriptive knowledge* of its identity. Russell concludes that because the semantic function of a name is to be a subject for a proposition so to allow speakers to communicate information about objects, a name is not *just* a reference but is always a definite description. Our ability to use a name presupposes an awareness of the *object it means to reference*, and this relies on us being able to describe what that object is like; names, therefore, describe the object in a roundabout manner. The name 'Dog' is shorthand for 'that object which has four legs, barks, plays fetch', and 'Aristotle' stands for 'that object who was the student of Plato, developed syllogistic logic, tutored Alexander the Great…'.

It is tempting to think, with Russell's view of names being disguised descriptions at mind, that if George Orwell is the author of 1984, then it is also true that 'the author of 1984' is a name in the same way as 'George Orwell' is, however this is mistaken according to Russell (Edmonds and

Eidinow 2001: pp. 177-179). Russell accepts that names are reducible to descriptions – to know a person's name is to know the identity of the individual – however, a name is taken to be the representation of *what the object is factually*, whilst a description only references an object when its propositional content is true. Therefore, 'George Orwell' names the object and if 'George Orwell was the author of 1984' is true, then 'the author of 1984' describes the object which 'George Orwell' names. But as a matter of practice, although *anyone* could be called 'George Orwell' we tend to think of the person who was the author of 1984 – the name possesses some *descriptive quality* about the object, and to the degree that we want to reference a specific thing in our speech is the degree to which we are required to know the specific details of that thing in association with its name. Thus a particular individual comes to mind when someone says 'Julius Caesar', and 'in order to discover what is actually in my mind when I judge about *Julius Caesar*, we must substitute for the proper name a description made up of some of the things I know about him.' (Russell 1917: p. 221). To these ends, there are two categories of knowledge which a person can have of the object which a name references, *knowledge by acquaintance* and *knowledge by description*. As phrased by Lacey,

> If I am acquainted with an object it can be a constituent of a proposition I understand, and its logically proper name will be the subject of that proposition. If I know such a proposition to be true I have knowledge by acquaintance of the object. (Lacey 1996: p. 98).

For example, because I am acquainted with the object named 'dog' I am able to identify the statement 'dogs have twelve legs' to be a cognitive proposition and I am able to judge whether it is true or false – it is false because the object which we mean to reference by the term 'dog' does not possess the properties of twelve legs. Hence, 'dog' is a shorthand description of an object which does not have twelve legs. The point here is *not* whether the object pointed towards has twelve legs, but whether the true descriptions about that object are *compatible* with the descriptions which the name 'dog' is shorthand for.

> If on the other hand I know the proposition *that the last French king was beheaded*, whose subject is a description, I have knowledge by description of that king, whether or not I am also acquainted with him. (Lacey 1996: p. 98).

For example, although I do not know *who* the last King of France was, I do know that 'the last King of France' is a description/title of a sort of thing which a person could be. As such, I can recognise that the statement 'the Last King of France was beheaded' is a statement about the same person who was the Last King of France, irrespective to whether I know who that was. So, although the

object has no causal link to the word (and vice versa), there is still an essential relationship such that the use of a name requires an awareness of the object, indeed, to recognise that a word is used as a name is to recognise that an object is being described. For Russell, 'religious language' could be a disguised description if it is a name, but we should not think that the object must be described as a language which is religious. Just as how Dartmouth describes an object even when the object is no longer found at the Mouth of the River Dart, so too would 'religious language' describe its object when the language is not religious. The descriptive element of the name does not have to be what a literal *prima facie* reading of it would suggest – after all, the Big Bang was neither big nor a bang, and the Holy Roman Empire was neither Holy nor Roman, nor an empire (Kripke 1980: p. 26).

That said, Russell almost always examples material objects when discussing the sorts of things which names reference and this would be a problem for an *abstractly* existing language. However, the association of proper names with material objects has been deemed more a matter of custom than necessity,[70] and Miller questions whether it is a platitude which lacks the legitimacy to build a comprehensive theory of language upon (Miller 2002: p. 12). Strictly speaking, if a proper name has only a function or it is descriptive and the terms themselves are not what does the describing, then 'religious language' might not have anything to do with objects which are descriptively religious – it could be an odd name for some other sort of thing. In any case, Millian and Russellian constructions of proper names presuppose a realist ontology which benefits the study of religious language – that there is an *object* language fit for study and apt for designation.

Under Mill or Russell, we are required to presuppose the existence of a mind-independent realm in which objects exist prior to being named, and although the nature of these objects do not influence the status of a name it is nonetheless essential to know the identity of the object in order to ensure that you are picking out the desired object with the name which you are using. However, not all religions accept this sort of realist dualism[71] and those which do are not in agreement about which objects are religious and whether language itself abstractly exists. As there is no causal relationship between the nature of an object and the name sufficient for one to indicate the other (that the name does not describe the object, and the object does not inform us of its name), we are in need for two

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[70] Cf. 'When discussing the *object* which a person's name references, 'OBJECTS' must presumably be wide enough to include things like someone's character, and knowing objects may anyway involve knowing facts about them.' (Lacey 1996: p. 98).
[71] Cf. S4. C5.

explanations: how do names get associated with objects, and how do we learn those associations. The two most common explanations are the Causal and Description accounts. The Causal Account holds that the act of calling something X *causes* X to become the reference for the object ('religious language' references *whatever* we reference with that name), whilst the Description Account holds that the name 'religious language' *describes* the sort of thing which would be suitable for that name, allowing for us to 'pick the referent out' of the name's information (Evans and Altham 1973). Beyond the proper name reading of 'religious language' needing to resolve this complex problem to be able to provide a satisfying response to the field linguist paradox, each account carries their own respective difficulties. Although we shall consider this in greater detail in the following chapter, it is for now sufficient to note that under the Causal Account, the study of religious language is *either* a study of whatever we happen to point at when we say '*that* is a religious sentence' or it is a study of *how* and *why* we name things in this manner. Under a Description Account, the study of religious language studies *those things* which we sense to be suitable for what the term 'religious language' implies, but proper names are generally taken as *not* having a meaning or definition, making it difficult to imagine them as having descriptions. There might be scope for a merging between common and proper names, such as if 'religious language' was a common name for a *type* which the Hindu religious language is an *individual* of, or that it is the common name for the *type* of individual which token sentences constitute.

Wittgenstein claimed that language can be understood a series of games consisting of rule-governed procedures and activities, and that games, like families, can resemble one another (Wittgenstein 1994: §67). Just as how people can resemble one another due to sharing similar eye colours, body shapes, gait, and temperament, etc., so too can the features of language be shared, like questions, requests, metaphors etc., and thus classifiable as a member of a common language family. This is not to say that they are all the same, but more generally that 'there are resemblances between them which are rather like the resemblances between different members of the same family' (Morris 2007: p. 297). In Wittgenstein's terms, common names reference *types* (families) and proper names reference individuals (family members), and so we find the relationship between common names (humans) having *token* proper names (Harry) running parallel with the proper name's objects (the person *named* Harry) being an individual of a *type* (human). This introduces the possibility of 'religious language' being the common name for a family of individual languages, and each individual language could be referenced with a proper name, e.g., 'Hindu religious language', 'the divine language of Hebrew' etc.

However, as Biletzki and Matar glumly puts it, 'still, just as we cannot give a final, essential definition of 'game', so we cannot find "what is common to all these activities and what makes them into language or parts of language"'[72] (Biletzki and Matar 2020). Both readings therefore have an equal share of strengths and weaknesses which typically overlap – the strength of one is the weakness of the other – however, they both seem to offer plausible responses to the field linguist's requirements. As a proper name, 'religious language' can fulfil the semantic role of a proposition's subject by introducing a referent into the utterance, and this carries an object fit for knowledge to be gained *by acquaintance*. Furthermore, as a field linguist could come to learn about an object language if it could be experienced or discovered through reason, then the prospect for the study of religious language looks positive. On the other hand, a common name reading secures religious language as a type and offers a system building effect where a field linguist could gain *knowledge by description* through metalanguage, and eventually gain a grasp of the sort of thing which makes a sentence classifiably religious. But which classification of name is 'religious language', and how are we to make sense of it, and, ultimately, what are the outcomes for the study?

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[72] This intext quote references *Philosophical Investigations* (Wittgenstein 1994: §65).

S1. C4. Proper or Common?

We have observed the advantages and disadvantages of proper and common name classifications for 'religious language', and each offers a means of fulfilling the necessary semantic function so to provide our metalanguage enquiry with cognitive form. As our study of religious language is purposefully non-revisionary – that is to say, we wish to *learn* the language as it is and not attempt to alter the language so to make it more 'sensible' for us – then we must maintain a clear avoidance of adopting a definition or word classification *for the sake of our study's convenience*. The classification of name which 'religious language' holds influences the sense of our sentences about it and in turn the sense of our study of it – if a proper name, then a study of religious language could become a metaphysical study of an abstractly existing thing, whereas a common name reading brings about a study of *descriptions of objects* – and before we consider each eventuality in detail, we shall first explore the conceptual foundations on which they stand.

A good place to start is with Wittgenstein's observation that as a name is like a tag or label placed onto an object for the purpose of reference, then our awareness that a word is a name depends on us being able to *see* the object onto which the name is attached (Wittgenstein 1994: §15). As such, if we were to discover that 'religious language' is used as a name but lacks a referent (be it a type or token), then the study of religious language would cease to be a coherent study of an *object* language, and this is a real possibility because 'many names, indeed many *kinds* of names, appear to lack reference', moreover, if names 'are conceived as paradigmatic devices for singular reference and also (unlike descriptions) to be context-invariant', then it would be a great embarrassment for the study to discover that 'religious language' is an *empty name* (Baker and Hacker 1983: p. 231). We should expect to be able to identify a name by agreeing on the characteristics of its object, in part because such a description implies that there is an object but also because a common description would imply a commonly used label. To these ends, Wittgenstein notes that despite the sentence 'Moses did not exist' being open to various readings like, 'the Israelites did not have a *single* leader when they withdrew from Egypt […] their leader was not called Moses […] there cannot have been anyone who accomplished all that the Bible relates of Moses', each reading nonetheless treats 'Moses' as a name and the subject of a proposition (Wittgenstein 1994: §79). A name functions as a reference for an object, but the same object might not be 'picked out' by the same name if there are disagreements about how the object is *described*. To illustrate, we could imagine someone saying, 'if by Moses you mean a historical figure, then he existed; but if by Moses you mean an individual who parted the Red Sea with a staff in hand, then he didn't exist', to

which a Jew may reply, 'if you only mean Moses in the former sense, then you do not know the meaning of Moses at all'. This example illustrates that although a name references an object and names are themselves shorthand descriptions, there will be no 'right' name to use if objects do not possess their names as attributes. If we cannot ascertain the name of an object by describing the object itself, then names are shorthand descriptions of *what the speaker believes* to be true about the object, irrespective to the object itself. Wittgenstein summarises this view by asking,

> Should it be said that I am using a word whose meaning I don't know, and so am talking nonsense?—Say what you choose, so long as it does not prevent you from seeing the facts. (And when you see them there is a good deal that you will not say.). (Wittgenstein 1994: §79).

There are two points being made here. First, there are no *prescriptive facts* for how we ought to reference objects, but only *descriptive facts* about how we reference objects. Second, we often understand what a word means when found in context but struggle to offer a definition when under scrutiny, e.g., I *know* what 'obtuse', 'after' and 'ardent' means, but I cannot define them off-the-cuff. In combination, Wittgenstein asks whether this means that we are talking nonsense because we do not know the meaning of every word which we use, and he replies that we are in some sense free to mean whatever we like by the words we use but are also constrained to the facts of the matter. This is contentious because it suggests that we can choose 'religious language' to mean whatever we please such that when one person says that religious language is X, another is free to disagree on the grounds of preferring 'religious language' to mark something else. Austin, noting Ayer's frustration with this kind of verbal manoeuvre, asks 'how could *anything* be a question of truth or falsehood, if anyone can always say whatever he likes?' (Austin 1965: p. 60). Ayer accepts that there is nothing stopping a person from meaning whatever they please by their use of the words 'real', 'real shape' or 'real colour', but he warns that this verbal freedom does not translate into a metaphysical, logical or epistemological freedom. Being able to choose whatever we want to mean by 'religious language' should not convince us that there is an equally free choice about the nature of the objects to which our words correspond (Austin 1965: pp. 59-60). It is one thing to quibble about whether such-and-such is accurately captured by the term 'house' but quite another to quibble about whether the object exists, is made of bricks and has four walls – likewise is to be thought about the object language which we seek out. People likely mean different things by 'religious language' which is an inevitable outcome of there being no prescriptive facts of language, but that does not mean that sentences like 'religious language is cognitive' are always correct.

The classification of a name as proper or common holds considerable influence over the sense of

our sentences, the cognitive semantic value of our utterances, and the sort of approach which a field linguist would be required to take to fulfil their task. This chapter has started to identify a relationship between our recognition of a word as a name and our awareness of the object which the name references, implying that *if* 'religious language' is a name *in our metalanguage* then there must be a description available from *within* metalanguage which accounts for the object which it designates. This offers serious hope for the field linguist, who by studying the meaning of sentences *about* 'religious language' from within the familiar territory of metalanguage can come to grasp a description of the *object language* which the name references. Due to the field linguist paradox, we cannot offer a description which requires the field linguist to have *prior knowledge* about the religion or its language, e.g., we cannot reference *religious* locations because the field linguist does not know what *makes* a location, context, language, book etc., 'religious'. There are at least two directions to take in response to this: Kripke's distinction of rigid and nonrigid designation, and Frege's introduction of *sense*. Each view will be introduced, critically analysed, and shown to be individually unsuccessful, but potentially ideal if blended into a hybrid position through a mode of religious realism.

If we take 'religious language' to be a name, then our understanding of how names work could provide valuable information to the field linguist. For example, Kripke takes a proper name to be a rigid designator, something which directly references a specific object in every possible world in which that object exists and never anything else, as such, if Kripke is correct and 'religious language' is a proper name, then so long as we are right to use it as a name, we should be able to identify the object which we mean to reference. On the other hand, Frege holds that a name is comprised of both reference and sense, where sense acts as a description for the object which we mean to reference even on occasions where there is no actual existing object. Therefore, if Frege is correct and we use 'religious language' as a name, then we should be able to identify the sort of object we mean to reference by discovering its *sense*. The next chapters explore Kripke and Frege, identifying their strengths and weaknesses, and concludes that each approach has something valuable to offer our investigation but neither of them are decisive solutions.

S1. C5. Kripke

We can call a name a designator because its semantic function is to reference, and Kripke suggests that we should 'call something a rigid designator if in every possible world it designates the same object, a nonrigid or accidental designator if that is not the case' (Kripke 1980: p. 48). Thus, rigid designators are things (not necessarily words, but symbols) which directly reference 'the same object in all possible worlds in which that object exists and never designates anything else'[73] whilst *non*rigid or *accidental* designators reference an object in a looser and perhaps broader sense, e.g., 'Aristotle' is a rigid designator whilst 'the pupil of Plato' is nonrigid (LaPorte 2006: p. 322) & (LaPorte 2018). Proper names are rigid because they pick out an individual and designate it in all possible worlds in which that object exists at all possible times whilst it exists. Common names are nonrigid because they reference a collection of attributes and properties which several different individuals could fulfil within the same/multiple worlds at different time periods. For example, 'The Queen of England' is a nonrigid common name because several different individuals could meet that description, whilst each of those individuals possess a rigidly designating proper name, one of which being 'Elizabeth Alexandra Mary Windsor', because the name designates *the same individual in every possible world in which that individual exists*. If 'religious language' is a name we must ask whether it is rigid as a proper name or nonrigid as a common name, and how, under either classification, the field linguist could use that information in their study.

Where a rigid designator directly references the same object in any possible world in which that object exists, a nonrigid designator indicates towards but does not directly reference an object – nonrigid designation is usually encountered through *definite descriptions*; statements which lead one to identify an object in virtue of that object meeting the given description (Schwartz 1980: p. 196). If 'religious language' is a common name and references a classification type and not a specific individual then it would be nonrigid in virtue of the classification being itself a description, but as there are some nonrigid designators which are not common names, it remains possible that 'religious language' is neither a proper nor a common name and is still nonrigid. Part of the contention here is that a rigid designator picks out a specific object (it targets a particular identity), but as proper names do not describe objects and therefore do not offer any information about the object's identity, we are forced to ask questions about the identity of the object so to ensure that we are using the right name in relation to the right object. It becomes somewhat unclear at this point as

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[73] Szabó and Thomason offer a more detailed explanation, 'ordinary proper names, whether they are empty or not, are modally and temporally rigid: they designate the same thing at all possible worlds and at all times if they designate anything' (Szabó and Thomason 2019: p. 82).

for whether a referring expression which describes the object counts as a common or a proper name, but in virtue of describing it appears to fall outside the rigid designation category. Once we know those specific details, we can question whether the rigid designator *describes* the object. Kripke clarifies that '…although someone other than the U.S. President in 1970 might have been the U.S. President in 1970 (e.g., Humphrey might have), no one other than Nixon might have been Nixon', therefore 'the U.S. President in 1970' is nonrigid whilst 'Nixon' is rigid (Kripke 1980: p. 48). Continuing, Kripke adds, '…proper names are rigid designators, for although the man (Nixon) might not have been the President, it is not the case that he might not have been Nixon (though he might not have been *called* 'Nixon').'[74] (Kripke 1980: p. 49). But this raises the question of whether being the U.S. President in 1970 is an essential element to the identity of the object which we mean to rigidly designate with the proper name Nixon, for if it is then we must respect some degree of description, but if that is not an essential element to the object's identity, then we must ask what is. Kripke gives some thought to this and notes that,

> When we think of a property as essential to an object we usually mean that it is true of that object in any case where it would have existed. A rigid designator of a necessary existent can be called *strongly rigid.* (Kripke 1980: p. 48).

For example, if we were to say that omnipotence is an essential property to the object which we mean to mark by the term 'God', then we are saying that 'God' is a *strongly rigid designator* of an object which must necessarily possess omnipotence.[75] Considering Russell's views on descriptions, if the proposition 'the word 'God' successfully picks out an object which is essentially omnipotent' is true, and therefore 'God is omnipotent' is a true description of the object which the name 'God' designates, then we would have an ideal foundation for our study. The study of religious language would be a study of *what is said about the objects rigidly designated by names like 'God'*, but we are left in some doubt because we do not know whether such objects exist. What we are not in doubt of, though, is the fact that some people believe that the object picked out by 'God' is necessarily and essentially omnipotent, meaning that we are able to deduce that their use of the term 'God' is strongly rigid in designation. At the very least, the study of religious language would contextually be a study of the language used by the religious when they are talking about the objects of their belief, and if one of those objects happened to be language, then the study of

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[74] Russell suggests that a name might be a property of the object which it references where he writes, 'A description which will often serve to express my thought is "the man whose name was *Julius Caesar*". For whatever else I may have forgotten about him, it is plain that when I mention him I have not forgotten that that was his name.' (Russell 1917: p. 221).

[75] This is considered in greater detail in S3. C4. in the context of negotiable and non-negotiable commitments.

religious language could also be a study of *an actual object language* and not merely a language used to talk *about* religious objects. However, as the ideal account for religious language would address religious diversity, it would be preferable to identify an object which is not limited to just *one* language or religious tradition.

A common name stands for a type which is itself a description of the sorts of things which are classified under its term, but a name could exist for a *species* such that the name is proper and yet somewhat functions as a description. LaPorte gives the example of the term 'Honeybee' which 'seems to pick out the honeybee kind rigidly' whilst, ''the insect species that is typically farmed for honey' happens to designate the honeybee, but it does not rigidly designate the honeybee', and is therefore a nonrigid definite description (LaPorte 2000: pp. 296-297). It could be the case that 'religious language' *as a noun* rigidly designates a specific kind or species of language whilst Scott's outlining of putatively religious sentences is a nonrigid definite description which may likely come in consequence of an *adjective* reading of 'religious language' as well as a portrayal of common tendencies within the field of literature. Clearly, there is a need to specify a particular individual object which bears the name 'religious language' whilst also ensuring space for diversity and plurality, and naming a species, type or family is a potential way forward. In either case, Kripkean accounts of names are realist due to their presupposition that there are language independent objects, and as the objects have no causal influence on the names, Kripkeans need 'something like a causal theory of reference, where links between language and world are created in baptismal events, in which baptizers are causally connected to the items named' (Chakravartty 2007: p. 54).

If proper names are like labels on objects, then the baptising act of sticking a label onto an object is what *causally* links language and the world together, and Austin's issue is that we could attach any name onto any object without objection. If we are studying the meaning of religious sentences then we want to guarantee that such sentences 'exist' to be studied, and part of this is that there is an object *fit* for the name. A similar point is expressed by the misidentification challenge – if a child was to point at a shrew and say 'this is a mouse', how are we to correct them if they are able to retort, 'no, I am telling you that I am naming this thing, 'mouse''? ; likewise, what do we say to the field linguist whom we suspect to have mistakenly called a moral language 'religious'? (Slezak 2002: p. 369). We do not want the field linguist to arbitrarily baptise an object 'religious language' and then report its meaning, we want them to identify *what we mean* by 'religious language', and that requires us to explain our naming ceremonies. This is an expansion of Wittgenstein's questions

about how we should understand sentences like '*this* is blue' – do we take it as a statement about the *object* (that this is blue in colour) or as a statement about the *word* 'blue' (that this is the sort of thing which we mean to mark with the word 'blue')? (Wittgenstein 1994: §38). If we do not know what the word 'religious language' means nor what the object language is, then how are we to understand someone saying, '*this* is religious language'? We would want to know about truth-conditions if they said that they are reporting a fact about the object or word, and if they are not reporting a fact but are instead *baptising* the object with that word then we could, as Austin objects, point at whatever we please. This does not mean that we must choose between believing that there are objective facts to language or face a sort of linguistic nihilism, but that if there is an account for *why* and *how* we commonly refer to the same objects with the same words, then it must be applicable to our use of 'religious language', irrespective to its status as a proper or common name. Kripke might agree that pointing at an object and naming it 'Charles' is sufficient for a baptismal event, but there are still serious questions about naming abstract objects which we cannot 'point out', like language or pain. There is also pragmatic difficulty with identifying the 'correct' reading of sentences like 'this is a religious language', where in one sense we could read it as a truth-apt *description* that this thing referenced is an example of the thing we call 'religious language', whilst in another sense we could read it as a declarative *prescription* that this object referenced *is baptised with the name* 'religious language'.

A further contention is that, 'the reference of a rigid designator can be fixed by a nonrigid one… The entity upon which the truth of a name-containing utterance, standardly used, rigidly depends is fixed by a thought-component which may not be, and typically is not, rigid.' (Sainsbury 2003: p. 99). Consequently, and borrowing from Kripke's example, several people can have the name 'Nixon' but there is only *one* person who we mean to exclusively reference by that name in any possible world in which that person exists, and this requires the assumption that the person has unique identifiable features fit for direct rigid designation. Problematically, we can quickly find ourselves in a typically philosophical muddle about what makes a person *that* person; do we mean to designate the person's body, appearance, skills, memories, subjectivity, or a cluster[76] of all these things? Indeed, many of our names are meant to be causally linked with specific objects in consequence of our *subjective* (and therefore nonrigid) thought-components, such as an evaluation of an individual's beauty. For example, sentences like ''Marilyn Monroe' is an ugly person's name' is linguistically confusing not simply because we think it is factually false, but because we use that

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[76] Cf. (Baker and Hacker 1983: p. 237).

name *to mean to say* that a person is beautiful, e.g., 'look how beautiful your child is, she's a little Marilyn Monroe'. Similarly, a child's love and interest for science can be expressed by referencing them*, but not naming them*,[77] 'Einstein', thus the sentence ''Einstein' is the name of a stupid person' is an error of language as well as a potential error of historical fact.

Under Kripke's dichotomy of names, proper names can be categorized as rigid designators because they directly reference the same object in every possible world where that object exists, whilst common names and definite descriptions can be categorized as nonrigid designators because they indirectly reference a *type* of object. This distinction is intuitive and helpfully implies that a proper name is not limited to purely cognitive evaluation because a name does not make a claim *about* an object but is rather the reference for that object. However, if this was true and 'religious language' was a rigid designator of a specific object, then although the name does not describe the object, we must possess some descriptive knowledge about the object so to ensure that we can relate this name with the same object on each use of it. In effect, the object is the extension of the name and our descriptive knowledge of the object's identity is the intensional meaning, but many names are used to reference objects which we identify on strictly nonrigid criteria.

If 'religious language' was a proper name, then we would be required to describe the identity of the object every time we use the name and this heightens the essentiality of this thesis's task; if 'religious language' is a proper name without an object, then it is not a proper name and our sentences which treat it as one are *semantically valueless*. Alternatively, if 'religious language' is nonrigid in designation, then we are nonetheless required to provide a description of *what* the term is pointing towards, and we have the continuous pressure that each use of the term constitutes either a naming ceremony or a description without clear truth-conditions. But we have also identified an additional factor in this chapter: the use of a name is not accountable to just its extensional referent or the intensional description of the name's object, but *its semantic sense*.

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[77] If we were to hear a teacher commend a child for their love of science and the parent was to look at their child and say, "he's an Einstein", we would not take this to be a naming ceremony of the child *nor* a factual statement revealing that child's ancestry.

S1. C6. Frege

Frege writes that expressions, propositions, and identity statements usually feature names which introduce a referent into a sentence such that we can associate what is being said with an object being spoken about (Chalmers 2006: p. 56). Frege further claims that if a name was just the function of designating an object, then all names which designate the same object would share identical semantic value – but they do not. This requires an additional dimension of meaning to exist which accounts for the semantic difference, which Frege calls 'Sinn', and is traditionally translated into English as 'Sense', but as the term is of a lexical field, we should avoid thinking that it carries the ordinary linguistic baggage (Morris 2007: pp. 21-47). Therefore if 'religious language' is a name and operates as Frege maintains, then a field linguist should be able to discover its referent by studying the metalanguage.

Frege's *Sense and Reference*, which introduces the concept of sense, begins with a contention: how could a = b, if true, differ from the cognitive equivalent a = a? (Frege 1948). To illustrate, if the meaning of a sentence which contains a proper name is dependent upon the extensional element of that name (the object it stands to reference), then the meaning of a sentence should not be influenced if we were to swap one proper name with another which references the exact same object, but it is influenced, thus showing that there is more to a proper name than just designation. For example, the sentence 'the Morning Star is the Morning Star' should be cognitively equivalent to the sentence 'the Morning Star is the Evening Star' because 'Morning Star' and 'Evening Star' name the exact same object (Frege 1948: p. 210). However, the first sentence is uninformative and *analytic* due to having its truth in virtue of the rules of language alone, whilst the second sentence is in one respect informative due to it expressing a fact about astronomy and language, whilst in another respect it's *synthetic* due to its truth requiring empirical investigation (Searle 1958: p. 166). If 'religious language' rigidly designates *the same object* as 'mystical language', then we should ask whether 'religious language is religious language' shares the same semantic value as 'religious language is mystical language'; and the answer seems to be no. This implies that the second sentence is synthetic, thus Frege writes that in addition to what we can call the reference of the sign (the object which the word references), there is something in addition which he would 'like to call the *sense* of the sign, wherein the mode of presentation is contained. In our example, accordingly, […] the reference of 'evening star' would be the same as that of 'morning star,' but not the sense.' (Frege 1948: p. 210).

Frege identifies *sense* as the feature of language which is the semantic difference between saying a=a and a=b, but also as *the cause* for the semantic difference insofar as he highlights that one notices sense when they notice the mode of presentation. On the one hand, a word's sense is its meaning (the *sense* is that aspect of morning star = evening star which makes the sentence synthetic), but it is also in some manner the *indication* of what the name means to reference; that 'morning star' seems to name something at odds with 'evening star', hence our surprise at discovering that the two name the same star.[78] Sense, therefore, is found in the relationship between a name and its object as indicated through our use of the name and presentation of the object – sense likely has its origin in *naming rituals*. The importance of this is immense,

> Accordingly, with a proper name, it is a matter of the way that the object so designated is presented. This may happen in different ways, and to every such way there corresponds a special sense of a sentence containing the proper name. The different thoughts thus obtained from the same sentences correspond in truth-value, of course; that is to say, if one is true then all are true, and if one is false then all are false. Nevertheless the difference must be recognized. So we must really stipulate that for every proper name there shall be just one associated manner of presentation of the object so designated. (Frege 1918: p. 359).

Any given object is open for several different names, each with their own *sense* of meaning, because the same object can be presented in a variety of different ways. Even if we used the same term 'religious language' and agreed that it named the same object, the fact that the object's appearance can alter depending on context or perspective means that the object is often presented in different ways when being named, thus the name 'religious language' could have several different senses. Alternatively, 'religious language' might have a *sense*, but it might not be constant nor truly indicative of the existence of an actual object –

> It may perhaps be granted that every well-formed expression representing a proper name always has a sense. *But this is not to say that to the sense there also corresponds a reference.* The words 'the celestial body most distant from the Earth' have a sense, but it is very doubtful if they also have a reference. The expression 'the least rapidly convergent series' has a sense but demonstrably has no reference, since for every given convergent series, another convergent, but less rapidly convergent, series can be found. In grasping a sense, one is not certainly assured of a reference. (Frege 1948: p. 11).

Although there is a sense to 'religious language' which is not captured by 'mystical language', this does not mean that there are two *different objects*; indeed, they may fail to reference any object whatsoever, and their sense could be accountable to custom rather than the presentation of an

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[78] Kripke writes, 'Frege should be criticized for using the term 'sense' in two senses. For he takes the sense of a designator to be its meaning ; and he also takes it to be the way its reference is determined.' (Kripke 1980: p. 59).

object. When we notice a sign being used as a subject for a proposition, we intuit that it is a name and therefore has an associated object which it references, but this is a *surface grammar* identification, and it can lead us into error. Take the example of a sentence like 'the pain is throbbing' and how we could picture someone thinking that 'pain' in naming some physical object which is pulsating in size or shape, but on deeper analysis (hence depth grammar) we discover that the concept of pain and the term itself rarely, if ever, is thought of as an object and referenced with a name (Klein 1976: pp. 254-255). Inferring this, Frege writes that 'the sense of a proper name is grasped by everybody who is sufficiently familiar with the language or totality of designations to which it belongs', implying that grasping sense is *part and parcel* of language fluency – but grasping is not the same as knowing, or more broadly, know-how to use a word is not the same as knowing-that the word is a name (Frege 1948: p. 210). Proportionately, an etic study of 'religious language' might yield few fruits if the ability to detect *sense* is part and parcel of being a member of the community and in possession of an emic perspective. Yet, if 'religious language' is an etic *metalanguage* term which references an emic *object language*, then one's familiarity with the etic metalanguage might mean that they can grasp the sense of the name which in turn provides information about the emic object language it references. This could be a sophisticated explanation for the current study of religious language – we take the ability to identify a 'religious language' or sentence for granted because the sense of the name is already grasped within metalanguage, and although sense does not guarantee that such a referent exists, we cannot help but suppose that it does and so should go looking.

Frege's view that the sense of a name can be grasped by those who are familiar with the language suggests that our ability to grasp the sense of the study's use of the term 'religious language' implies that we share a degree of familiarity with not simply the metalanguage of the study, but religious language itself *if* our use of the term is descriptive rather than causal in meaning. Recalling Austin's concern, although *anything* could be baptised with the name 'religious language' under a Causal Account of word meaning, a Fregean Description Account allows for an object to be 'picked out' of the name as indicated by its sense, making the name describe as much as it represents the object. For example, Searle suggests that if we were to discover that the person referred to by the name 'Aristotle' never existed but was a historical fabrication, then although *the sense* of 'Aristotle' being a proper name for a person may be lost, there nonetheless remains a sense to saying that 'Kant was a good philosopher, but he was no Aristotle' (Searle 1958: pp. 168-169). This is because some names certainly possess a *sense* but only contingently possess a reference, e.g., there is a sense to the names 'Easter Bunny', 'Santa' and 'Ra', but we might not believe that

the name reference actual objects – they are descriptions of our ideas and not descriptions stemming from observations of objects. The issue here is that if, for example, the phrase 'religious language is mysterious' was shown in some manner to be false, the use of the phrase could nonetheless influence the *sense* of the name and we might struggle to shake that sense off.

Our consideration of Kripke and Frege stemmed from the distinction between proper and common names, and it is apparent that if a name references something external to itself, then we must suppose the existence of a language-independent realm where objects exist fit for designation, description, and naming, irrespective to a name's rigidness or sense. Indeed, even Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* view of language conforms with those of Russell, Frege and many others in its adoption of an albeit different, though nonetheless metaphysically realist, view that the objects named in language must be supposed to exist independent to language (Hacker 2001: pp. 71-72). In essence, all the accounts for names which have been considered are realist because *if* a name references an individual or a type of individual, then we must suppose that such individuals (and their types) exist independent to language – that the things which we pin our labels onto and shuffle under types of categories *are real*. Significantly, this does not require us to suppose that 'religious language' names a *real* object, on the one hand it could name a type, but on the other, as Frege points out, it might not name anything at all. It is not necessary for religious language to name an *actual object* in the external world, rather it only needs to reference an object (broadly construed so to allow nominalist accounts) which exists *outside* of the metalanguage. In other words, the study of religious language needs the object named 'religious language' to exist *outside* of the metalanguage, otherwise the study of religious language is a study of whatever we please.

S1. C7. Section Conclusion

The dominant approaches within the study of religious language are principally concerned with providing a general account for the meaning of religious sentences, sentences which are taken as positing a religious entity or property due to its content or context. Methodologically speaking, the study presents token religious sentences and applies theoretical concepts to them like non-cognitivism, error theory, reductionism and minimalism, so to see which individual or combination of concepts yield the most insightful and consistent explanatory power. Of all things which a general account could include, questions of truth (be it cognitivism, objectivism, verification etc.,) are of upmost interest – are terms like 'God' referring expressions; are statements like 'Jesus died for our sins' cognitive propositions, and if so, what are its truth-conditions, and do they obtain? Although Scott and Vainio are correct in their summaries of the study having this shape and direction, the study itself is mistaken to believe that this is the best way to reach a sufficiently robust account for religious language.

We must presuppose the existence of X in order to study X, and if we reference X with the term Y, then we must ask *how* Y references X so to ensure that we are studying X and not Y. In our case, the study of religious language attempts to target *that* (X) which the term 'religious language' (Y) means to pick out, and although the study offers descriptions of what religious sentences look like, there is no account for *what makes them religious*. As such, there is no clear explanation for how to verify whether we have picked out the 'correct' object by the term 'religious language'. That said, there is still a *sense* to what the term means to pick out such that we could in principle compose a checklist of sentences and commonly tick off those which strike us as being religious. The study relies on that sense (whatever it may be) in order to identify religious sentences which are then studied, and so there would be a plethora of problems if that sense cannot be accounted for. Firstly, it would be embarrassing to discover that terms like 'religious language' are empty names as that would mean that the study of religious language is *not* a study of a common object. Secondly, the Causal Account for names implies that sentences like '*this* is a religious sentence' are baptismal events and so the study of religious language is more accurately a study of *whatever we baptise with that name.* Thirdly, if it were the case that a sufficient account for the meaning of a religious sentence must also account for the religiosity of its language then any account which does not include *that sort of discussion* will inevitably fail, and as observed, that sort of discussion is not currently included in general accounts. The questions which the study asks about words like 'God' and 'Karma', such as whether they are referring expressions, and if so, are their extensions

subjective or objective/verifiable via empiricism or rationalism, are not restricted to only the words in religious utterances. They can and should be asked about the words in our metalanguage talk about religious language.

If the reason why the study principally addresses the meaning of token sentence is because it already has a compelling account for what makes a sentence or language religious, then our request to have that account explained should not be too difficult to fulfil nor too unreasonable to ask. This is not to say that there are no accounts, but that they are usually rather brief, scarce in detail, and rarely applied to a diverse range of religions and host-languages – indeed, many of them are justified in appeal to preconceived beliefs *about* religion. That said, we have a candidate hypothesis: our know-how of the surface grammar which *hosts* religious and metalanguage allows us to notice when a sentence is grammatically formed in a way which implies the presence of depth grammar and subsequently an alternative domain of meaning than what surface grammar alone can provide. If 'religious language', 'religious sentence', 'religious utterance' etc., are used as referring expressions such that the study of religious language is a study of the *objects* being referred to, then our task of establishing the identity of those objects requires us to first establish the classificational identity of those referring expressions. If they are proper names then they must pick out a particular individual but if they are common names then they must stand for a *type* of individual – and even then, if we were to agree (for example) that they are proper names, we still have all the work ahead of us to determine whether they are accountable to a Millian, Russellian, Fregean or Kripkean reading.

By adopting a field linguist position which is aware of both its etic surface grammar perspective and its emic depth grammar limitations, we find that what starts as a cursory request to have the object language brought to attention soon becomes a substantial problem about how this can be done and what the implications are if it isn't. So, although we use the term 'religious language' as a referring expression and the legitimacy of the study depends on that being justified, it is far from clear what *sort* of referring expression it is and how the objects are identified, and any solution brings baggage. It appears once again that a surface grammar reading of the metalanguage term 'religious language' has it as a referring expression which describes the sort of object to which it corresponds – it references a language which is religious. A deeper grammatical reading casts doubt on this because if it is a Millian or Kripkean proper name then such a description cannot be established, whilst if it is Russellian or even Fregean then there needs to be either some descriptive knowledge about the object or a capacity to *sense* a further implication of the name's use. But for

our purposes, the link between our grammatical know-how of the English host-language and the English metalanguage is becoming far more apparent, irrespective to whether we conclude that 'religious language' is a specific type of referring expression.

It is acknowledged on all sides that there are several religious languages (or that 'religious language' is not limited to just Christianity) and this leaves us with a handful of questions which must be answered if we are to judge whether 'religious language' refers to an individual or type of individual. How many religious languages are there; how many ways can a language be religious; how many religions have religious languages; which religions have which religious languages, and how? Putting aside the Millian or Kripkean contention that 'religious language' should not be taken as a description of what it names as well as the Fregean view that the name possesses a sense (whatever that sense may be), we can nonetheless consider the sorts of sentences which the study already deals with and note their *diversity*.

Section Two - Dealing with Diversity

S2. C1. The Sort of Account We Need

The previous section outlined how the dominant approach within the study of religious language has the chief aim of establishing a general account for the meaning of token religious sentences. This presupposes that we have some method or ability to identify which sentences are religious, but as it is believed that a general account for their meaning does not need to include an account for their identity, such presuppositions, though no doubt essential for the study's legitimacy, drop out of consideration. If we are right to conclude that metalanguage terms like 'religious language' and 'religious sentence' are referring expressions then we must ask for how their referents track across the breadth and depth of religious and host-language diversity; if they do, how, if they do not, then is the study limited?

We need to account for the method, skill or knowledge which causes us to identify a sentence as religious if we are to develop a robust theory for religious language, and a sufficient account for this will include an explanation for how we can *discover* that religious element of language from a field linguist's perspective. It could be true that we identify sentences as religious when they posit a religious entity or property because such positing is what *makes* a sentence religious, but a sufficient account for this will outline how a person can discover this truth. When we ask about what religious language is and what its sentences mean we are also asking about what religion is and what characterises the language as being *like that*; we can, like Hudson, ask three questions:

> (i) What training is required in order to participate in religious belief [language]? (ii) Is it reasonable, or unreasonable, to do so? (iii) What is the essential difference between those who do participate in it and those who do not? (Hudson 1968: p. 37).

We want to know what sort of training the field linguist must receive for them to be able to *see* a sentence as religious, and as we presuppose that we can already identify religious sentences then we only need to have it brought to the forefront of mind. Moreover, just as Vainio clarifies that,

> My task here is purely descriptive, that is, I do not intend to suggest what religious people should think when they use religious language. Instead, I evaluate which available theories are good descriptive accounts of religious language, that is, whether they adequately explain what people are doing when they use religious language, or whether they are revisionary accounts that tell religious people how they should use religious language. (Vainio 2020: p. 1).

So too do we seek a descriptive account for how we currently identify sentences as religious, and that requires us to question whether we identify religious sentences differently depending on the religion or host-language in question. Descriptive theories are best appreciated in opposition to *prescriptive theories*, where the latter assert the existence of some authoritative prescriptive standards, rules or facts to language such as to be able to appeal to them in correction or criticism of any token utterance. We must, as Scott warns,

> be careful to distinguish between non-revisionary theories, which aim at giving an interpretation of religious language, from revisionary theories, which aim at modifying how religious language is used and at saying what it ought to mean rather than what it does mean. (Scott 2013: p. 4).

A descriptive theory is usually *non*-revisionary for two reasons: it is not in the business of correction but only description, and in virtue of not being a prescriptivist the descriptivist has no authoritative standards to appeal to if they were to start correcting sentences. Contrarily, a prescriptive theory is usually revisionary because in its presumption of there being facts about what constitutes meaningful speech it cannot help but assume that if an utterance falls outside of those facts, then it fails to be meaningful:

> Non-revisionary theories aim to explain what religious sentences and utterances mean. Revisionary theories, in contrast, propose accounts of what religious language should mean or how it should be used. While non-revisionary theories are descriptive of religious language and should do justice to linguistic data, revisionary theories are usually driven by metaphysical or epistemological considerations. (Scott 2017).

The sort of theory which we seek will be *descriptive* for two reasons: firstly, we want to know how we currently distinguish religious from nonreligious sentences, secondly, we have already established that the most plausible route to forming such an account will rearrange what we already have before us – 'Philosophy may in no way interfere with the actual use of language; it can in the end only describe it. For it cannot give it any foundation either. It leaves everything as it is.' (Wittgenstein 1994: §124). McClendon and Smith share this view and summarise that a general account for religious language should be expected as able to

> show the relations between religious speech and other sorts of everyday speech, exposing not only the elements in religious language which warrant its being called religious, but also those which warrant its being called language – its continuities with other everyday talk as well as its differentia. (McClendon and Smith 1973: p. 414).

McClendon and Smith call for the object referenced by 'religious language' to not merely be brought to attention but accounted for in a manner which makes apparent why and how it warrants

being called both religious and language. If there are grounds which do warrant the term 'religious', such as a description account of referring expressions would entail, then we need to discover what those grounds are – and McClendon and Smith have two important thoughts about this. Firstly, they imply that a sufficient account for the meaning of a religious sentence must also account for what causes the sentence to be distinctly religious in contrast to nonreligious, and this ties into this thesis's proposal that a sentence is religious when it captures the religious domain of meaning. Secondly, they both agree that Ian Ramsey went the most distance towards a sufficient explanation which can be presented in three theses: *generative thesis, functional thesis,* and *justificatory thesis* (McClendon and Smith 1973: pp. 414-415).

The first thesis affirms that religious language originates from a sort of 'cosmic disclosure', the *functional* thesis explores the role of religious language in terms of speech *about* that disclosure, and the *justificatory* thesis considers the 'empirical fit' of a religious utterance regarding the disclosure and the function of the language (McClendon and Smith 1973). A disclosure does not have to be cosmic or religious – there are disclosures of all kinds, such as the moral lesson of a story, the punchline of a joke, or the name of a pet – the term 'disclosure' only means to capture the phenomenological experience of *grasping* the meaning of something. Although it is tempting to say that new information is being disclosed and grasped, Ramsey is careful to stress that

> I use 'disclosure' not in relation to information, but to refer to situations about which various metaphorical phrases are commonly used. Such phrases, e.g., are those which speak of situations 'coming alive', 'taking on depth', situations in which 'the penny drops', where we 'see' but not with eyes of flesh, where something 'strikes us', where 'eye meets eye' and where 'hearts miss a beat'. (Ramsey 1972: p. 115).

McClendon and Smith offer several examples of disclosure events, such as

> a courtroom scene in which the prisoner stands before the judge to be sentenced, only to be recognized as the judge's boyhood friend, or a formal academic tea at which some embarrassing or "revealing" event – someone spills punch on the dean's wife; someone bends over and a garment seam rips wide open; all the lights unexpectedly go out – causes the situation to lose its frigid formality as, in the shared predicament, persons become human for one another. At a certain point, "the ice breaks, the penny drops, the light dawns," and discernment of persons as persons occurs. (McClendon and Smith 1973: p. 416).

One is not disclosed new information per se (as we all know that we are humans), rather a disclosure event is where we are shown what we already know in a revealing manner, it is to rearrange what we already have before us so that we can see things in a new light. Take the first

example where a judge is about to pass a sentence and suddenly realises that the accused is a long-lost childhood friend, everything changes upon this realisation, upon this *disclosure*, and 'no longer is the situation one of judge and accused. What was before a rather objective situation suddenly gains in depth.' (Stiver 1996: p. 75). In Wittgensteinian terms, the judge's experience of an objective, factual, professional court case is of a *surface grammar* kind, but on disclosure that the accused was an old schoolfriend, the situation transforms into something entirely different where surface grammar is insufficient.[79] Instead, the judge finds themself dealing with memories, emotions and personal attachment, it introduces a depth of meaning into the situation and therefore demands a *depth grammar* to address it. A religious disclosure is a combination of a disclosure of persons (that 'penny dropping' moment when we *realise* that we are people) and morality (that 'dawning realisation' of what it morally means to be and see a human as a person). A cosmic disclosure would be such a paradigm-shifting occurrence that everything seems to change and the language which functions best to capture this is 'religious', but if this were true and we can identify religious sentences then we must also suppose that we have had some sort of cosmic disclosure or can recognise when others have. It is possible that our ability to identify other *nonreligious* disclosure events such as ones of persons, art, love or morality means that we are accustomed with coming across grammatical signifiers which indicate the presence of a depth of meaning which must be contextualised to be accessed – hence why McClendon and Smith suggest that an account must address religious and nonreligious language. Nielsen champions a description of what an utterance must be like in order to be religious which is compatible with the sort of thing which McClendon, Smith and Ramsey seem to envision –

> To be unequivocally a religious utterance, (1) my utterance must in normal contexts be expressive of and have a tendency to be evocative of a very pervasive and focal attitude towards life, and (2) the objects of these attitudes must be objects of devotion and commitment. (K. Nielsen 1982: p. 2).

Nielsen's emphasis that an utterance must be *expressive of and have a tendency to be evocative* is a considerable change in direction; instead of taking religious sentences as ones which posit a religious entity or property, they are ones which express and evoke a pervasive and focal attitude towards life which carry objects of devotion and commitment along as baggage. The thought that a sentence can evoke a particular attitude or disposition makes it possible for religious sentences to *reveal themselves as being religious* – we don't discover them, they make themselves apparent to

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[79] Cf. (Ellis 2020a) for a broader discussion about how the depth grammar of religious language can sufficiently address the depth of the human condition.

us. In a very real sense, they evoke an extraordinary experience within a person and this experience *is* what we mean to call 'religious' therefore a religious language is a language which we have a religious experience of.[80] Although the thought that a language could be discovered as religious because of some disclosure event or due to its own evocative manner is novel, it raises its own sorts of problems in terms of verification. If there is a fact to what is and what is not a religious sentence such that the claim 'this is a religious sentence' is either true or false, then there must be a *verification principle* which outlines what its truth conditions are and how to judge if they obtain, and the most notable version of this is the Logical Positivist's.

A.J Ayer's *Language, Truth and Logic* presents the well-known version of the verification principle – the primary function of language is communicating propositions, and a proposition is meaningful *if and only if* it can be verified through analytic reason or rigorously gathered experience based data (Ayer 1983) & (Hughes 1993: p. 95). Crucially, the verification principle is not separate to that which determines the meaning of a sentence as if it is a metal detector which only detects and does not *determine* whether an object is metal, rather, 'the meaning of a statement is the method of its verification' (Wisdom 1938: p. 452). Or, in greater detail,

> We say that a sentence is factually significant to any given person, if, and only if, he knows how to verify the proposition which it purports to express – that is, if he knows what observations would lead him, under certain conditions, to accept the proposition as being true, or reject it as being false. (Ayer 1983: p. 48).

Verification is a feature of language meaning insofar as the status of being a proposition is determinable to one's ability, in principle, to verify the truth or falsity of its claim – verification is not targeting the fact being reported, but whether the sentence even reports a fact. Any epistemological system which lays out the standard for testing the truth or falsehood of a claim is a verification principle, and the most popular is found within Logical Positivism which asserts that, 'a meaningful statement must either be empirically verifiable, or be a tautology, that is, analytic or true by definition' (Sprigge 2001: p. 206). It is not that a proposition must be deemed true or false to be a 'meaningful proposition', but that the proposition must be shown as asserting something which can in principle be determined as true or false, irrespective to whether anyone ever reaches

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[80] Cf. Haddox's *Religious Language as Religious Experience* for a brief overview of some of the problems facing an understanding of religious language as a religious experience (Haddox 1971). Likewise, Chatterjee responds to some of those criticisms saying, 'Ah, but this is an example of the cognitive element in religious *experience,* it may be objected, rather than in religious *language.* This does not worry me. Religious experience finds expression in language. Often a gesture takes the place of language, as in the case of a floral offering.' (Chatterjee 1974: p. 473).

the answer.[81] Those sentences which at first appear to be propositions but are shown as having no clear means for testing under scrutiny, are stripped of the semantic status of a proposition and are deemed a *pseudo-proposition*. The verification principle can be applied to the study of religious language in two ways: religious sentences must be verifiable, but so too must the metalanguage sentences about religious sentences. Thus, if 'religious language' is a referring expression and the subject for the proposition 'religious language is accountable to Moderate Attitude Theory' then if we cannot designate what the term references then it fails to be fit for a proposition's subject and subsequently the claim 'religious language is accountable to Moderate Attitude Theory' is a pseudo-proposition. The verification principle brings the threat of prescriptive revision,

> If, with verificational analysis, language is initially pictured as an instrument whose *essential* function is to make possible the communication of empirical facts, then conceptual shears are supplied to snip off those utterances which fail to further this function. (Ferré 1970: p. 92).

Logical Positivists readily yield these shears and are happy to snip branches off language in their usual course of analysis, and 'a good example of the kind of utterance that is condemned by our criterion as being not even false but nonsensical would be the assertion that the world of sense-experience was altogether unreal' (Ayer 1983: p. 53). The reasoning behind Ayer's example appeals to how it is often our sense-experiences which inform us that *other* sense-experiences have mislead us, and so any belief which rejects the world of sense-experience is self-defeating – 'anyone who condemns the sensible world as a world of mere appearance, as opposed to reality, is saying something which, according to our criterion of significance, is literally nonsensical' (Ayer 1983: p. 53). As the verification principle is applicable to sentences *in* religious language then we would condemn as nonsense any religious sentence which asserts that the world of sense-experience was unreal, such as found in Buddhism and Advaita Vedanta.[82] Furthermore, as the verification principle is also applicable to metalanguage sentences about religious sentences then we would also condemn as nonsense any general account for the meaning of religious sentences which asserts the nonreality of the world of sense-experiences, such as global anti-realism. But this raises a rather odd implication – if 'religious sentences are non-cognitive' is a cognitive metalanguage proposition, then we must assume that the claim is in principle verifiable. This means that we must posit some prescriptive fact about what a religious language is like such that we can

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[81] Ayer distinguishes *practical* verifiability from verifiable *in principle*; the proposition 'the earth orbits the sun' was *in principle* verifiable in 13th century England, but it was not practically verifiable due to technological limitations – therefore the proposition, if ever made, would have been meaningful (Ayer 1983: pp. 48-49).
[82] This is explored in S3 & 4.

verify whether the term 'religious sentences' is a referring expression which *successfully* picks that object language out of the world of sense-experience and introduces it as the proposition's subject. The oddness of this is that it makes intuitive sense to verify whether a claim is correct, but it is less intuitively obvious what it means to verify that a sentence *is* a sentence – 'I fail to see what could be meant by saying that a *sentence* is verifiable, nor what could be meant by saying that a *sentence* is true or false, though some philosophers say this sort of thing.' (Lazerowitz 1939: p. 203). It implies that there is some fact or truth to what a sentence is *outside* of the sentences themselves, and this oddness of thinking is expressed by Richard Rorty,

> To say that truth is not out there is simply to say that where there are no sentences there is no truth, that sentences are elements of human languages, and that human languages are human creations. Truth cannot be out there – cannot exist independent of the human mind – because sentences cannot so exist, or be out there. The world is out there, but descriptions of the world are not. Only descriptions of the world can be true or false. The world on its own – unaided by the describing activities of human beings – cannot. (Rorty 1989: p. 5).

Although believing that there is a mind-independent language in the world would be a suitable way for verifying whether a candidate sentence is meaningful, the verificationist is not obligated to be a language realist in that sense. That said, it is worth noting that several religious traditions do posit the mind-independent existence of an object language which is instantiated with religious properties and so a metaphysical verification process could take place which would not be plausible for a nominalist language. It is also odd (and revisionary) to discard our initial identification of a religious sentence because under closer examination it is revealed by the verification principle as nonsense (Ayer 1983: p. 158). The verification principle is therefore necessarily prescriptive but there is considerable dispute as for whether it is also necessarily revisionary.

Although prescribing standards for language is not the same as revising the language, one of the principal projects of Logical Positivism 'was to show how to translate all meaningful language into scientific language, in other words, to reduce meaningful nonscientific language to scientific language.' (Martinich 2001: p. 2). Many opposed the verification's revisionary approach towards religious language, such as Margaret Chatterjee, who accused it of being 'in all cases occupied with a clarificatory, if not a corrective task', where 'actual grammar was to be replaced by logical grammar' (Chatterjee 1974: p. 474). Making her position clear, Chatterjee emphasises that 'religious language does not need correction. It needs understanding' and she is frustrated with any analytic approach towards religious language which utilises a verification principle in virtue of it being prescriptive as opposed to descriptive (Chatterjee 1974: p. 474). Chatterjee continues that

those who take such positivist approaches often misrepresent religious language as theological (and vice versa) – religious language is 'the language of addressal (as against the language of statement), of prayer, praise, worship, religious celebration (including verbal and non-verbal acts), and religious instruction (including questioning and the use of parable)' (Chatterjee 1974: p. 474). Theological discourse is propositional whilst religious language is existential; theology is for talking *about* religion in order for us to know more about religious beliefs, practices and customs, whilst religious language is for talking *to* the objects of religious belief for the purpose of *knowing them* – indeed, 'the former is the language of description (which is why it clashes head-on with the verificationist thesis), the latter is the language of invocation.' (Chatterjee 1967: p. 393). This is not strictly in opposition with Scott's description if we interpret Chatterjee as *indirectly* positing religious entities and properties via addressal, but even then, those kinds of sentences do not appear to be the sorts which the study is chiefly concerned with. Such an interpretation would also presuppose 'that the very use of certain forms of linguistic expression itself commits the speaker to something like a theory about the nature of things' thus praying to God is an act of addressal which presupposes the existence of the object which 'God' references (Winch 1977: pp. 204-205).

The verificationist movement 'diverted philosophical attention to the propositional', meaning that the majority of those who studied religious language concentrated on topics like cognitivism, truth-conditions and reductionism – issues of the philosopher's own creation which rarely, if ever, crop up in the lives of the religious (Chatterjee 1967: p. 393). These sorts of questions target what Chatterjee considers to be *theological discourse* and not religious language, and so the study has started off on the wrong foot. Theological discourse is performed by the religious community in a metalanguage and so it is in some sense etic as well as emic; it is emic insofar as having first-hand experience from within the community, yet it is etic insofar as it is neither religion nor religious language, and so it is to the side of the object or system under examination. Chatterjee does not think that theological discourse is uninformative about religious language, but that for the person who has a purely etic perspective they may struggle to *see* the dividing line between the emic and the etic, and so religious language can 'have theological presuppositions which *may* mislead. At least they may mislead whoever tries to analyse the meaning 'from the outside'.' (Chatterjee 1974: p. 474). Chatterjee's approach towards religious language is in many ways sympathetic to MacIntyre's: they both agree that a non-revisionary description is preferred over a revisionary prescription, they are both sceptical of the extent to which religious language relates or depends upon the sorts of beliefs which analytic philosophers have in mind, and they both take clear

inspiration from the late-Wittgenstein tradition.[83] They are not however without their own opponents.

Referencing Malcom Diamond's[84] belief that the verification principle has demonstrated the meaninglessness of talk about God, McClendon and Smith argue that this does not have to be so and that verificationism can be non-revisionary (McClendon and Smith 1973). Even *if* the verification principle supplies the philosopher with conceptual shears to snip off dead ends, it does not mean that verificationism is false nor that the ideal theory for religious language is unachievable through it.[85] The distrust which people like Chatterjee and MacIntyre have with the Positivist's linguistic analysis

> has a more profound cause than the misreading of the role of verificationism in modern analytical philosophy. This cause, we believe, is the lack of an adequate general theory of religious language which will account for the truth in the verification theory while showing its limits, and will integrate most of the modern insights into religious language as well. (McClendon and Smith 1973: p. 413).

The distrust of the verificationist's approach towards religious language originates in part from a misunderstanding of how verification works in analytic philosophy, McClendon and Smith claim, but also from a gap where a *properly understood* general theory for religious language which utilises verificationism should be found. If we are to say that there are some sentences which 'warrant' being called 'religious' and others which do not warrant it, then we are necessarily implying some prescriptive standard for what constitutes a religious language. Consequently, it is not merely that identifying the object language would be helpful and verificationism goes some way to assist with this, it's that verificationism assures us that the whole business of studying the *object named* 'religious language' goes bust if the object cannot be identified. McClendon and Smith add that,

> most investigators have remarked that religious language is in some sense self-involving; it is not so widely believed that this aspect is necessarily connected with a representative or referential aspect. Both these putative aspects, however, must be considered in attending to the general or theoretical question, whether or how (any) religious language can be

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[83] Cf. (MacIntyre 1970 & 1964).
[84] Cf. (M. L. Diamond 1967).
[85] Todd R. Long interpretates Rush Rhees as combining verificationism with Wittgensteinian philosophy of religion: 'Two themes, or methods, inform nearly the whole book: a concentrated focus on the "grammar" of religious statements and a selective reliance on verificationism. Although the latter may sound provocative since Wittgensteinian philosophy of religion can rightly be seen as a polemic against logical positivism, I will argue that Rhees's reliance on verificationism is important for his project' (Long 1999: p. 21) & (Rhees 1997).

> validated or justified - for the decline of verificationism, far from settling this question, raised it anew in the most urgent way. (McClendon and Smith 1973: p. 414).

There are two aspects of the above quote which are of interest to our study; the first observes religious language to be 'in some sense self-involving' and the second notes that the very question of *what* religious language is is itself a matter of verification. This thesis's proposal that a language is religious when it captures a religious domain of meaning agrees that religious language is self-involved because part of what it means *is* its identity, and so we cannot separate one aspect from the other. However, if it is the case that we possess a skill or ability which lets us distinguish religious from nonreligious sentences then we must ask whether that skill or ability is compatible with verification, and if so, how. We have proposed that the solution lies in our grammatical know-how of the language which hosts the religion allowing us to notice surface grammar abnormalities which are indicative of depth grammar, and this does not presuppose some objective prescriptive standard but instead implies that the 'object' is a *product* of grammar. But in order to draw the boundary lines which divide theological discourse from religious language we must come to some agreement about what religion is – how do we know when someone is etically talking about it, and how do we know when someone is emically speaking within its context?

S2. C2. Finding The 'Religion' In Language

In order to study the meaning of religious sentences we must be able to identify them, and this supposes that the 'religious stuff' of language is something which most of us are familiar enough with to be able to notice when it is present. This raises the question – what is the 'stuff' of religion, and how is that 'stuff' in language such as to say that there are discernibly religious sentences? The question of what sort of thing is a religious sentence is in essence an extension of the question 'what sort of stuff is 'religious stuff'?', and it is concerning that the sociology of religion has not established an agreeable answer. Scholars disagree in terms of both method and conclusion, with some questioning whether a definition for religion is possible,[86] and others wondering whether a sociology of religion can even exist without one.[87] This chapter explores the key themes and approaches in the sociological study of religion and highlights several similarities, chiefly that they both face the same challenges and seem to rely on a shared assumption that the stuff of religion (the religious 'stuff' of language/sentences) is so obvious and self-evident that we can identify and study religions and their languages without needing to know what that stuff is or how we came to detect it.

One of the most influential definitions is that of Durkheim's,

> A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden – beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them. (Durkheim 1995: p. 44).

Although once influential, this account has come under increasing criticism due to its Western European undertone and bias (Alatas and Sinha 2001). Although fitting into Abrahamic faiths, the idea of Hinduism being a 'unified system of beliefs and practices' or that the Jains make rigid distinctions between the sacred and profane are questionable. This sort of approach is prescriptive and potentially revisionary insofar as it sets down some preconceived defined criterion for what constitutes as 'religion' and therefore what could be plausibly treated as a *religious* language, and any system which is not compatible is taken as being *not* a religion and thus *not* in possession of a religious language. Weber offers an entirely different approach towards the sociological study of

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[86] 'I make no assumptions in the beginning of this exercise about a proper definition of religion. There exists a bitter and useless controversy in the sociology of religion about what religion is, and whether one needs an explicit 'transcendental,' 'superempirical' referent for a belief system to be religious.' (Greeley 1982: p. 9).

[87] Hill phrases his first chapter of *A Sociology of Religion* as an argument for how the sociological study of religion is possible so long as we take the doubts which were raised by Benjamin Nelson seriously (Hill 1976: pp. 1-18) & (Nelson 1970).

religion and instead proposes a methodology which rivals that of Durkheim's in both influence and character –

> To define 'religion', to say what it is, is not possible at the start of a presentation such as this. Definition can be attempted, if at all, only at the conclusion of the study. The essence of religion is not even our concern, as we make it our task to study the conditions and effects of a particular type of social behaviour. (Weber 1966: p. 1).

There is a boundary to what the sociologist's 'task' is, the sociologist is in the business of analysing the *social* behaviour and practice of a religion and not the metaphysical or ontological analysis of the *essence* of religion. Due to a lack of definition or criterion for what constitutes as religion, Weber's approach is more descriptive than it is prescriptive, yet a lack of preconceived criterion brings its own share of weaknesses as captured by Berger –

> I am not at all convinced by Weber's position on the proper sequence of definition and substantive research, since the latter can only proceed within a frame of reference that *defines* what is relevant and what is irrelevant in terms of the research. (Berger 1967: p. 176).

Weber has an obviously different methodological approach towards the task of studying religion than Durkheim; Durkheim offers a definition for religion 'up front' and establishes a case in favour for it,[88] whilst Weber *as if* performs an exploratory study with the implication that the definition of religion will be discovered at the conclusion.[89] Addressing Berger's confusion for how a study of X can be performed without any frame of reference that defines what X is, Arnal and McCutcheon suggest that 'the assumption here seems to be that what counts as the 'stuff' of religion is so obvious and self-evident that it can be identified and studied without even knowing, in Weber's words, 'what it is.'' (Arnal and McCutcheon 2013: p. 17). This is similar to what we have observed with the study of religious language; there is a general assumption that the 'religious stuff' of language is so obvious and self-evident that token sentences and utterances can be identified and studied without any need to know what that 'stuff' is or how we came to detect it. This could inspire a Weber-like defence where it is argued that defining the religious essence of language is neither the task of, nor necessary for, the philosopher, and this might be compelling if it was shown that one's account for the meaning of a religious sentence does not depend upon one's account for how the sentence is religious. Although this thesis challenges the viability of such a defence due to having proposed that the two accounts are interdependent and therefore not easily separated, it does

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[88] Smith notes this distinction, commenting that he is taking a Durkheimian procedural approach (C. Smith 2017: ft. 1).
[89] Weber does not provide a definition at the end of his study, something often noted by sociologists (McCutcheon 1998: p. 52).

not go so far as to argue that a philosopher must be equipped with a lengthy account for every identifiable feature of every possible religious sentence. More tentatively, it is reasonable to expect the philosopher who studies religious language to be capable of providing, when requested, some clear indication of *knowing* what they are looking for in or around language when they claim to be studying specifically *religious* language.

Although it is easy and even tempting to criticize Weber's reliance of intuition as being too subjective, we should be careful to avoid swinging to the other extreme – just because a dependence on subjective intuition is problematic does not mean that the solution must be found in an objective criterion. We necessarily prescribe a standard onto all systems of belief and language whenever we say that X is what makes something a religion and its language 'religious', and the more features we set down the more systems and languages we are likely to exclude. When we ask about the religious 'stuff' of language we must also ask about what religion is, and the danger is that because 'there is no discrete part of reality that can simply be labelled "religion"… [when] we construct operational models of religion, we must be careful not to destroy the worlds we intend to observe by creating new ones that are intolerant of subtle differences' (Herbrechtsmeier 1993: p. 16). We can destroy the worlds which we intend to observe by setting down definitions which contradict or exclude them, but we also risk their destruction by supposing that they can be defined and studied:

> The notion that something called *religion* can be isolated, analyzed, or defined is primarily a modern Western conceit… The analytic tendency in theism is strongly reinforced by Western science because science in its very essence is an analytical discipline… But we must note from the outset that the very idea of defining "religion" would be nearly incomprehensible in many non-Western societies. (N. Nielsen 1988: pp. 1-2).

It is not merely the case that religious diversity makes it unlikely for any single definition to capture the depth and breadth of all religions, it's that for some religions, especially those in non-Western contexts, the very idea of defining and studying it is nonsensical. The implication of this for the study of religious language is potentially damning – there is no such thing as a 'religious' sentence or language which can be defined and identified, and the thought that a sentence is religious when it posits a religious entity or property risks the Western presupposition that a religion can be defined in that sort of way. From this perspective we can better appreciate Chatterjee's criticisms of the verification principle being insufficient because 'a large part of Indian religious language cannot be described as 'God-talk' at all' (Chatterjee 1974: p. 478). This is the most serious methodological challenge which both the sociology of religion and the study of religious language face,

A primary methodological issue to be decided in attempting to establish a definition of religion is whether and how any specific etic concept can allow for a sympathetic, nondistortional understanding of the various emic religious phenomena within the universe of human cultures. (Herbrechtsmeier 1993: p. 1).

The field linguist is an outsider to the religious community and can only hold an etic perspective towards it, and the challenge is how (or whether) they can establish a general account, criterion, theory or model of what a religion/religious language is/means when we readily accept that those sorts of things are not discernible features of reality but *emic* in their existence. Although we can in some sense broadly outline religions and religious languages, this does not mean that either are isolatable features of reality or society. Any

attempt to isolate religious phenomena among all social phenomena is a wrongheaded approach to the problem, since social phenomena of any specific type (economic, political, philosophical, artistic, or religious) are so interconnected with those of other types, that finding any hard and fast distinguishing marks among them is a vain and methodologically ill-advised hope.[90] (Herbrechtsmeier 1993: p. 10).

This social interconnectivity makes it likely that we need to understand more than just the *religious* aspect of the community but also their moral, political and artistic dimensions as well, and so we can expect that there will be moments of disagreements and moments of miscommunication amongst the world's religions because there is no universal definition for 'religion' nor essential criteria for what makes something 'religious' (MacIntyre 1970: p. 162). Ultimately, the ideal general account would account for *all* religious sentences in all religious languages, and so we need 'to develop models that do full justice to the emic diversity of religious phenomena' whilst acknowledging the limitations of our own etic perspectives (Herbrechtsmeier 1993: p. 16). Despite the observer (field linguist) being *outside* of the immediate social environment which they are studying and so possess an *etic* perspective towards it, they are almost inevitably *within* some other social environment which they possess an emic perspective towards – there could be occasions where the field linguist unknowingly projects emic attitudes onto the object of their study and mistakenly treat them as something etic. This inadvertently risks being *Eurocentric*, which we can define as follows:

Eurocentrism is generally defined as a cultural phenomenon that views the histories and cultures of non-Western societies from a European or Western perspective. Europe, more specifically Western Europe or "the West," functions as a universal signifier in that it

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[90] Thornton echoes this and describes that 'in its passage through history religion enters into the texture of its human environment in such a way that a single pattern of life is woven out of the various elements through a unifying power which characterizes the religion in question' (Thornton 1950: p. 13).

assumes the superiority of European cultural values over those of non-European societies. Although Eurocentrism is anti-universalist in nature, it presents itself as a universalist phenomenon and advocates for the imitation of a Western model based on "Western values" – individuality, human rights, equality, democracy, free markets, secularism, and social justice – as a cure to all kinds of problems, no matter how different various societies are socially, culturally, and historically. (Pokhrel 2011).

Although Durkheim and Weber are not explicitly asserting the superiority of Western or European religious traditions, their underlying assumptions are suspect. For example, Durkheim's definition for religion is presented as something etic – that we can take it and see *case examples of it* in the world – but it could be emic, where Durkheim inadvertently takes *Western Theism* as the standard for what religion is and the question is whether there are other similar systems in the world. Likewise, Weber's reliance of the self-evident nature of what the 'stuff' of religion is could essentially be an appeal to our Western emic customs and familiarities which are then projected onto the world around us. In some respect this might be unavoidable, after all, if religion is socially constructed then one can only see what their own society constructs. However, the danger is that despite us knowing this to be true we nonetheless assume that we can have an impartial and inclusive study of religion and its languages, when it is just as likely that we are studying *that* which we have projected onto them. Take as a brief example of this the following critical descriptions of ethnographic films as 'a means by which Europeans represent to themselves their (usually subjugated) others' and that the 'the emphasis of ethnographic filmmakers has been and is to record different cultures in an attempt to discover something of their own' (Pratt 1992: p. 7) & (Sherman 1998: p. 32).

Sherman's suggestion that in studying a different culture we also in a sense study our own, makes an additional point beyond the general observation that by looking for differences we are unavoidably looking for things which make ourselves unique. Our desire to learn about our own society by studying other societies leads to us projecting certain aspects of our identity onto them, and we begin to see ourselves in them and therefore begin to study ourselves through our study of them. This is clearest where Pratt continues her description of 'ethnographic expression' by proposing 'autoethnography' – the practice of the subjected other representing 'themselves in ways that engage with the colonizer's own terms' (Pratt 1992: p. 7). This not only deepens their subjugation, but it forces them to misrepresent their own positions, beliefs and practices for the sake of meeting *our* expectations – making us, in an important sense, a colonizer. In virtue of being unable to divorce the meaning of a language from the social context in which it is spoken, the act of making another religious community speak *in our terms* forces our social-linguistic context upon

them, and this obviously prescribes, revises, and potentially destroys the world which we intended to observe.

We should not think that there must be an object or aspect in or about reality which can be picked out and called 'religion' for two reasons; Frege shows that a sense to the name 'religion' does not guarantee the existence of a referent, and even if there is a referent there is still no guarantee that it can be picked-out and studied independently from the environment in which it is found. In effect, even if there is an object language our etic perspective hinders our ability to *see* the emic religious aspects within language, be that because the religious quality of language is only accessible from within the community or because there are some important elements of meaning which are beyond the outsider's grasp. Although we can doubt whether the religious quality of an experience, belief or language is accountable to some sort of 'mind-independent religious object' which can be picked out of reality and directly referenced as a 'religion making thing',[91] it seems beyond dispute that the religious dimension of meaning is the religious *stuff* of religious language. However, we need to recognise that the 'religious stuff' of religious language is open to a vast variety of possibilities due to the sheer diverse breadth and depth of both religion and language.

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[91] Cf. (Wells 1921; 1917) for a detailed examination of the challenges with doing this.

S2. C3. Religious Diversity

This chapter[92] outlines how the sheer depth and breadth of religious diversity raises serious doubt about the likelihood for any holistic account of religious language being possible. Religious diversity raises a handful of problems for the study of religious language: are all religions the same; do they all have religious languages; are all religious languages religious for the same reasons; can a religion be false and yet in possession of a religious language; are all candidate religious languages *religious* or are some mistaken; in essence, is it possible that every proposed religious language is religious, or must there be some exclusions? David Hume has it that diversity is difference, and when it comes to religion, difference means contradiction – there is a *real* disagreement when one religion claims that the world has always existed whilst another claims that it was created. When we think about the vast number of religions which have existed, and the diverse variety of views and claims which each has made, then the number of disagreements is increased exponentially. This is the problem of religious diversity, and it is the focus of Keith Ward's *Religion in the Modern World—Celebrating Pluralism and Diversity*; is diversity a problem, can all religions be equally true, and how are they to interact? (Ward 2019).

Resembling what we saw Ryle and more recently Burley call a *thick approach,* Ward's multi-disciplinary project accounts for how religions function, and reasons that a sophisticated investigation into religious diversity requires an approach which is as inclusive to diversity as it is sensitive to the social, cultural, and linguistic domains in which the diversity exists. To these ends, structured into six parts, Ward's book starts with a presentation of Hume's initial contention and then dives into fundamental questions regarding the nature, structure, and definition of religion with reference to Durkheim, Smart, and Sharpe. As the book develops, Ward proposes and applies an innovative methodology which first identifies the cultural, historical, and linguistic contexts in which religious beliefs are made and expressed, and then considers what the most appropriate reading would be. In doing so, Ward highlights the often-overlooked reality of religious beliefs existing in a perpetual state of development and interpretation which cannot be accurately represented when removed from their social, cultural, and linguistic contexts. In our interest, the religious classification of a sentence or language could change as the religion develops, and if we are not members of that tradition then we might not realise that that change has happened. Being able to notice when a word or sentence picks up or drops religious meaning is a necessary component of identifying and explaining the meaning of religious language, and so Ward's

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[92] Parts of this chapter has already been published (Ellis 2020b).

observations track with this thesis. The beliefs which are expressed in religious language are in a constant state of development, reinterpretation, and modification, as too is the language itself – religious beliefs and languages develop together. This implies that a religious language is not an independent system of communication which is only deployed to describe religious beliefs, but it is as much a part of what religion is as the beliefs themselves – religious language is *within* religion and is not to be understood as a handy though essentially separable tool.

To Ward, the question of whether all religions share the same beliefs is secondary to whether *sharing them* is what makes them commonly religious, likewise the question of whether all religions share the same language is secondary to whether that is what makes a language religious. Ward's focus on the context in which a language exists is important because it reminds us of our need to immerse ourselves within that language's community, and not simply study it with etic attention – we need to live the religious life. Recalling Lesnick, religious language needs to communicate a depth of meaning which talk about 'crackers and wine' cannot access, and this is inclusive to any equivalent depth for any other religion. Ward believes that a religious realist approach towards the *actions,* rather than the objects of religion strikes the right balance between acknowledging the diversity of religious beliefs whilst maintaining a meaningful and recognisable etic commonality.

Ward proposes the existence of what he calls the three transcendental values of *truth*, *beauty,* and *goodness*, and claims that all religions aim to address them with the three dimensions of *doctrine*, *experience,* and *practice*. The truth conditions of a religious sentence/belief are found in the overlap between values and dimensions, each having a subtly different conception of truth; the *matter-of-fact* truth to the world's origin (doctrine), the humbling *revelation* of one's place in the cosmos (experience), and the *rightful honesty* of moral behaviour (practice). The commonality amongst the diversity is the shared (though in practice different) approaches towards the same three transcendental values, and where each religion's practices differ, so too do their language's customs, rituals and sentences differ. Ward concludes that religious diversity should not be taken as a sign of inconsistency or error, but instead a good and natural feature which can even be a positive influence on the mutual search for God, goodness, and truth.

In a Wittgensteinian sense, Ward can be read as side-stepping Hume's contention by arguing that the more socially, culturally, and linguistically diverse religions are, the less likely it is that they mean the same sorts of things when issuing truth-claims, avoiding *real* contradictions (Ward 2019:

pp. 147-148). Ward's approach towards the study of religion aids our approach towards the study of religious language – the field linguist needs to learn how to *speak* religiously, and this requires immersion in religious life, community, and context; things which an etic analytic study of religious language struggles to do. That said, the field linguist still needs to identify the religious life, community, and context from a position of knowing nothing whatsoever about them, and this is perhaps the greatest benefit of Ward's approach. The fact that religion is a continuously developing process of reinterpretation and contextualisation means that the search for religious meaning in language *is a central feature of religion.* If religion is defined by what it does, then the religious element of a belief, language or experience is at least in part attributable to their methodological origin and not solely their content. In Ward's view, religion is what religion does, and religion searches for meaning in life, language, and experience, and so the field linguist's search for a religious language is not an entirely separate pursuit.

Ward believes that religions are diverse for the same reason, and this reason both defines what a religion is and accounts for their commonality. Specifically, a religion is comprised of three dimensions which aim to study three transcendental values, and to the degree that their practices and conclusions differ *is* the degree to which religions are diverse and yet still common. Problematically, it is not always clear whether Ward believes that these three transcendental values *literally exist* and are studied by all religions through the same methods with at least some reaching 'true' conclusions, or whether he finds this to be a useful, though not thorough, foothold. Ward is often doing two or more things at once, and you're never quite sure which one it is at any given moment, in a word, it suffers from its own merit. It's *that* ambitious that it's at times scarce in detail; *that* accessible to the general reader that it lacks the weight of references and analysis deserving of such a project; and *that* appealing to a general reader's intuition, that it at times makes too bold of a statement, or too sweeping of a generalisation. As a result, Ward's attention towards philosophical or religious concepts and practices are often too brief to be considered an in-depth analysis, whilst too substantial to be considered a summary – it fits uneasily between the two. This awkward positioning makes it difficult for the reader to distinguish between whether Ward is *describing* the content and practices of religions, or whether he is *analysing* the ontological truth of the beliefs as if there really are spirits, souls, divinity, God, three transcendental values, etc. This discrepancy directly impacts our study of religious language because the semantic value of a religious sentence is dependent upon the existence of referenced objects.

Ward applies his methodology towards religion with an evidently Christian (Eurocentric) bias, such

as where he is uncharitable towards non-theistic positions by inferring that they're immoral, undesirable, or nihilistic, which signals that he has a *realist* approach towards the existence of religious objects. In one case, Ward claims that if Durkheim's functionalist view is correct and thus sacred symbols hold no truth beyond their social utility, then there will also be no objective purpose to human life nor any future life to look forward to (Ward 2019: p. 14). Ward also writes that there would be nothing preventing people from pursuing 'policies of world-domination and totalitarian rule' if there are no religious or objectively moral principles which constrain an individual's freedom (Ward 2019: p. 14). This holds serious repercussions to our study because if we believed that Ward is correct (that if there are no religious or objective moral principles then the world would be meaningless) then anyone who believes that the world has objective moral principles is forced to assume that that *constitutes a religious truth*. Furthermore, the question of whether religions share the same dimensions of *doctrine*, *experience* and *practice* is disputable, especially in the case of Ward allowing for considerable scope in those differences. For example, both the Christian and the Buddhist have doctrine though they are not compatible in terms of whether there exists a permanent self or soul. Broadening this gap further, it is not just that doctrine differ in seemingly incompatible ways, but that what constitutes as doctrine is unclear – must religious doctrine come in the form of *religious* beliefs, or would scientific, ethical, philosophical, or historical beliefs be acceptable? Could one make a distinction between religious and theological doctrine and how are we to do so; must a Christian believe in a *literal* resurrection or is a 'demythologized' reading acceptable; must one's historical belief in the Battle of Kurukshetra as outlined in the Bhagavad Gita constitute a religious doctrine? Ninian Smart's *The Religious Experience of Mankind* brings these discrepancies to the forefront of mind and shows how they undermine the possibility of saying that all religions are the same (Smart 1977).

Part of what Smart does so well when expressing religious diversity is highlighting how differences often go beyond belief. For example, let us imagine a Hindu who rejects the belief that Christ was the incarnation of God. They would not become a Christian if they were to change their mind because Hindus typically believe that God has many incarnations, and this removes the uniqueness and exclusivity of Christ's identity which seems central to the Christian worldview (Smart 1977: pp. 672-681). So, although the Hindu can agree that Christ was God in Flesh (or the son of God), it would not strike them as a rarity – indeed it's a rather common occurrence, all things considered. When the dimensions of doctrine and practice overlap, like in ethics, there are additional differences in justifications and interpretations which seemingly nullify the otherwise unified agreement that murder and theft are bad whilst peace and love are good. One religion may judge

that an action is theft whilst another doesn't; one religion may find a killing to be just, and another not; one religion may find love to allow for polygamy whilst another deems it adulterous; one religion may assert total pacifism as a means for peace, another not.[93] If religious language is the means through which a religion *phrases* its doctrine, then the features of a religious language would alter depending on both the content of the doctrine as well as what constitutes doctrine – e.g., whether the language is truth-apt as well as expressive. Likewise, if religious language constitutes religious practice as suggested by Bahnsen, then the communication of religious moral principles, such as in Commandments, Mitzvahs and Dharma, also alters depending on the justifications and interpretations in play. In terms of religious experience, Smart notes that religious experience comes in different forms and not all religions share equal interest in them; for example, some religions are almost entirely mystical in their experiences whilst others are actively hostile towards mysticism (Smart 1977: p. 674). Some religions do not believe in the existence of an omnipotent and omniscient deity who reveals secret truths to humans;[94] some religions believe that the gods are often found interfering with human affairs for rather petty and jealous reasons.[95] Some religions claim that what are now understood as medical disorders were in fact mediums through which the gods spoke to humans;[96] some actively encouraged the consumption of hallucinogenic drugs to such an extent that it became a religious ritual with an associated deity.[97] Religions are therefore not *trivially* diverse – as if they reach different answers to the same questions or have different procedures during their rituals – they are entirely different paradigms, and perhaps the main thing that unites them is the fact that they are paradigms.

As noted in the previous chapter, one of the most important developments in the sociology of religion is the self-recognition that religious diversity can be increased or decreased depending upon one's definition for religion. In one sense, a sociologist observes something and then attempts to offer the best account for what it is and how they are all recognisably similar despite their differences, but in another important sense, a sociologist could propose a definition for religion and apply that to the world such as to rule whether something is or is not classifiable as a religion. A similar phenomenon could be occurring where in one sense we agree that 'Dead to Sin; Alive in

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[93] Cf. Ravindra Kumar's *Nonkilling and Indian Religions* for a brief though informative summary of how various Indian religions have understood Ahimsa (Kumar 2010: pp. 211-218).
[94] Jainism (McLoughlin 2007: p. 27).
[95] Greek pantheism (Morford and Lenardon 2003: p. 128).
[96] Cf. (Devinsky and Lai 2008).
[97] The Vedic Hindu Soma rituals (Staal 2001).

Christ' (Romans 6), 'he is not slain when the body is slain' (Bhagavad Gita: 2:20)[98], and 'Long is the night to the sleepless; long is the league to the weary. Long is the worldly existence to fools who know not the Sublime Truth' (Dhammapada: 5:60)[99] are religious, yet in another sense, if we understand these things as religious *for a particular reason*, then we run the risk of disqualifying alternative sentences because of them *lacking that reason*. The sociology of religion, Hill explains, has come to the common acceptance 'that any approach that divorces the empirical study of religious beliefs and activities from the theoretical context within which these phenomena can be given a sociological interpretation is a misconceived enterprise', and so too ought our study (Hill 1976: p. 1). This, we can now appreciate, is a comment regarding the emic nature of the religious domain of meaning and, as Uhlenbeck and Wittgenstein initially observed, the reason for why we cannot study language as an isolated phenomenon.

To explain the meaning of a religious sentence we must first identify a sentence as religious, and in doing so we must be conscious of the probability that in identifying a sentence as religious we have effectively presupposed some standard for what constitutes as religious which will exclude other sentences. It is difficult to find common agreement about what the 'stuff' of religion is, and it's even more difficult to know how to approach the study with the awareness that some religious traditions are unwilling to engage with that kind of analysis, and we do not want to force them for fear of revision via colonization. Moreover, the etic-emic division is more pervasive than what we may have first thought, especially in terms of how one might only be able to 'see' religion from within the community (emic) and what we mean by 'religion' and subsequently 'religious language' is a projection of our own emic perspectives onto different systems. It is not just *religious* diversity which makes defining and studying religion and consequently religious language difficult, it is host-language diversity, too.

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[98] All translation of the Bhagavad Gita used in this thesis are from His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, unless otherwise stated (Prabhupāda 1998).

[99] All translation of the Dhammapada used in this thesis are from Acharya Budharakkhita (Buddharakkhita 1985).

S2. C4. Host-Language Diversity

Where the previous chapter explored religious diversity, this chapter considers linguistic diversity – some religions use several languages as hosts whilst others only use one; is it possible that some theories for religious sentence meaning are inapplicable to some religious languages because the host-language does not work in the way which the theory presumes? It is hard to imagine how there are languages which can communicate things which other languages cannot, especially when this is being considered from the perspective of a monolingual. Although hard to imagine, if some languages fail to express X whilst others succeed then we should ask whether some languages can express religiously relevant ideas whilst others cannot. This concept is somewhat lacking in the philosophical study of religious language, but it is central to *theolinguistics*.

In the most basic of ways, if we are to take a religious sentence as one which posits a religious entity or property then we need to know not only what religious entities and properties are like, but what the linguistic action of positing is like. How would we know whether a sentence *posits,* irrespective to whether it posits a religious kind of thing; could it be possible that religions have their own unique ways of positing which a surface grammar understanding of the host-language would struggle to identify? Could different host-languages posit in different ways? As a more sophisticated hypothetical, let us imagine a religion which believes that time is a religious property which is associated with a divine entity, and so for all intents and purposes, speaking about time is, in their opinion, speaking about a religious property. This belief is so influential that they begin to associate the grammatical *tense* of an utterance with the *religious property* of time, such that to speak negatively about the past or the future is an offence to the divine entity from whom time springs forth. In this scenario, the changing between host-languages would be a very complicated and potentially problematic affair, especially when we consider the fact that some host-languages appears to be tenseless.[100] Thus, what counts as positing in one language may differ in another on the basis of whether *grammatical tense* can communicate the religious property of time – likewise, the grammar of tense might not necessarily 'posit' in the sense of propositional content, but may be an *attitude of religious significance.* This hypothetical is not as inapplicable as one might initially think, as seen by the studies performed in theolinguistics.

Theolinguistics is 'a term which has been used for the study of the relationship between language and religious thought and practice, as illustrated by ritual, sacred texts, preaching, doctrinal

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[100] Cf. (Shaer 2003) & (Bittner 2005) for further discussion on tenseless languages.

statements and private affirmations of belief' and marks a relatively underexplored area of study within contemporary philosophical literature (Crystal 2018: p. 3).[101] We should expect, writes Crystal, that the study of language will be a priority for those who want to understand religion due to the central role which language has in scripture, ritual, tradition and cognition, and as linguistics is the science of language, we should expect the field of linguistics to take up some burden in that pursuit, hence theolinguistics (Crystal 2018: p. 3). Theolinguists have been aware of two things from the beginning: the boundaries of their own interests and study of religious language, and the existence of other fields which have their own, sometimes overlapping interests, such as found in psychology, sociology, theology and philosophy. The theolinguistic movement attempted to address this by calling for more communication between fields of study because,

> A credible theolinguistics can only grow out of the various disciplines' mutual awareness of each others' methods and standards… the theologian should not work with obsolete conceptions of language, nor the linguist hold naïve or fallacious views of theology; and neither should build his arguments on unstable philosophical premisses. (van Noppen 1981: p. 2).

Where theolinguistics has had some long-standing desire for interdisciplinary research into religious language, the philosophical study has been rather comfortable within their own territory and somewhat unwilling or unmotivated to consider the concerns of the linguist. The benefits of theolinguistics should be clear to see for the philosopher because,

> by using a linguistic approach to God-language rather than a sectarian one, we can maintain a dual focus on words' emotional connotations and on their use within a larger language context. By focusing on God-language as language, we can avoid, for a while, arguments over orthodoxy and truth and thereby free ourselves to look more or less objectively at how we use certain words. (Eberle 2007: p. 4).

If the study of religious language is, as we saw with Scott, a study of the meaning of religious sentences with the aim of forming a general account which includes a lot of discussion about cognitivism, truth-conditions and verification, then an approach which puts arguments about truth to the side is unlikely to attract many philosophers. However, if we are wanting to understand the meaning of religious sentences *irrespective* to their truth then we should willingly engage with the theolinguistic pursuit, and so a lack of engagement is perhaps more telling of what the philosophical motivations are than anything else. Noppen makes an interesting remark where he says that 'as a branch of linguistics, theolinguistics calls for a discourse approach inasmuch as

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[101] That said, Crystal has recently expressed newly gained optimism for the future of Theolinguistics (Crystal 2021: p. xv).

religious language is best described and assessed within a context of belief where its utterances are regarded as meaningful' (van Noppen 2015: p. 28). Noppen's suggestion that the study of religious language is best performed when described and assessed within the context of a belief system where its utterances are regarded as meaningful has two philosophically and theologically relevant implications.

First, that accessing the meaning of a religious sentence requires some associative awareness of the religious belief system; second, that religious language is meaningful to at least those who are within that belief system. Where Eberle wants the study to be objective and targeted on word meaning, Noppen emphasises that the religious quality of the language cannot be identified if the nature of the beliefs which the language reports are not considered. We could take Noppen as saying that religious utterances are only conceivably meaningful if the associated religious beliefs are either true or believed to be true, whilst a more flexible interpretation would hold him as saying that religious language must be understood within the religious context, and he uses the term 'belief' as a shorthand for that. A Logical Positivist reading of the first interpretation would conclude that the religion's language is meaningless *irrespective* to whether the speakers think that their beliefs are true, but in virtue of thinking that religious sentences are not in the business of reporting facts, a non-cognitivist might be more willing to take either reading. The second implication reinforces the influence which one's proximity to the language community has on their understanding of the language, and this is to be expected with religious language in particular because of its dense layers of moral, aesthetic and historical overlaps as well as it potentially being a social construction which can only been seen from within. Let us consider how diverse host-languages can be and how difficult it is for the dominant approaches within the study of religious language to track them.

Firstly, religions often utilise the linguistic devices or quirks of a host-language for the sake of communicating or expressing a subtle perspective or attitude and this can easily be lost or muddled up when the host-language is swapped with another, and so 'much of the Hebrew word play of Genesis is, sadly, lost in translation.' (Eiselein, Goins, and Wood 2019: p. 31). Hebrew does not share the same linguistic convention as English in respect to marking proper names with capital letters, and as a noun, verb or adjective could in principle be used *as* a proper name (spring; summer; baker) it can be difficult to judge whether a word is a name or not. One consequence of this is that, 'the word 'adam is a gender-neutral term for human beings, used in Genesis 1:27, where "male and female" are specified as part of the category, giving rise to one midrashic tradition that

Adam was originally a hermaphrodite', but because 'Adam' is male gendered when translated as a proper name in English, it opens the passage to interpretation about the origin, dominance or priority of the male gender (Eiselein, Goins, and Wood 2019: p. 31). Moreover, the term 'adam' is a play of the word 'adamah' which means *arable land*, thus the reading of humanity as *that which came from the arable land* leads to subtle though powerful metaphors which are entirely lost in the English translation. Let us say for the purpose of illustration that under usual conditions 'Adam' would constitute a religious entity such that any sentence which posits it would be taken by Scott as being religious – now that we know that the original Hebrew term is gender-neutral, would we be willing to say that those sentences which posit Adam as a *male* are not positing a religious entity? Similar problems arise with religious traditions which have different attitudes about the relationship between an individual and their name, with some believing that a person's name is spiritually bonded to the individual, and this heightens the relevance of which specific host-language is utilised.

The religion of the ancient Canaanites consisted of a pantheon with the most popular deity being Baal, however the term 'Baal' was not treated as a name but a title like that of lord or master (McLoughlin 2007: pp. 100-101). Part of the reason for why was because Baal could be *lord of anything* – the lord of the rain, rocks or fertility, and so the narrow rigid scope which a proper name implies would not capture the all-encompassing nature of what Baal meant. In this manner of thinking, the act of positing a religious entity is not a straightforward action of using a name in reference to some external singular deity, because one could use the term 'Baal' in reference to several things, indeed one could instead use a phrase like 'rider of the clouds' (McLoughlin 2007: p. 100). A different sort of relationship between name and individual is seen in the religious traditions of Native American tribes where it is broadly believed that 'a 'symbol' and the thing it represents share the same reality… a name is not an arbitrary sign for the thing it represents; they share the same being. A name enfolds a reality within it like a hologram.' (Freke and Wa'Na'Nee'Che' 1996: p. 30). Although this resembles Tillich's distinction between signs and symbols,[102] it, unlike Tillich's view, is applicable to *all* names and not just 'religious' ones. For Native American tribes, 'words have potency and force integral to their sound. They are sacred and magical. They are alive' and to avoid any doubt about whether this is a literal belief or something metaphorical, Freke and Wa'Na'Nee'Che' clarify that 'numbers are not seen as merely abstract

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[102] 'If x is a sign then x points beyond itself but does not participate in the reality of that to which it points. If x is a symbol then x points beyond itself and participates in the reality of that to which it points' (Rowe 1966: p. 593).

symbols to count with. They contain the spiritual secrets of the Universe. Each number has a *spirit*, its own quality, which is a doorway into understanding the nature of Creation.' (Freke and Wa'Na'Nee'Che' 1996: p. 31). The thought that all words are sacred and magical, and that they, like numbers, are not abstract human creations but gateways into the secrets of the universe requires us to radically shift what we take a religious sentence as being – it is not merely the positing of a religious entity or property, it is that each word *is* a religious entity or property. Language itself is an object of religious belief and may well render every token sentence religious in principle of its inherent features. Recalling the Weber-like defence where a philosopher could argue that it is not necessary to have an account for the religious essence of language to identify and study the meaning of some interesting looking sentences, they could acknowledge that there are numerous beliefs about the religious identity of language whilst reaffirming that the philosopher is only interested in accounting for the meaning of token sentences. Such a philosopher could agree that there are various reasons for thinking that a language is religious without also agreeing that these reasons matter for the philosophical study of religious language meaning. The issue is that this constrains the study to only those sentences which appear to fit the philosopher's interests – that only those sentences which posit religious entities and properties are considered. But because not all religions think that their religious languages and sentences posit entities and properties, then it is clearer to say that this philosophical study of religious language is more specifically a study of only *some* sentences within *some* religious communities about *some* entities and properties.

The same word within the same religious tradition can be treated as having a different semantic or grammatical function depending upon interpretation, and when we come as an outsider with only an *etic* perspective and attempt to translate that tradition into a different host-language we can inadvertently assume that one *specific* interpretation and use of a term is the standard for all other interpretations and uses within the broader system. It is commonly agreed amongst Native American tribes that there is some ultimate creative power or energy which lies behind all creation, but each nation references it in their own unique way through their own linguistic traditions. The Zuni treat it as a bisexual and adopts the term *A'wonawil'onas*; the Pawnee opt for *Tirawa*, but 'to the Najaho it is the totality of all life, and therefore unknowable and may not be named'; whilst for 'the Lakota language *Wakan Tanka* is not a noun. It portrays something in movement' and so might be better treated as a verb (Freke and Wa'Na'Nee'Che' 1996: pp. 29-30). The alteration between nouns and verbs is arguably a feature in Jewish scholarship, such as where Edith Wyschogrod argues that the word 'faith' should be treated as a verb rather than a noun and that the word 'works' does not have any pejorative connotations (Wyschogrod 1990). Wyschogrod suggests that this

change improves the portrayal of the ethical dimension of Jewish thought by placing more attention on the *act* of faith rather than the passive possession of it, but such a linguistic shift can only come *after* one's initial understanding.[103]

The link between a person and their name can carry such a degree of religious significance that it prompts us to reconsider the boundaries of 'religious language', especially when the positing of a religious entity or property is central to the meaning of that name. Naming a child is broadly understood as a spiritual or religious event and even amongst secular communities a great deal of thought is put behind picking the 'right' name, but for some communities, like the Logbara, a name can often be a shorthand description which demands a justification. Dalfovo observes that the Logbara people, a community found in north-west Uganda and north-east Zaïre, have two separate meanings to their personal names; a literal meaning (a word-for-word translation) and a 'real' meaning (the reason which motivated a name-giver to pick the name which they have given, and this could come in the form of a story, the weather conditions when the child was born, hopes for the future, or worries and pain) (Dalfovo 1982). For example, a child who is born prematurely and in ill-health may motivate the parents to choose the name *Dradebo,* which literally means 'he has already died' (Dalfovo 1982: p. 117). Other names can have *literal* as well as a *real* religious meaning which directly posits a religious entity or property and could therefore be treated as a shorthand religious utterance. Names of these sorts could be, *Oritia* which literally means 'Near the offering or sacrificial place of the ancestral spirits' and its 'real' meaning could be accountable to the location or the day of their birth, whilst the name *Butele* literally means 'Waiting for the grave' and could be a sombre reminder of death or a reference 'to the fact that all brothers and sisters previously born have died and that the tomb is similarly waiting for this child' (Dalfovo 1982: p. 118). The dominant approach within the study of religious language is expected to account for whether (and how) words like 'God' are referring expressions – the religious language community of the Logbara people demonstrates just how difficult such a task is. The belief that a name has two descriptive meanings which posit religious entities and properties (such as *A'bini* – 'for the ancestors'; *Adrobo* – 'done by God'; *Adroobale* – 'why did God create?'; *Okumadroyo* – 'Women have no God') raises complex questions about what *constitutes* a religious language which the current dominant approaches within the study would struggle to address (Dalfovo 1982: pp. 121-126).

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[103] This is likely an example of what Winch had in mind when he said, 'given the existence of these practices and uses of language, theological doctrines will be elaborated which in their turn will react back on the practices and language of believers.' (Winch 1977: p. 203).

Nearly all languages address the conceptual space of person in terms of *speaker*, *addressee* and *other* (e.g., first person 'I' is the *speaker*, second person 'you' is the *addressee*, and third person 'everyone' is *other*). Sometimes we use collective personal pronouns like 'we' or 'us', and it can be unclear whether the addressee is being *included* or *excluded* in that collective reference – the So language addresses this. The So language, spoken at the Uganda-Kenya boarder, is able to clearly specify whether an addressee is included or excluded in the speaker's first-person reference, where 'exclusive here refers to the speaker and his or her group, but excluding the addressee(s). The inclusive forms, by contrast, explicitly include the addressee(s) along with the speaker and his or her group in the notion of 'we'.' (Bickel and Nichols 2007: p. 220). This suggests that some host-languages might be better placed than others to express theological concepts because of their grammar, such as we may arguably find happen with Bultmann's use of German. German, unlike English, captures two senses of the term 'historical' in sentences like 'a historical event'; an event is said to be *historisch* when it is entirely constrained to the past, whilst it is said to be *geschichtlich* when it took place in the past but is still felt in the present (Owen 1957: p. 25). This distinction is important to Bultmann's theology because it distinguishes the sense of saying that the actions of Christ are historical and finished and saying that his actions are still playing out today. Although this thought can be captured in English as we have just done, it is easier in German in virtue of there being words *at hand* to utilise, and this might be a relevant factor in some circumstances. Finally, the polysemic nature of Hinduism's chief host-language, Sanskrit, is of such significant influence that it is itself an object of religious belief and the study of it is considered by many as being a religious pursuit.

The linguistic phenomenon of polysemy is when a word, particularly when used as a predicate, offers several possible meanings to a sentence because the word can be used in reference to a wide range of different things, e.g., the word 'bank' could be taken as a building or the side of a river, and therefore the sentence 'I went to the bank' is ambiguous (Machery 2014: p. 204). If a given word can take on a religious dimension of meaning in certain contexts as observed earlier by Wilson, Hick and Harrison, then a theory of polysemy could be transferable to our study of religious language. Typically, a polysemic sentence avoids ambiguity due to the speaker's context, tone, or gesture, but in the case of Sanskrit, the language itself can be contextually categorized into

one of two modes (Vedic Sanskrit[104] which is preserved for religion, and daily use Sanskrit which is ordinarily spoken) where the same word can feature in both but hold different meanings in each (Lugli 2018: p. 113). For example, the religious term Śraddhā can loosely be understood as meaning faith, but is open for meaning 'longing', 'desire', 'high regard', 'esteem', and even specifically 'a pregnant woman's desire', and therefore can be used in reference to a range of things 'be it the efficacy of Vedic sacrifices or the transcendental teachings of the Upaniṣads' (Mitra 2018). If English does not have a word which implies this collection of meanings, then it will be unable to communicate the same sense as Sanskrit and this might be central to Hinduism: the fact that one religious sentence can be read as saying several different things at once is indicative of the wisdom of the gods.[105] Deshpande notes, some individuals like Kātyāya have placed 'the same religious status for contemporary Sanskrit which was unanimously ascribed to the Vedic scriptures and their language' as revealed in the view that, 'correct usage of Sanskrit leads to prosperity. This is similar to the correct use of the Vedic expressions.' (Deshpande 1985: p. 123). Finally, emphasising the religious importance of a Sanskrit host-language for some Hindus,

> Quite early on, moreover, grammarians not only concerned themselves with the formal description of Sanskrit and the details of how a grammar operates to carry this out but also with a philosophical-religious aspect of language associated with such release and union [Moksha]. […] Finally, the great god that is said to enter mortal beings is speech (Sabdah): we should study grammar in order to attain union with this great god. […] And one who knows grammar and uses correct forms thereby practices a type of yoga which gains him merit, felicity, and ultimate union with the absolute being. (Cardona 1990: pp. 12-13).

It is apparent that if 'religious language' is a referring expression which we are willing to deploy towards a vast range of religions and host-languages then whatever object it means to pick out, it must be common, nonlocalized, and nontemporal. There is, though, some room for dispute within this: it is one thing to ask whether we are willing (for whatever reason) to refer to X as a religious language, but quite another to ask whether we are *right*. If the study of religious language does not want to be a study of *how* we use the term 'religious language' but instead a study of the object which the term references, then we need to know how we use the term so to ensure that we are studying an object rather than a custom. Moreover, a religion might propose that they have a religious language, but this does not guarantee that they are right. Let us imagine a religion which

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[104] The script which Vedic Sanskrit is written in is called Devanagari, and has been translated to mean 'script of the divine city' and 'script of the city of the gods' (Walter H. Maurer 1976).

[105] 'Scholars have labelled this approach to Sanskrit as embedding a "panchronistic" view of the language, whereby diachronic and synchronic dimensions of the study of the language collapse into one another, or as betraying a "timeless" conception of language, where matters of chronology simply do not play any role in the description of the language. This feature has sometimes been connected to the traditional Hindu characterization of Sanskrit as an "eternal language"' (Lugli 2018: p. 109).

believes that the only religious sentences which it possesses are ones which do not posit a religious entity or property. How would we expect Scott to respond?

We might expect Scott to conclude that what they take religious sentences as being are different to what he takes them as being, but we would not expect Scott to prescribe what he takes religious sentences as being onto that religious tradition in some revisionary manner. Instead, Scott might simply acknowledge the difference, respect the diversity, but reaffirm that he is only really interested in religious beliefs and as a belief must be propositional and *usually* posits some religious object, then he is only going to study *those sorts* of sentences. On the face of it there is nothing wrong with such a conclusion, but if it were adopted then we must be crystal clear about what that means – it means that the study of religious language is *not* a study of what religious language is nor is it a study of all religions, indeed, it is not even a study of all the kinds of sentences which the study acknowledges to be legitimately religious. It is in fact a study of sentences which appear to posit 'religious' objects with the task of asking whether they are propositions, and if so, whether they are suitable to function as belief claims. If the study was nothing more than this, then it must remain quiet about sentences which appear religious but do not posit beliefs, such as non-cognitive utterances, terms of addressal and imperatives, and symbolic, existential, aesthetic, or even poetic remarks. Such an approach would be so limited in scope, counter-intuitive and uninformative about what it is like to be religious that it is unpalatable for most people to adopt.

S2. C5. Section Conclusion

The dominant approach in the study of religious language attempts to form a general account for the meaning of religious sentences and it is not expected to account for how a sentence is religious nor for how we identify it as religious. This approach presumes that terms like 'religious language' and 'religious sentence' are referring expressions which track the breadth and depth of both religious and host-language diversity, hence our common use of the terms in reference to the object languages of Christianity, Hinduism and Daoism. However, this section has brought this presumption into doubt: although we use these referring expressions across diversity, we cannot ensure that we agree because we do not know what the method is behind our use of the terms. If we think that the utterance 'this is a religious language' is truth-apt, then we must provide the conditions for that truth, and that demands that we identify what the referent of 'religious language' is. It is becoming obvious that we cannot account for what a religious sentence means without also being able to account for how that sentence is religious, and this is applicable across the scope of religions and host-languages. It is doubtful that any general account for the meaning of those sentences which posit what a *Westerner* would consider to constitute a religious entity or property will address this diversity in a robust way.

What sort of account are we looking for? First, and in general agreement with Scott, Chatterjee and Vainio, we seek a non-revisionary descriptive account for religious language *as used by the language community*. We want to know what the speakers mean by what they say, and not whether they are *right* to phrase things in the way that they do. The challenge, though, is that this section highlighted just how diverse religions, languages and their combinations can be – they could, in principle, be combined in ways which are beyond the general Western intuition. Our study of Durkheim and Weber introduced two plausible methodologies towards the study of religious language: one which begins with a definition or criterion (be it a *prescription* for what makes a sentence religious or a *description* of what those sentences which we are willing to call 'religious' look like), and another which asserts that such a definition can only come at the end of a study and that it should instead begin with targeting what is self-evidently the object of study. The dominant contemporary approach within the study of religious language is far more of the latter than the former, and this is not to say that that is right or wrong but that it brings its own strengths and weaknesses which when observed accounts for the failures of the study overall.

The worst thing which a study can do in terms of being exclusive of religious diversity is assume

that all religions and languages are the same, therefore any approach, account, or attitude towards religious language which does not attempt to be inclusive of religious and host-language diversity is almost inevitably exclusive, revisionary, and arguably colonial. The philosophical study of religious language must respect the Rhetorical Sovereignty – 'the inherent right and ability of peoples to determine their own communicative needs and desires in this pursuit, to decide for themselves the goals, modes, styles, and languages of public discourse' – of each religious tradition within each host-language (Lyons 2000: pp. 449-450). The thought of trying to define and study 'religion' in some singular or objective manner is incomprehensible for many non-Western traditions, and it would be revisionary if not *colonial* to affirm that their sentences are only religious when they posit an entity or property which we are willing to deem 'religious'. Insisting that these communities speak in our terms would impose an incomprehensible standard upon them which not only misrepresents but forces them to misrepresent themselves if they were to engage with us. This is clearly an unacceptable outcome for the study, and to these ends it should be avoided by a robust account.

That said, a philosopher could agree that the study of religious language needs to be more diverse whilst reaffirming that the philosopher's task is to assess the meaning of those sentences which clearly relate to questions about religious belief, hence ones which posit religious entities or properties. Such a philosopher could therefore acknowledge the existence of non-literal and non-cognitive religious sentences whilst clarifying that the philosopher is not in the business of studying them, but this would evidently be a rather counter-intuitive conclusion. The philosophical study of religious language should be conceptualised as a broad study within which one can establish narrow areas of specialism and interest, like cognitive religious utterances. The suggestion that the study of religious language is a study of those sentences which posit properties or entities causes non-cognitive utterances to not merely fall outside the scope of the study, but lose the classification of being 'religious'. This revisionary outcome is increased exponentially when we consider the scope of religious and linguistic diversity, and how so many religions and their sentences would face declassification in consequence of not positing things which the Westerner may consider to be 'religious'. Indeed, it could even be the case that *positing* looks different in different languages – does one *posit* in sign language in the same way as one posits verbally, and how might this influence our detection of a 'religious' sign language utterance? In any case, if a philosopher was to respond to this section by agreeing that more work needs to be done in terms of increasing inclusivity and representation of religious and host-language diversity but nonetheless reaffirms

that the *philosopher's* task only concerns those sentences which posit, then we should highlight how uninformative such an approach will be.

This thesis began with the suggestion that a robust account for religious language would account for what religious language is as well as what its sentences mean, and we have seen reason to suspect that the possibility of answering the second depends upon us answering the first. This thesis also proposed that an examination of how we currently identify religious sentences would lead to knowledge about what we currently think religious language is like, and if this examination demonstrated that the religious identity of a language was inseparable from the religious meaning of its sentences, then the act of identifying a sentence as religious is also an act of understanding its meaning. Hence it was posited that a solution can be found with how a field linguist's understanding of a host-language can allow them to notice when a surface grammatical reading of a sentence provides insufficient access to what the speaker appears to understand themselves as communicating. The additional meaning would therefore be an aspect of depth grammar, making a sentence's identity invariably linked with its domain of meaning, but this view can develop into a broader belief that religious language is a product of ordinary human language; that the objects of religious belief are objects of grammar; that the religious domain of meaning is a human creation; and that there is no 'real' religious reality or 'real' religious languages. Such an outcome is however unnecessary.

If the objects of religious belief were objects of grammar, then that does not mean that there are *no real religious objects* – it just means that the constructions of language are exactly that, constructions of language. A linguistic construction could still map onto an external mind-independent reality and portray accurate 'pictures' of that world, or it could be a fictional projection of some sort, but neither outcome is guaranteed from the sheer acceptance that what we mean by the term 'soul' is at least in part *grammatically constructed*. If there was a 'religious reality' which exists outside of human creation (as a 'real phenomenon' which we access as opposed to a mental construction or mass social delusion) then there would be a plausible and intuitive route towards an acceptable solution to this thesis's challenges and observations. Religious realism, the view that the objects of religious belief exist independently of human experience and belief, would allow for the claim that metalanguage terms like 'religious language' pick out an *actual object in the world which can be identified*. It would be acceptable, if not ideal, to show that the referent of 'religious language' is a mind-independent object which possesses some power or ability to confer a dimension of meaning onto token sentences which it is associated with and therefore combines the

question of what religious language is with what its sentences mean. We know that it would be ideal for 'religious language' to reference an *actual object language which has a religious reality* and if that religious reality could exist in a way which is applicable for all religions and their languages, then the study of religious language would be facing the start of a compelling solution. The next two sections will outline how religious realism could *theoretically* ground the study, and then demonstrate that in *practice* it causes more problems than what it could ever resolve. This will lead to the conclusion that this thesis's proposal of grammatical know-how is the most plausible account on offer because it, unlike religious realism and anti-realism, is applicable in any possible outcome.

Section Three – Religious Realism

S3. C1. Intro to Religious Realism

There is a need to identify an *object* language which warrants the use of the referring expression 'religious language', and religious realism, the view that the objects of religious belief exist independent of belief, offers an intuitive way of fulfilling this (Alston 1995). Religious realism, broadly put, is the view that the objects of religious belief exist independently of belief – terms like 'soul' and 'God' are said to reference objects which possess a mode of existence which is not contingent to any given individual's belief or experience. For the sake of communicational ease, we shall use the term 'religious reality' to represent any *religious* object, principle, action, agent etc., which would be apt for realist belief, and so 'religious reality' is taken to be inclusive of a variety of possible objects, events, actions, states etc. Religious realism comes in various shapes and sizes with each offering a slightly different perspective, and so it is important to emphasise that this thesis is concerned with those versions which best address the central elements of the study of religious language. Therefore, although religious realism is not usually expected to provide an account for the identity and meaning of religious language, an adapted version of the position might be able to address the study's central questions and form the basis of an appealing account, making it worthy of consideration. In this sense, we shall use the terms anti, non and irrealism interchangeably when expressing the negation of any form of religious realism. This section explores whether a variation of religious realism could provide a robust account for both the identity and meaning of religious language, and it reasons that some variations could do so by claiming that there is a mind-independent religious reality (be it an object, entity, property etc.,) which confers some unique meaning or value onto a sentence such that we can identify and understand religious sentences under one broad account which is discoverable for the field linguist and inclusive of both religious and host-language diversity. However, the term 'realism' is used in several conversations and has subsequently become saturated with different associations making it difficult to pick out its exact meaning,[106] and this drips into our study in the form of *theological* and *religious* realism. As such, this chapter starts with a brief outline of key definitions and distinctions before moving into a more detailed discussion as for whether and how some variations of religious realism could provide a robust account for what religious language is and what its sentences mean in a way which is compatible with the current shape of the study.

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[106] Cf. Political Realism (Korab-Karpowicz 2018); Legal Realism (H. W. Jones 1961); and how some Legal Realists link realism with other realist positions, such as logical positivism (Shapiro 2001: p. 170).

Loosely put, theological realism is the view that the claims of a *specific* religion are true and therefore the objects of that religion's beliefs are real, whereas religious realism is more abstractly the view that there *are* 'religious' objects, irrespective to how a particular religion interprets them.[107] As theological realism can be categorized under religious realism and we are studying religious language and not merely Christian sentences, we shall target religious realism broadly conceived and only consider theological realism as and when necessary. This section explores whether religious realism could lead to a robust account of religious language which is inclusive to religious and host-language diversity whilst possessing explanatory power about what religious language is, what its sentences mean, and how we can discover each aspect from a field linguist perspective. Let us begin by sketching a rough outline for how religious realism could theoretically respond to the challenges which this thesis has raised against the contemporary study of religious language.

It was proposed that a truly robust account for religious language would address what a religious language is as well as what its sentences mean, and we criticised the contemporary study for having leapfrogged over the first part and diving straight into the second. This criticism addresses two subtly different elements of the study: the cognitive value of the study depends on there being a referent to the referring expression 'religious language', and if we do not know what makes a language religious nor how to detect that quality, then we would struggle to verify whether we have dived into the 'correct' pool. Religious realism is a potential way for uniting the two discussions with minimal disruption, thus offering us the basis for a truly robust account of what a religious language is as well as what its sentences mean whilst still allowing for us to 'integrate most of the modern insights into religious language as well' (McClendon and Smith 1973: p. 413). There is a difference between believing that there is a mind-independent religious reality and there actually being a mind-independent religious reality, and a religious realist possess this belief, affirms that the world is for fact like that, and claims that other religious beliefs could be deemed true or false according to this objective standard. Consequently, religious realism is true *if and only if* there is a mind-independent religious reality, irrespective to whether anyone correctly references it. If a variation of religious realism is to account for the identity and meaning of religious language, then it will need to associate the study's object language with an actual mind-independent religious

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[107] 'theological realism can be distinguished from religious realism in that debate about the former arises from and draws upon the beliefs and doctrines of a particular religious tradition such as Christianity' (Moore 2016).

reality. If religious language can be identified and understood due to only the speaker's *intentions* or *possession of a belief*, then there does not need to be a real religious reality to have a religious language, and so religious realism would fail in its account for both the identity and meaning of religious language. So, if a variation of religious realism is to account for the identity and meaning of religious language then there must be a real interaction between language and religious reality which confers an identifiable feature, meaning or value onto token sentences. This intricate relationship is most apparent in Nuyen's definition of religious realism –

> the view that religious languages and practices refer to a divine being or a divine reality that in fact exists independently of them. Furthermore, such being or reality confers meaning and value on the languages and the practices themselves. Religious antirealism, while advocating religions as meaningful and worthwhile, denies both of these views, holding instead that in fact there is no transcendent being or reality to which religious languages and practices refer and that the source of religious meaning and value lies in us, human beings. (Nuyen 2001: p. 394).

The view that religious sentences refer to a divine being or reality which in fact exists independently of them does four things: First, it shows that religious sentences are *content-external,* which is to say that part of their meaning is determinable to the fact that they are referring to things outside of themselves. Second, divine being or divine reality resembles what Scott takes religious sentences as positing, but the use of the phrase *reality* does well to capture this thesis's consistent observation of a religious *domain of meaning* – a 'religious stuff' to language, so to speak. Therefore, we can say that religious language is associated with a religious reality – to speak of religious objects, deities, entities, properties, objects of belief, is to speak of primarily *a religious reality*. Third, Nuyen's specification that the religious realist believes that such a religious reality *in fact* exists as opposed to 'is believed to exist' demonstrates that although a religious realist *believes* that there are mind-independent religious objects, religious realism is true *insofar* as it is fact that such objects do indeed exist. Finally, the emphasis on *independently of them* makes realism an ontologically dualist position – it affirms that there is a realm of reality outside of one's own mind and in it are objects of religious belief. Nuyen's second sentence makes it obvious for how religious realism matters to our understanding of the meaning of religious sentences – it is not as if a religious sentence about the religious reality is detached from that reality, but it gains some meaning or value in virtue of that reality. If religious realism is true then the only way for a sentence or language to be 'religious' is on the explicit condition that it is accountable to the actual mind-independent existence of a religious reality which has conferred meaning onto that sentence, otherwise it is religious and meaningful for some *non*-realist reason. Hence Nuyen's third clarification that the religious realist is opposed by the anti-realist who in the disbelief in the

existence of a mind-independent religious reality is also in rejection of any theory which offers an account for religious language *under those terms*. However, a religious anti-realist does not need to be an atheist – the anti-realist rejects the *mind-independent* existence of a religious reality, they do not necessarily deny the existence of a mind-dependent religious reality. For the sake of clarity, we will outline the sort of religious realist about religious language which Nuyen seems to have in mind before analysing religious realism under closer scrutiny.

Moore's version of theological realism is a good example of the kind of religious realism which this thesis has been outlining because it not only specifies that the identity and meaning of religious language is accountable to a mind-independent religious reality, but that the truth of this acts as an argument for the truth of theism. An example of this can be seen in *Realism and Christian Faith*: *God, Grammar, and Meaning*.

> The importance of remembering that practices of faith are governed by God's direct presence lies principally in that they thus honour him but also in the fact that they can turn against their practitioners in much the same way as did the practices of Jesus' day. So when I say that God himself is the grammar of faith I mean that it is he who regulates our practices (including theological ones), teaches us their point, and thereby keeps our language in good order: God enables us to show his independent reality because he shows himself through practices of faith. (Moore 2003: p. 110).

According to Moore, God is involved in the maintenance of religious language and practice to such an extent that religious language and practice would fall apart if it were not for the reality of God, and it is in this rather literal sense that Moore takes God to be the *grammar of faith*. This can be transformed into an argument for the truth of theism – that only God's personal involvement can account for the meaning of certain languages and practices, and so us having such languages and practices is a proof of there being such a reality to God. As a *theological* realist, Moore is specifically saying that the religious reality *as presented in Christianity* is 'real' and therefore Christianity is the standard for religious language because if we were to find a language which was meaningfully religious because of Zeus's personal involvement, then it would mean that Christian theological realism *is false*. Another example of this mode of thinking is seen in the claim that, 'the eucharist should . . . be regarded as ineradicably the sacramental enactment of God's judgment and grace and as incapable of losing its meaning because God grants it through his gracious presence'; the mind-independently existing God confers a unique religious meaning onto language which would not be possible nor accountable to anything other than the truth of religious realism (Moore 2003: p. 117). Verbin breaks Moore's Christian theological realism down into two elements which

we have traced in Nuyen's thoughts; that there is a religious reality which is uniquely Christian, and that reality confers meaning onto things like language –

> The first is a conception of realism that involves a commitment to God as the condition for the possibility of religious meaning, knowledge and truth […] Such a realism, in other words, is committed to the proposition that if there is religious meaning, knowledge and truth within the Christian community, it is made possible by means of God. Moore's second conception of 'Christian realism' involves a commitment to God as the realized condition for the possibility of religious meaning, knowledge and truth, within the Christian community, as in fact guaranteeing the meaning, knowledge and truth of various utterances made about God within the Christian community. (Verbin 2003: p. 220).

If we adopted Moore's terms then we would *ipso facto* render all other incompatible religious beliefs false and their languages irreligious. If God is not personally securing the meaning of the religious languages of Hinduism or Buddhism, then the languages are not religious, and the religions are factually mistaken to believe otherwise. These outcomes might be true, but they are tough bullets to bite and are at odds with an inclusive approach towards religious and language diversity, however if it were true – that there is a mind-independent religious reality which transfers religious meaning or value onto sentences in ways which could not happen under nor be accountable to anti-realism – then several aforementioned problems could be avoided.

A useful way to think of religious realism is through an analogy, as realism is

> the view that material objects exist outside us and independently of what we take to be our perceptions of them [then] by analogy religious realism is the view that that objects of religious belief exist independently of what we take to be our human experience of them. (Hick 1989: p. 172).

Religious realists link an ontological claim with an epistemological claim: that there is a mind-independent *religious* reality which we can access and form *religious* beliefs about. It is usually the *object* of belief which makes the belief 'religious', but it is not unheard of to encounter religious realists who believe that the epistemological method for forming their beliefs is also religious.[108] Consequently, when we apply religious realism to the study of religious language we can place discussions about the externality of an object (object-externalism) in one hand, and discussions about the *relevance* which the externality of a referent has to the meaning of a sentence (content-externalism) in the other hand.[109] A religious realist does not need to think that every possible

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[108] Cf. S3. C4.
[109] Like *Semantic* Externalism, the view that the meaning of language is set by factors outside of any given speaker, such as conventions, rituals, customs, or ontological facts of grammar, this thesis uses Content Externalism to mark the

object of religious belief exists mind-independently (one could be a realist about *some* religious objects and not others), and so if a variation of religious realism is to account for religious language, then it must link a mind-independent religious object with a language or sentence e.g., through the act of positing, referencing or contextual association. This could hypothetically link the externality of religious objects (object-externalism) with the content of religious sentences (content-externalism) thereby providing the basis for a religious realist account for the identity and meaning of religious language. To these ends, Nuyen's version of religious realism specifies that a language or sentence is conferred with a unique *religious* meaning or value when it is associated with a mind-independent religious reality, and this allows us to *identify* the 'religious' element of a language in a way which could also account for the *meaning* of the language.

Putting aside field linguist constraints, religious realism has the merit of appealing to the shared intuition within the contemporary study of religious language. Resembling Face Value Theory, religious realism provides a straight-forward non-revisionary account for religious language because 'the way someone who believes in God talks about God shows that he thinks God really exists independently of faith' and this usually leads to the position that 'either God exists or God does not exist, because God at least purports to be an actually-existing independent individual being' (Cupitt 1980: p. 47 & 15). The religious realist makes a link between content-externalism of sentences and object-externalism of religious reality such that they suppose that there is some religious reality 'separate from our language and that our language stretches out to a reality that is external to us and tries to express it accurately' (Vardy 1995: p. 16). Religious realism therefore comes hand in hand with the correspondence theory of truth,[110] however Hick's clarification that the objects of religious belief are not necessarily the same as how we perceive them marks a distinction between naïve religious realism and critical religious realism. Naïve religious realism is the view 'that the world exists externally to ourselves and is basically the way it is presented to us through our senses' whilst critical religious realism 'emerged in the first half of the present [20th] century' and most notably focused on the role which projection, perception and interpretation has on the human experience of objects (Stiver 1996: p. 52) & (Hick 1989: p. 174). Critical realism is,

> a way of describing the process of 'knowing' that acknowledges the *reality of the thing
> known, as something other than the knower* (hence 'realism'), while also fully
> acknowledging that the only access we have to this reality lies along the spiralling path of

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view sentences are meaningful when they are understood as being about things outside of themselves (Rowlands, Lau, and Deutsch 2020).

[110] Indeed, Vardy goes so far as to say that 'Someone who holds to a correspondence theory of truth is today called a realist' (Vardy 1995: p. 16).

appropriate dialogue or conversation between the knower and the thing known (hence 'critical'). (Wright 1992: p. 35).

Critical realism, perhaps better expressed by the phrase *realism subject to critique*, observes that although language attempts to draw pictures of the external world (correspondence), there may be cases where people *project* qualities onto the external world without realising and mistakenly believe them to be mind-independent like colours, beauty, patterns, and intentions. This is better known as the *Projection Fallacy*, where we 'talk as though things possess qualities, when what we ought to say is that they cause effects in us of one kind or another, the fallacy of 'projecting' the effect and making it a quality of its cause' (I. A. Richards 2002: p. 16). There is a serious and technical distinction between religious realism and anti-realism in this respect: in their assertion of the existence of a mind-independent religious reality, the realist endorses the view that at least some sentences which feature objects of religious belief are *content-external* because the object of belief is claimed to be mind-independent, moreover, the realist asserts that these objects *actually exist* and therefore support the truth of religious object-externalism. Some variations of religious realism could go on to argue that it is the actual existence of such external religious objects and their transferal of some meaning or value onto some languages and sentences which accounts for how a language is said to be religious and how that sentence is said to possess religious meaning. The anti-realist may or may not agree that the meaning of some religious sentences hinge on content-externalism, but in their denial of the mind-independent existence of religious objects, they also reject both the truth of religious realism and the possibility for it accounting for the religious identity and meaning of any given sentence. To clarify, the religious anti-realist does not necessarily deny the content-externality of religious sentences – they can agree that when some people say 'God listens to my prayers' they mean to be understood as saying something about an external object – however, as the anti-realist claims that there are no external religious objects/reality they also claim that the religious identity and meaning of a language cannot be accountable to religious realism. This reaffirms that when it comes to religious language, the distinction between the realist and anti-realist is not simply ontological where one proposes a particular mode of reality and the other rejects it; but that the realist thinks that the actual existence of such religious objects/reality account for the current identity and meaning of some religious languages. In thinking that there is a religious reality independent to human experience and belief, the critical religious realist also thinks that we

> can reasonably take his talk about God, bound as it is within a wheel of images, as being reality depicting, while at the same time acknowledging its inadequacy as description. This, we believe, is the position a critical theological realist must take. (Soskice 1985: p. 141).

Bringing this together, when we ask, 'what makes a language religious, and what does its sentences mean?' some variations of religious realism can answer threefold: at least one object of religious belief exists in the external world (object-externalism), its association with language *makes* language religious, and the meaning of some religious sentences come from their association with those external objects (content-externalism). This has some resemblance with Benjamin Hary's 'sanctity by association', which suggests that the degree to which one religious text can be associated with another, such as through translation, is the degree to which that text can be spoken of as having gained some *sanctity* (Hary 2009: p. 55-56). Thus, an English translation of the Torah has sanctity in virtue of its association with the Torah's content, but the Torah *in Biblical Hebrew* is of greater sanctity in virtue of its language. Where Hary might be making a social-cultural or linguistic claim, this thesis is suggesting a metaphysical one – that there is something 'metaphysically sacred' which can be 'passed along' from text to text, speaker to speaker, object to word etc., through actions which associate religious objects with token sentences. This variation of religious realism can therefore argue that 'religious language' is a referring expression which picks out an object language that warrants the term 'religious language' because of its association with real religious objects, and part of the meaning of its sentences is reducible to their association with these religious objects. Such a religious realism therefore provides a philosophical rather than linguistic[111] explanation for religious language because it attempts to provide a foundation for the language's identity and meaning, and so Lesnick's suspicion of there being more to Mass than 'crackers and wine' is perhaps correct because there is a real religious object, reality, value or domain of meaning which he is sensing but failing to fully grasp.

This shows that some variations of religious realism can claim that: (i) there are mind-independent religious objects, (ii) these objects can be known and spoken about, (iii) such objects confer meaning and/or value onto language. A religious realist of this ilk thinks that the identity and meaning of religious language cannot be separated from the mind-independent religious reality which confers religious meaning and value onto the language. This would combine both Scott's treatment of religious sentences as ones which posit religious entities or properties with this thesis's view that an account for the meaning of a religious sentence must also account for the religious domain of meaning. However, unlike what this thesis proposes, a religious realist of this variety

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[111] Keane observes that 'it is unusual for religious language not to bear some formal marks of its special character' and offers examples of discourse markers, linguistic devices, ritualistic habits etc., which allow linguists to categorize and later identify a certain *use* of language, but this does not tell us about the *religious domain of meaning* (Keane 1997: p. 52).

suggests that our detection of a religious language is not an outcome of linguistic know-how but potentially some other intuitive power.[112] This raises questions about what an object must be like to be 'religious' and what perceptual skills are required for us to be able to detect it, and as the answers to these questions depend on how religious objects relate and transfer meaning onto language, we should first consider the nature of those relations and then ask whether a version of religious realism could sufficiently account for it.

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[112] This is explored in the following chapters.

S3. C2. The Kinds of Realism for Religious Language

Although most religious realists agree that at least some religious objects exist mind-independently and are suitable for religious belief, not all agree that the existence of such objects influence the identity and meaning of religious language. The variations of religious realism which have the highest potential for providing an account for religious language are therefore the ones which posit a relationship between religious objects and language, and there are several ways for how this relationship could occur. One variation holds that a sentence picks up religious meaning, value, and identity in virtue of it *referencing* a religious object; another variation holds that a language could abstractly exist and be itself instantiated with a religious reality – that Hebrew, for example, is *literally* a religious object language; and another variation holds that the *environment* makes a sentence of language religious – that it is religious *when it is spoken by God*. For the sake of clarity, we shall adopt the following terms:

Language Realism – the view that language exists independent of mind.

Language Nominalism – the view that language does *not* exist independent of mind.

Epistemological Realism – the view that the object(s) of belief exist independent of mind.

Epistemological Religious Realism – the view that the object(s) of *religious* belief exist independent of mind.

Religious Language Realism – the view that 'religious language' references a language which exists independent of mind.

Religious Language Nominalism – the view that 'religious language' does *not* reference a language which exists independent of mind.

The importance of addressing whether 'religious language' is a referring expression has already been made clear, and so it is useful to distinguish between those who think that it references an actual object language from those who think that it references a nominalist system of signs and symbols. This also caters for the diverse range of views about religious language identity as well as acknowledging that a language's mode of existence will influence the relationship which it can

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have with religious objects which in turn shapes the study.[113] We can therefore divide all variations of religious realism apt for forming an account of the identity and meaning of religious language into two groups based on where they locate the religious object/reality which confers religious identity and meaning:

Internal Religious Language Realism – the view that the 'religious stuff' of language is *internal* to the object language.

External Religious Language Realism – the view that the 'religious stuff' of language is *external* to the object language, irrespective to whether the object language is real or nominal.

At this stage we can begin to provide a robust account for religious language which fulfils the aforementioned requirements. The variations of religious realism which have the most potential for accounting for religious language assert that there is a mind-independent religious reality which transfers meaning and value onto token sentences such as to warrant the referring expression 'religious language'. This secures the study of religious language with a real *object* language as well as a reason for following the *sense* of the name 'religious language' as a description – there is, quite literally, a language instantiated with religious meaning and value on account of the mind-independent existence of religious objects. Moreover, it was earlier claimed that a sufficient account for the meaning of religious language would struggle to develop without also providing an account for the religious identity of a language, and a supporter of this variation of religious realism explains why this is so: what accounts for a language being religious also accounts for its domain of meaning. The two come together, and so we cannot provide an account for one whilst remaining totally silent about the other. Religious realism affirms the mind-independent existence of a religious reality which is suitable for belief, and this brings with it the need for a verification principle; indeed, it was earlier argued that verifying what 'religious language' references is important for the cognitive status of the study. In the views of McClendon and Smith, we seek a 'general theory of religious language which will account for the truth in the verification theory while showing its limits, and will integrate most of the modern insights into religious language as well', hence the appeal of establishing a variation of religious realism which is accompanied by a verification principle (McClendon and Smith 1973: p. 413). This raises two sets of questions – what

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[113] A realist would be more inclined to examine the metaphysical properties of language than a nominalist in virtue of them believing that language is an actual abstract object.

would verification principles look like for variations of religious realism, and how would we verify the truth of any variation?

S3. C3. Putting Realism to the Test

Variations of religious realism are in theory plausible and appealing, but to be true as an account for religious language they must also be true in what they claim, which is to say that a version of religious realism accounts for religious language on the condition that there *is* a mind-independent religious reality which confers meaning and value onto language that matters for our study of its identity and meaning. The religious realist has two problems to overcome: what is the 'stuff' of this religious reality such that we can accurately detect it, and how can this be found prior to language such that it can be utilised as a foundation for language. All religious realists agree that the objects of religious belief exist independently of humans, and if this is to be the foundations for religious language then the realist must also affirm, as Nuyen specifies, that religious objects transfer meaning or value onto sentences. Put alternatively, if we could account for what makes a language religious and what its sentences mean without having to also posit the mind-independent existence of any religious reality then religious realism is superfluous. Religious realism makes a series of factual assertions: (i) there are religious objects independent of mind, (ii) these objects can be known, (iii) these objects transfer some meaning onto language and sentences, and as such it ought to be expected to layout its truth conditions for verification. To these ends Hick writes that,

> an indicative sentence expresses a factual assertion if and only if the state in which the universe would be if the putative assertion could correctly be said to be true differs in some experienceable way from the state in which the universe would be if the putative assertion could correctly be said to be false, all aspects of the universe other than that referred to in the putative assertion being the same in either case. (Hick 1960: p. 12, ft. 1).

Some supporters of some variations of religious realism take the view that a sentence is religious when it references a mind-independent religious object; when it is featured in a mind-independent religious context; when it is instantiated with a mind-independent religious reality etc., and so they should be expected to outline what the world would be like if religious realism was true in contrast to if it were false and then demonstrate that this world is decisively the former and not the latter. If a variation of religious realism was unable to identify an experienceable difference between a realist and a nonrealist world, then their claim that there is a religious reality falls short of an important aspect of verification. To address this, Hick proposes what he calls 'eschatological verification', the view that religious sentences report facts which are in *principle* verifiable but only practicably verifiable after death,

> The broad idea is that the theistic conception of the universe, and of what is going on in human life, *is* capable of experiential verification, although according to Christianity the verifying situation lies in the final fulfilment of God's purpose for us beyond this present

life. (Hick 1977: p. 190).

Putting aside the debate about whether this mode of verification is acceptable for verifying the truth of what religious sentences say,[114] it does not offer a method for verifying whether any given sentence is religious. As noted above, there are a variety of forms which religious realism could take in its account for religious language, and a successful account should be able to identify what the *religious* quality of language is and map out how that quality is transferred onto language. We shall begin with the Western intuition – a sentence is religious when it is conferred with some religious meaning or value and the only way for that to happen is when the sentence *correctly references an actual mind-independent religious object*. But does this mean that a sentence can only be religious if it reports a true belief? To answer these questions, it is helpful to consider Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* which, 'combines atomism with the picture theory of the proposition…', where there,

> are names which correlate with objects. *Objects*, then, on the ontological side of this equation, must be the simple constituents of facts, the elementary, unanalyzable building blocks of facts. As propositions are made up of names standing in relation to each other, facts are made up of objects in relation. What these relations are in propositions and in facts, and how they correlate, make up the picture theory. (Churchill 1994: pp. 391-392).

The picture theory of propositions holds, broadly put, that propositions try to *picture* what the objects of discussion are like in such a manner that they essentially bring about an image in one's mind which means to portray what the world is like. Strictly speaking the term 'picture' only means to express that language is *about* things, and so a picture does not need to be a mental image and it does not need to be about the *external* world (it could be *internal* things like emotions or dreams)[115] (Anscombe 1971: pp. 18-19). If a religious object was *dependent* upon a mind – say, it was a feature of one's subjective feelings – then although a proposition could picture it, it is not 'mind independent' and so may fall short of the religious realist's requirements. As such, a religious sentence under religious realism is one which *successfully* references a mind-independent religious object – a picture is religious only when it portrays a real religious object (Zemach 1995: p. 480). This leads to the conclusion that a sentence is *indicatively* religious when it appears to posit an external religious object, and if the only way for a sentence to be religious is by it successfully picturing an actual religious object, then Scott is right to take religious sentences as ones which

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[114] Cf. (Tooley 1976) & Schlick offers some explanation for how a belief in souls existing in some imperceivable realm would require a degree of empirical proof (Schlick 1936: p. 357).

[115] Cf. 'To give the essence of a proposition means to give the essence of all description, and thus the essence of the world' (Wittgenstein 1974: 5.4711).

posit (or picture) religious entities or properties. As such, any talk in religious language which fails to picture a religious object also fails to take on a religious identity, and if this sentence was intended to be taken as a proposition, then the sentence loses its semantic value if the proposition's subject has no actual extension. Moreover, if the picture account of language holds for *metalanguage*, then to the extent that 'religious language' is used as a referring expression and yet lacks a clear referent is the extent to which the study's language loses its cognitive form. This bolsters the claim of some varieties of religious realism – that a sentence cannot be religious unless it is related to a mind-independent religious reality, but it is unclear whether this means that religious sentences must express true beliefs about that reality. The word 'soul' might be 'religious' insofar that it accurately designates a mind-independent religious object and therefore picks up some religious meaning and value, but this does not mean that every sentence which features this word is equally religious, e.g., 'souls do not exist' and 'souls are made of mud'. A supporter of this (or a similar) variation of religious realism will need to balance how they identify a religious sentence with the sentence's content so to avoid awkward outcomes where a religious sentence seems to report a false or meaningless belief. Such a balance could possibly be struck by a variation of expressivism.

The expressivist, as Scott describes, believes that 'religious sentences conventionally express non-cognitive attitudes and in many cases also express beliefs. However, religious sentences do not have religious content, and the beliefs that they express are not religious beliefs', as such, there are no true or false *religious beliefs* but instead true or false *nonreligious* beliefs which are at times critically related to what a religion asserts (Scott 2013: p. 7). The sentence 'be thankful for God made the World for us all' can be broken into two parts: there is a nonreligious belief being expressed (that the world was created and therefore has not always existed), and there is also the expressive attitude of gratitude, celebration and thankfulness for the existence of the world which the religious mark with the concept 'God's creation'. At the heart of the expressivist's view is that 'talk of funniness, for the expressivist, does not pick out a genuine property of objects and speakers' thus talk of divinity or Godliness does not pick out a genuine property either, meaning that there are no true or false beliefs *about* such objects (Scott 2013: p. 8). Some religious realists could adopt expressivist views insofar as they could argue that the language is inherently religious, regardless of what its sentences say or what attitudes they express, but this would still require at least one sentence to affirm that religious language is an actual mind-independent object, and this might constitute a religious sentence. The challenge is clear, but the solution is not. Supporting a mode of content-externalism where a sentence is religious because it designates a mind-

independent religious reality is an intuitive way to account for the identity and meaning of religious language, but the prospect that some religious sentences report false beliefs is a significant challenge. An expressivist could try to strike a balance by claiming that a sentence is religious due to its association with some religious reality as reflected in the attitudes and sentiments of the speaker, but this comes at the cost of rejecting the view that religious sentences are cognitive and express religious beliefs; something which many religious realists would oppose. The question of *where* a variation of religious realism would locate the 'religious stuff' of language is at the heart of this balancing act – hence the distinction between Externalism and Internalism.

Externalism and Internalism differ only in respect to where the religious objects are in relation to language – Externalists believe that the objects are *outside* language whilst Internalists believe that they are *inside* language. There are at least two ways for Externalism to function[116] (a religious object is referenced by a word, or a sentence occurs within a religious environment) and one Internalist way (the language possesses a religious property as an attribute).

Regarding the first mode of Externalism, if 'soul' fails to reference an object then it fails to be religious. The problem with this being an account is that we can identify religious sentences (sometimes within the same tradition) which report conflicting beliefs about objects and/or do not seem to reference the same objects. It is not clear that all Christians are referencing the same object by the word 'soul', and assuming that there is a finite number of things which the object is like, then only some Christians succeed in picking it out and therefore only some succeed to speak religiously, whilst others appear to be succeeding when they are in fact failing. The additional challenge here, then, is telling the two apart.

The second mode of Externalism holds that the content of a sentence does not need to reference an external object to be religious, but that the sentence itself needs to be associated with some externally existing religious factor. For example, the sentence 'please kneel' may take on religious status when it is spoken in Church during ritual, or if found in the book of Psalms, if it was spoken by God to a prophet. The distinction between these two modes of Externalism is whether it is the language which is reaching out to the religious reality or the religious reality which is reaching out to the language. The issue with these sorts of accounts is twofold: firstly, it causes the content of speech to drop out of concern (a religious sentence could report a false belief; e.g., a priest

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[116] This applies for Realism and Nominalism.

conducting a service could accidently speak a falsehood during his teachings of scripture) and secondly, there are a series of Euthyphro-like Dilemmas which would need overcoming.[117]

Internalism asserts that the religious property is an attribute of language thus meaning that the language *itself* possesses a religious reality. The problem with this account is that it commits to ontological views about language which are not shared amongst religions or even members of the same religion, and it faces a more extreme consequence of having the content of speech drop out of consideration. Where an Externalist could argue that a sentence is religious because the word 'God' successfully picks out an external object even if the sentence's claim *about* that object is false or that a sentence is religious because it was spoken by the Pope even though what the Pope said was false, the Internalist can say *anything whatsoever* – a shopping list is religious when written in that language.

The contemporary study puts more effort into explaining what religious sentences mean than what makes sentences religious, and the study broadly takes the view that religious sentences are ones which posit a religious property, entity or object. The study quickly moves on from this brief comment about the identity of religious language and dives into deeper questions about how such sentences behave, and so there is little interest as for whether the study of religious language is studying a *nominalist* or *realist* language. The meaning of the sentence, it is supposed, has little dependence on the metaphysics or ontology of language itself, and so it is believed that religious realism is not required to make any strict commitment to any specific theory of language. The only thing which the religious realist needs to commit to is that the central predicates of their discourse are instantiated by external referents, which is to say, a realist about God must take the view that the term 'God' references an external object fit for religious belief. Variations of religious realism can link the account for what a religious sentence is with what a religious sentence means through the view that religious sentences posit religious things – *Religious Language Externalism*, for example, could hold that a sentence is religious because the act of referencing or designating a mind-independent object of religious belief transfers a unique and identifiable meaning onto the sentence itself. In this view, a sentence about God is religious because it is *literally* talk about God. This chapter has considered several variations of religious realism which can in theory link the account for the identity of religious language with an account for the meaning of religious

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[117] Is the language religious *because* it comes from God, or does God speak the language *because* it is religious; is the language religious *because* it is in the Bible, or is it in the Bible *because* it is religious; is the language religious *because* it is in a ceremony, or is it in a ceremony *because* it is religious etc.

language. Moreover, such an account might also be able to address the field linguist's requirements, both religious and host-language diversity, and provide a non-revisionary account for the meaning of at least some central religious sentences. The variations of religious realism which we have considered can provide at least two important services: they can provide an ontological basis which supports the study's intuition that the term 'religious language' is a referring expression towards an identifiably *religious* object language, and they can also provide an epistemological system which goes some way towards linking the identity and meaning of a religious sentence. The following chapters will examine the successes and failures of each outlined variation of religious realism, and to do this we must first identify and explore the ontological, metaphysical and epistemological commitments which religious realists make across the board. Through an adaption of error theory, we shall demonstrate that the central commitment of religious realism – that there is a mind-independent religious reality – is incompatible with the truth of several religions, and if religious realism is essential to the identification and understanding of religious language, then this commitment is also incompatible with the identity and meaning of several religious languages.

S3. C4. The Error Theorist's Challenge

Error theory agrees that moral judgements are cognitive, externally focused, and if true, would lead to factual beliefs, however such beliefs are never true because the realist fails to identify what moral properties are like and how we would know about them (Mackie 1977) & (Miller 2003: p. 5). Analogously, the error theorist about religion agrees that religious judgements and sentences are cognitive, externally focused, and if true, would lead to factual religious beliefs, however such beliefs are never true because the religious realist fails to identify what religious properties are like and how we would know about them. Error theory does not take this as proof that religious language, beliefs, judgements etc., are *meaningless*, just that they are *untrue.* It is plausible that despite being prone to error, religion and its practices, languages, traditions, beliefs etc., are meaningful and important, and not totally nonsensical nor necessarily dispensable.[118] Error theory asks two important questions and offers a path for a suitable response: what must a property be like to be 'religious' and how would we understand that property and the meaning or value which it confers onto language? The error theory points out that religious realism has certain non-negotiable commitments in consequence of its view, for example, mind-independent existence is a non-negotiable commitment which a religious realist has when describing what a property must be like to be religious. This chapter introduces the error theory, documents the sorts of commitments which religious realism has, and then goes some way to show that the truth of religious realism comes at too great of a cost to be acceptable.

Andrew Moore observes that 'plenty of people are global realists but religious anti-realists, and if they admit that religious people speak with a realist intent it is still open to them to be error theorists about religious language', and in doing so opens the door for a plausible error theorist challenge against religious realism (Moore 2004: p. 140). Although religious realism is not understood as being committed to a theory of language, it is nonetheless committed to the cognitive value of the central claims within its discourse, such as 'there is a mind-independent religious reality.'. Indeed, a realist about God must assert that talk about God succeeds in referencing the object, God, but this does not therefore mean that such a sentence is necessarily *religious*. Error theorists agree that the typical speaker of religious language intends to be understood as talking about external objects when they say things like "Jesus walked on water", however, they go on to point out that such intentions are not unique or peculiar to religious language – hence *Global*

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[118] 'The main reason why it has been thought that religious language cannot be literally meaningful is that some philosophers – particularly the logical positivists – have embraced a strongly verificationist theory of meaning ... But this theory of meaning is itself highly implausible.' (Mackie 1982: p. 2).

Realism. A whole range of realist positions can be expressed through English and so it is not difficult to imagine how the linguistic devices which express moral, aesthetic and scientific realism are used by the religious community to express their religious realism. If this is the case – that we can identify and understand religious language through the same grammatical know-how which allows for us to do the very same with moral, aesthetic and scientific realism – then we have no need for religious realism to be true. This undermines the intuition behind some variations of religious realism, such as Moore's view that God himself personally intervenes and maintains our language in good order, and it also increases the burden of proof which the religious realist must meet if they are to provide an account for both the identity and meaning of religious language. It is not sufficient to support religious realism on the argument that speakers *intend* to be understood as referencing external religious objects; rather, the realist must demonstrate that the identity and meaning of at least some sentences are accountable to the truth of religious realism.[119]

Being an error theorist about religious language is plausible, after all despite being most associated with ethics 'there are error theories about numbers, color, free will, and personal identity' (Olson 2017: p. 58). Error theory concludes that the beliefs, judgements, and languages which are religious are in error, but our beliefs, judgements, and languages *about* religious beliefs, judgements, and languages are not in error, thus securing the meaning of our study's metalanguage and the possibility for forming true beliefs (Joyce 2001: p. 5). There is some dispute about whether an error theorist must think that moral (and religious) beliefs are *false* or more tentatively *untrue*, however there is broader agreement that the moral/religious realist understands the objects of those beliefs as possessing metaphysical 'qualities or relations of a very strange sort, utterly different from anything else in the universe' which require, epistemologically speaking, 'some special faculty of moral [religious] perception or intuition, utterly different from our ordinary ways of knowing everything else' (Mackie 1977: p. 38). A presentation of what error theory about religion looks like and how it can lead to an irrealist position is found in Scott's *Wittgenstein and Realism* (Scott 2000).

Adopting Paul Boghossian's definition for irrealism – 'the view that no real properties answer to the central predicates of the region [of discourse] in question ' – Scott suggests that error theory could lead to irrealism if it were to decisively show that external religious properties do not exist and there is no clear way for understanding them if they did (Scott 2000: p. 174). Religious realism

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[119] If the identity and meaning of religious language can be accounted for without needing an actual mind-independent religious reality, then religious realism does not account for religious language.

would be false if we interpret Boghossian's term of '*real* properties' as *external* properties and were shown that they do not exist, but if we understood fundamentally subjective properties as 'real properties' since they *really exist*, then religious realism would still be false despite there being 'real properties'. For a religious realist, the mind-independent existence of the 'religious stuff' of language is *the central predicate of the region* – existing is not enough, it must be a mind-independent sort of existence. The error theorist does not necessarily think that religious people are lying about having had certain experiences and possessing certain beliefs, the error theorist might agree that a person did hear a voice when praying and it was understood by that person as coming from God, but the error theorist maintains that such an experience does not prove the *central predicate of the religious realist discourse*. Likewise, an error theorist does not need to think that religious properties and entities are impossible, but merely that they have not been shown to exist or instantiated (Joyce 2021). This demonstrates that an essential element to religious realism is the belief that the 'religious reality' exists independently of experience, and so an error theorist must be shown more than the fact that people believe such-and-such, the error theorist must be shown that those beliefs are *true*. In essence, error theory deconstructs what a realist says about religion and religious objects and asks, 'what must a property be like in order to be as the realist imagines, and what must we be like in order to access and understand them?'. As the error theorist believes that such properties do not exist, they conclude that those regions which depend upon the existence of these properties as central predicates (religious language, belief, experiences, etc.,) are prone to error.

This challenges Scott's specific phrasing of error theoretic irrealism being, 'the view that the declarative sentences of the discourse in question are all false. The discourse's predicates denote properties, but there are no such properties: the states of affairs we aspire to describe in the discourse do not obtain' is therefore disputable (Scott 2000: pp. 174-175). If religious realism is the view that the objects of religious belief, and therefore the referents of some religious terms, possess an ontologically objective mode of existence, then religious irrealism would be the view that there are no ontologically objective religious objects and therefore no such referents. However, as irrealism is specifically the negation of the realist's commitment to there being *ontologically objective* objects of religious belief, the irrealist is not required to comment on whether there are *ontologically subjective* objects of religious belief. As such, even under error theoretic irrealism where ontologically objective objects of religious belief are rejected, there could remain meaningful and potentially true declarative statements about ontologically subjective religious objects and properties. It certainly follows, as we saw with Boghossian, that religious realism would be false if

there are no mind-independent properties which the central predicates of religious discourse attempt to denote, but religious realism would still be false if the predicates of some religious sentences denote mind-dependent religious objects and such objects were found to exist. Scott's phrasing purposefully emphasises that the properties must exist in a mind-independent fashion to meet the requirements of religious realism, and by implication, a language cannot be religious for *subjective* reasons. If we found a language which was religious for subjective reasons, which is to say religious because the predicates of its sentences denote mind-dependent religious properties which exist, then we could conclude that irrealism is true/realism is false without also stating that every declarative sentence in every religious language is false – we could however say that they are *prone to error*. If we take the view that a religious sentence only ever posits mind-independent religious entities, properties, objects etc., then we can agree that just as 'there are no ethical properties of a kind that could answer to the predicates central to ethical discourse [and] Since there are no such properties, ordinary moral thought is systematically mistaken' then analogously, 'an error theorist about religious discourse would maintain that all members of the class of predicates central to religious discourse have uniformly empty extensions; that is, declarative religious statements are false.' (Scott 2000: p. 175). But as suggested, there is room to argue that not all declarative religious sentences target what are intended to be understood as being mind-independent religious objects and therefore there is room to argue that not all declarative religious sentences are false under error theoretic irrealism.

Whether an error theorist must think that religious statements are *false* is questionable, in part because Scott (and others) sometimes use the term 'untrue' instead.[120] The difference between 'false' and 'untrue' could be stylistic and somewhat secondary because religious realism would still be 'false' in either circumstance. However, 'false' rather than 'untrue' could imply that an error theorist *knows* that the religious properties do not exist because they are impossible, whilst 'untrue' leaves some reasonable space for the possibility of the properties whilst still expressing an oppositional stance towards realism. Richard Joyce offers an alternative route for where the implications of 'false' or 'untrue' may lead when he explains moral error theory in reference to atheism,

> it would seem that when a theist says "God exists" (for example) she is expressing something that purports to be true. According to the atheist, however, the claim is untrue;

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[120] Cf. Scott (Scott 2017) ; Mackie describes moral judgements as being 'all false', Joyce uses the term 'false beliefs' in reference to moral beliefs, and both Jonas Olson and Stephen Finlay label first-order moral statements like 'murder is wrong' as false (Kalf 2019: p. 4).

indeed, according to her, theistic discourse in general is infected with error. The moral error theorist claims that when we say "Stealing is wrong" we are asserting that the act of stealing instantiates the property of wrongness, but in fact nothing instantiates this property (or there is no such property at all), and thus the utterance is untrue. (Joyce 2021).

This suggests that an error theorist could be unsure about the existence of religious properties but more or less certain that they are not instantiated into language – if religious or moral properties existed it does not follow that we have error-free thoughts, judgements or declarative sentences about them. There is a distinction between judging whether a declarative sentence is religious and whether it is true, false, or untrue. As we are primarily concerned with what makes a sentence or language religious, then we care about the truth-status of a candidate religious sentence insofar as that matters to its religious identity. If the only way for a sentence to be religious was its successful referencing of external properties in truth-value declarative sentences, then every candidate sentence which fails the error theory also loses its religious status. In our case, instantiation is different to reference – if a language is religious only when an externally existing religious property confers religious value or meaning onto it, then it does not necessarily follow that a successful reference constitutes a successful conference and thus *instantiation* of religious value (a language could be religious for reasons *other* than what it references, e.g., it is religious because God spoke it, irrespective to the extensions of the words). In practice, error theory has two tasks; the assertation of *what* a term refers to ('religious reality', 'God', 'religious property') and the *assessment* of whether the things which are said when such terms are deployed are true (Joyce 2001: p. 5). The burden falls on the realist to answer these questions as it is the realist who is asserting their existence, but the error theorist can assist the realist in this pursuit because, 'error theorists think that we can derive from our current moral [religious] discourse a conceptually 'non-negotiable commitment' about what a property would have to look like to count as a moral [religious] property' (Kalf 2019: p. 2).

In explaining how error theorists detect certain commitments which moral realists possess on account of their language, Matt Luz compares moral with religious language, outlining that there are two platitudes for what the term 'God' represents. The first being 'non-negotiable commitments', things which are *essential* for what it takes to be God such that if the object named 'God' lacks those features then the object *is not what 'God' names*,[121] and the second are 'negotiable commitments', things which are *not* essential and therefore acceptable to drop[122] (Lutz

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[121] Omnipotence, Omniscience, Omnibenevolence, The Creator of the Universe etc.
[122] The giver of the Ten Commandments, the one who spoke to Moses and revealed the Quran to Mohammad.

2014: pp. 362-363). If there is a deity which has all the non-negotiable commitments but transpired to have never spoken to Moses, 'then the thing to say is not that there is no God, but rather that God did not do one of the things that the Judeo-Christian faiths hold him to have done', thus if we found a language which has all the necessary requirements to be religious but was not compatible with Jainism, then we should say that Jainism is mistaken about religious language and not that the language is not religious (Lutz 2014: p. 363). This makes it theoretically possible for a religion to possess a language which has all of the non-negotiable commitments required to be classed as 'religious' whilst having no true beliefs. In terms of religious language, there are a combination of negotiable and non-negotiable commitments which the religious realist faces when it comes to what a property must be like in order to be 'religious'. It is worth noting that religious diversity makes it unlikely that all religions conceive of the same sort of property, and unless several different religious properties exist, then we should expect religious realism to *exclude* some languages from holding religious status.

Religious realism has negotiable and non-negotiable commitments when it comes to outlining what a property must be like to be religious; the most important non-negotiable commitment being that the property confers value or meaning onto language and that it exists *independently* of experience. Possessing an experience-independent mode of existence is captured by what Searle calls an 'ontologically objective mode of existence', where Searle distinguishes ontology from epistemology, and objectivity from subjectivity (Searle 1999: p. 44). Statements about ontology treat an object's mode of existence, and subjectivity and objectivity mark the dependence or independence which that mode of existence has upon a subject's experience – an object is said to be ontologically objective if 'their mode of existence does not depend on being experienced by a subject' whilst it exists in an ontologically subjective fashion if 'they exist only as experienced by some human or animal subject.'[123] (Searle 1999: p. 44). Religious realism has two non-negotiable *ontological* commitments; the existence of *that* which makes language religious does not depend on the experience of a subject, and that the extension of religious words and sentences exist independently of a subject. Statements about epistemology treat the conditions under which a belief is judged as true or false, and subjectivity and objectivity signify the location of those conditions – a belief is said to be subjective 'if its truth depends essentially on the attitudes and feelings of

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[123] Searle immediately clarifies that there is a fallacy in this division when it comes to the application of the scientific method: it was once believed that one's conscious experience of pain cannot be scientifically studied because it is said to have an ontologically subjective mode of existence (Searle 1999: pp. 44-45). However, Searle argues that the epistemic statement 'John is in pain' is not based around feelings, opinions, or prejudice, but is instead a factual statement about the object named John – John either is or is not in pain.

observers', whilst it is 'considered objective if it can be known to be true or false independently of the feelings, attitudes, and prejudices of people' (Searle 1999: p. 44).

A statement is epistemic when it makes a belief claim and belief claims are *cognitive* as cognitive sentences are truth-apt, whereas non-cognitive sentences do not make belief claims because non-cognitive sentences are not truth-apt. Cognitive and non-cognitive sentences often overlap, and realists acknowledge that 'the full range of religious utterances has always included a variety of non-cognitive uses of language: exclamations, commands and exhortations, performances and so on', but they reaffirm that 'language can be employed in all these different modes to say something (whether true or false) about 'what there is' and 'how things are' in the universe beyond our minds' (Hick 1989: p. 176). For example, an exclamation like 'forgive me Lord' *is not* a belief claim but is non-cognitive, however a broader consideration of the exclamation leads one to suspect that the speaker *believes* that there is an object referenced by the term 'Lord' to whom the exclamation is addressed towards.[124] What this means is that there is room for negotiation about the extensions of religious words, the external objects which confer religious meaning or value onto language, and the sorts of interpretations one is required to make of scripture. Assuming language can possess a 'religious reality' for reasons other than because of what it references, a religious language could be entirely non-cognitive and still realist,[125] and so although in the eyes of most religious realists 'it seems almost beyond dispute that such core religious statements as that 'God loves human beings', 'The Qur'an is the Word of God'… have normally been intended cognitively', cognitivism is not necessary for, nor necessarily follows from, religious realism (Hick 1989: p. 176). But this leaves us in a tricky situation, on the one hand we have outlined that a realist is a person who accepts a Correspondence Theory of Truth and likewise takes propositions as picturing the world, as such, a name or referring expression must *picture* an actual object of the external world in order to *not* be an 'empty name'. Yet on the other hand we have a good reason to suspect that a realist could avoid this requirement because they can avoid being cognitivists – although they think the assertion 'there are mind independent religious objects' is cognitive, they are not necessarily required to believe that a religious reality is transferred onto a sentence *only when* the sentence reports a truth-apt belief about it. This might lead us to suspect that there is some negotiation to be had about the *sort* of realism in play.

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[124] This, though, has been challenged in above chapters.
[125] If the sentence 'there is a mind-independent religious reality' constitutes a religious sentence which must be true for religious realism to be a sufficient account for religious language, then religious realism requires cognitivism. But this is open to dispute insofar as the statement 'there is a mind-independent religious reality' could be contained within theological discourse, and not inherently nor externally instantiated with a religious reality.

As we know, Hick is a *critical* realist and is therefore critical (and open for negotiation about) the extent to which our understanding of our experiences of the external world *accurately correspond* to the facts of the external world, however he nonetheless presumes that such a system rationally grounds his beliefs. A reformed epistemological realist might have different avenues for negotiation because they do not believe that one's belief in God must be rationally grounded in the same way as other realists do. The reformed epistemologist argues that a belief in God can be properly basic and immediately justified without requiring additional evidence or argumentation (Wolterstorff 1976) & (Plantinga and Wolterstorff 1983). Wolterstorff clarifies that although reformed epistemology is not foundationalist or literalist, 'the Reformed Epistemologist regards a great deal of religious language as being about God; that is to say, he is of the view that in our use of religious language, we often refer to God' (Wolterstorff 2001: pp. 56-57). Wolterstorff's phrasing of *a great deal* and *often* rather than *all* and *always* implies that there is some room for negotiation about the sort of thing a religious property must be like to warrant one's belief and talk about it. However, as Scott rightly notes, there is one discussion to be had about the obligations a person faces when *making* a claim and another discussion to be had about the obligations they face when *believing* in its truth, and as it is not always clear where the boundary line is between what *makes* a sentence religious and what religious sentences usually do, it is not obvious that the reformed epistemologist secures much room for negotiation after all (Scott 2013: p. 199). A reformed epistemological realist could believe in the existence of a divine language because of having experienced the *Word of God*, and as God is not always talking about himself, they can conclude that talk of God is indicative but not necessary for what makes a language religious. If a variation of religious realism is to successfully account for the identity and meaning of religious language, then there must be a mind-independent religious reality, because everything else can be accounted for under irrealism. We need to balance (i) explicitly asserting the mind-independent existence of a religious reality which confers some unique religious meaning or value onto language such as to make the meaning of any religious sentence necessarily accountable to religious realism, with (ii) the recognition that a religious realist does not need to believe that religious sentences are literal, shallow, intuitive or in any way easily understood.

Perhaps God is beyond explicit human knowledge and only addressable through *apophatic* language, in theory, even mysticism is compatible with religious realism as one could think that the meaning/nature of 'religious reality' is fundamentally mysterious and exists independently of

humans, but this position is rarely encountered (Stiver 1996: pp. 16-21).[126] In this spirit Joseph

Dan's description of mysticism and literalism overlaps with realism,

> The mystic believes that as God cannot express anything which is untrue, and the truth cannot be expressed in human language, the words of divine revelation incorporated in the holy writ, be it the Bible, the Gospels or the Koran, cannot be understood literally because then they will be conveying only partial truths or even completely false messages. Their divine source proves that they are set in symbolic language, and in order to be understood they have to be read as such. The mystics could not reconcile themselves to the non-mystic's reliance on the literal meaning, while the non-mystics could hardly understand how the mystics discover such unimaginable interpretations of seemingly simple biblical verses. (Dan 1985: p. 48).

A non-literal reading of religious language based on the view that the objects of religious belief are

incommunicable risks religious realism being unable to designate and instantiate the external

'religious reality' into language, and so perhaps it is the case that 'all language about God is human

construction and as such perforce 'misses the mark''[127] (McFague 1987: p. 23). Ayer raises a

similar objection which maintains some strength to its bite despite the general collapse of Logical

Positivism, 'if a mystic admits that the object of his vision is something which cannot be described,

then he must also admit that he is bound to talk nonsense when he describes it' (Ayer 1983: p. 156).

The dispute, then, is not whether it is easy to read religious language but whether a person can

support religious realism whilst being unable to clearly reference the object and describe it.

Negotiation can only go so far here because language can fool us into thinking that abstract ideas

are real objects (hypostatisation[128]) and non-literal talk can fool us into thinking that there are

objects behind our similes when there are none, as powerfully illustrated by Wittgenstein,

> Now, I want to impress on you that a certain characteristic misuse of our language runs through all ethical and religious expressions. All these expressions seem, prima facie, to be just similes […] For when we speak of God and that he sees everything and when we kneel and pray to him all our terms and actions seem to be parts of a great and elaborate allegory which represents him as a human being of great power whose grace we try to win, etc., […] Thus in ethical and religious language we seem constantly to be using similes. But a simile must be the simile for something. And if I can describe a fact by means of a simile I must

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[126] Although religious realists like Hick, Vardy, Swinburne, Craig and Plantinga would agree that human language cannot perfectly capture God's nature and that certain aspects of scripture are non-literal, we would probably not describe them as mystics.

[127] This is essentially the 'problem' of religious language and Peter Vardy raises that one problem of religious language is explaining how we can meaningfully talk *about* God if God is beyond our finite and fallible understanding (Vardy 1995: p. 39).

[128] 'As I understand it, a hypostatization or substantialization or reification consists in mistaking as things entities which are not things. Examples of hypostatizations of properties (or ideas, universals, or the like) in this sense are such formulations as 'the ideas have an independent subsistence', 'they reside in a super-heavenly place', 'they were in the mind of God before they became manifested in things', and the like, provided that these formulations are meant literally and not merely as poetic metaphors.' (Carnap 1947: p. 22).

also be able to drop the simile to describe the facts without it. Now in our case as soon as we try to drop the simile and simply to state the facts which stand behind it, we find that there are no such facts. And so, what at first appeared to be a simile now seems to be mere nonsense. (Wittgenstein 1965: pp. 9-10).

The religious realist must at some point drop non-literal language and directly reference the objects of their belief in a manner where their truth-conditions are ascertainable and therefore verifiable. The contention is that if the religious realist intends to be understood as expressing a belief in the actual existence of a mind-independent object and not making a non-literal, non-cognitive or metaphorical claim, then they need to make this explicit in their language. Of course, this is not to say that direct and literal talk about the objects of religious belief is easy or even the most common use for religious language – perhaps most religious sentences are non-cognitive – but if religious realism is to hold in any firm sense, then the central claim, that a mind-independent religious reality exists, must hold in a verifiable manner and this might constitute a *religious sentence*. There is a tension between the sorts of sentences which are central to religious realism e.g., those which affirm the core beliefs of religious realism, and the question of whether those sentences are religious. If a religious sentence is a sentence which posits a religious entity or property, then it appears that religious realism has a religious sentence at its core where it declares the mind-independent existence of at least one object of religious belief. We could attempt to create some form of *Religious Realist Irreducibility Theory* which holds that non-literal speech like 'religious metaphors are the only way of stating truths about God, and the content of a metaphorical utterance about God cannot be stated, even in part, in literal terms.' (Scott 2013: p. 157). But more than repackaging the initial problem of non-literal speech, this approach would significantly undermine the intuitive appeal of the realist's *face value*. This is not to say that it is impossible to juggle a belief in a mind-independent religious object with the view that nothing literal can be said about it, but that such a position is not what most religious realists have in mind.

Although it is broadly agreed that one is not required to possess a robust theory for religious language to be a realist about religious objects, it transpires that some variations of religious realism are in greater need than others for such a theory. For example, if a religious realist took religious sentences as ones which posit religious entities, e.g., God, and they also believed that the object to which the term 'God' pertains *is real*, then such a realist is in some sense committed to a theory of language which keeps the objects of their belief and the objects of their language in good coherent order. If one cannot reference the object 'God' then one cannot truly utter a belief claim that such an object exists, and although there is wriggle-room for interpretation etc., there must be a firm

connection between believing that an object exists and believing that the sentence "God exists" directly communicates a belief in that object's existence. As religious realists affirm the *truth* of there being a mind-independent religious reality and not merely their possession of the belief or their intention to be understood as speaking as if it is true, the success for any religious realist account for the identity and meaning of religious language depends on there being an actual mind-independent religious reality. If there is no mind-independent religious reality then religious realism cannot be the account for the identity and meaning of any language, irrespective to anyone's beliefs or intentions. As such, if a variation of religious realism is true then any claim to the contrary is *wrong*; any language which is called religious for alternative reasons is *fraudulent*; any religious sentence which does not treat object-externalism *fails* to treat any genuine object of religious belief; and any belief which is incompatible with ontological objectivity is incompatible with what religious beliefs are. The religious realist can (and some do) bite this bullet, but they do so at the cost of rendering the beliefs of several world religions *wrong* and their languages either *not* religious, fraudulent, religious for reasons which the religion fails to comprehend, or some combination thereof. As the realist gets more particular in their language Realism or Nominalism and Internalism or Externalism, they narrow down the collection of religious traditions which are plausibly true and in possession of genuine religious languages, they become, in effect, a theological realist.

The religious properties of language and the objects of religious belief referenced in language, as the two may not always overlap,[129] have 'qualities or relations of a very strange sort, utterly different from anything else in the universe' which require, epistemologically speaking, 'some special faculty of moral [religious] perception or intuition, utterly different from our ordinary ways of knowing everything else' (Mackie 1977: p. 38). We have some idea about what a property must be like to be considered religious, but less about what the faculty of perception or intuition would be like. There are suggestions, like *sensitius divinitus*[130] and *lectio divina*,[131] but these faculties evoke ontological commitments which risks opposing religious diversity. For example, if *sensitius divinitus* was true as Calvin has it, then it would mean that the religious beliefs of Jainism are false

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[129] A sentence can reference an object of religious belief which truly exists (God), but it could be something else which makes that sentence religious such as it being spoken during Mass.

[130] 'There is within the human mind, and indeed by natural instinct, an awareness of divinity. This we take to be beyond controversy. To prevent anyone from taking refuge in the pretense of ignorance, God himself has implanted in all men a certain understanding of his divine majesty' (Calvin 1960: p. 1.3.1).

[131] 'an intimate dialogue with a living, present, divine interlocutor who will answer when the reader appeals to him' (D. Robertson 2011: p. xii), whilst the practice is more specifically 'devout or spiritual reading, that is, reading done in the presence of God and in a contemplative spirit.' (Abhishiktananda 2001: p. 85).

and its religious language accountable to the truth of a different religion (if its language remains religious). Be that as it may, we would be left wondering why the Christian God provides a religious language to a false belief system which encourages idol worship. Any sufficient account must make an ontological commitment to an external object in virtue of needing to measure one, but if doing so introduces an additional object (the method of accounting for the religious object 'sin' requires the assertion of the religious object 'God'), then we will want to account for the religious object 'God' in a way which avoids circular reasoning.

For Hick, merely encountering what one believes to be an external object within one's perception is insufficient as proof for the ontologically objective mode of existence which the object is required to possess if it is to be religious. If one's immediate experience was sufficient for an accurate identification of an externally existing religious property (naïve realism), then we should expect every religious experience to be a similar experience of the same property. Yet religious experiences differ considerably, and this might raise some suspicion that either an appeal to experience is insufficient for a proof or that the inconsistency of experience is an argument against any given object's existence, but Hick's Kantian inspired critical religious realism gives reason to reconsider. Hick points out that there is no reason to believe that an object in the external world (objects in and of themselves) would be like how humans experience them, and as such, there should be no surprise that religious experiences differ. We do not need to be Kantians to reach this conclusion, because,

> it arises out of elementary reflection upon our experience. We quickly realize that the same thing appears in either slightly or considerably different ways to people owing both to varying spatial locations in relation to it and to differences in their sensory and mental equipment and interpretive habits. (Hick 1989: p 242).

Thus, the method for *identifying* a religious property is somewhat different to experiencing it – one could experience it, but that experience is not what truly causes us to identify it for what it is, there is a need for some additional test. Hick proposes a moral test because he believes that an essential element to a *genuine* religious experience is the effect it has upon the individual's internal life which is revealed through their moral attitudes[132] (Firestone 1999: p. 162). There are several charges to levy against Hick's response. In the opinion of Ayer, Hick's position dies by its own sword – we can readily accept that people have extraordinary life-changing experiences which they honestly believe to be of religious significance, but 'unless he can formulate his 'knowledge' in

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[132] This will be considered in more detail in S4. C4.

propositions that are empirically verifiable, we may be sure that he is deceiving himself' (Ayer 1983: pp. 157-158). Ayer directly closes off any opportunity for the religious realist or mystic to appeal to some limitations of language as 'it is no use his [the mystic] saying that he has apprehended facts but is unable to express them. For we know that if he really had acquired any information, he would be able to express it' (Ayer 1983: p. 157). O'Hear makes a similar argument without endorsing the Logical Positivist's view – those religious realists who are willing to make so many adjustments and exceptions for the verification of a religious experience in contrast to a nonreligious experience, such as by appealing to some special religious training or perception, are essentially undermining their own intuitive strength and epistemological legitimacy (O'Hear 1984: pp. 47-48). Another sort of defence for Hick is *not* based in his appeals to a Kantian inspired critical religious realism, but instead Chesterton's famous call for seriousness –

> Every time one man says to another, "Tell us plainly what you mean?" he is assuming the infallibility of language: that is to say, he is assuming that there is a perfect scheme of verbal expression for all the internal moods and meanings of men. Whenever a man says to another, "Prove your case; defend your faith," he is assuming the infallibility of language: that is to say, he is assuming that a man has a word for every reality in earth, or heaven, or hell. He knows that there are in the soul tints more bewildering, more numberless, and more nameless than the colours of an autumn forest; he knows that there are abroad in the world and doing strange and terrible service in it crimes that have never been condemned and virtues that have never been christened. Yet he seriously believes that these things can every one of them, in all their tones and semi-tones, in all their blends and unions, be accurately represented by an arbitrary system of grunts and squeals. (Chesterton 1904: pp. 43-44).

This view is strengthened when we consider how Hick simultaneously acknowledges that we cannot directly experience a mind-independent realm whilst also being firmly committed to its existence through his religious realism. Others believe that religious objects are identified through some special religious faculty (*sensitius divinitus*),[133] whilst other thinkers have proposed, like Descartes, that God placed knowledge of his existence in the minds of all people as an innate idea which is discoverable through reason (Descartes 2013: p. 35). Whilst negotiation can occur about the particulars, the overall theoretical framework for religious realism is clearly defined and set down. In its assertion of the existence of a mind-independent religious reality, religious realism is potentially uttering a religious sentence; but if we were to put this to the side and hold, as most do, that religious realism is not required to present a theory for religious language, then we can still ask whether religious realism is *relevant* for the identity and meaning of religious language. A thoroughly robust account of religious language would respond to both dimensions of the

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[133] Something which O'Hear demonstrates as insufficient on account of it avoiding rigorous verification and peer-review (O'Hear 1984: p. 47).

discussion – what religious language is, and what its sentences mean – and variations of religious realism allow for the potential formation of a unifying account. There is a general intuition that many religious sentences are spoken with the intention of being understood in a straight-forward realist way – that those who say, "there is an afterlife" mean to be understood as making a truth-apt belief claim which possess external truth-conditions. The religious realist claims that these truth-conditions are met, but it is not obvious that this impacts the study of religious language because an error theorist can identify and understand the same kinds of sentences without claiming that the truth-conditions are met. If a variation of religious realism is to offer an account for religious language, then it will be required to demonstrate that the identity and meaning of at least one religious sentence is only accountable to the actual truth of religious realism. Taking this to its logical ends, we encounter a trilemma where we are forced to judge between the truth of religious realism and the religious identity and meaning of any given language or sentence.[134] In essence, if a language or sentence can be definitively shown as both religious and accountable to a theory which is incompatible with religious realism, then all variations of religious realism have been rendered false in their accounts for religious language. On the other hand, if a language or sentence is religious *on the sole condition* that it is accountable to a variation of religious realism, then any candidate language or sentence is either religious because it meets those conditions or is not religious because it fails to meet those conditions. Call this the *Trilemma of Religious Realism*:

1. Religious realism fails as an account for a given religious language, meaning that a language can be religious for non-realist reasons.
2. Religious realism is the only account for religious language, and the religious language in question is religious.
3. Religious realism is the only account for religious language, and the religious language in question is *not* religious.

The variations of religious realism which concern this thesis hold that a language or sentence is religious on the condition that it is associated with an actual mind-independent religious reality which transfers some unique identity and meaning onto the language or sentence. As we are considering whether a variation of religious realism could offer a robust account for religious

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[134] To clarify, we want to know what it would look like if there are religious languages which a variation of religious realism can/cannot account for, or if there can only be religious languages on the condition that they are accountable to religious realism, and so we shall not consider the possible outcome where both religious realism fails and there are no religious languages.

language, it would be improper to adopt the first prong of this trilemma and render religious realism false from the very start. We shall therefore take the view that a language is religious if and only if it is accountable to a variation of religious realism, and this leads to the next two prongs: a language either is accountable and therefore religious, or it is not accountable and therefore not religious. These two prongs remind us that the truth of any variation of religious realism does not itself entail that any given language or sentence is religious; there could be languages and sentences which are *mistakenly* identified as religious. We can therefore call those which are religious *genuine* and those which only appear to be religious *fraudulent*, and the challenge is to tell them apart.[135] Thus, there are three possibilities: i) all supposedly religious languages are genuine, ii) all are fraudulent, iii) some are genuine, and some are fraudulent. The second aspect of the Trilemma makes the third possibility most likely: the legitimization of one religious language comes at the cost of rendering other accounts false and alternative languages fraudulent. For example, if the language of Judaism is religious *because* it is the divine language of God then contrary beliefs within Judaism are false; beliefs which reject the existence of God are false; traditions which claim to have a language which is religious for reasons which are at odds with Judaism's reasons are at best mistaken about their language,[136] and at worse mistaken about a *fraudulent* language.

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[135] We use 'fraudulent' rather than 'ingenuine' because the language appears religious (when it isn't) and is as if masquerading as something other than what it is.

[136] A religion could have a legitimate religious language which they don't understand and therefore have false beliefs about.

S3. C5. Section Conclusion

This thesis began by marking the difference between studying what religious language is and what religious language means, and it proposed that a sufficient account for the latter cannot remain silent about the former. Moreover, it was proposed that the identity of religious language is in part accountable to its domain of meaning (and vice-versa) due to *depth grammar* being both an identifiable aspect of an utterance as well as a key feature to its semantic meaning. The dominant approach in the study aims to develop a general account for the meaning of religious language and it is not expected to include an account for how a language can be religious, and this thesis suggested that this hinders the study from forming a thoroughly robust account. An alternative approach was suggested which asks, 'what do *we mean* by the term 'religious language'?', and this brought attention to the study's presupposition of an object language and yet lack of idea for what that object language is. The crux of this approach was that in coming to understand what we mean by 'religious language' we would come to understand what an object must be like to be apt for referencing as such, hence considering whether 'religious language' has a *sense*, naming ceremony, hidden description etc.

Although we know-that we possess a grammatical skill or know-how in respect to using the term 'religious language' as a metalanguage referring expression, we could not decisively determine what sort of referring expression it is, be it a proper or common name, accountable to Mill, Russell, Kripke or Frege. Furthermore, we saw that the sociological study of religion faces a comparable dilemma with Weber taking a similar approach to what is seen in the study of religious language – religious language is so obvious and self-evident that we can identify token examples without needing to know what exactly it is or how exactly we have spotted it. This led to the recognition that we are willing to use the term 'religious language' across the breadth and depth of religious and language diversity, implying that if the term is successfully referring to something, then it is referring to something common and compatible with that diversity. This caused us to doubt whether the contemporary approaches within the study of religious language can address the full scope of religions and languages in a robust and inclusive way. Religious realism was identified as an intuitive, compatible and plausible solution – if there was a mind-independent religious reality which confers meaning onto certain sentences, then we can identify a religious sentence in virtue of its quality and we also know that that quality influences its meaning in ways which an anti-realist cannot account for. Moreover, if this mind-independent object exists for all people throughout all

time, then all religions and languages could be 'religious' for the same base reason – they are all associated with it.

Religious realists do not think that beliefs, language and practices only *try* to reference some external religious object, but that they in fact succeed – that there *is* a mind-independent reality, and the variations of religious realism which interest this thesis claim that this reality confers some unique meaning onto sentences. If such a variation of religious realism is true, then the only way for a language to be religious *is on the sole condition* that it relates to a mind-independent religious reality. If there is no mind-independent religious reality, then there either are no religious languages or there is an account *other* than religious realism which accounts for religious language – to be true, religious realism must account for every religious language whilst it only needs to fail once to be wrong overall. This was seen to be a trilemma – if any language is religious for reasons other than religious realism then religious realism is false; but if religious realism is true then either (a) an object language is accountable to its terms and is *genuinely* 'religious' or (b) the object language is not accountable to its terms and is *fraudulently* 'religious'. Furthermore, a person could have true or false beliefs about the religious status of a language (they could be right or wrong in their belief that Sanskrit is religious), and if it were religious, then a person may have additional true or false beliefs about how or why it is religious. As a robust account for religious language would include an explanation for what *makes* the language religious as well as for what its sentences mean, then in testing religious realism we must test three things: (i) are the relevant religious beliefs in question compatible with religious realism, (ii) is the religious language as understood compatible with religious realism, and (iii) are any of these religious beliefs *true* and religious languages *genuine* under religious realist terms?

As we can distinguish religious from nonreligious sentences without knowing what exactly the distinguishable 'stuff' is, and religious realism offers the most plausible, compatible and defended explanation within the philosophy of religion, we shall assume that religious realism is *true* and therefore sufficiently explains how the study of religious language operates. By this we mean to say – if there is a true religious belief or a genuine religious language then it is necessarily accountable to the non-negotiable commitments of religious realism. If there are any religious beliefs which do not conform, then those beliefs are false; if there are any candidate religious languages which do not conform then they are fraudulent; if the meaning of any religious belief or language is contingent to terms which are incompatible with religious realism then they are considered bunk and meaningless. As this emphasises the importance of considering whether a person correctly

understands their supposedly religious language and whether the language in question is accountable to any variation of religious realism, we must consult the body of thought which examines their own understanding of religious language – we must consider theology.

Section Four – Religious Realism Refuted

S4. C1. The Relevance of Theology

This thesis suggests that our grammatical know-how of surface and depth grammar in host-languages accounts for our ability to identify sentences that capture a religious domain of meaning, but this raises a set of different questions and faces different challenges. If our know-how of a host-language's grammar is essential to our detection of a religious language, then how would we deal with unfamiliar host-languages or religions which claim to possess a language which is religious for reasons which grammar alone cannot account for? Would this imply that all religious languages, when hosted in English, share the same domain of meaning? Could it not be the case that different religions have different domains of meaning, and that different host-languages have different abilities to capture it? If the study aims to develop an account which helps us understand the nature of religious belief and practice, then a 'correct' account for a religious language needs to conform with a 'correct' account for that religion's set of beliefs and practices. Moreover, this thesis's proposal of grammatical know-how is somewhat undermined if a variation of religious realism was successful in its account: grammatical know-how of a host-language might help us identify and understand religious language, but it does not account for how the language is religious nor for what the religious community believes or practices. We must therefore consider the theology of each religion in our response to these questions and concerns about each religious language, for theology is, in an important sense, the body of thought where we find the religious trying to understand their own faith.

Although we usually understand 'theology' in reference to Christianity,[137] we can inclusively say that any religion which examines itself is performing a theological investigation, thus theology is not limited in form or character to 'spirituality' but can enter discussions about ethics, language, ritual, and other existential perspectives about meaning and value. Theology, literally meaning 'thinking about God', is the study of the fundamentals of a religion with the aim of either helping the faithful develop a more rigorous understanding of their faith or to help non-believers understand what the religion is about, thus the theology *about* religious language is invaluable for both our and their studies (Badham 1996). There is some debate about whether theology is the study of *how to*

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[137] Ninian Smart refers to Adi Shankara as a theologian; John P. Keenan describes 'Mahāyāna theology is an approach to thinking about the Christian faith within the philosophical context of the great Mahāyāna Buddhist thinkers'; whilst Shinto is described as possessing a theology in *World Religions: An Illustrated Guide* (Smart 1969: p. 131), (Keenan 2004: p. 89) & (McLoughlin 2007: p. 46).

talk about God, and to see the reasoning behind this debate it is helpful to consider Tracy's description that 'theology attempts to correlate certain specified meanings and truths in our common human experience and language with the interpreted meanings and truths of a specific religious tradition' (Tracy 1978: p. 93). The study of religious language would benefit from hearing what theology has to say, but the sorts of information which can be gained will differ depending on each religion, each school of thought, and potentially the language which *hosts* the theological discourse.

Some Christian theologians accept that it is important to consider what can be said of God but nonetheless affirm that 'if someone were to ask, what is theology, it would be misleading to begin by saying, for example, that theology is a systematic reflection upon a man's language about God.' (van Buren 1968: p. 53). The reason for why, according to Buren, is 'that theology is that activity of men struck by the biblical story, in which they undertake to revise continually the ways in which they say how things are with their present circumstances, in the light of how they read that story', and so a focus on how we speak distracts us from the pertinence of how we act in light of what we have read in scripture (van Buren 1968: p. 53). Although a religious realist could in principle agree that an element of the human understanding of God is a result of grammar, the actuality of the object referenced by 'God' is independent to grammar and all other mind-dependent contingencies. At some point the realist must break free of linguistic constraints and explicitly affirm the actual mind-independent reality of at least one object of religious belief because if they cannot then they cannot meet their non-negotiable commitments to the sort of ontological objectivity which their realism demands. However, there is the view that *all* the objects of religious belief are in fact objects of the grammar of religious language, and so a study of language is a study of the nature of the belief in religious objects – hence, theology as grammar.

All theology is essentially a study of religious language to someone like Winch, and despite Buren protesting against this sort of description even he agrees that there is, for better or worse, books which contain life changing information and that language is an important part of the broader puzzle which the religious feel compelled to unpick in light of their faith (Winch 1977: p. 203) & (van Buren 1968: p. 53). For someone like Winch, just as how the words of a sentence hang together in a meaningful way because of grammar, so too may the beliefs of a religion hang

together because of an analogous 'grammar' for belief or faith.[138] To these ends, theology 'states the grammar of religious living and thinking' and 'is a name for what is often that tacit awareness of when and how to use the word *God*' (Holmer 1978: p. ix, 202). This position clearly resonates with this thesis's suggestion that our identification of a religious language is accountable to our grammatical know-how of the host-language's surface and depth grammar, however this thesis's proposal did not claim that the objects of religious belief are in toto grammatical. It could be the case that the objects of religious belief are ontologically objective but are only epistemologically discoverable and accessible through one's skills and know-how of grammar. This suggests that our proposal of grammatical know-how is compatible with both religious realism and anti-realism; it is, in essence, ontologically quiet. But realism *is not* ontologically quiet and so it must show that the objects of religious belief are not outcomes of grammar and that it is not the case that knowing how to speak about God *is what it means* to understand religious beliefs and practices (Keightley 1976: pp. 12-13) & (D. Z. Phillips 1995a). This outlining of theology allows us to better grasp Wittgenstein's declaration that, 'Grammar tells what kind of object anything is. (Theology as grammar).' (Wittgenstein 1994: §373).

Learning about religious language and learning about religious belief through the medium of theology was earlier identified with Wittgenstein's comment that, '"You can't hear God speak to someone else, you can hear him only if you are being addressed".--That is a grammatical remark.' (Wittgenstein 2004: §717). To see how this seemingly theological remark is grammatical, one must realise that the grammar of language is *essentially related* to the structure of the belief system which provides the language with meaning. If it makes no grammatical sense to say that you have heard what God said to me then it makes no theological sense to believe it, and this leads to two questions which were raised earlier: does this make the belief false and the sentences irreligious, and does this make the religious experiences of others beyond verification? To answer, we will examine three things: whether the religious languages of the Judeo-Christian and Dharmic traditions are compatible with any variation of religious realism; whether their theological beliefs are compatible with a variation of religious realism; and whether any of them can be shown as currently true. If there are incompatibilities or failures to adhere, then, as outlined in the *trilemma of religious realism*, we will need to judge whether the language is not religious, whether the

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[138] Cf. Keightley's *Wittgenstein, Grammar and God* (Keightley 1976: p. 13) and Bloemendaal's *Grammars of Faith : A Critical Evaluation of D.Z. Phillips's Philosophy of Religion* (Bloemendaal 2006).

theological beliefs of the religion are false, or whether this is a reason to think that variations religious realism cannot account for every religious language..

S4. C2. The Religious Language of Judeo-Christianity

Judeo-Christianity, a term which is not without dispute,[139] generally stands to reference the socio-cultural, ethical, and in our focus, religious traditions which feature in the Tanakh (Old Testament) and are developed in the New Testament. The language of Judaism, Hebrew, plays a central role in Jewish faith and practice, with some rabbis and scholars believing that Hebrew is *internally* religious whereas others maintain that it is *externally* religious. Although sharing several features of Judaic thought about religious language in virtue of having the Tanakh as the bedrock for the New Testament, for Christianity, Hebrew is not an object of religious belief, and it does not hold the same role or significance. The *Trilemma of Religious Realism* means that the actuality of one religious language comes at the potential cost of rendering alternative accounts *false* and alternative languages *fraudulent*, e.g., if Judaism's religious language of Hebrew is accountable to *internal* religious realism then any *externalist* account or religious belief is false, and those Christians who claim to be the natural inheritors of Jewish thought must be careful to not undermine the religious authority and status of Hebrew in fear of undermining their own theological foundations. This chapter shall explore Judaic-Christian theology about religious language and identify a sufficient commonality amongst them for religious realism to *theoretically* overlap.

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[139] Cf. 'And it is here that we can identify the myth. Jews and Christians have conspired together to promote a tradition of common experience and common belief, whereas in fact they have joined together to reinforce themselves in the face of a common disaster … before a world that regards them as hopelessly irrelevant, and meaningless. The myth is a projection of the will to endure of both Jews and Christians, an identification of common enemies, an abandonment of millennial antagonisms in the face of threats which do not discriminate between Judaism and Christianity.' (Cohen 1971: p. xix).

S4. C3. Judaism

Some scholars distinguish Jewish languages from languages spoken by Jews, the distinction being the immediacy which a language has with Jewish identity (Rabin 1963) & (Spolsky 2014).[140] As Judaism is considered by many Jews to be *both* a religion and a culture such that a person could be a secular, atheist, or 'non-Torah-Adhering' Jew, we will do well to specify that the religious language of Judaism which interests us is the language(s) which are instantiated with the 'religious reality' which concerns Judaism. Some Jewish scholars believe that this language is Hebrew (that Hebrew is internally religious or externally religious), whilst others are open to any human language being religious. We will first explore Internalist and then Externalist accounts, then epistemic methods for perceiving the religious reality, and conclude with the *Trilemma of Religious Realism*.

Judaism holds religious realist beliefs about, and because of, the content of the Torah, the most authoritative Sacred Text of Judaism consisting of the first Five Books of the Hebrew Bible (Tanakh). The Torah is understood as documenting 'the primary revelation from God to the greatest of the prophets, Moses, known in the Jewish tradition as 'Moses our Rabbi', who received the divine teaching face to face in the most direct way.' (Kunin 2000: p. 111). Let us explore how Rabbis and Jewish scholars like Menahem Mendel Merimanov and Gershom Scholem believe that the content of the Torah is about external objects of religious significance, and that Hebrew is either inherently religious or the closest human manifestation of the divine language of God. Although stating that Exodus 20:1-14 documents the historical fact of Moses encountering God, Merimanov clarifies that its *linguistic content* is best understood as Moses's own human interpretation of what he heard God's Divine Voice say – and specifically, that Moses *only* heard God speak the first word of the Ten Commandments ('anochi' – 'I') (Scholem 1976: p. 34) & (Mualem 2002). Merimanov suggests that upon hearing God refer to himself through the word *anochi*, God's identity was revealed to Moses and with that came an understanding of God's teachings which Moses then put into human language. In the context of Exodus 20:1-14, 'anochi' is understood as God's reference to himself as an 'I' – as an infinite unity, a perfection, a state of all-encompassing being which transcends human conception and communication, which is represented by the term *Aleph* (Scholem 1976: p. 35). So, although anyone can refer to themselves with the term *anochi*, only God can refer to himself through *anochi* and in the process reveal his identity as *Aleph*. Being the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, *Aleph's* relationship with *anochi* takes on additional symbolic

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[140] E.g., A Jew can speak German, but German, unlike Yiddish, is not a *Jewish Language*.

meaning, such as how God is the beginning of all things, and as *Aleph* stands for the beginning of language (hence *alph*abet), we can ask whether the religious reality of God is captured by language in some important sense. Consider Rosenzweig's questioning of,

> what God Himself, through his self-revelatory relationship with human beings, tells of His name. Thus, the voice of God, God's self-revelation, may not be separated from an enquiry into God's name, and human logic alone is inadequate to initiate or to conclude the enquiry. (Galli 1994: pp. 64-65).

Scholem begins the first[141] of two discussions about the ontology and meaning of Hebrew with a rendition of Psalm 119:160 – 'Thy word (or: essence) is true from the beginning', which links together the essence of God, the essence of his speech, and the essence of the language through which he speaks, which is the concept of aleph (Scholem and Pleasance 1972: p. 59). As Derrida puts it,

> There is a power of language, therefore, at once a *dynamis*, an enveloped virtuality, a potentiality that can be brought or not to actuality; it is hidden, buried, dormant... Scholem will not cease to develop this theme and in his works on the name of God, Jewish mysticism, above all on the Kabbalah… The magical power of the name produces effects said to be real and over which we are not in command. The name hidden in its potency possesses a power of manifestation and of occultation, of revelation and encrypting. What does it hide? Precisely the abyss that is enclosed within it. To open a name is to find in it not something but rather something like an abyss, the abyss as the thing itself. Faced with this power, once we have awakened it, we must recognize our impotence. The name is transcendent and more powerful than we are. (Derrida 2002: pp. 213-214).

Supporting this link, Merimanov believes that God's utterance of anochi is inseparable from aleph because when God speaks one hears *both*, making the speech itself beyond human pronunciation and its occurrence a divine revelation (Scholem 1976: p. 35). God's name, therefore, is more specifically that self-addressal which reveals his hidden identity to us in a way which appears almost empty or abyss-like because we cannot rigidly-designate it with a name. The name is more powerful than we are because it brings a reality into being which at once demonstrates itself as divine whilst showing ourselves as impotent – God's identity is as if hidden in language, but not beneath the surface or below the ink, but within the reality of its meaning, thus establishing the sort of theological realist link necessary for a variation of religious realism. This can lead to the view that there is a sacred language of Judaism which is uniquely God's and beyond human pronunciation, and in one sense it is Hebrew but in another it is not; it is Hebrew *as God speaks it*, but humans cannot speak it as God does. This raises the question of whether Hebrew is unique:

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[141] Cf. Part two (Scholem 1972).

God's omnipotence and care for the Jewish people seems to be a good reason to suspect that he can (and will) speak in a language which his people will understand, but if Hebrew was particularly necessary then the Jewish people would (and arguably do) understand the maintenance of their language and way of life as an extension of their covenant with God.

Mualem describes the difference between the divine essence of aleph and the human pronunciation of aleph as a dichotomy within language, between the 'ineffable transcendental dimension which is represented by the Aleph, and a conventional dimension of human communication', and as such 'the Aleph cannot be expressed and yet it shows itself in language.' (Mualem 2002: p. 41).[142] In this respect, God might be *deus absconditus* (divinely hidden) since God's essence is *hidden away from human comprehension within language*, but in virtue of believing that Moses encountered God in a *real* sense, they cannot hold God to be *in toto absconditus* (Scholem 1972: p. 175). Linking God's divinity with the inaccessible transcendental dimension of the language God uses to reveal himself to us means that we encounter God when he reveals himself *hidden in language*, and once seen, he cannot be spoken of by humans.[143] If coming to see God is what we mean by 'divine revelation' and revelation takes place through language, then it follows that as it is God who decides if and when to reveal himself (and not humans who get to pick and choose whether to see God), then it is only through God's use of language that his identity is revealed, and never through ours. Referencing God in Hebrew is a serious matter in Judaism as there is broad agreement that it cannot be done successfully and that his name is too sacred to be uttered, therefore many choose to write YHVH, which has its roots in the Hebrew for 'to be' or makes use of descriptions and titles like *Shaddai* (Almighty) and *Adon/Adonai* (Lord/My Lords) (McLoughlin 2007: p. 102). Here we find two realist links between the meaning of a sentence's content and the existence of external religious objects; the first being the Internalist account where a religious property is within language (be it Hebrew or not), and the second is a more straightforward Externalist account where language is religious *because* it came from God. The two can overlap, such as on occasions where the language spoken by God is inherently religious and the content of the language is *about* God – thus the

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[142] This position is hinted towards in the final passages of the *Mandukya Upanishad* where Om is broken down into three syllables (A U M), however a fourth is spoken about which, 'is beyond [all] letters: there can be no commerce with it; it brings [all] development to an end; it is mild and devoid of duality. Such is Om, the very Self indeed.' (Zaehner 2000: p. 254).

[143] This has some resemblance to Wittgenstein's distinction between *Saying* and *Showing*; 'There are, indeed, things that cannot be put into words. They *make themselves manifest.* They are what is mystical.', and such things can only be *shown* (Wittgenstein 1974: §6.522) & (Grayling 2001: pp. 18-19).

power of 'anochi'.

Some argue that Hebrew is not *essential* for Judaism by referencing *Siman 101* and specifically its claim that prayer must have *kavana* ('to aim') which means that an individual must be focused, intentional and aware of what they are saying and who they mean to say it to, thus making prayer in a language which one does not understand lack kavana (Hammer 1994: p. 13). The final passage of *Siman 101* shows that this is not a closed case as it expresses a mixture of rabbinic views with some going as far as suggesting that only some prayers can be done in any language whilst a private prayer for oneself must be done in Hebrew.[144] Others, like Reuven Hammer believe that the matter is more clear-cut, 'certainly is it permissible to pray in any language' and 'there is nothing magical in Hebrew' but there are benefits to Hebrew prayer for even those who are not fluent, such as the experience of being a member of an ancient society, culture, and heritage (Hammer 1994: p. 13). In Hammer's view, kavana is the most important element to prayer and it is ideal to do it through Hebrew, but if one cannot speak Hebrew and kavana is only possible through an alternative, then it is better to pray with kavana than to not pray at all.

The variations of religious realism which concern us require some epistemological commitments about how we can identify and understand religious language, and so it is informative to consider how the practice of reading and interpreting scripture in Judaism is as religiously significant as prayer. Where we might think that the counterpart to writing is reading or speaking is listening, in Judaism, the counterpart of both is arguably interpretation (Faur 1997). The phrase *reading* the Torah is limited because '"interpretation" is intrinsic to the Hebrew concept of "Scripture" and writing', and so even if we try to avoid interpretation and take as much of a surface level reading as possible, we are still interpreting the text because a surface level reading *is still an interpretation*, and so the Torah can be considered an 'object of human interpretation' (Faur 1997: pp. 1-2). The act of interpretation is in one part linguistically unavoidable, and in another a central religious concept for Judaism: as all reading takes the form of interpretation, and the goal of interpretation is awareness of the mind of the speaker, then the fact that we cannot access the mind of God means that all scripture is necessarily interpretation and therefore in need of further interpretation.

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[144] 'One may pray in any language he desires; and this is [in regards to when one is praying together] with a congregation. But when [one is praying] alone, he should only pray in the Holy Language. And there are those who say that this [requirement to only pray in Hebrew] only applies when one is asking for his own personal needs, such as praying for someone who is ill, or for some painful episode in his household, however [when reciting] the regular liturgy established for the congregation, even an individual may recite it in any language. And there are those who say that even an individual requesting his own personal needs may request them in any language he wishes, except for in the Aramaic language.' (Karo, n.d.: Siman 101: 4).

Reflective interpretation of scripture is consequently a reflective contemplation about God and is therefore equivalent in religious meaning to prayer where the reader interprets the text and structures their life around its lessons. In theory, the study of scripture can in this sense take on the function of prayer, and concepts like kavana and the question of host-language can remerge in a new light. The consequences of thinking that the Torah is a divinely revealed religious text which demands interpretation is captured in Jonathan Sacks phrasing that,

> The idea of the 'Torah from Heaven' was, even before it was explicitly formulated, far more than a belief about the origin of a text. It was a belief about the origin of a destiny. 'Torah from Heaven' did more than negate the idea that a people was the author of its own texts. It reversed it. It suggested that *the text was the author of the people*. (Sacks 1992: p. 209).

Religious realism, broadly conceived, is applicable to the theoretical framework which Judaism has for Hebrew – if we take Judaism as possessing an *inherently* divine language (either hidden within Hebrew or aside to Hebrew) then internal religious language realism holds; whilst if we take the language to be religious because of external factors, such as divine origin, then Externalism seems to hold. Additionally, the content-externalism of Hebrew allows the language of the Talmud to be *about* objects which are understood as existing in the 'external world'. Theory does not amount to fact – if Judaism has a religious language accountable to a variation of religious realism, then it must be internally or externally associated with a religious property which possesses an ontologically objective mode of existence. The issue is that whenever religious realism moves from theory and into practice it encounters the Trilemma because realism only works in practice *if it is factually correct*, and this results in the following:

1. Religious realism fails as an account for the religious language of Judaism, meaning that a language can be religious for non-realist reasons.
2. Religious realism is the only account for religious language, and the religious language of Judaism is genuine.
3. Religious realism is the only account for religious language, and the religious language of Judaism is *fraudulent*.

If a variation of religious realism correctly accounts for the identity and meaning of the religious language of Judaism, then that language must be accountable to either Internalism or Externalism, but the truth of one often renders the other false. For example, if the religious status of the language of Judaism is entirely reducible to God's divine nature being *hidden within it*, then those who claim that the English and German translations of the Torah are religious are factually mistaken, and the

texts themselves lose their religious status. But if the language is religious because of externalist reasons, such as its content referencing the religious experience of Moses, then not only is Internalism false, but English and German translations should be religious if they do not disrupt the communication of Moses's interpretation. The consequences of these positions are not constrained to philosophy or theology – if the language of Judaism is religious only in Hebrew, then those who report experiencing God's divine word when reading the Torah in English are wrong. Their experience was not religious. They had been tricked by a convincing fraud. These sorts of sentiments are perhaps too tough for many realists to willingly bite, especially when it is not obvious which languages are the legitimate ones.

A similar outcome is found in Christianity where the theory behind religious realism applies to Christian theories about the religious status of their language, however the Christian has an additional requirement. More than showing that they possess a religious language, the Christian needs to demonstrate that their religious language is the rightful heir and clear development of the Old Testament's language, the religious language of Judaism. As the authority of the New Testament hinges on the authority of the Old,[145] the Christian religious realist can neither offer an account for the New Testament's language which undermines the Old Testament, nor accept an account for the Old Testament which undermines the New Testament. The religious language of Christianity should not be understood as the religious language of the New Testament, but of the entire Bible. This is not to say that they must wholeheartedly agree with Judaism, but that some commonality is required to demonstrate development rather than contradiction. This causes the *Trilemma of Religious Realism* to apply to both Christianity's own standards as well as that of Judaism's – an Internal Religious Realist approach for Christian religious language likely conflicts with Externalist alternatives, and it may also conflict with the account given for the religious status of the language of the Old Testament. If the language of the Old Testament is religious *because* Hebrew is inherently religious, then the Christian needs to explain away the charge that a lack of Hebrew in the New Testament amounts to a lack of religious language. If the Christian reasons that the language of the New Testament is essentially the same religious language as the Old because it is spoken by and/or about the same God, then the Christian would be oddly implying that Judaism succeeds in identifying the religiosity of the Old Testament and yet consistently fails to identify the exact same religious language in the New. This could of course be true, but the Christian should be

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[145] E.g., During *The Temptation of Jesus* (Matthew 4) both Jesus and the devil appealed to passages in the Old Testament as an authority and justification for actions.

expected as able to offer a convincing account for how this has happened, especially when they likely agree that the Jews were the chosen people of God.

S4. C4. Christianity

There are several forms of religious realism in Christianity, such as seen in Critical Realism and Platonic Realism, and in their attempt to provide a basis for religious belief and practice they make some commitments, even inadvertently, to the identity and meaning of religious language. Insofar that the origin of Christian belief and practice is scriptural, and the religious language of scripture requires understanding, then all philosophical and theological movements which attempt to make sense of scripture, the Word of God and the message of Christ make some commitments to what religious language is and what its sentences mean. It is therefore unsurprising to find that the core elements of religious realism overlap with both Protestant and Catholic traditions and theologies, such as where the theology of Berkhof and Bultmann mimic aspects of Judaic thought, and Catholic concepts like *Lectio Divina* appeal to realism in a slightly different manner. Arguably, the most influential reason for why there is agreement amongst the variety of views is the common need to demonstrate that Christian religious language is the rightful heir and development of that which is encountered in Judaism; that the Word of God *is the same throughout the Old and New Testament*. As the belief that the Old Testament Prophets heard the *Divine Voice of the Lord and received the Word of God* are the foundations of Christianity, a religious realist account for the language of Christianity cannot undermine the religious status of the language found in the Old Testament.[146] Christian (and therefore, *theological*) religious realism must argue that the language of the New Testament shares the *same* religious property and therefore same religious status as the language of the Old Testament, but it is hard to imagine how this can be done because many Christians do not believe that Hebrew is inherently religious whilst many Jews do not think that the objects of Christian belief exist.

The burden of this work falls upon the Christian as it is the Christian who claims to be the rightful development of Judaism, whilst Judaism, by definition, *rejects* the Christian's claim. As Christianity does not exclusively use Hebrew and has its scripture translated into hundreds of host-languages, the Christian theological realist would be ill-advised to stake their claim on the inherent properties of Hebrew and should rather reference something *external*. The Christian could claim

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[146] Cf. Jan Rohl's chapter 'The General Cultural Context of Nineteenth Century's Biblical Interpretation - Old Testament Studies and Protestant Theology at German Universities'. In *Hebrew Bible, Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation* (Rohls 1996: pp. 52-63)*.* Particularly, 'For confessional Lutherans as well as for biblical theologians in succession to Beck, the Old Testament retains its importance not simply as a document of a religion that formed a precursor of Christianity... Originating in the Old Testament community, the New Testament community can comprehend and understand the preparatory word of God in the old covenant knowing that its inherent plan of salvation originates in the same saving purpose as that of the New Testament.' (Rohls 1996: p. 54).

that the religious status of the language of scripture is not dependent upon a specific host-language but on some externally existing factor which is shared by the Old and New Testament, and Judaism fails to realise this and has *false beliefs* in that respect. One way for Christianity to reach these ends is by staking the religious status of scripture on the Divine Voice which spoke it, that anything spoken by God is religious in virtue of it being the manifestation of the Word of God, irrespective to whether it is in Hebrew or Greek, and then go on to argue that Judaism fails to recognise that God speaks through Christ as he spoke through Moses. How this is achieved is negotiable, but what is not negotiable is that the Christian gives good reason to suspect that the religious status of the Word of God in the New Testament is just as authoritative as that encountered in the Old *because* it is the same Word of God, and not the word of another deity. When found in the philosophy of religion, religious realism tends to focus on the ontology, truth-status, and metaphysics of language, whilst when found in Christian Theology, it tends to focus on the *reality* of the religious experience of scripture.

Berkhof recalls that the traditional understanding of using a person's name was to signify the user's knowledge of the person named – to *know* your name is to *know who you are* – it was, 'an expression of the nature of the thing designated. To know the name of a person was to have power over him, and the names of the various gods were used in incantations to exercise power over them.'[147] (Berkhof 1949: p. 50). Religious language is straightforwardly realist in this view, the word 'God' or 'Jesus' is understood as a reference to an externally existing object and our understanding of the name implies an understanding of the object's identity. To use God's name is to make a knowledge claim about God *and* oneself – my use of God's name demonstrates that I *think* I know God's identity – and the nature of God's identity transfers onto the meaning of the name and the sort of knowledge I must claim to possess to use it.[148] Berkhof summarises that,

> The names of God are not of human invention, but of divine origin, though they are all borrowed from human language, and derived from human and earthly relations. They are anthropomorphic and mark a condescending approach of God to man. (Berkhof 1949: p. 50).

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[147] Bertrand Russell shares this observation, 'Words, from the earliest times of which we have historical records, have been objects of superstitious awe. The man who knew his enemy's name could, by means of it, acquire magic powers over him. We still use such phrases as "in the name of the Law". It is easy to assent to the statement "in the beginning was the Word".' (Russell 1940: p. 23).

[148] Taking or using the Lord's name in vain is where one claims to know of God's identity, when they are hopelessly mistaken.

Like the dichotomy between the transcendental meaning of God's Divine Voice and the limited human capacity with Hebrew, Berkhof suggests that God's name(s) can only be used by those who *know* God – God himself, and those who have received divine revelation. In addition to being a religious realist position, Berkhof's phrasing of 'condescending' implies an act of humility on God's part where his nature is beyond human comprehension and must be brought down to our level, yet an understanding at our level is *insufficient*. This goes beyond spoken and written language and includes any medium through which God's divinity is made known to us, such as dreams, art, revelation, or scripture. This Judeo-Christian thought resonates with Lesnick's realisation that his description of Mass being about crackers and wine was trivial and missed an important point. Lesnick suspected that there was a reality to Mass which those around him were experiencing which he was not, though in principle of him not experiencing it he does not know *what* it is like – it is a hidden reality which makes itself known. This hidden reality could be the same sort of religious reality which is considered in Judaic thought, and Berkhof's identification of it provides a narrative link between the Voice of God in the Tanakh and that of the New Testament. God could be hidden in language insofar as we can sense our own inability to capture the religious reality in our use of language, but we witness some mediums through which some people seem to encounter it – we depend on God to speak to us before we have any hope of speaking about him (Berkhof 1949: pp. 50-51).

Despite Berkhof's Protestant commitments, official Catholic dogma expresses a similar view and uses the same term 'condescension',

> 13. In Sacred Scripture, therefore, while the truth and holiness of God always remains intact, the marvelous "condescension" of eternal wisdom is clearly shown, "that we may learn the gentle kindness of God, which words cannot express, and how far He has gone in adapting His language with thoughtful concern for our weak human nature." For the words of God, expressed in human language, have been made like human discourse, just as the word of the eternal Father, when He took to Himself the flesh of human weakness, was in every way made like men. (Catholic Church 2012: §13).

This interpretation makes a clearer commitment to host-language diversity due to its clarification that God *adjusts* his language for our weak human nature, and his gentle kindness would likely motivate him to speak through German as well as Hebrew. Conforming to this outline, Berkhof adds that 'God had to condescend to the level of man, to accommodate Himself to the limited and finite human consciousness, and to speak in human language.' (Berkhof 1949: p. 51). Speaking in human language, then, can be understood in one of two ways: that God stopped speaking a divine language and used a human one, or that God stopped speaking *as God speaks* and adopted terms,

phrases, expressions, and concepts which humans could grasp like how we adjust our language when speaking to children about adult concepts (as observed with Lesnick). In either case, the change of language limits the depth and detail of the messages which can be communicated; we must contemplate, interpret, and reflect on the words of scripture so that we may mature and become better placed to grasp their meaning.

The *Constitution on Divine Revelation* reaffirms its realist commitments within the spirit of interpretation,

> 24. Sacred theology rests on the written word of God, together with sacred tradition, as its primary and perpetual foundation. By scrutinizing in the light of faith all truth stored up in the mystery of Christ, theology is most powerfully strengthened and constantly rejuvenated by that word. For the Sacred Scriptures contain the word of God and since they are inspired, really are the word of God; and so the study of the sacred page is, as it were, the soul of sacred theology. (Catholic Church 2012: §24).

This presentation unites the object-externalism of realist belief with the identity and meaning of religious language – the words of scripture originate from God and divine revelation, though the letters themselves are of human creation. Studying scripture is a sacred study of the Word of God, though a study of the letters, ink, or grammar of Hebrew or English *is not.* One sees the Word of God rather than the language of man when the scripture is read in the 'light of faith' which reveals the otherwise hidden identity of the *that* behind the name 'God', indeed, behind all the words of scripture. It is generally understood that the 'Word of God' means to reference divine revelation more so than the *words spoken by God*, however as we can see here as well as in Judaic thought, to hear God speak *is* to have his divine identity revealed to us – we cannot truly speak of the Word of God without also speaking about the *medium through which God communicates to Man and through which Man is commanded to respond* (Schaefer 2018: p. 28).

The realist about God must maintain that God is *not* a construction of language but rather that 'God' is a sign which references an object *outside* of language – however, that is not to mean that the realist must believe that God cannot be, in some mystical sense, *hidden within language*. God could he hidden in a language which exists outside ours. To the Christian, the term 'God' as found in the New Testament as the reference for *that from which the Divine Voice comes* must be understood as referencing the same object as the Old Testament references in principle of their belief that the God of the prophets is *the same God* Christ speaks of. John Urquhart reaches a similar conclusion, 'whatever part of the Old Testament the writers of the New touch upon is holy:

it is all alike the Word of God' and goes on to reference several passages in the New Testament which demonstrates its theological legitimacy[149] (Urquhart 1930: pp. 67-68). The attention to the *same* Word of God secures the Christian with both a sense of scriptural authority as well as a common religious object which the Jewish faith may share, however this still leads one wondering how a religious realist balances their belief that Jews identify the Word of God in the Old Testament and yet fail to see the *exact same word of the exact same God* in the New. That said, one of the more problematic passages of the New Testament which treats the authority of scripture and its relation to the Word of God, is '[16]All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, [17]so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.' (2 Timothy 3:16-17). The above use of 'God-breathed' originates from the literal translation of the original Greek, 'theopneustos', but it is more commonly translated as 'inspired'. This passage supports the authority of scripture by tracing its origin to God and specifies that its content is useful for teaching etc., in righteousness, such as when it comes to moral practice. However, this interpretation is undermined in alternative translations, such as the *Revised Version of 1885*, '[16]Every scripture inspired of God *is* also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness: [17]that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work.' (*The Bible* 1885: 2 Timothy 3:16-17).

This translation's phrasing of 'every scripture inspired of God' rather than 'all scripture *is* inspired by God' raises doubt about whether some scripture *is not* inspired by God. Urquhart answers that this doubt is certainly implied but is dispelled when read in context, and that the better interpretation would understand,

> The words "inspired of God" are placed upon the sacred page for the simple purpose of reminding us of the high and holy origin and the Divine purpose of the Scripture. "Every Scripture" – historical as well as doctrinal, legal as well as prophetic – "being inspired of God," that is "*because* it is inspired of God," is laden with this blessed power. *Theopneustos* (translated "inspired") is literally "God breathed;" God breathed into the Scripture, and hence its surprising qualities. Its spirit is His Spirit. (Urquhart 1930: p. 71).

Urquhart offers religious realism the ability to track a religious property which when associated with *any text*, makes that text gain a religious status and therefore becomes classifiable as scripture. The phrasing *inspired of God* allows for the Christian to acknowledge the religious reality of the Old Testament as scripture by identifying the same divine origin and sacred purpose, and so the Word of God is not captured in scripture because of some exclusive property to Hebrew or Greek.

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[149] Matthew 1:22 ; Matthew 2:15 ; Acts 1:16 ; Acts 3:18 ; Acts 4:25.

Scripture, then, is the collection of human communicative acts which are inspired of God and are endowed with a 'religious reality' which, when encountered, constitutes a religious experience as the Word of God. This implies that scripture has a broader range than simply *biblical* – one could, in principle, understand the theology of Thomas Aquinas as scriptural. Despite considerable disagreements in other areas, Rudolf Bultmann generally agrees with this presentation, especially regarding encountering the Word of God in scripture.

Bultmann raises two substantial points which stem from a similar seed. First, the theological framework which a practitioner operates within will influence what they expect an account for religious language to look like; second, that there is a Word of God which is authoritative in terms of scripture. Considering the first matter, Bultmann underscores the epistemological baggage which accompanies certain methodological approaches towards scripture, such as empirical historicism, where,

> The historical method includes the presupposition that history is a unity in the sense of a closed continuum of effects in which individual events are connected by the succession of cause and effect. This continuum, furthermore, cannot be rent by the interference of supernatural, transcendent powers. (Bultmann 1960: pp. 291-292).

Bultmann acknowledges that the justification which some people offer for their belief in the truth of scripture is grounded on the presupposition that history is a unity of causes and effects; that we can historically document Christ's birth and death, and that archaeological records reveal the existence of certain battlefields, cities or locations which are discussed in scripture. We should subsequently avoid forming beliefs which go against the historical method, but this is easier said than done when the foundations of Christian belief for many people runs directly against this method, such as miracles, creation stories or events which lack archaeological evidence e.g., a world flood. Herein lies a classic Humean issue: the basis of Christian belief is miraculous and irreducible to the historical method because if they weren't then they would be insufficient as a proof of the divine.[150] Specifically, Hume does not claim that miracles are impossible *per se* but that eye-witness testimony is never an adequate mode of evidence for establishing a true belief in a miracle, and as the Christian faith *depends* on the belief in a miracle and offers only the testimony of the apostles as evidence, then the Christian faith faces serious problems (Hume 1998: sect. X, part. I, 86). The

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[150] 'A miracle is a violation of the laws of nature; and as a firm and unalterable experience has established these laws, the proof against a miracle, from the very nature of the fact, is as entire as any argument from experience can possibly be imagined… Nothing is esteemed a miracle, if it ever happen in the common course of nature' (Hume 1998: sect. X, part I, 90).

relevance of this for religious language comes down to what one theologically requires the language to be able to express. If a religious realist based their belief on the testimony of miracles – that Christ really did walk on water, and that that was a violation of the laws of nature, and that it is not accountable to mass delusion, trickery, or fraudulent reports – then they *must* understand religious language via content-externalism, true in its claims, and conforming to ontological objectivity. If religious language cannot talk about external things, then the apostles' testimonial talk about Christ's miracles is not religious talk. This emphasises the first of Bultmann's two substantial points – one's theological framework comes about from religious language and as if doubles back and constrains that language – from scripture we form beliefs, and those beliefs modify our future reading of scripture. Bultmann responds to Hume's criticism by endorsing the overall point and offering a novel realist approach towards religious language as the Word of God, and we need to highlight Hume's sympathy towards faith and the Holy Spirit to better appreciate it.[151]

Hume emphasises that his argument is not *against* Christianity but hopes that,

> it may serve to confound those dangerous friends or disguised enemies to the *Christian Religion*, who have undertaken to defend it by the principles of human reason. Our most holy religion is founded on *Faith*, not on reason; and it is a sure method of exposing it to put it to such a trial as it is, by no means, fitted to endure. (Hume 1998: sect. X, part. II, 100).

Hume's point is that we would be in error to understand the testimony of miracles as proof of Christianity's truth for two reasons; firstly, that such evidence is never sufficient for the sort of belief it aims to establish, secondly, the belief that the Christian religion stands or falls on the bedrock of reason and not faith is a *theological* misunderstanding. Thus, Hume writes that if miracles are 'considered merely as external evidences, and are not brought home to every one's breast, by the immediate operation of the Holy Spirit' then we have mistakenly supposed that Christianity stands on reason, not faith; but as faith is the bedrock, miracles are to be understood as something other than external evidence (Hume 1998: sect. X, part. I, 86). This implies that the Holy Spirit has an important relationship with faith as a justification for belief; one gains belief through testimony *not* because they suspend reason (and thus think uncritically or irrationally), but that some other operation occurs where the Holy Spirit confirms the message as a matter of *faith*. This could be compatible with Reformed Epistemology, but its undertone of fideism might be problematic; in any case, Bultmann seems to agree in a broad sense and stresses the theological

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[151] I have made this line of argument elsewhere (Ellis 2021).

element to Hume's *philosophical* argument.

Philosophically, 'we must show that it [a miracle] is a phenomenon of the spiritual life, not one of nature' so to avoid the brunt of Hume's argument, as well as to remain consistent with the historical and other important naturalist methodologies which are reliable and integral to other Christian beliefs (Bultmann 1953: p. 121). Theologically speaking, this requires us to reconsider the teachings of the Bible through a methodology which is more naturalistic than what we traditionally find though nonetheless remains consistent with the Christian faith; Bultmann suggests that Christian theology needs to realise that,

> No mature person represents God as a being who exists above in heaven; in fact, for us there no longer is any 'heaven' in the old sense of the word. And just as certainly there is no hell, in the sense of a mythical underworld beneath the ground on which we stand. […] it is impossible to use electric light and the wireless and to avail ourselves of modern medical and surgical discoveries, and at the same time to believe in the New Testament world of spirits and miracles. (Bultmann 1984: p. 4).

The language of scripture may have initially been understood in a *prima facie* realist way, but it is not necessary for that tradition to continue. Bultmann's project, as Owens puts it, is

> based upon a single axiom. God is a personal subject who is related personally to his creatures. Myth is any statement or image that violates this norm of inter-subjectivity and demythologization is the attempt to reclothe such statements and images in a properly subjective form. (Owen 1957: p. 20).

Bultmann maintains a realism in the sense of asserting that God is a personal subject which exists in relationship with creatures (which implies that God is *external* to creatures), though he emphasises that the language of scripture should not be understood in a way which places God *outside of human meaning*. This delicately balances the object and content-externalism of religious realism with the epistemological subjectivity of human dependent meaning. Although God 'exists' even if we do not think so, the *meaning* of the truth of his existence is entirely *subjective*, therefore religious truths should not be treated nor spoken about as something external, distanced, and far removed from people, like the cold impartial laws of thermodynamics. Bultmann thinks that scripture and its theological exegesis are often understood through 'objectifying language' – a mode of language which speaks about subject matters *as if* they exist outside of the human experience and context (as 'out there in the world') thus limiting any real, personal, or direct engagement with its core elements. This is opposed to 'non-objectifying language' – a mode of language which speaks about subject matters from within the personal concern of individuals (as

something *essentially human*) thus allowing for direct, deep, and personally meaningful engagement (Webster 1980: pp. 11-12). Bultmann concludes that the dominant schools of thought regarding the language of scripture are *objectifying* the Christian message and in turn placing it somehow 'outside' of the human domain of life, meaning and reality.

In *New Testament and Mythology*, Bultmann argues that 'Myth should be interpreted not cosmologically, but anthropologically, or better still, existentially' and adds that 'the importance of the New Testament mythology lies not in its imagery but in the understanding of existence which it enshrines' (Bultmann 1984: pp. 10-11) & (Webster 1980: p. 12). Bultmann is calling for a move away from the externally focused theology which develops from the objectifying language found in some variations of religious realism, and towards a non-objectifying language which maintains the immediacy, subjectivity, and presence of religious meaning. Christian myths like miracles, Genesis, Job, and Noah should not be interpreted in a cosmological sense and spoken about in an objectifying language because doing so would transform Christianity into a scientifically disprovable and therefore dispensable set of beliefs. Instead, myths should be interpreted as existential comments about the human condition in a non-objectifying language tradition, as this would maintain the religious domain of meaning within the human condition and not 'out there'. Perhaps one could go as far as to say that the fact that humans speak about these things in objectifying language tells us something existentially important about the human condition. This is not to say that Bultmann thinks 'God' has no external extension, but that any talk about God as an external, supernatural, transcending object which abandons historicity, is *crude myth*.

Bultmann's views and its relation to the *Word of God* is vivid in Ronald Smith's term 'this-worldly'; Bultmann believes that God's divine transcendence is *this-worldly* because his transcendence is seen from *within* the world[152] whereas an objectifying cosmological framework alienates God's nature from us and presents him as something 'other-worldly' (R. G. Smith 1956: pp. 94-114). Bultmann reiterates this in a way which resembles 'the light of faith' where he writes, 'to every other eye than the eye of faith the action of God is hidden.' (Bultmann 1953: p. 197). It is less that the objects of religion are hidden 'out there' which only the eye of faith can see, and more that the eye of faith is *ours* and allows us to see religious meaning within the context of spiritual

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[152] The mystery of God's transcending nature is not accountable to his 'other-worldly' nature, but rather that 'God is the mysterious, enigmatic power that meets us *in* the world and *in* time' (Bultmann 1955: pp. 8-9).

life.[153] As such, Bultmann tries to balance his belief that the extension of 'God' is outside of human experience and language with his belief that the religious domain of meaning is this-worldly. There is a gulf which separates man from the divine, and the interaction between the two is always one directional – man encounters the divine when 'God speaks to man his Word and man responds with his decision' (Owen 1957: p. 24). Therefore, 'the only miraculous act that God performs is his act of addressing man in the moment of encounter' (Owen 1957: p. 24).

Where Berkhof might think that the religious aspect of language is *within* language and/or that a use of such language requires an awareness of the identity of those things which it addresses, Bultmann maintains that it is in fact God who addresses us through the Word of God, a Word of divine judgement[154] and grace (Owen 1957: p. 24 & 53). The Word is more broadly the medium through which one encounters the divine, be it the experience of baptism or childbirth, and although Bultmann strives for a this-worldly conception of God's mysterious transcendence he reasons that a direct encounter with God (as if, face-to-face) would trivialise this and therefore maintains that an encounter is always indirect. Although indirect, an encounter with the divine is not something which a person could fail to notice. When God speaks, man cannot help but hear and is demanded to respond – even if our response was to ignore what has been said.[155] Maintaining his aim for a *this-worldly* presentation of our experience of God, Bultmann describes the medium through which we encounter the divine as facilitated by two events: first, a person finds themselves in an existential situation, and second, they encounter the Word as preaching (Owen 1957: p. 24). This is most famously captured when Augustine, lamenting the absence of God in his life, heard an unseen child cry 'Tolle lege, Tolle lege' (take and read, take and read) and took it to be the Word of God speaking to him about the Bible, which he then picked up and read (Augustine 1961: viii, 6-10).

In Bultmann's opinion, Augustine was in an existential *moral* situation where he was questioning his life and he *heard* the Word as preaching about it; that the Word addressed Augustine's situation, referenced the scripture of the Bible, and instructed him to read it. With the origin of the voice being hidden from Augustine's view, there was room for him to interpret the 'true' origin being from the Hidden though always present God, securing Bultmann's *indirect* encounter with God

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[153] Hence miracles being a phenomenon of the spiritual life and not a feature of the external natural world – the religious domain is essentially personal not external, and certainly *not* impersonal.

[154] Cf. Hebrews 4:12-13 '**12** For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. **13** Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.'.

[155] 'You have seen many things, but you pay no attention; your ears are open, but you do not listen.' (Isaiah 42:20).

whilst maintaining a *direct* this-worldliness to the experience. Bultmann presents the Word as being less dependent on language than Berkhof and some Rabbis, however there is enough broad agreement in terms of the Word being a medium of communication which can be contained within scripture, for 'when the Word of Scripture illuminates a particular situation and demands a particular response we may believe that we are encountering God' (Owen 1957: p. 24). The theoretical compatibility which religious realism has with Judeo-Christian theology about the Word of God is further strengthened by the similarities seen in Hick's critical realist description of religious experience.

Hick believed that an essential and testable element to any genuine religious experience is its causal effect on a person's moral life, and that part of what it means to have a religious experience is to be *aware* (to identify or recognise) that the experience is indeed religious. To express this, Hick uses the term 'experiencing-as' which stands to reference the *way* one is experiencing a particular object, e.g., I might experience some rock in the distance as a predator whilst another person might experience it as a trick of the light (Hick 1968). A *religious* experience-as is when a person experiences an object *as* a religious object, or more broadly, when one is having an experience which they can identify as being of a religious kind (Hick 1997: p. 22). One's recognition that an object of experience is of a religious kind is accountable to two factors: firstly, we must have a preconceived idea for what a 'religious' object or experience is like so to be able to experience something *as one,* secondly, that 'religious experiencing-as more commonly occurs in the awareness of situational than of object meaning.' (Hick 1997: p. 22).

Hick seems to agree with Bultmann that a religious experience is composed of two parts, the situation which a person is in and the object of experience, but Hick believes that these two parts relate through the medium of morality. For example, the object of Augustine's experience was the voice of a child, but because Augustine was aware of his situation (he was having an existential crisis of faith) coupled with his preconceived conceptions of God, his Word, his Divine Voice, scripture etc., the child's voice could be 'experienced-as' coming from God and addressing both him and the Bible. Therefore, for Augustine, the child's voice as an object of experience became a religious experience-as the Divine Voice of God expressing his Word through the child's speech. This enters into the moral domain because God's Word was experienced-as *help* by Augustine; Augustine was lost, and God came with guidance. Religious experiences, Hick argues, always leaves an individual with more information than what they started off with – that they have been given an instruction, received a lesson, gained new appreciation or outlook on life – in addressing a

situation, one cannot help but understand the new information at the moral level. Hick underscores the *moral aspect* of essentially the same thing which Bultmann specified, that man cannot help but respond to the Word of God because we must decide what to do with the information we have received. What we find is that 'at the situational level the religious consciousness may find a further order of meaning in the moral life, interpreting the ethical requirements of the interpersonal world as mediating either the external claim of God or the internal requirement of Dharma, leading one to act or refrain from acting in this or that way.' (Hick 1997: p. 22).

Religious experiences bring about new information which by their nature demand a response, making them enter the *moral life of the individual*, making a moral test a suitable method for checking whether a proposed religious experience was indeed religious. A religious experience is intuitively a life changing event, and if a person's life hasn't changed, then we will likely conclude that their experience wasn't religious. Firestone summarises that although it is somewhat unclear exactly *how* the moral domain of a religious experience proves that there is some external religious object, 'we must assume that something like a cause and effect relationship exists between genuine religious experience and the moral life that it creates.' (Firestone 1999: p. 162). Part of what it means to encounter God is to have the very standard of one's life put into question and that *is* moral, thus we do in response is a moral *action*.

The error theory draws several non-negotiable commitments out of religious realism which have clear overlaps with both Judeo-Christian theology and Hick's critical religious realism. This is promising for religious realism and the religious status of the Judeo-Christian language because if a language is religious under only the conditions of some varieties of religious realism, then supporters of Judeo-Christianity will be thankful to see conformity, likewise, if Judeo-Christianity possesses a religious language then religious realists will be thankful to see how they could theoretically account for it. Our exploration has also brought to bear the fruit of an earlier thought: there is one discussion to be had about what the religious mean when they talk about religious things, and another to be had about what the religious mean when they talk about hearing the Divine Voice speak the Word of God. Is the Word of God a linguistic thing; is the Divine Voice talking; when scripture seems to quote what God said, is that the Word of God or is it something else? If the Word of God is something which cannot be missed, and it seems that most Judeo-Christian Theology would agree on this, then why is it that people read these supposed quotes without having a religious experience? It is written that,

> And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is indeed at work in you who believe. (1 Thessalonians 2:13).

Which implies that the Word of God can be expressed by humans, and when a person receives it, they recognise that although they are hearing words from humans, they are not hearing 'the human word'. This Christian thought resembles what can be found in earlier Judaic thought, where the 'reality' of the religious meaning of scripture is not found in the words as objects but hidden in the words as experience. Judeo-Christian theology can be described as agreeing that religious language talks about the independently existing objects of religious belief, but importantly adds that these objects *talk to us* – God reveals himself to us through his Word, and then we talk about him and his Word. Thus, we find the religious significance of John 1:1-5 & 14 -

> [1]In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. [2]He was with God in the beginning. [3]Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. [4]In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. [5]The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it… [14]The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

The Word was God and through the Word all things were made (God spoke the world into existence in Genesis), and so the Word is part of God and yet distinguishable from God as the Word was also *with* God. The Word then became flesh as Christ, but we do not take Christ to be a feature of language but instead the medium through which the Word is known (unless, of course, we hold that Christ is an object of grammar) – for Bultmann, Christ came when mankind was in an existential situation and preached our redemption. The Word cannot be identified or understood if it was not for *its* addressal of us – that *it* speaks to us; it questions us, and we cannot question it.[156] So, although we can speak about it and it can speak through us, at no point is an utterance of man an utterance of God; the Word of God is found within the words of man. Although theologians disagree about whether this makes language internally or externally religious and whether the Word of God is best expressed in Hebrew or Greek, there is agreement on the fact that religious reality is real and substantially personal. Although the nature of God and divinity is *outside* of human thought, the heart of Judeo-Christian religious faith is that God makes himself known in the lives of individuals through experience. This is not lost in the theological views of Karl Barth,

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[156] This is not to say that we cannot ask questions about it, but that we cannot hold it subject to our judgements or standards, for it is the Word that questions us.

It is not the right human thoughts about God which form the content of the Bible, but the right divine thoughts about men. The Bible tells us not how we should talk with God but what he says to us; not how we find the way to him, but how he has sought and found the way to us; not the right relation in which we must place ourselves to him, but the covenant which he has made with all who are Abraham's spiritual children and which he has sealed once and for all in Jesus Christ. (Barth 1978: p. 43).

The varieties of religious realism which concern us rely on there being external religious objects which confer a unique meaning or value onto language which accounts for both its religious identity and meaning. Judeo-Christian theology about the religious status of the language of scripture overlaps with religious realism in a variety of ways, however the *Trilemma of Religious Realism* implies that at least some of those theological beliefs are false. The role of the 'Word of God' is more than to maintain a consistent narrative between the Divine Voice of the Tanakh and the Word of the New Testament. It provides a consistent ontologically objective religious property which relates to the language of the Tanakh and the New Testament and therefor confers the same religious identity and meaning throughout the Bible. In effect, Christians claim to have the *same* Word of God as found in the Tanakh, and an Internalist can understand this in terms of God being hidden within language and the Externalist can understand it as the claim that the same God is speaking through Christ as who spoke through the prophets. Religious realism, though, requires some epistemological commitments about how we can come to identify and understand a religious language, and the Christian practice of scriptural reading and interpretation addresses this.

One notable practice for reading scripture with the aim of accessing the religious domain of meaning in the Christian tradition is *Lectio Divina*. The essence of *Lectio Divina* is 'an intimate dialogue with a living, present, divine interlocutor who will answer when the reader appeals to him' whilst the performance is more specifically 'devout or spiritual reading, that is, reading done in the presence of God and in a contemplative spirit.' (D. Robertson 2011: p. xii) & (Abhishiktananda 2001: p. 85). The religious realist view that scripture can be read in God's presence and that there is an object which can answer questions when addressed is on the one hand objectifying, yet on the other deeply focused on an individual's experience and contemplative spirit. The aim of Lectio Divina is to facilitate a dynamic between the addressee, the speech, and the addressed, be it God addressing us or us addressing him, for despite Bultmann's emphasis that the Word of God addresses us, he does not deny that humans speak to God in prayer or as reported in scripture. Lectio Divina establishes an environment where 'three persons are engaged: the one who is reading, the one whose words are read, and the Holy Spirit, who is the bond between them and the very environment in which they meet.' (Abhishiktananda 2001: p. 85). During Lectio Divina, the

reader 'should seek above all to be tuned in to the Spirit, so as to be enlightened and inspired by him' which implies the existence of an external speaker *God* as well as endorsing Bultmann's thought that the Word preaches (Abhishiktananda 2001: p. 86). In conceptual agreement, Catholic Dogma urges that the Clergy,

> should gladly put themselves in touch with the sacred text itself, whether it be through the liturgy, rich in the divine word, or through devotional reading, or through instructions suitable for the purpose and other aids […] And let them remember that prayer should accompany the reading of Sacred Scripture, so that God and man may talk together; for "we speak to Him when we pray; we hear Him when we read the divine saying.". (Catholic Church 2012: §25).

Lectio Divina is a versatile concept suitable for various forms of religious realism. When a sentence is read or heard from a particular approach which fosters a relationship between audience and author, the language of the scripture reveals itself as the Word of God, the Word being *broadly* the medium through which the divine is encountered whether it is specifically God *himself* or an angel or some other manifestation of divinity. As such, one could plausibly say that they encountered the Word of God whilst listening to Vivaldi, and that deep contemplative thought about that experience is an aspect of *Lectio Divina* in practice. This allows the religious realist to apply Lectio Divina onto speech acts which are not themselves considered scriptural but nonetheless rich in religious meaning, such as *The Pilgrim's Progress* or anything which fits Samuel Coleridge's description of the Bible,[157]

> in the Bible there is more that *finds* me than I have experienced in all other books put together; that the words of the Bible find me at greater depths of my being; and that whatever finds me brings with it an irresistible evidence of its having proceeded from the Holy Spirit. (Coleridge 1840: p. 13).

Religious realism, broadly conceived, has some theoretical overlap with Christian theology about religious language, but there are also some significant disagreements about whether the religious properties which Christianity has in mind are the same as what Judaism has in mind. If they are not, then the Christian will need to explain how Christianity is the development of the same tradition in a way which acknowledges diversity but maintains consistency, whilst if they are the same then the belief that Hebrew is inherently religious is either false or inadequate as an account for its religious status. If they are the same, then the Christian needs to explain how it is that Jews are consistently succeeding in identifying religious properties in the Tanakh and yet remain totally blind of its

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[157] A larger collection of examples, accompanied with detailed analysis, is found in *The Death and Rebirth of Religious Language* (Jasper 1996).

presence in the New Testament. Putting aside Trilemma-like issues as well as its difficult relationship with the religious language of Judaism, there is theoretical compatibility between Judeo-Christian theology and varieties of religious realism. Although it seems inevitable that any specific account under religious realism would render more Judeo-Christian beliefs false than true, there is still room for at least one consistent account. This cannot be said for the religious languages found in the dharmic traditions of Hinduism and Buddhism, indeed, they are that incompatible that the truth of one renders the other false.

S4. C5. Religious Realism and Dharmic Traditions

Ontological objectivity is arguably the clearest and the most problematic of the non-negotiable commitments of religious realism. As we are assuming the theoretical truth of religious realism, we are forced to conclude that all non-realist religions are wrong and in possession of a fraudulent religious language unless it is instantiated with an ontologically objective religious property. The ideal account for religious language would be applicable to *all* religious languages, as such, if the languages of Hinduism and Buddhism do not meet the realist's demands then they are not religious – unless, of course, they are religious for reasons which the realist cannot account for. Nondualism (being the rejection of the proposed dichotomy between subjects and objects; ontological objectivity and subjectivity; the mind-dependent and the mind-independent) is perhaps the most identifiable feature of Dharmic religions and their languages, despite their otherwise significant disagreements.

In addition to the robust philosophical/theological thoughts of each individual nondualist religion, the sheer number of nondualist religions outside of the Western theological context is staggering and often underrepresented in religious realist literature. Be it Advaita Vedanta, the nonduality of Mahayana Buddhism and the self-annihilation practices of Zen, the unity of me and not-me contained in the Dao,[158] alternatives to religious realism are rife outside of the Western context (Loy 1983). We need to account for religious and host-language diversity (or providing a convincing explanation for how there are so many convincing *fraudulent* religious languages), and an awareness of the religious traditions and languages of the non-Western world goes some way to emphasise the limitations of religious realism. It also undermines the presumptuous suggestion that these religions either do not possess a legitimate religious language, or they do but they cannot comprehend nor account for it despite having studied it for thousands of years. Yet, the recent and evidently Western religious realist system of thought best suited for accounting for Judeo-Christian traditions can succeed where the likes of Adi Shankara, Lao Tzu and even the Buddha himself failed.

The dichotomy between ontologically objective and ontologically subjective modes of existence is central to religious realism, however this dichotomy is not central to what makes a system of

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[158] Consider the nondualism of the Taoist claim, 'Once upon a time, I, Zhuang Zhu, dreamt I was a butterfly, fluttering hither and thither, to all intents and purposes a butterfly. I was conscious only of my happiness as a butterfly, unaware that I was Zhu. Soon I awaked, and there I was, veritably myself again. Now I do not know whether I was then a man dreaming I was a butterfly, or whether I am now a butterfly, dreaming I am a man.' (Glattfelder 2019: p. ix).

thought a religion. Dualism is prevalent throughout the Judeo-Christian traditions as observed in their outlining of language, God, belief and religious experience, but such a dichotomy is not found in Dharmic schools of thought. Nondualism is prevalent throughout the philosophies, ethics, traditions, practices and languages of Hinduism, Buddhism and Taoism, making it a serious challenge.

S4. C6. Hinduism

Vedanta stands for the Vedas (the foundational texts of Hinduism) and Advaita literally means nondual, therefore Advaita Vedanta is the nondual interpretation of the Vedas which stems primarily from the final collection of Vedic texts, the Upanishads. Advaita Vedanta is one among many forms of Vedanta, and it is most vividly opposed by the dualist reading of the Vedas, Dvaita Vedanta. Although Advaita Vedanta can be argued as more akin to a philosophical tradition than a religion, Vedanta is itself a Hindu philosophical theology which has direct application to both religious language and the daily spiritual practices of Hindus, making it invaluable to our study (Clooney 1999) & (Deutsch 1993: p. 4). Advaita (nondual) is a deliberate term in difference to monism – the point of advaita is that it opposes dvaita (dual), and nondualism is not committed to the belief of there being an 'objective singular reality' as monism could imply (Deutsch 1993: p. 3). Advaita Vedanta can be described as a *substance* view of reality because although 'the underlying premise of Advaita-Vedanta is that ''consciousness'' defines existence as opposed to existence precluding consciousness', the Vedantist argues that there is still an essential substance to the Real as explored through Atman and Brahman (Sriraman and Benesch 2005: p. 43). It is not always obvious or possible to judge whether any given candidate Hindu sentence is conforming with the ontological objectivity which religious realism requires; both dvaita and advaita can *read* a sentence as content-external (after all, the Advaita Vedantist utters a content-external sentence in their rejection of the external world), however only dvaita affirms some degree of object-externalism.

Advaita Vedanta does not disagree with the *prima facie intuitive appeal* of a realist or dualist understanding of experience and reality, indeed they agree that our experiences imply that there are objects outside of us in some external mind-independent realm, however, they emphasise that this intuition is nothing more than illusion, maya. The position of Advaita Vedanta is not quite captured by 'religious' or 'global' anti-realism because the position does not target the external world but rejects the objective-subjective dichotomy. Advaita Vedanta walks a delicate path between talking and acting *as if* there is an external world for the sake of simplicity whilst believing that there is no duality at all. We shall track this path through Upanishadic thought about dreams and apply this deeper contextual awareness to what the Upanishads say about Sanskrit. This reveals that the language is not intended to be understood as the realist imagines (e.g., through content and object-externalism), and if it were to be taken in this way then it would: show that the religious tradition is false, cause us to ignore what the religion means to say, and leaves the realist needing to explain

how the language appears religious when it isn't.

Upanishadic thought recognises a distinction between awake states and asleep states which is used to explore the distinction between the belief that we experience real external objects and the belief that we do not, 'in that dream world there are no chariots, no animals to draw them, no roads to ride on, but one makes chariots and animals and roads oneself from the impressions of past experiences', yet 'everyone experiences this, but no one knows the experiencer' (Eknath 2007: p. 29). Although the content of awake experiences and dream experiences *look* the same, we do not take our dream experiences to be *common or public*, they are not what the realist would call 'real', but instead projections or creations of the subject. Advaita Vedanta recognises this distinction but makes an additional point – no one knows the experiencer. Irrespective to whether there are objects 'behind' mental perceptions when awake or asleep, people seem to experience dreams in similar ways and part of the similarity is the common recognition that dreams can be as vividly 'real' as non-dreams.[159] The Upanishads asks whether we can doubt the reality or identity of the subject who experiences dreams and awake states in the same way as we can doubt the reality or identity of the objects which we see when we *think* we are dreaming. If I am the same subject in dreams as I am when awake, then we know that there is a permanence to *me* in either situation; but if I am not the same subject when experiencing dreams as I am when experiencing awake states, who (or what) replaces me and where do I go? This position challenges the belief that the externality of an object is what makes an object *real* by examining the perceptual differences between the reality of dreams, the reality of non-dreams, and the reality – but not *externality* – of the subject which experiences both dreams and awake states. If there is a *Self* which is the permanent subject of experiences and that subject is not an external object, then we know that the 'reality' of an object is not determined by its externality – an object is no longer understood as an externality but instead a target of thought, experience or perception. Religious realists struggle to explain how an ontologically objective property makes a dream *religious*, especially when we take a dream as being ontologically subjective, but this challenge is exasperated when we consider religions which reject the basis of distinguishing between subject and object.

A religious realist could discuss the 'religious reality' of dreams (an ontologically subjective phenomena) whilst maintaining ontological objectivity to the objects of religious belief by

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[159] In the first sense my dreams are no more real than yours, in the second sense I often think I am awake when I am dreaming - we truly believe we are in danger when we dream of falling down a well or being chased by an elephant (Eknath 2007: p. 29).

stipulating that the objects perceived in dreams are usually mind-dependent constructions, but that on some limited occasions external objects enter the subjective dream realm. A dream is ontologically subjective whilst the object referenced by 'God' is objective, and so there is a distinction between dreaming that God visited you and God really visiting you in your dream; the latter is *legitimately* religious, the former a convincing fraud. Be it the belief of The Dreamtime as found in the traditions of the Aboriginal people,[160] the Polynesian belief that one's soul can leave the body without leading to death and dreams are the experience of the soul's journey,[161] or the Christian belief in visions of Christ in dreams,[162] the 'object' of religious belief is taken to exist independently to the dream. The difficulty which Advaita Vedanta poses for religious realism is that it undermines the idea that the *externality* (objectivity) of a thing makes it more real. In Western realist thought, the term 'object' is taken to mean *external*, that an object *is an external feature of the mind independent realm*, but this is not found in the Advaita Vedantic tradition. Instead, the subjective Self – the dreamer of the dreams, seer of the sight, hearer of the sounds, thinker of the thoughts – is the *real*.

A dream is not religious because Vishnu appears (though that would of course be remarkable), but because it leads one closer to the Truth. The aim for a practitioner of Advaita Vedanta is for the Atman to escape the cycle of reincarnation (Samsara) and become unified with Brahman (Ultimate Reality). In its nondualist fashion, Moksha is simultaneously a breaking away from one thing and a unification with another; it is the liberation from Maya and reincarnation and the unification of Atman with Brahman. Nonduality is philosophically complex but theologically immense and underpins Hindu religious belief, practice and ritual, making Advaita Vedanta, perhaps the most shared and vocal modes of nondualist Hindu thought deserving of the term 'theology'. This underpinning is found in the philosophical theology which treats the religious status of language, especially that of Sanskrit.

Those who think that Sanskrit is a divine language believe that even those who do not understand Sanskrit nonetheless gain purification from simply hearing it. Such people therefore take the view

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[160] Cf. (Glaskin 2015) & (Price-Williams and Gaines 1994).

[161] Cf. (*Encyclopedia of World Religions: Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Zen, Hinduism, Prehistoric & Primitive Religions.* 1975: p. 43).

[162] Kelly Bulkeley writes that Pyanjuwa understood his dreams as visions which encouraged him to host church services in graveyards, 'His strong belief in the reality of dreams and visions is one of the focal points of the movement... [Pyanjuwa] had also decided to help analyze and interpret dreams for other people. He explained that as belief in direction through dreams and visions was very common among his people he had instituted this 'advice service' to try and guard against wrong teaching and unwise action coming into the community through dreams' (Bulkeley 1995: p. 6).

that the religiousness of Sanskrit is not dependent on one's reading but experience of it. For example, Bhartrihari introduced a nondual conception of reality,

> known as 'word advaita,' or non-dualism, based on the notion that the word (shabda) is the transcendent reality. His idea of 'shabda brahman,' or ultimate reality, as the basis of all language, broke the barrier between grammar and philosophy… Bhartrihari maintained that the study of Sanskrit grammar alone could cause one to attain liberation from birth and rebirth. (C. Jones and Ryan 2007: p. 81).

This Advaita Vedantic view links language with the relationship between Atman and Brahman, where ultimate reality and language is inseparable, meaning that the devotional study of language translates into a devotional study of the object of religious belief.[163] The integration which language has with belief is more than ceremonial, for example ॐ (Om or AUM) is the symbol of Sanatana Dharma as well as a sacred sound, but it is not the *name* of a god. 'ॐ' is understood as *the essence* of reality, and so is uttered at the start and end of rituals 'so to honour this very syllable, because of its greatness and because it is the essence.' (Olivelle 1996: p. 98). Whereas Hebrew in Judaism is important for religious contexts and there is debate about whether prayer should be performed in Hebrew or the language which the speaker best understands, there is almost unanimous agreement amongst Hindus that Sanskrit is *the* language of the faith and that its religious properties *matter* to its communication.[164] When taken further, the Hindu's point is less concerned about man's ability to communicate with the divine – that we can speak the language of the gods – and more with the fact that it means that man *is* divine, because, 'the essence of man is speech; the essence of speech is the Rg verse; the essence of the Rg verse is the Saman chant; the essence of the Saman chant is the High chant [Om]' (Olivelle 1996: p. 98).

This brings about a perfect unity because Atman and Brahman are unified, and language has ultimate reality (Brahman) as its essence whilst we (Atman) have Om as our essence through speech. The belief that Om is the essence of reality and that the essence of man is speech, and the essence of speech is, like all other things, Om, means that we cannot separate our understanding of a sentence's content from the belief that the sentence *is inherently religious,* just as we cannot separate our essence from *the essence of reality* – all is one, Om. This is made clear in the opening lines of the Mandukya Upanishad,

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[163] We find a similar link between Bhakti Yoga and Karma Yoga (the practice of devotion and the practice of selfless service).
[164] E.g. the Sacred Speech of Sanskrit has an exclusive deity, Vac, who was later adopted by Sarawati, the author of the Vedas (Daniélou 1991: p. 260).

> Om – this whole world is that syllable! Here is a further explanation of it. The past, the present, and the future – all that is simply Om; and whatever else that is beyond the three times, that also is simply Om. (Olivelle 1996: p. 289).

Om, then, is not quite a word instantiated with a religious property but the essence of Om *is the* essence of reality, and this is understood as being as profoundly philosophical as it is religious because it encapsulates ourselves and reality being one of the same (Olivelle 1996: p. 98). This position is hinted towards in the final passages of the *Mandukya Upanishad* where Om is broken down into three syllables (A U M), however a fourth is spoken about which, 'is beyond [all] letters: there can be no commerce with it; it brings [all] development to an end; it is mild and devoid of duality. Such is Om, the very Self indeed.' (Zaehner 2000: p. 254). Therefore, the Hindu tacitly accepts that there are things beyond speech but not beyond language; that, paradoxically, there is a fourth syllable to A U M which cannot be represented or referenced, and yet is still a syllable – a feature of language which cannot feature in language, just as we are a feature *of* reality and cannot feature *in* reality. This bears surprising similarity with Jewish thought, but unlike Jewish thought it is not compatible with realism's non-negotiable commitment to religious properties possessing an ontologically objective mode of existence.

There are three general outcomes under realism for those religious languages/traditions which do not adhere to the ontological objectivity-subjectivity dichotomy (This is the *Trilemma of Religious Realism* manifest):

    i)   Religious realism is correct, the language is religious, and the religion is factually *wrong* in their religious beliefs;

    ii)   Religious realism is correct, the language is *not* religious, and the religion is factually *wrong* in the religious beliefs;

    iii)   Religious realism fails as an account.

The commitment to ontological objectivity requires the realist to commit to the view that a language is religious (and that a religious belief is true) only if the religious objects of those beliefs are external, and the truth of realism would result in the falsehood of non-realist beliefs and the loss of their *religious* language. If the first of the three outcomes obtained, then we would be required to extend the conclusion of Advaita Vedanta's falsehood to all other religious traditions which are not committed to the distinction between ontological objectivity and subjectivity. In addition to the requirement of the first mode, the second mode would also need to explain how the

sentences/languages of such non-realist religions *appear* religious when they are not actually religious. We would in essence need an explanation for how some languages/sentences are fraudulent imposters of 'real' religious languages/sentences, and that will likely be a difficult extra task for an already struggling realism. The third outcome is, of course, unacceptable for the realist and so there is considerable pressure to respond to one (or both) of the first two. On the balance, if we had an account for religious language which remains quiet about the ontologically objective mode of existence of any given object and still accounts for religious language, then that would be a more attractive account.

It would be ideal if we could identify and understand religious language with the same explanatory power as the realist but without the ontological baggage which comes with its non-negotiable commitments. This might be achieved if we moved our attention away from ontological objectivity and towards the experience of religious language, irrespective to whether any specific variation of religious realism can account for it. If it could be shown that the religious experience (the experience which the realist takes to come in consequence of the religious properties) does not require any ontological commitments, then that account would be preferable. But before exploring this avenue further, we would do well to see how Buddhism challenges religious realism's reliance on an ontological dualism between object and subject by rejecting the existence of any subject.

S4. C7. Buddhism

The religious status of Buddhism has been a point of scholarly debate amongst Western academics because despite some Buddhist traditions lacking beliefs in souls/spirits or a creator deity/a receiver of prayers, they nonetheless hold profound teachings about the nature of life, meaning and purpose, with clear and unique metaphysical, ethical and epistemological commitments (Herbrechtsmeier 1993). Although the founder of Buddhism is referred to as simply 'the Buddha', 'Buddha' is more specifically a name for a *state of being* and not a single individual, as such, Buddhism is not the religion which worships a particular person/God/demigod etc., but a way of life which leads one into the state of *Buddhahood* (sometimes called Enlightenment or being 'Awakened') (Gethin 1998: pp. 32-33). Buddhism is in many ways the mirror image of Advaita Vedanta – it holds nondualism, a denial of the external world, and the belief that with training, experience and practice, Enlightened states are possible; however, like all mirror images, it is diametrically opposed (Loy 1983).

Where a supporter of Advaita Vedanta believes in the existence of a real and permanent Self (Atman), the Buddhist claims that there is no such Self (Anatman), and in consequence of rejecting the existence of self, the Buddhist does away with dualism. Buddhism's doctrine of Anatman simultaneously rejects the existence of a Permanent Self and the ontological substance which it carries, and instead argues that reality is impermanent and reducible to a sophisticated relationship between perception, inference and mental construction (vikalpa). Where Advaita Vedanta offers a nondual *substance* view of Reality through the relationship of Atman and Brahman, Buddhism champions an incompatible *Modal* view which rejects the existence of any substance whatsoever (Murti 2008: pp. 10-11). The nondualism of Buddhism develops from the observation that the object-subject distinction is internally related where one implies the other (to speak of an external is to imply an internal; objects imply subjects), therefore its rejection of a permanent Self severs the tie to the existence of permanent objects (Foshay 1994: p. 548). Buddhism tries to account for the illusion of dualism whilst offering instruction for how a person can put this knowledge into practice so to free themselves from the suffering which the illusion brings. This practice is often called a study, and

> To study the buddha way is to study the self. To study the self is to forget the self. To forget the self is to be actualised by myriad things. When actualised by myriad things, your body and mind as well as the bodies and minds of others drop away. No trace of realisation remains, and this no-trace continues endlessly. (Dōgen 1985: p. 70).

The assumption of religious realism's truth forces us to conclude not only that Buddhism is false due to its disbelief in the external (ontologically objective) world, but irreconcilable because of its attempts to convince people that dualism (and therefore realism) is an illusion which leads to suffering and ignorance. In the eyes of religious realism, Buddhism does more than make a series of scholarly blunders in its nondualism, it actively propagates falsehoods born from an ignorant erroneous philosophy and consequently brings about more ignorance than what it means to dispel. The Buddhist's philosophical system is not quiet in this dispute; indeed, it offers one of the most robust defences of nondualism and its teaching are designed to challenge the foundations of any dualist (thus realist) system. In a serious respect, the religious realist Worldview is the sort of Worldview which Buddhism is designed to tackle and rid us of, and so we must understand its theology in finer detail to understand the religious status of its language.

Dualism is at the core of ordinary experience and saturates almost every aspect of human life including language and Buddhism, and knowing this does not remove the illusion of dualism from one's life. The practice of Buddhism, then, is more clearly the leading of oneself into a different mode of existence beyond dualism, beyond attachment, and beyond Buddhism, where *knowing* the truth of nondualism becomes embodied and one *sees unity* (Herbrechtsmeier 1993: p. 14). There are two conditions of being and truth according to Buddhism: the ordinary illusionary state of being within the truth of the illusion of dualism, and the Enlightened, Awakened state of being within the truth of nondualism. The dualist intuition of religious realism is located within the first state of being, and although acknowledging the vividity of the *experience* of dualism and the sophistication of the *realist's theory* in equal measure, the Buddhist, in practice, affirms its falsehood. As *knowing* the truth of nondualism does not stop the illusion from being seen any more than how knowing *the fact of any illusion* stops the mind from perceiving it, the Buddhist, prior to living in an Enlightened State, is caught between two worlds – they are stuck in the world of illusion, knowing that it is an illusion (Herbrechtsmeier 1993: p. 14). Most Buddhists therefore try to walk a middle path – to live life in a balanced position of knowing the truth and seeing the illusion – 'The middle path is the avoidance of both the dogmatism of realism (the reality of objects) and the scepticism of Nihilism (the rejection of objects and consciousness both as unreal)' (Murti 2008: p. 8). It is not easy to navigate between the two worlds, and the Buddhist in an almost playful manner is aware of the counter-intuitive confusion which their way of thinking leads to, as summarised in the claim, 'Believe me, the Bodhisattvas are as real as earth and sky, and have infinite power to aid beings in distress, but they exist within our common mind, which, to speak the truth, is itself the container of earth and sky' (Harvey 2013: p. 170).

Within the dualist experience of reality which the religious realist affirms, the Buddhist *understands* that the realist both perceives and believes that 'horses are animals existing independently of whether we choose to think of them or not, whereas dragons and unicorns exist while they are in our thoughts and vanish as soon as we turn our minds to something else'. The Buddhist might also have those kinds of experiences and sometimes develop those sorts of beliefs, however the Enlightened ones – those who *live* the truth and not simply hold it as a belief – perceive and believe that 'the horses at the nearest stable are precisely as real or unreal as the dragons and unicorns in our minds - intrinsically all of them are void' (Blofeld 1992: pp. 95-96). The transformative process of entering a new domain of being makes Buddhism deserving of the 'religious' classification of thought and practice, and its explanation for *how* the perception and belief of dualism originates makes its language more plausibly 'religious'.

The Buddhist account of the illusion of dualism is laid out in the work of Acvaghosha, who is most known for having authored the Buddha-caritakavya, one of the most popular poems depicting Buddha's life (Suzuki 1900: p. 216). Dualism originates from a 'disturbance of mind', which is the event of the mind being brought out of a state of oneness and peace and into an experience of perception which discriminates between subjects and objects, or ethically phrased, me and not-me (Acvaghosha 1900: p. 71). Acvaghosha elaborates that, 'in consequence of the disturbance of the mind there originates that which perceives an external world. When the mind is not disturbed, perception does not take place… Through perception an unreal external world originates.' (Acvaghosha 1900: p. 72).

As the unreal external world originates from perception and as *that* which perceives comes about from a disturbance of mind, Subject and Object, me and not-me, as encountered within experience, are unreal manifestations of the mind. This is advanced further when we read that 'independent of that which perceives [i.e., the ego or subject], there is no surrounding world [or the object]', which directly rejects the existence of a mind-independent realm whilst also accounting for how and why we come to suspect and sense that there is one (Acvaghosha 1900: p. 72). Suzuki, the translator of Acvaghosha's work, likens this description to that of Berkley's Idealist remark that 'take away the perceiving mind and you take away the objective world.' (Acvaghosha 1900: p. 72). Perhaps in prediction of the sorts of rebuttals which the Buddhist might face from a realist or a Dvaitan, Acvaghosha details how six kinds of phenomenon come about in consequence of the disturbance of mind, with the fourth being, 'an attachment to names [or ideas, *samjna*], etc. By clinging the mind

hypostasises all names whereby to give definitions to all things' (Acvaghosha 1900: pp. 72-73). Once again, Suzuki draws a link between this Buddhist claim and Western thoughts about Nominalism and hypostatisation, however it is unclear whether we think that the referents of our references are 'real' *because* language forces dualism upon us, or whether dualism is a feature of language because the distinction between me and not-me, subject and objects, is engrained within experience.

Suzuki's note towards hypostatisation relates to earlier warnings about how a *way* of speaking can develop into a *way* of thinking and believing, and the Buddhist accuses the realist of this; religious realists are not just hypostatising religious objects, but all objects insofar as the belief in the existence of mind-independent objects to which our words pertain *is an illusion*. The distinction between the religious languages accountable to variations of religious realism and the religious language(s) of Buddhism is not entirely reducible to the former being dualistic and the latter being nondual, indeed, Buddhism claims that all languages are dualistic, it is that the Buddhist takes the dualism of language as being part of the illusion. The Buddhist and the realist share some agreement in this respect – language is understood as being content-external and many speakers *mean to be understood* in this way – however, the Buddhist, unlike the realist, thinks that the belief in the existence of an external world of objects *is false*. Where a religious realist is committed to the belief that at least one religious sentence successfully *describes* an ontologically objective religious object, the Buddhist realises that all sentences, including that one, *hypostatises*. This is not to say that they think words *bring things into existence* – as if an object ceases to be perceived when we forget its name – but that all sentences, even those which so vividly appear to be descriptions are part of the dualist illusion. To describe an object is to imply a duality between the object being described and the subject making the description, and as such, a description is part of the origin of the illusion of dualism – it is not a proof that dualism is true, but it is one of many origins of the illusion. Therefore, counter-intuitively, the more emphatically the religious realist insists that a given speaker of a given religious language means to be understood as talking about mind-independent objects, the more justified the Buddhist believes themselves to be in their belief that language is a root of the illusion of dualism, hence its inclusion in the list of six sorts of phenomenon which develops from a disturbed mind. Hence,

> The Buddha's true nature, and the nature of reality in general, is perceived correctly only in the dharmakaya, because all reality is, according to Mahayana thought, nondual. Although the true nature of things as such (including the Buddha and ourselves) can be known, it can

never be expressed in language or in any other form of symbolic representation, because all language and symbols are dual by nature. (Herbrechtsmeier 1993: p. 14).

The Buddhist's understanding of language is inseparable from Buddhism for two reasons: Buddhism is a system contained in language, and language is a key cause of the illusion of dualism. Irrespective to whether we side with the subtleties of Buddhism, it is evident that if religious realism is true then the Buddhist's belief in nonduality is false, and if adherence to the terms of a variation of religious realism is the only way for a language to be religious, then the religious language of Buddhism either isn't religious, or is religious for reasons which are incompatible with the core beliefs of Buddhism. The contextual origin of religious realism brings with it the baggage of Western philosophy and theology; it is not simply that some religious traditions disagree about the nature of reality, but that the nature of reality is often a decisively *religious* belief and so realism is itself typically *religious*. There is a Western and arguably Eurocentric mindset that science has made talk about the external world secular and therefore applicable in some impartial and universal manner onto the diverse set of religious, philosophical and linguistic traditions, but this is deeply mistaken – 'if we in the scientific West can take the integrity of religious conceptuality seriously, and if we consider especially the case of Buddhism, we might reflect more profoundly about the relationship between "words" and "things."' (Herbrechtsmeier 1993: p. 16).

S4. C8. Religious Realism's Response

The above chapters have considered the extent to which a variation of religious realism could account for the beliefs and religious languages of Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism and Buddhism. In doing so we observed a trilemma – a variation of religious realism either is or is not the correct account for the religious identity, meaning and truth-status of religious languages and beliefs. Religious realism would be a flawed account for religious language if a language was shown to be religious, or a belief was shown to be true, for reasons which are incompatible with the truth of any variation of religious realism. Religious realism would be falsified if, for example, a nondualist language was shown to be religious or the belief of there being no mind-independent realm was shown to be true. On the other hand, if the only way for a language to be religious is through the terms laid out in a variation of religious realism, then those languages and beliefs which adhere are genuine and true, whilst those which do not adhere are fraudulent and false. Moreover, as religious realism is an ontological position which asserts an actual mind-independent religious reality then it is almost inevitable that religious diversity will result in logical inconsistencies. For example, if the correct explanation for the meaning of the Christian religious language is that God exists and is personally involved in its grammar, then those religions which assert incompatible beliefs about the existence (or nonexistence) of different gods, are false. Some religious realists are more willing than others to acknowledge this incompatibility and bite the bullet,[165] whilst others, like Hick, attempt to avoid it by offering a *critical* religious realist account.

Hick suggests a Kantian distinction between mind-independent objects (things in and of themselves; noumena) and mind-dependent objects (objects as experienced; phenomena) and places the *Critical* religious realist between the two as a mediator (Hick 1989: p. 242). Hick is not always clear about whether he is proposing an ontologically real or merely conceptual distinction between the two, and this is a serious problem because each lead to a slightly different outcome. An ontological distinction affirms the existence of a mind-independent realm which renders some central beliefs in Hinduism and Buddhism false, whilst a conceptual distinction saves Hinduism and Buddhism from exclusion, but nonetheless fails to meet the realist's non-negotiable commitment to positing an *actual* mind-independent reality. In effect, the religious realist cannot have it both ways and yet they are often determined to try, and in doing so either fall short of their own standards or misrepresents the nature of incompatible religious beliefs. For example, Hick writes,

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[165] Cf. (J. B. Phillips 1960: pp. 70-74).

I want to say that the noumenal Real is experienced and thought by different human mentalities, forming and formed by different religious traditions, as the range of gods and absolutes which the phenomenology of religion reports. And these divine *personae* and metaphysical *impersonae*, as I shall call them, are not illusory but are empirically, that is experientially, real as authentic manifestations of the Real. (Hick 1989: p. 242).

The first challenge which Hick faces is ambiguity – when he is speaking of the noumenal Real then it seems like he is speaking of something ontologically distinct from *that* which we perceive, and yet when he speaks about *that* which we perceive he describes it as *not* illusionary and empirically (experientially) real *as authentic manifestations.* What exactly does that mean? If we were Platonists, we might be willing to say that we never directly experience the 'Idea' or 'Form' but nonetheless encounter 'authentic manifestations' of the Perfect Ideas and Forms as shadows. However, just because a sense-experience of an object is in some meaningful sense an experience of an 'authentic manifestation' of the noumenal Real, it would be an error to say that the perceived object *is* the actual object, and so it is not clear in what way Hick understands it as 'real'. Let us apply Hick's ambiguity to the opening passage of the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*,[166]

O my Lord, Śrī Kṛṣṇa, son of Vasudeva, O all-pervading Personality of Godhead, I offer my respectful obeisances unto You... By Him even the great sages and demigods are placed into illusion, as one is bewildered by the illusory representations of water seen in fire, or land seen on water. Only because of Him do the material universes, temporarily manifested by the reactions of the three modes of nature, appear factual, although they are unreal. I therefore meditate upon Him, Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa, who is eternally existent in the transcendental abode, which is forever free from the illusory representations of the material world. I meditate upon Him, for He is the Absolute Truth. (Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam: 1:1).

If Hick is saying that the great sages and demigods are phenomenological manifestations of *the Real* and that our representational experience of them is just as illusionary as our representational experiences of the material world, then although compatible with Hindu thought, Hick's position is at odds with religious realism's non-negotiable commitment to the religious reality having a mind-independent mode of existence. Put alternatively, if the Real is ontological then we must ask whether phenomenological manifestations are also ontological, and if so, whether it is of the same or different kind. If it is of the same kind then there is one and not *two* ontologies and therefore there is no ontological distinction between object and subject, thus falling short of the religious realist's requirements, yet if Hick affirms that the two are ontologically distinct then he is running against the nondualist views of Advaita Vedanta. The ambiguity of whether Hick is making an ontological or conceptual distinction between the noumena and phenomena is seen throughout his

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[166] All translations of the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* are from His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, unless otherwise stated (Prabhupāda 1972).

work, and Hick's appeal to Kant only emphasises this ambiguity in terms of whether we should adopt a one or two world interpretation of Kant (Allais 2004). For example,

> I want to say that the Real *an sich* is postulated by us as a pre-supposition, not of the moral life, but of religious experience and the religious life, whilst the gods, as also the mystically known Brahman, Sunyata and so on, are phenomenal manifestations of the Real occurring within the realm of religious experience. (Hick 1989: p. 243).

The phrase *postulated by us as a pre-supposition* is strikingly Kantian and leads us to suspect that there is an a priori or transcendentally deductive method at play, and his ambiguity between making an ontological or conceptual distinction is in essence *the same* ambiguity between one and two world interpretations of Kant. Confusingly, on the same page Hick seems to move away from a conceptual presupposition and towards an ontological distinction,

> conflating these two theses one can say that the Real is experienced by human beings, but experienced in a manner analogous to that in which, according to Kant, we experience the world: namely by informational input from external reality being interpreted by the mind in terms of its own categorical scheme and thus coming to consciousness as meaningful phenomenal experience. (Hick 1989: p. 243).

The use of the phrase *informational input from external reality* makes the matter clear – Hick believes that there *is* a mind-independent reality in which the objects of religious experience exist *in and of themselves*, and this is further evidenced by Hick's reference to Information Theory –

> we are speaking of the transmission of information from a transcendent source to the human mind/brain and its transformation by the mind/brain into conscious experience […] The 'presence' of the Real consists in the availability, from a transcendent source, of information that the human mind/brain is capable of transforming into what we call religious experience. (Hick 1989: p. 244).

Hick sides with the view that there *is* a mind-independent reality in which the objects of religious belief are found, and there is also some medium or informational input through which the external objects are detected and perceived. This makes Hick's description of Brahman being the 'phenomenal manifestations of the Real occurring within the realm of religious experience' either a direct contradiction of Advaita Vedanta or a misrepresentation of the Hindu belief as captured by Advaita Vedanta (Hick 1989: p. 246). Just as we observed Buddhism defend itself against the charges of realism by actively attempting to diagnose realism as a cause of the illusion which leads to suffering, the confusion which Hick has with blending the conceptual with the ontological is also addressed by Hindu philosophy, and specifically Shankara's levels of truth.

Shankara explains that 'there is only one Reality, and that any idea that the soul is distinct from this divine Absolute, or that the world is real independently of it, rests upon an illusion' (Smart 1969a: p. 129). Supporters of Advaita Vedanta agree that we experience what *feels* like an external world and that 'it is possible to speak as though the Absolute is the creator of the world, and to worship God as a personal being', but they nonetheless stress that the Enlightened person, who accesses a higher level of truth, realises 'that there is but one divine Reality' (Smart 1969a: p. 129). Echoing this, Radhakrishnan acknowledges that the Advaita Vedantic conception of Brahman is difficult to understand and therefore supports the practical utility of speaking about Brahman as if it is 'God' or a combination of deities (Radhakrishnan 1967: p. 268). That Brahman *is* Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva; Brahman *is* Shakti absolute, and Durga, Parvati and Kali; that we – our atman – is also Brahman. The matter comes down to perspective, as 'the Absolute is the pre-cosmic nature of God, and God is the Absolute from the cosmic point of view', yet *any* suggestion of duality is maya – indeed, the thought that maya is distinct from Brahman *is also illusion* (Radhakrishnan 1967: p. 273) & (Jamison 2006: p. 54). Speaking about Brahman as God(s) is pragmatically useful so long as one recognises that that is *apophatic* speech and so one must remain cautious of the extent and limitations of that use of language and the potential risk that it could begin to develop falsehoods within the speaker (Jamison 2006: pp. 50-51).

S4. C9. Section Conclusion

By arguing that the identity and meaning of religious language is accountable to its association with a mind-independent religious reality which tracks across both religious and host-language diversity, a variation of religious realism was shown as having real theoretical potential in accounting for the identity and meaning of religious language. However, all the variations which we have explored have been shown to be far more revisionary, prescriptive and counter-intuitive than what its theory implied. Religious realism's non-negotiable commitments make its variations more divisive than informative, especially because its truth renders several religions false, and its trilemma raises additional challenges. Religious realism does not have any response beyond doubling-down on its trilemma: if religious realism is true and there is a mind-independent religious reality which confers meaning onto language, then a religion's language is either associated with that reality or it is not, and the religion is either correct or mistaken in its beliefs. Any alternative would render religious realism false, and so if we accept any variation of religious realism then we are forced to say that a language is religious *if and only if* it answers to the realist's requirements, and there is a high probability that many languages fail, and those which succeed are likely in some conflict with one another. We should therefore make a similar judgement: does this show that religious realism is not an ideal account for religious language, or does this show that it is an ideal account and that we should consequently dismiss several religions and their languages as bunk, false and illegitimate?

If religious realism is the broad view that there is a mind-independent religious reality, then *theological* realism would be the narrower explanation for what that reality is like; and for the variations which concern this thesis, the former would be the broad view that there is such a reality which confers a value or meaning onto languages, and the latter would be a specific explanation for what that reality is, how conference occurs, to which languages this happens and how that influences meaning. As such, a religious realist account is in many ways incomplete – it is not sufficient to merely assert that there is some mysterious mind-independent reality which confers a unique domain of meaning onto sentences, one must *demonstrate it as true* and in doing so commit themselves to a particular theological narrative. This likely leads to further problems because if one realist supports Religious Language Internalism, then they are at odds with the Religious Language Externalists; and there could be competing theories within the same religion about the same language. This spotlights the neglected point that a religious realist not only contradicts the anti-realist, but very likely contradicts other realists.

Conceptually speaking, the religious realist must affirm as a fact that there *is* a mind-independent religious reality and so they must also affirm as a fact that there are sentences which successfully reference at least one ontologically objective 'religious reality', but as discussed, this does not mean that the sentence is necessarily religious. If there is *no mind-independent* realm then religious *realism* is false, but if there is a mind-independent realm which is *not religious* then *religious* realism is false. It follows that any belief which rejects the existence of a mind-independent realm is *false* and if that belief was 'religious' then the religious belief is also false; but as it is obvious that rejecting the existence of the mind-independent world would have broad consequences, all such consequences are likewise false – a whole system of thought could be prima facie rejected as false. This becomes a serious problem when applied: as soon as we conceptualise the falsehood of any religious belief which runs contrary to the religious realist's non-negotiable commitments, we immediately realise that several ancient religious traditions and languages would be rendered false, irreligious and bunk.

In theory, a religious realist could avoid this outcome by simultaneously arguing that there is a mind-independent religious reality whilst asserting that there are no sentences or languages which are sufficiently associated with it so to have a religious meaning or value conferred upon them. Where a religious anti-realist *denies* the existence of a mind-independent religious realm and an error theorist believes that such a belief claim is *untrue*, this sort of realist narrowly disagrees with how a language could be religious and whether any succeed. Ultimately, such an argument would fail to apply to the study of religious language meaning because in principle of asserting that there are no sentences which have that domain of meaning conferred upon them, there are no sentences which could have their meaning accountable to those realist terms. This would therefore bring the discussion back a few paces and requires us to ask how they distinguish religious from nonreligious sentences, especially as they do not believe that there are any religious sentences in existence.

This leads to the conclusion that if religious realism is the true account for what religious language is and what its sentences mean then we are always either right or wrong when we identify a sentence as religious, and every religious belief is also either right or wrong; and due to the vast diversity of religious beliefs, we *know that most of us are wrong most of the time*. This is unsatisfactory for several reasons. First, it would only be an account *if* we were to agree that there currently is a mind-independent religious reality which many nonreligious philosophers would reject. Even then, we know that we are forced to make a theological realist commitment when we assert that religious realism is factually true in respect to this world, and this unavoidably leads to

the view that almost every religious belief and religious language is false and fraudulent. Second, we know that there are several world religions which not only reject the existence of a mind-independent realm (and are therefore wrong), but which cannot be represented through that sort of dialectic. At the most extreme, a religious realist can treat this as further evidence for the religion's meaninglessness, but a more reflective and sensitive attitude would see it for what it is – colonialization. Finally, the fact that religious realists like Hick try to defend the meaningfulness of religious languages found in Hinduism and Buddhism implies that they are aware, and wish to avoid the consequence of, the prescriptive, revisionary and non-inclusive tone of religious realism.

But this cannot be done. One cannot ignore nor talk their way around the vivid contradiction of religious realism's assertion of a mind-independent realm and the Hindu and Buddhist who reject this. If the purpose of studying religious language is to understand the nature of religious belief as expressed by the believers, then we cannot *force them into saying something else* and should instead accept that their rejection of realism is indicative of them being very different to what we usually take a religion as being like. Hence how religious realism is unavoidably revisionary and prescriptive, and therefore an unacceptable solution to the challenges raised in this thesis.

Section Five – Thesis Conclusion

This thesis began with the observation that the study of religious language is composed of two parts – what religious language is and what its sentences mean – and despite a satisfactory answer to the second requiring a satisfying answer to the first, the dominant approaches within the contemporary study leapfrog over the first and dive straight into the second. The motivation for this is accountable to two factors: most of the philosophers who discuss religious language often do so as a means to a further end – they study religious language to better understand the nature of religious beliefs; second, it is taken for granted that what a religious sentence is is so obvious and self-evident that it goes without saying, and so nothing is really said about it at all. In consequence, religious sentences are taken as being ones which posit a religious entity or property, and the overall aim for the study is to develop a general account for the meaning of those sentences which will include details about truth-aptness, truth-conditions, truth-status, and referring expressions. This was deemed to be a problem.

It is hard to imagine how a robust account for the meaning of religious language could apply to token languages and sentences while remaining silent about *how* they are religious and *how* they have been detected. At the very least, we need to find token sentences if we are going to study whether they are cognitive or non-cognitive, but this supposes that we can accurately identify them. We therefore need *some limited idea* about what a religious sentence is, and so we can broadly take the view that a religious sentence is a sentence which has a clear association with religious belief and practice such as seen through what it posits, its attitudes, its context etc. However, if religious language is accountable to cognitivism, for example, then it would be an error to call "do not kill" a religious sentence because the sentence is not cognitive. Here we find that the sorts of sentences which we call religious link with the sorts of accounts which we form for their meaning, and although we must start the study with some limited idea, we must be careful to not *beg any questions or rig any games*. The contemporary study wants to know *how* religious languages and sentences mean what they mean, as opposed to simply knowing *what* they mean. For example, the study would not be satisfactorily addressed by a list of sentences and interpretations, instead, the study wants to know *how it is the case that* a token sentence means a particular thing and therefore seeks out a general account for their meaning which can be applied to a range of utterances. Similarly, this thesis proposes that the study should seek a general account for *how* a language or sentence is religious. We should not be satisfied with a list of sentences which have been traditionally treated as 'religious' without any further exploration or examination, and should

instead want an account for *how* a language or sentence can be called religious which we can pick up and apply to other examples in the world. This led us to the *field linguist paradox* and the *problem of the criterion*, where the former demonstrates the problem with expecting a religiously illiterate person to be able to identify a religious language by recognising that it is associated with something religious, and the latter highlights the problem with presupposing knowledge about the identity of religious language in the act of testing whether a proposed account for its identity is true. Consequently, although it is intuitive that the study's object language is associated with what we generally take as being religion, it is difficult to build a sophisticated and *thick* philosophical study of religious language on the view that a religious language can be identified through knowledge or skills which can only come about after having understood the language. But as we seek an account which applies to how we currently use the term 'religious language', we must consider how we can commonly pick out similar sentences and call them religious.

If we cannot work out what *we mean* by the term 'religious language' then it's obvious that the foundations and legitimacy of the study will be jeopardised – a study of language without a clear object language is hardly a study at all. The agreement that 'religious language' and 'religious sentence' are metalanguage referring expressions implies that the study intends to target *that* which is referred to as opposed to the action or method behind the referencing; and yet, we have more reason than ever to suspect that the two cannot be separated. Hence the *problem* of the study of religious language being that it focuses on what religious language means to the near total neglect of what a religious language is and what we mean by 'religious language'. As the semantic value of a referring expression is reducible to the function of designation, then any indicative referring expression which *fails* to pick out an object consequently fails to gain the semantic value of a referring expression. Those sorts of referring expressions are said to be *empty* because they do not carry and therefore do not introduce an object into the sentences in which they feature, therefore if the study of religious language is meant to be a study of the objects which these referring expressions carry, then the prospect of having empty names translates into having an empty study. This effective pulling of the rug from beneath the study's feet is something which we would want to avoid, but its potential truth must not be lost sight of.

As we broadly agree that some languages and sentences warrant referring to as 'religious', then it is obvious that a detailed study of how we make that judgement is not simply useful, but the proper starting place for any study of religious language. With that in mind, we went on to ask about the type of referring expression which 'religious language' constitutes because knowing whether it is a

common or a proper name, a definite description or rigid designation, possessive of a sense or is a disguised description, allows us to make further inferences about what *we mean* by our use of the term. If it is a rigid designation, then we know that the need for a clear object is essential for its semantic value, whilst knowing that it is a common name which is descriptive allows us to know that the name maintains semantic value even if there are no actual objects which fit its description. After all, the semantic value of a common name is attributable to its description of a type rather than designation of an individual, and so it can offer a description whilst standing as a symbol in representation of those objects which fit the description. If the term is reducible to Causal Accounts and baptismal events, then we face the real possibility of the study being a study of *whatever we happen to gesture towards* – each use of the term 'religious language' is a naming ceremony, and so every study could have its own object language. This is a serious possibility, and we do not avoid the need to give this sort of detail if we were to adopt a Description Account because this requires us to *describe* the referent. If we knew that 'religious language' was a Russellian disguised description then we have good reason to suspect that the term is describing what an object must be like to warrant being its referent, but if we took it as a Millian proper name then it could literally be the name of *anything whatsoever*. After further consideration, we concluded that there is no clear or decisive answer in this respect, and that it is possible, if not likely, that a combination of things cooccur.

Although we struggle to identify the exact category of referring expression which the term constitutes, we are nonetheless advancing the underlying view that the study of religious language must begin with a study of the metalanguage which uses it as a referring expression. We know that we are willing to use the term in reference to a vast variety of diverse religions and host-languages, and so if there is an object being referenced then it must be able to apply across this diversity. This brought attention to how the sociology of religion asks similar questions and faces similar problems – to ask about the 'religious stuff' of language is to ask about the 'stuff' of religion. Some sociologists go into intricate detail about what the 'stuff' of religion is whilst others think that it is so self-evident and obvious that it goes without saying, and some even question whether it makes sense to speak of 'religious stuff' in the first instance. The contemporary study of religious language appears to take the religious 'stuff' of sentences for granted and assumes that we can all identify them when we see them, but this is a blunder because it gives room for miscommunications to develop which often fly below the radar. It may turn out that there is no 'real object' being referenced which we can intuitively detect and gesture, but that the object is instead a grammatical construction which is mistakenly treated as something ontologically distinct.

This led to the outcome of knowing that the study of religious language acts as if there is some commonly understood object being referenced by the metalanguage term 'religious language', and that there is an underlying assumption that this object language is so obvious and self-evident that we can spot it without needing to know extensive details about it. This, though, is revealed to be a blunder. If there is no object then there is no consistent target of the study, if there is no referent then our referring expressions might be empty and subsequently our metalanguage sentences semantically senseless. Whatever the 'religious stuff' of language is, it needs to be something which can transfer across religious and host-language diversity, and this is no meagre task. An ideal solution could come from a variation of religious realism which proposes that there is something 'real' and 'discoverable' about the object language which we can identify and track across religious and host-language diversity.

By asserting the mind-independent existence of a religious reality which confers a unique meaning or value onto sentences, some variations of religious realism combine what a religious language is with what religious language means – a religious language is one which has a unique domain of meaning which is accountable to its association with an actual mind-independent reality. As there is a variety of ways for how a language could be associated with such a reality, religious realism appears to be broad, flexible and therefore able to cater for religious diversity. All modes of religious realism in terms of religious language fall under two categories – the *ontology* of language (realists and nominalists) and the *location* of the 'religious stuff' of language (Internalists and Externalists) – and this appears to capture all possible combinations for all possible religions. Where Scott adopts the terms 'entities' and 'properties', we can expand this scope and speak of a 'religious reality', which means to capture the *stuff* of these entities and properties which make them 'religious'. Thus, the claim that the objects of religious belief exist mind-independently (be them entities or properties) allows for the provision of a discoverable explanation suitable for the field linguist – a religious realist of this ilk could literally *show* the 'stuff' of religion and religious language. Despite its intuitive and theoretical appeal, all variations of religious realism ultimately fall short of this thesis's challenges and goals, and this is first hinted by its non-negotiable commitments contradicting several world religions, and the fact that if a religious reality did exist, then most religious realists would be wrong most of the time.

As religious realism is the broad claim that there is a mind-independent reality whilst *theological* realism is the narrower account of that reality, then despite all theological realists agreeing about

religious realism, not all religious realists theologically agree about that reality. Specifically, if a variation of religious realism is true – that there is a mind-independent religious reality which accounts for all object languages which warrant referencing as 'religious language' – then all religions and philosophies which disagree are prima facie false and do not possess *genuine* religious languages. Furthermore, all religions and philosophies which prima facie agree with religious realism have only the appearance of agreement, for there is still plenty of disagreement in the theologies of Realism and Nominalism, Internalism and Externalism, host-languages and object languages. In any case, the baggage which comes with religious realism is unacceptable: it would exclude and dismiss more religions and languages than it could ever account for, and even if it were true, it is at odds with the fact that we currently reference languages 'religious' which couldn't possibly be religious under realism. Many of us would be unwilling to pay this price, and concluding that all variations of religious realism fail to account for religious language does not mean that anti, non, or irrealism succeed.

If a field linguist's familiarity with a host-language allows them to notice that their surface grammar understanding of a sentence fails to provide them with the same degree of meaning as what the speaker seems to understand themselves as meaning – such as with Lesnick – then the solution to religious language identity and meaning appears to be grammatical and not ontological (unless the two are the same). Where the central non-negotiable commitments of religious realism falsify those religions which do not accept realism, a religious anti-realist position renders realist religions false. Moving from one ontological extreme to the other makes the same sorts of mistakes because it falsifies several religions and leaves us unsure as for why and whether we think that their languages warrant referral to as 'religious'. Affirming or denying the existence of a mind-independent religious reality does not address the *religious domain of meaning as experienced*. There either is or there is not a mind-independent religious reality, and if someone asserts that its presence (realism) or absence (anti-realism) *matters* for our identification and understanding of religious language, then it must be shown that

> the state in which the universe would be if the putative assertion could correctly be said to be true differs in some experienceable way from the state in which the universe would be if the putative assertion could correctly be said to be false, all aspects of the universe other than that referred to in the putative assertion being the same in either case. (Hick 1960: p. 12, ft. 1).

If religious realism or anti-realism was relevant for the identity and meaning of religious languages and sentences, then it must be shown that there would be an experienceable difference to religious

language in a realist world as opposed to an anti-realist world. If there is no experienceable difference then we should conclude that either eventuality has no bearing on our study, and until it is obvious that there would be a difference and it is clear which of the two is true for this world, then we should argue that religious realism has not met its own verification standards. Moreover, if this world is not evidently realist or anti-realist and it's also not obvious that that makes a difference for religious language, then we should attempt to find an account which has as few ontological commitments as possible. Surface and depth grammar fits this requirement.

This thesis proposed an alternative approach which could account for both the identity and meaning of religious language whilst accommodating for our metalanguage use of the term 'religious language' – our know-how of surface grammar lets us notice when sentences appear to capture a domain of meaning which we are failing to grasp, and we call this depth grammar. A surface grammar reading of 'Jesus died for your sins', for example, informs us that the purpose behind the death of someone (or perhaps, something) was involved with something called 'sins', but our lack of knowledge-that 'Jesus' and 'sins' mean such and such detriments our ability to make sense of the sentence. However, simply being aware of the story of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection etc., is not the same sort of understanding which at least some people possess, and there is a significant gap between this religious understanding and the nonreligious understanding. There is more to understand than what a surface reading reveals and the gap between the two understandings is not determinable to matter of fact beliefs, metaphysics or ontology, but to a qualitative depth of meaning captured by an identifiable depth grammar, and there are several indications of this being the case. Firstly, religious sentences are often spoken in unusual ways which set them apart from other ordinary expressions. People 'confess' their belief in Christ, and one does not usually *confess* straight-forward factual beliefs such as one's belief that Pythagoras was Greek. Secondly, and more complexly, there appears to be a whole world of meaning beyond the surface grammar – it isn't just the occasional sentence or odd performative speech-act which catches us out, it's seeing wine and crackers as the blood and flesh of God, which is lost on us. This kind of difference is not a rational or analytic blunder, as if we are failing to *look closely enough* at the crackers and the wine; the difference is that we don't even know *how to look* – we are convinced that we are blind but have no idea what it is that we cannot see, what it means to see, and how and whether we should come to see it. But we must stress that this does not require us to believe or disbelieve in some magical language which MacIntyre and Alston are opposed to, rather it comes down to a matter of perspective as observed in Lesnick's judgements.

Which is more likely: that billions of otherwise level-headed people are part of an ancient joke designed to fool the minority of people that certain objects like crackers and wine are *more* than that, or that these people are genuinely seeing and experiencing something different than nonbelievers, irrespective to whether they are seeing a hidden truth or a socially constructed illusion? The thought that every religious person is consciously and actively trying to deceive a minority of nonreligious people is that implausible that it enters the territory of delusion – only the delusional would sooner accept such a global conspiracy than accept that they are not accessing a domain of meaning which others are. Religious people are not lying when they report seeing what they take to be the handiwork of God any more than a schizophrenic is lying when they report hearing voices or seeing strange objects. It is of course important to discuss whether there are mind-independent objects or realities behind these experiences, but that is a separate discussion to the one about the *fact* of having that kind of experience in the first instance. Assuming that we all experience mind-independent and mind-dependent objects and that each type of experience has more or less similar degrees of importance, then it seems that our experience and understanding of religious language is less dependent on ontology than what we may at first think. The meaning of religious language must be accountable to its own terms within the *emic* context of the speaker's community, and if we agree that there are thousands of logically incompatible religious beliefs and, under some variations of religious realism, incompatible languages, which are nevertheless equally legitimate and meaningful, then we also know that a robust account for religious language will not require revisionary or prescriptive talk about realism or anti-realism. Indeed, 'theological non-realism is as empty as theological realism. Both terms are battle cries in a confused philosophical and theological debate' (D. Z. Phillips 1993: p. 35).

This thesis claimed that the study of religious language has two topics of discussion, the first being about the *identity* of religious language and the second being about the *meaning* of religious language. The contemporary study of religious language aims to develop an account for the meaning of those sentences which the study customarily takes as being religious, and it places very little attention on the religious identity of a language or sentence. It was suggested that the study might be able to form a better account for the meaning of religious language if it had a better account for the identity of religious language, and so an alternative approach was proposed which attempts to provide an account for both the identity and meaning of religious language by examining *what we mean* by the term 'religious language'. This revealed that the term 'religious language' is used as a metalanguage referring expression towards utterances which appear to have more meaning than what a surface grammar interpretation can access, and once explored, they are

seen to possess a unique domain of meaning. There does not appear to be something metaphysically or ontologically true to this domain of meaning which makes it discernibly religious, rather the domain of meaning is a common aspect of the human condition and religion is the system of thought, practice and language which develops around it. It is proposed that the religious domain of meaning which is captured in some sentences is done so through depth grammar, and our ability to intuit a sentence as having a depth of meaning which our surface grammar reading is failing to access is part of the process of identifying a religious sentence. The identity of a religious sentence is thereby caught up with its meaning because its meaning is captured by its identifiable depth grammar. Therefore, 'religious language' refers to the stock of phrases, linguistic devices, words, metaphors etc., which are used to capture and evoke a *depth* of meaning which becomes the defining emic element of what a religion is. The success of this thesis is not measured by whether the reader agrees with this description of religious language, but instead by whether this thesis gives sufficient cause for the scholar to pause and reconsider the study's methodology. It is of my opinion that this thesis provides overwhelming reason for why we should reconsider the current study of religious language, and it is my hope that in doing so we shall come to see what is already laid out before us – that there is a depth of meaning to being religious and there is a depth of meaning to religious language, and if we are to discern the meaning of the latter then we must learn to see like the former.

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