TOWARD A

THOMISTIC THEORY

OF

MEANING

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by
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REFERENCE
DO NOT CIRCULATE
# Toward A Thomistic Theory of Meaning

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OUTLINE

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CONCLUSION
INTRODUCTION

Tertullian made the now famous and often quoted cry that is supposed to offer a theological shield when the philosophical fire becomes too hot, "What has Jerusalem to do with Athens, the Church with the Academy, the Christian with the heretic? . . . After Jesus Christ we have no need of speculation, after the Gospel no need of research."1 Obviously Tertullian brings all of his philosophical acumen to bear upon the question of heresy. As observed in an article concerning him, Tertullian was a "man of vast erudition, [who] employed the classical rhetorical arts and freely cited Greek and Latin authors, although he disclaimed a reliance on Greek philosophy."2 Theologians constantly employ their philosophical presuppositions in the midst of theological and biblical research and writing. Philosophical presuppositions are operative in the Calvinist as well as the Classical theist.

The relevance of a study of the nature, causes and locus of meaning to biblical hermeneutics is prompted by just such attitudes as are reflected in Tertullian's admonition. Indeed, what has Jerusalem to do with Athens? What difference does it make what philosophers are saying about the nature of meaning? What significance can their comments have for biblical interpretation?

Such questions are easily answered by simply pointing out the scores of books which bear such titles as Theology and Philosophical Inquiry, New Essays in Philosophical Theology, Meaning and Understanding, The Word of God and the Mind of Man, The Handmaid to Theology, etc. Each of these books deals with philosophical issues as they touch on theological inquiry and the interpretation of the Scriptures.


The influence of philosophy is seen in such statements as the following.

We need fully to recognize that our reading of the letter to Philemon (or whatever), however certain we may feel it is what Paul meant, is actually only a hypothesis—our hypothesis—about the discourse meaning. It is the result of seeing certain aspects of the text and of providing what we understand to be the meaning that provides coherence to the evidence.³

Anyone familiar with contemporary Literary Criticism will immediately recognize the post-structuralist use of the word "reading" in the above quote. This assertion seems to presuppose a definite philosophy of hermeneutics. If it is true that "our reading of the letter to Philemon (or whatever)," is in fact "actually only a hypothesis—our hypothesis—about the discourse meaning," then how can it be known that our reading is hypothetical unless someone possesses a non-hypothetical reading against which we may judge all other readings to be hypothetical? This quote exhibits the fallacy of the lost distinction. Since every reading is only "our hypothesis," then against what are we distinguishing these readings? Do these authors assume they possess the non-hypothetical reading from which they are able to judge the readings of everyone else. Nevertheless, these considerations are ultimately philosophical issues.

Or again, in a recent book by a well respected conservative author we find another instance of the influence of philosophy. After a very helpful historical survey of the various systems of literary criticism, the author makes the following claim:

If literature is an act of communication, then meaning resides in the intention of the author. The author has encoded a message for the readers. Interpretation then has as its goal the recovery of the author's purpose in writing.⁴


This quote emphasizes the intimate connection of an understanding of the causes and locus of meaning, and the interpretation of a given passage. An author has encoded within the text a message, but is interpretation an effort to discover the author's purpose, or is it an effort to discover the meaning of the text? Are these the same? If literature is communication, then it seems that the meaning must also be in what is communicated, not only in who communicated it.

The purpose of these examples is to illustrate that philosophy plays an important role in hermeneutics. A few observations will demonstrate that the above examples are philosophical in nature. As for the first quotation, the idea of a "discourse meaning" is not an idea that is taught in Scripture. This is not to say that it is either right or wrong, but simply to point out that it is a philosophical rather than a properly biblical category. The author's philosophy of textual meaning has significantly shaped his hermeneutics. As to the second quotation, there is no passage of the Bible that teaches the idea that the meaning of a text is in the intention of the author. Again, the fact that it is not taught in the Bible does not indicate that it is either a good or a bad concept, but simply demonstrates that it is philosophical, not theological. Clearly, the author's philosophical concept of the relation between thought and word has shaped his view of the goal of hermeneutics. In each case the author's philosophy was developed in a direction that determined how he would address a passage of literature in order to discover its meaning. As J. P. Moreland has pointed out,

philosophy often functions as, among other things, a second-order discipline. For example, biology is a first-order discipline that studies living organisms, but philosophy is a second-order discipline that studies biology. In general, it is possible to have a philosophy of \( x \), where \( x \) can be any discipline whatever, for example, law, mathematics, education, science, government, medicine, history or literature [and we can add hermeneutics]. When philosophers examine another discipline to formulate a philosophy of that discipline, they ask normative questions about that discipline, analyze and
criticize the assumptions underlying it, clarify the concepts within it, and integrate that discipline with other fields. Clearly the above quotes are second-order propositions made about the first order discipline of hermeneutics. They are not themselves interpretations of passages. Rather, they are philosophical claims concerning the principles of interpretation.

Similar examples are many and readily available. For better or worse philosophy influences how we interpret the Bible. As one critic of the Christian faith put it, "The real intellectual difficulty for the believer or would-be believer is not the problem of proof but the problem of meaning. The characteristic propositions of religion seem to me to be meaningless." Whether this is an accurate appraisal or not is another question, but it does illustrate how much influence philosophy has had upon theology and hermeneutics.

In his book Has the Church Misread the Bible?, Moises Silva devotes several pages to the relationship between philosophy and hermeneutics. One section in particular is concerned with the impact of the thinking of Immanuel Kant on nineteenth-century biblical interpretation."Earlier in this book Silva observes how Analytic Philosophy has brought about "an almost complete reorientation of the way 'one does philosophy' in Britain and America." This widely influential philosophy proposes that "the real business of philosophy [is] not to build speculative systems


8. Silva, Has the Church Misread the Bible?, p. 5.
but simply to analyze the way language is used."

This emphasis upon the analysis of language, as Silva points out, has had a tremendous impact upon biblical hermeneutics. The central question in linguistic analysis is the problem of meaning, or, "What does it mean to mean?"

The impact of philosophy upon biblical interpretation is beyond dispute. But there seem to be as many philosophical positions as there are philosophers, and many of these positions seem to be diametrically opposed and mutually exclusive--such as Platonism and Thomism, or Realism and Nominalism. Consequently, every position cannot be right. Accordingly, this present study will examine some philosophical foundations of the nature of meaning upon which competing principles of biblical interpretation are constructed in an effort to contrast these proposals with a Thomistic theory.

Although there are many books and articles dealing with issues related to the nature of meaning, the causes and locus of meaning, and the acquisition of meaning, this study will be directed toward a presentation of a Thomistic theory of the metaphysical basis of meaning, and how this theory attempts to ground linguistic meaning in being. Ultimately the implication of this is that meaning is based upon the nature of God. Accordingly, the theory presented in this paper will advocate a relationship between communication and understanding that is analogous to the relationship between creation and knowledge.

9. Silva, Has the Church Misread the Bible, p. 5.
PART I:

THE NATURE OF MEANING: A THOMISTIC EVALUATION OF PROPOSALS

Introduction

The many and varied theories of the nature of meaning express part of the philosophical systems of the theorists. From the Thomistic perspective, what anyone claims about the nature and function of linguistic signs is related to his epistemology, which in turn is founded upon considerations of metaphysics. In other words, for the Thomistic philosopher, to talk about reality involves knowing reality. To know reality involves an attempt to understand the nature of reality. This perspective is illustrated in the chart in Figure 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HERMENEUTICS</th>
<th>How do we understand what is communicated?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LINGUISTICS</td>
<td>How do we communicate what we know?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EPISTEMOLOGY</td>
<td>How do we know that which is?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>METAPHYSICS</td>
<td>What is that which is?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REALITY</td>
<td>That which is!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1: Relation of Disciplines

On the basis of this perspective, an investigation of alternate proposals of the nature of meaning will briefly consider the epistemology and the metaphysics of a given system in order to understand that theory.

Philosophical systems can be grouped together according to different criteria. When considered from a Thomistic perspective, philosophical systems can be grouped together in the following manner. Epistemologically, they seem to fall into three broad classes, Idealism, Realism, or some combination of these two to
form a Dualism. The various idealistic systems are united in what Andrew Reck calls a "core ontology—that mind, or spirit, is ultimate. . . . the idealists maintain that from mind all else is derived; within mind all else dwells."¹ Realism, as an epistemological system asserts that external reality is directly knowable and exists apart from any perception of it. Dualism in its most popular form is the representative perception or ‘copy theory’ of knowledge. Norman Geisler gives a succinct description of this class of dualism.

This form of dualism recognizes two distinct and independent orders of existence. First of all there are ideas, that is impressions or sense data which are the immediate objects of perception . . . Second, there is an independent and external world which we infer as the cause of the sense data perceived by our consciousness.²

Ontologically, philosophical systems are divided with reference to the question of universals and particulars. Concerning this question, philosophical systems may be divided into two broad categories, Nominalism and Realism. "Nominalism maintains that only particulars exist in reality . . . "³ Extreme Nominalism asserts that universals are merely words. Concept Nominalism, sometimes known merely as Conceptualism, holds that universals exist as concepts in the mind, but that only particulars exist in reality.

In the context of these broad divisions among philosophical systems, the chart in Figure 2 below will help to illustrate the


2. Norman L. Geisler, and Paul D. Feinberg, Introduction to Philosophy (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), p. 135. Geisler also expounds the phenomenalism of A. J. Ayer as a second type of dualism. Since the arguments directed at the "copy theory" dualism apply with equal force to phenomenalism, and since, as Geisler observes (p. 143), "Ayer does not now, nor did he ever, have a large following for his form of epistemology," we will not deal directly with this system.

Figure 2: Relation of Philosophical Systems
relationships between these systems as considered from the Thomistic perspective. This chart is not designed to be exhaustive, but to organize the presentation of this paper as it touches upon the relation between the problem of meaning and these broad divisions.

To explain the logic of this chart, we begin with the existence of something. The assertion that something exists is undeniable because, in order to deny that something exists, the one making the denial must exist. But this raises questions about that-which-is. Either that-which-is is in the mind, or it is apart from the mind, or both. Generally speaking, the view that that-which-is is in the mind is called Idealism. Realism, on the other hand, posits the existence of an external reality that is independent of the mind, but is knowable. The view that reality exists both in the mind and apart from the mind in some way is called Dualism. Dualism proposes either the existence of two realities, one outside the mind, the other in the mind, as in the "copy theory," or, as in the Phenomenalism of A. J. Ayer, the existence of external reality is left as an open question. Ultimately, either reality exists outside the mind or it does not. The question of dualism can be dealt with in a consideration of Idealism and Realism. If reality exists only in the mind, then Dualism is eliminated along with Realism. If reality exists outside the mind, then Idealism is eliminated, and Dualism can be considered as a possible modification of Realism. Therefore, for our purposes we will narrow the epistemological choices in the beginning to Idealism or Realism.

If that-which-is exists is only in the mind, then it must partake of the nature of the mind. This is Idealism. If, however, reality exists apart from the mind, then another question arises, namely, what is this external reality? Either external reality exists only as particular things, or it does not. If reality is

only particular things, then there are no universals. This is Extreme Nominalism. If, on the other hand, reality exists as universals and particulars, then another question arises, namely, where are these universals? Either the universals are only in the mind, or not. If universals are only in the mind, then they are not in the external reality. This is Concept Nominalism. On the other hand, if universals also exist in external reality, or if they are somehow grounded in external reality, then another question arises, namely, how do the universals exist in external reality? Either they exist apart from individual things or not. If they exist apart from individual things, then they are not in the material realm of particulars. This is Transcendental or Platonic Realism. However, if they exist in the individuals, or are somehow grounded in the individuals, then there must be some universal or common aspect to individual things. This is Thomistic Realism.

These brief and general observations have been presented in an effort to provided some basic direction for a consideration of some of the various views of meaning that have been proposed. In line with these observations, this investigation will attempt to deal with the nature of meaning as it is articulated in accordance with the three major divisions which result from the above considerations. Epistemologically, we will discuss meaning from the point of view of Idealism and Realism. Ontologically, we will consider meaning as it is based upon Nominalism and Realism.

One assumption of this paper is that theories of meaning are based upon either some form of Idealism or Realism. This implies that various forms of nominalism will ultimately be associated with epistemological Idealism, as the dotted lines in the chart indicate. As Etienne Gilson has described,

Essentially, it consists in a considered choice between two possible methods, Aristotle's and Descartes'. Either one begins with being, in which thought is included—ab esse ad
nose valet consequentia; or one starts from thought, in which being is included—a nose ad esse valet consequentia.  

One purpose of this investigation is to present an evaluation of these theories in an effort to contrast them with the Thomistic theory. This paper takes the position that meaningful communication can be adequately accounted for from the Thomistic Realist perspective.

In order to conduct this investigation in its proper relation, the first section will deal with what this author identifies as the problem of meaning. The survey will then present various proposed solutions to the problem. This investigation will begin with a consideration of Idealism, continue with an inquiry into Nominalism and will conclude with a consideration of Extreme Realism. Each section in Part I will include an exposition of the broad category, such as Idealism generally, to be followed by an investigation of a representative historical or contemporary individual or individuals in that general category, and reasons for including that person in the respective category. Some classifications will be less controversial, and some more. None of the classifications should be considered as necessary beyond the confines of this paper, and are based upon the perspective of the author. The purpose of considering these various proposals about the problem of meaning is to present the view that Idealism, Nominalism, and Extreme Realism compose the logical alternatives to Moderate or Thomistic Realism, but do not offer an adequate explanation of the nature of meaning. Consequently, the Realist perspective is considered to be the only alternative that adequately accounts for the fact of meaningful communication, and therefore provides a foundation upon which the many and varied problems in hermeneutics may find solutions.

5. Etienne Gilson, Methodical Realism (Front Royal, Virginia: Christendom Press, 1990), p. 115. "it is valid to infer knowing from being," "it is valid to infer being from knowing."
Moderate or Thomistic Realism will be discussed at length in part II. The structure of Part II will follow the relationship of the disciplines as illustrated in Figure 1, beginning with Metaphysics and proceeding through Epistemology, Linguistics and concluding with Hermeneutics. The discussions of these various parts of the total theory form a presentation of a Thomistic point of view. It is not presumed that this presentation would necessarily be acceptable as a paradigm for Thomistic philosophers, but it is believed to at least be in harmony with a traditional interpretation of the philosophical system known as Existential Thomistic Realism as expounded by such Thomistic scholars as Etienne Gilson, Jacques Maritain, Anton Pegis, Louis Regis and others.
CHAPTER 1
Identification of the Problem of Meaning

I. Recognizing the problem

In the abundance of material on meaning, it seems to have become almost an academic requirement to acknowledge the fact that "the noun 'meaning' and the verb 'to mean' themselves have many distinguishable meanings."¹ In his article entitled "The Problem of Meaning," John A. Oesterle observes, "The English word 'meaning' has a peculiar ambiguity which has been to a considerable extent the source of confusion in the many studies recently published on 'meaning'"² In an article appearing in The Monist in 1936, Leo Abraham observed, "Like many other philosophical terms 'meaning' is extraordinarily ambiguous. Its radical ambiguity may most readily be indicated by the following group of more than fifty typical quotations from philosophical and psychological writers, in each of which the term 'meaning' is used in a different sense."³

There certainly is no lack of proposals for identifying the nature of meaning. J. P. Louw identifies meaning as a set of relations.

Though we generally, in everyday language, speak of "the meaning(s) of a word" or of "a word having a meaning," . . . meaning is not a "possession," that is, something which a word has, but that meaning is a set of relations for which a verbal symbol is a sign, a point strongly advocated by Nida . . . ⁴

According to Ogden and Richards, words do not have meanings.

Words, as everyone knows, "mean" nothing by themselves, although the belief that they did . . . was once equally universal. It is only when a thinker makes use of them that


they stand for anything, or, in one sense, have 'meaning.' They are instruments.\(^5\) Another proposal asserts that in fact words do have meaning, but that meaning is in "the intention of the user."\(^6\) Contrary to this is the assertion that "... the exegete should not necessarily restrict the meaning of the text to what he feels can be demonstrated to be the intention of the human author."\(^7\)

Ferdinand de Saussure, widely considered to be the father of modern linguistics, understands meaning to be a system of values. He states, "When we speak of the value of a word, we generally think first of its property of standing for an idea. ... Language is a system of interdependent terms in which the value of each term results solely from the simultaneous presence of the other ..."\(^8\) Saussure specifically rejects the idea that language is a nomenclature which he defines as "a naming-process only--a list of words, each corresponding to the thing that it names."\(^9\)

Pythagoras was one of the first philosophers to propose that language is a nomenclature. "According to Pythagoras, the soul gives names to things."\(^10\) Aristotle countered this claim by proposing that linguistic signs are "signs of passions in the soul ... but the passions of the soul, of which vocal sounds are the

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first signs, are the same for all . . . "11 In his commentary on Aristotle's *Peri Hermeneias* [On Interpretation], Aquinas expounds upon Aristotle's proposal.

"[P]assions in the soul" must be understood here as conceptions of the intellect, and names, verbs, and speech, signify these conceptions of the intellect immediately according to the teaching of Aristotle. They cannot immediately signify things, as is clear from the mode of signifying, for the name "man" signifies human nature in abstraction from singulars; hence it is impossible that it immediately signify a singular man.12

On the other side of the philosophical spectrum, Plato held that language, "connects us across the limbo from this absolute reality [of 'forms' and 'ideas'] to its shadowy reflection, which is the familiar everyday world in which mortals live."13

In more recent times, Reader Response hermeneutics has proposed that the meaning of a text is supplied by the reader, not by the author or the text. Deconstructionist hermeneutics asserts that meaning is not determinate, but is "always deferred, or delayed."14 Then there are the text-based theories of meaning, and various literary critical methods about which Jonathan Culler comments,

Once upon a time it might have been possible to think of criticism as a single activity practiced with different emphases. The acrimony of recent debate suggests the contrary: the field of criticism is contentiously constituted by apparently incompatible activities. Even to attempt a


list—structuralism, reader-response criticism, deconstructionism, Marxist criticism, pluralism, feminist criticism, semiotics, psychoanalytic criticism, hermeneutics, antithetical criticism, Rezeptionsästhetik...--is to flirt with an unsettling glimpse of the infinite that Kant calls the "mathematical sublime."...most readers are only baffled or thwarted....

The problem of meaning is found in every discipline that seeks to communicate its findings and proposals by means of words and texts. Catherine Belsey notes, "On the evidence of this issue of New Literary History, the central problem of literary theory is the problem of meaning." A major philosophical movement known as Analytic Philosophy is predicated upon the problem of language and meaning and has met with wide acceptance in the philosophical world in recent years. It appears as if the pursuit of the nature of meaning is fraught with a wide variety of conflicting viewpoints, and a disturbing amount of confusion.

The problem of meaning is also complicated by the fact that discussion is carried out on at least two levels, the word and the text. As conventional signs, words "cannot be expected to give their meaning, since there is that arbitrariness about words." Unlike smoke which signifies fire regardless of the linguistic community to which the observer belongs, a word does not yield its meaning by means of any natural relation between the sign and what is signified. Even onomatopoetic expressions employ conventional linguistic signs, the characters of which are taken from a given language in an attempt to linguistically symbolize a sound or noise.


The problem of meaning is also encountered on the level of the text, that is, a group of words syntactically arranged by an author for the purpose of communicating meaning. This level of the problem is considerably more complicated in that there are a number of factors involved, in addition to individual words, by which the meaning of a text is communicated. Some of these factors are grammar, context, considerations of synonymy, historical background, culture, and biographical information about the author.

In addition to these factors, the researcher finds himself in a unique situation when analyzing meaning. Amid the constant interaction among and within the various disciplines, and amid the varieties of theories offered by such schools as deconstructionism, structuralism, behaviorism, etc., one simple fact remains unaltered. Of necessity, each theorist who seeks to present his views on the nature of meaning relies on the possibility of meaningful communication in order to communicate his theories. As Oesterle has pointed out, "We at least have to know what they mean even if we are trying to find out the meaning of 'meaning.'"18 The unique situation in the problem of meaning is that the interaction and discussion concerning the problem must take place within the confines of the very area which is purported to be problematic. Regardless of the position one takes on the nature of meaning, everyone operates as if expressing and understanding meaning is at least a possibility. This simple observation seems to demonstrate one inescapable point. As Mortimer Adler has put it, "It is either a fact or an illusion that men, using language, are able to converse or discourse with one another about matters that are public, not private."19


II. Clarifying the problem

The fact that such confusion about the nature of meaning seems to prevail in the very midst of the abundance of meaningful, daily communication points out the need for some distinctions. There is a difference between the problem of meaning that involves the difficulties of making one's thoughts understood, and the problem of meaning that involves explaining the nature of meaning itself. One need not be able to explain the nature of meaning in order to communicate meaningfully. For thousands of years people have meant things, and other people have understood what was meant. Similarly, we need not explain the physiology of walking in order to walk, or the nature of love in order to love. To require a comprehensive theory of meaning as a prerequisite to meaningful communication is comparable to requiring a "watertight theory of how knowledge of God is possible before we can allow ourselves the luxury of knowing Him."20 In addition to the fact that this is counter to our experience, it is also self-defeating. To attempt to construct a theory of how we know God presupposes that knowledge of God is at least possible. But to assume that knowledge of God is possible presupposes at least a basic knowledge of God, that is, that He exists, that He is knowable, etc. But to know that He exists is to have knowledge already, prior to any theory. A fortiori, to assume that one must construct a theory of meaning before meaningful communication is possible assumes that meaningful communication of the theory is possible before the theory is constructed.

The very fact that there is such a state of confusion in the mass of conflicting theories indicates that meaning is alive and well. The confusion is not primarily the result of an inability to mean or understand what is meant. Indeed, conflicting theories are developed and proposed precisely because one theorist has understood the meaning of another theorist's claims and wishes to

take issue with his proposals. With all due consideration to the manifold problems of communication, meaning is expressed and understood in everyday experience. Therefore a theory of meaning must not dictate what the nature of meaning must be ideally. To the contrary, the theorist must observe the fact of meaning and attempt to understand and explain the reality of meaning. We must listen to meaning, not attempt to legislate it.

Given the complexity of the problem, there are some basic distinctions which will aid in the understanding of the issues. One such distinction, already observed, is that between the "meaning of a word," and the "meaning of a text." But to ask what a word means calls for several additional distinctions.

Traditionally a distinction has been made between meaning and usage. At first it seems problematic to say that words have absolutely no meaning apart from usage. If words were completely devoid of meaning there would seem to be no reason for choosing one word over another. For example, before there were any examples of the use of the words "tree" or "dog," when talking about a tree, why not use the word "dog"? The customary response to this inquiry is to say that words do not have meaning in themselves, but they have a range of meaning illustrated by usage in certain contexts. However, it seems that examples of usage are derived from the various contexts in which a word is used. But why was a given word used in a certain context in the first instance? This would seem to be a case of circular reasoning. Words are used in a given context to communicate meaning according to their usage. However, unless the word has the possibility to give a certain meaning in context, there would seem to be no reason to choose one word over another. If a word has never been used, it has no usage. But if it has no usage, how can it be used to mean something in a context? One may inquire about the various definitions of a word that would appear in any standard dictionary, but it appears that definitions are merely systematic presentations of the uses of words in particular contexts. One aspect of the problem becomes clearer. How do words acquire meaning? How do meaningless notations become
meaningful words? How did the combination of the symbols t-r-e-e become the word "tree" which could be meaningfully used in a given context?

Regarding the distinction between the meaning of a word and the meaning of a text John Lyons gives a helpful observation. That there is a distinction to be drawn between the meaning of a word and the meaning of a (non-idiomatic) phrase or sentence is obvious enough, as also is the fact that the meaning of a phrase or sentence is a product of the meaning of the words of which it is composed.21

There is, then, a relationship of individual words to a text, and there is a relationship of the whole text to its individual parts, the words. The whole meaning of a text is composed of the individual parts which are the meanings of the various words. However, the individual parts fit into the text according to the meaning of the whole. On the surface this seems to be circular reasoning. Individual words have meaning in the context of the whole, but the whole is composed of the meanings of the individual parts.

For example, a given word can be used in a context to provide an actual meaning out of the possible meanings which are the uses which the dictionary records. The word "dog" can be used to mean several different things. In a given context, such as the statement, "That dog is a Great Dane," some of the possible meanings are eliminated while certain others remain possible. If the context is expanded, "That four-legged animal with the short hair, the black muzzle, which stands about 36 inches high is a dog which has been given the name 'Great Dane,'" then the possible meanings of the word "dog" are narrowed by the context to one actual meaning out the several possible meanings, or uses. The context has restricted the field of meaning of each word in the context. Yet the meaning of the context is composed by the contributions of its various parts. This problem is known as a hermeneutical circle. Essentially it is a question of the mutual

relationship of word and context. What, then, is the relationship between the words in a text and the text as a whole?

III. Stating the problem

Behind these and the many other distinctions that can and must be made, there is one abiding question that permeates all inquiries into language and meaning. As Bertrand Russell has pointed out,

When we ask what constitutes meaning, we are not asking what is the meaning of this or that particular word. The word "Napoleon" means a certain individual; but we are asking, not who is the individual meant, but what is the relation of the word to the individual which makes the one mean the other. 22

As Russell has observed, the problem of meaning is, on all levels, not simply a question of what does this word or that text mean, but what is the nature of meaning. William P. Alston has presented the basic issue as follows.

This is a problem of philosophical analysis, which is best formulated as follows: "What are we saying about a linguistic expression when we specify its meaning?" That is, we are trying to give an adequate characterization of one of the uses of 'mean' and its cognates. 23

Simply, although somewhat cryptically, the problem of meaning can be stated as "What does it mean to mean?" This is cryptic because the question itself must assume a certain meaning of the first appearance of the word 'mean' in order to be understood. However, if we recall the earlier proposal that it is not necessary that the hearer be able to understand the nature of meaning in order to understand the meaning of a word or text, we can provisionally accept this way of posing the question. Mortimer Adler has helped to clarify the problem of meaning.

The task of a philosophy of language . . . is to construct a theory that attempts to explain the reality or fact of communication . . . . Since the presence of meaning is indispensable to the communicative function of language, the


explanation of meaning is indispensable to the explanation of language as an instrument of communication.\textsuperscript{24}

From the number of confusing claims and counterclaims, this seems to be the one basic problem—what is the nature of meaning? The abundance of questions and inquiries concerning meaning cannot "be investigated unless one is working with some concept, perhaps implicit, of linguistic meaning."\textsuperscript{25}

The task of constructing a theory of linguistic meaning will involve an investigation into the major schools of thought which have proposed theories of meaning. It will also involve an investigation into such questions as, "How do meaningless notations become meaningful words?" "What is the nature of a linguistic sign?" "What is the relationship between a word and a concept, between language and thought, between meaning and philosophy?" "What are the implications of a theory of meaning for hermeneutics?"

A well developed understanding of the nature of meaning can provide a solid foundation upon which to build a reliable system of hermeneutics. The perspective of this paper is that a theory of meaning that begins with reality and seeks to understand the phenomenon of linguistic communication can provide a safeguard against the multitude of theories that would effectively undermine our faith in God's written revelation. Philosophical systems that are inimical to evangelical Christianity have exerted an influence on Christian thinkers throughout the centuries and have endeavored to frustrate an orthodox approach to God's Word. Recently, the battle for the Bible has shifted from overt denials of an inerrant text, to the more subtle tactics reminiscent of the serpent's inquiry into the meaning of the Divine author's proclamations. The serpent's question is being repeated, albeit in the dress of

\textsuperscript{24} Adler, \textit{Some Questions About Language}, pp. 5, 15.

enlightened philosophy and infallible science; "Hath God said?" A theory of meaning that is built upon sound philosophical ground will enable the interpreter of the Bible to counteract the ever encroaching doubt as to the possibility of knowing what God's Word really means. This paper endeavors to present a Thomistic perspective on the nature of meaning as reasonable and viable option for a philosophical foundation upon which to base an evangelical system of hermeneutics.
CHAPTER 2

Approaches to the Problem of Meaning

1. A Thomistic Evaluation of Idealism

   A. General introduction to Idealism

   The term "Idealism" derives from the Greek word ἴδέα, which was used of something seen or looked upon. According to the Encyclopedia of Philosophy, the word idealism "came to be used as a philosophical term in the eighteenth century."¹ Leibniz was the first to use the term in a philosophical context to distinguish between his own philosophical views and those of materialists. However, the term came to be used of the philosophical system of Bishop Berkeley and "was applied . . . to the view that nothing could be known to exist or did exist except the ideas in the mind of the percipient.² There are many different definitions of idealism given in the standard histories of philosophy. Thomas Hill provides a helpful description of epistemological idealism.

   Traditionally, epistemological idealism has been taken to be the view that the object of knowledge depends upon the experiencing or knowing process. That view may, however, be interpreted in a number of different ways. It may mean that the finite knower creates or conditions the finite object, or in any case that some knowing process creates or conditions those objects. It may mean that all reality is essentially experiential in character, or it may mean . . . that all of reality, embracing both objects and knowings, belongs to a single interdependent and coherent system.³

There are different classifications of idealists, depending upon the focus of their speculation. Epistemological idealists are primarily concerned with questions of knowledge, while subjective idealists are primarily concerned with self as the criterion of


reality in which the conceptual determines the real. Mortimer Adler identifies six theses that have been proposed in modern times by idealists of one kind or another.

1. the denial that there is an independent reality, which is the object of our knowledge and understanding, or at least the denial of a reality that is the same for all of us;
2. the assertion that the structure and features of the world in which we live and the shape of our experience of it are determined by the ideas we employ to think about it;
3. the assertion that the innate structure of our minds--our senses, our imagination, and our intellect--is itself constitutive of the world we experience;
4. the belief that the experienced world is not the same as an unknowable independent reality if that unknowable, independent reality does in fact exist;
5. the view that there is a variety among our experienced worlds, varying with the ideas that diverse persons employ in thinking about them;
6. the doctrine that our own ideas are the only objects with which we can have direct acquaintance, though they can also somehow be regarded as representations of a reality with which we cannot have direct acquaintance or of which we cannot have experience.  

Although modern Idealist philosophers may not endorse all of these theses, a majority would agree that the sixth thesis is valid. As George Klubertanz has observed, "By most of the upholders of such a system, knowledge is said to have as its object the idea or representation in the mind." It is this sixth thesis, primarily, which renders an Idealist account of meaning, and ultimately of knowing, completely inadequate.

B. An examination of Idealism

In considering the epistemology of Idealism it must be clear that we are not narrowing our consideration to Epistemological Idealism per se. Rather, we will consider the more general aspects which cut across all particular emphases, and which ultimately lead

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to a universal idealistic epistemology, regardless of the particular focus of any certain idealistic system.

1. Its metaphysical foundation

According to most historians of philosophy, it was the achievement of Rene Descartes to bring the world out of the middle ages and into the modern age. But, Descartes also laid the foundation of modern idealistic subjectivism. A Thomistic evaluation of Descartes' system is ably presented by Etienne Gilson. As he has explained, the ambitious desire of Descartes was to apply his universal mathematics to all problems and thereby to effect a "complete liberation of knowledge from its objects." By thus removing knowledge from the dictates of the various objects, Descartes believed he could successfully demonstrate the applicability of his universal method to solve all problems, even those of ethics and metaphysics. His mathematical method would provide the same kind of certainty for metaphysics as was enjoyed in mathematics. But apparently Descartes did not realize that the certainty of the mathematical method was due to "the extreme simplicity of the object of mathematics," not to any guaranteed (or "a priori") universal applicability of its method.

Nevertheless, the success of the mathematical method in its application to its proper object led Descartes to apply this method to all disciplines, regardless of their proper objects. Gilson identifies the root of Descartes' method.

The principle that lies at the root of Cartesian mathematicism is that, since the most evident of all sciences is also the most abstract, it would be enough to make all the other sciences as abstract as mathematics in order to make them just as evident.

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7. Etienne Gilson, *The Unity of Philosophical Experience*, pp. 142-143.


Consequently, Descartes had placed the test for certainty in the individual subject, the locus of abstraction. The very nature of the mathematical method dictated this result, as Gilson points out.

For the mathematician the problem of essence always comes from that of existence; the true circle and the true triangle are the definitions of the circle and the triangle, while shapes given empirically in sense experience are only approximations in regard to their definitions.\textsuperscript{10}

Mathematics, then, is essentially idealistic in its methodology. The ideals of the mind dictate the essences of things in reality. The test for truth resides in the clear and distinct idea in the mind. Although Descartes could doubt the existence of the external world, and even the existence of his own body, he could not doubt his own internal states and ideas. John Wild succinctly states the conclusion to which Descartes' method led: "Since we know only our own subjective states which are the direct objects of knowledge, the existence of an external world is at once called in question."\textsuperscript{11} By this bold move, Descartes had made a subtle shift away from the Realism of the Scholastic philosophers and had introduced an error which has become the plague of modern philosophy.

Descartes wrongly considered thought to be the object of thought, and almost every philosopher outside the scholastic tradition has accepted what he affirmed as though it were a demonstrated truth. Descartes was the originator of what has become a deep-seated and definite prejudice in favor of subjectivism.\textsuperscript{12}

Descartes had successfully created an unbridgeable gulf that "so isolated mind and matter as to create a radical dualism ..."\textsuperscript{13} As Descartes himself asserted, there are "two ultimate classes of

\textsuperscript{10} Etienne Gilson, \textit{Methodical Realism}, pp. 84-85.


real things—the one is intellectual things . . . the other is material things . . . "¹⁴ This radical separation led to the conclusion that the nature of man is "a thinking substance, with a body thrown in as a kind of useless appendage."¹⁵

But this separation of the thing from knowledge was not unique to Descartes. The Empiricists were employing the same notion. From a different philosophical point of view, John Locke had proposed the same gulf. Although rejecting the innate ideas of Descartes, he employed the same separation of the object from knowledge.

Substances could only be an unknown "standing under or upholding" of qualities, because here in using the general name substance "as in all other cases where we use words without having clear and distinct ideas, we talk like children; . . . and that thing they pretend to know and talk of, is what they have no distinct idea of at all, and so are perfectly ignorant of it. . . ."¹⁶

Consequently, qualities are external appearances, and cannot be the means whereby we can know what a thing is in itself. Substance, which in Scholastic philosophy was considered to be that which "stands under" qualities, cannot be perceived. But since only qualities can be perceived, and that which stands under them cannot be perceived, then substance cannot be known. The object of knowledge, then, is not substantial reality, but qualities as perceived. As McCall concludes, "For both philosophers, the former [Descartes] as rationalist and the latter [Locke] as sensist, ideas rather than things become the object of the mind."¹⁷ In his definition of the term "idea," Locke asserted,


It being the term which, I think, serves best to stand for whatsoever is the object of the understanding when a man thinks . . . 18

The foundation of knowledge was no longer the objective realm of reality as had been asserted by traditional Aristotelian and Thomistic Realism, but the subjective realm of ideas. The analysis of Locke's proposals by Joseph Brennan identifies the crucial problem with a subjectivistic philosophy from the Thomistic perspective.

Locke's analysis of perception tells us (1) that what we know are our sensations or "ideas," (2) that these sensations are produced in us by physical objects external to us, (3) that there is at least a partial correspondence between our perceptions and these external causes. But it is just at this point that a difficulty rises. What assurance have we that there is any correspondence at all between our "ideas" and their external causes? What justifies our belief in this likeness between perceptions and the things which produce them in us, if what we know are perceptions only? There is simply no way of showing that any correspondence whatever exists between our "ideas" and the physical objects which are supposed to cause them. Indeed, there is no way of demonstrating that there are any physical objects existing independently of us. 19

In short, the problem was not the identification of the object of knowledge. That which we know is not objective reality. Rather, that which we know is the idea or concept in the mind.

2. Its epistemological synthesis

Although the two camps of Rationalism and Empiricism were saying the same things about that which is the object of knowledge, they could not agree upon the source of that knowledge. From where do ideas come? The Rationalism of Descartes proposed that knowledge derived primarily from innate ideas. The Empiricism of Locke countered that all knowledge is derived from sense impressions, from which the mind forms its ideas. Each system had


its insurmountable problems. It was a problem for the rationalists to claim that "the mind can determine truths about objects, without relying in any essential way upon sense experience."20 Likewise, Collins continues, "Although the empiricists show that all our knowledge begins with sense experience, they failed to take account of the observation of the rationalists that not all elements in knowledge take their origin from sense experience."21 As Kant described,

though all our knowledge begins with experience, it by no means follows that all arises out of experience. For, on the contrary, it is quite possible that our empirical knowledge is a compound of that which we receive through impressions, and that which the faculty of cognition supplies from itself (sensuous impressions giving merely the occasion), an addition which we cannot distinguish from the original element given by sense, till long practice has made us attentive to, and skilful in separating it.22

Kant's synthesis was not merely a blending of the elements of Rationalism and Empiricism, but, as Collins characterizes it, "a radical reconstitution, of the elements provided by the previous century of modern speculation."23

Kant's synthesis involved the acknowledgement that all knowledge begins with sense experience, but that the necessary categories which make the confusing barrage and changing diversity of sense experience intelligible is supplied by the mind of the knower. As Vincent Brummer describes,

Perception, he maintained, is not the passive recording of an inherent order in reality: it is an active process of creating order in the chaos of disorderly impressions we receive through perception. Our concepts are not, therefore,


reflections of an inherent order in reality, recorded through our perception; they are principles of order which we apply to phenomena as we perceive them. . . . According to Kant's conceptualism, our concepts reflect the divisions that we apply to reality as we experience it.  

Kant posited that the necessary categories that Hume denied, but which Kant saw as necessary for knowledge, could not be derived from experience of the sensible, changing world, but were supplied by the mind and imposed upon impressions.

According to Kant what we know is appearance only. Things as they exist independently of ourselves (things-in-themselves) are unknowable to us. The world of appearance, however, is not a deceptive phantasm. It is an orderly and rational world. And it is orderly and rational because its structure is the product of the knowing mind.

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**Figure 3:** Kantian Idealism

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Kant's epistemological synthesis had effectively married rationalism and empiricism, and yet had still managed to make the knowledge of objective reality impossible (Figure 3).

What is known, then, is not the real world as it exists in itself. What is known is the phenomenon as it has been molded by the categories of the mind. As Armand Mauer observed, Kant "assumes that instead of our knowledge conforming to objects, objects must conform to our knowledge." But this is what Kant called his "Copernican Revolution" in philosophy.

As the illustration shows, the thing as it is in itself is not accessible to the mind of the knower. Only the phenomenal qualities are perceived. However, once these qualities are perceived, the mind imposes upon them the categories which exist "innately" in the mind. The mind does not have innate ideas as in Cartesianism, but it has innate categories of quantity, quality, relation and modality which impose order and intelligibility upon that which is perceived. Consequently, the mind "read(s) into the reality we experience." But the objects of knowledge are not derived from reality, as in a Realist framework. Rather, they are the ideas in the mind which have been shaped by the mind. As Vern Poythress has observed, "By means of his reflection on the categories of the human mind, Kant specified what could and could not be the object of knowledge. And this pronouncement virtually determined what could and could not be part of the world."

3. Its linguistic implications

The implications of Idealism for the problem of meaning are disastrous. The roots of modern idealism, such as has been


27. Vincent Brummer, Theology and Philosophical Inquiry, p. 41.

expressed by William Ernest Hocking and Brand Blanshard,\textsuperscript{29} are found in the radical metaphysical separation of mind and matter in Descartes, and the radical epistemological separation of idea from reality in Kant. As Etienne Gilson maintains,

The first consequence of Cartesian mathematicism, and the one from which all the others flow, was the obligation it imposed on the philosopher of always going from thought to being, and even of always defining being in terms of ideas or thought.\textsuperscript{30} Having shifted the starting point of knowledge from objective reality to the subjective idea, the ultimate end of the Cartesian experiment was either the skepticism of David Hume or the epistemological solipsism of Bishop Berkeley. But Kant could not rest with either alternative, as Gilson explains.

After Hume, the only course left to Kant, in order to save a causality no longer possible to find in things, was to conclude that it is prescribed for things by thought. Thus the Cartesian cycle reached completion with the purity of a perfect curve, and according to the demands of its first principle; having started from the mind, philosophy, after several fruitless attempts to escape from it, declared its final resolve to remain there.\textsuperscript{31}

This aspect pertains specifically to the problem of meaning. If the object of our knowledge is the representation that exists in the mind—either the subjective states of Cartesianism, or the innate categories of Kantianism—then knowledge is not a conformity of thought to thing, because the mind never apprehends the object in reality. But knowledge that does not apprehend objective reality is incommunicable, for there is no objective verification of meaning. If there is no objective verification of meaning, then

\textsuperscript{29}. These more recent philosophers have not advocated an absolute idealism, but have attempted to combine idealism with pragmatic and even realist tendencies. For a discussion of these and similar modern philosophers see Gilson, Etienne, et al. Editors. \textit{Recent Philosophy: Hegel to the Present}. New York: Random House, 1966, and Reck, Andrew J. \textit{Speculative Philosophy}. Albuquerque, New Mexico: University of New Mexico Press, 1972.

\textsuperscript{30}. Etienne Gilson, \textit{Methodical Realism}, p. 84.

\textsuperscript{31}. Etienne Gilson, \textit{Methodical Realism}, p. 90.
communication cannot take place, for, then, meaning is determined by the interpreter, not by the communicator/author. For language, this means that "Words are names or signs referring to the concepts and hence to the structural divisions of reality represented in these concepts." However, the concepts are not derived from objective reality, but are ideas in the mind. The consequences of this conclusion are made clear by John Peifer.

Herein lies the basis of critical philosophy and of post-Kantian idealism. The object and absolute term of intellectual thought is the idea. An other, outside of thought, is entirely dispensable, for it is not the other that is directly attained—thought attains only the idea in thought. And the idea, as regards its formal content, is not from the other, from the object, it is from the subject. Consequently, it is not like the object, it bears no resemblance to it: coming from the subject, it is like the subject.

Although Kant would assert that there is a shared structure of rationality that makes communication eminently possible, Kant's system cannot account for this, nor can his assertion be verified. It can only be hoped, therefore, that the ideas in the minds of different individuals correspond to each other in the act of communication. There is no longer any objective foundation for meaning or for communication. The ideas in the mind of one speaker can never be transferred to the mind of the hearer. When a word is used, the word is representative of the idea in the mind of the speaker. When the recipient hears the word, he associates it with the idea in his mind. But there is no way of discovering whether the idea in the mind of the first is the same as the idea in the mind of the other, because the only way to communicate is by means of signs, but signs are associated only with subjective ideas, not with objective reality. Consequently, communication is impossible. Even though Kant believed that all rational minds possess the same categories, there was no way for Kant to justify


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this belief. Ultimately, communication is based on a kind of fideism. There is then no means of adjudicating between contradictory and mutually exclusive claims. One must simply believe that the categories and concepts which he desires to communicate correspond to those in the mind of a hearer, but he can never know that they do.

However, communication is not impossible. Everyday experience demonstrates this. Therefore, the Idealist explanation of knowledge is inadequate to account for the facts of real experience. Joseph Owens' observation clearly exhibits the inadequacy of Idealism.

Any existence outside thought remains inevitably, according to this approach, outside thought, that is, it is unthinkable. Yet ordinary experience indicates quite the reverse. Only in terms of things outside it can thought itself be known and understood by men in their present life. . . . You know directly sensible things, each grasped as having a real existence of its own. By reflexion, you are conscious of giving those things new existence in your cognition, and are thereby conscious of your own activities and your own self. But if you had never known sensible things in their extramental existence, you would not be able to know any cognitional existence or cognitional subject at all.34

Everyday experience indicates that meaning is communicable because the meanings of our words can somehow be objectively verified. Idealism does not allow for or explain this self-evident experience. It is an inadequate solution to the problem of meaning.

II. A Thomistic Evaluation of Nominalism

A. General introduction to Nominalism

There are many varieties of Nominalism. However, there is an essential element by virtue of which a particular variety is necessarily nominalistic. "The fundamental contention of Nominalism is that all things that exist are only particulars."35


Nominalism is a position which seeks to offer a solution to the problem of universals and particulars. The problem arises from the consideration the classical question, "How can we draw from singular things a concept that is general?" D. M. Armstrong identifies five general classes of Nominalism, and gives a brief description of each.

**Predicate Nominalism.** The question arises "In virtue of what do these general terms apply to the things which they apply to?" The answer of Predicate Nominalism is "In virtue of nothing". The fundamental fact in this situation, which cannot be further explained, is that the predicates do apply.

- a has the property, F, if and only if a falls under the predicate F

**Concept Nominalism.** The Concept Nominalist calls upon concepts, conceived as mental entities, to do the job for which the Predicate Nominalist employs predicates.

- a has the property, F, if and only if a falls under the concept F

**Class Nominalism.** For the Class Nominalist:

- a has the property, F, if and only if a is a member of the class of F's

**Mereological Nominalism.** For this variant of Class Nominalism:

- a has the property, F, if and only if a is a part of the aggregate (heap) of the F's

**Resemblance Nominalism.** According to this view:

- a has the property, F, if and only if a suitably resembles a paradigm case (or paradigm cases) of an F.\(^\text{36}\)

It is easy to identify the universal characteristic of Nominalism in each of these particular varieties. In each case the assertion identifies a certain quality by virtue of which F can be truly said to be an instance of F. It is not because there is any essential characteristic or identity of nature between a and F which accounts for the relationship. Jacques Maritain provides a helpful description of Nominalism.

The nominalist school, for which universals have no existence except as names or ideas with which nothing in reality corresponds; for instance, there is nothing in the reality of

human nature which is equally present in Peter, Paul, and John.37

B. An examination of Nominalism

Although there are varieties of Nominalism, they all agree that all things that exist are particulars. The differences arise in their explanations of "the way that the problem of apparent identity of nature is to be solved."38 The ensuing investigation will therefore be general in nature so as to be applicable to all varieties of Nominalism.

1. Nominalism and subjectivism

William of Ockham is the nominalist par excellence. For Ockham, "Universals have no existence in reality. They are convenient mental fictions, signs standing for many particulars at once."39 His criticism of Realism followed the basic theme that "a single distinct entity appearing in a multiplicity of individual things is a contradiction in terms."40 Armand Mauer provides a clear analysis of Ockham's position.

But in the perspective of Ockham's nominalism, no two items have anything in common. In his view, it is absurd to speak of a number of things presenting a common intelligible or formal object. Every reality or thing is individual and one in number and it shares nothing in common with anything else. Only terms or concepts are common or universal, in the sense that they are predicable of many things. But things themselves are not common or universal.41 The implication of this for a knowledge of reality is clear. If every individual thing exists only as one thing with nothing in common with anything else, then it is impossible for the same thing

to exist outside of the mind and inside the mind. Consequently, what is known is not the thing that is in reality, but a mental copy of that thing. John Lyons gives a synopsis of Ockham's intuitionism.

The intuitive apprehension of an object causes a concept of that thing to arise naturally in the mind. This individual concept is a natural sign of the object; and it can be regarded as the meaning of the written or spoken word which, by convention, signifies it in particular languages. 42

The crucial point here is that the concept that is formed must, by Ockham's own lights, be something other than the real thing. It must be a representation of that thing. A particular thing is one and indivisible. There is no aspect of a particular that can exist simultaneously in several things. Lyons further asserts,

Nominalism . . . does not necessarily imply subjectivism or skepticism with respect to the possibility of our acquiring knowledge of the external world. Ockham, at least, seemed to have held that our knowledge of individuals is direct and intuitive, and is caused by the individuals. 43

However, according to Etienne Gilson, "Ockham's . . . intuitive cognition is the immediate perception of a really existing thing, 44 but, this intuition exists only as long as the event of perception takes place. It is the abstraction that is the memory of certain past events, or "our mental representation of mere individuals." 45 So then, the immediate perception is the sense impression, and the abstraction is the image or idea in the mind that is a representation, or copy of the indivisible particular thing in reality.

How, then, can it be known whether the representation in the mind is an accurate copy of the thing in reality? If the thing in

44. Etienne Gilson, The Unity of Philosophical Experience, p. 69.
45. Etienne Gilson, The Unity of Philosophical Experience, p. 69.
reality is indivisible, then that which is known is not that which is in reality. As Gilson comments,

What Ockham wants us to realize is that, since everything that really exists is individual, our general ideas cannot correspond to anything in reality, whence it follows necessarily that it is not their nature to be either images, or pictures, or mental presentations of any real or conceivable thing.46 Consequently, contrary to Lyons’ claim, Nominalism in fact does entail subjectivism and ultimately skepticism.

2. Nominalism and sensism

Further, on the basis of the Thomistic Realist view that metaphysics and epistemology are inextricably connected, it seems that Nominalism entails sensism. John Wild explains this point.

The nominalist is a consistent materialist. He holds that there is no evidence for the existence of immaterial universals outside the mind, and concludes that all being is material and individual. The universal exists neither outside the mind nor in the mind. What are commonly called concepts or universals, in his view, are really mere words or physical disturbances of some kind in the organism. . . . These peculiar disturbances, according to the nominalist, are produced, like sense impressions, by physical agencies which are either outside or within the organism. Thus reason tends to be reduced to sense.47

Working from the Thomistic Realist position of the priority of metaphysics and the view that epistemological assertions have metaphysical implications, the logic seems to be inescapable. If there is a material reality, and the things of material reality are singular and indivisible units, and there is no aspect of them that can exist in common with other units, then there is no immaterial aspect to particulars. It is precisely this immaterial form in the Thomistic Realist system accounts for the common nature, or essence, of material things. To allow for the immaterial aspect in material things opens the door for the assertion by the Realist that there is in fact a common nature. But to eliminate the

46. Etienne Gilson, The Unity of Philosophical Experience, pp. 67-68.

immaterial is to be left only with the material. Consequently, knowledge is reduced to the sense perception and the objects of knowledge are copies or representations that the mind forms from these impressions.

Even if a nominalist claims to believe in immaterial particulars, like souls, minds, numbers, etc., these are not items of knowledge, at least not according to the Thomistic Realist definition of knowledge, but are items of belief. But even according to the nominalist's own system, there can be no evidence presented by which one can know that immaterial particulars exist. One must simply believe that they do. If such evidence were presented in favor of immaterial particulars, then the same evidence could be employed in favor of immaterial universals. The same method, namely sense perception, by which the nominalist rejects immaterial universals necessarily involves the rejection of immaterial particulars. It is not the "universality" as such that is rejected. Rather, it is the "immateriality" by which universals are said to be universal that is rejected. A nominalist who believes in immaterial particulars does precisely that—he believes.

The account by David Hume of the reappearance of the idea presents the historic example of sensism. He asserts,

We find, by experience, that when any impression has been present with the mind, it again makes its appearance there as an idea; and this it may do after two different ways: either when, in its new appearance, it retains a considerable degree of its first vivacity, and is somewhat intermediate betwixt an impression and an idea; or when it entirely loses that vivacity, and is a perfect idea. The faculty by which we repeat our impressions in the first manner, is called the memory, and the other the imagination.48

Unfortunately this account is patently impossible. Hume has stated that the difference between the impression and the idea is the "vivacity and liveliness" with which the mind is stricken. Once the impression is gone, then an idea appears (reminiscent of

Ockham's own description). The idea is distinguished from the impression by the degree of vivacity, as observed in the above quote. The question arises, how is this distinction identified? The vivacity of the idea cannot be measured against an impression which is no longer existent. Yet the vivacity of the idea is all that appears in the mind. If the original vivacity is somehow remembered against which the vivacity of the idea is measured, then there is more to the perceptions than merely the impressions and the ideas.

If one claims that the mind can simply repeat the impression that has given rise to the idea in order to measure the vivacity of the idea, this will not do. How can it be known that a subsequent impression is identical to a previous impression since the vivacity and liveliness of the first impression cannot reappear in the mind? A comparison between a previous and a subsequent impression is, according to Hume's account, impossible. Once an impression is past, it is gone forever, never to be repeated.

Hume also claims that ideas of the memory "preserve the original order of the impressions, at least to some degree..."49 Here again Hume has created an impossible scenario. Since the impression is past, how can the order of the idea be compared with an impression that no longer exists and cannot be recalled? There is no remembrance of the exact order of the impression, unless there is some other mental entity that retains this order. In this case there is more to the knowledge than what Hume understood from his impressions.

The tendency to confuse the conceptual and the real is seen in Hume. He makes the statement, "Whatever the mind clearly conceives includes the idea of possible existence, or, in other words... nothing we imagine is absolutely impossible."50 Although it is imaginable that nothing exists, it is actually impossible that

Sensism

Knowledge of Ideas

External Reality is Material.
Meaning is Representative Idea
as Copy of Sensibly Perceived Qualities.

Figure 4: Sensism

nothing exists because something does exist. Hume has confused logical relations with metaphysical relations. Simply because the human mind must conceive of nothingness in terms of a subject term in a proposition, this does not mean that the concept of nothingness confers being upon nonbeing. This is a confusion of the conceptual and the real. Not everything that can be conceived is in fact possible in reality. Of course Hume might object that in such a case nothingness is not clearly conceived. However, this is simply a case of defining one's position into existence. The notion that clear and distinct ideas are adequate tests for the truth of an idea is a bit of Cartesian residue that had proven to be an inadequate test of truth even in Descartes' own system.

The Thomistic view of knowledge is the conformity of thought to thing (this definition is worked out in greater detail below). Assuming this definition, then, sense perception is not enough to produce knowledge. As Owen Bennett indicates, "Mere sense perception on the part of the learner is not sufficient. If it were, there would be no reason in the world why one could not teach
a dog geometry." However, "With the demand that every valid idea be merely a faint copy of a more vivid impression of sensation, the test for truth and objectivity is the sensation itself." The idea, then, as the object of knowledge is merely a copy of a sensation and does not attain objective reality at all (Figure 4).

3. Nominalism and language

If in fact sensism is a necessary concomitant of Nominalism, and this seems to be the case from a Thomistic perspective, this would make meaningful communication impossible for the same reasons that Idealism failed to adequately account for meaningful communication. For the nominalist, "Ideas and concepts are now nothing more than copies and representations of sensible singulars." For the idealist, ideas and concepts are constructs and impositions of the mind upon sense impressions. For both the idealist and the nominalist, the object of knowledge is the idea or concept, not the objectively real thing existing apart from the mind.

While the idealist appears to separate intellectual knowledge from sense perception by making the thought determinative of the thing, the nominalist seems to make sensation the seat of knowledge, thereby denying intellectual cognition. Jacques Maritain observes this aspect of Nominalism and indicates its influence in modern philosophy.

This position amounts to sheer negation of the possibility of intellectual knowledge, and reduces science to a figment of the mind. The most typical representatives of this school are, in antiquity the sophists and the sceptics, in modern times the leading English philosophers, William of Occam in the fourteenth century, Hobbes and Locke in the seventeenth, Berkeley and Hume in the eighteenth, John Stuart Mill and


52. John Peifer, The Concept in Thomism, p. 27.

Spencer in the nineteenth. It may be added that the majority of modern philosophers (that is to say, of those who ignore or oppose the scholastic tradition) are more or less deeply, and more or less consciously, imbued with nominalism.\textsuperscript{54} But the intellectual cognition of common nature in particular things is easily demonstrated. The nominalist proclaims that only particulars exist, and that general terms are merely words that are applied indifferently to many things that are similar in certain respects. The question then arises, "Are these things similar in certain respects because they have something in common?" If the nominalist answers negatively, then he has undercut his only explanation for the existence of general terms, and he has rendered language unintelligible. If he answers positively, he has denied the basic tenet of Nominalism that only particulars exist, individually and indivisibly with no common nature.

But some nominalists might not deny that particulars can have some aspect in common. Then, as Mortimer Adler presses the point, "We are . . . obliged to ask them whether we are able to apprehend what is common to two or more entities, or apprehend the respects in which they are the same."\textsuperscript{55} If they answer negatively, then they have eliminated their only explanation of the meaning of general terms, and again have made language unintelligible. If they answer positively, then they have denied the foundational proposition of Nominalism. As Mortimer Adler comments,

To affirm that what is common to two or more things, or that what is the same about them, can be apprehended, is to posit an object of apprehension which is quite distinct from the object apprehended when we perceive this or that singular particular as such. But this is precisely the position which opponents of nominalism regard as the correct solution of the problem; namely, that there are objects of apprehension other than perceived particulars.\textsuperscript{56}

\textsuperscript{54} Jacques Maritain, \textit{An Introduction to Philosophy}, pp. 159-160.


\textsuperscript{56} Mortimer J. Adler, \textit{Ten Philosophical Mistakes}, p. 45.
The Thomistic perspective asserts that metaphysical universals are the only possible explanation for general language, indeed for language at all. "Only if we first develop a satisfactory theory of universals can we expect to develop fruitfully the further topic of the semantics of general terms."  

It is the very process of giving something a name, such as calling it a man or a dog, that connects the universals with the particulars.  

Words alone and concepts separated from reality cannot account for the use of the universal in language. For,  

it is absurd to suppose a word, as such, to be universal: for the spoken sound and the written character are conventional signs, and always in themselves singular, no matter how often repeated. Each repetition is individual: only the mind can universalize a sign, and its power so to do is evident from our previous explanation of the process.

Even if we employ the distinction between word token and word type, we have not thereby avoided the problem. John Lyons provides the following definition of a word token: "Tokens are unique physical entities, located as a particular place in space or time." He goes on to explain that tokens are of the same type "by virtue of their similarity with other unique physical entities and by virtue of their conformity to the type that they instantiate."  

If Lyons' descriptions is correct, then he has provided an explanation of type and token that fits well with a Thomistic Realist view that asserts the existence of essences or common natures. The type is the common nature, or the universal essence which all tokens have in common. This description cannot be employed by a Nominalist to explain general terms, for he cannot

assert the existence of a common nature in word tokens on the one hand, and then deny the same for things in reality on the other hand. If word tokens can have a common nature that unites them as tokens of a type, then things in reality can have common natures that unite them to their universal essence. From the Thomistic perspective, Nominalism presents itself as an inadequate solution to the problem of meaning.

III. A Thomistic Evaluation of Extreme Realism

A. General introduction to Realism

Realism is that tradition in philosophy which asserts the existence of external reality apart from the mind. Andrew Reck presents two meanings of Realism.

It signifies (1) the scholastic doctrine of the objective existence of universals, and (2) the belief that there exists an objective world independent of the mind that knows it. In the first sense, realism is an ontological theory. In the second sense, realism is an epistemological theory.\(^{62}\)

As an epistemology, Realism is opposed to Idealism because realism asserts the existence of an externally real world apart from any perception on the part of a mind. As Geisler has put it,

The realist would say that just as your feet can be under the desk without depending on that relationship for their existence, so too any object can be known to you (the subject) without being affected by you.\(^{63}\)

As an ontological doctrine, it is opposed to Nominalism because Realism asserts the existence of essences. There are several varieties of realism from the common-sense Realism of the man on the street, to the extreme Transcendent Realism of Plato. Historically, both a Realist ontology and a Realist epistemology have been affirmed independently and together. For example, "Epistemological realism may hold that objects exist in reality independent of minds, while denying that universals are such

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objects." Geisler expounds upon two types of Realism, extreme or primitive Realism, and common sense Realism. Etienne Gilson distinguishes what he identifies as Moderate Realism as distinct both from extreme and common sense Realism. We shall attempt to present the major forms of Realism and the theories of meaning which have been allied to them.

B. An examination of Extreme Realism

Because the philosophical system of Plato is the best historical example of Extreme Realism, and because all other instances of this kind of Realism are generally designated as Platonic, our examination of Extreme Realism will consist in an investigation of the philosophy of Plato.

1. Plato's philosophy of being

Plato's philosophy is essentially an ontological Realism, although, as Frederick Copleston has observed, "it is difficult to separate Plato's epistemology from his ontology." Basic to Plato's philosophy of being is his theory of the Forms or Ideas. Copleston provides a succinct description of Plato's doctrine of Forms.

... the essence of Plato's doctrine of Forms or Ideas is simply this: that the universal concept is not an abstract form devoid of objective content or references, but that to each true universal concept there corresponds an objective

64. Andrew J. Reck, Speculative Philosophy, p. 54.
66. Etienne Gilson, Methodical Realism, Front Royal, Virginia: Christendom Press, 1990, and Thomist Realism and the Critique of Knowledge, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986. In these two book Gilson's primary effort is to distance his form of realism from what he views as a tendency of modern Thomists to follow an Idealist approach to epistemology by articulating a critical realism. In the process he distinguishes Methodical Realism from the common sense philosophy of Thomas Reid while presenting a Realism that is in no way contrary to the common sense of the man on the street.
reality. . . . it remains true that the essence of the Platonic theory of Ideas is not to be sought in the notion of the "separate" existence of universal realities, but in the belief that universal concepts have objective reference, and that the corresponding reality is of a higher order than sense-perception as such.\textsuperscript{68}

For Plato, a Form was the essence that provided the unity and intelligibility of the sensible particulars. The world of the sensible was a world of becoming. But it is necessary that the sensible changing world of becoming have some stable and unchanging being. In the \textit{Cratylus} Socrates observes that "it is evident that things are themselves possessors of some stable being of their own, not in relation to us nor caused by us; . . . but of themselves they are disposed in regard to their own being as set by nature."\textsuperscript{69}

Although the nature of the Forms and their relation to sensible things is still a point of controversy among the interpreters of Plato, it is at least certain that the Forms enjoyed a separated existence. Copleston's evaluation of the separate existence of the Forms seems to fit the data best.

If they [the Forms or Ideas] exist "apart from" sensible things, this "apart from" can only mean that the Ideas are possessed of a reality independent of sensible things. There can be no question of the Ideas being in a place, and, strictly speaking, they would be as much "in" as "out of" sensible things, for ex hypothesi they are incorporeal essences and incorporeal essences cannot be in a place.\textsuperscript{70}

Copleston's point is that the Forms or Ideas are certainly separate from the sensible particulars. However, he proposes that they are not located in any "place," being themselves immaterial. Indeed they must be immaterial in order to be intelligible. Consequently, it is a moot question to attempt to locate the Forms in a place. It is nevertheless clear that they are separate from the sensible particulars of the material world.

\textsuperscript{68} Frederick Copleston, \textit{A History of Philosophy}, Book I, Volume I, p. 151.

\textsuperscript{69} Plato, \textit{Cratylus}, 386DE.

Plato reached the doctrine of Forms by reasoning from the changing particulars of the sensible world to the abstract universal. Because each individual who ascribes beauty or virtue to anything does so on the basis of some ultimate standard of beauty and virtue, there must, then, exist some ultimate standard. This ultimate standard provided the unity and intelligibility to the sensible world of opinion.

Failing to analyse with sufficient accuracy the nature of our ideas and the process of abstraction, and applying too hastily his guiding principle, that whatever exists in things by participation must somewhere exist in the pure state, Plato arrived at the conclusion that there exists in a supra-sensible world a host of models or archetypes, immaterial, immutable, eternal, man in general or man in himself, triangle in itself, virtue in itself, etc. These he termed ideas, which are the object apprehended by the intellect, the faculty which attains truth—that is to say, they are reality. 71

The Forms or Ideas, then, are reality. As Reck observes, "Forms are the most substantial entities in Plato's ontology." 72 Because the Forms are, and are not in process of changing or becoming, as is the sensible world, they are fixed, timeless, individual, indivisible and intelligible. Each Form is identical to itself and different from other Forms. "Yet each Form is a universal, a One of Many, since each Form is the norm or model which time-bound, space-materialized singular things imitate or in which they participate." 73 Separate and immutable, they are the perfect intelligible beings of true knowledge.

2. Plato's philosophy of knowing

Ultimately the doctrine of Forms issues from an Idealistic epistemology. The Ideas are proposed because the sensible world of becoming does not offer true knowledge. For Plato, "The object of true knowledge must be stable and abiding, fixed, capable of being

72. Andrew J. Reck, Speculative Philosophy, p. 58.
73. Andrew J. Reck, Speculative Philosophy, p. 58.
grasped in clear and scientific definition, which is of the universal, as Socrates saw."\textsuperscript{74} However, the universals are not grasped through the senses as part of the physical, changing world of sensation. Indeed, as Pegis has observed, "the doctrine [is] that what is intelligible in reality cannot be found in, or abstracted from, the sensible."\textsuperscript{75} Rather, the Forms are proposed as the ontological foundation which gives meaning to the general ideas. Again Copleston provides a helpful explanation.

In the \textit{Phaedo}, where the discussion centres round the problem of immortality, it is suggested that truth is not to be attained by the bodily senses, but by reason alone, which lays hold of the things that "really are." What are the things that "really are," i.e. that have true being? They are the essences of things . . . These essences remain always the same, while particular objects of sense do not.\textsuperscript{76}

Consequently, the "objective reality" of Forms is dictated by the mind, and only then is it claimed that they provide the unity that binds the particular changing things of this world of opinion. The following description given by Anton Pegis makes this point clear.

Persuaded that the world of sensible things did not contain and could not give any more than an approximation of truth, Plato was forced to the conclusion that the world of sense was only part of reality, in fact, the inferior part. For the world of sense could not reflect any truth at all unless there were truth within reality itself for the world of sense to reflect, even imperfectly. Nor could human knowledge reveal within itself all those characteristics of permanence, of universality and of necessity unless reality itself contained these same characteristics and revealed them to the human intellect. If, therefore, human knowledge contains truths that it sees but does not make, and yet truths that it does not find in the world of sense, this must mean that the true

\begin{enumerate}
\item Frederick Copleston, \textit{A History of Philosophy}, Book I, Volume I, p. 150.
\end{enumerate}
reality of being, such as it is revealed to the human intellect, lies beyond the world of sensible things.\textsuperscript{77} Plato's doctrine of Forms, then, is ultimately a form of epistemological Idealism, as Jacques Maritain observes.

This position reduces sense-knowledge to mere illusion. That which is real is, for example a human nature existing in itself and separately outside the mind, a man in himself (platonism). \textellipsis It must be borne in mind that realism understood in this sense, far from being incompatible with idealism, is essentially an idealist doctrine. For realism of this type regards as the reality of things that which is distinctive of our Ideas as such. Plato is thus at once the most typical representative both of idealism and absolute realism.\textsuperscript{78}

What is known is not what is derived from the senses. Intellectual knowledge is of the universal, of the Forms or Ideas. But if true knowledge is such that it cannot be found in the world of the sensible, then from where does this knowledge come? The Forms are postulated on the basis of reason alone, as has been observed. As Plato put it into the mouth of Socrates,

\begin{quote}
Evidently, then, he would reach the purest understanding of them [the Ideas] who would approach each reality by means of thought alone, neither introducing the sense of sight into the work of understanding nor bringing with him any other sense whatever along with the work of reasoning; who, using thought alone by itself and unalloyed, would set out to hunt things in their very selves and unalloyed. \textellipsis Don't you think that, if at all, such a one, Simmias, will arrive at the possession of reality?\textsuperscript{79}
\end{quote}

Although Plato proposed the separate existence of the Forms, their existence is ultimately in the mind. Since the Forms are ultimate

\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{77} Anton C. Pegis, "Cosmogony and Knowledge: The Dilemma of Composite Essences," p. 278.
\item \textsuperscript{79} \textit{Phaedo}, pp. 65d-66a.
\end{enumerate}
reality, then, reality is finally only a postulate of the mind. What is known is not the sensibly real, but the intellectually real. This is epistemological Idealism.

3. Plato's philosophy of language

Since the Forms or Ideas are the objects of true knowledge, they function as the meanings of general terms.

The process of defining general concepts is one which terminates in a formula which refers to a Form. The classification of particular things, moreover, pivots on the recognition of common properties, of an essence which is the same in many instances; and that essence is a Form. Communication by means of language presupposes that words, on Plato's theory, refer to meanings which different minds may entertain; and these meanings are Forms."

According to Plato, "words [are] conventional signs for concepts, concepts [are] mental representations of ideas, and ideas [are] the transcendent essences of things around us. Our language, therefore, reflects our concepts, which in turn reflect ideas as essential structures of reality." Meaning is found in the Ideas in which sensible reality participates or imitates.

If one were to talk about the Athenian Constitution as good, it would at once be realized that the immutable and stable concept in this judgment is the idea of good. The Athenian Constitution may be changed or altered in some way such that it would then be judged bad. But this would indicate that in the midst of the change, good remained the same. Consequently, the idea of the good is the meaning of the term applied to the Athenian Constitution when it participates or imitates that unchanging Form of goodness.

The same holds true for sensible things such as man. Socrates and Plato are each called man. However, throughout all the differences from one man to another, the concept of man remains the

80. Andrew J. Reck, Speculative Philosophy, p. 58.
82. Copleston, A History of Philosophy, Book I, Volume I, p. 150. 52
same. The meaning of the general term "man," then, is found in the form or Idea which is the unchanging universal which "signifie[s] the separated idea of man."\(^{83}\) The nature of meaning is in the realm of the Forms or Ideas. The Forms or Ideas are said to exist apart from the mind (Figure 5).

![Diagram of Platonic Idealism]

Reality is in the realm of Forms or Ideas.
Matter is shadowy reflection of Reality.
Meaning is found in Form outside the Mind.

**Figure 5: Platonic Idealism**

Although each culture develops a convention of linguistic communication composed of sounds and written words, the words signify the universal Forms, which are their meanings. The meaning of the word ἄνθρωπος or "man" is not the sensible individual, for this is only a shadow of the real. The sensible individual participates in the real, but the real is "man-in-himself." The general term cannot immediately signify the particular man, but signifies the universal, immutable man-in-himself.

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The problem of meaning, then, is still intact. The Ideas are the objects of knowledge and yet have no existence in the external sensible world. Plato asserts that they exist somewhere, but he never identifies where. It seems ultimately that they really only exist in the mind. Now, since that which is sensibly perceived is not the object of knowledge, and that which is the object of knowledge is not sensibly perceived, Plato has posited a situation in which knowledge has no object, and sense impressions produce no knowledge. The object of knowledge is the subjective idea. It can only be hoped that everyone's Ideas are the same. But language is rendered meaningless, for nothing can be said about sensible reality since terms apply to the subjective idea, not to the thing in the sensible world. Extreme Realism has fallen victim to, and perhaps historically is the originator of, the same problem found in Idealism and Nominalism. Extreme Realism is, also, an inadequate solution to the problem of meaning.

IV. Conclusion

As the diagram in the introduction to Part I illustrates, the perspective proposed in the thesis of this paper views both Nominalism and Extreme Realism as ultimately leading back to Idealism. It is true that each system articulates in a different way the relationship between the mind and extra-mental reality. But each system also advances a subjectivism in which the idea, or concept in the mind, is the object of knowledge. These systems do not attain to a knowledge of reality directly, but only attain that which is in the mind. In this respect they can each be considered a form of subjective Idealism. "The root of all subjective idealism may be traced to the confusion of what we know with the medium whereby we know."\(^{84}\)

But the errors of subjective Idealism are not without their benefit, as Louis Regis indicates.

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The very errors to which Idealism has given rise, teach us a lesson: the first and last word of any epistemology is not of an epistemological order but is pronounced by metaphysics or by a pseudo-metaphysics. . . . The point of departure of every epistemology, therefore, will be the acceptance of a measure of knowledge, that is to say, a certain conception of reality. If reality is conceived as being one, then all knowledges will be necessarily measured by this unity. If, on the other hand, reality is conceived as diverse or multiple, then the measures will be multiple and there is the possibility of several diverse knowledges. Now, in Idealism, it is a pseudo-metaphysics which defines the measure or the reality. Moreover, it is either mathematics or physics which plays this role; and since each is a particular science, then Idealism excludes the diversity of the real.  

According to Regis, then, the investigation of knowledge is predicated, either knowingly or unknowingly, upon the metaphysics of the one doing the investigation.

What has this to do with the problem of meaning? Elliott Johnson has made the point quite clear: "This problem of meaning can be reduced to two basic questions: How do I know? and How do I know that I know?" In other words, the problem of meaning is intimately related to considerations of epistemology. This fact, in itself, is not the problem. However, it manifests the validity of the above investigation into the philosophical systems on the basis of which various solutions to the problem of meaning have been proposed. This section has attempted to present a Thomistic appraisal of the various systems considered in order to contrast them with Moderate Realism. Following this pattern, then, the presentation of a Thomistic theory of the nature of meaning will involve an exposition of the foundational questions of metaphysics and epistemology from the point of view of Thomistic or Moderate Realism.

86. Elliott E. Johnson, Expository Hermeneutics: An Introduction (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), p. 8, emphases in original.
PART II

THE NATURE OF MEANING: A REALIST PERSPECTIVE

Introduction

The diagram in Figure 6 illustrates the perspective of this section.

![Diagram showing the metaphysical foundation of meaning]

**Figure 6** Metaphysical Foundation of Meaning

The remainder of this paper will be an attempt to expound the basic
thesis presented in this diagram. Additionally, this diagram corresponds to the earlier diagram in Figure 1, "Relation of Disciplines." Chapter three of this paper, "Metaphysics," will attempt to explain a Thomistic view of the nature of external, created reality dealing with the "Created thing" in the Figure 6. This chapter will attempt to answer the question, "What is that which is?" and will involve defining such terms as "form" and "matter" which appear in Figure 6.

Chapter four, "Epistemology," will attempt to explicate a Thomistic view of knowledge and answer the question, "How do we know that which is?" Chapter five, "Linguistics," will address the question, "How do we communicate what we know?" And chapter six will deal with the question, "How do we understand what is communicated?" by addressing two crucial problems in hermeneutics.

It may be helpful at this point to present a summary of the flow of reasoning presented in the Figure 6. At this point, many terms will be introduced the explanations of which will be provided in the discussions in the following sections of this paper. Figure 6 illustrates not only a Thomistic view of the metaphysical foundation of knowledge, but an analogical relationship between knowledge and communication.

The diagram in Figure 6 begins at the top with a representation of the existence of the forms in the mind of God. These forms exist as Divine ideas in the Divine intellect. These ideas are the forms of things existing apart from the things themselves. As Etienne Gilson explains,

the form of a thing can exist apart from the thing in two distinct ways; either because it is the exemplar of that of which it is said to be the form, or because it is the principle which enables us to know the things. In either case, we must assume ideas to exist in God.‘

According to the Thomistic view, all things exist in God's mind before their existence in the finite world of things. God created

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the matter out of nothing and imposed upon it a form, thereby creating a thing in reality. This creative event is characterized in the Scripture by the phrase, "and God said." The resultant real object is composed of form and matter.

As we will attempt to expound later, when a man knows an object in reality, the form of the thing comes to exist in the mind of the knower. Man imitates God in that, while God is all things by virtue of His Divine Intelligence in which all forms exist as Divine Ideas,² so man becomes all things by obtaining the forms of things that come to exist in the mind of man as ideas. Consequently, it is not necessary for a man to go back into the mind of God in order to know reality. Rather, man knows reality by means of the form of the thing as it is in itself.

The second half of the diagram in Figure 6 illustrates the event of communication. Analogous to the existence of the forms as Divine Ideas in the mind of God, so the forms, or meanings, exist in the mind of man as ideas. A man takes the matter, his language, imposes upon it a form, meaning, and creates a text in reality. In this act, man imitates God's creative act. A second man is able to extract the form of the text by which he understands the meaning of the text, for the form is the meaning. In this act man knows the meaning of the text in a way analogous to the way he knows a thing in reality. Consequently, it is not necessary for the second man to attempt to go behind the text into the mind of an author in order to discover the meaning of a text. The meaning of the text is located in the text as its form, which is analogous to the way the form of the thing in reality is located in the thing in reality. As God is the efficient cause of the being of things, a human author is the secondary efficient cause of the meaning of texts. God is not the Originator of all specific meanings, although He certainly is the Originator of some specific meanings,

² The claim here that God is all things should not be taken in a pantheistic sense. God is not all things ontologically. God is all things intellectually, by virtue of the existence of the forms of all things in the Divine Mind as Divine Ideas.
such as His Word. However, God, as the primary efficient cause, has created the universe in which specific meanings are possible. Human beings, as secondary efficient causes, are the originators of some specific meanings, such as the sentences they speak, but not the creators of meaning qua meaning. In short, God made all specific meaning possible and some specific meanings actual, while humans make some specific meanings actual.

As has been explained above, this diagram also presents the order in which we will conduct our investigation. We begin with the reality of the external world and address the question, "What is that which is?" We will then investigate the knowing process in an effort to answer the next question, "How do we know that which is?" From this point we will move to a consideration of the linguistic question, "How do we communicate what we know," and finally address the question of hermeneutics, "How do we understand what is communicated?" As has been pointed out his order follows upon the relationship of disciplines as illustrated in the diagram in Figure 1 of Part I above.

If the relationship of disciplines as illustrated in Figure 1 is accurate, then that which is communicated is what is known, and what is known is the real world. Indeed, as Jacques Maritain has put it, "The proper object of understanding is being." As he explains elsewhere,

In reality ideas, as the consciousness of every man witnesses immediately, are our instruments of knowledge. If, therefore, knowledge did not apprehend the things themselves, knowledge would be an operation or activity without end or object, which is absurd. For to form an idea or judgment is to know, just as to make use of a knife is to cut. And, just as it is impossible to cut without cutting something—the end or object of the act of cutting, which is not the knife, but the thing cut by it—so it is impossible to know without knowing something—the end or object of the act of knowing, which is not the idea, but the thing known by it.  


The proper object of knowledge, then, is not our ideas, but reality. However, in order for a thing in the real world to be known, it must remain unchanged in the act of knowing. As Joseph Owens points out,

A thing or essence has to remain unchanged in itself in being known. Otherwise not it but something into which it changed would be known. Cognition, in order to be cognition, has to leave unchanged the essence of what it knows.\(^5\)

The proper object of knowledge, then, is that which is, as it is in itself. This leads us to the first question in our effort to climb the staircase to an adequate hermeneutic. As illustrated in Figure 1 of the Introduction to Part I, and in the diagram in Figure 6 above, that question is, What is that which is?

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CHAPTER 3

Metaphysics: What is that which is?
The foundation of meaning

According to the Thomistic view proposed in this paper, the world appears to abound with a great many different things. All things are not the same. There are many different kinds of things. Some things are very different from each other, such as a rock and a dog. Some things are similar to each other, such as a dog and a cat. Things that are different in kind are differentiated by their species. A dog is a different species of thing from the species of a rock or a cat. But things are not only different by species. There are also different instances of the same species. One dog is not another, yet they are of the same species. Individual dogs are numerically different.

There must be some way of accounting for these differences in things. The fact that there is meaningful communication about different things and the differences in things calls for an explanation. How can we account for the fact that the human mind is able to distinguish between things and reflect that difference by means of language? The capacity to understand and communicate the differences in things must be grounded in the real difference in the things of external reality. In order to understand the fact that we communicate what we know, we must understand how it is possible to know. But to understand how knowledge is possible we must understand the objects of knowledge. But to understand the objects of knowledge, we must understand that which is. To attempt to explicate these claims, we will begin our investigation of that which is by a consideration of substance.

I. The reality of substance

According to Joseph Owens, "The sole absolutely basic essence in any finite thing is called its substance."¹ According to Jacques Maritain, "Substance is a thing or nature whose property is to exist by itself, or in virtue of itself (per se) and not in

another thing."² Both of these definitions assume the reality of substance as that which exists independent of anyone's perception. Simply, the word substance indicates that which exists in itself. This concept is not to be confused with the more scientific or physical concept that refers to the constitution of material objects or particles. In Thomistic metaphysics, the term substance can be used with reference to spiritual entities as well as physical entities in as much as each entity exists as an independent being.

To explicate the nature of substance is not to attempt to prove the existence of external reality. As Robert McCall has observed, "The self-evident is indemonstrable. The self-evident does not need to be demonstrated."³ Something is self-evident in itself if, when one understands the terms involved, that thing is immediately known. As St. Thomas described it,

Thus, as soon as you know the nature of a whole and the nature of a part, you know immediately that every whole is greater than its part. . . . that every whole is greater than its part is, absolutely speaking, self-evident; but it would perforce be unknown to one who could not conceive the nature of a whole.⁴

But, external reality seems immediately obvious and therefore self-evident. If this is so, it seems highly problematic to attempt to prove the existence of a reality which is external to the mind, for to whom or what would such a proof be directed? External reality appears to be self-evidently experienced on a daily basis by all who are alive. What is to be demonstrated, therefore, is not whether there is an external reality, but that external reality exists outside the mind as what is called substance. "Whatever be

² Jacques Maritain, An Introduction to Philosophy, p. 224
³ Robert E. McCall, The Reality of Substance, p. 49.
its explicit formal definition . . . substance is the thing in its necessary role of independent existence."⁵

A. Substance as independent existence

In Thomistic metaphysics, the most basic principle of external reality is what is called substance. The reason for starting with substance is the proposition that "There must be things which exist in themselves."⁶ Anything that exists must either exist in itself or in another. To say that something exists in another is to assert that it could not exist independently. "The sun tan has its few months' being each summer only as a modification of a human skin."⁷ A sun tan does not have independent existence, whereas the man in whom the sun tan exists does have independent existence.

The independent existence of substance is not to be confused with an independence or dependence upon extrinsic efficient causality. Every finite being is caused to be by the efficient causality of the Uncaused Cause, namely God. Owens clarifies this distinction when he states, "The dependence or independence that distinguishes essences refers not to the reception of being but to the way in which that being is possessed."⁸ A man is not a modification of being. A man is a being. A man has his being in an independent way, that is to say, a man does not exist in another thing as a quality exists in another thing. Any being which has its being in this independent way is identified as a substance. Conversely, "Whatever has its being in dependence upon a substance . . . is known as an accident."⁹

Even so, every being has its being either independently or dependently, as described above. Every being is either a substance

⁵ Robert McCall, The Reality of Substance, p. 50.
⁶ Robert McCall, The Reality of Substance, p. 50.
or an accident. But every being cannot be an accident, for an accident cannot exist independently; else it would not be an accident, but a substance. Neither can accidents exist dependently upon prior accidents in an infinite regress, for an infinite regress is impossible. An infinite regress of accidents would constitute an independent existence, or substance. But to assert that accidents are substance is contradictory. Therefore, there must be independent existences, or substance. McCall makes a helpful observation of this point.

Either there are things which have independent existence, sustaining self and sustaining dependents, or there is nothing, due to the ever-eluding second alternative [infinite regress] in its march to infinity. The fact that a thing as such, as itself, is sustained not in another but in itself is proof that there is the reality of substance.\(^{10}\)

B. Substance and change

A second aspect of the Thomistic view of substance is the relation of substance to change. The fact of change has been a topic of philosophical and practical investigation since the beginning of intellectual observation of the world. The ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus is famous for the saying attributed to him, "All things are in a state of flux."\(^{11}\) However, Heraclitus' observation was somewhat flawed. It is self-defeating to assert that all things are in a state of flux, for this would include the claim that all things are in a state of flux, the truth of which rests on the assumption that it is unchangeably true. But if the claim that all is in flux is itself not in flux, then it is not the case that all is in flux, and the claim falsifies itself.

A Thomistic view asserts that in the midst of change, something must remain unchanged. Indeed, the very notion of change includes the idea that something changes. Yet, that which changes is the same thing through the change. As Margaret Gorman has

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observed, "If there were not things to change, man would say that there were new things, not that things changed."\textsuperscript{12} Gorman identifies three elements of change.

1. the arrival of something new.
2. a subject to receive the change or to be changed for, if there is nothing that has changed, no change has taken place but a new being has come. A ball to be moved must be a ball or it cannot be moved and be described as a ball that has been moved. A child to grow must be a child; the growing does not occur unless there is a subject of growing.
3. the subject's lack of the perfection acquired through the change.\textsuperscript{13}

From these principles it is clear that change implies permanence. There must be some aspect of a thing that undergoes change, a subject of change.

A consideration of accidental change will provide a helpful illustration of this point. If an accident is a modification of a substance and is not essential to the substance qua substance, then it is easy to see that in accidental change, the accidental characteristic changes while the substance remains the same. The man who has obtained the sun tan has undergone an accidental change. It is not essential to the nature of a man that he have tan skin. A pale man is no less a man than a man with a tan. A tan is an accidental characteristic. When the tan fades, the man remains the same man. The substance does not change. The accidental characteristic of skin color changes. The reality of change offers a confirmation of the reality of substance. George Klubertanz provides an enlightening summary of this point.

... in the kind of change we are considering here, the subject remains what it was, in the sense that it retains the same nature and individuality. But in itself this subject can, and often must, receive further determinations ... Because this subject remains the same "under" the change, and

\textsuperscript{12} Margaret Gorman, \textit{General Semantics and Contemporary Thomism} (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1962), p. 17 (emphasis in original).

\textsuperscript{13} Margaret Gorman, \textit{General Semantics and Contemporary Thomism}, p. 89.
so "is under" ("sub-stands") the various determinations that it has, it is called a "substance." ¹⁴

C. Substance and predication

According to A Dictionary of Philosophy, predication is "The attribution of a property to a subject." ¹⁵ Now, assuming the substance/accident dichotomy as presented above, if there is no substance, then all attributes are accidents, and all predications are accidental predications. However, according to Aristotle,

... since the accidental always implies a predication about some subject, if all statements are accidental, there will be nothing primary about which they are made; so the predication must proceed to infinity. But this is impossible for not even more than two accidents can be combined in predication. An accident cannot be an accident of an accident unless both are accidents of the same thing. ¹⁶

If there is no substance, then predication cannot make any assertion about the essence of anything. As Aristotle argues, "In general those who talk like this do away with substance and essence, for they are compelled to assert that all things are accidents, and that there is no such thing as 'being essentially man' or 'animal.'" ¹⁷ But, if there is no substance then words cannot have reference to what a thing essentially is. Consequently, words would not have a definite range of meaning, but would be unlimited in reference. As Aristotle concludes,

If ... it be said that "man" has an infinite number of meanings, obviously there can be no discourse; for not to have one meaning is to have no meaning, and if words have no meaning there is an end of discourse with others, and even, strictly speaking, with oneself ... ¹⁸

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¹⁶ Aristotle, Metaphysics, 1007 a 34.

¹⁷ Aristotle, Metaphysics, 1007 b 22.

¹⁸ Aristotle, Metaphysics, 1006 b 5.
McCall provides a helpful summary explanation of the logic of Aristotle's argument.

Without substance there is no limit placed on the number of predications, because there is never anything at which a final point must be reached for the two mutually exclusive alternatives: being so or not so. Tall and not tall; white and not white; sick and not sick: these are contradictories basically because of the impossibility of realizing them in the same subject at the same time and under the same circumstances.19

Without substance there is no reason to assert that a thing is white as opposed to non-white because there is nothing about which to make any assertion. Without substance, which is the essence of what something is, there is no reason not to assert that a thing is both white and non-white. Without substance, there is no means by which to limit the number of predications, and discourse becomes meaningless.

Someone may argue, however, that the law of non-contradiction forbids the predication of contradictories. However, the Thomistic perspective grounds epistemology in metaphysics and asserts that the law of non-contradiction obtains with reference to predication because it is grounded in being. The assertion that a thing is both white and non-white is a contradiction in predication because it is a contradiction in being. One cannot assert that something is both white and non-white because a thing must be either white or non-white.

However, discourse is in fact meaningful. White and non-white cannot be predicated of the same thing in the same relationship because of the nature of the thing as it is in itself. Predication is limited to the nature of reality by virtue of its substance. The fact of communication provides yet another demonstration of the reality of substance.

To speak of substance, then, is to make reference to what something is as an essence. The substance of man is his man-ness. According to Klubertanz,


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Substance is that principle of being whose nature it is to be directly ordered to esse in itself. . . . Essence in the strict sense is substance considered as being of a certain kind of species and being capable of receiving an act of existing. 20 So substance identifies what a thing is in itself. However, the notion of substance qua substance does not provide us with an understanding of its intelligibility. How is it possible to understand what a substance is? In short, how is knowledge of substance possible? To answer this question we must examine the principles that constitute the nature of substance.

II. The nature of substance

In the realm of finite things, substance is composite. As Joseph Owens points out, "[Substance] consists of two components or intrinsic principles, matter and form." 21

A. The constituent principles of substance

As we have observed, in the Thomistic scheme, it is necessary to account for the differences in things. A dog is different from a cat because of those characteristics that make it a dog. There must be some way to account for the fact that the substance of a dog is a different kind of substance than the substance of a cat. A dog is a different form of reality from a cat. Additionally, a second dog is different from the first dog, but it is of the same form of reality. The way in which a dog is different from a cat is different than the way one dog is different from another dog. A single explanation cannot account for these two ways of being different. Dogs cannot differ by their form, for this is the very principle by which they are constituted dogs. Benignus Gerrity has provided a helpful description of this point.

A [dog] is different from a [cat], and from every other kind of being, precisely because it is a [dog]; but it were absurd to say that it is different from another [dog] precisely because it is a [dog]. Some second principle must be recognized to account for the distinction between two [dogs]. We call these two principles form and matter. The form makes

a thing the kind of thing that it is, and the matter makes it the individual that it is.\textsuperscript{22}

The two constituent principles of substance, form and matter, are the very principles that account for the two ways in which things differ. In this use, the term principle indicates that neither "form" nor "matter" are entities or beings in themselves, but are the constituents of being. Things that differ according to kind differ by their respective forms. Things of the same kind that differ as individuals differ by their matter.

Form is also designated substantial form in order to differentiate it from accidental form. Form "is the determining and specifying principle of essence or substance."\textsuperscript{23} Simply stated, form is that principle which accounts for the fact that a thing is a certain kind of thing. It is not possible to provide an analytical definition of form, because by an analytical definition one attempts to break down that which is to be analyzed into its more basic constituents. However, form and matter are the most basic constituents of being. Therefore, form and matter must be described rather than analyzed.

The form of a dog is its "dog-ness." Form in this use must not be confused with the more common connotation of shape. Although the shape of a thing is determined by the kind of thing that it is, the principle of form is not to be identified with this single characteristic. "The form, therefore . . . is what determines the nature of a thing."\textsuperscript{24} Form is the actualizing


\textsuperscript{23} George Klubertanz, \textit{Being and God}, p. 117.

\textsuperscript{24} Benignus Gerrity, \textit{The Theory of Matter and Form and the Theory of Knowledge}, p. 36.
principle of being. A dog is a dog because of its form. A dog differs from a cat because of their respective forms.  

Matter, also identified as primary or first matter, "is the determinable and limiting principle of substance in material things . . ." The Aristotelian/Thomistic concept of matter must not be confused with the typical modern concept of physical matter. Matter, in this philosophical usage, is a principle of being. It is "the common ground of substantial change, the undetermined element of corporeal being. It is the purest potentiality, void of form . . . " One dog does not differ from another dog on the basis of form, for it is the form which constitutes each a dog. They cannot differ by dogness, for that is the very aspect in which they are alike. Two dogs differ, not by form, but by matter. Whereas the form "makes a thing the kind of thing that it is . . . the matter makes it the individual that it is."  

Roughly speaking, form is the whatness of a thing, and matter is the thatness of a thing. Neither form nor matter is a being in

25. Form in the Aristotelian sense must not be confused with Platonic form. In Plato's system, the forms were universals which existed in the realm of the ideas, as has been explained above. For Aristotle, and St. Thomas, the form was a constituent principle of the being of real things. Whereas for Plato the forms were the universals, for Aristotle and Aquinas the forms were not the universals. Plato's concept of the forms was contradictory. By asserting that the forms were universals, and at the same time maintaining that they existed as individuals, he was actually robbing the forms of any universality and confining them to the actual character of particulars. Universals, by virtue of their universality, are not particulars. Universals cannot exist as particulars, else they cease to be universal. The Thomistic concept of the form is that each particular finite thing is composed of its form and its matter.

26. George Klubertanz, Being And God, p. 117.


itself. Rather, they are principles of composite beings. Every finite being is composed of form, what it is, and matter, that it is. Things in reality can differ according to what they are—a dog or a cat—and they can differ according to the fact that they are—this dog or that dog. The constituent principles of finite substance, therefore, are form and matter.

B. The knowability of substance

Following the Thomistic scheme, the problem of the knowability of substance is seen in the fact that in order to know something as it is in itself, that thing must somehow enter the mind of the knower. As Gerrity presents the problem,

In order that there may actually be knowledge, the thing primarily necessary is that the object be present in the mind of the knower. To know a house I must get the house into my mind.\textsuperscript{29}

Now, to have an object present in the mind, neither the mind of the knower nor the object known can be altered in the knowing process. The knower cannot materially become a house, for then the knower is no longer a knower, but a house. Nor can the house be altered in the process of knowledge, for then it is not the house that is known, but some other thing. Etienne Gilson presents the problem in the form of the question, "... on what conditions can the knowing subject become the object known, without ceasing to be itself?"\textsuperscript{30} There must be some principle by which real things can enter into the mind of a knower without altering either in the process. That principle is form. As Jacques Maritain observes,

there exists in everything an intelligible and immaterial element, which Aristotle calls form, in virtue of which it possesses a specific nature or essence;\textsuperscript{31} Maritain uses the term "element" as synonymous with constituent principle. As the most basic constituents of substance of being,

\textsuperscript{29} Benignus Gerrity, \textit{The Theory of Matter and Form and the Theory of Knowledge}, p. 57.

\textsuperscript{30} Etienne Gilson, \textit{The Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas}, p. 266.

\textsuperscript{31} Jacques Maritain, \textit{An Introduction to Philosophy}, p. 84.
form and matter are its elemental parts, or basic principles. To say that an object is intelligible is to say that it is capable of being known by the intellect. But, if external reality is purely material, then it is completely unknowable, for, as will be explicated in the section on epistemology, it is impossible for the mind to become another material object. As Robert Brennan observes, "A universe made up of matter alone would be simply unintelligible.\textsuperscript{32}

It is equally impossible for a real material object to enter one's mind. But there must be some aspect by which a real object can enter the mind of the knower, and that aspect must be immaterial. As Gilson describes it,

The element of an object which can be assimilated by thought, is precisely its form. To say that the knowing subject becomes the object, is consequently the same thing as to say that the form of the knowing subject enriches itself with the form of the object known.\textsuperscript{33}

Consequently, substance is knowable by virtue of the immaterial constituent principle of form. All sensible reality is composed of form and matter. Therefore, all sensible reality is intelligible by virtue of its form.

III. Summary

The Thomistic view of the metaphysical foundation of the nature of meaning sketched in this chapter began with the reality of the external world and an exposition of the reality of substance. Either things exist independently or dependently. But to assert that things exist only dependently issues in a self-defeating infinite regress. Therefore, some things exist independently, and this is substance. We have also attempted to explain that that-which-is is understood to be substance by a consideration of the reality of change and the fact of predication.

Next, we examined the constituent principles of substance, form and matter. We observed that things are different by kind and

\textsuperscript{32} Robert Edward Brennan, \textit{Thomistic Psychology}, p. 115.

\textsuperscript{33} Etienne Gilson, \textit{The Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas}, p. 264.
by individuality, and that the principles of form and matter account for the differences in things. Form is what a substance is. Matter is that a substance is. We went on to show that the principle of intelligibility in a substance is its form.

In the next section our task will be to consider the Thomistic view of knowledge. Once we have considered the nature of that-which-is, it is necessary to examine how we can know that-which-is.
CHAPTER 4

Epistemology: How do we know that which is?
The content of meaning

The presentation in Chapter 3 has led us to the next step in
the exposition of a Thomistic theory of meaning, namely, a
consideration of the knowing process. We have considered the
reality of substance and its constituent principles, form and
matter. The knowability of substance was introduced in the latter
part of the previous section. Our present task is to consider in
greater detail how it is possible to know reality.

According to the principles of Thomistic or Moderate Realism,
"The noblest way of possessing a thing is to possess it in an
immaterial manner, that is, by possessing its form without its
matter. And this is the definition of knowledge."¹ Etienne Gilson
states, "We start with the fact that the knowing of an object is
the actual presence of the object in the thought . . ."² It is not
sufficient that the mind have merely a copy of the real external
object in the mind, for, if the mind can have only a copy of the
object, and not the object itself, then it can never discover
whether the copy accurately represents the real object. It does
not matter how one attempts to approach or investigate external
reality. If a copy is all that the mind can obtain, then the mind
does not have access to the real object, and a comparison between
the real object and the copy in the mind can never be achieved.
Consequently, reality can never be known. In a Thomistic scheme,
the knowledge of externally real objects is foundational to all
knowledge. Abstract knowledge, knowledge of propositions, etc.,
are built upon the foundation of the knowledge of external reality.

Knowledge must involve the presence of the real object in the
mind of the knower. This is the problem of knowledge. In dealing

2. Etienne Gilson, The Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas, p. 266.
with this problem, however, one must realize that it is not accurate to claim that it is the intellect that knows. Rather, as St. Thomas asserts, "... properly speaking, it is neither the intellect nor the sense that knows, but man that knows through both ..." 3 Man knows by means of his senses as well as his intellect. As Gilson points out,

there are not two conceivable solutions of the problem of knowledge, one for the intelligence and the other for the senses. Sensible knowledge and intellectual knowledge may be and are in fact two different kinds or two different phases of one and the same operation, but they must inevitably be accounted for by the same explanation. 4

I. Sense cognition

According to Thomistic epistemology, the first step in the investigation of the knowing process is the consideration of sensation. The immediate problem which is faced is the fact that, as Brennan has observed, "Knowledge is possible only on the condition that subject and object have something in common. ... a certain degree of immateriality is a primary requisite." 5 This is necessary because the Thomistic view asserts that the mind is immaterial. Although there are a number of competent Thomists who argue for the immateriality of the mind, an exposition and defense of this position would require a separate thesis. We will, therefore, adopt this as a working assumption in this paper since the purpose here is to present a theory of meaning from a Thomistic perspective.

From this perspective, then, for the object to enter the mind of the knower, there must be an immaterial aspect of the object, and this is its form. It must be remembered that "a being is


defined by its form." The form is the "whatness" of substance. Therefore, when the form enters the mind of the knower, it is the substantial form of the thing in reality that is thereby known.

The first step in the knowing process is sensation. Since this is the first step, it follows that it is by way of the senses that the form of the object initially enters the mind of the knower. Sensation is considered under two general divisions, external and internal.

A. The external senses

It will not be necessary to spend a great deal of time on this aspect of the knowing process since, as Brennan points out, "From the time of Aristotle, psychologists have been fairly well agreed upon the fivefold division of our external senses into vision, hearing, smell, taste, and body sense or somesthesia."

1. Sensible encounter with objective reality

The first point to be considered with reference to the external senses is whether in sensation the mind forms the impression of what is sensibly perceived by means of some subjective modification, or whether the senses actually attain the objectively real.

As M. Aloysius observes, for St. Thomas, "sense exhibits itself as a passive power which must be initially moved by an external stimulus." To be a passive power indicates that the senses do not generate the forms of sensible cognitions. The form of the real object is impressed upon the senses. Aristotle employs the example of an impression of a signet-ring upon wax.

It must be taken as a general rule that all sensation is the receiving of forms without matter, as wax receives a seal without the iron or gold of the signet-ring. It receives an imprint of the gold or bronze, but not as gold or bronze. Similarly the sense of any sense-object is acted upon by a thing having colour or flavour or sound; not, however, in respect of what each is called as a particular thing, but in so far as each has a certain quality and according to its informing principle.  

That which is embossed on the signet-ring is received in the wax and is separated from the matter of the ring. As Mortimer Adler explains, "The golden A on the signet is formally the same as the waxen A, but materially different."  

It is clear from the illustration that the form impressed upon the wax is not generated by the wax but by the impression of the signet-ring. Similarly, the form impressed upon the senses is not generated by the senses, or by the mind of the knower, but by the object in reality. As M. Aloysius has put it, "Now, inasmuch as human knowledge takes its rise from sense-data, this suffices to ground it in objectively existing things."  

2. Sensible encounter by intentional form

It is necessary, then, to examine how this impression is accomplished. As has been stated before, knowledge begins with the impression upon the external senses of the form of an objectively real thing. As the impression of the signet-ring left its form in the wax, but did not leave its matter, so the impression of the objectively real object leaves its form on the external sense without its matter.

This process takes place by actual entrance of the form of the object into the knowing subject. As Klubertanz describes it,

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to know another is in some sense to be (and thus to have become) another, to take on the form of another. To be another, to possess another's form—though not a material, physical being and possession—is nevertheless real, for we actually have knowledge of various things.\(^\text{12}\)

This indicates that the mode of existence of the object in external reality, and the mode of existence of the same object in the knowing subject are different. The same object that exists materially in external reality exists immaterially in the knowing subject. This immaterial existence in the knowing subject is called intentional existence. Klubertanz describes the nature of intentional existence as the "orientation of human knowledge to things known" as a "kind of 'extending out toward or over, including' (intendere) the object in itself."\(^\text{13}\)

Joseph Owens observes that intention "seems to have meant originally an idea, or representation in thought. Later the etymology of the word was used to bring out the notion that cognition 'tends' toward or into its object."\(^\text{14}\)

The intentional existence is an immaterial existence of the form of the real object in the knowing subject. The form of a man is impressed upon the sense of sight. But the sense of sight does not become another person. The sense of sight remains a sense of sight while becoming the form of the man sensed. To explain this process St. Thomas introduced the notion of the "species."\(^\text{15}\) The species is not a new or different entity that has been introduced into the knowing process. Rather, the introduction of the term "species" is an effort to clarify the explanation of the knowing process by naming a distinct aspect.

The form of the thing in reality, which is the metaphysical principle of substance and determines what a thing is, is impressed

\begin{itemize}
  \item[12.] George P. Klubertanz, *The Philosophy of Human Nature*, p. 68.
  \item[13.] George P. Klubertanz, *The Philosophy of Human Nature*, p. 68.
  \item[14.] Joseph Owens, *An Elementary Christian Metaphysics*, p. 32.
  \item[15.] Etienne Gilson, *The Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, p. 266.
\end{itemize}
upon the senses. The way the form informs matter to constitute a
substance in external reality is different from the way the same
form informs the knowing subject. The form is combined with matter
to constitute a real being. Matter receives form as its form by
which it is determined to be a certain specific thing in reality.
The intellect, however, does not receive a form as its form, but,
as John F. Peifer describes it, "precisely as it is the form of the
other, of the thing."\(^{16}\) Matter receives its form materially. The
knower receives the form of the thing in reality immaterially, or
spiritually.

The term "species," then serves to distinguish between the
form as it informs matter and the same form as it informs the
knower. Robert Brennan provides a helpful explanation of the
notion of the species.

The word species is very technical in meaning. Here it
signifies, not a logical principle which determines
predicational existence; nor an ontological principle which
determines natural existence; but, if I may use the term, an
epistemological principle which determines intentional exist-
ence. In its cognitive meaning, therefore, a species is an
intentional form. As an intentional form it is an instrument
of knowledge or an intermediary which enables the subject,
without ceasing to be what it is by nature, to become the
object, without destroying the nature of the object.\(^{17}\)

The species is not another object, nor is it merely a copy of the
object in reality. The species is the sensible and intelligible
aspect, namely the form, of the object in reality as it is in its
immaterial mode of existence in the knower. But, as Etienne Gilson
insists,

it is of capital importance to grasp that the species is not
one thing and the object another; the species is the object
itself "per modum speciei," that is to say, the object
considered in its action and its efficacy exercised upon a
subject.\(^{18}\)

\(^{16}\) John F. Peifer, The Concept in Thomism (New York: Bookman,

\(^{17}\) Robert E. Brennan, Thomistic Psychology, pp. 116-117.

The diagram in Figure 7 below illustrates this first step in the knowing process. The circle represents the thing in reality composed of matter and form. The five small squares represent the five external senses. The five lines represent the impression of the form of the external object upon the appropriate sense. The result is the formation of an impressed species, which is the form of the object as it exists in the appropriate sense.

Figure 7: Sense Cognition: Part 1

B. The internal senses

As a result of a sensible encounter with external reality, a sense organ, or sense organs, are impressed upon by the form of the real object. The form of that object comes to exist in the knowing subject as the species, or intentional form. However, it is apparent that there must be something more to the sense experience than the sense impression of the five external senses. For example, it is evident that the sense of sight cannot ascertain the difference between blue and sweet, simply because sweetness is not
the proper object of sight. Also, experience indicates that we are aware of our sense experience. As George Klubertanz argues, the senses are passive powers, and their objects are related to them as agent to patient. Since the sense cannot act upon itself, it cannot know itself. Consequently, the sense power is not reflexive. And so none of the external senses can be the principle of sensory consciousness. Consequently, in any and every act by which we are aware of an external object, we can distinguish at least two elements, one of which is the act of a particular external sense, and the other of which is the knowledge of that act.¹⁹

These observations lead to the conclusion that there must be some additional power or powers of the mind that are able to account for these experiences. These additional powers are the internal senses.

1. The common sense

It is a fact of experience that the mind is able to distinguish between "red" and "warm." The sense of sight is able to distinguish between "red" and "blue," but not "red" and "warm" because it does not know "warm." There must, therefore, be a unifying power by which the mind is able to unite all of the sensible aspects into a single perception. That power is called the common sense. This term is traditional in scholastic philosophy and is too common to be replaced. However, it must not be confused with the popular idiomatic use in English referring to a body of knowledge that is generally accepted by a group. Gilson describes common sense as that "to which all sense-perceptions must be submitted, as to their common centre, to enable it to judge of them and to distinguish between them."²⁰

The function of the common sense, then, is to "perceive different sensible species, distinguish them, compare them, [and to] be aware of them as entities that are distinct from the emotive

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accompaniments they cause ... "21 Additionally, the data that is received by the external senses is "collected into a common image, which is attributed to one and the same external object." 22 The diagram in Figure 8 below illustrates the next step in the knowing process.

![Diagram](image)

**Figure 8:** Sense Cognition: Part 2

The reproduction of the circle inside the square represents the fact that what is perceived is not simply a copy of the thing in reality, but is that thing according to the mode of existence it takes in the mind of the knower. The five lines leading from the individual senses to the common sense represents the collecting aspect of the common sense. The result is the formation of an impressed species that is the sensed object as a whole. It is an


impressed species because the proper object of the common sense is the form as it is impressed upon the senses.

2. Imagination

Because the proper object of the common sense is the external object as it acts upon the external senses, the common sense "functions only while the object is physically present and being sensed by the external senses." However, experience teaches us that we are able to recall at least some of the experiences which we have had in the past. Even though the object may not be present, we are able to recall the image which was originally the result of a previous sense experience. As Klubertanz observes, "it is immediately evident that we have a power of retaining sensory experience. This power is called 'retentive imagination . . .'"

The power of the imagination is composed of two aspects, the reproductive and the creative. The reproductive imagination is that aspect by which the mind is able to represent (re-present, or present again) things in the mind. The creative imagination is that aspect by which the mind is able to combine the representations or portions of representations into images which have never actually been the objects of the senses. But, as Brennan points out, "In both cases . . . the contents of what is represented on the imaginal power must be drawn from previous experiences, even when chimeras and mountains of gold are fantastically created."

23. In addition to the power of imagination, the scholastic philosophers proposed two other powers of the internal senses, the memorial power and the estimative power. Each power has its respective function; however, their functions are not crucial to the thesis of this paper. Therefore, we will refrain from a consideration of these powers.


The operation of the imaginal power is the production of an expressed species or image. Here the term "image" is used in a technical sense and "is not a mere extrinsic picture or portrait, but it is an expressed intentional similitude."\(^{27}\) Brennan warns of the problems surrounding the use of this term.

The term "image" is rather inadequate as a description of the product of the imagination, because it is so immediately suggestive of something seen. The fact is, of course, that imaginal power is limited only by the limitations of sensitive experience. Accordingly, we have images arising from all the fields of sensation: visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, and somesthetic.\(^{28}\)

The terms "image," "picture," and "representation" are not, therefore, to be taken only in the more common understanding of some sort of visual reproduction in the mind's eye. Rather, these terms are employed in an attempt to bring out the similitude that exists between the expressed species and the object in reality. The visual representation in the mind of a past visual experience is certainly one instance of an image. It is simply the case that the image is more than simply visual, not that it is not visual at all.

Although this expressed species is identified as a representation or a similitude, it must not be supposed that the realist account of the knowing process has come to the same point for which the idealist theories were criticized. The insurmountable difficulty of Idealism, or any "copy theory," is that the real object is always outside the mind, while the mind attains only a copy of the thing in reality. Consequently, the mind is never able to acquire the real object by which to discover whether or not its copy is an accurate representation of the objectively real object. This "gap" is illustrated in the diagram in Figure 9 below.


In opposition to this, the realist view proposes that the real object actually enters the mind by means of its form from which the imagination is able to make an expressed species. The mind, then, has both the real object, by virtue of its intentional being, and the expressed species in the mind by which a comparison can be made to discover the accuracy of the representation and similitude of the expressed species.

This expressed species is designated by the term "phantasm" as it is considered in relation to the act of the intellect, which will be considered next. The word "phantasm" derives from the Latin word "phantasma," which means "image," "the representation of a thing in its absence . . ." 29 The diagram in Figure 10 below illustrates the final step in sense cognition which results in the expressed species or the phantasm. The phantasm is designated as an expressed species because the imagination makes its object "appear." 30 Whereas the external senses and the common sense issue in an impressed species by virtue of the impression of the form of the external object, the imagination, and the other powers of the internal senses, issue in the expressed species by which the image is expressed in the mind of the knower.

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Figure 10: Sense Cognition: Part 3

It may be objected that there is no readily available empirical evidence for the above delineated scheme. However, the above explanation of sense cognition is an attempt to give a rational explanation for common experience. The empirical evidence is the common experience of sensation. The rational explanation is an attempt to analyze this experience and provide a possible explanation for this common experience. But, rational explanations require rational justification, not empirical justification. The justification for this explanation is that it seems to explain all the data of experience.
C. Summary

According to the Thomistic scheme, then, sense cognition is knowledge of the particular thing as it is in itself\(^3\) according to its sensible qualities. The form of the thing in reality has come to exist in the mind of the knowing subject as an impressed species in the external senses and common sense, and as an expressed species in the imagination. It exists in the mind as an intentional being by virtue of an immaterial mode of existence. The expressed species of the imagination are not one thing while the impressed species of the common sense are another. Rather the expressed species is "numerically the same species which are used by the *sensus communis* [common sense]," for they are "transferred to and retained by the imagination, though used there in a different manner."\(^3\) The phantasm, which is the ultimate term of sensible cognition is that upon which the intellect will operate issuing in intellectual knowledge. As Gerrity notes, "The phantasm is formed not merely to represent a singular thing, but principally to serve as the material out of which the active intellect abstracts the intelligible species."\(^3\)

II. Intellectual cognition

The next step in the analysis of this Thomistic scheme is the examination of intellectual cognition. The termination of sense cognition is the phantasm by which the particular thing in reality

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31. Gerald Phelan offers a word of clarification on this expression. "For Kant the 'thing-in-itself' was some inscrutable entity beyond the reach of reason which only an indefensible dogmatism or an act of faith or an irrational experience could lead one to accept. . . . The thing in itself of which I am speaking [and in this paper] is an essence exercising an act of existence in the world of reality--actual or possible--as contrasted with that same essence exercising an act of existence in the world of knowledge." Gerald B. Phelan, "Verum Sequitur Esse Rerum" *Mediaeval Studies* I (1939): p. 16.


is known as particular. The form of the thing in reality has been received into the mind of the knower apart from its matter but along with all the concrete conditions of matter. By the senses the mind knows the qualities of this particular thing in the here and now. The necessity of this process in the Thomistic scheme is explained by Benignus Gerrity.

The only proper stimulus and object of the operation of the intellect is the actually intelligible. Now . . . matter of itself is not intelligible at all, and . . . the actually intelligible is nothing less than form entirely free from matter and material conditions. But things composed of matter and form are, obviously, not pure forms; and the consequence is that the proper objects of man's intellect, as they exist naturally, are not actually intelligible. . . . The only way out of the difficulty is to show that these things are made actually intelligible. Sensation and the formation of the phantasm . . . are the beginning of this process of making them so, but it reaches its completion only in the operation of the intellect.34

Experience teaches us that the mind is capable of knowing not only the particular, but also the common or universal aspects of individual things. Our language is replete with words that have general reference. As Mortimer Adler argues,

Unless, by means of our abstract concepts, we can understand triangularity as such or what is common to particular cows, trees, and chairs, the general or common names we use can have no significance, for they do not refer to this particular triangle or to that particular cow, but to triangles in general and cows in general.35

The process by which the mind comes to know the common nature, which is in the phantasm that has been produced by the imagination, involves two powers of the soul.

By one power [the soul] makes things actually intelligible, by abstracting their forms from individual matter, and thus rendering them intelligible forms. This power is called the active [or agent] intellect. The other power is the ability to receive these actually intelligible species, and so to know the objects of which they are the forms. This [is]

35. Mortimer J. Adler, Ten Philosophical Mistakes, p. 43.
generally called the possible intellect, sometimes . . . the passive intellect.\textsuperscript{36}

A. The agent intellect

The intellect "lays hold upon the whatness of things, as universal . . ."\textsuperscript{37} It accomplishes this task by an act of illumination and abstraction in which the common nature or essence is illumined and separated from the individuating conditions of matter.

1. Illumination and Abstraction

The first aspect of the action of the agent intellect is described as illumination. L. M. Regis compares the act of illumination by the agent or active intellect to the illuminating function of light.

. . . our intellect is called active because it illumines the phantasm as light illumines color, which, in an objective context, means that just as color is actually a motive cause of our visual power only because it is illumined by light, so the phantasm can move the possible intellect only insofar as it is illumined by the light of the agent intellect.\textsuperscript{38}

But it is not the function of illumination to impose upon the phantasm its intelligibility, as Gerrity points out.

The active intellect does not, as the analogy of the light might lead one to believe, confer radical intelligibility on the intelligible species. It cannot do so, for these species are forms, and every form is in its own right intelligible . . .\textsuperscript{39}

Consequently, it is not some intelligible thing other than the form of the thing in reality that the intellect knows. That is to say, the agent intellect has not imposed upon the phantasm some aspect that was not present in it before the act of illumination. It is the "freedom from materiality" that is the "condition for the

\textsuperscript{36} Benignus Gerrity, \textit{The Theory of Matter and Form and the Theory of Knowledge}, p. 90.

\textsuperscript{37} John Peifer, \textit{The Concept in Thomism}, p. 110.

\textsuperscript{38} L. M. Regis, \textit{Epistemology}, p. 232.

\textsuperscript{39} Benignus Gerrity, \textit{The Theory of Matter and Form and the Theory of Knowledge}, p. 93.
actualization of this radical intelligibility.\textsuperscript{40} Illumination implies an act of making "visible" that which is already present in the thing, not adding something to the thing.

This point is made in order to set the realist position over against the claims of Nominalism at this crucial point in the process of intellection. The nominalist claims that only particulars exist, not universals. Extreme Nominalism, according to the Thomistic evaluation, claims that there are no grounds for the universal in extra-mental reality. However, the Thomistic Realist position asserts that the common nature or essence is present in each individual, and, rather than imposing upon the individual an aspect of commonality generated by the mind and represented by general terms, as the nominalist claims, the agent intellect simply illumines the essence of the thing and abstracts from the phantasm the common nature that is already and always present in the individual.

The second aspect of the action of the agent intellect is abstraction. St. Thomas elucidates the notion of abstraction.

Abstraction occurs in two ways: one, by way of combining and separating, as when we understand one not to be in another or to be separate from it; two, by way of a single and absolute consideration, as when we understand one without considering the other at all. . . . whatever pertains to the definition of any species of material reality, for instance stone or man or horse, can be considered without individuating conditions which are no part of the definition of the species. And this is what I mean by abstracting the universal from the particular, the idea from sense images, to consider the nature of a species without considering individuating conditions represented by sense images.\textsuperscript{41}

Abstraction, then, is the act of the agent intellect by which it separates the common nature that has been illumined in order to form the impressed intelligible species. All those accidental features that are not necessary to the constitution of the

\textsuperscript{40} Benignus Gerrity, \textit{The Theory of Matter and Form and the Theory of Knowledge}, p. 93.

\textsuperscript{41} St. Thomas Aquinas, \textit{Summa Theologiae}, Ia.85,1.
individual as this or that kind of substance are stripped away by abstraction, and only the essence of the thing remains. That is to say, the agent intellect abstracts the essence of the thing from all those qualities such as this color, or this weight, which do not make the thing to be what it is. As John Peifer describes it,

The intellect . . . receives intelligible similitudes in a more perfectly immaterial way, as stripped of the individuating conditions of matter. It lays hold upon natures which are common to numberless individuals. The intelligible species which activate the intellect must, therefore, be similitudes totally divested of matter: both without matter and also without the individuating conditions of matter.42

The act by which this divesting of the individuating conditions of matter is accomplished in order to form the impressed intelligible species is abstraction.

2. The impressed intelligible species

The result of the action of the agent intellect is the formation of the impressed intelligible species. It is not the function of the agent intellect to know, as John Peifer points out.

The active [agent] intellect does not know; its whole function is to prepare for knowledge by producing the impressed species which determine and actuate the possible intellect for the act of cognition.43

The impressed intelligible species is "impressed" because the agent intellect is causing an impression of the abstracted essence. It is "intelligible" because it is the intelligible aspect of the thing, namely, its form. It is a "species" because this is the term which has been introduced in order to identify the form of the thing as it is in the mind in its immaterial or intentional mode of existence. The impressed intelligible species which has been produced by abstraction is none other than the common nature or essence of the thing in reality. But, the notion of common nature must not be confused with the notion of the universal. As Joseph Owens observes, "The universal . . . has a type of community that

makes it strictly one in itself, and does not allow it to be one and many at the same time. The universal is found only in the intellect, never in the sensible thing that is known by its means."

It is important to point out again that what has been produced by the agent intellect in the act of abstraction is not some different thing from the thing in reality, as Joseph Owens makes clear.

All that the intellect knows . . . is there in reality in the thing. The modes of being, on the other hand, follow respectively from the nature of the intellect and the nature of the thing. The nature of a sensible thing is material; so in its real existence it has a material, and therefore singular and contingent, mode of being. The nature of the intellect is immaterial; so when the same sensible thing exists in the intellect, it has an immaterial mode of being, a mode that is universal, necessary, and immobile. This difference in mode does not at all affect the identity of the object. It is the same thing no matter which of the two modes it may assume."\(^{45}\)

B. The possible intellect

The possible intellect is the passive power that is actualized by the impression of the intelligible species, the latter being produced by the agent or active intellect. This intelligible species is the common nature or essence of the thing in reality that has been abstracted from the phantasm. It is intelligible because it is free, not only from matter, but also from the individuating conditions of matter. The act of the possible intellect, then, is the act of intellectual knowledge. But, as Robert Brennan points out, "The task of the possible intellect . . . is not only to receive and be fecundated, but also to produce in its own right: and so it gives expression to its

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representational power by forming a species of its own. This species is the idea or concept."\textsuperscript{46}

1. The Idea

Of paramount importance is the fact that the idea formed in the possible intellect is not the object of knowledge. Rather, it is the means by which the thing is known. John Peifer elucidates this point.

Properly speaking, thinking is not forming concepts, thinking is knowing things. But we know things only as they are in knowledge, only as they are in concepts. Consequently, thinking involves the forming of concepts in which we know things.\textsuperscript{47}

The idea which is formed by the action of the possible intellect is none other than the form of thing in reality "considered as having existence apart from the [thing itself]."\textsuperscript{48} Since the idea is the form of the thing in reality, it is not the idea that is the object of knowledge. Rather, the idea is the "instrument," so to speak, by means of which the intellect knows the thing in reality. The object of knowledge is the thing in reality, not the idea in the intellect.

The importance of this distinction is stressed by Mortimer Adler: "To suppose that ideas are directly observable is the fundamental mistake of modern introspective psychology, from Descartes and Locke down to the end of the nineteenth century and until the first two decades of the present century ..."\textsuperscript{49} By making the idea the object of knowledge, the intellect is barred from ever knowing the thing in reality. As Adler observes elsewhere,

The root of the error lies in neglect or ignorance of the intentional mode of existence that belongs to objects apprehended by the mind. The error can, therefore, be avoided


\textsuperscript{47} John Peifer, \textit{The Concept in Thomism}, p. 157.

\textsuperscript{48} Etienne Gilson, \textit{The Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas}, p. 137.

\textsuperscript{49} Mortimer J. Adler, \textit{Intelect: Mind over Matter}, p. 144.
by a precise understanding of the relation between intentionally existing objects and really existing things; to wit, that one and the same entity can have both modes of existence.\textsuperscript{50}

We began this section on the knowing process with a definition of knowledge according to the principles of Thomistic or Moderate Realism.

The noblest way of possessing a thing is to possess it in an immaterial manner, that is, by possessing its form without its matter. And this is the definition of knowledge.\textsuperscript{51}

Having arrived at the formation of the idea, we have reached that point where the knower and the known have become one. The object in reality has come to exist in the intellect as the object of knowledge. The knower and the known are one. By virtue of the existence of the form in the mind of the knower, the mind has taken on the form of the known and has become one with the known by sharing its form.

This whole process of knowledge is graphically illustrated in the diagram in Figure 11 below. As before, the squares represent the powers of the soul, while the circles represent the object known. Although the diagram illustrates the various powers and activities of the mind in the knowing process, it must not be assumed that this indicates that the knowing process takes place in neatly compartmentalized stages. Rather, the knowing process is virtually immediate. When the senses are acted upon by a thing in reality, the mental response involves an immediate sense impression, intellectual apprehension and judgment. The knowing process is not a succession of acts, but is the act of the soul. As has been asserted before, it is not the senses nor the intellect that knows. Man knows by means of his senses and intellect.

\textsuperscript{50} Mortimer J. Adler, \textit{Some Questions About Language}, p. 94.

\textsuperscript{51} Quoted by Robert Edward Brennan, \textit{Thomistic Psychology}, pp. 111-112.
Figure 11: Knowledge

2. The Thought

To complete this investigation into this Thomistic view of the knowing process it will be helpful to consider the three operations
of the intellect once the intelligible species has been received. These acts or operations include apprehension, judgment, and reasoning. It will not be the task here to deal with these in any depth, but only to briefly describe theses in an effort to complete the discussion.

a. Apprehension

According to George Klubertanz, apprehension is "the operation by which we lay hold of a thing, making the thing present in and to our intellect, but without affirming or denying."52 As St. Thomas points out, the human intellect does not attain a complete knowledge of reality all at once, but moves toward understanding by degrees.53 The first act of the intellect is simple apprehension by which the mind knows what a thing is. Because the intellect has received the intelligible species, which is the form or "whatness" of the thing in reality, the first act of the intellect is to apprehend the whatness of that which is known. However, as Joseph Owens points out, "Human cognition ... can never attain anything through simple apprehension without simultaneously knowing it as existent either in reality or in the mind."54

b. Judgment

The act by which the intellect affirms or denies is the judgment.55 This act is that which simultaneously accompanies the act of simple apprehension. The judgment can be viewed as either an affirmation or a negation. As Klubertanz describes it,

55. George P. Klubertanz, The Philosophy of Human Nature, p. 175. It is at the level of judgment that misunderstanding and error is initially encountered. In Thomistic Epistemology, errors of judgment are the result of illicit judgments produced by the mind on the basis of inadequate information, or the overriding influence of the will, or similar acts. The discipline of logic explores many errors of judgment.
In affirmation, we say that a thing is (was, will be, either simply, or according to some mode of necessity, possibility, and so forth), in negation, that a thing is not (was not, and so forth).\textsuperscript{56}

Judgment differs from apprehension in that judgment is the knowledge in terms of the affirmation or denial of the existence of that which has been apprehended. Judgement is not properly a knowledge of "whatness," but of "thatness." Again Klubertanz offers a helpful explanation.

By judgment, we know the being as a whole: we know its essence inasmuch as the judgment virtually contains an apprehension of the subject (and of a predicate if the judgment contains a second term), and we know the subject as actually existing, when we assert (or deny) that it is.\textsuperscript{57}

c. Reasoning

The operation of reasoning is the third act of the intellect. It is "the operation by which we proceed from known truth to new truth distinct from the previously known truth but implied in it."\textsuperscript{58} Reasoning is a complex operation and involves many different types of movement. The more narrow classification of syllogistic reasoning moves from premises to conclusions. Other types of reasoning include the more general aspects of movement from question to answer, the building of definitions, the accumulation of empirical evidence in the investigation of an hypothesis, etc.

d. Conception

One fruit of the operations of the intellect is the formation of the concept. This is one of the most problematic aspects of the investigation of intellectual knowledge because there is such a diversity of definitions employed by the various scholastic philosophers. Joseph Owens states,

By the very act of knowing the really existent thing, the intellect gives it intentional being. By reflection the

\textsuperscript{56} George P. Klubertanz, \textit{The Philosophy of Human Nature}, p. 175.

\textsuperscript{57} George P. Klubertanz, \textit{The Philosophy of Human Nature}, p, 175.

\textsuperscript{58} George P. Klubertanz, \textit{The Philosophy of Human Nature}, p. 177.
intellect then knows it [the really existent thing] through a new act of cognition as an existent in the mind. In this reflection the intellect see it [the really existent thing] as a concept. . . . The concept is produced as a similitude of the thing in order that the thing itself may be known in and through it. . . . The similitude is the same knowable content considered precisely as in intentional being. The concept, therefore, is the content as it exists in the intellect and not in the thing, in a way that constitutes a distinct object of reflection.  

George Klubertanz equates the formation of the concept with the act of apprehension so that the concept is the apprehension of the "whatness" of the thing in reality. 60 Etienne Gilson defines the concept as the "representation of the perceived object, as conceived by the intellect, i.e., created within itself, and expressed by a word." 61 John Peifer's definition is similar to these.

The concept, then, is no mere picture or replica of an objective counterpart; it is not a thing which secondarily bears a resemblance to something other than itself. It is the form of the exterior thing existing as known in the intellect. 62

Robert Brennan equates the concept with the expressed intelligible species, the mental word and the image of an intelligible order. 63

Finally, Mortimer Adler makes the following observations about concepts.

The first is that concepts are (a) acquired dispositions to recognize perceived objects as being of this or that kind and at the same time (b) to understand what this kind or that kind of object is like, with the result (c) that the individual having formed a concept is able to perceive a number of sensible particulars as being of the same kind and to

discriminate between them and other sensible particulars that are different in kind.  

Adler goes on to explain that the concept-formation in humans "enables them to perceive a number of sensible particulars as being of the same kind and to discriminate between them and other sensible particulars that are different in kind."  

It is beyond the scope of this paper to investigate the subtle differences that issued in these various definitions and descriptions. It is sufficient to note the similarities. Each one of these individuals emphasized the fact that the concept has specific reference to the kind of thing understood by means of it. Also, each philosopher stressed the fact that the concept is not that which is known, but that by which the object is known. In this respect, the term "concept" is simply another word for "idea." The term "idea" is apparently employed when consideration is given to the entity as it exists in the intellect. The term "concept" is apparently employed when consideration is given primarily to the content.  

C. Summary  

The Thomist view of knowledge as presented in this paper began with sense cognition which issued in the formation of the phantasm, the form of the thing in reality, separated from its matter but not from its concrete material conditions. The agent intellect illuminates the intelligible aspect of the phantasm that is the common nature or essence of the thing. It abstracts this essence from the phantasm forming an intelligible species that is impressed upon the possible intellect. The possible intellect, in an act of understanding, expresses this intelligible species in the form of an idea or concept. The intellect, by means of the expressed intelligible species, also called the idea or concept, knows the thing in reality. The knowable thing has become the known object of the intellect, and knowledge is the result.  

CHAPTER 5

Linguistics: How do we communicate what we know?
The communication of meaning

In his book entitled Some Questions About Language, Mortimer J. Adler makes the following observation.

There is one property of language about which universal agreement exists. Whatever else can be said about language, one indisputable fact about it is that its component elements --its words and sentences--possess a property that has been variously called "sense," "significance," or "meaning." Meaningless marks or sounds, however they may be arranged or used, do not constitute a language. A meaningless language is a contradiction in terms.¹

In his article titled "The Philosophy of Language," Louis Lachance identifies the subject matter of his inquiry by drawing a distinction between the employment of signs in the animal kingdom and the use of language among humans. He identifies the distinctive difference by pointing out that "Thanks to an association of images, fixed by nature or by repeated experiences," animals employ signs "without perceiving the relation of meaning."² According to George Klubertanz, "Language is an arbitrary sign or system of signs for expressing and communicating knowledge and other mental states, and emotions."³

The distinctive ingredient in each one of these statements about the nature of language is the aspect of the employment of signs to communicate meaning. It is not that signs simply communicate meaning, but that language involves the awareness of the relation of meaning. That is to say, language is not merely the employment of signs to communicate meaning. In an analogous way we can say that a wolf communicates to the rabbit it desires to devour. Although it is by instinct that the rabbit estimates the danger the wolf presents and makes every effort to save itself, the

rabbit is not aware of any relation of meaning even though it makes use of this relation. By contrast, human beings not only make use of the meaning relationship of signs, but are also aware of the relation between signs and what they signify. That is to say, humans are aware of the relation of meaning. As Jacques Maritain asserts,

what defines language is not precisely the use of words, or even of conventional signs; it is the use of any sign whatsoever as involving the knowledge or awareness of the relation of signification, and therefore a potential infinity; it is the use of signs in so far as it manifests that the mind has grasped and brought out the relation of signification.  

I. The elements of language

An investigation of the nature of language, then, should be concerned with meaning. As Mortimer Adler states, "the first and minimal obligation of a philosophy of language is to explain or account for language as an instrument of communication, through the use of which we are able to converse with one another about matters or items that we are able to consider in common."5

But as has already been observed in the quotes above, language is particularly a system of signs by which meaning is communicated. In preparation for an investigation of meaning we will consider the nature of the sign that is the carrier of meaning.

A. The sign

A sign "leads the knowing faculty to apprehend something other than itself, in virtue of a real relation between the two."6 It is important to emphasize certain aspects of this definition. First of all, a sign leads. As we shall see in our consideration of the formal sign, it is not essential to the nature of a sign

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that it be something in its own right in order to be a sign. Some signs are also things. Some signs are pure signs and not independent things.

Second, a sign leads a knowing faculty. "The sign relation is an object of knowledge . . ."⁷ A sign is not the efficient cause of behavior. A sign signifies by virtue of a relation of which the knower must be aware. A sign functions noetically.

Third, a sign leads a knowing faculty to something other than itself. Signs signify something other than themselves. A sign cannot be a sign of itself. Finally, a sign is that which leads a knowing faculty to apprehend something other than itself, by virtue of a real relation between the sign and that which is signified. A sign signifies by virtue of a real relation, or a relation in reality. A sign cannot function if it is only a sign of a relation in the mind, for the relation in the mind is destined ever to be only in the mind of the one in whom the relation exists. If the relation is not capable of becoming extra-mental, it is not communicable.

There are essentially two kinds of signs, the instrumental sign and the formal sign. The instrumental sign can be considered under two further classifications, namely, the natural instrumental sign and the conventional instrumental sign. Because the nature of the formal sign is more abstract, and the natural instrumental sign is the more readily understood, we will conduct our investigation from the less difficult to the more difficult.

1. Instrumental sign

An instrumental sign is so designated because it functions as an instrument for signifying the sign relationship. Henry Veatch identifies an instrumental sign as

one which signifies its significatum to a knowing power only by being first apprehended itself. That is to say, one must

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first apprehend the sign and only then does one apprehend the significatum.\textsuperscript{8}

In order for an instrumental sign to carry out its signifying function it must be known first before it can lead the knower to what it signifies. The instrumental sign is either natural or conventional.

a. The natural instrumental sign

A natural instrumental sign is one in which the relation between the sign and that which it signifies is a natural relation. That is, the relation obtains by virtue of the natures of the sign and its significatum. As St. Augustine observed, "Natural signs are those which, apart from any intention or desire of using them as signs, do yet lead to the knowledge of something else, as, for example, smoke when it indicates fire."\textsuperscript{9} Smoke naturally signifies fire by virtue of its nature. Generally speaking, fires produce smoke. Consequently, when an observer knows that what he is observing is smoke, this naturally leads the observer to the fire from which the smoke has been produced.

b. The conventional instrumental sign

A conventional instrumental sign is instrumental because it must first be known as what it is before it can perform its signifying function. A conventional sign is "one whose significance comes not from its own nature but from human convention--e.g., words, signals, guideposts, etc."\textsuperscript{10} St. Thomas has observed the distinction between natural and conventional: "things that signify naturally are the same among all men; but the signification of letters and vocal sounds . . . is not the same among all men."\textsuperscript{11}

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Nevertheless, a conventional sign must be known as it is in itself in order to function as a sign. As Adler points out, "... they are themselves objects of which we are perceptually aware as well as instruments that function to bring to mind the objects they signify."\textsuperscript{12} The conventional signs employed in the Russian language do not function as signs for the individual who cannot read or understand the Russian language. An individual who does not know even of the existence of the Russian language would not realize that certain marks and notations on paper were in fact letters of the Russian alphabet, or words of the Russian language. Even though someone might have seen the letters and have been told that these particular marks were actually letters in the Russian language, they would still not function as signs for that individual. A conventional sign is significant by convention and functions as a sign for those who belong to that language community. A language community employs a system of marks and notations as instrumental signs. John Lyons gives a commonly employed example to illustrate the nature of the conventional sign.

In English there is a word 'tree', in German there is a word 'Baum' and in French there is a word 'arbre'; and each of these words, we will assume, has the same signification: it may be used to refer to the same class of objects. These three words are quite different in form; and no one is more naturally appropriate to signify trees than are the other two. To make the point rather more precisely none of the forms of 'tree' ... or of 'Baum' ... or of 'arbre' ... whether written or spoken is naturally representative of trees or of their distinctive properties.\textsuperscript{13}

Lyons' quote brings out the fact that linguistic signs are conventional in nature, and that there is no natural relationship between a linguistic sign and what it signifies. A word may be used to refer to the "same class of objects" because of the common nature of the objects in that class. But, as Lyons points out, no

\textsuperscript{12} Mortimer J. Adler, \textit{Ten Philosophical Mistakes}, p. 61.

one word is more naturally appropriate to signify a class of objects, or their common nature than is any other word.

2. Formal sign

a. The nature of the formal sign

The formal sign is more difficult to examine because of its nature. Henry Veatch defines the formal sign as,

one whose whole nature and being are simply a representing, or a meaning, or a signifying of something else. Such signs, in other words, are nothing but meanings or intentions.\(^{14}\)

John Oesterle draws clarifies the distinction between the nature of the instrumental sign and that of the formal sign. His description will help to elucidate the nature of the formal sign.

The instrumental sign represents something else mediately; it must be itself known as an object in order to signify. The formal sign represents something else immediately; it is known, not as an object, but formally as that in which the object is represented to the knowing power.\(^{15}\)

Another method of considering the formal sign is to consider it in terms of the metaphysical principles of form and matter. As has been described in the section on Epistemology above, the thing in reality enters the knowing subject by means of its form. The form is the metaphysical principle of determination by virtue of which a thing is what it is. The entrance of the form into the knowing subject informs the mind in a manner analogous to the manner in which it informs matter. In a sense, the mind becomes the thing in reality by virtue of the presence in the mind of the form of that thing. In the intellect, the form is separated from any conditions of matter. The resulting entity that exists in the intellect is called the concept. The concept is nothing else but the existence of the form of the thing as it has been abstracted from the


individual. The concept is the formal sign.\textsuperscript{16} The concept exists, not as another thing that must itself be perceived, but as the form, the "whatness," of the thing in reality. This is the formal sign. The formal sign is "formal" because it is the form of the thing in reality. Its only nature is the nature of that of which it is the form, i.e., the thing in reality. The formal sign of a man, then, is the form of the man in the intellect. The formal sign, in this case, has no other nature than the nature of the man whose form it is. Consequently, when the formal sign is known, it is in fact the form of the man in reality that is known, not some other object that points to this nature.

b. The necessity of the formal sign

Oesterle provides an explanation of the need for the formal sign, which, although rather lengthy, will be helpful in understanding the place of the formal sign.

the insufficiency of the instrumental sign, which, negatively, shows the need of the formal sign, can be indicated. Any instrumental sign, by the nature of the case, involves ambiguity. This is what is meant by "interpretation" for, being that kind of sign--being only instrumental--it must be interpreted since it can signify more than one thing. The instrumental sign depends for its signification, not upon itself, but upon the signification it is expressing. Hence it is the signification it is expressing which must be obtained in communication. But to obtain the signification the instrumental sign is expressing is to go beyond the instrumental sign itself. Since, then, the instrumental sign is only the extrinsic expression of signification, there is nothing to prevent one and the same instrumental sign from expressing different significations. If, then, there were only instrumental signs there would be inescapable ambiguity, and hence no communication would be possible; there would be only an endless regress of ambiguous signs. Communication, the, depends upon formal signs, which is only another way of saying

\textsuperscript{16} Oesterle observes that, "The formal sign, the concept, can be understood ultimately only in terms of how there is any knowledge at all." "Another Approach to the Problem of Meaning," p. 259.
that instrumental signs, even to be signs at all, must depend upon formal signs.\footnote{17}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure12.png}
\caption{Signs}
\end{figure}

Oesterle's argument is another way of stating Aristotle's argument from predication (discussed above as a demonstration of the reality of substance). If all predication is accidental, which is the nature of the instrumental sign, then communication becomes impossible because predication falls into an infinite regress. The signification of an instrumental sign is accidental to the nature of the sign. There is nothing that requires a certain instrument

\footnote{17. John Oesterle, "Another Approach to the Problem of Meaning," p. 259.}
to be a sign of this or that particular thing. It is essential that an instrumental sign be a sign of something, but nothing that dictates that it be the sign of one thing over another. Because of this, an instrumental sign can become the sign of many different things within the confines of the conventions of its language community. But, all signs cannot be signs accidentally, else there would be nothing that signifies essentially and necessarily. But there must be something that signifies essentially and necessarily, else signification, as predication, falls into an infinite regress. Hence, the formal sign is necessary for communication because its essence is the form of the thing in reality. Therefore it signifies essentially and necessarily that of which it is the formal sign.

The diagram in Figure 12 above illustrates the different kinds of signs which we have described and the relationships between their functions.

B. The word

The word is a sign by convention. Although there is some controversy among linguists over what constitutes a word, it is beyond the scope of this paper to attempt to adjudicate between the various proposals. By whatever criteria a linguist determines what constitutes a word, there is one universally acknowledged fact concerning the word. A word is a carrier of meaning. As Mortimer Adler has observed, "A meaningful notation is a word. Notations can be meaningless, but there are no meaningless words." 18 Although it may be objected that other notations are meaningful which would not necessarily be considered words, such as musical notations or chemical notations, it is not at all clear that these types of notations are meaningful in the same way a word is meaningful. Musical notations and chemical notations functions as symbols. A musical notation does not mean music in the same way the word "music" means music. Even a chemical notation is not necessarily meaningful in the way a word is meaningful. The chemical notation

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18. Mortimer Adler, Ten Philosophical Mistakes, p. 54.
NA does not mean sodium in the same way the word "sodium" means sodium. The notation NA stands for sodium. However, to the degree that a notation loses is function as a symbol and becomes functional as a word, to that degree it is a word, and hence a meaningful notation.

1. Two classifications of words

Words, as carriers of meaning, can exist as sounds in the air, as notations or marks on a surface. We will call these external words. But there is another kind of word that exists in the mind which we will call the mental word. In distinguishing between these two classifications of words, we will begin our brief consideration of the word as it is in external reality.

a. The external word

An external word is a meaningful sound or notation. An external word is meaningful by convention. A word, then, is a conventional sign. Aristotle recognized that words were meaningful by convention. He stated, "And just as letters are not the same for all men so neither are vocal sounds the same . . . ."\(^{19}\) Aristotle also made a distinction between the written word and the spoken word, a distinction that illuminates the relation of the word to its meaning. He said, "Now words that are in vocal sound are signs of passions in the soul, and words that are written are signs of words in vocal sound."\(^{20}\) This statement sets up a relation of proportion between the written word and the spoken word, and between the spoken word and the passion of the soul. The written word is to the spoken word as the spoken word is to the passion of the soul. Each is a sign, and a conventional sign.

However, Aristotle pointed out that "the passions of the soul, of which vocal sounds are the first signs, are the same for all; and things of which passions of the soul are likenesses are also

\(^{19}\) Aristotle, *On Interpretation*, I, 16a. 5.

the same." In his commentary on this section, St. Thomas explains Aristotle's statement.

When he speaks of passions in the soul we are apt to think of the affections of the sensitive appetite, such as anger, joy, and other passions . . . But here Aristotle is speaking of vocal sounds that are significant by human institution. Therefore, "passions in the soul" must be understood here as conceptions of the intellect, and names, verbs, and speech, signify these conceptions of the intellect immediately . . . They cannot signify things, as is clear from the mode of signifying, for the name "man" signifies human nature in abstraction from singulars; hence it is impossible that it immediately signify a singular man." This is a succinct statement of that which has been argued in the section on Metaphysics and Epistemology above. The word is an instrumental sign by convention. However, the conception in the mind is not a conception by convention, but is, by virtue of human nature, the same for all men. Unlike the Kant's system that is built upon the hope that the categories are the same for all men, the Thomistic system asserts the existence of a common human nature that can be accounted for by analytical investigation of reality as it is in itself.

Kant asserted that there was a shared rational structure. The Thomistic system asserts that there is a common metaphysical nature. A metaphysical nature can be accounted for by an explication of the nature of reality. If reality is of that nature, then all men share the same nature because that is the nature of reality. However, a rational structure cannot be accounted for by an explication of the nature of rationality, for such an explication would only apply to the rational structure of the one providing the explication. There would have to be some

21. Aristotle, On Interpretation, I. 16a. 6. The passions of the soul are "passions" because they arise as the result of an impression upon the possible or "passive" intellect. As St. Thomas' comment points out, "the conception arises from things by way of a kind of impression or passion." Aristotle On Interpretation, Lesson II, par. 6. p. 26.

recourse to universal reality, and some way for Kant to account for
the fact that all reality is as he has asserted it to be. However,
his own system has eliminated this possibility by making it
impossible to know anything as it is in itself.

A word, then, is a conventional sign of a conception in the
soul. But the external word is a certain kind of conventional
sign. Specifically, an external word is an instrumental,
conventional sign. Words are instrumental signs because "they have
perceptible existence in themselves apart from signifying . . ."[23]
An individual must know the word itself before he can be led to
that which the word signifies.

b. The mental word

In a Thomistic Realist epistemology there is another kind of
word identified as the mental word. Here the aspects of
Epistemology and Linguistics merge. As has been previously
emphasized, the concept is the means by which the thing in reality
is known. The form of the thing comes to exist in the mind of the
knower as an intentional being. The nature is abstracted from the
phantasm and informs the possible intellect. The possible
intellect forms the concept which is the nature of the thing in
reality. This concept is a formal sign because it directs the mind
to a knowledge of the thing in reality. It is not the thing in
reality in its extrinsic being. As Margaret Gorman has pointed
out, "Knowledge . . . is in the knower according to the manner of
the knower, not according to the manner of the known."[24] The
concept is the thing in reality according to its intentional being
in the mind of the knower. As Klubertanz sums it up,

what we mean primarily and ordinarily by the term "intel-
lectual knowledge" is the intellectually known object--the
object produced in and by the act of understanding. This
immanently produced object is necessary because the really
existing object (or the object that can exist) is (a)


[24] Margaret Gorman, General Semantics and Contemporary Thomism,
p. 119.
sometimes absent, and (b) sometimes does not exist in exactly the same way as it is known, as in the universal knowledge we have of singular things. Hence, that which we know about something is a medium which is itself known, and in which the real or existent object is known. Such a medium is a pure or formal sign, whose whole reality lies in its reference to the thing that is known. This formal sign is called the "mental word." . . . It is the mental word which is directly referred to by, and is the meaning of, the external word, (which is spoken, heard, and so forth). 25

That which is known by the intellect, then, is variously called the expressed species, when considering it according to its metaphysical constitution; the concept, when considering it according to its content; the formal sign, when considering it according to its function of representing to the intellect the thing in reality; and the mental word, when considering it as the mental counterpart to the external word. As St. Thomas describes it,

As used of us, speaking signifies not merely understanding but understanding plus the expression from within oneself of some conception; and we cannot understand in any way other than by forming a conception of this sort. Therefore, properly speaking, every act of understanding is, in our case, an act of uttering. 26

It is this "expression from within oneself" that is identified as the mental word. It will be recalled that from the point of view of Thomistic metaphys, the species formed by the possible intellect in the act of understanding is the expressed intelligible species. It is expressed because it is an act of understanding, or an expression in the mind of the concept, the content of which is that thing in reality which is being known. As John Peifer explains,

. . . in understanding we speak within ourselves what we know, and we know what we speak. Speaking what we know, we express a word to ourselves in which we know what we know. 27

It must not be thought, however, that when the mind expresses the mental word that it necessarily employs a certain linguistic word.


26. St. Thomas Aquinas, Truth, Q.4, a. 2. ad. 5. emphasis in original.

We have all had the experience of not being able to think of a word by which we might express what is on our mind. The mind engages in a process by which it somehow brings up for consideration many different linguistic words, each of which is in turn rejected because for some reason it does not quite capture, as an external word, the mental word present in the mind. Suddenly, the mind finds that one word for which it was looking that can adequately articulate the thought.

Before that linguistic word was discovered, however, the thought itself was beyond our reach, although it was there in the mind. This is to say, we knew what we wanted to say. We just didn't have the right word. We could possibly substitute a description, or perhaps we could identify what we wanted to say by some ostensible indication. But, until that one word was discovered, we were unable to adequately express the thought, even to ourselves. Etienne Gilson provides a helpful comment.

However, the existence of unspoken thought [that is pre-linguistic thought] appears to be attested to by interior observation. Thought is anterior to speech with an anteriority at once temporal and causal. The anteriority of time can be more or less long. Quite often it is so short that we could take it to be almost simultaneous. But even then, what I want to say to myself or to others is something which has not yet been said.\(^28\)

Before the linguistic expression is spoken in the mind, the mind has formed a concept, an inward expression of understanding, called the mental word. This mental word is the inward expression of which the linguistic word is the external expression. The diagram in Figure 13 below illustrates this point.

The first square represents sensible perception. The second square represents intellectual cognition. The abstracted nature is the concept, the content of which is universal man. This concept is expressed in the mind in an act of understanding as the mental word. The linguistic sign "man" is the external expression of that

Figure 13: The Mental Word

The act of understanding. The linguistic expression could be any equivalent external word from any language which carries the same meaning, such as ἄνθρωπος in Greek, or הombres in Hebrew. As Aristotle has observed, the passions of the soul are the same for all men even though the linguistic signs are conventional. 29

2. The nature of words

The nature of words can be considered from two vantage points. The external word has both a linguistic nature and a metaphysical nature. The metaphysical nature of the mental word has been considered above in the discussion of the nature of the concept,

the formal sign, and the mental word. However, the relationship between the mental word and the external word accounts for the metaphysical nature of the external word. We will consider first the linguistic nature of the external word.

a. Linguistic nature

It is obvious that, although not all words are name words, some obviously are. Name words are words which name things, such as horse, man, or starship, states of affairs, such as "happiness," or real relations such as "justice" and "truth." As Klubertanz describes it, "Some language 'stands for' or 'represents' things (for example, 'book'), but some language does not (for example, 'more,' 'truth')."\(^{30}\) Additionally, some words have no lexical meaning in themselves, but only as they relate to other words in the construction of meaningful expressions, such as prepositions and conjunctions. Mortimer Adler provides a helpful description on the distinction between these kinds of words.

The words classified as categorematic have lexical meaning in their own right and without serving to qualify or modify the meaning possessed by other words. In contrast, the words classified as syncategorematic, and sometimes called "particles" . . . do not have lexical meaning in their own right, but only when they serve to qualify, modify, or relate other words in significant phrases or sentences.\(^{31}\) The function of categorematic or name words, then, is to designate some thing, state, or relation that actually exists or could exist in reality. Syncategorematic words function syntactically in meaningful phrases or sentences. Syncategorematic words can also represent real relations or logical relations. For example, the syncategorematic word "in" can be used as a preposition in a meaningful sentence to represent the real relation of position. The word "is" can function syncategorematically to communicate the logical relation of identity.

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The linguistic nature of words, then, is exhausted in these two categories. As Mortimer Adler asserts, "All the words listed in the dictionary of a language can be exhaustively divided into name-words having designative significance and linguistic operators having syntactical significance."32

b. Metaphysical nature

This brings us to the metaphysical nature of words. Although it is not possible to deal with the proposal of Ferdinand de Saussure concerning the nature of words, for to do so would involve a whole book unto itself, suffice it to say that his effort to prevent the consideration of the nature of words according to the analogy of body and soul33 is unconvincing. The relationship of body and soul, which according to Thomism is a metaphysical relationship of form and matter, is well suited to illustrate the metaphysical nature of the word. In fact, St. Thomas employed this very analogy in describing the metaphysical nature of the word.

The name and verb . . . signify by human institution, that is, the signification is added to the natural thing as a form to matter, as the form of a bed is added to wood.34

The relationship of form and matter as it relates to the nature of the word becomes clear when we remember that the mental word, which


33. Saussure asserts, "The two-sided linguistic unit has often been compared with the human person, made up of body and the soul. The comparison is hardly satisfactory" Course in General Linguistics, translated by Wade Baskin (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1966), p. 103. He offers instead the analogy of a chemical compound. Since a chemical compound is homogenous, and, as Saussure himself claims, the two-sides of the linguistics compound are not, it is difficult to understand why he used this analogy (compare the analysis by Etienne Gilson in Linguistics and Philosophy, pp. 34-35). It will not do to claim that Saussure is considering the individual molecule of a chemical compound, because the molecule is composed of distinct elements, each of which is what it is apart from the compound. However, words are not words if they have no meaning.

34. St. Thomas Aquinas, Aristotle On Interpretation, Lesson II, par. 4, p. 25.
is the concept in the mind, is the intellectual counterpart to the linguistic word. The mental word, then is the form of which the linguistic sign is the matter. This relationship will become more significant when we discuss meaning below.

II. The function of language

Having looked at the basic elements of language, we move on to consider the function of language. As has been observed above, the function of language is to communicate meaning. Battista Mondin has clearly expressed the Moderate Realist view of language.

Language is by definition that activity with which man, through vocal or written signs, puts himself in communication with his own peers (or with some other intelligent being, for instance God) to express his own sentiments, desires, or knowledge.\(^{35}\)

According to Mondin's description, this uniquely human activity\(^{36}\) is accomplished by means of "vocal or written signs." Signs accomplish their instrumental task by virtue of a relation of signification.

A. Signification

As John Lyons has observed, "The meaning of linguistic expressions is commonly described in terms of the notion of signification: that is to say, words and other expressions are held to be signs which, in some sense signify, or stand for other things."\(^{37}\) We will consider some of the approaches to the notion of signification.

1. Behaviorism

A widely known description of signification from a behaviorist viewpoint was proposed by Ogden and Richards. Their description is

\(^{35}\) Battista Mondin, Philosophical Anthropology (Bangalore, India: Theological Publications in India, 1985), p. 135.


illustrated as a triadic relation pictured in Figure 14.38

![Figure 14](image)

The point of the triangle represented in this diagram by the letter A, is labeled by O&R as "SYMBOL." Point B in this diagram is labeled by O&R as "THOUGHT OR REFERENCE." Between point A and B they identify what they hold to be a causal relation that goes from B to A, if the thought elicits an appropriate linguistic sign, or from A to B if the sign elicits the accompanying thought. According to their diagram, A "Symbolises" B. Point C is labeled "REFERENT." Between B and C they identify "other causal relations" by which they indicate that B "Refers to" C. These relations go from C to B when a referent elicits an appropriate thought. Between A and C they identify "an imputed relation" in which A "Stands for" C. The dotted line between A and C indicates an indirect relation between these two points. Accordingly,

"Between the symbol and the referent there is no relevant relation other than the indirect one, which consists in its being used by someone to stand for a referent. Symbol and Referent, that is to say, are not connected directly . . . but only indirectly round the two sides of the triangle."39

O&R's account of the relation between Symbol and Thought, and

38. C. K. Ogden, and I. A. Richards, The Meaning of Meaning, p. 11. From this point this work of Ogden and Richards will be referred to as O&R.

between Thought and Referent is set forth in terms of a theory of behavioristic response.\textsuperscript{40} John Lyons summarizes the proposition of O&R.

Some object (C) in the external world calls forth a thought (B) in the mind of the speaker and this thought in turn elicits from him a sign (A).\textsuperscript{41}

Although it is not within the scope of this paper to mount a comprehensive criticism of behaviorism, it will be helpful to note that behaviorism of any kind is a self-defeating theory. If in fact the relation between A and B or between B and C is causal in a behavioristic manner, then it is self-defeating to attempt a logical argumentation in hopes of bringing about a cognitive response to the stimuli which O&R present. If the relation is simply a behavioral response to stimuli, then my behavioral response, which is that there is a logical and cognitive relation between A & B and a natural relation between B and C, is just as legitimately a response to the stimuli as the response which O&R affirm. In other words, there is no way for O&R to present their views as true over against opposing views since all views are merely behaviorist responses to stimuli. Behavioristic accounts are inadequate for explaining logical and cognitive relations. As Mortimer Adler observes,

Limited to accounting for the connections between stimuli and responses . . . behavioristic theory, in any of its forms, cannot explain how meaningless notations become meaningful words that have referential significance.\textsuperscript{42}

The main difficulty that O&R face in their proposal is the relation between thought and referent. John Oesterly identifies this problem.

Because they recognize only instrumental signs, they cannot

\textsuperscript{40} In his book \textit{Language and Philosophy} (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1949), Max Black also characterizes the theory of Ogden and Richards as "causal and behavioristic" (p. 195).


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treat the relation of Thought and Referent semantically; hence the departure from semantics at this point and the quite arbitrary positing of the behavioristic presumption. Behaviorism, purified or unpurified, cannot use signs intelligibly.\textsuperscript{43}

Ogden and Richards have fallen victim to the prevailing philosophical assumption of empiricism in which metaphysics has supposedly been eliminated. Consequently, they cannot explain the relation between thought and thing in terms of the necessary formal sign in the intellect. Their problem stems from the fact that they consider all signs to be instrumental signs, as is indicated from their observation about the sign situation.

If we stand in the neighbourhood of a cross road and observe a pedestrian confronted by a notice To Grantchester displayed on a post, we commonly distinguish three important factors in the situation. There is, we are sure, (1) a Sign which (2) refers to a Place and (3) is being interpreted by a person. \textbf{All situations in which Signs are considered are similar to this.}\textsuperscript{44}

As this paper has attempted to show, not all situations in which signs are considered are in fact similar to this. If the Thomistic theory is correct, the formal sign is not something which has its own perceptible being, and the relation between the formal sign and the thing in reality is natural, for the nature of the formal sign is the essence of the thing in reality as it exists in the mind. \textsuperscript{0\&R} could not find a link between the thought and the thing as long as they held that the relationship was that of instrumental sign to referent. What could possibly account for the fact that a particular thought was linked to a particular thing in reality? The behaviorist account is unacceptable because it cannot account for different "interpretations" of signs. If the response to a sign is simply a behavioristic response, then there is no way to explain the different interpretations of signs, because an

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{43} John Oesterle, "Another Approach to the Problem of Meaning," p. 258.
\textsuperscript{44} Ogden and Richards, \textit{The Meaning of Meaning}, p. 21, emphasis added.
\end{flushleft}
explanation implies a rational, not simply a behavioristic endeavor. If a reason can be given for these differences, then this reason is not simply a behavioristic response to stimuli, but is a rational presentation that involves truth claims. But truth claims are not simply behavioristic responses to stimuli.

2. Structuralism

In expounding the ramifications of Saussure's doctrine of the absolute arbitrariness of the sign, Jonathan Culler points out that one of its most significant implications is that language cannot be a nomenclature. For Saussure this means that language cannot be "simply a nomenclature [series of names arbitrarily selected] for a set of universal concepts,"45 because, "Languages do not simply name existing categories; they articulate their own."46 In support of this, Culler observes,

if language were a set of names applied to independently-existing concepts, then in the historical evolution of a language the concepts should remain stable.47

First of all, it is not necessary that language be a nomenclature for it to be partially composed of a nomenclature. Language may in fact be partly a nomenclature, and partly some other aspect or aspects, as we have discussed above. Secondly, it is not necessary that concepts be immutable in order to have names applied to them. Concepts can be independently-existing and mutable. Immutability is not an essential aspect of independently-existing concepts. At least this has not been demonstrated, merely asserted. Thirdly, it is simply not the case that in a nomenclature names must be applied to concepts. Rather, names may be applied to things in reality by means of the concept. It is not necessary that the name "tree" name my concept of a tree. Rather, the name "tree" may be applied to the independently-existing real tree as known by means of the concept.

However, Culler attacks the idea that language is a nomenclature by giving an example of what he understands to be changing concepts.

The English word *cattle*, for example, at one point meant property in general, then gradually came to be restricted to four-footed property (a new category), and finally attained its modern sense of domesticated bovines. Or again, a "silly" person was once happy, blessed, and pious. Gradually this particular concept altered; the old concept of "silliness" transformed itself, and by the beginning of the sixteenth century a silly person was innocent, helpless, even deserving of pity. The alteration of the concept continued until, eventually, a silly person was simple, foolish, perhaps even stupid. 48

In attempting to justify the claim that language is not a nomenclature, Culler employs these examples in an illustration.

If language were a nomenclature we should be obliged to say that there exist a number of distinct concepts and that the signifier *silly* was attached first to one and then to another. But clearly this is not what happened: the concept attached to the signifier *silly* was continually shifting its boundaries, gradually changing its semantic shape, articulating the world in different ways from one period to the next. 49

But Culler's own account contradicts his point. Culler has employed a very subtle equivocation here. Indeed, what *silly* was employed to signify shifted. But it was not the concept of being happy, blessed, pious that changed, for in fact it was still possible to employ linguistic signs to signify these concepts. The concepts in fact remained the same. It was the referential significance of the word that in fact changed. The word, in Culler's own account, "continually shifted its boundaries, gradually changing its semantic shape, articulating the world in different ways from one period to the next." But to articulate the world differently is to acknowledge that it is not necessarily the world that is changing, but perhaps only my articulation of it. It was the semantic range


of the word that shifted, not necessarily the concepts themselves. The same concepts were still capable of signification, only by other signifiers that were also shifting.

By the statement, "the concept attached to the signifier silly was continually shifting its boundaries, gradually changing its semantic shape . . ." Culler is either saying that the concept "happy, blessed, and pious" eventually became the concept "simple, foolish, perhaps even stupid," in which case he is claiming that one concept has become another, or he is saying that the real state of affairs once signified by the signifier "silly" was no longer signified by this signifier, in which case the concept of reality never changed. In fact, the very description that Culler claims was not the case is the only reasonable explanation. The concept of the real state of affairs, that some people are happy, blessed, and pious, remained the same throughout the shift of signification of the word silly. In fact, it is still possible to employ a sign to signify the state of being happy, blessed, and pious.

Culler equivocates in his use of the word "concept." In his description of a "silly" person as being "happy, blessed, and pious," he is employing the term concept with reference to a particular state of affairs in reality. When he says, "Gradually this particular concept altered," he has shifted the meaning of the word "concept" from a concept of the state of affairs in reality to the concept of the signification of a term. In the first instance he is talking about the concept of a "happy" kind of person, previously signified by the term 'silly.' In the second instance he is talking about the concept of the signification of the term 'silly,' not the concept of the "happy" kind of person. His first use of the term concept is with reference to the state of affairs, while his second use is with reference to signification. He has employed two levels of the term concept without differentiating between them. The first level is the concept as it relates to the kind of person being signified. The second level is the concept of the signification of the term 'silly.' What he has said is this; the concept of what kind of person is signified by the term 'silly'
was the concept of a happy kind of person. Later, the concept of what kind of person is signified by the term 'silly' became a stupid kind of person. Now, the concept of what kind of person the term 'silly' signified indeed changed. But this is the second-level use of the concept. It is the concept of the signification of a term, not the concept of the real state of affairs.

This claim is perfectly reasonable. The concept of what 'silly' signified has indeed changed. The concept that silly once signified happy, has changed. But, this says absolutely nothing about they call independently-existing concepts of reality. Culler's, and by association Saussure's, claims do not fit.

Still more problematic in the reasoning of both Culler and Saussure is that this principle is self-defeating. To claim that languages "do not simply name existing categories; they articulate their own," is to make a claim that in their own languages names an existing category of all languages. Culler has identified an aspect of all languages which he categorizes, and then claims that his category universally applies to all languages as if this were simply an existing category. By this statement, Culler has said that it is a universally existing category of all languages that each language articulates its own categories. But, if this is merely a category of his own which his own language has articulated, then it is not necessarily universally applicable. It may in fact be universally the case that all languages simply name existing categories, at least in part. Culler's claim cannot be employed to simply name an existing category of all languages because he has ruled out this possibility in his claim. Likewise, the concept of not attaching names to universal concepts is itself a universal concept to which Culler and Saussure have attached the name "arbitrary."

Culler identifies this doctrine of absolute arbitrariness as leading to the conclusion that "Language is not a nomenclature and therefore its signifieds are not pre-existing concepts but changeable and contingent concepts which vary from one state of a
language to another.⁵⁰ Here again Culler has constructed a self-defeating claim. How is it possible to distinguish the difference between the concepts from one state of a language to another unless there is some constant, unchanging point of reference from which to make the distinction? The idea of change necessarily involves a continuity by which the change may be identified. One is forced to point out that Culler has employed one unchanging and unconditional concept of all language, that is, changeable and contingent concepts. In Culler's own words, "The fact that the relation between signifier and signified is arbitrary means, then, that since there are no fixed universal concepts or fixed universal signifiers, the signifier itself is arbitrary, and so is the signified."⁵¹ Both Culler and Saussure could be asked, "Is it a fixed universal concept of all languages that there are no fixed universal concepts?"

It is also a curious aspect of both Culler's exposition of Saussure, and Saussure's own claims, that if the relation between signified and signifier is arbitrary, that the concept must suffer the burden of change? Saussure talks at length about the morphological and phonological changes that a sign undergoes. But, when it comes to the concept to which the signifier is related, it is always the concept that changes. An observation of experience seems to indicate exactly the opposite. When a signifier begins to take on some new and additional concept, it is not the original concept that has changed. Rather, it is the field of reference of the signifier. Although the old concept may not have a signifier that exclusively relates to it, nevertheless, that concept can be described.

Granted, there is nothing in the nature of a linguistic symbol necessitating that it relate to a given concept. But simply because the application of a signifier to a concept is at least somewhat

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arbitrary, this does not by any means entail contingency on the part of the concept. What could cause such a view? I believe it is Saussure's unwarranted theory of what constitutes a sign, signifier and signified.

In the chapter entitled "Nature of the Linguistic Sign," Saussure criticizes what he identifies as the "naming-process" view of language. He defines this "naming-process" as "a list of words, each corresponding to the thing that it names." His criticism of this view is, "It assumes that ready-made ideas exist before words."  However, this criticism begs the question. What Saussure has said is that words cannot simply be names of things because "The linguistic sign unites, not a thing and a name, but a concept and a sound image." But simply to assert that a sign is the linking of a concept and a sound image is not sufficient to establish this as a fact. This creates a "chicken and egg" problem for Saussure. If the sign links a sound-image and a concept, which has logical priority, the concept or the sound-image? Also, from where has the concept derived?

Later, Saussure flatly states, "There are no pre-existing ideas . . ." By this Saussure means that external reality is not the efficient cause of ideas to which the mind must conform. In his view, ideas are not conformed to reality, rather, reality is arbitrarily divided up by the mind in conformity to what ever way a particular linguistic community has articulated the categories of reality. If reality does not cause the mind to articulate categories according to its pre-existing nature, pre-existing in the sense that reality exists prior to anyone's perception of it, then from where do such categories and concepts arise? Do they

52. Ferdinand de Saussure, Course in General Linguistics, p. 65.
53. Ferdinand de Saussure, Course in General Linguistics, p. 66.
54. Ferdinand de Saussure, Course in General Linguistics, p. 112. There are a sufficient number of occasions in which the words "idea" and "concept" are used interchangeably to understand them as synonymous in Saussure's thought.

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arise from the encounter with reality? If so, then the idea is a representation of reality. The idea "horse" is a representation of the actually existing "horse." Now if language does not involve a "naming-process" in which a name applied to the thing in reality, then the sign must be applied to the idea. Indeed, this is Saussure's assertion. He states, ". . . the choice of a given slice of sound (i.e., sound-image) to name a given idea is completely arbitrary."\(^{55}\) Now if the image is in fact an accurate representation in the mind of the thing in reality, then what has Saussure gained by denying that the sign names the thing in reality?

Saussure makes a distinction between a sign and the two parts that compose it. For Saussure, the sign is composed of the concept (the signified), and the sound-image (the signifier). Now, if the sound-image signifies the concept, then what does the sign stand for? What is a sign? Is not a sign what leads a knowing faculty to something other than itself? The sound-image signifies, or points to the concept. The concept is signified by the sound-image. What does the sign signify? Does the word arbor signify anything? Apparently, for Saussure, the word is a sign of a relationship between its two parts. But if the word is a sign of this relationship, then what is the sound-image? Is it the word? Saussure's account does not seem to fit reality, at least not reality as viewed from the Thomistic perspective.

It seems that one reason Saussure does not allow for a sign to name a thing in reality is because the sign names its two parts, the signified and the signifier. The crucial part that has been omitted from Saussure's scheme is reality. Even Ogden and Richards identify this problem when they point out, "Unfortunately this theory of signs, by neglecting entirely the things for which signs

\(^{55}\) Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, p. 113.
stand, was from the beginning cut off from any contact with scientific methods of verification.\textsuperscript{56}

Indeed, Saussure asserts, "To prove that language is only a system of pure values, it is enough to consider the two elements involved in its functioning: ideas and sounds."\textsuperscript{57} What about reality? From where do ideas come? How are ideas related to reality? Since ideas are subjective, how can I possibly know that my ideas are comparable to the ideas in the mind of another? To simply assert that sounds stand for ideas and that the use of the same sounds to signify similar ideas in another mind begs the question. All I can know for sure is that when another person uses a particular sound, it signifies a certain idea in my own mind. How can I know that the same sound is signifying the same idea in another's mind?

A possible response to this criticism might assert that success in mutual communication is evidenced by the success in survival, and that this gives evidence that there is a possible similarity in subjective ideas. However, it would be difficult to maintain that the mutual survival of animals indicates a similarity in subjective ideas in the minds of animals. Indeed, mutual survival of animals would not even indicated the existence of ideas at all in the minds of animals.

The obvious test would be to relate the sound to some object outside of our minds and indicate that the sound signifies the idea that corresponds to that reality. This implies that the idea derives from reality. However, if the sound triggers the idea that corresponds to the external reality, then the sound is the sign of the reality, not of the idea. The sound is not a part of a sign that stands for a sound-idea relationship.

Let me illustrate. Suppose two individuals desire to communicate about a tree. How does speaker 1 know that the sound "tree"
corresponds to the same idea in the mind of speaker 2? Well, speaker 1 could point to a tree and articulate the sound "tree." Speaker 2 would indicate agreement that the sound "tree" functions similarly for him. But, of what has the sound become a sign? Speaker 1 could not point to the head of speaker 2 while articulating the sound "tree" and expect speaker 2 to relate that sound to the concept of a tree. In the initial stages of communication between individuals of different languages, or between an adult and an infant, the ostensible indications may be broad and general. However, as more knowledge is gained, more refined distinctions could be made. For example as more abstract concepts are developed in the mind of the infant, or more accurate understanding is gained by those of different languages, the distinction between "tree" and "bark" could be made.

**Figure 15: Saussure's Theory of Communication**

Saussure has made a serious error. Although the sound "tree" causes speaker 2 to recall the concept of a tree in his mind, the sound is not a sign merely of the concept, but of the tree in reality by means of the concept. If the sound signifies merely an idea in the mind, as he illustrates in his diagram reproduced in Figure 15, then it would be not be possible for speaker 1 to point to a tree and articulate the sound "tree," for this would be using
the sound as a sign of the tree in reality, not as a sign of the idea of a tree in the mind of speaker 1. Saussure has confused the function of a sign and the reference of a sign, that is, what the sign signifies. The function of the sign is to represent to the mind that to which it refers. The sound does not represent to the mind a concept, which is itself a representation of the thing in reality. The sound represents to the mind the thing in reality from which the concept derives. The concept derives from reality, not from the sign. The sign is instilled with meaning because the mind, having derived the concept from reality, as we have explained in the section on Epistemology, applies a linguistic sign to refer to the particular thing in reality. Upon the occasion of employing this sign—for example, the sound "tree"—the mind recalls the concept of "tree" that the sign has represented to the mind. The sign has not represented the concept of "tree" to the mind. Rather, the sign has represented the tree to which the concept corresponds. The function of the sign as it relates to the mind is different from its function as it relates to reality. What the sign refers to is a real tree. The sign's function is to represent this reality to the mind so that the mind recalls its concept that corresponds to that reality thus represented.

3. Conceptualism

The Thomistic Realist position can be characterized as Conceptualism. However, this term must be qualified by the Realist Metaphysics and Epistemology as has been defended above in order to distinguish it from every form of Kantian and Idealist Conceptualism. The concept is the abstracted nature of the thing in reality. There is a natural relation between the concept of a tree and the tree in reality, because the concept is the essence of the tree according to its intentional existence in the mind of the knower.

Signification, then, is conceptual. Concepts cannot be arbitrary, because they are derived from the essences of things and are grounded upon substance. Linguistic signs have meaning because, on the one hand, they signify the concept in the mind, and on the
other hand, they refer to the particular thing in reality as sensibly perceived.

In his criticism of conceptualism, John Lyons makes a number of self-defeating claims. He characterizes all conceptualism in the following criticism.

First, even if we grant that there are concepts associated with words, such that . . . when I hear the word "table," the concept of a table will come into my mind and, if I think of a table, the word 'table' will be called up for use as required, there is no evidence to show that concepts of this kind play any part in ordinary language-behavior.\(^{58}\)

In his consideration of conceptualism, Lyons has departed from the field of linguistics and has entered the area of metaphysics. Since a methodology is fitted for the object which it is designed to investigate, and since metaphysics and linguistics are not entirely of the same nature, it is improper to employ a methodology suited for linguistic investigation in metaphysical inquiry. The difference lies in the fact that the concept is not simply a mental entity. Indeed it is a mental entity, but it is more than that. The concept is metaphysically connected with the thing in reality. Consequently, an analysis of conceptualism must proceed on the basis of a consideration of being and essence.

In his criticism, Lyons attempts to argue against conceptualism in general, but he does not consider the Thomistic notion of the concept. In the Thomistic system, it is impossible for the mind to entertain the meaning of the word table without the accompanying concept, for the concept is the meaning. Lyons neglects the philosophical term "concept" as used in Thomistic metaphysics and epistemology and focuses on the more common association of concept as some sort of mental picture. This is evident from his statement, "Of course, one may be able to form some mental image of a table, if asked to do so . . ."\(^{59}\) Granted it may not be the case that in normal language-behavior the mind


forms a mental picture in every instance of hearing or employing the term table. But it is equally as certain that, for the person who knows the meaning of the word table, a concept is immediately associated in the mind with the hearing or using the word, for the concept is the meaning of the term.

Lyons makes the claim that "Introspection is notoriously unreliable; but there is no other way of determining whether a succession of concepts accompany the production and understanding of utterances, and introspection does not give any clear support to the view that this is the case." The obvious question here is, "Unreliable for what?" Is introspection unreliable in reporting what goes on in one's own mind, as Lyons seems to claim that it is? If this is its unreliability, then how can it be known that introspection is unreliable? In order to judge the reliability or unreliability of a particular report from introspection, an accurate report would have to exist against which all reports might be judged to determine the accuracy or inaccuracy of each. Does Lyons purport to possess this accurate report? Is he not using his own report from his own introspection to make the judgment that the report that conceptualism gives "does not prove that we normally do so . . ."? Simply because Lyons acknowledges the unreliability of his own introspection, or that the reports of others are unreliable because they may not account for what he has learned from his own introspection, does not mean that all reports from everyone's introspection is unreliable.

Lyons also criticizes conceptualism by claiming, "As the term 'concept' is used by many writers on semantics, it is simply not clear what is meant by it; and that is perhaps of itself a sufficient criticism of their use of the term." But simply because the term is unclear to someone does not mean that the term itself is inadequate. It is understandable that such a

philosophical term would be unclear to someone who is not versed in its signification in Thomistic philosophy. Even though the term concept has a long history of use in Thomistic epistemology, it still requires a considerable amount of investigation and study in Thomistic and Realistic metaphysics to grasp the significance of the term. As has been argued, the concept is the form of the thing in reality as it exists in the mind of the knower by virtue of its intentional being.

Lyons' second major criticism is directed to the claim that the meaning of a word is what it signifies. He asserts,

As long as we restrict our attention to objects like tables, it might seem reasonable to say that the words which are used to refer to them are signs. At least we can give a fairly clear account of the relationship between word and object in cases like this. Once we extend the notion of signification to cover all lexemes, however, we run the risk of trivializing it completely. For to say that what a word means is what it signifies—unless we then go on to recognize different kinds of signification—is to say no more than what a word means is what it means.62

The difficulty that Lyons identifies in this notion leads him to conclude, "It would seem to be preferable, therefore, to restrict the notion of signifying, or standing for, to that subclass of lexemes or expressions in language which do stand for things in some clearly interpretable sense of 'signify.'"63 Earlier Lyons made a distinction between word-forms and lexemes. In an example he distinguished between the vocabulary-words find and found as a subclass of what he called lexemes.64 In this example, the vocabulary words find and found are lexemes.

Now, according to this definition it is difficult to see how applying the notion of conceptual signification to cover all

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lexemes runs the risk of "trivializing it completely."\textsuperscript{65} Is he saying that lexemes such as \textbf{find} or \textbf{found} cannot be conceptualized? Lyons had left open the possibility that conceptualism does not run the risk of trivializing the notion of signification if "we then go on to recognize different kinds of signification. But this is precisely what takes place in the Thomistic system. How indeed could these terms be conceptualized in the Thomistic system? First of all, it must be remembered that "the primary object of our intellect in its present state is not just any being or truth, but the being and truth found in material things . . . and it comes to a knowledge of all else from these."\textsuperscript{66} Joseph Owens expounds upon the implication of this basic truth.

Upon examination the basic contents of human cognition, from which all else in it is derived, appear without exception as sensible things and human activities specified by sensible things. Try to think of anything in other terms. You find you cannot do so. All immaterial things are found represented through notions experienced in the sensible. The concept of an immaterial thing retains the notion of thing while removing the notion of materiality. Subsistent being is represented as existence identified with substance. Here the notions of both substance and existence are taken from the substance and existence of material things, with materiality and all other limitations denied them.\textsuperscript{67}

Because the proper object of the intellect is being, and since all else derives from this, it follows that all is understood in terms of this. An abstract concept such as "liberty" is understood in terms of the real relation that exists or should exist between moral beings. Those words that indicate relations between parts of speech in the sentence, such as prepositions, conjunctions, etc.,

\textsuperscript{65} John Lyons, \textit{Semantics}, Vol. 1, p. 114. "In the sense of 'word' in which \textbf{find} and \textbf{found} are said to be forms of, or belong to, the same word, it is a vocabulary-word that is being referred to; and vocabulary-words constitute one subclass of what (with some support in current linguistic usage) we are calling lexemes" (Vol. 1, p. 19, emphasis in original).

\textsuperscript{66} St. Thomas Aquinas, \textit{Summa Theologiae}, Ia.87,4.

\textsuperscript{67} Joseph Owens, \textit{An Elementary Christian Metaphysics}, p. 215.
signify real relations in reality. All of these, as Joseph Owens has pointed out, appear as sensible things and human activities specified by sensible things. The lexemes find and found are conceptualized in terms of human activity specified by sensible things. Contrary to Lyons' claims, to identify the concept as the meaning of a term, and to propose that what a word means is what it signifies, is by no means trivializing.

B. Meaning

We must now articulate exactly what is the nature of meaning according to the Realist perspective. Much of what will be discussed in this section has been mentioned in previous sections. The task here will be to synthesize the principles into a succinct statement of the nature of meaning.

1. What is meaning?

As has been indicated in various ways in the discussions above, the meaning of a word is the concept that it signifies. Two points must be explained in order to clarify this definition. First of all, the term concept must be understood in the context of Realist Epistemology as defended above. The word is the instrumental sign, whereas the concept is the formal sign. John Oesterly points out this distinction and its importance.

The concept cannot be an instrumental sign since the concept is not an object known in any way (except reflexively). It is a formal sign because it signifies by representing directly and immediately the object. In terms of the other divisions of signs, the concept is a natural sign because of its natural connection with the signified, being its intentional form and likeness. 68

Although Mortimer Adler uses the term "idea" to "stand for the cognitive elements in the human mind--its perceptions, memories, images, empirical concepts, and theoretical constructs," he points out that these are "formal, not instrumental, signs." 69 The "idea" for Adler has essentially the same meaning as our use of the


69. Mortimer Adler, Intellect, p. 130.
term "concept." As formal signs, then, "each idea is a meaning." As he goes on to explain,

Each is a single meaning, which is its reference to the object perceived, imagined, remembered, or understood. Words as instrumental signs get their meaning by being imposed upon the objects referred to by ideas as formal signs. By being thus associated with ideas, words express the meanings that ideas are.⁷⁰

Second, it is important to stress that the concept, or the ideas in the terminology of Adler, are not the objects of knowledge. Consequently, the concepts or ideas as concepts and ideas are not themselves the content of the meaning. That is to say, the meaning of the word "man" is not the concept of man, but the concept of man, that is, the content of the concept, or what the concept is of. The meaning of the word man is the universal nature of the man which exists in the mind as a formal sign or concept. As St. Thomas has made clear, words "signify these conceptions of the intellect immediately . . . They cannot immediately signify things, as is clear from the mode of signifying, for the name 'man' signifies human nature in abstraction from singulars; hence it is impossible that it immediately signify a singular man."⁷¹ It is not the concept as a concept that is signified by the word man. Rather, it is "human nature in abstraction from singulars" that is signified by the word man. The term concept is applied to any nature that is abstracted from particulars by the intellect. So, it is not the concept as concept that is signified, but the concept as it is the abstracted nature of some particular that is signified. In this example, the word man does not mean "concept of man." Rather, the word man means "human nature as abstracted from particular man" and this exists in the mind in the form of a concept. Again Mortimer Adler explains that "it is by imposition on the objects which we apprehend by means of those ideas, not by

⁷⁰. Mortimer Adler, Intellect, p. 130.

imposition on the ideas themselves, that meaningless notations acquire their referential significance."

2. What is referential significance?

Another aspect of the nature of meaning is that meaningless notations do not become meaningful words by being imposed upon things directly. The assertion of St. Thomas, quoted above, makes this clear. The linguistic sign man is not imposed upon a particular man, for then it could not be applied to other particular men. Rather, the word man is imposed upon the object as it is apprehended by means of the concept. The word man refers to a particular man as he is perceived by means of the images, memories, etc., in the mind. This avoids the problem of words that name things that do not exist in external reality, such as a unicorn. If the thing to which the name word refers exists only in the mind, then it is not thereby meaningless. Again Mortimer Adler offers a helpful explanation.

Naming is not asserting. The word "angel" may not name anything that really exists, but it certainly does name something that men can talk about to one another and, in addition, can disagree about when they ask the question that certainly can be asked, "Do angels in fact really exist?"

To confuse referential significance with the assertion of real existence, as the logical positivists have done in their verification principle, is to confuse another distinct aspect of the nature of meaning, namely, existential denotation.


73. Mortimer Adler, Some Questions About Language, p. 31.

74. The major problem with the verification principle as it has been applied to meaning, is that it is unverifiable. The only way a sentence can be declared meaningless according to the verification principle is if it is understood to make an assertion about something that does not exist, or to make an assertion that is false. However, the only way to know that an assertion is false is if the meaning is understood and understood to be false. In other words, the only thing to which the verification principle can be applied is to meaning. The verification and falsification principles themselves are neither verifiable nor falsifiable.
3. What is existential denotation?

In a Thomistic theory of meaning, this aspect of the nature of meaning has to do with the real existence of the thing to which a word refers. A name word can have referential significance and not have existential denotation. A name word can have both. Although a name word cannot be a name word without naming something, it is not necessary that it name something that actually exists in external reality. Of course, it can be pointed out that anything that is thought exists as a being in the mind. Existential denotation is that aspect of a name word that asserts the existence of the thing in reality. It is an aspect of the problem of meaning, not because it is part of the meaning of a word, but because name words can be used to denote things that do not exist in extra-mental reality as well as things that do exist in extra-mantal reality. As Mortimer Adler points out, "existential denotation of a word is no part of its lexical meaning." 75

III. Conclusion

With the addition of the linguistic term, in this case the word "MAN," the illustration in Figure 16 on page 130 is now complete.

It depicts a Thomistic theory of knowledge and meaning, showing the nature of meaning, its relation to the knowing faculty, and its foundation in the metaphysical constitution of substance of reality. The thing in reality, composed of form and matter, is perceived by the knower. The form of the thing becomes the object of knowledge. The thing becomes the object of sensible knowledge in the here-and-now as a particular individual thing. The nature is abstracted from the phantasm and is expressed in the intellect as a mental word. A linguistic expression is applied to the

75. Mortimer Adler, Some Questions About Language, p. 33. This is in fact the fine point of distinction upon which Immanuel Kant capitalized in attacking the ontological argument of St. Anselm. Simply because a word, such as "God," has referential significance does not necessarily mean it has existential denotation. Simply because we can conceive of the greatest possible being does not necessitate his existence.
concept, which is the means by which the thing in reality is known, and by which the name becomes a name of that thing. The meaning of the word is the concept in the mind of the knower. The referential significance is that to which the word refers as an idea, memory, image, etc. The existential denotation is the capacity of the word to denote the real existence of things. Categorematic words name, while syncategorematic words function syntactically. This is a Thomistic Realist's theory of the nature of meaning.
Figure 16: Knowledge and Meaning

EXISTENTIAL DENOTATION

THING IN REALITY

EXISTENTIAL SIGNIFICANCE

LINGUISTIC SIGN
"MAN"

MEANING

SENSIBLE STAGE

EXTERNAL SENSES

INTERNAL SENSES

INTELLECTUAL STAGE

AGENT INTELLECT

ABSTRACTION

IDEA

MENTAL WORD

RECALL, PAST IMAGE

ABSTRACTED NATURE

RECALL, PAST SPECIES

IMPRESSED INTELLIGIBLE SPECIES

IMPRESSED INTELLIGIBLE SPECIES

MEMORIAL POWER

IMAGINAL POWER

ESTIMATIVE POWER

DISCERN, INSENSATE ASPECTS

EXPRESSION OF SPECIES

EXPRESSION OF SPECIES

PHANTASM

COMMON SENSE

REPRODUCTIVE SENSE

CREATIVE SENSE

PRESENTATIVE SENSES

RE-PRESENTATIVE SENSES

"JOHN"

FORM/MATTER

INDIVIDUALIZED FORM

PARTICULAR MAN

INDIVIDUAL MAN

UNIVERSALIZED FORM

UNIVERSAL MAN

IMPRESSED SPECIES

SENSED SEPARATELY

Sensed SPECIES

TO

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CHAPTER 6

Hermeneutics: How do we understand what is communicated?
The interpretation of meaning

The final step in the staircase ascent involves the application of the conclusions of the above investigation to a consideration of the causes and locus of meaning in hermeneutics. This section will not deal in depth with the general principles of hermeneutics or hermeneutical methodology, but will consider the relationship of the Realist theory of the nature of meaning to the issues of the causes and locus of meaning as they relate to hermeneutics in order to offer a possible paradigm for more detailed investigation.

Hermeneutics is the science of understanding. Therefore we will begin our application by a look at the relationship of meaning and understanding.

I. Meaning and understanding

In the section on Epistemology, we have demonstrated that the mind employs two powers in the act of understanding. Robert Brennan provides the following synopsis: "two separate powers are required in the soul if it is to understand; agent intellect, whose object is the potentially understandable, and possible intellect, whose object is the actually understandable." The agent intellect abstracts the essence from the particular, and the possible intellect forms the concept that is the means by which the mind understands the thing in reality. But the formation of a concept in the mind by which the intellect knows the thing in reality is nothing else but forming a meaning, for the concept or idea is meaning. Again Mortimer Adler makes this point clear.

. . . our ideas do not have meaning, they do not acquire meaning, they do not change, gain, or lose meaning. Each of our ideas is a meaning and that is all it is. Mind is the

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realm in which meanings exist and through which everything else that has a meaning acquire meaning.  

What, then, is understanding? In the words of Winfried Corduan, "understanding is the discernment of the meaning of a proposition." The diagram in Figure 17 illustrates this.

Contrary to the diagram offered by Saussure (Figure 15), the act of communication involves a grounding in objective reality. The speaker speaks a word in the language common to both speaker and hearer. The hearer, upon hearing the word, recalls the individualized form to which the word refers. The meaning of the word is the nature or essence of the thing to which the word refers. In this diagram, the word employed also has existential denotation in that it denotes the actually existing thing. The word is composed of form and matter. The formal aspect corresponds to the abstracted form existing in the minds of both the speaker and the hearer. The nature of reality and of the mind insures that all minds abstract according to the same principles. The individualized and universalized forms in the minds of each individual are precisely the same because they are determined by the thing in reality, not by the minds of the knowers. Consequently, meaning is grounded in being and is objectively verifiable.

The discernment of the meaning of a proposition presupposes the discernment of the meaning of the words in the proposition and their relationship in context. Not only is meaning derived in this manner concerning objects, but also concerning relations, as the illustration below in Figure 18 shows.

As William May has observed, because material being is composed and complex rather than simple, and because the intellect necessarily obtains knowledge through sensation, "We just do not

Figure 18: Communicating Real Relations

have an intuitive grasp of a given being in its totality, in all its wealth." Human intellectual knowledge is necessarily partial and progresses by means of judgments. What the mind grasps in part, the judgment synthesizes. Consequently, the intellect is able to know relations in reality by means of the act of judgment. David Hume's problem in discovering causality in sensible experience is that he endeavored to discover it by an analysis of the idea rather than by the function of judgment by which the mind unites or separates distinct ideas.5

The Realist view of the nature of meaning, then, relates to understanding because it finds meaning in the concepts of the intellect, which are not themselves the objects of knowledge but are the means by which the intellect attains a knowledge of reality. If understanding is a discerning of meaning, then the Realist perspective provides meaning grounded in reality.


II. Meaning, its causes and locus

A. What are the causes of linguistic meaning?

A Realist view of the nature of linguistic meaning has provided the epistemological and metaphysical foundation upon which to distinguish the various causes of meaning. Let us look at six causes of meaning and three distinct uses of "intention," which seem to exhaust the possibilities.

1) the efficient cause--agent--that by which meaning is caused, namely, the mind of the author. This is the intent in the mind of the author--"I didn't intend to say that."

2) The final cause--purpose--that for which meaning is caused, namely, to communicate. This is the intent of the author as to the purpose for his communication, "My intention (purpose) was to help you."

3) Material cause--material--that out of which meaning is caused, namely, words and symbols, language.

4) Formal cause--form--that of which meaning is caused, namely, the meaning of the text. This is the intent of the author in the expressed meaning of the text.

5) Exemplar cause--pattern--that after which meaning is caused, namely, the Logos, God, the Divine communicator.

6) Instrumental cause--means--that through which meaning is caused, namely, logic, reason. 

Keeping these causes in mind in the process of interpretation goes a long way in enabling the interpreter to avoid confusion and misinterpretation. At least one persistent and very popular error in interpretation can be traced to the confusion of causes, namely, where meaning is found.

B. Where is linguistic meaning found?

Although this is a problem area that is often not recognized as such among biblical interpreters, it is a point of considerable contention in literary criticism.

1. Author-centered theories

E. D. Hirsch is a prominent figure in the controversy about the locus of meaning. In Validity in Interpretation, Hirsch makes

some statements early in the book which seem to indicate that he advocates the theory that the locus of meaning is the text. Such remarks as, "... sensible belief that a text means what its author means," or his references to the modern emphasis on "semantic autonomy of language" are statements with which anyone advocating a text-centered view would prima facie agree. He even speaks disparagingly of the tendency in modern criticism toward a "prevailing skepticism which calls into doubt the possibility of objectively valid interpretation." However, there appears to be an underlying notion that the author's intended meaning is the criterion for validity in interpretation. The following statement hints at this notion.

For, once the author had been ruthlessly banished as the determiner of his text's meaning, it very gradually appeared that no adequate principle existed for judging the validity of an interpretation. 7

To say that the author is "the determiner of his text's meaning" sounds very much like the theory that holds that the locus of meaning is in the text. It seems to acknowledge the author as the efficient cause of meaning, as articulated above. However, Hirsch shifts the locus of meaning from the text to the author by his assertion that it is only the author's determination which provides an "adequate principle . . . for judging the validity of an interpretation." If the locus of meaning is the text, then the author is the determiner of meaning, but the text itself provides the only adequate principle for judging the validity of an interpretation.

There are, then, two aspects of a text. The first is the as determined by the author. The second is that meaning which the reader has interpreted. They may be the same. They may be different. It is the responsibility of the reader to validate his interpretation of the meaning of the text by comparing it with the meaning that the author determined.

7. E. D. Hirsch, Jr., Validity in Interpretation, p. 3.
The question, then, is, where will we go to find the author's determinate meaning? Will we go to the text? Apparently not, for the reader's interpretation of the text must be measured against the author's determination of that meaning. Where is this determinate meaning found? It seems that for Hirsch, the validity of an interpretation is not found in the understanding of the meaning of the text. The text must be interpreted, not to discover its meaning, for its meaning is in the author's determination, i.e., in the mind of the author. The reader's interpretation of the meaning of a text must be validated against the meaning which the author determined for his text.

When Hirsch undertakes to define meaning, he does not do so without a certain amount of ambiguity. In attempting to make a distinction between meaning and significance, Hirsch provides the following definitions.

Meaning is that which is represented by a text; it is what the author meant by his use of a particular sign sequence; it is what the signs represent. Significance, on the other hand, names a relationship between that meaning and a person, or a conception, or a situation, or indeed anything imaginable.8

A certain amount of ambiguity is caused by the statement that meaning is that which "is represented by a text." What does it mean to "represent" meaning? Do words and sentences represent meaning or do they mean something? It seems that Hirsch is attempting to avoid asserting that the meaning resides in the text while not completely abandoning the text in conveying meaning. The next statement seems to confirm this and again points to the idea that the locus of meaning is the author, not the text; "[Meaning] is what the author meant by his use of a particular sign sequence."9

Perhaps it can be argued that Hirsch holds that the locus of meaning is the author rather than the text. It seems that he does. Perhaps it can be argued that Hirsch holds that the locus of

meaning is both the author and the text. This view also seems to fit Hirsch's argument. However, either view is problematic, for, from the interpreter's point of view, the only locus accessible is the text, since one person cannot enter into the mind of another person. Now it will be objected that one person can indeed enter into another person's mind. By means of his text, or by historical or biographical information, an interpreter can reconstruct what might have been on the author's mind when he wrote his text. However, to reconstruct what might have been on the mind of an author is not to enter his mind, for if an interpreter could enter the mind of an author he would not have to reconstruction what might have been, for he would know directly what in fact was. When it is said in this paper that one person cannot enter another person's mind, this is meant in a literal sense. An interpreter cannot actually and literally enter another person's mind.

Although this may seem tautologous or even irrelevant, it is of crucial importance. The impression that is given by referring to the author's intended meaning is that somehow it is possible, apart from any text, to discover what was on an author's mind when he wrote his text. But, this is not possible. Consequently, the priority in interpretation must not be an author's intent as some interpreter has reconstructed it, for this is only an interpreter's supposition. The priority must be the objective text itself. The danger of giving the impression that there is something outside of the text that functions as the determining factor of meaning for the interpreter is found in statements like the following: "If literature is an act of communication, then meaning resides in the intention of the author. . . . Interpretation then has as its goal the recovery of the author's purpose in writing."10 Who is to say what an author's purpose was, and by what objective standard can be employed to adjudicate between competing proposals of what was an author's purpose?

The controversy over the locus of meaning is frequently a confusion of causes. As Longman has observed, "The author has encoded a message for the readers." But the message that the author has encoded resides in the text of that message once it is encoded. The author is the efficient cause of the meaning, but the text is the formal cause, according to the Realist view. As was illustrated in Figure 6, it is not necessary for the knower to go back into the mind of God to know reality, because reality is known by means of the form that constitutes the real thing. Similarly, it is not necessary to go back into the mind of the author to know his meaning, because his meaning resides in the text as form to matter. The error of author-centered theories of interpretation can be effectively countered from a Realist perspective.

2. Reader-centered theories

According to Schuyler Brown, the assumption that linguistic meaning resides in a text "is certainly not intuitively obvious." Brown proposes to demonstrate that "meaning exists formally only in human beings." Tremper Longman, in his helpful historical survey, identifies the reader-centered theory as proposing that "Meaning resides in the reader, not in the text." It seems, however, that those who advocate such a position are advocating a self-contradictory assertion. Surely Brown is counting on his text to communicate his proposition that meaning exists formally only in human beings.

This position also contradicts reality as it is presented from a Realist perspective. If meaning exists formally only in human


beings, then it is impossible for one human being to communicate meaning to another. It is necessary that meaning be conveyed by some medium. Between human beings this medium is language, either written or spoken. If meaning exists only formally in human beings, however, then meaning does not formally exist in the vocal sounds or written notations which humans use as linguistic signs to carry meaning from one human to another. How does Brown suppose meaning can be communicated? He asserts, "meaning is generated by a reader reading a text."\textsuperscript{15} This seems to assert that the meaning of a text originates in the mind of the reader and is not determined by the text, in which case, the meaning of Brown's own text is not found in the text, but in those who read his text. But this leaves no objective standard of verifying the interpretation of textual meaning.

In their book \textit{Linguistics & Biblical Interpretation}, Peter Cotterell & Max Turner associate Jacques Derrida with the Reader-Response theory. According to their description, the Reader-Response interpretation proposes that "meaning is merely potential in any text; it only becomes actual in relation to a reader."\textsuperscript{16} Now, either the author is counting on the text to actually mean that texts have only potential meaning, or, since the text has only potential meaning, it doesn't actually mean that texts have only potential meaning. Consequently, it is a potentiality that some texts do have actual meaning. In either case this assertion is self-defeating.

A Realist view not only proposes that a text has actual meaning, and that the locus of meaning is the text, but the Realist perspective provides a metaphysical and epistemological foundation upon which can be based the assertion that meaning exists formally both in the mind and in the text. This is asserted by the relation


of the formal sign, or mental word, and its corresponding linguistic sign(s).

3. Deconstructionism

Robert P. Scharlemann's article on Deconstructionism focuses on Jacques Derrida's contention that there is no transcendental signified. He explains that this transcendental signified means "that there is no access to what is signified by linguistic signs which does not itself in turn have to make use of linguistic signs," and that "no signified thing which is not in some way pointed out by a linguistic gesture and does not in some way signify in turn, or, to put it differently, which is not in some way mediated by and existent in language."\(^{17}\) By denying a transcendental signified, according to Scharlemann, Derrida is "denying that there is any observing or intuiting or other apprehending of things which is not in some way mediated by language, even if the only language involved is the gesture or word by which a thing is pointed out."\(^{18}\)

Contrary to the claims of Derrida, however, it is possible to articulate the existence of a "transcendental signified" by which the mind apprehends reality apart from any linguistic sign. This is the formal sign, or mental word as presented in a Thomistic Realist epistemology.

Again, it seems that the abandonment of the foundation of a Realist metaphysic leads to a self-destructive conclusion. Scharlemann and Derrida provide two such examples of Derrida's brand of Deconstructionism. According to Scharlemann, Derrida asserts, "there is no absolute ground of the sort that 'metaphysics' had conceived . . . but a play that connects signs to other signs indefinitely." The self-defeating nature of this assertion hardly need to be identified, except perhaps to ask the question, "Is it an absolute ground that there is no absolute

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ground?" In his book *Limited Inc*, Derrida asserts, "I shall try to demonstrate why a context is never absolutely determinable, or rather, why its determination can never be entirely certain or saturated." Of course Derrida's own context is determinable, and Derrida is counting on the fact that his linguistic meaning will be determinate in its meaning, that, because a context is never absolutely determinable, linguistic meaning is fundamentally indeterminate.

A Realist view of meaning attempts to ground meaning in the reality of being. It seeks to provide a determinate context of reality that is the same for every reader and speaker, and maintain an objective point of reference from which to investigate questions of hermeneutics and linguistics.

C. A Realist perspective on the locus of meaning

A Thomistic Realist perspective on the locus of meaning might be initially identified as a text-centered theory because it asserts that the locus of meaning is the text. This is accurate as far as it goes. It is inaccurate if such a designation is taken to imply that the Realist perspective makes the same assertions as Structuralism or the New Criticism. The Realist perspective does not attempt to eliminate the author from his text, or render historical and biographical research unnecessary. Rather, the Thomistic Realist perspective attempts to provide an objectivity to the interpretive process.

1. Meaning and the historical context

The book by Cotterell and Turner referred to above provides a good example around which to consider these issues from a Realist perspective. In section 3.3, entitled "Meaning as Significance and Presupposition Pools," Cotterell and Turner consider the importance of a common set of presuppositions between author and reader in arriving at an appropriate understanding of the significance of a
discourse. One example that CT use is the passage in Revelation concerning the letter to the church at Laodicea. They concentrate particularly on the part that speaks of the Laodicean church as being hot and cold (Rev. 3:15-16).

CT observe the older interpretations of this passage that view the 'hot' as being "zealous for the Lord," and 'cold' as being "actual antagonism." CT point out an inconsistency of this position and offer an alternative that takes into consideration the historical setting of the church of Laodicea. Their presentation seems to explain all the data much more effectively. Their point is that, whether or not their understanding of the passage is correct, "it must be elements in the presupposition pool (not merely those in the text) that are potentially determinative of significance."20

At this point, CT's discussion becomes confusing. Their discussion seems to employ the terms significance and meaning interchangeably. Was the difficulty in the Revelation passage over its meaning, or its significance? It will be helpful to employ a distinction between meaning and significance that is ably defended by E. D. Hirsch.

The important feature of meaning as distinct from significance is that meaning is the determinate representation of a text for an interpreter. An interpreted text is always taken to represent something, but that something can always be related to something else. Significance is meaning-as-related-to-something-else.21

The exposition given by CT employs these historical referents to provide information to illustrate that "utterances have meaning

19. Peter Cotterell & Max Turner, Linguistics & Biblical Interpretation, pp. 90-97. Throughout the remainder of this discussion, this book will be referred to by the designation CT.


... and that part of that meaning is fixed by the context."\textsuperscript{22} The question is, however, is this an accurate appraisal of the situation? It seems that whether or not we agree with CT's identification of the historical places and events to which the designations 'hot' and 'cold' may have referred, the meaning of the passage is nevertheless clear. Jesus said, "I know your deeds, that you are neither cold or hot; I would that you were cold or hot. So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot or cold, I will spit you out of My mouth."

At this point, CT observe that the historical information leads to a more accurate grasp of the significance of the passage. Having made this helpful observation, why do they, then, confuse the significance with the meaning of the text? Earlier in this section they approvingly quote the following observation by Brown and Yule.

One of the most pervasive illusions which persists in the analysis of language is that we understand the meaning of a linguistic message solely on the basis of the words and structure of the sentences(s) used to convey that message.\textsuperscript{23} CT add, "Such a view clearly does not account for the entirely different conclusions concerning Peter's discourse that could be reached by his hearers." If by "significance" CT mean the idea that can be represented by such expressions as "significance of the discourse for the speaker/ writer . . . and of the . . . significance for his hearers or readers," and, "significance for us, today," then CT have expressed a very important point of hermeneutics.

However, if, for CT, the idea of "significance" of the text is interchangeable with the idea of the "meaning" of the text, then they have only managed to cloud the issue and make the meaning of meaning more obscure. The observation of Brown and Yule has either misrepresented what is meant by saying that meaning is derived from

\textsuperscript{22} Cotterell & Turner, p. 97.

\textsuperscript{23} Cotterell & Turner, p. 94.

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the words and structure of the sentence(s), or they are using meaning and significance interchangeably. But to use these terms interchangeably introduces confusion.

In CT's example of the Revelation passage, they provide us with helpful information. However, the information they provide does not determine the meaning of the text. That is to say, the historical context is not the formal cause of meaning, nor is the meaning of this text located in the historical information. In this case, the historical information has illuminated the significance of the meaning which was already resident in the text by making known the possible referents involved. If we never come to know with absolute certainty to what the designations of 'hot' and 'cold' and 'lukewarm' refer, it would still be clear that, to Jesus, the condition of being either hot or cold is preferable to the condition of being lukewarm. The meaning of the text is clear. The problem for CT was not with the meaning of the text, but with the difficulty of relating the meaning of the text in a significant way to the Laodiceans, and to us today. But, to relate the significance of the passage to the original audience, or to us today is to discern the significance of the text, not the meaning of the text. Now, if CT want to use the word 'meaning' in the sense of the significance of a text, namely, "What does it mean for me?" then that is their prerogative. However, this is inconsistent and confusing. Perhaps they could have employed a designation such as meaning₁, meaning₂, etc., so that their uses could be distinguished.

Additionally, it must be pointed out that historical material often provides necessary information that will enable the interpreter to understand the linguistic meaning as well as the significance of a text. Historical investigation provides the interpreter with examples of usage which lead to an understanding of the meanings of words in context. Historical information provides the content which an author employs when he communicates meaningfully. The biblical authors wrote about historical events and people. An understanding of the culture in which the author
lived aids the interpreter in understanding the linguistic dynamics that shaped the author's use and expression. However, the linguistic meaning of a text is not located in these things. Each of these factors has its own linguistic meaning, and an understanding of their meanings as they relate to a given text may help to illuminate the linguistic meaning of that text. These factors provide necessary and vital information that enables the interpreter to discover the linguistic meaning of a text, but it is the linguistic meaning of the text is discovered. It is the linguistic meaning of the text that is the goal of the interpretative enterprise. Application and significance arise out of the linguistic meaning. They are not determinative of that meaning.

Let me illustrate. Deuteronomy 14:21 states, "You shall not boil a kid in its mother's milk." What does this passage mean? There are many commentators who speculate on the historical possibilities with reference to this text. Keil and Delitzsch assert that, "But the actual reference is to the cooking of a kid in the milk of its own mother, as indicating a contempt of the relation which God has established and sanctified between parent and young." However, they also observe that, "In the Targum Mishnah, etc., it is regarded as a general prohibition against eating flesh prepared with milk," and that "Luther and others suppose it to refer to the cooking of the kid, before it has been weaned from its mother's milk." P. C. Craigie relates the command to Canaanite religious practice and the idea that the prohibition might "be one that had close associations with the


25. Ibid.
fertility cult."26

These citations serve well to illustrate the point. What does this passage mean? It seems obvious that the passage means, do not boil a kid in its mother's milk. Now, the referents of the words are relatively clear as well; "kid," "milk," "mother," are all clear. The problem arises when the interpreter tries to discover the significance of this passage. On a popular level we ask, "What does it mean?" What is actually being asked is, what does this prohibition signify, what was the significance of this passage for Israel, or what is its significance for interpreters today? Now, if some commentator is able to provide evidence to establish as a fact that this prohibition was given with the Canaanite practices in mind, then the significance would become much clearer. Then we would begin to understand what significance the prohibition had for the lives of the people of Israel and the significance it had for their relationship with the LORD. We would also be brought a long way toward understanding its significance for us today. But, this regards the significance of the passage, not its meaning.

The danger in confusing these two aspects is the tendency to substitute the significance for the meaning. When a group of lay people or a pastor begins to employ what is understood to be the significance of a passage in such a way as to see it as the meaning of the passage, then interpretation has become subjective, and there is no longer an objective determinate factor, viz. the text itself, that preserves the meaning of the text for an interpreter.

The determinate factor in the text is the form/meaning of the text that resides in the text, not in the interpreter or in the historical info even in the mind of the author. The analogous relationship between the form/matter constitution of extra-mental reality and the form/matter constitution of a text provides a helpful illustration. A human being is a thing in reality that is

composed of form and matter. Its form is the determinate aspect by which its nature and consequently its function are perceived. The form of the human being, in an analogous way, determines his meaning. The meaning of the human being is that he is a rational creature functioning as a free moral agent in this world. However, there are a number of different legitimate applications of the humans. A human being can function as an object of investigation by practitioners of various disciplines. A human being can function as a boost to assist another human being to climb a wall, or a tree. In fact, any application that does not destroy the form of the human being is a legitimate application of the human being. However, if someone were to take a human being and break him into parts for firewood, this would not be a legitimate application of a human being as a human being. If someone were to take a human being and remove his skin in order to adorn a lamp as a lamp shade, this would not be a legitimate application of a human being. Any application of the human being that destroys his form is an illegitimate application of the human being qua human being. This is because these kinds of applications, in a sense, are not the meaning of the human being. The meaning of a human being is to be a rational creature created in the image of God and functioning as a free moral agent. The difference between legitimate and illegitimate applications are identified in reference to the form that resides in the human being. Any application that destroys the form of the human being, is an illegitimate application.

Similarly, the form of the text, which is the meaning of the text, is the determining factor in deciding whether a certain application, or significance is legitimate or appropriate. Any application or understanding of significance is legitimate as long as it does not destroy or distort the form of the text. If an interpreter were to break up the text and apply its parts in some way that destroys the form of the text, this is not a legitimate application of the meaning of this text. It may be a legitimate application of those words as words, but not of this text as this text. Likewise, an interpreter cannot take the historical
information, as helpful as it is, and make this the meaning of the text. In fact, it is the meaning of the text that makes it possible to identify pertinent historical information. If the meaning of the text were not discernable before the historical investigation, it would be impossible to distinguish between relevant and irrelevant historical information. CT knew what it meant to be hot or cold. Consequently, they were able to discover historical circumstances that helped to illuminate the possible spiritual significance of Jesus' words to the Laodiceans.

2. Meaning and the author

What applies to historical information applies to the purpose and intent of the author. Although it is helpful and illuminating to attempt to reconstruct what may have been an author's purpose in writing, these aspects cannot be the determining factor of the meaning of the text for the interpreter once the text is brought into existence by its author. Again we must employ distinctions. It is obvious that the author is the one who determines the meaning of his text. A parrot may utter sounds that humans identify as words and phrases. However, the parrot does not mean anything by these sounds, because the parrot is not a rational creature that employs linguistic expression to communicate meaning. Meaning is communicated by minds that mean. However, once a message is communicated, the meaning must be conveyed from the meaner to the hearer. The meaning is deposited in the text by the author. But the meaning, though it ever remains in the mind of the author, is deposited in the text. Consequently, for communication to take place, the meaning that is originally in the mind of the author must be carried to the mind of the hearer by means of the text that the author employs. From the point of view of the hearer, then, the meaning is in the text of the author, not in the mind of the author. The author's mind is always inaccessible to other minds apart from some communication by the author. But if one mind communicates to another by means of signs, then the meaning of the communication is in what is communicated, not in who communicated it. The author is the secondary efficient cause of meaning, but
the text is the locus of that meaning.

Therefore, to propose going back into the mind of an author in an effort to discover the intent/purpose of the author is a confusion of causes and a misunderstanding of where meaning is found. First of all, the human author may be unavailable for comment. But what if he were available? How would he go about telling an interpreter what was his intent? Would he describe what was going on in his mind when he wrote his text? But in order to describe what was going on in his mind he would have to use words to do this. If the meaning of that text is also located in the author's mind we are faced with trying to find out what was his intent behind the words he employed to explain the intent of his first text. How would he explain what he meant by the words he used to explain his intent? Again he would have to employ words, and we are faced with the problem of trying to discover what was his intent behind those words, and the next set of words to explain the intent of the previous set, ad infinitum. By searching for some authorial intent behind the words which the author employs, and then using that to dictate what the text means, entails an infinite regress. All of this is avoided because the intent of the author is expressed in the meanings of the words and sentences which he employs. But if the intent of the author is in the text, then, for the interpreter, the locus of meaning is the text, not the author's mind.

Again it must be pointed out that biographical information about an author is pertinent and helpful in the interpretative process. Information about his life, his culture, his experiences provide helpful insight which may illuminate the meaning of his text. However, from the point of view of the interpreter, the meaning of a text is not located in these things once an author has created his text. The danger here is the tendency to give priority to what a given interpreter views as an accurate picture of the author's intent over the linguistic meaning of the text. Some authors have employed what they understand to have been Moses' intent in writing the creation account in Genesis to determine the
meaning of the text. They claim that because Moses' intent in writing this account was to magnify the majesty of God, and that Moses did not intend to provide a scientific record, that Genesis is therefore not an accurate account of the beginning of the universe. Rather, it is a mythical story that accomplishes Moses' intent. In this case the supposed intent of the author is employed in such a manner as to distort what is the normal grammatical-historical signification of the text. The need for biographical research and the illumination it provides for a text should never be employed to overturn the grammatical-historical signification a text.

III. Conclusion

We have dealt with only two hermeneutical questions, namely, what are the causes of meaning, and where is meaning located. However, these comments were designed to show how a Realist perspective might be employed in addressing hermeneutical issues. The grounding of meaning in being provides an objective standard to which interpretations may be related. The analogous relationship between the form/matter constitution of things in reality and the form/matter constitution of a text provides a foundation upon which the determinate aspect of meaning can be based. It provides a means by which an interpreter can distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate applications and understandings of the significance of a text. It attempts to give priority to the text over extra-textual considerations. The Realist perspective does not eliminate historical research or attempt to separate an author from his text. Rather, the Realist perspective seeks to place these aspects in proper relation to the text, locating the meaning in the text and employing these necessary investigations as tools by which to better understand the meaning of the text. The distinction of causes of meaning and the different uses of intention help to clarify the issues and identify the problems in hermeneutic theory and practice. The Realist perspective endeavors to take hermeneutics out of the realm of the subjective Idealism, and place it in the realm of the objective reality.
CONCLUSION

A Moderate or Thomistic Realist view of the nature of meaning, as presented in this paper, is an attempt to demonstrate the philosophical foundation upon which has been built the traditional western hermeneutical practice of grammatical-historical exegesis. The value of the Realist perspective is that it is a reasoned philosophical demonstration of the experience of the common man. The man in the street interacts with reality on a daily basis, all the while believing that things which exist outside the mind are knowable, and that it is possible to meaningfully talk about them. The layperson and the pastor alike assume that when the Bible talks about a human being, that the human beings of biblical times are essentially the same as human beings today. In short, the average man in the street assumes that reality is as he perceives it to be, and it is essentially the same for everyone. The Realist account is an attempt to present a reasoned philosophical demonstration of the fact of common experience.

Additionally, the Realist perspective of the nature, causes and locus of meaning is an attempt to demonstrate that language is grounded in the very being of God. The philosophical system of St. Thomas Aquinas is not ultimately based on autonomous human reason. Rather, it is based upon God and His self-revelation. However, the revelation of God is communicated to the mind of men. For St. Thomas, faith and reason are intimately related. Reason cannot produce faith, but faith is not unreasonable. Consequently, although reason cannot provide the basis for belief in God, for only God Himself is an adequate basis for faith, reason plays a vital role before, during and after faith. The revelation of God is a revelation communicated to men in the language of men. Consequently, language is ultimately grounded in God. But, to ground language in God is to ground it in being, for the nature of God is to be. Only God has life and immortality in Himself. Only God has His Being in Himself. For St. Thomas, an investigation into the mysteries of metaphysics is an investigation into the very
nature of God. While all created things have being, only God is being. Only God is the great I Am.

Since the time of Descartes, man has been progressing steadily toward the goal of bringing every thought captive to the autonomous human reason. The product of the Enlightenment is a man who is ultimately the determiner of truth. The product of Kantian Idealism is the relegation of the spiritual to the realm of the unknowable, and consequently the unnecessary. The product of modern philosophy is the conviction that man is the measure of all things, and the conceptual is the real. Philosophy since Descartes has created a man who questions the existence of external reality, the objective foundation of truth, and the possibility of meaningful communication. Man has come to believe that he shapes his own destiny. Man has come to believe that he is the ultimate determiner of meaning. Consequently, it is each man that decides what is true for himself. Each man generates the meaning of the text he reads—even a biblical text. The meaning of the Bible is no longer objectively determined by the Divine Author, but subjectively created by the human reader. The question is no longer what hath God said, but what hath man read?

Biblical hermeneutics must not be led down the path of looking within for truth and meaning. The objectively communicated revelation of God must be the measure of meaning because it is grounded in His nature—because it is grounded in Being. If the errors of modern philosophy that permeate the current popular views of hermeneutics are not checked, then exegesis will become a task of finding meaning everywhere except in God's own words. It is hoped that this modest attempt at an explication of the metaphysical foundation of the nature of meaning has demonstrated the need to constantly reaffirm the objective basis of meaning, and that a Realist perspective offers a viable alternative to the present trend toward subjectivism.
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