

**THE RIDDLE OF SPIRITUAL PEDAGOGY:
HOW IS AUTHORITATIVE SPIRITUAL TEACHING POSSIBLE?**

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A THESIS SUBMITTED FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN THEOLOGY AND RELIGION
TRINITY TERM 2022

Acknowledgements

Writing on spiritual pedagogy has given me occasion to reflect in gratitude on my own teachers and many other sources of support. The ideas for what would eventually become this thesis began to take shape at the University of Toronto. At Toronto, I benefited from the careful teaching of Gordon Rixon, SJ, Jeremy Wilkins, Gill Goulding, CJ, Bob Sweetman, Darren Dias, OP, Jennifer Nagel, and, especially, Michael Stoeber, who was my supervisor through two degrees.

My Jesuit superiors, especially Brian Paulson, Karl Kiser, Dan McDonald, Brad Schaeffer, and Frank Turner assigned me to pursue doctoral work and provided generous support along the way. In addition to the Jesuit community resident at Campion Hall, over the course of the doctorate I had extended stays at Berchmanskolleg Jesuit community in Munich and Canisius House Jesuit community near Chicago. I am grateful for the support of these communities.

The fellows, students, and staff of Campion Hall provided all manner of help along the way. I am especially grateful to Wilma Minty, Sarah Gray, Keir Meikle, Philip Kennedy, and Nicholas Austin, SJ for much practical assistance and kindness. One of the joys of Campion Hall is interacting closely with a rich array of fellows. I am grateful for many conversations with Joel Rasmussen, Gavin Flood, John Barton, Patrick Riordan, SJ, Robert Marsh, SJ, and Patrick Goujon, SJ. Peter Davidson and Jane Stevenson were constant sources of support during my time in Oxford and models of generous scholarly life, well-lived.

Joel Gutteridge, Matt Rosen, and Jarek Jankowski sharpened my thinking in our fairly eccentric reading group. We had entirely too much fun worrying about sense-making. Many friends enlivened an otherwise arid time of study, particularly: Travis LaCouter, James Lorenz, Mark Aloysius, SJ, Anne Ploin, Pavlo Smytsnyuk, Vijay D'Souza, SJ, Artur Suski, SJ, Joseph Simmons, SJ, Carl Scerri, Philip Moller, SJ, Stephen Withnell, Patrick McGrath, SJ, and Lucinda Armstrong.

This dissertation would not have been possible without the patience, insight, and encouragement of my supervisors, Stephen Mulhall and Graham Ward.

My brother, Jonathan, has been a model of dedicated teaching in difficult circumstances. Finally, my greatest debt of gratitude is to my parents, Joanne and David. They are my first and best teachers.

Material on Herbert McCabe from chapter two was adapted for the article: "Herbert McCabe's Realism." *New Blackfriars* 103, no. 1104 (March 2022): 294–308.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/nbfr.12733>.

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Short Abstract

This thesis asks: can a spiritual teacher be said to teach with authority, as much of the Christian tradition holds and, indeed, requires to continue itself? To answer this question, a secondary question is pursued: what is the relationship of spiritual authority to other types of authoritative teaching? The spiritual pedagogue attempts to form others to live according to God's will, which is mysterious in principle. Unlike most other disciplines, the spiritual teacher cannot claim authoritative knowledge of the essence of her discipline. Nevertheless, I argue that spiritual teaching authority is a legitimate though limited form of authority, and that a sign of such authority is a self-consciousness of its own limitations.

Drawing on Wittgenstein and Aquinas, I argue that spiritual teaching authority is a riddling form of prudential counsel. Wittgenstein's account of language within shared activities provides the "rough ground" to speak of the activities associated with spiritual pedagogy while distinguishing the inarticulable mystery at the heart of such teaching. The language of spiritual pedagogy is riddling in Cora Diamond's sense in that such language fails to make sense but lies within a cultivated, intelligible set of questions and activities. This Wittgensteinian account is joined with Thomas's two rules for prudential human action, the eternal law of God's own being, and human reason. The eternal law is, in principle, mysterious yet it formally orders human reason. The spiritual pedagogue becomes authoritative by becoming riddling herself, i.e., by being transformed through her engagement with scripture and tradition in community. This ongoing transformation allows her to creatively and richly speak and act around the riddle of God without ever claiming to solve that riddle.

Short abstract word count: 273

Long Abstract

This thesis asks: can a spiritual teacher be said to teach with authority, as much of the Christian tradition holds? The question of spiritual authority is typically posed in relation to other types of authoritative teaching. Therefore, a second question follows from the first: what is the relationship of spiritual authority to other types of authoritative teaching? I argue that spiritual authority is a real albeit limited and primarily practical authority that differs from most other types of authority because a sign of spiritual authority is its self-conscious limitations regarding the essence of its subject matter.

Spiritual authority is often regarded as epistemically tenuous, and sometimes politically dangerous, compared to other more immanent types of intellectual and practical authority. While the spiritual teacher works with the authoritative statements of scripture and tradition, she does not and cannot have knowledge of God's essence. Rather the spiritual authority teaches and models an approach to mystery. The spiritual pedagogue prudently shapes her action and speech around what she knows cannot be finally said because the object of spiritual teaching is both within and beyond the world, both within and beyond human life. The spiritual pedagogue gives instruction and makes claims within human language that exceed the capacity of that language insofar as they attempt to speak of the mystery of God—this is great riddle language in Wittgenstein and Cora Diamond's sense, which is developed throughout the thesis. These riddles and the language surrounding them become richer as one is formed into prudent, often habituated action and the language arising from such action. Language fails in riddles, but such failure is located within a cultivated space of discourse and action.

I argue that spiritual authority is premised upon graced, prudential counsel that both preserves spiritual authority as a meaningful authority and recognizes its distinctive limitations in being unable to speak to the essence of its subject. Through a non-foundational, Wittgensteinian reading of Thomas Aquinas, this thesis will argue that authoritative spiritual teaching is traditional, concrete, and self-destabilizing. Spiritual teaching functions on two non-competing levels, or *duplex regula* in the Thomistic sense: an immanent level open to rational evaluation and a transcendent, riddling level of divine gift. The paradoxical authority of the spiritual teacher recommends tangible action on the path to ultimately inarticulable spiritual development. This conclusion accords with the claims of many Christian spiritual authorities about their own teaching office and holds that the language of religious pedagogy can be both realistic and non-idolatrous.

The thesis proceeds in six chapters. The first chapter makes an historical case for spiritual authority and the modern challenges to spiritual authority. Directed formation – *paideia*– has been a feature of Christianity from its beginnings and was itself shaped by Greek philosophical precedents. Whether the ancient teachings of the Desert Fathers and Mothers, contemporary parish-based spiritual direction programs, or a wide variety of other forms of Christian formation, Christian teaching makes authoritative claims about “who God is” and “what God asks of me or us”. The central tension of spiritual pedagogy is how one can speak with authority about what is in principle mysterious. The chapter highlights the concreteness of spiritual pedagogy in the tradition coupled with the mystery of discerning God’s will in the concrete. These claims arise from and direct students towards action—the contemplative in spiritual teaching arises from the practical and prudential.

The second chapter introduces Grammatical Thomism as an extension of Thomist thought, especially with regard to spiritual pedagogy. The chapter begins describing Thomas Aquinas as a spiritual pedagogue who used all the intellectual tools at his disposal to further his pedagogy. The most innovative and controversial tool at his disposal was the introduction of Aristotle into western Europe. The chapter argues that Wittgensteinian Thomism is an authentic extension of Thomism. Thomas incorporated Aristotle's philosophy principally on the grounds that Aristotle's philosophy provided powerful philosophical tools for Thomas to further a wide range of his own theological and philosophical ends. Thomism continues to seek after the best philosophical tools available, as Thomas did in his own day. I argue that Wittgenstein's philosophical insights enhance the power of Thomas's thought, particularly with regard to the status of religious language.

Wittgensteinian Thomism is controversial, in part because of the trends in wider Thomist thought, particularly the recruitment of Thomas as a partisan for realism since the Thomist revival under Pope Leo XIII. Wittgenstein, by contrast, is seen as an anti-realist, incompatible with Thomas in particular and theological thought more generally. To frame this controversy, Wittgensteinian Thomism is located without wider Thomist thought. The groundwork for Wittgensteinian readings of Thomas is laid by various developments in Thomism since the decline of the manualist tradition, most notably Bernard Lonergan's Transcendental Thomism, which is itself controversial. The chapter's defense of Grammatical Thomism is contingent on two claims to be proven in subsequent chapters. Firstly, that Wittgenstein's philosophy is directed towards reality such that it is compatible with Thomist thought—this is taken up in chapters three and four. Secondly, that Wittgensteinian thought,

particularly on riddles, compliments and provides additional power and precision to Thomas's thought—this is taken up in chapters five and six.

The third chapter develops a dynamically realist or “realistic” reading of Wittgenstein. Claims that Wittgenstein merely “talks about talk” is a common but misguided objection to his philosophy. Wittgensteinian grammatical analysis is a descriptive rather than prescriptive project. Grammar rules are neither true nor false but allow one to say true and false things about the reality. The process grammar describes is one of communal adaptation to reality through the development of language and forms of life. Importantly for the spiritual pedagogy, one comes to mastery of grammar rules through training in a community. It is through this training that one becomes able to identify features of the world. The chapter concludes by suggesting that direct reference theories, most notably Saul Kripke's, presume training in order to refer. Training in grammar is not an impediment to talking about reality but an aid to it.

Chapter four moves from the general account of Wittgenstein on grammar in chapter three to specifically religious language. Wittgenstein wrote relatively little on religious topics directly but inspired an enormous and often contradictory secondary literature on religious language. Criticism of Wittgensteinian approaches to philosophy of religion and theology often fail to account for the variety of Wittgensteinian approaches. The chapter articulates two main approaches to religious language in Wittgenstein. The first is that religious language is just another language game tied to particular forms of life and only partially understandable outside those forms. The second approach is that religious language is nonsensical such that it cannot be a proper language game. I argue that both accounts are inadequate. Treating religious language like other language games does not adequately account for the centrality of

mystery in religious language. Discarding religious language as nonsensical fails to account for the useful applications of religious language. Despite these inadequacies, both accounts include helpful features that can be integrated into religious language as riddle language.

Chapter five solves the dilemma articulated in chapter four through riddle language and useful conjecture. Riddles are non-pejoratively *nonsensical* insofar as they defy sense-making yet are intelligibly motivated, and language from sensible contexts is projected upon and woven around them. This approach also ameliorates theological and philosophical concerns about idolatry in religious language. Anselm's *Proslogion* has long been a focus of Wittgensteinian and wider philosophical attention. The chapter begins by reading the *Proslogion* through the longer *Monologion*, which is an explicitly riddling text. Drawing on Cora Diamond and Stephen Mulhall, the chapter argues that riddles remain unsolved until one can account for *how* a riddle describes. Even an active riddle can be useful in the same way that a mathematical conjecture may be useful in drawing new connections and exploring new possibilities. A conjecture is, by definition, not fully consistent but can be a practical guide.

Chapter six applies the riddle theory developed in chapter five and shows how spiritual pedagogy is a riddling form of prudence, which usefully employs conjectures. I substantiate this claim using Thomas's account of teaching in the *De Veritate* and prudence in the *Summa Theologiae* through the Wittgensteinian Thomist framework developed in chapters two, three, and four. Thomas holds there is a *duplex regula* for human action: the first rule is the eternal law, the second human reason. The eternal law is the answer to the all-important spiritual pedagogy question posed in chapter one ('what would God have me do?') and is premised on the related question, 'who is God?' The answers and, indeed, the questions are riddles to be engaged; they cannot be straightforwardly solved. The eternal law is, in

principle, unknowable. Prudence is regulated by the human rule seeking after the eternal rule. For Thomas, this occurs both by natural and supernatural means. God helps human beings to be prudent, both directly and through teachers. Teaching depends on the virtue of counsel, which is itself derived from prudence. Counsel takes three forms in Thomas: counsel as a divine gift, counsel as an exercise of human reason, or counsel as a combination of the two, e.g., the counsel of a spiritual pedagogue. One human being offers counsel another through both human reason and the gift of divine counsel. Counsel *qua* human prudence is neither easily nor completely able to be disentangled from counsel *qua* divine gift, although they are different in kind and non-competing. To be meaningful, such counsel must be associated with a form of life and grammatically analyzable, yet nonsensical in the non-pejorative sense articulated in chapter five. The authority of spiritual counsel is ultimately grounded in the eternal law, which cannot be known directly but can be imperfectly incarnated as one becomes a riddle.

Long abstract word count: 1624

Abbreviations

Works by Thomas Aquinas

DV	<i>De Veritate</i>
SCG	<i>Summa Contra Gentiles</i>
ST	<i>Summa Theologiae</i>
JB	Commentary on Job

Works by Ludwig Wittgenstein (cited by remark number except BB, LFM, PG, PO, and CV, which are cited by page number)

BB	Blue and Brown Books
C	On Certainty
CV	Culture and Value
LE	Lecture on Ethics
LFM	Lectures on the Foundations of Mathematics
LRB	Lecture on Religious Belief
PG	Philosophical Grammar
PI	Philosophical Investigations
PO	Philosophical Occasions
PPF	Philosophy of Psychology – A Fragment (Formerly PI Part II)
RFM	Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics
RPP I	Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology, vol I
RPP II	Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology, vol II
Z	Zettel

Works by Søren Kierkegaard

PC	Practice in Christianity
PF	Philosophical Fragments
SUD	Sickness Unto Death

0.0 Introduction

Reflecting on his role as a Christian teacher and that of his collaborators, St. Paul claims that they are “servants of Christ and stewards [*oikonomos*] of God’s mysteries” (1 Cor 4:1).¹ The steward shares in the authority of the master—acting and speaking on the master’s behalf. Stewards of a human master are valuable to the master because the steward understands what the master would wish to be done in a given situation. The steward of God’s mysteries is unlike the steward of a human master. In chapter thirteen of the same letter, Paul says of human knowledge of God that one sees “in a mirror dimly [riddle] [*ainigmati*]” (13:12). For Thomas Aquinas, Paul’s dark mirror or riddle-understanding is the “inchoate beatitude” [*inchoatio beatitudinis*] which cannot in principle be clarified in this life but is a proximate goal to be sought in this life (ST II-II.180.4).² Only in the eschaton can one see clearly. For Thomas, even in the garden of Eden, Adam understood God as a riddle, “so far as every creature is something obscure when compared with the immensity of the Divine light; and thus Adam saw God in an enigma (*aenigmate*), because he saw Him in a created effect” (ST I.94.1.ad3). The steward of God’s mysteries is a steward of riddles that she cannot properly understand yet acts in and through. The Christian tradition is built on the teaching and leadership of those who speak and act for God through riddles. Sometimes these riddles are explicit, though often they can be mistaken for literal description. This thesis asks: can a

¹ All biblical citations are taken from the *New Revised Standard Version* unless otherwise noted. Greek New Testament citations taken from Nestle-Aland. Michael D. Coogan et al., eds., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with Apocrypha: New Revised Standard Version*, Fourth Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Eberhard Nestle, Barbara Aland, and Holger Strutwolf, eds., *Novum Testamentum Graece et Latine*, 28th ed. (Stuttgart: Dt. Bibelges, 2014).

² All citations from Thomas Aquinas are cited parenthetically. When citing the *Summa Theologiae*, citations are from the *Respondeo* section of the given question unless otherwise noted. “[*I*]nchoatio beatitudinis” might also be translated “the beginning of beatitude”. In either case the context makes clear that Thomas is distinguishing the limited and uncertain beatitude of the present from the fullness of beatitude.

teacher be said to teach with spiritual authority, as much of the Christian tradition holds? That is to say, an authority exercised (a) within a social and linguistic context, (b) addressing a particular person or community while (c) finding its justification in the mysterious call of God? To answer this question, a related question is pursued: how can a spiritual pedagogue teach what is, in principle, mysterious with authority?

I intend to answer these related questions using a three-pronged approach. First, I make a brief historical survey of spiritual pedagogy and the challenges to spiritual pedagogy. Modernity challenges many traditional authorities. Spiritual authority becomes ripe for critique as either a relic of a past social order or else as merely irrational. Various crises within the Christian church make claims to authority particularly vexed. Some of these critiques mischaracterize spiritual authority or conflate it with related forms of social and institutional authority. I identify characteristics of spiritual pedagogues recognized by the Christian tradition and which distinguish institutional authority from spiritual authority as such. Spiritual authority combines concrete practical instruction with the preservation of mystery. Spiritual pedagogy both provides practical help to advance one's spiritual life and maintains that discernment is a divine gift. This survey raises the question how abiding mystery affirms practical instruction rather than undermining such instruction. Mystery and practical instruction would seem to be incommensurable.

Second, I follow Stanley Cavell's astute observation that spiritual authority and the ability to speak about revelation is both a "logico-philosophical and [a] Christian issue."³ Most of the thesis develops a philosophical approach to the language and forms of life of

³ Stanley Cavell, "Kierkegaard's On Authority and Revelation," in *Must We Mean What We Say?: A Book of Essays*, Cambridge Philosophy Classics edition. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 156.

spiritual pedagogy that can reconcile concrete instruction with mystery. I advance a Grammatical Thomist method, which I take to be a reading of Thomas Aquinas amended by a Wittgensteinian grammatical investigation. This method enhances Thomas's already careful account of the status of theological language. Grammatical investigation is supplemented with a Wittgensteinian account of riddles. Emerging from this method, a key distinction is drawn between solving a riddle and developing helpful conjectures built around unsolved riddles. One may advance in practically useful conjecture while preserving a riddle.

Third, the riddle method is applied to Thomas's account of the virtues required for spiritual pedagogy, most notably the virtue of counsel and the closely aligned virtue of prudence. The distinction between useful conjecture and riddle becomes an interpretive key to understanding Thomas's *duplex ordo* account of acquired and infused virtues. This riddling-informed reading of Thomistic counsel answers the question articulated in section one—how mystery and practical instruction are not only compatible but complimentary. Mystery drives practical instruction and spiritual progress.

0.1 A Kierkegaardian Prelude to Spiritual Authority

Given the significant theoretical groundwork required to address spiritual pedagogy as a Grammatical Thomist riddle, I will present a Kierkegaardian prelude of riddling spiritual pedagogy. This gestures towards both the challenge of spiritual pedagogy and introduces spiritual pedagogy as speaking from having received a mystery or riddle that cannot be properly accounted for in other terms. Søren Kierkegaard exercises a considerable influence

on Wittgenstein and, in part, anticipates subsequent theory.⁴ Wittgenstein's account of the absolute, discussed in subsequent chapters, owes much to Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard is widely associated with disclaiming authority and critiquing would be authorities of his day, though his critiques are not of Christian authority as such but of nearly ubiquitous misunderstandings and abuses of such authority. Kierkegaard intriguingly, albeit briefly, employs riddle language in the description of Christian inwardness by his exemplary Christian pseudonym, Anti-Climacus. If my reading is correct, Kierkegaard may have, in a rough and largely ahistorical outline, a sense of the place of riddles in authoritative pedagogy that anticipates the riddling account of spiritual authority I will develop using Thomas Aquinas and Wittgenstein.

Kierkegaard famously critiques Christendom, particularly the Danish state church and its pretenses to Christian authority. Kierkegaard sets the problem of spiritual authority and a tentative characterization of such authority in helpfully stark terms. Spiritual authority is distinct from all other types of authority and comes solely from God.⁵ Kierkegaard imagines contrasting approaches to revelation and teaching authority across his pseudonyms. The contrast between the doubter pseudonym, Johannes Climacus, and the model Christian, Anti-Climacus, is particularly instructive. Though Kierkegaard does not refer to Anti-Climacus as a teacher or preacher as such, he is a "Christian on an extraordinarily high level" in deliberate

⁴ Though it is difficult to trace Wittgenstein's influences religiously or otherwise, Kierkegaard seems to stand in the background of Wittgenstein's thinking on religion. Wittgenstein recounted to Maurice Drury, "Kierkegaard was by far the most profound thinker of the last century. Kierkegaard was a saint." Maurice O'Connor Drury, "Some Notes on Conversations with Wittgenstein," in *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Personal Recollections*, ed. Rush Rhees (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981), 87.

⁵ Kierkegaard addresses the question of spiritual authority in various places in his authorship. A comprehensive account of spiritual authority in Kierkegaard is well beyond the present scope. Kierkegaard considers the case of his contemporary, Adolph Peter Adler, as a would-be spiritual authority in great detail. His treatment requires too much historical background for the present purposes. The pseudonymous author of *Book on Adler*, Petrus Minor, is closely related to Johannes Climacus and an early draft of *Adler* was written as Climacus. Søren Kierkegaard, *The Book on Adler*, ed. Howard V Hong and Edna H Hong (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2009).

contrast to Climacus (PC 279-280). Climacus and Anti-Climacus differ on the sort of teaching each is willing to accept and the role of the teacher in the development of each. Climacus begins his *Philosophical Fragments* by holding Socrates as a model of teaching. Socrates makes no claims to special knowledge but facilitates the student's learning. A teacher of this sort is "only an occasion, whoever he may be, even if he is a god, because I can discover my own untruth only by myself, because only when *I* discover it is it discovered" (PF 14).⁶ To Climacus, the non-Socratic teaching authority of pastors is "a common lunacy" (PF12). No human being is a true authority, and any claims to authority should be treated with skepticism. A Socratic teacher's instruction can be verified. The Socratic teacher teaches the student how to arrive at a particular conclusion like going through the steps of a mathematical proof. Each step is open to scrutiny. The student can, and often should, follow the process to verify the teacher's assertions. Appeal to the teacher's personal authority is unnecessary and potentially dangerous. At best, a teacher offers a method one can use to arrive at some truth. Teachers are the occasion to learn for oneself.

Climacus ultimately finds this Socratic mode of teaching unsatisfactory because it does not seem able to deliver higher truths. The truths the god had to tell, the human being could not in principle demonstrate. There seem to be certain truths that one must learn by trusting in a teacher rather than verifying what the teacher says. For example, one cannot see God directly and, therefore, one relies on God's works. Even knowing where to look for verification is difficult. "But, then, what are the god's works? The works from which I want to demonstrate his existence do not immediately and directly exist, not at all. Or are the wisdom

⁶ It is, however, a central question in Climacus to what extent such discovery is possible and to what extent Climacus is simply plagiarizing the god and in need of the god's teaching.

in nature and the goodness or wisdom in Governance right in from of our noses?” (PF 42) The answer is no, at least not in a way human beings can properly understand. The inference from creation to God requires a “leap” because God is unlike creation (PF 43). God is absolute, creation is contingent. Herein lies a paradox for Climacus, one which a Socratic teacher cannot help him across.

Anti-Climacus begins from a place of trust and dependence on his teacher. Anti-Climacus’s model teacher is Christ: “...the teacher [Christ] is more important than the teaching. Wherever it is the case that teaching is an essential component, there is a reduplication; the reduplication lies precisely in this, that the teacher is integral” (PC 123). The content of the teaching of Christ cannot be separated from Christ as the teacher. One cannot learn nor maintain the teaching of Christ without Christ remaining as one’s teacher, whereas the content of Socrates’s teaching does not depend on Socrates.

Christ is the model teacher because Christ is Anti-Climacus’s model of truth. Truth is participatory. “Being the truth is identical with knowing the truth, and Christ would never have known the truth if he had not been it, and nobody knows more of the truth than what he is of the truth” (PC 205-6). There is no third-party perspective on this truth. To know truth is to engage in the activity of truth. Joel Rasmussen writes that for Anti-Climacus “to learn the truth is most appropriately interpreted by living in accordance with this divine expression of truth, rather than by coming to a cognitive grasp of an objective truth.”⁷ If Christ is the necessary teacher, one cannot come to a cognitive grasp of the truth apart from through Christ as the divine expression of truth.

⁷ Joel D. S. Rasmussen, “Poetry, Piety, and Paideia in Kierkegaard’s Practice in Christianity,” *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook* 2010 (January 18, 2010): 161, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110223026.153>.

The Socratic teacher is conditioned by the human capacity to independently verify what the teacher is saying. By contrast, Christ the teacher is unconditioned except by himself. So too Christ's call and the practice of imitating Christ the teacher is unconditioned. The Apostle's teaching as revelation-facts is unconditioned.⁸ The virtues taught by Socrates are conditioned by one's own expectations and sense of limits. Anti-Climacus highlights the inability of the systematizing "assistant professors" (PC 95, 126) to cope with encounter with the God-man. Direct communication of the God-man is impossible. There is no third-party position from which one can deflect judgement. To attempt a third party, socially acceptable Christianity is to be caught in social convention and to lose Christ.

The mirror is held up to the person, who is confronted by the riddle, a mirror that may be as dim as St. Paul's. Here Anti-Climacus introduces the intriguing image of the riddle and the self-disclosing guess: "[What dwells within] is a riddle, but he is guessing the riddle, what dwells within him is disclosed by what he guesses" (PC 127). Encounter with the God-man does not end in quiet but prompts speech even as one is caught in a riddle. One is becoming truth, encountering Christ as a riddle. One speaks out of this riddle, but not with full knowledge, only with guesses. Guesses are not merely speculative but performative. They are founded upon one's ways of thinking and living. The authentic preacher of the Gospel is one

⁸ Kierkegaard makes parallel distinctions between the authority of a genius and an apostle in his "The Difference between a Genius and an Apostle". First, the genius's innovations in teaching are absorbed into general human knowledge whereas the apostle offers something paradoxically new, which is concerned with the eternal and therefore unable to be assimilated. Genius is additive to human knowledge, apostleship is not. Second, the genius speaks from his own authority but the apostle from divine authority. Third, the genius employs an immanent teleology; the apostle has an absolute, paradoxical teleology. In other words, the genius speaks in a human register albeit at a high level. The apostle speaks in a spiritual register incommensurable with other types of human knowing. Søren Kierkegaard, "The Difference Between a Genius and an Apostle," in *Without Authority* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 94.

who imitates Christ (PC 235-239). This imitation is always incomplete. The human spiritual pedagogue imitates Christ and is confronted by a riddle.

In *Sickness unto Death*, Anti-Climacus makes a similar distinction between conditioned and unconditioned, finite and infinite. Kierkegaard distinguishes between anxiety, which is finite, and despair, which is infinite. Despair is found in the interplay between the human and the divine. “In despair the self wants to enjoy the total satisfaction of making itself into itself, of developing itself, of being itself; it wants to have the honor of this poetic, masterly construction, the way it has understood itself. And in the final analysis, what it understands by itself is a riddle; in the very moment when it seems that the self is closest to having the building completed, it can arbitrarily dissolve the whole thing into nothing” (SUD 69-70). The riddle appears at the limits of one’s efforts at self-construction and containment. The awareness of this riddle as open and unsolved in oneself is upbuilding for Kierkegaard. It is upbuilding precisely because in the riddle is a place for divine action. One despairs of one’s completeness and so opens oneself to help in God. The willingness to be acted upon by God is a sign of Christian maturity and credibility.

Kierkegaard makes clear that Anti-Climacus, who confronts these riddles, is an extraordinary Christian because of his hidden inwardness in imitation of Christ (PC 282). Kierkegaard contrasts this inward Christianity with a public Christendom and its representatives. A pastor’s eloquent speech, timely erudition, sense of history, and place within the established Christendom is not the mark of Christian authority (PC 216). Kierkegaard is reluctant to set Anti-Climacus up as an alternative pastor for an alternative Christian community. Yet Anti-Climacus’s hidden inwardness is manifest for an audience’s edification. Anti-Climacus’s teaching about the imitation of Christ and striving after divine

virtues is presented as authoritative when compared to author pseudonyms or even writing under Kierkegaard's own name. Kierkegaard will be an occasional point of reference throughout the thesis.

0.2 Why Riddles?

Kierkegaard's account of riddles as disclosive, captures a central feature of riddling, especially spiritual riddling. Riddles as a means of spiritual growth is of ancient origin, therefore Paul's invocation of riddle language (and Kierkegaard's) is unsurprising. In various ancient cultures, the wise and prophetic were those who could ask and answer riddles.⁹ The teaching of riddles as a literary form was preserved from antiquity into the medieval rhetorical curriculum and persisted as a serious literary form before declining somewhat in the seventeenth century.¹⁰ In modern times, riddles have largely been reduced to a curiosity of children yet struggling with these seemingly trivial riddles can be disclosive and educative. Consider a riddle being posed to a child: a mother might ask a child: "what has hands and a face but cannot smile?" Even a clever child will probably be puzzled by this but trust that her mother is posing a question that can be answered. The child herself has hands and a face and can smile. So too the child's friends with hands and faces can smile. As the child considers the riddle, she will go through the various uses of the terms "face", "hands", and "smile" she has encountered. Perhaps she recalls the dour family cat, who has a face and paws, not proper hands. This might be a candidate for an answer if one stretches the meaning of hands. Such an

⁹ Riddles can be found in literatures across the world in a variety of forms since antiquity, from Sanskrit classics to Cervantes. A Welsh and E Rettberg, "Riddle," in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780190681173.001.0001/acref-9780190681173-e-0968>.

¹⁰ Curtis A. Gruenler, *Piers Plowman and the Poetics of Enigma: Riddles, Rhetoric, and Theology* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2017); Eleanor Cook, *Enigmas and Riddles in Literature*, Illustrated edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

attempt at an answer discloses what she knows and can piece together in an imaginative leap. The eager child may propose this conjecture to her mother as an answer and be praised for her cleverness but encouraged to think a bit more.

The child returns to her room and continues to consider the riddle. Perhaps the child is beginning to become frustrated—surely all faces can smile. She is also becoming a bit hungry and glances over at the clock next to her bed. Her mother only recently taught her to tell time. The child concentrates on the clock face. The little hand is between the five and the six. The big hand is on four. Suddenly the answer becomes clear. The clock is not smiling. The child’s ability to solve the riddle required thinking about “face” and “hands” beyond the typical application of the terms to human beings. Once the riddle is solved, it ceases being a riddle and becomes just another description, albeit an odd description. The metaphors underlying the riddle become plain.¹¹ An unsmiling face with hands is a clock.

The clock example may seem trivial compared to Kierkegaard’s usage of riddles. For the mother, riddle is trivial except as a pedagogical exercise. To the child, the riddle is quite serious. To solve the riddle requires marshalling what the child knows about the world and seeing new connections or a new framing of what she knows. The book of Proverbs begins praising instruction grounded in the fear of the Lord, so that the learner may, among other things, “understand a proverb and a figure, the words of the wise and their riddles [*chiydah*]” (Proverbs 1:6).¹² To understand the riddles of the wise is to be counted among them because

¹¹ The association of metaphor and riddle goes back at least to Aristotle. “Good riddles do, in general, provide us with satisfactory metaphors; for metaphors imply riddles, and therefore a good riddle can furnish a good metaphor.” Aristotle, “Rhetoric,” in *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, trans. W. Rhys Roberts (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), ll. 1405b5-10.

¹² So too, Moses’s authority in Numbers is affirmed by God speaking to him plainly as opposed to in riddles (Num 12:8). Yet this is tempered by numerous descriptions of the overwhelming power of the divine presence on Moses.

one has come to understand the world as the wise do.¹³ The child is a bit wiser for having solved the riddle herself.

These pedagogical riddles have answers. The riddles Anti-Climacus highlights do not. They are presently unsolved and, in principle, unsolvable by human means. A great riddle is a riddle that not only has not been solved but cannot be solved. In the child's riddle, the riddle can be collapsed and the educational process short-circuited by explaining the metaphors underlying the riddle. A great riddle cannot be collapsed nor explained by metaphor.¹⁴ Yet like other riddles, in grappling with a great riddle, one's conceptual connections expand. Though Anti-Climacus recognizes the riddle at the end of the process of interior construction, such a process is not useless. One may despair in the comprehensiveness of the interior construction and still gleam valuable lessons from it.

For great riddles, one cannot definitively arbitrate the various ways to a solution because there is no solution. The genealogy of attempts at a solution—various provisional and inadequate conjectures—is all that is available. These are inadequate interior constructions in Anti-Climacus's sense. Though this is not a solution, such a genealogy enriches life and understanding. God is mysterious, a great riddle without solution. Positively, the riddle without solution invites an ever-expanding search, an ever-enriching series of connections and provisional, ultimately inadequate answers. Answers are attempted with no confidence that

¹³ The parables of the Gospels such as the parable of the sower and seed might be regarded as riddles. Those lacking the right frame to understand “may indeed look, but not perceive, and may indeed listen, but not understand” (Mark 4:12). See: W. R. F. Browning, “Riddle,” in *A Dictionary of the Bible* (Oxford University Press, 2009), <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199543984.001.0001/acref-9780199543984-e-1632>.

¹⁴ Eleanor Cook presents a helpful guide to the literary uses of enigma and riddle beginning in antiquity. In her account, she sharply distinguishes riddle as a literary device from logical paradox and presumably would resist great riddles. Cook, *Enigmas and Riddles in Literature*, 36.

they will be proven correct, but the attempts are themselves enlightening because of the novel and often rich connections they seek to draw. An unanswered riddle does not make sense, but the attempts at solving the riddle, even when they fail, often do yield new and interesting connections. The great riddle drives understanding precisely by refusing to be understood itself. In the conclusion, I return to the sketch of Kierkegaard in this introduction and the ways in which Grammatical Thomism sometimes challenges but largely compliments the Kierkegaardian account.

0.3 Chapter Outline

Having outlined the problem of spiritual authority a-historically through Kierkegaard, the first chapter makes an historical case for spiritual authority and the modern challenges to spiritual authority. Directed formation –*paideia*– has been a feature of Christianity from its beginnings and was itself shaped by Greek philosophical precedents. Whether the ancient teachings of the Desert Fathers and Mothers, contemporary parish-based spiritual direction programs, or a wide variety of other forms of Christian formation, Christian teaching makes authoritative claims about “who God is” and “what God asks of me or us”. The central tension of spiritual pedagogy is how one can speak with authority about what is in principle mysterious. The chapter highlights the concreteness of spiritual pedagogy in the tradition coupled with the mystery of discerning God’s will in the concrete. These claims arise from and direct students towards action—the contemplative in spiritual teaching arises from the practical and prudential.

The second chapter introduces Grammatical Thomism as an extension of Thomist thought, especially with regard to spiritual pedagogy. The chapter begins describing Thomas Aquinas as a spiritual pedagogue who used all the intellectual tools at his disposal to further

his pedagogy. The most innovative and controversial tool at his disposal was the introduction of Aristotle into western Europe. The chapter argues that Wittgensteinian Thomism is an authentic extension of Thomism. Thomas incorporated Aristotle's philosophy principally on the grounds that Aristotle's philosophy provided powerful philosophical tools for Thomas to further a wide range of his own theological and philosophical ends. Thomism continues to seek after the best philosophical tools available, as Thomas did in his own day. I argue that Wittgenstein's philosophical insights enhance the power of Thomas's thought, particularly with regard to the status of religious language.

Wittgensteinian Thomism is controversial, in part because of the trends in wider Thomist thought, particularly the recruitment of Thomas as a partisan for realism since the Thomist revival under Pope Leo XIII. Wittgenstein, by contrast, is seen as an anti-realist, incompatible with Thomas in particular and theological thought more generally. To frame this controversy, Wittgensteinian Thomism is located within wider Thomist thought. The groundwork for Wittgensteinian readings of Thomas is laid by various developments in Thomism since the decline of the manualist tradition, most notably Bernard Lonergan's Transcendental Thomism, which is itself controversial. The chapter's defense of Grammatical Thomism is contingent on two claims to be proven in subsequent chapters. Firstly, that Wittgenstein's philosophy is directed towards reality such that it is compatible with Thomist thought—this is taken up in chapters three and four. Secondly, that Wittgensteinian thought, particularly on riddles, compliments and provides additional power and precision to Thomas's thought—this is taken up in chapters five and six.

The third chapter develops a dynamically realist or "realistic" reading of Wittgenstein. Claims that Wittgenstein merely "talks about talk" is a common but misguided objection to

his philosophy. Wittgensteinian grammatical analysis is a descriptive rather than prescriptive project. Grammar rules are neither true nor false but allow one to say true and false things about the reality. The process grammar describes is one of communal adaptation to reality through the development of language and forms of life. Importantly for spiritual pedagogy, one comes to mastery of grammar rules through training in a community. It is through this training that one becomes able to identify features of the world. Wittgensteinian approaches are often treated as outmoded in the face of direct reference and other more recent metaphysical theories. I sketch a Wittgensteinian response to such claims, namely that direct reference theories, most notably Saul Kripke's, presume training in order to refer. Training in grammar is not an impediment to talking about reality but an aid to it.

Chapter four moves from the general account of Wittgenstein on grammar in chapter three to specifically religious language. Wittgenstein wrote relatively little on religious topics directly but inspired an enormous and often contradictory secondary literature on religious language. Criticism of Wittgensteinian approaches to philosophy of religion and theology often fail to account for the variety of Wittgensteinian approaches. The chapter articulates two main approaches to religious language in Wittgenstein. The first is that religious language is just another language game tied to particular forms of life and only partially understandable outside those forms. The second approach is that religious language is nonsensical such that it cannot be a proper language game. I argue that both accounts are inadequate. Treating religious language like other language games does not adequately account for the centrality of mystery in religious language. Discarding religious language as nonsensical fails to account for the useful applications of religious language. Despite these inadequacies, both accounts include helpful features that can be integrated into religious language as riddle language.

Chapter five solves the dilemma articulated in chapter four through riddle language and useful conjecture. Riddles are non-pejoratively *nonsensical* insofar as they defy sense-making yet are intelligibly motivated, and language from sensible contexts is projected upon and woven around them. This approach also ameliorates theological and philosophical concerns about idolatry in religious language. Anselm's *Proslogion* has long been a focus of Wittgensteinian and wider philosophical attention. The chapter begins by reading the *Proslogion* through the longer *Monologion*, which is an explicitly riddling text. Drawing on Cora Diamond and Stephen Mulhall, the chapter argues that riddles remain unsolved until one can account for *how* a riddle describes. Even an active riddle can be useful in the same way that a mathematical conjecture may be useful in drawing new connections and exploring new possibilities. A conjecture is, by definition, not fully consistent but can be a practical guide.

Chapter six applies the riddle theory developed in chapter five and shows how spiritual pedagogy is a riddling form of prudence, which usefully employs conjectures. I substantiate this claim using Thomas's account of teaching in the *De Veritate* and prudence in the *Summa Theologiae* through the Wittgensteinian Thomist framework developed in chapters two, three, and four. Thomas holds there is a *duplex regula* for human action; the first rule is the eternal law, the second human reason. The eternal law is the answer to the all-important spiritual pedagogy question posed in chapter one ('what would God have me do?') and is premised on the related question, 'who is God?' The answers and, indeed, the questions are riddles to be engaged; they cannot be straightforwardly solved. The eternal law is, in principle, unknowable. Prudence is regulated by the human rule seeking after the eternal rule. For Thomas, this occurs both by natural and supernatural means. God helps human beings to be prudent, both directly and through teachers. Teaching depends on the virtue of counsel,

which is itself derived from prudence. Counsel takes three forms in Thomas: counsel as a divine gift, counsel as an exercise of human reason, or counsel as a combination of the two, e.g., the counsel of a spiritual pedagogue. One human being offers counsel to another through both human reason and the gift of divine counsel. Counsel *qua* human prudence is neither easily nor completely able to be disentangled from counsel *qua* divine gift, although they are different in kind and non-competing. To be meaningful, such counsel must be associated with a form of life and grammatically analyzable, yet nonsensical in the non-pejorative sense articulated in chapter five. The authority of spiritual counsel is ultimately grounded in the eternal law, which cannot be known directly but can be imperfectly incarnated as one becomes a riddle.

1.0 The Problem of Spiritual Pedagogy

The spiritual pedagogue gives concrete, authoritative advice about God and God's will yet God and God's will are in principle mysterious. The introduction briefly and abstractly articulated the inherent tension of spiritual pedagogy. This first chapter offers an historical basis for that abstract claim and a more detailed account the tensions inherent in it. The chapter begins by expanding the account of the tensions inherent in spiritual pedagogy and explicating some mischaracterizations of spiritual pedagogy, which the subsequent historical survey will help alleviate. The chapter then presents various examples of authoritative spiritual pedagogy within the Christian tradition to illustrate the convergence of the concrete with the mysterious. The selection criteria are somewhat idiosyncratic. Given the breadth of the tradition, a wide variety of figures could have been chosen. My selection criteria are twofold. First, I have selected major figures from within the Christian spiritual tradition whose inclusion is largely uncontroversial. To that end, only brief mention is made of more contemporary and controversial spiritual pedagogues. Second, I have favored ascetics of various sorts. The direction an abbot offered to a monk is generally better documented than pastoral outreach to laity for most of Church history. Well recognized spiritual pedagogues tended to be ascetics teaching other ascetics. The modest ambition of this chapter is to motivate my subsequent theoretical development of riddle language through examples of spiritual pedagogy, and I make no claims to offer a comprehensive account.¹⁵ A project such as this naturally invites questions about hard cases of spiritual pedagogy. For example, is the

¹⁵ I doubt whether a properly comprehensive account is possible. Bernard McGinn's ongoing *The Presence of God* series on the history of Christian mysticism, currently in seven volumes and nine codices written over some thirty years, may be the closest any single author has yet come to such a task.

theologian, the parish catechist, or the charity worker necessarily, or even potentially, a spiritual pedagogue? This first chapter deals strictly with paradigmatic cases to motivate a theoretical account. Only with the benefit of the theory developed in subsequent chapters can the harder cases be better evaluated.

My historical survey begins with the authority of the Apostles as discussed in the New Testament, particularly the ways in which spiritual authority is exercised for the development of the community and the individuals therein. From Christian scriptures, the chapter traces developmental spiritual pedagogy through the ascetic tradition focusing on the *Apothegmata Patrum* and the writings of St. John Cassian. Concentrating on practical or ascetic spiritual instruction as an epistemic as well as moral concern of spiritual pedagogy helps to avoid the dual temptations of quietism and deconstruction. Quietism comes from taking the spiritual or mystical to be premised on an inarticulable experience. The deconstructionist reading reduces the spiritual into other forces and contextual factors. Practical instructions retain sense yet the rational account motivating them is self-subverting. Popular preaching and instruction often exhibit this self-subverting practicality. Given the more diverse audience of popular preaching compared to preaching in ascetic communities, such preaching typically is less clear and precise—hence the focus on the ascetic in this motivating chapter. Pseudo-Dionysius and St. John of the Cross are particularly sharp and influential examples of concrete, self-subverting spiritual pedagogy and are treated in turn. The exempla section ends by drawing out a point implicit in the previous discussion: that spiritual pedagogy perforce creates language. Few spiritual pedagogues have been more generative of new language than St. Francis of Assisi. His ongoing capacity to generate new language is briefly explored. The chapter concludes by articulating characteristics of spiritual

authority based upon the examples considered and recapitulating some of the abstractly presented tensions in light of their history. Given the riddling nature of spiritual pedagogy, if my characterization is correct, any characterization must remain provisional despite being richly drawn.

Exploring spiritual pedagogy and its history from a contemporary standpoint requires recognizing and making explicit the retreat from such authority that is characteristic of modernity. Before considering examples of spiritual authority, the first section sets out two sets of challenges to spiritual authority. The first section deals with challenges inherent to spiritual authority. The second section distinguishes between the typical pre-modern challenge of which authority from the modern challenge of whether to have an authority at all.

1.1 Tensions Inherent in Spiritual Authority

In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus makes the difficult command: "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect (*teleios*)"¹⁶ (Matthew 5:48). As a command, it is meant to be actionable. Those who feel the force of the command are meant to do something, in the original context of the chapter to love one's enemies as God does. The command to do anything as God does or to be as God is raises enormous difficulties not only theoretically but practically. Striving to be perfect may require choosing to do A and avoid B or do B and avoid A, often in cases where both A and B seem to be morally upstanding options. The choice between A and B is premised on the perfection of God and the perfection of the Divine Will, which at least in the classical Thomist understanding, is unknowable insofar as it is a statement of God's essence. The role of the spiritual pedagogy is precisely to help form

¹⁶ "*Teleios*" might also be translated as "true", though being true as God is true raises similar problems.

individuals and communities to be perfect as the unknowable God is perfect. For individuals and communities seeking to be “perfect”, guidance is required, but who is qualified to offer it? God may guide someone directly and exclusively but more often guidance comes mediated through authorized persons within communities—they are spiritual pedagogues.

Nested in the practical question of what to do to be perfect is the theoretical question of what perfection might be when applied to God. Spiritual pedagogy attempts to answer or at least move towards an answer to the practical problem and in so doing engages the theoretical problem. Spiritual pedagogy adds three philosophically and theologically interesting foci to questions of religious language. First, the language of spiritual pedagogy cannot be a private language between God and a single individual because it consists of at least two human beings in conversation through, with, and about God. Second, at least to some limited extent, the mysterious ascent to or relationship with God is narrated between the spiritual pedagogue and the student. The spiritual pedagogy conversation is not a *post-facto* reflection about God but a dialogue about an ongoing relationship and the actions one ought to take in that relationship. Third, spiritual pedagogy conversation is practical. Even if the goal of spiritual pedagogy is to contemplate God, the spiritual pedagogy conversation includes how one best disposes oneself to receive such contemplation. Put in more traditional terms, contemplation of God is bound to the active life.

For a spiritual pedagogue to be successful, her student must understand her, and she must in turn must understand her student. Yet given that God is both the object of and a participant in the conversation, understanding in its most fulsome sense appears to be ruled out by the mystery of God. On the other hand, spiritual pedagogy has criteria for understanding. The spiritual pedagogue offers explanations to her student about the spiritual

life, God, and other people. These may not always be theoretical explanations offering definitions of divine reality, but minimally practical explanations regarding relationship with God, other people, and oneself. Even if a spiritual pedagogue claims, as many do, that she merely assists in the discernment of the individuals, this requires a capacity to understand and explain the spiritual realities of the student at least on a practical level. There are standards for correct and incorrect explanation, correct and incorrect use of language in spiritual pedagogy conversations.

Like any other human speech, this dialogue is subject to grammatical investigation set within forms of life and communities. As noted above, unlike other forms of speech, God is taken to be both the object of and a participant in such spiritual conversations. The term ‘spiritual’ sometimes carries the negative connotation of explaining something concrete away by elevated abstraction.¹⁷ The spiritual can be set against the everyday. At its worst, spiritualizing can become a form of sophistry, setting aside truth for the rhetorical impact of elevated language and serving no higher end. Minimally, spiritual language seems to be an alien form of language operating according to different rules to quotidian language.¹⁸

¹⁷ Anscombe argues that the common association of spiritual with immateriality and immaterial substance is delusive. Spirituality risks vacuity when regarded outside of the context of belief and practice. She writes: “I put it forward that the spirituality of the human soul is its capacity to get a conception of the eternal, and to be concerned with the eternal as an objective, and perhaps also as something that can be leant on and feared. I do not say ‘God’ because the thing is clear independently of people’s believing in God.” Rather saying ‘God’ requires certain abilities. These are the sorts of abilities the spiritual pedagogue teaches. G. E. M. Anscombe, “The Immortality of the Soul,” in *Faith in a Hard Ground*, ed. Mary Geach and Luke Gormally, Kindle Edition (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2012), 73.

¹⁸ James Conant develops an extended account of logically alien language arising from the relationship between divine reason and divine will. Conant is rightly concerned with the temptation to constrain “God’s creative power” in the limits of human logic. I am broadly sympathetic to Conant’s account, and I contend that alien logic is a practical concern for the spiritual pedagogue. James Conant, “Reply to Moore: Descartes on the Relation of the Possible to the Actual,” in *The Logical Alien: Conant and His Critics*, ed. Sophia Miguens (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2020), 571.

Neo-Aristotelian writers such as Alasdair MacIntyre and G.E.M. Anscombe rightly highlight the interchange between ethical understanding, metaphysical understanding, and background social conditions.¹⁹ One cannot simply deduce right ethical action from a fixed metaphysical understanding because one's ethical understanding informs one's metaphysical understanding. Ethical and metaphysical understanding are informed by social conditions. The three are intertwined. Metaphysics abstracted from ethics risks robbing ethical concepts of their content by alienating such concepts from their proper context in human life.²⁰ Notions of human goodness or happiness lose their grip on reality when defined in wholly abstract terms according to the scholars following MacIntyre.²¹

One's understanding of God and discerned actions are similarly intertwined. Given that God is a mystery, one cannot simply deduce from the divine essence to actions. While much has been written about the need for practice in spiritual and theological understanding, less attention has been paid to the teaching required to instill practices or the authority that underlies such teaching. The ways in which metaphysics are taught occasion a wide array of metaphysical and epistemological questions, which is all the more true with the added complexity of spiritual matters. Spiritual questions inevitably arise in epistemological and

¹⁹ The ethical case has been made by various, broadly Aristotelian thinkers including: Alasdair C. MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 3rd edition (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007); Iris Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (London: Penguin, 1993); Thomas S. Hibbs, *Aquinas, Ethics, and Philosophy of Religion: Metaphysics and Practice* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007), <http://www.loc.gov/catdir/toc/ecip073/2006034519.html>; G. E. M. Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy," *Philosophy* 33, no. 124 (January 1958): 1–19.

²⁰ See: Cora Diamond, "Losing Your Concepts," *Ethics* 98, no. 2 (January 1988): 255–77, <https://doi.org/10.1086/292940>; Stephen Mulhall, *The Ascetic Ideal: Genealogies of Life-Denial in Religion, Morality, Art, Science, and Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 28–31.

²¹ For example, one recent collection along these lines: Jennifer A. Frey and Candace Vogler, *Self-Transcendence and Virtue: Perspectives from Philosophy, Psychology, and Theology*, Routledge Studies in Ethics and Moral Theory (Routledge, 2018).

metaphysical inquiry. Often these questions are implicitly, and unreflectively, answered by the framing of the inquiry.

Spiritual pedagogy has a tradition of guarding against the vacuousness of spiritual language by training students to be at home with spiritual language through forms of life associated with spiritual pedagogy. To take an obvious example, the spiritual pedagogue cannot teach a person who refuses to pray.²² One cannot explain prayer in its various nuances without presuming at least some concrete training in the practice of prayer. Even among those who pray, there is a wide variety of practice. The spiritual pedagogue is trainer as well as explainer.²³

Having the correct training comes to the fore in the practice of discernment of God's will. Take the common example of a student who comes to a spiritual pedagogue having memorized various scriptural texts. The student can perfectly cite verses regarding the perfection of God and God's care for human beings. To return to Matthew 5:48, "So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect." The student deploys the texts to articulate his understanding of God, God's will for him and, thus, to justify or preclude a certain behavior. He or she is thrown back on images of God as well as ideals of perfection and goodness both in choosing to cite this verse and in its interpretation. The spiritual pedagogue, upon hearing the student's interpretation, questions not the quality of citation but the quality of the student's understanding.

²² Camus's Jesuit Father Paneloux is a striking example of the language of spiritual pedagogy ringing hollow in the face of catastrophe. His inadequate understanding of and response to the dire situation of plague ridden Oran exposed not great riddles but platitudes. Albert Camus, *La peste*, Collection Folio 42 (Paris: Gallimard, 1947).

²³ As Wittgenstein notes: "Any explanation has its foundation in training. (Educators ought to remember this.)" (Z 419). I will return to the issue of training in chapter three.

On one level, both student and teacher parrot words about the perfection of God and fall well short of being perfect as God is perfect. Both student and teacher come up against their reasons coming to an end as Stanley Cavell would put it, to paraphrase slightly.²⁴ Though the verse is beyond the capacities of both teacher and student, the two are not on equal terms before it. The spiritual pedagogue drawing on a knowledge of scripture may, for instance, contextualize the verse in its broader context enjoining love of enemies. So too, the spiritual pedagogue may contextualize the verse in the practice of loving enemies. The spiritual pedagogue has more reason to deploy. Though these two activities are vital to the work of the spiritual pedagogue, a biblical scholar might offer the same insights, perhaps in a less directive way. Perhaps this is combined with a keen sense of doctrine and systematic theology.

The spiritual pedagogue's engagement with the text of scripture, theology, and the experience of the person praying with the text is to discern God's action which often requires but is not reducible to any of these. Herein lies the riddle of spiritual pedagogy. The language of the spiritual pedagogue is pulled in two directions. To avoid being vacuous, it is rooted in the life of the student and teacher as well as a long tradition, history, and theology. On the other hand, none of these foundations are sufficient to being perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect. No human language nor way of life can accommodate God's ways. The task of spiritual pedagogy is simultaneously to make the spiritual at home and to constantly relearn that it cannot be at home. The authority of spiritual pedagogy is likewise at home in the pedagogue and yet cannot be at home. Spiritual pedagogy counsels with authority beyond that

²⁴ Stanley Cavell, *Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 124.

which a human being can properly hold—spiritual pedagogues are stewards of a divine authority rather than owners.

1.2 The Challenges of Spiritual Authority, Ancient and Modern

Though one can find examples of a general skepticism of spiritual authority in the ancient and medieval world, these were comparatively uncommon. Much of the history of religion and religious conflict pivots around who teaches with authority. The premise of such conflicts being that bad authority, or the wrong authority, is harmful and to be resisted. Objections to spiritual authority *per se* become increasingly common in the modern world.²⁵ Spiritual teaching authority has been seen as a violation of the proper autonomy and rights of individuals.²⁶ Since at least the Enlightenment, spiritual authority has been unfavorably compared with other political, scientific, and social authorities.²⁷ Diderot notoriously

²⁵ Linda Zagzebski identified three challenges to epistemic authority, which includes spiritual teaching authority. First are various arguments that authority is contrary to egalitarianism insofar as privileging a particular person or group of persons as epistemic authorities runs contrary to the similar cognitive faculties enjoyed by human beings. The second and more serious challenge is that epistemic authority is contrary to cognitive autonomy and must be rejected on these ethical grounds. The third objection is domain specific. Namely that certain areas of knowledge do not admit of authority. John Locke famously argues that religious belief cannot be compelled authoritatively. Since Locke, the problem of the plurality of religious authorities has also become a serious challenge to religious authority. Linda Trinkaus Zagzebski, *Epistemic Authority: A Theory of Trust, Authority, and Autonomy in Belief* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Linda Zagzebski, “Authority in Religious Communities,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Epistemology of Theology*, ed. William J. Abraham and Frederick D. Aquino (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199662241.013.2>.

²⁶ Resistance to certain types of spiritual pedagogy has deep roots in capitalist thinking through Bernard Mandeville’s influence on the Scottish Enlightenment. Mandeville pillorizes the teaching of asceticism as hollow and ruinous to the community in his *Fable of the Bees*. Mandeville remains a touchstone thinker to John Maynard Keynes. It is no coincidence that the symbol of the Royal Economic Society is the honey bee. John Maynard Keynes, *The Collected Writings of John Maynard Keynes. Volume 7, The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money.*, Keynes, John Maynard, 1883-1946. Works. 2013 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press for the Royal Economic Society, 2013), 359–61, <http://www.cambridge.org/core/product/identifier/9781139524278/type/BOOK>.

²⁷ Debates on secularism and post-secularism provides one important fault line in how to understand religious authority in contemporary culture. See, for example, the contrasting positions of Taylor and Ward on the explanatory power of secularism: Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007); Graham Ward, “History, Belief and Imagination in Charles Taylor’s *A Secular Age*,” *Modern Theology* 26, no. 3 (June 2010): 337–48, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0025.2010.01611.x>; Graham Ward, “Secularism: The Gold Lie,” in *Fundamentalism or Tradition* (New York: Fordham Univ Press, 2019).

associated the illegitimate political authority of kings with the illegitimate religious authority of priests and suggested a way to solve both problems simultaneously.²⁸ To extend Marx, if religion is an opiate, its authorities are mere drug dealers purveying false consciousness. In modernity, *Paideia*, that is formation toward a socially given goals of human excellence, is replaced by *Bildung*, excellence as defined by the individual from within.²⁹ For modern critics, the decline of spiritual teaching authority is part of a larger move away from respect for social authority—as one’s respect for the mayor and baron declines so too one’s respect for the priest and rabbi.³⁰ Authority runs counter to self-reliant pursuits of perfection.³¹ Jeffrey Stout put this movement to modern individualism starkly: “Modern thought was born in a crisis of authority, took shape in flight from authority, and aspired from the start to autonomy from all traditional influence whatsoever.”³²

The more basic modern criticisms of spiritual teaching authority occasion a more intensive search for a definition as well as a greater awareness of the disanalogies between spiritual authority and authority of other types. Even those suspicious of authority may

²⁸ “Et ses mains ourdiraient les entrailles du prêtre, / Au défaut d’un cordon pour étrangler les rois.” (And his hands would weave the entrails of priests / for lack of cord to strangle the kings.) Denis Diderot, *Poesies diverses: mémoires scientifiques*, Chefs-d’Oeuvre de la littérature (Paris: Garnier, 1915), 16, <http://purl.ox.ac.uk/uuid/219828f706784c79979d67351d30c6b9>.

²⁹ Jennifer Herdt offers a detailed analysis of this transition in the German tradition, see: Jennifer A. Herdt, *Forming Humanity: Redeeming the German Bildung Tradition*, *Forming Humanity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019), chap. 1.

³⁰ Various scholars make this point, see for example: Hannah Arendt, “What Is Authority?,” in *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Penguin, 2006); Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1989).

³¹ On both sides of the Atlantic, religious formation became more and more an exercise of self-actualization removed from its communitarian and doctrinal origins. See Cavell on the Emersonian strand of this development and Herdt on the slightly earlier *Bildung* tradition. Stanley Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome: The Constitution of Emersonian Perfectionism: The Carus Lectures, 1988, 1988* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990); Herdt, *Forming Humanity*.

³² Jeffrey Stout, *The Flight from Authority: Religion, Morality and the Quest for Autonomy* (Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 2–3.

concede that political authority is necessary and palatable when premised on consent. Those focused on self-actualization may disagree that there is rule in heaven at all, or that such rule impacts earth. Heaven seems not to hold elections. For example, two Christian groups may disagree about who teaches with authority because of some narrow conflict over, for example, biblical interpretation or ecclesiological doctrine. They agree that such an authority is essential and has a certain set of characteristics, many of which may be implicit in their discussions. What is implicitly accepted seldom occasions investigation. By contrast, the criticism of spiritual authority as a legitimate type of authority *per se* invites a more basic investigation and occasions reflection on inherent tensions in spiritual authority discussed in the previous section.

Broadly speaking in modernity, spiritual authority is commonly conceived, or misconceived, in two ways. First, spiritual authority is the authority of having an extraordinary or mystical experience. Second, spiritual authority is another sort of authority or role in disguise. While the first approach emphasizes the extraordinary and otherworldly nature of spiritual authority to the extent that it becomes too high and abstract to be relevant, the second approach sees nothing extraordinary in spiritual authority at all, such that it loses its claim to authority. In fact, the claims to spiritual authority are objectionable precisely because of their life-denying pretension to displace the ordinary. Spiritual authority exists in a tension between concreteness and inexplicability. Both mistaken characterizations attempt to collapse the riddle of spiritual pedagogy by accounting for how it is meant to function or not to function. I will take these two characterizations in turn.

From at least the time leading up to the Protestant Reformation and perhaps earlier came an increasing focus on individual experience of God and a move away from institutional

mediation. Christianity has always valued mystics, as did the older Jewish tradition. In modernity, the meaning of mystic shifted from one with a deeper insight into God's revelation for the sake of the community to one with an extraordinary experience.³³ If spirituality is about "intuition and feeling", to quote Friedrich Schleiermacher, the person with the most extraordinary feelings is best able to offer counsel.³⁴ It may, however, be the case that no one is qualified to offer counsel.

The essentialist or perennialist reading of mysticism sees transcendent and ineffable experience running through various religious traditions.³⁵ Imageless, formless, placeless union, empty of content and discrete experience, driven by divine otherness characterized mystical experience insofar as such an otherness can be characterized.³⁶ In this view, an individual's extraordinary experience, even when such an experience cannot be properly articulated, is granted a special authority.³⁷ These experiences moved one away from the

³³ For example, in patristic readings of scripture, the highest form of interpretation is mystical (or anagogical). The mystical reading compliments the other three readings: the historical, allegorical, and moral. See: Henri de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis: The Four Senses of Scripture*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1998).

³⁴ Schleiermacher's shift of theology from doctrines to "intuition and feeling" is a long process moving towards an experiential focus. Schleiermacher's individualistic redefinition of religion reflects an interest in religion and religious authority as experiential. "Religion's essence is neither thinking nor acting, but intuition and feeling." Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Schleiermacher: On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*, trans. Richard Crouter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 22; Michel de Certeau, "Mysticism," *Diacritics* 22, no. 2 (Summer 1992).

³⁵ Aldous Huxley was a notable proponent and popularizer of this tradition, though one can only find essentialist tendencies in Christian authors such as Evelyn Underhill. Aldous Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy* (New York: Harper, 1945); Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism: The Preeminent Study in the Nature and Development of Spiritual Consciousness* (New York: Doubleday, 1990).

³⁶ Denys Turner is particularly strong in his critique of experientialist readings of mysticism. Turner reads darkness language as a second order critique of first order experience rather than as a failed description of an experience that defies description. See: Denys Turner, *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

³⁷ William James's work on mysticism and its peculiar authority is insightful. To take one small example: "They are states of insight into depths of truth unplumbed by the discursive intellect. They are illuminations, revelations, full of significance and importance, all inarticulate though they remain; and as a rule they carry with them a curious sense of authority for after-time." William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (New York: Longmans, 1905), 380–81.

particular to an ecstatic and disembodied state.³⁸ In part, the mystic's authority comes from transcending particularity—ascending to higher realms. Possibly such a mystic can instruct others in finding the same type of detachment or extraordinary experience.³⁹ Such limited authority is attractive in times otherwise suspicious of authority precisely because it is shorn of historical baggage and justified in immediate experience.⁴⁰ Yet given that such mystics overwhelmingly employ negative or apophatic language, the capacity to offer content or concrete instruction is limited.⁴¹ Some scholars of mysticism argue that mysticism is strictly experiential with no moral, social, or doctrinal implications.⁴² Even within mystics firmly rooted in a tradition, such as John of the Cross, one can find strikingly negative descriptions.⁴³ The experientialist/essentialist reading is correct at least insofar as spiritual authorities struggle to express their own experiences and frequently complain of the limits of their language.

³⁸ For an overview of comparative mysticism see: Michael Stoeber, “The Comparative Study of Mysticism,” in *The Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), religion.oxfordre.com/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.001.0001/acrefore-9780199340378-e-93.

³⁹ The distinction between internalist and externalist mysticism complicates this somewhat. Externalist mysticism claims some mystical insight of the world, whereas internalist mysticism claims an inner depth. Externalist mysticism is more readily instructive insofar as it claims a space common with other people.

⁴⁰ Henri de Lubac attempts to rescue the term mysticism from essentialist readings. His discussion of mysticism closely corresponds to my authoritative spiritual pedagogy. Peter Tyler argues partly on Wittgensteinian grounds for ethical mysticism of embodied practices that must be shown rather than said. See: Henri de Lubac, “Mysticism and Mystery,” in *Theological Fragments*, trans. Rebecca Howell Balinski (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 35–69; Peter Tyler, *The Return to the Mystical: Ludwig Wittgenstein, Teresa of Avila and the Christian Mystical Tradition* (London: Bloomsbury, 2011).

⁴¹ Jean-Luc Marion has attempted to construct a post-metaphysical phenomenology of overwhelming revelatory or mystical experience within the Christian tradition. See, for example: Jean-Luc Marion, *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2002); Jean-Luc Marion, *Givenness and Revelation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

⁴² See, for example, Bharati who takes mysticism to be strictly amoral and to be judged solely on the quality of one's mystical experience: Aghananda Bharati, *The Light at the Center: Context and Pretext of Modern Mysticism* (Santa Barbara, California: Ross Erikson, 1976).

⁴³ For such a reading of John and other mystics see: Walter T. Stace, *The Teachings of the Mystics: Selections from the Great Mystics and Mystical Writings of the World* (New York: New American Library, 1960).

The alternate reading of spiritual authority is a more quotidian authority or claim to such authority disguised in mysterious terms. Spiritual authority may be reducible to an institutional role, charismatic personality, or social expectation. It certainly involves all these factors. The danger is reducing spiritual authority to such factors. John Locke's account of miracles and authority provides an early, partly secular example of moving spiritual authority into the quotidian by conflating spiritual authority with a show of power.⁴⁴ Locke argued that the validity and authority of revelation and its messengers is attested by miracles.

Authoritative spiritual pedagogy in Locke is taken to be another indication of power—very great power different in extent but *not different in kind* from other messengers and their ways of demonstrating authority. He writes: “So likewise the number, variety, and greatness of the miracles wrought for the confirmation of the doctrine delivered by Jesus Christ, carry with them such strong marks of an extraordinary divine power, that the truth of his mission will stand firm and unquestionable, till any one [sic] rising up in opposition to him shall do greater miracles than he and his apostles did.”⁴⁵ Locke briefly notes the section of First Corinthians: “For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles” (1 Cor 1:22-23). He does so only to observe that Greeks do not seek after miracles as Jews do. Taking the passage wholly out of context and ignoring Paul's warning, Locke argues that the judgement that something is a miracle is a rational judgement of extraordinary power outside the normal course of natural

⁴⁴ While John Locke and the social contract tradition illustrates the new challenges to spiritual authority in modernity, Zagzebski pithily describes Locke as a “standard religious epistemic egoist”, namely that “The fact that someone else has a certain religious belief gives me a reason to believe it, but only if I have evidence of the reliability of the source.” Zagzebski, *Epistemic Authority*, 183.

⁴⁵ John Locke, “A Discourse of Miracles (1706),” in *Hume's Abject Failure*, ed. John Earman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 117.

laws. Locke does not regard miracles as mysterious or paradoxical. A miracle indicates great power which one would be wise to follow. Locke himself argues for the necessity of miracles in validating revelation because they go beyond what is possible by human reason alone. Nevertheless, the reasonable alone is necessary for salvation for Locke.⁴⁶ Locke may be read as a partly secularized Pelagian—that is one who denies both the necessity of grace and the effects of original sin.⁴⁷ Rather, individual effort is required for salvation. A just God guarantees the minimal requirements for such efforts to be possible. The free human being enters into a covenant with God because God provides the best deal on offer.⁴⁸

Michel de Certeau's account of modern mysticism illustrates a further displacement of spiritual authority and the emergence of the mystical as part of the wider emergence of the ordinary.⁴⁹ For Certeau, mysticism is an ever-evolving set of practices which move away from the traditions which inspired them. "The ways of mystics were accused (with good reason) of being 'new.' ... grounded in their faith in Beginning that still comes in present, mystics established a 'style' in the form of practices defining a *modus loquendi* and/or a *modus agendi*."⁵⁰ Certeau argues that mysticism is an invention of the early modern period as

⁴⁶ John Locke, *The Clarendon Edition of the Works of John Locke: The Reasonableness of Christianity: As Delivered in the Scriptures: As Delivered in the Scriptures*, ed. John C Higgins-Biddle, *The Clarendon Edition of the Works of John Locke: The Reasonableness of Christianity: As Delivered in the Scriptures* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 152–53.

⁴⁷ Eric Nelson defends such a Pelagian reading of Locke. Eric Nelson, *The Theology of Liberalism: Political Philosophy and the Justice of God* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press, 2019).

⁴⁸ Charles Taylor notes that though there is little reason to doubt Locke's own piety, Locke's hedonistic understanding of relationship to divine law marks a clear break with prior Christian tradition. One no longer seeks after perfection in imitation of Christ but seeks of the best arrangement for oneself available, which happens to be with a generous God. Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 159–76, 241–42.

⁴⁹ "Mystic science was not constituted by the creation of a coherent linguistic body (that is, a scientific system), but by defining legitimate operations (that is, by a formalization of practices)." Michel de Certeau, *The Mystic Fable: The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, trans. Michael B. Smith, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 142.

⁵⁰ Michel de Certeau, "Mystic Speech," in *The Certeau Reader*, ed. Graham Ward (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2000), 188.

spiritual practices become increasingly disconnected from their scriptural, liturgical, and theological foundations, which had been integral to spiritual practice in the medieval and patristic periods.⁵¹ Certeau rightly observes that: “A journey on the part of the speaker [of mystical language] produces a shift in meaning.”⁵² These meanings continue to shift as the mystical continues to open new questions.⁵³ He argues that these shifts constitute a move away from existing religious traditions and structures rather than an ongoing development of those religions.

Modern mysticism both arises out of and contributes to the decline of an enchanted world.⁵⁴ For Certeau, the spiritual teaching authority of the ancients and medievals does not survive into the modern period. Whether or not the ancient and modern mystic had similar extraordinary experiences is immaterial to Certeau. Mysticism is a matter of practice and language rather than extraordinary experience. The same experience can be narrated various ways, as he argues with the case of the Ursuline nuns of Loudun, France in 1634.⁵⁵ The local priest, Urbain Grandier, was accused of summoning demonic forces and was subsequently convicted and executed. The nuns claimed remarkable experiences, but whether such experiences should be regarded as possession or mental illness, transcendent or immanent is a matter of context rather than a fact about the experience. Locke, for his part, took the whole

⁵¹ Certeau, *The Mystic Fable: The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*; Michel de Certeau, *The Mystic Fable: The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, ed. Luce Giard, trans. Michael B. Smith, vol. 2 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 3,15.

⁵² Michel de Certeau, “How Is Christianity Thinkable Today?,” in *The Postmodern God: A Theological Reader*, ed. Graham Ward, Blackwell Readings in Modern Theology (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 142.

⁵³ “Anything termed ‘mystical’ becomes a mini detective story, an enigma; it requires a search for something other than what is stated; it introduces endless details having the value of clues.” Certeau, *The Mystic Fable: The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, 1:99.

⁵⁴ Certeau, 1:22–24; Certeau, “Mystic Speech,” 193.

⁵⁵ Michel de Certeau, *The Possession at Loudun* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

affair to be a political ploy by Cardinal Richelieu to attack Grandier, who was critical of the Cardinal.⁵⁶ The seemingly demonic signs were not sufficiently impressive to carry much authority for Locke.

Along with Pierre Hadot, Certeau was a relatively early reader of Wittgenstein in France. He took the return to ordinary language to include a critique of authority—especially religious authority. “The critical return of the ordinary, as Wittgenstein understands it, must destroy all the varieties of rhetorical brilliance associated with powers that hierarchize and with nonsense that enjoys authority.”⁵⁷ Certeau self-consciously takes himself to be following Wittgenstein in dethroning the expertise of the philosopher as speaking beyond what can be said, and casting doubt on other sorts of experts, which earned the suspicion of those claiming to be spiritual authorities for Certeau and, to some extent, Wittgenstein. Certeau writes that Wittgenstein “changes the *place* of analysis, henceforth defined by a *universality* identical with *submission* to ordinary use.”⁵⁸ Philosophical, scientific, and spiritual privilege “disappears into the ordinary.” Certeau is correct insofar as authoritative spiritual teaching happens in a particular time and place between individuals and communities in their ordinariness. It is marked by its particularity and context. These particularities are not theological *per se* but among other things historical, sociological, and psychological. They can be explored fruitfully within those disciplines. Yet the authoritative teacher claims to speak on behalf of, empowered by, or in the name of a mysterious God, at least in some

⁵⁶ Lord Peter King, *The Life and Letters of John Locke: With Extracts from His Journals and Common-Place Books* (London: Bell & Daldy, 1864), 81, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/wu.89099963381>.

⁵⁷ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven F. Rendall (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2011), 13.

⁵⁸ Certeau, 11.

limited sense. Social, political, institutional, and personal considerations seem to underdetermine spiritual teaching authority. In the face of modern analysis, one might be tempted to consign spiritual authority to a previous, naïve age.⁵⁹

Focused, if not chastened, by the above critiques, I characterize *spiritual* authority as the authority to assist others in understanding who God is and what God wants of an individual or community. An authority who speaks in a way that is wholly new or mysterious cannot function as an authority since the exercise of authority requires a common language so that authority might be received. Though silence and paradox are common features of spiritual authority, such authority is neither quietist nor vacuous but incarnate and directed to concrete albeit always provisional action or conversion. The mysterious and the ordinary meet in the act of spiritual pedagogy. The spiritual pedagogue speaks without knowing precisely how her advice works; she speaks in riddle and out of a riddle. The language of spiritual pedagogy has content such that it can be acted on yet remain radically unexpected and rooted in mystery.

Spiritual pedagogy avoids quietism and inaction by speaking and acting from within a community and history. Spiritual authority has social and political implications but is primarily directed towards the relationship of a person or community with God. Insofar as God and God's ways are mysterious, spiritual authority is premised on grounds that are, in principle, mysterious. Talk of God strains language to a breaking point. The spiritual pedagogue is constantly creating new language and finding new ways to communicate,

⁵⁹ Rowan Williams rightly observes: "There are too many problems in delimiting the golden age, too many bits of special pleading that have to be entered when the evidence for primitive purity is less than compelling. The whole idea that there is a privileged era for being a Christian is a strange one." Rowan Williams, *Why Study the Past?: The Quest for the Historical Church* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2005), 96.

though never in such a way that is adequate to mystery. The criterion for successful language of spiritual pedagogy is not ultimate success in speaking adequately of God but communicating a next step on the path to God and another way of speaking about God to accompany it.

Careful reading of the above provisional characterization immediately raises two important questions. First, how can advice or modeled behavior be both mysterious and concrete? Second and relatedly, how can someone be an authority in what is in principle mysterious? The above characterization risks incoherence, yet, as this chapter argues, it is an accurate description of what authoritative spiritual pedagogues themselves and the Christian tradition take them to be doing. The misinterpretations of quietism and deconstruction can be seen as a way to render spiritual authority coherent, but they do so by radically recharacterizing it from an ongoing process to something fixed.⁶⁰ The examples below show spiritual pedagogy as an ongoing engagement with mystery.

1.3 Spiritual Authority Exempla

1.3.1 Apostolic Authority

‘Authority’ (*exousia*) is invoked some ninety-three times in the New Testament and is a serious concern of New Testament authors and the early church. Some uses of ‘authority’ refer to the relationship between Christians and political authority. Many of these uses refer to Jesus, who as God would not have religious or spiritual authority derived from anywhere other than himself as God. Questions of spiritual authority flowing from the authority of Jesus

⁶⁰ I use quietism in a modern sense rather than in the sense of “*Hesychasm*” or contemplative practice associated with the Jesus Prayer common in the Christian east and with important parallels in the ascetic tradition of the Christian west.

arose almost immediately in the early Church. After the Ascension, Jesus was no longer available to guide the disciples in person. The Apostles claim spiritual and religious authority on the basis of their relationships with God in Jesus. Apostolic authority is a participation in Jesus's authority. As Jesus's close companions on earth, the eleven Apostles had the most recognizable claim to such a relationship.

An overarching concern in the Acts of the Apostles is the authority of the Apostles in their governance and building up of the Church. This includes explaining how the authority to teach arrives differently for the original disciples than for Paul. Acts begins with Jesus's commission to the Apostles through the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:2). They are to spread the Gospel message to the end of the earth. The Apostles come into conflict with existing religious authorities. Early Christianity both grounds its claims in the context of the authority of the Israelite tradition, while at the same time offering a critique or correction to that authority. It is through the Holy Spirit that the Apostles preach with boldness and claim a spiritual authority surpassing the authority of existing authorities resistant to their message. Luke frequently sets the authority of the Apostles against that of the established religious authorities who seek to suppress the Gospel but ultimately cannot.

In Acts' telling, finding a successor to Judas was one of the first items of business for the Apostles after the Ascension (Acts 1:15-26). The choice of Matthias as an Apostle combined deliberation of the Apostles in choosing a field of candidates with the manifestation of the Holy Spirit in a choice within that field by lot.⁶¹ This first identification of a spiritual

⁶¹ Paul's first letter to Timothy similarly includes an institutional element: that of Paul's power to appoint bishops with a prophetic call (1 Timothy 1:18). The spiritual authority which Paul asks Timothy to take up in the spirit requires a moral character compatible with authoritative office (1 Timothy 3).

authority by the Apostles rather than Jesus directly was both deliberative and invited divine participation using criteria the Apostles could not anticipate. As illustrated in the case of St. Paul, spiritual authority is conferred in unpredictable ways. The sometimes-uneasy relationship between spiritual authority premised on institutional role and spiritual authority premised on particular gifts begins with Paul and remains a feature of the tradition.

The Apostles' authority combines the Apostles' "testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 4:33) and the practical disposition of the community assets such that everything was shared in common and the needy received what they required (4:35-37). The authoritative proclamation of the Gospel in words is inextricable from that proclamation in deeds, including the quotidian distribution of resources according to the will of God. Acts also records the great deeds of the apostles. Sometimes these deeds are in the form of miracles such as healings or miraculous escapes (e.g., Acts 9:32-43; 12:3-19). Their most esteemed witness is in their willingness to lose their lives for the sake of the Gospel as was the fate of all but one Apostle according to tradition. The authority of the Apostles in the proclamation of the resurrection of Christ includes practical direction in the Christian life as a living out of that resurrection through the Holy Spirit.⁶² In more formal terms, *Kerygma* includes *praxis*. Practical direction is both a means and a result of spiritual pedagogy. Acts frequently uses the Apostles' control over material goods as a symbol of spiritual authority linking the spiritual

⁶² Peter Candler develops a helpful account of manuduction or being led by the hand as a principle of Christian pedagogy. See: Peter M. Candler, *Theology, Rhetoric, Manuduction, or Reading Scripture Together on the Path to God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006).

and the practical.⁶³ The spiritual authority of the Apostles is in their practical witness to this way of living in community coupled with their proclamation.⁶⁴

Paul's spiritual authority is more complex than the other apostles insofar as Paul undergoes a shift of authority from that granted to him by the chief priests (Acts 26:10-12) to an apostolic spiritual authority. Paul claims for himself the authority to teach in the name of Christ as something in which one cannot boast but is for the building up of the community (2 Cor 10:8, Acts 9). The measure of authority is what has been given by Christ (1 Cor 9:1, 15:8-10, Gal 1:11-12). Paul disclaims a comprehensive understanding of what he is teaching, the mysteries he has been called to steward, precisely because these mysteries come from God in Christ. For example, "O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!" (Rom 11:33) or "Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!" (2 Cor 9:15). Like the other apostles, Paul teaches the people with authority, founding and directing churches in his travels.

As briefly noted in the introduction, in his most sustained account of his own teaching authority and apostolic teaching authority more generally in the first letter to the Corinthians, Paul speaks of his own teaching role and that of other ministers of the Gospel "as servants of Christ and stewards (*oikonomos*) of God's mysteries" (1 Cor 4:1).⁶⁵ The imagery is one of participation between God, the landowner, and the ministers of the Gospel as household managers. The steward is given instructions from the landowner who leaves the steward the

⁶³ See: Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, ed. Daniel J. Harrington, Sacra Pagina (Liturgical Press, 1992), 111.

⁶⁴ Ward develops the theme of practical knowledge and mimesis in spiritual pedagogy: Graham Ward, "Spiritual Exercises: A Christian Pedagogy," in *Christ and Culture*, Challenges in Contemporary Theology (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 225–32.

⁶⁵ First Corinthians is also the clearest example of Paul's day-to-day authority. See: James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 574–75.

task of seeing those instructions carried out. Through Christ, the Spirit reveals what was once hidden and now revealed at least partially, though it is still hidden on strictly human terms. The spiritual teacher is one who teaches in and through the Spirit. A central part of Paul's understanding of this stewardship is re-narrating history through Christ as its answer, who was once hidden and is now revealed.

Stewarding mysteries is both retrospective and prospective. It solves the prophetic riddles set down in the scriptures and tradition. Throughout his writings, Paul as well as other New Testament authors testify that Christ fulfills various prophecies and in so doing solves riddles posed long ago. Stewardship is prospective in helping to foster relationships with God and knowledge of God of those to whom he ministers in the exigencies of their lives in community. Paul's letter was written to a community vexed by questions of morality, liturgical practice, and leadership. The community was in danger of splitting into factions. Stewarding mysteries includes not only solving (or at least exploring) the riddles of the past but helps uncover God's will for the present and future. In the language of Paul used in most of the Christian tradition, the spiritual authority "discerns" the Spirit not only in the unfolding of the past but in future actions (1 Cor 12:10).

These sometimes-directive mysteries are unveiled through the Spirit, who is a greater mystery still. Such revealed mystery, while opening new language and new ways of living does so through a yet deeper mystery.⁶⁶ The grammar of spiritual teaching is teaching what is unknowable in strictly human terms but knowable as mystery revealed through the Spirit. One cannot account for *how* one knows in the Spirit because one cannot account for the Spirit, nor

⁶⁶ For a discussion of 'mystery' see: Jean-Noël Aletti, "Mystery," in *Encyclopedia of Christian Theology*, ed. Jean-Yves Lacoste (Routledge, 2005), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203319017>.

can one easily disentangle what is known in the Spirit from what is known through other means. Paul chides those who seek a simple formula to indicate who is speaking with authority and those who expect to be able to use worldly criteria to evaluate the mysteries of God. “For Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles” (1 Cor 1:22-23). Paul takes his own authoritative proclamation to be foolishness by the dominant cultural criteria of his time. The foolishness of the Spiritual Pedagogue is speaking things she cannot make sense of in human terms, yet she concretely directs her own life and the lives of others. This pedagogy is a riddle. Who speaks in human words for the Spirit? Even if one answers a spiritual pedagogue, the riddle remains until one explains not only that this is the answer but also how.

Returning to Paul’s understanding of ministers of the Gospel “as servants of Christ and stewards of God’s mysteries”, for Paul and other ancient Christian authors, a ‘mystery’ (*mysterion*) is something of divine origin which was or is hidden.⁶⁷ As noted above, for Paul, mysteries are not in principle unknowable to human beings but are in principle unknowable to human beings by human means.⁶⁸ The mysteries stewarded by Paul concern the origin and

⁶⁷ The various senses of the term ‘mystery’ in the Ancient Near East are complex and beyond our present scope. One common usage of mysteries relevant to the present discussion is mysteries used in initiation. Induction to various religious and philosophical groups was a process of being initiated into its mysteries. See especially: T. J. Lang, *Mystery and the Making of a Christian Historical Consciousness*, *Mystery and the Making of a Christian Historical Consciousness* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), <https://www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.1515/9783110436860/html>; Markus N. A. Bockmuehl, *Revelation and Mystery in Ancient Judaism and Pauline Christianity*, *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen Zum Neuen Testament* 36 (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1990).

⁶⁸ “The problem for modern readers is that mystery tends to convey, what is impenetrable not because it necessitates revelation but because it can never in principle become coherent or intelligible.” Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, *The New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 2013), 240–41.

destiny of the world as revealed by the Spirit. They have always been the case, but from his perspective were recently made known in Christ and through the Spirit.⁶⁹

If to solve a riddle requires articulating not only that something is the answer but also how, stewarding God's mysteries becomes more complicated. Earlier in the same letter, Paul writes: "[W]e speak God's wisdom, secret and hidden, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. None of the rulers of this age understood this...these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit" (1 Cor 2:7-8, 10). Paul is at pains to qualify the sort of knowledge and authority that he exercises as steward of God's mysteries. Paul both insists that the stewards of God's mysteries be trustworthy yet undermines the power of his readers to determine who is a trustworthy authority. The human capacity for judgement is unequal to the task. For instance, he writes: "But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court" (1 Cor 4:3). Paul cannot even judge himself he claims. God is the only one in a position to properly judge the trustworthiness of those who steward God's mysteries. Yet Paul, the other Apostles, and Christian leaders of various descriptions through the centuries claim that their stewardships be recognized by others as authoritative not on their own authority but because they are stewarding God's mysteries. The spiritual pedagogue at once disclaims her own capacities and claims to steward mysteries and, with them, authority. The emptying or *kenosis* of human capacities enables the fullness or *pleroma* of stewardship.

Knowing something to be a riddle is itself an achievement insofar as one recognizes a lack of sense or only the promise of sense. The description of authority given by Paul seems sensible and is, in fact, used discursively. There are various sensible grammars of spiritual

⁶⁹ See: Lang, *Mystery and the Making of a Christian Historical Consciousness*, 33–40.

pedagogy, but none are a grammar of the Spirit short of the eschaton. Though useful, such a grammar is necessarily unstable and subverted by use. While Paul answers various riddles as steward of God's mysteries, such authority poses a greater riddle. Who is both a limited human being for whom the mysteries of God are too high and able to steward the mysteries of God? The answer to the riddle may be Paul but how remains unclear and, thus, the riddle remains unsolved.

Paul's Christian foundations extend widely into the gentile world. In perhaps the most dramatic scene of Paul's spiritual authority, he preaches at the heart of Greek culture in the Athenian Areopagus (Acts 17:16-34). Paul attempts to bridge the new message he has in Christ with the "exceptional" but misguided religion and philosophy he finds in Athens. He preaches in a language intelligible to those schooled in the philosophies of the city in a way that some are able to hear. In his various writings, Paul exhorts a pattern of moral action conformed to the proclamation of the Gospel, that Christians take on the mind [*nous*] of Christ, for example in 1 Cor 2:16. As Luke Timothy Johnson observes: "Paul uses the term *nous* in much the same way that Aristotle did in the *Nicomachean Ethics*: the *nous* is more than the source of thinking; it is closer to what we might call a 'mind-set'—that is, it involves a construal of reality that forms the basis for the prudence (*phronesis*) that guides specific decisions."⁷⁰ (I turn to prudence in chapter six). Paul, as a spiritual authority, forms Churches and their members into the *nous* of Christ. Though the mind of Christ remains a riddle, it is not something Paul can properly account for and yet he acts and exhorts others to act out of

⁷⁰ In particular, the Christian struggle against sin is compared to the Greek *paideia* (Heb 12:2). This parallels the Greek ideal of formation through struggle. See: Luke Timothy Johnson, *Among the Gentiles: Greco-Roman Religion and Christianity*, Anchor Yale Bible Reference Library (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 2009), 160.

this mind.⁷¹ Drawing people to this *nous*, Paul is engaging in classically epideictic rhetoric, that is rhetoric seeking the moral and spiritual advance of its listeners.⁷² For Paul and other spiritual pedagogues, their language seeks improvement without the pretense of a complete explanation.

The Letter to the Hebrews, traditionally attributed to Paul though of uncertain authorship, reaches for the rhetoric of Greek *paideia* directed towards what scholars speculate is a struggling Christian community.⁷³ The letter speaks of the great gift of God in Christ to all believers. Christ is the great high priest who entered into the suffering of the human condition and opens salvation to all. In the context of chastising its addressees for their dull understanding, the author of Hebrews observes: “For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic elements of the oracles of God” (Hebrews 5:12). Though the verse is intended to critique its readers, it presumes that in order to teach spiritual matters one must first be taught or formed—in this case, formed in and through the mystery of Christ the great high priest. Hebrews does not delineate stages of formation beyond child and mature. This has led some commentators to claim that Hebrews’ adoption of Greek *paideia* was quite limited, that *paideia* is not a process but a binary.⁷⁴ Other commentators rightly argue that the text itself speaks of a long process of learning through suffering rather than a swift and decisive change in attitude.⁷⁵

⁷¹ Ward recently developed these riddling insights into an approach to Christology, see: Graham Ward, *Another Kind of Normal: Ethical Life II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), chap. 3.

⁷² Aristotle notes: “the true and the approximately true are apprehended by the same faculty” (1355a15). Rhetorical persuasion is truth seeking within its particular scope, or most effective at persuading when truth seeking (1355a20). Aristotle, “Rhetoric.”

⁷³ Johnson, *Among the Gentiles*, 169.

⁷⁴ For example: William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, Word Biblical Commentary; v.47A (Dallas, Texas: Word Books, 1991), 137.

⁷⁵ For example: Alan C. Mitchell, *Hebrews*, Sacra Pagina (Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 2007), 121–22.

The early Christian Church's adoption of Greek *paideia* becomes increasingly clear in the generations after Paul. Christianity was taken to be the fulfillment of classical learning into a higher form of transformation, deification.⁷⁶ Yet even before Paul, Greek education had a significant influence on Jewish formation.⁷⁷ Recent scholarship has highlighted the importance of *paideia* in the Septuagint.⁷⁸ Early Christianity was set within a philosophical milieu that was itself directed toward the formation of virtuous individuals and communities, as Pierre Hadot has argued.⁷⁹

Hebrews advised that its readers should “go on toward perfection” (6:1). Yet the process of this moving on is odd if not within a progressive model. The verse continues “leaving behind the basic teaching about Christ, and not laying again the foundation: repentance from dead works and faith toward God, instruction about baptisms, laying on of hands, resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment” (Hebrews 6:1-2). There is almost no indication that the author of Hebrews would wish to contradict these things. Rather, it would seem that, along the path of formation and greater conformity with Christ, one must move to

⁷⁶ Werner Jaeger, *Early Christianity and Greek Paideia*, Carl Newell Jackson Lectures 1960 (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1961), 90.

⁷⁷ Greek *paideia* strongly influenced the second temple Jewish practice. The inheritance of *paideia* into Christianity is both directly from Greek and Roman sources and through the Greek influence already felt in Judaism. See: Jason Zurawski and Gabriele Boccaccini, *Second Temple Jewish “Paideia” in Context*, Beihefte Zur Zeitschrift Für Die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft Und Die Kunde Der Älteren Kirche ; Beiheft 228 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017); Patrick Pouchelle, “The Septuagintal Paideia and the Construction of a Jewish Identity during the Late Hellenistic and Early Roman Period,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 81, no. 1 (January 2019): 33–45; Georg Bertram, “Παιδεύω,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. G. W. Bromiley et al., vol. 5 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1964), 596–625.

⁷⁸ Patrick Pouchelle, *Dieu éducateur: une nouvelle approche d'un concept de la théologie biblique entre Bible Hébraïque, Septante et littérature grecque classique*, Forschungen zum Alten Testament. 2. Reihe. 77 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015); Peter Gemeinhardt, “In Search of Christian Paideia Education and Conversion in Early Christian Biography,” *Zeitschrift Für Antikes Christentum / Journal of Ancient Christianity* 16, no. 1 (2015): 88–98, <https://doi.org/10.1515/zac-2012-0008>; Zurawski and Boccaccini, *Second Temple Jewish “Paideia” in Context*.

⁷⁹ Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995); Pierre Hadot, *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique* (Paris: Études augustiniennes, 1981); Pierre Hadot, *What Is Ancient Philosophy?*, trans. Michael Chase (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2002).

new levels building upon a foundation of previous instruction and experience. What those new levels might be and how one might ascend to higher levels is not clear in the Letter to the Hebrews but comes into greater focus in subsequent centuries of Christian writing. Already in the scriptural witness an outline of spiritual authority can be discerned. This spiritual authority draws on existing language in attempting to articulate how individuals and the community might progress in conformity to Christ. There is a clear, though not necessarily causal, link between teaching in words and in a way of life.

1.3.2 Patristic Authority

The shape of spiritual authority and the process of pedagogy becomes sharper through the centuries and councils. Particularly after the conversion of Constantine, two threads of spiritual authority come into focus in the patristic period: clerical authority and monastic or ascetic authority. The relationship between asceticism and institutional position was less delineated and problematic in the earliest days of the Church. Institutional structures were still developing and the moral character of those in power, as least as it was recorded, was generally high. To take the most prominent example in the early Church, the authority of the martyrs was not clerical though a great many clerics were also martyrs or otherwise suffered for the faith.

A tension develops in various forms between the spiritual authority of clerics and the authority of ascetics. The spiritual authorities of the early generations created a novel religious language in and through Christ drawing on the Jewish and Greek sources at hand. Subsequent spiritual authorities' own credibility came in part from maintaining continuity with the witness and authority of the Apostolic witness while continuing to create new language in novel contexts. The picture of authority emerging in the Ancient Church can be

seen as having three interrelated poles: continuity with scripture and Apostolic tradition, clerical position, and ascetical practice which often includes good works. Though shifting in scope, importance, and interrelation, these three poles remain active in the Christian tradition to the present day in various communities.

The early ascetic tradition, centered in the Egyptian desert, was overwhelmingly non-clerical. One can overstate the clerical/ascetic divide. While it is the case that ascetics need not be clerics, a cleric's spiritual authority is enhanced by asceticism and good works.⁸⁰ These ascetic and clerical traditions mutually inform as the secular clergy adopt monastic/ascetical practices and monasteries become increasingly clericalized.

In the ascetic tradition, the capacity to spiritually teach came from one's own graced progress in ascetic exercises including good works. Such exercises helped open one to the love of God. Though life in the desert was largely solitary, it was a cultivated solitude with God. The sayings and example of various desert ascetics were treated as authoritative well beyond the desert. In the fifth century, these sayings were collected in the *Apophthegmata Patrum*.⁸¹ The *Apophthegmata* recorded authoritative spiritual pedagogy with students, who would approach one of the wise figures, often asking, "Abba such and such, give me a word" or "Abba so and so answer me this." The collection consists in terse stories combining brief bibliographical glimpses into the holy lives of the abbats with concrete spiritual advice to

⁸⁰ For example, even before the conversion of Constantine, the third century *Didascalia Apostolorum* warns that lax bishops put their communities at spiritual risk and should hold fast to ascetic practices such as taking poor food. George E. Demacopoulos, *Five Models of Spiritual Direction in the Early Church* (Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 7.

⁸¹ The *Apophthegmata* comprises multiple collections, variously organized and with a complex transmission history. For an overview see: William Harmless, *Desert Christians: An Introduction to the Literature of Early Monasticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 183–86, <https://www.oxfordscholarship.com/view/10.1093/0195162234.001.0001/acprof-9780195162233>.

those who seek their counsels. Often the advice is eminently practical, for example how one ought to pray or eat or sleep. The *Apophthegmata* records the particularity of discernment of spirits (*diakriseis pneumatōn*).⁸² Like Paul centuries earlier, they are identifying where the Spirit is leading a particular person or community. The abbas are not systematic in their counsel precisely because they take themselves to be discerning the activity of the Spirit as opposed to applying rules. Though the Spirit would not lead someone to vice, one discerns between various virtuous paths. For example, at some points, the abbas come very near to killing their bodies in severe austerity and advising others to do so. At other points, they moderate austerities or prescribe other good works.⁸³ Their authoritative spiritual pedagogy is likened to a doctor diagnosing a particular spiritual illness and giving a personalized diagnosis or to a counselor healing a wound with graced words.⁸⁴

Though one can trace repeated themes in the *Apophthegmata* and patterns of the Spirit, the abba's discernment is particular to each person being addressed. The discernment of the abbas and their students is an intersubjective process as opposed to knowledge already possessed by the abba and merely imparted to the student.⁸⁵ It is education in the original Latin sense of being led out (*e ducere*); it is primarily training (a point I return to with Wittgenstein in chapter three). The abba's goal is not to impart doctrine to the student in the

⁸² Early Christian thinkers are particularly influenced by Paul's use of discernment (1 Cor 12:10). For a synthetic history of discernment in the early Church, see: Mark Allen McIntosh, *Discernment and Truth: The Spirituality and Theology of Knowledge*, A Herder & Herder Book. (New York: Crossroad, 2004), chap. 2, <http://www.loc.gov/catdir/toc/ecip0414/2004001699.html>.

⁸³ For example, Abba Poemen advises Abba Isaac "We have not been taught to kill our bodies, but to kill our passions." Benedicta Ward, *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection*, Revised edition. (London: Cistercian Publications, 1984), 193.

⁸⁴ Irénée Hausherr, *Spiritual Direction in the Early Christian East*, Cistercian Studies Series, no. 116 (Kalamazoo, Mich: Cistercian Publications, 1990), xii–xvi.

⁸⁵ Frederick D. Aquino, "Spiritual Formation, Authority, and Discernment," *The Oxford Handbook of the Epistemology of Theology*, June 8, 2017, 165, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199662241.013.26>.

first instance, but to help the student come to a first-hand knowledge of God; doctrine aids this primary aim. For the desert ascetics and the patristic church more broadly though, any strong distinction between spirituality and doctrine is anachronistic.

The abba's authority was self-consciously rooted in scripture, which they quoted constantly.⁸⁶ The abbas prized an interior or active knowledge of the scriptures, even the devil can simply quote scripture. William Harmless, SJ helpfully observes: "The accent on practice led the desert fathers to criticize any who equated knowledge of the scriptural text with knowledge of scripture."⁸⁷ The word given by the abba was an encounter with God mediated through the abba.⁸⁸ The work of the abba became like a word of scripture, a graced, sacramental word yet capable of concrete instruction.⁸⁹

In the third and fourth centuries, St. Antony the Abbot (also known as Antony of the Desert and Father of All Monks) was one of the great early ascetics treated in the *Apophthegmata*. Asceticism in itself was not spiritually authoritative, but the divine gift of discernment, a distinction Antony himself draws in his letters.⁹⁰ That is the gift: to find the will of God in the particular for an individual or community. The desert Christian literature includes laments of monks who have not received the gift of discernment despite their asceticism. Anticipating the debates of subsequent centuries, Antony distinguishes between willful asceticism (with the accompanying dangers of pride) and an asceticism that opens one

⁸⁶ Burton-Christie convincingly counters the argument that the Christianity of the desert was unscriptural. See: Douglas Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert: Scripture and the Quest for Holiness in Early Christian Monasticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

⁸⁷ Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 245.

⁸⁸ Benedicta Ward, "Traditions of Spiritual Guidance: Spiritual Direction in the Desert Fathers," *The Way* 24, no. 1 (1984): 61–70.

⁸⁹ Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert*, 4.

⁹⁰ Antony the Great, *The Letters of St Antony the Great*, trans. Derwas Chitty (Oxford: Sisters of the Love of God Press, 1975), 23.

to God. Discernment is a gift of God. Humble asceticism is a well-trying means to dispose oneself to and ask God for this gift.

Even among the clergy, the importance of asceticism was deeply held in the patristic Church. For example, St. Athanasius of Alexandria, a patriarch, claimed that Antony was an authoritative teacher for him.⁹¹ Clerical authority largely respected and at times even deferred to ascetic authority in the patristic period. St. Augustine is notable for placing less stress on ascetic authority than other writers of his time as a response to Donatism and Pelagianism. Though various comparisons could be made, the distinction between St. Augustine and his contemporary St. John Cassian is instructive. In the western church, John Cassian has been judged harshly for suspected semi-Pelagianism and implicit criticism of Augustine though Cassian is the most celebrated western saint in the eastern church and his influence on monastic life (both eastern and western) is difficult to overstate.⁹² Cassian extends the tradition of the *Apophthegmata* albeit in a more systematic form, and he links the asceticism of the Egyptian desert and later forms of monasticism in both east and west.⁹³ Cassian is explicitly formational in his two great works, the *Institutes* and the *Conferences*. He prefaces the *Conferences* noting that the *Institutes* deals primarily with the external, while the

⁹¹ It does not necessarily follow that spiritual authorities must themselves have a great, proximate teacher. A common hagiography trope holds that certain great spiritual teachers are uniquely graced from their youths with insight and divine favor. This was the case in the story of Antony and later Benedict of Nursia, to take just two examples. Though in both cases, they remained self-consciously within the tradition, taught by those who came before through their writings and witness if not directly.

⁹² Augustine Casiday, *Tradition and Theology in John Cassian, Tradition and Theology in St John Cassian*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), chap. 2; Augustine Casiday, "Rehabilitating John Cassian: An Evaluation of Prosper of Aquitaine's Polemic against the 'Semipelagians,'" *Scottish Journal of Theology* 58, no. 3 (August 2005): 270–84, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0036930605001407>.

⁹³ Cassian was strongly influenced by his own teacher Evagrius Pontus. Evagrius expounds a tripartite schema of progress of practical life, natural contemplation, and deifying theology. His influence extends widely through the tradition though his personal status as a spiritual authority is more controversial than the figures covered in the chapter.

Conferences presumes external structures and moves to deeper “internal” space though the two are closely related.⁹⁴ As in Augustine, the metaphor of interiority functions similarly to the metaphor of height. The *Conferences* offers a paradigmatic and subsequently influential form of spiritual authority as individual spiritual direction.⁹⁵ The *Conferences* recounts twenty-four conversations with spiritual authorities dispensing wisdom according to a Christianized classical question and answer format (*erotapokris*), which was the standard form of monastic spiritual pedagogy.

The dispute between Augustine and Cassian raises various technical questions of grace and nature that are beyond the present scope. At least some of the divergence between the two is a matter of audience. Augustine’s life was marked with various periods of asceticism. In later life, as a diocesan bishop, his pastoral priority was for the lay faithful under his care. His concern was to avoid spiritual elitism more than to pursue a desert ideal of Christian perfection. His strategy for training clergy was laid out in two programmatic texts, *On Catechizing the Ignorant* and *On Christian Teaching*. His concerns are for the rhetorical and doctrinal proficiency of clerics and catechists rather than their spiritual progress.⁹⁶ Augustine’s shift from the ascetic to the doctrinal created tensions, as Harmless notes: “By 418, Augustine and the North Africans had won the day, but the debate had not quieted. In monastic circles, both in North Africa and in Gaul, people wondered out loud whether

⁹⁴ John Cassian, *The Conferences*, trans. Boniface Ramsey, Ancient Christian Writers, no. 57 (New York: Paulist Press, 1997), 30.

⁹⁵ Demacopoulos, *Five Models of Spiritual Direction in the Early Church*, 110.

⁹⁶ Augustine is concerned that the catechist be wise, but this is a narrower qualification than Cassian or many of his other near contemporaries. For example, Augustine writes: “the speaker who is awash with the kind of eloquence that is not wise is particularly dangerous because audiences actually enjoy listening to such a person on matters of no value to them, and reckon that somebody who is heard to speak eloquently must also be speaking the truth.” Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, trans. R.P.H Green (New York: Clarendon Press, 1995), Bk. IV Par. 17.

Augustine's view of grace rendered the hard work of asceticism unintelligible."⁹⁷ The history of the Church would appear to answer firmly in the negative as asceticism in general, and Cassian in particular, strongly influences monasticism in both eastern and western Christianity, which in turn shapes the whole Church.

While Augustine articulates the doctrinal requirements of spiritual authority, Cassian provides a richer account of the ascetic qualities and activities of the spiritual authority. Ascetic spiritual practices are the "tools of perfection" in cultivating purity of heart.⁹⁸ Commenting on Cassian, Frederick Aquino rightly notes that "purity of heart is not merely volitional in nature. It also has an epistemic dimension in that it plays a crucial role in developing a positive orientation towards cognitive states such as illumination, contemplation, and the vision of God."⁹⁹ Ascetic openness to spiritual authority is a sign of an epistemic openness to God. Cassian is clear that this does not diminish the need for God's grace.¹⁰⁰ It is an exercise of stewardship of mystery to shift to the Pauline idiom.

Cassian, in the voice of the desert Abba Nesteros who also appears in the *Apophthegmata*, argues that practical knowledge is preconditional to contemplative knowledge. The person caught by the passions is not only morally but also epistemically compromised in the spiritual life.¹⁰¹ Growth in practical knowledge, and with it virtuous action, better disposes one to discernment and contemplation while affirming the necessity and freedom of grace. Importantly, Cassian appeals to apostolic and scriptural authority in

⁹⁷ Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 399.

⁹⁸ Cassian, *The Conferences*, 46.

⁹⁹ Aquino, "Spiritual Formation, Authority, and Discernment," 163.

¹⁰⁰ Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 396.

¹⁰¹ For an extended example, see Cassian's "Fourteenth Conference the First Conference of Abba Nesteros: on Spiritual Knowledge". Cassian, *The Conferences*, 499–524.

making this twofold distinction. To appropriate the tradition, i.e., to gain the proper allegorical understanding of scripture prized in the early Church, one must be trained in the virtues. Given the context of the *Conferences* as a teaching document, Cassian is providing concrete advice to those under his spiritual care to cultivate a virtuous life. Cassian takes such teaching to be an exercise of discernment within the context of the student's and community's life.

Around a century after Cassian, Pseudo-Dionysius (hereafter Dionysius) offers perhaps the most influential writings after the scriptures on spiritual ascent and the role of hierarchical teaching in assisting such ascent.¹⁰² Dionysius is less a singular genius than a culminative figure of patristic spiritual ascent and pedagogy.¹⁰³ Gregory of Nyssa in particular anticipates Dionysius's careful combination of the positive and the negative.¹⁰⁴ While Dionysius is clearly influenced by Neo-Platonic hierarchy and a lively scholarly debate continues as to the extent of this influence, unlike the Neo-Platonic One, God is concerned with individuals and communities in Dionysius. The top of the hierarchy in Dionysius is mysterious but not remote.

In recent times, Dionysius is best remembered by those proponents of quietist or experientialist mysticism for his negative theology in *The Mystical Theology*, in which he

¹⁰² Recent attempts have been made to read Dionysius and Wittgenstein together. Fronda reads Wittgenstein as an ascetic. Watson sees Wittgenstein as attempting to render human beings transparent to the divine. Both readings strain Wittgenstein's text. Earl Stanley B. Fronda, *Wittgenstein's (Misunderstood) Religious Thought* (Leiden: Brill, 2010); Ed Watson, "The Sacred Fire: Wittgenstein, Pseudo-Denys, and Transparency to the Divine," *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology* 82, no. 2 (March 15, 2021): 136–54, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21692327.2021.1911674>.

¹⁰³ Andrew Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 154.

¹⁰⁴ See: Sarah Coakley, "Gregory of Nyssa on Spiritual Ascent and Trinitarian Orthodoxy: A Reconsideration of the Relation between Doctrine and Askesis," *Gregory of Nyssa: In Canticum Canticorum: Analytical and Supporting Studies. Proceedings of the 13th International Colloquium on Gregory of Nyssa*, July 27, 2018, 366, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004382046_017.

negates positive predications of God. He writes: “[M]y argument now rises from what is below up to the transcendent, and the more it climbs, the more language falters, and when it has passed up and beyond the ascent, it will turn silent completely, since it will finally be at one with him who is indescribable.”¹⁰⁵ The climbing of the text culminates abruptly in a denial of the possibility of speaking of God, at least not directly. “We make assertions and denials of what is next to it, but never of it.”¹⁰⁶ Dionysius negates the capacity for negation itself. Taken in isolation, the *Mystical Theology* can be read as quietist mystical authority rather than pedagogical spiritual authority.¹⁰⁷ Dionysius’s longer work, the *Divine Names*, explores at length various positive predications of God.¹⁰⁸ Dionysius is not a quietist, nor is he shy about sharing his counsel as attested in various surviving letters. Coming to recognize failure of language is a grace and an accomplishment, in part thanks to the right sort of pedagogy. The *Divine Names* moves through various names of God, some better than others but all inadequate. Their inadequacy stems from the inability to make sense of heavenly things by earthly language. Towards the end of the *Divine Names*, Dionysius writes: “That is why [scriptural authors’] preference is for the way up through negations, since this stands the soul outside everything which is correlative with its own finite nature. Such a way guides the soul through all the divine notions, notions which are themselves transcended by that which is far beyond every name, all reason and all knowledge.”¹⁰⁹ Dionysius does not stop using

¹⁰⁵ Pseudo-Dionysius, “The Mystical Theology,” in *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, trans. Colm Luibheid (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 139.

¹⁰⁶ Pseudo-Dionysius, 141.

¹⁰⁷ Like in Paul, mystery in Dionysius as in the sense of hidden rather than completely unknowable, though it is only through a process of purification and illumination that the hidden is revealed. See: Paul Rorem, *The Dionysian Mystical Theology*, Mapping the Tradition (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), 6.

¹⁰⁸ Rorem, 56–57.

¹⁰⁹ Pseudo-Dionysius, “The Divine Names,” in *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, trans. Colm Luibheid (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 130; Rorem, *The Dionysian Mystical Theology*, 56.

divine names, but he does so in the awareness that he cannot account for how they function. Many are mysteries in Paul's sense, once hidden and now revealed, yet not revealed in a way graspable by human beings except as riddles.

Dionysius carefully describes a *Celestial Hierarchy* and its earthly compliment, the "Ecclesial Hierarchy", as the means by which God communicates, purifies, and enlightens creation. The role of the human spiritual teacher is set within a vast cosmic vision of choirs of angels and saints.¹¹⁰ Dionysius is far more concerned with liturgical practice than the individual spiritual direction of the *Apophthegmata*. Within the liturgical order, people are drawn more deeply into the life of Christ through meditations on scripture and through the sacraments. The liturgical order mirrors the celestial order. The order of the cosmos comes from and, when perfected, returns to God. For Dionysius, hierarchy is a service of handing on what one has received from God. Dionysius writes:

The goal of a hierarchy, then, is to enable beings to be as like as possible to God and to be at one with him [...] Hierarchy causes its members to be images of God in all respects, to be clear and spotless mirrors reflecting the glow of primordial light and indeed of God himself. It ensures that when its members have received this full and divine splendor they can then pass on this light generously and in accordance with God's will to beings further down the scale.¹¹¹

The pedagogue participates in the dynamic of procession from God so that one is returned to God. What comes down enlightens and, thus, raises up. The celestial hierarchy is a model of handing down involving the whole cosmos including the ecclesial hierarchy and spiritual pedagogues in communicating God's splendor according to their place within the hierarchy.

¹¹⁰ Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition*, 165–66; Pseudo-Dionysius, "Celestial Hierarchy," in *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, trans. Colm Luibheid (New York: Paulist Press, 1987); Pseudo-Dionysius, "The Ecclesial Hierarchy," in *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, trans. Colm Luibheid (New York: Paulist Press, 1987); Andrew Louth, *Denys the Areopagite* (London: Continuum, 1989), chap. 4.

¹¹¹ Pseudo-Dionysius, "Celestial Hierarchy," 154.

The hierarchy envisioned by Dionysius is unstable in two respects. First, those in the hierarchy, especially human spiritual authorities, stand in need of counsel as well as being counselors.¹¹² Second, the hierarchical order is not always strict. Dionysius uses the image of a divine, fiery wheel.¹¹³ In Dionysius's image, God is at the center of the wheel, which is constantly revolving. Unlike the vast majority of Dionysius's hierarchical imagery, through the divine wheel "lift up the mind from below and carry the most exulted enlightenments down to the lowliest."¹¹⁴ Hierarchy in no way constrains God but is the typical way God communicates. Despite his own abstract and cosmic language, Dionysius's discussion of spiritual ascent becomes enormously influential to subsequent, more practical Christian spiritual pedagogues across the Eastern and Western Christian traditions.¹¹⁵ His influence is clear from his near contemporary Maximus the Confessor to the medieval Thomas Aquinas,

¹¹² "It is the members of the hierarchy who purify, illumine, and perfect, and themselves stand in need of such purification, illumination and perfection. The hierarchy is a community that is being saved and mediates salvation. Denys is often accused of a narrow individualism, because he seems concerned to show how the hierarchical arrangements meet the needs of the individual. But it is not so often noted that the hierarchical arrangements themselves are emphatically not impersonal, but are the arrangement of a community, or group of communities, whose members are seeking to draw near to God and draw others near to God." Louth, *Denys the Areopagite*, 41.

¹¹³ One finds divine wheels in the prophet Daniel (7:9). Wheels are associated with angels in the Hebrew Bible and Dead Sea Scrolls.

¹¹⁴ Pseudo-Dionysius, "Celestial Hierarchy," 190.

¹¹⁵ For Maximus, asceticism and detachment (*apatheia*) from the passions fosters the conditions for greater knowledge of and union with God. For example, Maximus writes: "Ascetic practice and contemplation mutually cohere in one another, and the one is never separated from the other. On the contrary, ascetic practice shows forth through conduct the knowledge derived from contemplation, while contemplation no less displays rational virtue fortified by practice." Though no practice is sufficient for spiritual vision, (Maximus the Confessor, *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* 58.64–69) cited by: Frederick Aquino, "The Philokalia and Regulative Virtue Epistemology: A Look at Maximus the Confessor," in *The Philokalia: A Classic Text of Orthodox Spirituality*, ed. Brock Bingaman (Oxford University Press, 2012), 245, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195390261.001.0001>; Rowan Williams, *Looking East in Winter: Contemporary Thought and the Eastern Christian Tradition* (London: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2021), 20–21.

whom he frequently quotes, to the early modern Teresa of Avila, and to more contemporary figures such as Simone Weil.¹¹⁶

1.3.3 Early Modern Authority

Though writing almost a millennium later, John of the Cross follows the trajectory described by Dionysius, though often in a more practical and self-consciously pedagogical register.¹¹⁷ John is rightly celebrated both as one of the great spiritual teachers of the early modern period and, like Dionysius, for his apophaticism. John's work unmistakably describes a path of ascent to God for students to follow. He strongly distinguishes human and spiritual knowledge. Edward Howells argues that John advances contrary, possibly even contradictory, ways of knowing when separating the sets of the faculties into sensory and spiritual: "The problem with John's position, which he appreciates, is that in excluding intelligible forms from the way in which spiritual goods are known he has now denied the basis of human knowledge."¹¹⁸ In other words, John explicitly denies the sensible basis for his own speech, yet he continues speaking. Mysteries are unveiled such that they can be spoken about but not explained. This tension, which is common in the various spiritual pedagogues already discussed, is particularly stark in John.

¹¹⁶ Weil's apophaticism may exceed that of Dionysius. For example, she writes. "It is impossible for God to be present in creation except in the form of absence." Simone Weil, *The Notebooks of Simone Weil* (London: Routledge, 2003), 419, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203715154>; William Robert, "A Mystic Impulse: From Apophatics to Decreation in Pseudo-Dionysius, Meister Eckhart and Simone Weil," *Medieval Mystical Theology* 21, no. 1 (July 16, 2012): 113–32, <https://doi.org/10.1558/mmt.v21i1.113>.

¹¹⁷ John was clearly influenced by Dionysius, though it is less clear whether this influence comes directly from reading Dionysius or through reading many authors deeply influenced by Dionysius, including Aquinas. See: Luis M Girón-Negrón, "Dionysian Thought in Sixteenth-Century Spanish Mystical Theology," *Modern Theology* 24, no. 4 (2008): 693–706; Sam Hole, *John of the Cross: Desire, Transformation, and Selfhood* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 94–95, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198863069.001.0001>.

¹¹⁸ Edward Howells, *John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila: Mystical Knowing and Selfhood* (New York: Crossroad, 2002), 29.

The division of intelligible forms from what lies outside is roughly evidenced by the division of his two great works, the *Ascent of Mount Carmel* and the *Dark Night of the Soul* which both comment on his own mystical poem *La noche oscura del alma*. *Ascent* largely, though with some exceptions, tracks the positive, humanly accountable journey to God whereas *Dark Night* follows the passive, dark stages of the journey. The demarcation between active and passive is not a simple matter for John as the various stages of the spiritual journey have both active and passive aspects. One moves decisively into passivity only after one's human powers have been exhausted. John offers the image of God providing manna from heaven only after the Israelite's flour had been exhausted.¹¹⁹

Both texts are self-consciously written as spiritually authoritative and as aids to other spiritual authorities. In the preface to *Ascent*, John writes of the spiritual pedagogue's work as guide: "We will discuss all this with divine help: how individuals should behave; what method the confessor should use in dealing with them; signs to recognize this purification of the soul, which we call the dark night; whether it is the purification of the senses or of the spirit."¹²⁰ A key aspect of the role of the pedagogue is epistemic; students do not know their own state and underestimate their need to advance.¹²¹ For John the epistemic is entangled with one's whole person. In this he is in continuity with the ascetic tradition of the early Church. Sam Hole helpfully summarizes that, for John, "The soul's ascent towards the state of union requires the progressive stilling and purification of all the soul's sensory and spiritual

¹¹⁹ John of the Cross, "The Ascent of Mount Carmel," in *John of the Cross: Selected Writings*, ed. Kieran Kavanaugh (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 70.

¹²⁰ John of the Cross, 59.

¹²¹ John of the Cross, 187–90.

appetites and faculties through the ‘dark night of the soul’.”¹²² To know God is to open oneself to be transformed by God. Again, John is in continuity with the tradition but casts the process of transformation in dramatic terms such that one wonders what is left of the person who began the process.

John distinguishes between active meditation and passive contemplation. Meditation is discursive. The soul approaches God primarily through its own powers to project and imagine. As the soul is purified, it becomes open to the possibility of contemplation. Contemplation is the passive reception from God.¹²³ The contemplative is one in a position to accept what God is offering having stilled the distraction of the senses and purified desires to focus on God. As above, the distinction between active and passive is gradual and partly overlapping. John gives detailed instructions to the spiritual pedagogue guiding this transition.¹²⁴ Through the process of ascent, one’s human faculties are seen to be inadequate in ways unknown previously. John charts the process of ascent and the various places human faculties falter and are given over to grace.

As souls advance, John retains his pedagogical voice. The dark way to God may be “*nada, nada, nada*” as he famously writes, yet he speaks concretely of the ascent of the souls that go beyond sensibility. John envisions the role of the spiritual director and the concrete instruction of the spiritual director as central to the development of souls. Though the dark

¹²² Hole, *John of the Cross*, 132.

¹²³ John of the Cross, “The Ascent of Mount Carmel,” 119–20.

¹²⁴ Hole describes the distinction between meditation and contemplation as well as the role of the director in navigating this transition in some detail. See: Hole, *John of the Cross*, 144–45; John of the Cross, “The Ascent of Mount Carmel,” 113–20.

night of the soul is “a sheer grace”¹²⁵, the director discerns concrete ways to help the student cooperate with such grace. John is not a quietist in that his instruction is concrete and directive in its self-subversion.¹²⁶ John, like Ignatius Loyola who will be discussed in chapter six, sits uneasily between the medieval and modern worlds.

1.4 Spiritual Pedagogy and Generating New Language

Though bound in tradition, spiritual pedagogy shows an ongoing creative process within tradition. New ways of living and new ways of speaking of and through the Gospel emerge. One can find signs of evolving spiritual authority even in forms of spiritual life that are self-consciously stable and historically grounded, such as those following the *Rule of St. Benedict*, which itself draws from St. John Cassian discussed above.¹²⁷ Spiritual pedagogy in its ongoing negotiation between the particular and the transcendent is constantly in need of re-expression and renewal. Some movements, though remaining self-consciously within the tradition, are more clearly novel. In the high Middle Ages, the mendicant orders represented a new form of spiritual authority. The itinerant and more radically poor mendicants marked a significant departure from previous religious rules of life of the monasteries.

The rise of this new authority is brought into particular stark relief in the figure of St. Francis of Assisi and his contemporary, Pope Innocent III. Innocent was at the pinnacle of papal political authority. Yet his approval of Francis and his order may be his most lasting

¹²⁵ The original Spanish verse is “*Oh dichosa ventura*” and could also be translated as “happy chance” or “happy adventure.” John of the Cross, “The Dark Night of the Soul,” in *John of the Cross: Selected Writings*, ed. Kieran Kavanaugh (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 188.

¹²⁶ “We can gather from what has been said that to be prepared for this divine union the intellect must be cleansed and emptied of everything related to sense, divested and liberated of everything clearly intelligible, inwardly pacified and silenced, and supported by faith alone, which is the only proximate and proportionate means to union with God.” John of the Cross, “The Ascent of Mount Carmel,” 101.

¹²⁷ Rowan Williams helpfully observes that great spiritual pedagogues such as Benedict creating new ways of speaking of God for their followers. Rowan Williams, *The Way of St Benedict* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), 47.

contribution. Francis's authority is characterized by extreme poverty, humility, attunement to nature and devotion to Christ crucified. Though all elements of the tradition, Francis found a new synthesis, a new way of presenting mystery through a spirituality that was "foolishness" in its extremity. Lewis Ayres argues that the extremity of Francis's life and teaching, his foolishness, is itself a form of discernment.¹²⁸ To be foolish is to lack sense, at least according to societal norms.

Pope Francis self-consciously looks back to the spiritual authority of Francis in his own exercise of religious authority both in the choice of his papal name, Francis, and in his most influential writings on the environment.¹²⁹ St. Francis discerned of the presence of God in creation: "*Laudato si' mi' signore per...* (Praise to you, my Lord, through)."¹³⁰ Francis seems to have taken this praise of God through creation literally through his preaching to the animals.¹³¹ The ability to discern God's presence in brother wolf or in the leader of an opposing faith and an opposing army was a discerned foolishness that continues to resonate while defying sensemaking.

Giotto di Bondone, the late gothic painter, offers a provocative portrayal of Francis and Innocent based upon a dream by Innocent as retold by Bonaventure, Francis's official

¹²⁸ "Foolishness becomes discernment when Francis asks the questions inspired by the Spirit; discernment is as much the knowledge of which questions to ask, the knowledge of which questions are asked in us by Christ, as it is the ability to discern answers. The freedom given by 'foolishness' is the lack of self-concern and self-awareness necessary to feel God." Lewis Ayres, "Francis and the Dark Night of Creation: A Meditation on Foolishness and Discernment in St Francis of Assisi," *New Blackfriars* 71, no. 838 (1990): 250.

¹²⁹ Pope Francis, "Laudato Si'" (Vatican, 2015), para. 10.

¹³⁰ Adolfo Padovan, ed., *I Fioretti di San Francesco e Il cantico del sole con una introduzione di Adolfo Padovan* (Milan: U. Hoepli, 1907), 324.

¹³¹ For biographical details on Francis and animals, see: Edward Allworthy Armstrong, *Saint Francis: Nature Mystic: The Derivation and Significance of the Nature Stories in the Franciscan Legend* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973).

biographer.¹³² The pope was said to have dreamt of his cathedral church, the Lateran Basilica, falling into ruin. In the dream, Francis holds up the great cathedral preventing its collapse. Giotto depicts a passive, sleeping Pope Innocent in full regalia flanked by equally passive advisors. Francis in his simple habit holds up a cathedral that is badly listing to one side. Though it is the pope who possesses the authority of office, the simple Francis has an authority the gloriously clad but somnolent pope lacks. The pope's dream directed him to hold up the authority of Francis and his spiritual teachings in a way that has marked the church since.

The creation of new spiritual language is ongoing. One can point to various spiritual pedagogues in modernity generating new spiritual language such as Theresa of Lisieux, Oscar Romero, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Simone Weil, or Dorothy Day. For the reasons discussed above, spiritual authority is less readily identified and accepted in modernity than in earlier periods. More modern examples of spiritual pedagogy will almost inevitably be more controversial. The authority of the spiritual pedagogue might be clear to contemporary followers but, to interested third parties, such a role may be opaque or only clarified over long periods of time. Raimond Gaita's example of a nun visiting the psychiatric ward is illustrative. During Gaita's time working as on the ward, he recounts a nun visiting and recalls how her approach to patients contrasts with the others working in the ward.

[E]verything in her demeanour towards [the patients]—the way she spoke to them, her facial expressions, the inflexions of her body—contrasted with and showed up the behaviour of those noble psychiatrists. She showed that they were, despite their best efforts, condescending, as I too had been. She thereby

¹³² See: Saint Bonaventure, *Seraphici doctoris S. Bonaventurae Legendae duae de vita S. Francisci seraphici*, Nova impressio. (Ad Claras Aquas: Ex typographia eiusdem Collegii, 1923); Regis John Armstrong, "The Spiritual Theology of the 'Legenda Major' of Saint Bonaventure." (Ph.D., United States -- New York, Fordham University, 1978), <https://search.proquest.com/docview/288130394/citation/CC7CFDD6C87E48F2PQ/1>; Julian Gardner, *Giotto and His Publics* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2011), 31–37.

revealed that even such patients were, as the psychiatrists and I had sincerely and generously professed, the equals of those who wanted to help them; but she also revealed that in our hearts we did not believe this.¹³³

The nun's "vivacity" when speaking to patients showed an openness and love towards the patients which struck Gaita years later. The nun's comportment contrasted with the still noble but unintentionally condescending work of the other care givers. Gaita is not a religious man, and the religious force of the nun is a source of ambiguity for him. He appeals to and later regrets the invocation of "mystery" language to describe her.¹³⁴ Mystery language is too religiously freighted for him.¹³⁵ As Gaita notes for himself and no doubt many others: "But mystery is a word with much baggage, most of which I prefer not to carry."¹³⁶ Minimally, the nun is an ethical teacher for Gaita, though the other care givers are also ethically excellent. Gaita is similarly struck by Mother Teresa, who is widely lauded as a spiritual teacher.¹³⁷ Gaita draws a distinction similar to that found in the tradition explored above, asceticism and good works are not ends in themselves: "The nature of Mother Teresa's compassion is a matter for wonder, but the wonder is not directed at her achievements."¹³⁸ Mother Teresa's activities, her good works and asceticism taught a new way of being: "The salient point is that

¹³³ Raimond Gaita, *A Common Humanity: Thinking about Love and Truth and Justice* (London: Routledge, 2000), 18–19.

¹³⁴ Raimond Gaita, *Good and Evil: An Absolute Conception*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2004), xxx.

¹³⁵ Mark Wynn and Stephen Mulhall offer recent, extended treatments of Gaita's nun example. Both note Gaita's resistance to religious and mystery language. Wynn takes the nun as an example of an infused moral virtue, albeit one which Gaita would likely resist. Mark R. Wynn, *Spiritual Traditions and the Virtues: Living Between Heaven and Earth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 99–114, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198862949.001.0001>; Mulhall, *The Ascetic Ideal*, 49–68.

¹³⁶ Gaita, *Good and Evil*, xxxi.

¹³⁷ Muggeridge helped popularize Mother Teresa's example and teaching to a wide audience. Hitchens offered a forceful dissenting view of Mother Teresa's qualities. Malcolm Muggeridge, *Something Beautiful for God*, Reprint edition (New York: HarperOne, 2003); Christopher Hitchens, *The Missionary Position: Mother Theresa in Theory and Practice* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2012).

¹³⁸ Gaita, *Good and Evil*, 204.

her love revealed – taught – what it is to be a human being because of the light it threw on the afflicted.”¹³⁹ In the language of the spiritual pedagogy tradition, she discerned the will of God who loves the afflicted.

The concept of spiritual pedagogy as an exemplar is not one that he can comfortably hold. In this, Gaita is in good company. Dorothy Day, almost certainly a spiritual teacher herself, frequently disclaimed being called a saint, the ultimate rank of spiritual pedagogue. She complains: “I don’t want to be dismissed that easily.”¹⁴⁰ Even as a spiritual pedagogue, she recognizes how fraught the category is in modern discourse. Gaita’s embrace of and resistance to spiritual pedagogues highlights the difficulty of spiritual pedagogy today. The preference not to carry the weight of history and metaphysics often borne by mystery language is strong. Yet spiritual pedagogy is stewarding or carrying mysteries. Through carrying mysteries, the spiritual pedagogue produces new language and shows new ways of seeing the world.

1.5 Provisional Characteristics of Spiritual Authority

Having briefly described spiritual pedagogy in various points in the tradition, I will articulate three interrelated characteristics of spiritual pedagogy. I am self-consciously avoiding calling this a definition because spiritual pedagogy is marked by a particular interaction between student, teacher, and God. To abstract a definition from this context is to mischaracterize spiritual pedagogy. Further, if I am correct in characterizing spiritual

¹³⁹ Gaita, 205.

¹⁴⁰ This quotation is oft repeated, but the provenance is uncertain, though her desire to remain politically relevant is certainly in keeping with Day’s other writings. Whether or not she actually uttered this phrase, the sentiment seems to represent her thinking.

pedagogy as riddling, such riddling cannot be sharply defined but remains provisional. With this qualification in place, the three characteristics are as follows:

First, like other legitimate authority, the goal is to improve the spiritual condition of those under their authority. This includes belief and praxis. Insofar as one can speak of improvement, one can also speak of hierarchy or spiritual ascent. The operative metaphor for improvement shifts over time though images of both depth and ascent are common in expressing the goal of spiritual pedagogy. The analogy of ascent is not descriptive of spiritual experience but prescriptive of a necessary path to or a limitation on God.

Second, spiritual authority is directed to and ultimately validated by what is in principle mysterious, except through revelation and remains a riddle to human intelligence even when revealed because one knows the answer but not how the answer functions. The spiritual pedagogue reaches for analogy by necessity rather than choice. While spiritual pedagogues provide concrete direction, their justifications are never sufficient but self-subverting. The spiritual authority typically has a set of skills or virtues that also confer a human authority, but these skills are insufficient *in se* to justify spiritual authority.

Third, spiritual authority teaches an approach to mystery both abstractly and by example. The spiritual pedagogue prudently shapes her action and speech around what she knows cannot finally be said because the object of spiritual teaching is both within and beyond the world, both within and beyond human life, language of beyond being itself nonsensical.

This chapter has attempted to offer a brief history of spiritual pedagogy and the challenges to spiritual pedagogy. Across a wide swath of history, the central tension of authoritative spiritual pedagogy remains. Human beings make claims about what is in

principle mysterious, and these claims are, in many cases, concretely actionable. Having set out the problem both abstractly and historically, in the next several chapters I will develop and defend a riddling Grammatical Thomism as a more adequate approach, though not a solution, to spiritual pedagogy.

2.0 Grammatical Thomism Among the Thomisms

In the previous chapter, I described the characteristics of a spiritual pedagogue. This chapter introduces Grammatical Thomism as a theoretical approach to spiritual pedagogy. Thomas Aquinas deserves to be numbered among spiritual pedagogues and self-consciously sets himself in continuity with the spiritual pedagogy tradition, especially the scriptures, Augustine, and Dionysius. It is testament to the riches of his thought that a wide variety of Thomisms have arisen over the centuries—the Grammatical Thomism I espouse is one in a wide and diverse tradition. I argue that Grammatical Thomism is particularly well-suited to highlighting and clarifying the pedagogical aspects of Thomas’s thought.

As is often the case with reappropriations of thinkers, the version of the thinker emerges transposed into a new time with a new set of concerns. In the case of Thomas, two major revivals of this thought, the second scholasticism and Leonine revival, held up Thomas as a speculative philosophical thinker. Thomas undoubtedly ranks in the first order of thinkers in both philosophy and theology, but his theology and philosophy were at the service of his spiritual teaching as a member of the newly established Dominican order forming other members of the order. His teaching primarily took the form of scriptural commentary. Jean-Pierre Torrell, OP rightly argues that Thomas Aquinas is first and foremost a “spiritual master” whose devotion to his work as a spiritual pedagogue generated his theological and

philosophical work as well as popular sermons and hymns.¹⁴¹ Thomas easily fulfills the three characteristics for spiritual pedagogy articulated in the last chapter.

Thomas does not distinguish spirituality from theology or philosophy. Thomas's life with God, his work teaching others to draw closer to God, and his scholarly output were of a piece. In Thomas's case, drawing others towards God meant eschewing as much notoriety as possible. When compared to contemporaries such as St. Bonaventure, Thomas says little about himself. Denys Turner helpfully observes: "The secret of Thomas's holiness is hard to see not because it is hidden somewhere, but because it is everywhere obvious in the Dominican theologian, so that were you to look for it here rather than there, the holiness in one place, the theology in another, you would miss both. The holiness of Thomas is a theologian's holiness, the holy teacher invisible otherwise than in the holy teaching itself."¹⁴² The same could be said of his philosophical insights which are themselves deeply intertwined with his theology.

Thomas carefully, and controversially, reflected on the status of his own speaking about God. Thomas guards what had been revealed before in the scriptures and in the tradition of the Church, seeking concord among sources whenever possible. He finds the promise of full understanding only in the eschaton when what is held by faith will be fully known and accomplished by being made blessed (ST II-II.2.5).¹⁴³ He was unable to adequately predicate

¹⁴¹ Within the French speaking scholarship particularly, there have been efforts to place Thomas's philosophical and theological work within his wider mystical and spiritual project. See, for example: Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas, Volume 2: Spiritual Master*, trans. Robert Royal (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2003); Marie-Dominique Chenu, *Aquinas and His Role in Theology* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2002).

¹⁴² Denys Turner, *Thomas Aquinas: A Portrait* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 270.

¹⁴³ Torrell helpfully exegetes Thomas's distinction between the eschatological dimension of divine science premised on faith and other types of sciences. Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas, Volume 2*, 13–16.

of God, yet Thomas went on speaking and writing (ST I.12). This is fundamentally the position of the spiritual pedagogue, and Thomas is more self-conscious of this position than most. His philosophical sensitivity, awakened in part by his reading of Aristotle on the nature of sciences, enhanced this self-consciousness in ways that served his spiritual pedagogy.¹⁴⁴

This chapter has a twofold goal. The first is to locate the grammatical reading of Thomas among other Thomisms beginning with a brief historical sketch. The second is to argue that, assuming a Wittgensteinian approach is as philosophically fruitful in the twenty-first century as an Aristotelian approach was in the thirteenth, Grammatical Thomism is a legitimate inheritor of the Thomist tradition and particularly the Thomist tradition as an inextricably spiritual and intellectual tradition. Grammatical Thomism is a loose affinity of thinkers more than a self-conscious project in either theology or philosophy of religion. The critique against or genius of Grammatical Thomism, depending on your position, is its reading of Thomas through and some friendly amendments by Wittgenstein that respect Thomas as a spiritual pedagogue. For some Thomists, articulating Thomas systematically through another philosopher is no Thomism at all; for Wittgensteinian Thomists, the greatest respect to the master is friendly amendment.

Thomas Aquinas and his teacher Albert critically incorporated Aristotle into a largely Neo-Platonic received philosophical and theological framework. The ground for such incorporation was principally the philosophical fruitfulness of Aristotle's work. The same criterion applies to the Grammatical Thomist incorporation of Wittgenstein's thought into a Thomistic framework, namely the philosophical fruitfulness of Wittgenstein's thought. As

¹⁴⁴ This influence is most clearly seen in Thomas's commentary on Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics* and his discussion of the nature of theology as a science in the *Summa Theologiae* (ST I.1).

will be discussed below, though other analytic Thomists find similarities between Wittgenstein and Thomas's thought, Grammatical Thomists go beyond this by making friendly amendments to Thomas using Wittgenstein. Chapters three, four, and five make a case for a Wittgensteinian approach to religious language before incorporating that approach to Thomas in chapter six.

2.1 The Emergence of Thomism: Aristotelian Controversies to Modernism

On 7 March 1277, 219 theses including several held by Thomas Aquinas, who died 7 March 1274, were condemned in Paris by the bishop Étienne Tempier. Not to be outdone by what was happening in France, on March 18 of the same year, theses of Thomas were condemned in Oxford by Thomas's Dominican confrere Archbishop Robert Kilwardby.¹⁴⁵ The Oxford declaration condemned Aristotelian unicity of substantial forms, a position Thomas held and not a position condemned in Paris.¹⁴⁶ This controversy highlights Thomas's great contributions to philosophical theology; Thomas synthesized Aristotle into his philosophy and theology. The precise history of the 1277 condemnations is complex and disputed. 1277 is one of a series of interventions reflecting a concern about the influx of philosophical texts from the middle east written by non-Christian authors, both Greek and Islamic. Through his teacher Albert the Great, Thomas takes up Aristotle as "the philosopher" because Aristotle provided tools to seek the truth.¹⁴⁷ As Brian Davies, OP puts it, "Aristotle

¹⁴⁵ Gerald McCool, *Neo-Thomists* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1994), 21, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/oxford/detail.action?docID=3017006>; L. W. B. Brockliss, *The University of Oxford: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 95–103; Isabel Iribarren, "'Responsio Secundum Thomam' and the Search for an Early Thomistic School," *Vivarium* 39, no. 2 (2001): 255–96, <https://doi.org/10.1163/156853401760017196>.

¹⁴⁶ D. A. Callus, *The Condemnation of St Thomas at Oxford*, Aquinas Paper; No. 5 (Oxford: Blackfriars Publications, 1946).

¹⁴⁷ Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Aquinas's Summa: Background, Structure, and Reception*, trans. Benedict M. Guevin (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 12.

became for [Thomas] a paradigm of sound reasoning.”¹⁴⁸ In Thomas’s telling, Aristotle’s philosophy provides a philosophical foundation for the Christian faith that compliments and enhances the tradition.¹⁴⁹ Such novelty provoked a forceful response. Thomas’s contemporary Bonaventure and his fellow Franciscans led the charge, seeing in Thomas’s use of Aristotle a break from the theological tradition coming from Augustine and from sound Platonic philosophy.¹⁵⁰ Thomas sees himself working by way of friendly amendment that affirms a broader continuity of the tradition. Throughout his work, Thomas strives whenever possible to synthesize seemingly conflicting authorities.¹⁵¹

The story of the condemnation of 1277 raises the question, who counts as a proper Thomist? One could answer the question narrowly, looking at the precise historical questions involved in the condemnation, but it cannot remain an historical question. Even those of us who are devoted to Thomas’s original texts do not live in the thirteenth century. Far removed from his context, contemporary scholars have difficulty inhabiting the novelty and vitality of newly gained classical insights arriving from the great scholars of the middle east in Thomas’s time. One cannot easily affirm Thomas’s position as Thomas did.

¹⁴⁸ Brian Davies, *The Thought of Thomas Aquinas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 2.

¹⁴⁹ Thomas occasionally expressed personal sympathy for Aristotle given his keen philosophical acumen but lack of the benefits of revelation. For example, in the *Summa Contra Gentiles* Aristotle is one of the “great minds [who] suffered from being so straitened on every side” (SCG III.48). His errors, in this case on ultimate happiness, are partly attributable to the misfortune of his context. For more on the relationship of Thomas and Aristotle, see: Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas, Volume 1: The Person and His Work*, trans. Robert Royal (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 236–39.

¹⁵⁰ McCool, *Neo-Thomists*, 17.

¹⁵¹ “Pure and infinite in God, the act of existence was limited in creatures by its correlative potential principle, the finite essence of each created participant. Once Aristotle’s metaphysics of matter and form had been transformed into Thomas’s participation metaphysics of essence and existence, it could expand its horizon to include the personal provident God whom Christians believed to be the world’s creator; and it could do justice to the Platonic participation metaphysics of Augustine and Pseudo-Dionysius without recourse to the un-Aristotelian expedients of spiritual matter and a plurality of substantial forms.” McCool, 17–18.

Unless one holds that Thomas is sufficiently perennial that his articulation stands without further need of cultural, philosophical, or theological translation, to approach Thomas Aquinas as a theologian or philosopher and not strictly as an historian is to become some kind of Thomist adapting the original arguments.¹⁵² Navigating the terrain between revisionism and historicism is not easily done. Given the history of the appropriation of Thomas, the problem is particularly vexing for Thomas with self-associating Thomists holding a wide variety of divergent opinions.¹⁵³ On the widest and most plural definition, a Thomist might be someone strongly influenced by Thomas, though this would say little as to the person's substantial commitments. On the other side is Romanus Cessario, OP, who I take as representative of a more conservative school of interpretation. Cessario proposes a narrow definition of Thomism that provides grounds for separating the real Thomists from the false ones:

Those who practice Thomism in the strict sense of the term observe a pristine adherence to the central principles of the philosophy and theology that Thomas Aquinas pioneered in the thirteenth century. This means that they eschew large-scale importations from other conceptual systems, while at the same time they aim in their own works to imitate Aquinas's appreciation for the rationality of the tradition.¹⁵⁴

What constitutes "pristine adherence" is difficult to specify. For example, self-associating Thomists seldom adopt the question format.¹⁵⁵ Most modern Thomists do not spend time

¹⁵² John Carlson offers of recent articulation of Thomas and his tradition as the perennial tradition of Christian philosophy. See: John W. Carlson, *Words of Wisdom: A Philosophical Dictionary for the Perennial Tradition*, Ebook Central (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012), <https://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/login?url=http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/oxford/detail.action?docID=3441087>.

¹⁵³ Prouvost emphasizes the diversity and discontinuity of Thomisms, though this is the minority report in the relevant scholarship. See: G ry Prouvost, *Thomas d'Aquin et les thomismes: essai sur l'histoire des thomismes*, Cogitatio fidei. 195 (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1996).

¹⁵⁴ Romanus Cessario, *A Short History of Thomism* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 19, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/oxford/detail.action?docID=3134746>.

¹⁵⁵ McCool, *Neo-Thomists*, 9.

commenting on scriptures nor writing hymnody. Surely commentary on sacred scriptures, as Thomas's chief occupation, was a "central principle" of his work. Pristine adherence cannot be mere imitation, both because Thomas is a tough fellow to imitate and because he would almost certainly act differently if he were alive now.

The danger with pristine adherence is that such a standard would cast Thomas from the traditions in which he locates himself. In taking up Aristotelian methods, Thomas makes a large-scale importation into the Augustinian theological tradition. His theology is brought under suspicion on these grounds. Yet it is precisely his appreciation and defense of the rationality of the tradition that prompts him to explore new systematic elements.

Thomisms in general and Grammatical Thomism in particular should be judged by the same standard by which Thomas held himself to maintain the Augustinian tradition. Therefore, *pace* Cessario, I propose two criteria. First, the Thomist engages the thought of Thomas deeply and positively while allowing for friendly amendments. Second, the importation of new conceptual systems to supplement Thomas is permissible when confronting challenges Thomas did not face or employing tools he could not access. On this interpretation, Thomisms can sometimes propose significant revision of Thomas to maintain the integrity of the intellectual project as a matter of current research rather than historical reconstruction. Preserving the rationality of tradition calls for continual engagement with contemporary learning.

Association with Thomas is not merely an intellectual question but a social one. It has been Thomas's fate to become a central figure in various schools over the course of centuries with a rich commentarial tradition emerging, especially among his fellow Dominicans in the years after his death. After his canonization, he became a reference not only for scholarship

but also spirituality and devotion. Often, Thomas would be set against figures living many years after his death, notably Franciscans such as John Duns Scotus. Later, Thomas became a central figure in the second scholasticism and was popularized by the newly formed Society of Jesus across its network of schools and colleges. Thomas loomed large over the Council of Trent and, thus, became a partisan in the Counter-reformation.

Thomas's social function as the standard-bearing figure of Roman Catholic thought and, to some extent, spirituality means being a Thomist is a claim to legitimacy beyond the particularities of any of Thomas's arguments. For much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to be a Roman Catholic meant some allegiance to Thomas as he became the preeminent Catholic thinker. To be a Thomist was to be a member of the right team.¹⁵⁶ The designation 'Thomist' is not only a description of a scholarly project but, also, a matter of group loyalty and ecclesial position.

The history of Thomism from early debates to the second scholasticism to modernity fills many volumes. On the way to Wittgensteinian Thomism, I would like to pick up the story in the late nineteenth century, when a Thomistic revival was popularized if not initiated by Pope Leo XIII's 1879 *Aeterni Patris* on the "restoration of Christian Philosophy." The same year as the encyclical, the *Editio Leonina* of the complete works of Aquinas was published, which included Thomas Cardinal Cajetan's commentary in its edition of the *Summa Theologiae*. Cajetan was a prominent Dominican in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries who wrote various influential commentaries on Thomas. The Leonine edition gave

¹⁵⁶ For example, Jesse Russell traces Thomism as an identity marker for Catholic Neoconservatism. By contrast, Herbert McCabe develops his Thomism in a Marxist direction. Jesse Russell, "'Whig Thomism' and the Making of the Catholic Neoconservative Movement," *Politics and Religion* 14, no. 2 (June 2021): 294–315, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S175504832000019X>.

Cajetan a sort of papal imprimatur and raised the status of his theory of analogy. This encyclical self-consciously continued the vision of the First Vatican Council's 1870 declaration *Dei Filius*, which has been taken to hold that the existence of God is provable by rational means. The full story is more nuanced and beyond the present scope. The popular reception that the council declared God provable by rational means is relevant, the implication being that one could rationally debate and win over agnostic and atheist thinkers by reason alone, at least in theory. The encyclical followed the siege mentality of the Council and recently stateless Papacy after the unification of Italy. It characterized the intellectual life of its day as fundamentally corrupted by misguided "modernist" philosophy in the shadow of Descartes and others who dismantled the scholastic synthesis. This modernism manifests itself in the corruption of intellectual, political, and even personal life. Thomas Aquinas, *qua* philosopher, was held as a model of resistance to the intellectual trends of the day. Being a Thomist was to be part of this resistance. Treating Thomas primarily as a philosopher rather than a theologian meant that his thought could be used to dialogue with and more commonly debate against various "modernist" trends. Philosophy was the vanguard in the defense of theology and, ultimately, faith. Pope Leo writes:

[C]learly distinguishing, as is fitting, reason from faith, while happily associating the one with the other, [Thomas] both preserved the rights and had regard for the dignity of each; so much so, indeed, that reason, borne on the wings of Thomas to its human height, can scarcely rise higher, while faith could scarcely expect more or stronger aids from reason than those which she has already obtained through Thomas.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁷ Leo XIII, "Aeterni Patris," 1879, para. 18.

Leo's successors as Pope further institutionalized the teaching of Thomas and the theses proper to Thomism.¹⁵⁸ In the wake of the Second Vatican Council and the demise of the manualist readings, Thomist thought lost its former dominance but remains central in Roman Catholic theology particularly. Modern Thomism still lives in the shadow of Pope Leo, partially through trying so hard to get out from underneath the shadow. This colors the ongoing debate whether Thomas is a model of resistance to a hostile intellectual world or the model of an accommodating theologian and philosopher ready to incorporate the best of the new with the old.

2.2 Taxonomy of Thomisms

There are various, and sometimes mutually incompatible, taxonomies of twentieth and twenty-first century Thomism. In few of them is Wittgensteinian or Grammatical Thomism considered as mainstream. On the occasion of his Aquinas Medal from the American Catholic Philosophical Association—traditionally a center of Thomist thought—David Burrell, CSC, a Grammatical Thomist, if there ever was one, reflects on his own outsider status among the Thomists—not without a touch of irony and a gentle critique of the conservatism of many Thomists.¹⁵⁹ Burrell notes how two surveys of contemporary Thomism, Fergus Kerr, OP's influential *After Aquinas* and Brian Shanley, OP's *The Thomist Tradition* offer only the briefest of treatments of his work. In Shanley's book, there is a single line on Burrell's argument that divine simplicity is a formal feature of God language: in Kerr's, half a page

¹⁵⁸ For example, the 1917 code of Canon Law recommended the teaching of Thomas Aquinas according to 24 approved theses. Catholic Church, *Codex iuris canonici Pii X pontificis maximi iussu digestus, Benedicti papae XV auctoritate promulgatus* (Romae: Typis PolyglottisVaticanis, 1919), para. 1366.

¹⁵⁹ David B. Burrell, "Postmodern Aquinas: With Attention to Aquinas's Relation to Scotus: Language or Logic?," *Proceedings of the ACPA* 82 (2009): 27–30.

under the heading of “Non-standard Interpretations.”¹⁶⁰ In another article, Kerr notes that, though Wittgenstein has enjoyed some influence in philosophy of religion, his influence in theology has been minimal, especially when compared to the enormous influence of Heidegger.¹⁶¹ Subsequent to Burrell’s speech, in response to Stephen Mulhall’s *The Great Riddle*, Kerr offers a more substantive but hardly complimentary treatment of Grammatical Thomism.¹⁶²

In defense of his approach, Burrell writes, “an Aquinas fruitful for us today would better be dubbed ‘postmodern.’ To justify that contention, we may begin by reminding ourselves of a primary tenet of the ‘postmodern’ reaction to ‘modernist’ goals: hermeneutics reigns, so key figures must be read in their context so as to be assimilated to ours. And when that context involves faith, we need to learn how to enter into it, rather than simply ‘bracket’ it.”¹⁶³ Burrell is clearly on the side of an adaptive reading of Thomas. Burrell’s Thomism softens the division of philosophy and theology and opens itself to the modern world and, in his later work, Islam and Judaism.

¹⁶⁰ Subsequent to Burrell’s speech, Bonino mentions Burrell as drawing on Pseudo-Dionysian aspects of Thomas’s thought as well as Thomas’s relationship to Jewish and Muslim thought—his development of Grammatical Thomism goes unremarked. Anscombe, Geach, and Kenny are the Wittgensteinian Thomists in this reading, though not Grammatical Thomists as such. Fergus Kerr, *After Aquinas: Versions of Thomism* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 201; Brian J. Shanley, *The Thomist Tradition* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 2002), 188; Serge-Thomas Bonino, “Thomism From 1962–2012,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Catholic Theology*, ed. Lewis Ayres and Medi Ann Volpe (Oxford University Press, 2019), 670–82, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199566273.013.60>.

¹⁶¹ Fergus Kerr, “The Reception of Wittgenstein’s Philosophy by Theologians,” in *Religion and Wittgenstein’s Legacy*, ed. D. Z. Phillips and Mario Von der Ruhr (Aldershot, Hants, England: Ashgate, 2005).

¹⁶² Kerr is kinder towards the Grammatical Thomist project in his review of Francesca Murphy’s broadly Balthasarian critique of Grammatical Thomism. Fergus Kerr, “Comment: Grammatical Thomism?,” *New Blackfriars* 97, no. 1071 (September 1, 2016): 527–28, <https://doi.org/10.1111/nbfr.12227>; Fergus Kerr, “God Is Not a Story: Realism Revisited by Francesca Aran Murphy,” *New Blackfriars* 89, no. 1022 (2008): 488–90, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.2008.00231_1.x.

¹⁶³ Burrell, “Postmodern Aquinas: With Attention to Aquinas’s Relation to Scotus: Language or Logic?,” 28.

Two years prior to Burrell's Aquinas medal acceptance speech, in his own speech accepting that same honor, Anthony Kenny gives a prominent place to Wittgensteinian inspired Thomism in the history of Thomism, highlighting Herbert McCabe, OP though not Burrell. Kenny proposed a rough but helpful fourfold distinction of late twentieth century Thomism that seems to apply to twenty-first century Thomism as well.¹⁶⁴ Each of the categories exhibits considerable internal diversity. Given the complexity of the schools of Thomism, no taxonomy is definitive, and one can draw the lines in various ways.¹⁶⁵ Kenny's is better than most, though Grammatical Thomism does not sit comfortably in any of the major schools of Thomistic interpretation. Despite this, exploring the main schools of Thomism helps locate Grammatical Thomism's various influences across Thomist thought.

2.2.1 Neo-Scholastic Continuity

The first category explored by Kenny is conservative Thomism in the Neo-Scholastics continuing in the model of Etienne Gilson and Jacques Maritain. Kenny points in particular to Ralph McInerny's defense of traditional natural theology and natural law as an exemplar of this Thomism, though McInerny is hardly an unreconstructed manualist. Both Gilson and Maritain, though conservative in retrospect, attempted to unburden Thomism from the

¹⁶⁴ Kenny publishes a similar though more detailed account of the various schools of Thomism the following year. He offers a briefer but substantial similar account in his foreword to Herbert McCabe's *On Aquinas*. He omits Transcendental Thomism in an earlier TLS piece. Anthony Kenny, "Aquinas Medalist's Address," *Proceedings of the ACPA* 80 (2007): 23–27; Anthony Kenny, "Thomas and Thomism," in *From Empedocles to Wittgenstein: Historical Essays in Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/oxford/detail.action?docID=415325>; Herbert McCabe, *On Aquinas*, ed. Brian Davies (London: Continuum, 2008), vii–ix; Anthony Kenny, "Aquinas and the Appearances of Bread," *The Times Literary Supplement*, October 5, 2001, The Times Literary Supplement Historical Archive.

¹⁶⁵ The distinction between historicist and revisionist is not a clean one. Some will argue both that Thomas, when properly understood, has a broadly tenable philosophy while still allowing for some updates. For example, John O'Callaghan argues that Thomas is a type of representationalist that does not fall into Cartesian traps yet also does not require a linguistic revision after Wittgenstein to be tenable. John O'Callaghan, *Thomist Realism and the Linguistic Turn: Toward a More Perfect Form of Existence* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003).

manualism of the Thomistic revival initiated by Leo XIII in his 1879 *Aeterni Patris* on the “restoration of Christian Philosophy” discussed above.¹⁶⁶ Gilson and Maritain offered more historically sensitive and philosophically rigorous approaches to the texts of Thomas. Gilson and Maritain both took Thomas to be the solution to many of the ills of modern philosophy. Gilson and Maritain disagreed with precisely how engaged a Thomist should be with contemporary philosophical currents¹⁶⁷, though both resisted a mixing of Thomism with other systems of thought. As Gilson put it: “Whoever sticks a finger into the machinery of the Cartesian method must expect to be dragged along its whole course.”¹⁶⁸ Francesca Murphy quotes Gilson with approval in her arguments against Grammatical and Transcendental Thomism.¹⁶⁹ To incorporate modern influences into Thomas, including Wittgenstein, is to be processed by the Cartesian machine. Such machinations cannot cope with the reality of God and so reduce God to a “story”. Any philosophy or theology seeking an accommodation with Descartes cannot, on this reading, be Thomism.

Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, OP is arguably the most influential Roman interpreter of Thomas guarding against mixing Thomas with other systems. One of his great intellectual

¹⁶⁶ John Haldane provocatively characterizes this pre-Vatican II scholasticism as “Cartesian Scholasticism” insofar as it aims towards a Cartesian standard of certainty, while rejecting Descartes himself. *Aeterni Patris* self-consciously continued the vision of the First Vatican Council’s 1870 declaration *Dei Filius*, which argued that the existence of God is provable by rational means. For a history of post-*Aeterni Patris* Thomism, see: Victor B. Brezik, ed., *One Hundred Years of Thomism: Aeterni Patris and Afterwards, a Symposium* (Houston: Center for Thomistic Studies, University of St Thomas, 1981); John Haldane, *Faithful Reason: Essays Catholic and Philosophical* (London: Routledge, 2004), 69.

¹⁶⁷ Readings of the compatibility of Gilson and Maritain vary. Maritain’s *Degrees of Knowledge* exhibits a greater openness to Transcendental readings of Thomas than Gilson’s cautious reading. See: Stephen Chamberlain, “The Dispute between Gilson and Maritain over Thomist Realism,” *Studia Gilsoniana* 6, no. 2 (2017): 177–95; Etienne Gilson, *Thomist Realism and the Critique of Knowledge* (Ignatius Press, 2012); Etienne Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994); Jacques Maritain, *Distinguish to Unite, or, The Degrees of Knowledge*, Maritain, Jacques, 1882-1973. Works. English. 1995 ; v. 7 (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995).

¹⁶⁸ Gilson, *Thomist Realism and the Critique of Knowledge*, 48.

¹⁶⁹ Francesca Aran Murphy, *God Is Not a Story: Realism Revisited* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 21.

tasks was to show how other Christian thinkers, notably St. John of the Cross agreed with Thomas and thus to defuse the mystical challenge to systematics. Garrigou-Lagrange was an opponent of his erstwhile doctoral student Marie-Dominique Chenu, OP, who was one of the leading French Thomists. Garrigou-Lagrange continues to exercise an influence, notably on Romanus Cassiaro discussed above. Self-consciously conservative Thomism continues to have a strong institutional presence.¹⁷⁰

The lines of continuity in traditional Thomism vary between interpreters. Natural law is often a centerpiece of such readings. However, some traditional Thomists such as Ralph McInerny challenge other aspects of received Thomism such as a systematic account of the analogy of being, especially the theory of analogy articulated by Cardinal Thomas Cajetan which were central to the project of *Aeterni Patris*.¹⁷¹ Rejecting systematized analogy may be a more historicist reading of Thomas. The literature is divided on this point and some traditional Thomists look more kindly on the second scholasticism and manualist traditions than others.¹⁷² This movement may be characterized by strict adherence to the text and the

¹⁷⁰ Thomas Joseph White, OP the American Rector of the Angelicum university in Rome is perhaps the most prominent contemporary voice of this school. See, for example: Thomas Joseph White, *Wisdom in the Face of Modernity: A Study in Thomistic Natural Theology*, Second edition. (Ave Maria, Florida: Sapientia Press, 2016); Thomas Joseph White, ed., *The Analogy of Being: Invention of the Antichrist or the Wisdom of God?* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2011).

¹⁷¹ McInerny's book on analogy notes David Burrell with particular gratitude, though he does not engage with Burrell's work substantially in the text. Burrell extensively comments on McInerny. Ralph McInerny, *Aquinas and Analogy* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1996), x; David B. Burrell, "From Analogy of 'Being' to the Analogy of Being," *Loneragan Workshop* 17 (2002): 53–66.

¹⁷² Joshua Hochschild argues that Thomas has a consistent theory of analogy. The inconsistencies in his discussion of analogy can be explained by the particular application of analogy in the various discussions across Thomas's work. Hochschild's defense of Cajetan's reading of Thomas is the minority report even among more

avoidance of outside systematic influences. Even within these limits, diversity is inevitable given the difficulty of Thomas's texts.¹⁷³

2.2.2 Radical Orthodox

Second is the Radical Orthodox reading of Thomas associated with John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock.¹⁷⁴ Their reading emphasizes the Augustinian continuity of Thomas's thought rather than the Aristotelian novelty.¹⁷⁵ If their reading is correct, the concerns raised about an excess of Aristotle in Thomas in 1277 would seem to be misguided. According to this reading, Thomas takes the intellect in its natural operation as informed by the light of divine intellect.¹⁷⁶ This reading disputes the separation of faith and reason, arguing that both are "degrees of intensity" of participation in divine truth.¹⁷⁷ The radical orthodox reading is notable for framing the question of truth as an ontological rather than epistemological question. It is certainly true that, as a pre-modern thinker, Thomas lacks a post-Cartesian concern for epistemology. An illuminist reading of Thomas sits uneasily with his attempts to account for how natural reason functions. If natural human knowledge is illuminated by

conservative interpreters. Joshua P. Hochschild, "Proportionality and Divine Naming: Did St. Thomas Change His Mind about Analogy?," *The Thomist: A Speculative Quarterly Review* 77, no. 4 (2013): 531–58, <https://doi.org/10.1353/tho.2013.0001>; Joshua P. Hochschild, "Aquinas's Two Concepts of Analogy and a Complex Semantics for Naming the Simple God," *The Thomist: A Speculative Quarterly Review* 83, no. 2 (2019): 155–84, <https://doi.org/10.1353/tho.2019.0013>; Joshua P. Hochschild, *The Semantics of Analogy: Rereading Cajetan's De Nominum Analogia* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010); Joshua P. Hochschild, "The Semantics of Analogy According to Thomas de Vio Cajetan's 'De Nominum Analogia'" (University of Notre Dame, 2001), <http://search.proquest.com/docview/304716655/?pq-origsite=primo>.

¹⁷³ To take one of the most vexing examples, Thomas treats analogy in at least six passages which admit of widely divergent interpretations leading to enormous controversy among Thomists, even those strictly committed to the texts taken pristinely. I Sentences 19.5.2ad 1; I Sentences 35.1.4, De V 2.11; De Potentia Dei 7.7; SCG I.34; ST I.13.5.

¹⁷⁴ See, for example: John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas* (London: Routledge, 2002).

¹⁷⁵ Mark Wynn characterizes their reading as illuminist. Wynn, *Spiritual Traditions and the Virtues*, 27.

¹⁷⁶ "Aquinas declares that both the natural powers of thought and the superadded powers given in grace and glory both operate through participation in the uncreated and intelligible light of the divine intellect." Milbank and Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas*, 19.

¹⁷⁷ Milbank and Pickstock, xiii.

divine intellect, one cannot account for how human beings come to know except to say through the mystery of divine intellect which is beyond human explanation. Epistemological questions are, thus, thwarted.

The fullness of truth is anticipated in liturgical celebration as an earthy participation in heavenly mysteries. Notwithstanding other disagreements, Burrell is highly sympathetic to Pickstock's vision of liturgy as an engaged metaphysics.¹⁷⁸ Radical Orthodox figures self-consciously place themselves in the tradition of Henri de Lubac, S.J., though their reading is controversial.¹⁷⁹ Arguably, this reading could fall into the first category insofar as it attempts to read Thomas as he comes, though others criticize this as a distorted reading of Thomas—undervaluing the ecclesiastical and biblical elements of his thought.¹⁸⁰ Minimally, it is an outlier from most other traditional Thomisms in its Augustinianism and its understanding of the relationship between faith and reason. This reading of Thomas is in self-conscious contrast to Transcendental Thomism, particularly Lonergan, to which we now turn.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁸ David B. Burrell, "Religious Life and Understanding," in *Grammar and Grace: Reformulations of Aquinas and Wittgenstein*, ed. Jeffrey Stout and Robert MacSwain (London: SCM, 2004), 127–29; Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy*, Challenges in Contemporary Theology (Oxford, U.K: Blackwell Publishers, 1998).

¹⁷⁹ The Radical Orthodox reading would place de Lubac more comfortably in the Augustinian camp than the Thomist camp. For a variety of perspectives on the place of Thomas in de Lubac's thought see: Serge-Thomas Bonino, *Surnaturel: A Controversy at the Heart of Twentieth-Century Thomistic Thought* (Ave Maria, Florida: Sapientia Press of Ave Maria University, 2009); Philip James Moller, "À Mes Amis Qui Croient et à Ceux Qui Croient Ne Pas Croire: Natural Knowledge of God and the Propulsion of Reason in Henri de Lubac; A Re-Assessment" (St John's College, University of Cambridge, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.17863/CAM.51205>.

¹⁸⁰ See, for example Aidan Nichols, OP, though Nichols likes Grammatical readings of Thomas far less than Radical Orthodox readings. Aidan Nichols, "Book Review: Truth in Aquinas, John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock (Routledge 2000)," *Theology* 104, no. 820 (July 2001): 288–89.

¹⁸¹ They argue that: "Lonergan subscribed to something akin to a Neo-Kantian/phenomenological notion of the *a priori*, as not once and for all accessible, but rather as continuously unfolding in the presence of phenomena, and in its open horizon somehow pre-assuming an orientation to the divine." This is a misreading of Lonergan, as I will discuss below. Milbank and Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas*, 39; Jeremy Wilkins, *Before Truth: Lonergan, Aquinas, and the Problem of Wisdom* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2018), 27.

2.2.3 Transcendental

Third, Transcendental Thomism arose out of the Thomist revival following *Aeterni Patris* but with an emphasis on openness to modern philosophical currents and challenges, particularly those of transcendental philosophy.¹⁸² Transcendental Thomism laid the groundwork for subsequent Wittgensteinian Thomism in part through its attempt to give an account of human knowledge of God through what was then contemporary philosophy. The movement began with two Jesuits, Pierre Rousselot (1878-1915) and Joseph Maréchal (1878-1944) and is now closely associated with a third Jesuit, Bernard Lonergan, and possibly a fourth, Karl Rahner.¹⁸³ The extent of Rahner's allegiance to Thomas is a matter of controversy.¹⁸⁴ Lonergan cites Rahner favorably on occasion, though Rahner never reciprocates.¹⁸⁵

Transcendental Thomists, as the name implies, are keenly interested in using Thomistic insights to articulate the conditions for the possibility of knowledge. The controversies around Transcendental Thomism tend to divide between those holding that

¹⁸² For a helpful overview of this movement, see: Declan Marmion, "Transcendental Thomisms," in *The Oxford Handbook of Catholic Theology*, ed. Lewis Ayres and Medi Ann Volpe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 700–717, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199566273.013.17>.

¹⁸³ From St. Ignatius Loyola's recommendation of Thomas onwards, Jesuits have promoted Thomas but also been on the whole freer and more accommodationist with their interpretations than Dominicans. Francisco Suarez and Luis de Molina are perhaps the most notable examples of this free or eclectic Thomism. For a quick overview, see: Cessario, *A Short History of Thomism*, 76–80; McCool, *Neo-Thomists*, 24–26.

¹⁸⁴ Rahner's first, failed doctoral thesis was notionally an interpretation of Thomas's theory of knowledge through Heidegger and Kant. In so far as Thomas had a theory of knowledge, it is only a sketch principally (ST I.84.7). Karen Kilby is probably correct that "For the sake of tidiness, of keeping twentieth-century Roman Catholic thought in manageable categories, Rahner's philosophy is often designated as transcendental Thomist and lumped together with that of Bernard Lonergan and others, but in many ways this is more of a confusing than a helpful designation." Karen Kilby, *Karl Rahner: Theology and Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2004), 14, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203505007>; Karl Rahner, *Spirit in the World* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1968).

¹⁸⁵ Anthony Kenny studied under Lonergan during his time at the Gregorian University in Rome, and Kenny's Thomism was influenced by Lonergan. Kenny offers a largely positive review of Lonergan's *Insight and Method in Theology* as ranking above most philosophy of religion, though lacking genius. Anthony Kenny, "In Defense of God," *The Times Literary Supplement*, February 7, 1975, The Times Literary Supplement Historical Archive.

Transcendental Thomists successfully respond to the challenges of Kant and Hegel and those holding that these Thomists become crypto-Kantians and Hegelians, thus abandoning authentic Thomism. They play with these post-Cartesian machines, despite Gilson's warnings. A similar critique is made of Grammatical Thomism's use of Wittgenstein. Lonergan minimalizes the influence of Kant on his thought.¹⁸⁶ Transcendental Thomists and Grammatical Thomists hold that Thomism is following the method of Thomas including updating that method to encompass modern development and concerns, even when such development strays from Thomas's texts on particular issues. The influence of Transcendental Thomism, particularly Bernard Lonergan, on Grammatical Thomism is significant.

Central to Lonergan's reading of Thomas is the priority of the inner word of understanding over being.¹⁸⁷ The concept of being "is the first concept: what is prior to the first concept is, not a prior concept, but an act of understanding; and like other concepts, the concept of being is an effect of the act of understanding."¹⁸⁸ Cognitional theory is first philosophy for Lonergan. Central to Lonergan's reading of Thomas and Burrell's subsequent reading is the inner word and the act of understanding.¹⁸⁹ Self-knowledge is the basis for all other knowledge. Any improvement in knowledge of the world relies on improvement in self-

¹⁸⁶ Lonergan claims that dialogue with Kant was an afterthought in his own reading of Thomas. Wilkins, *Before Truth*, 99–100.

¹⁸⁷ Fitzpatrick notes that "there is a single big issue on which Wittgenstein and Lonergan are at one. That is in their opposition to the notion of self as an isolated center of consciousness, detached from the body and the world 'out there' which it confronts and comes to know by some form of mental picturing supported by ostensive definition." Joseph Fitzpatrick, "Lonergan and the Later Wittgenstein," *Method: Journal of Lonergan Studies* 10, no. 1 (April 1, 1992): 42, <https://doi.org/10.5840/method19921017>.

¹⁸⁸ Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Verbum: Word and Idea in Aquinas*, ed. Robert M. Doran and Frederick E. Crowe (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 57; Wilkins, *Before Truth*, 110.

¹⁸⁹ Pasnau likewise argues that Thomas's "verbum" is a language like an account of thought, though he doubts this analysis can be pushed as far as the Wittgensteinian or Transcendental readings would have it. Though this is an historical objection not an objection to Transcendental or Grammatical Thomism as amending Thomas. Robert Pasnau, "Aquinas on Thought's Linguistic Nature," *The Monist* 80, no. 4 (1997): 558–75; Robert Pasnau, *Theories of Cognition in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

knowledge, which includes the human activities or forms of life in the act of understanding. Though self-knowledge is primary, teachers can play an important role in their students developing such knowledge. Knowledge progresses in a circular or spiral manner with new understanding prompting new inquiry.¹⁹⁰ The capacity to improve one's knowledge calls into question direct realism insofar as one's knowledge requires improvement and thus does not perfectly correspond to nor is perfectly embedded in reality.

Lonergan attempts to articulate an understanding of self-knowledge in Thomas that is untroubled by Cartesian dualism and the quest for certainty. To return to Gilson's metaphor, Lonergan tries to move beyond the Cartesian machine without getting entangled in it. David Burrell, the best candidate for a Grammatical Thomist, is strongly influenced by Lonergan. He is not Lonerganian in the sense that he adopts and extends Lonergan's method and its confidence in a science-like progression of knowing, even religious knowing, although he does agree with Lonergan on the fundamental place of judgement in knowing as opposed to foundational accounts of knowing. Burrell is careful in appropriating the work of his former teacher. Lonergan is barely mentioned in Burrell's *Analogy and Philosophical Language*, Wittgenstein and Lonergan diverge considerably on grammar, and Burrell clearly sides with Wittgenstein.¹⁹¹

¹⁹⁰ For example, in the *De Veritate* Thomas writes: "the circularity is observed in this, that reason reaches conclusions from principles by way of discovery, and by way of judgement examines the conclusions which have been found, analysing them back to the principles" (De Ver 10.8.ad10). This circular reading is controversial, and the texts are ambiguous, for example ST II-II 180.3.

¹⁹¹ David Tracy also draws parallels between Wittgenstein and Lonergan, arguing that both are engaging in intellectual and "spiritual exercises". That is, that the exercise of the philosopher is central to philosophy and theology themselves. David Tracy, "Bernard Lonergan and the Return of Ancient Practice in Philosophy and Theology," in *Filaments: Theological Profiles: Selected Essays*, vol. 2 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020), 230–31.

Lonergan is cited extensively in most of Burrell's other work. Burrell occasionally cites Lonergan's exhaustive exegetical commentaries on Thomas Aquinas. Burrell most often cites Lonergan on understanding as a human action centered on judgement, both Lonergan's interpretation of Thomas, especially *Verbum*, and his more systematic, original works, *Insight* and *Method in Theology*. Burrell argues that the demands to understand one's own knowing through judgement in Lonergan's *Insight* to be "astonishingly similar to Wittgenstein of the *Investigations*."¹⁹² He also points briefly to the compatibility of Wittgensteinian and Lonerganian approaches in his work in interreligious dialogue.¹⁹³ He translates the Lonerganian method of judgement from its broadly Hegelian formulation into grammatical form. He takes both Lonergan's insistence on the priority of judgement and Wittgenstein's grammar to be paths to "conceptual clarification" and "attending to meanings".¹⁹⁴

2.2.4 Analytic

Fourth are the analytic Thomists, among which Kenny numbers himself as well as Peter Geach and, importantly for the present purpose, Herbert McCabe. Analytic Thomism is a broad church for Kenny.¹⁹⁵ Any reading of Thomas employing the tools of Analytic Philosophy falls under this umbrella.¹⁹⁶ Along similar lines, John Haldane defines this loose

¹⁹² David B. Burrell, *Exercises in Religious Understanding* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1974), 5.

¹⁹³ David B. Burrell, *Towards a Jewish-Christian-Muslim Theology* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 4–6.

¹⁹⁴ Burrell, 6–7.

¹⁹⁵ "River Forest" Thomism may fall under this wider analytic umbrella. This small group of Thomists attempted to accommodate Thomas to modern empirical science as first in the order of learning and metaphysics first only in the order of reflection. Benedict Ashley, "The River Forest School and the Philosophy of Nature Today," in *Philosophy and the God of Abraham: Essays in Memory of James A. Weisheipl, OP*, ed. R. James Long, Papers in Mediaeval Studies 12 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1991), 1–16.

¹⁹⁶ Kenny's preferred Analytic Philosophy is rather more Wittgensteinian than the field has become—a fact which Kenny laments. Perhaps the most prominent voice in contemporary Analytic Thomism, Eleonore Stump, never engages with Wittgenstein in her major work *Aquinas*. Anthony Kenny, *Wittgenstein*, Rev. ed (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), xi–xx; Eleonore Stump, *Aquinas*, Arguments of the Philosophers (London: Routledge, 2003).

movement: “Analytical Thomism is not concerned to appropriate St. Thomas for the advancement of any particular set of doctrines. Equally, it is not a movement of pious exegesis. Instead, it seeks to deploy the methods and ideas of twentieth-century philosophy of the sort that are dominant within the English-speaking world in connection with the broad framework of ideas introduced and developed by Aquinas.”¹⁹⁷ Analytic Thomists typically take up a concern of Thomas and apply contemporary philosophical concerns and methods along with Thomas’s own thinking. The concern is typically to defend major concerns of Thomas while allowing for some freedom with regard to finer points. Often, Analytic Thomism proceeds by rearticulating Thomas’s core insights within a contemporary philosophical conversation. This comes at the risk of losing the core of Thomas in the rearticulation.¹⁹⁸

Wittgensteinian Thomism is a sub-category of the Analytic Thomism schema. Grammatical Thomism is then a sub-category of this sub-category.¹⁹⁹ Wittgensteinian Thomism has two mutually compatible modes. The first is to explore substantial agreement between Wittgenstein and Thomas. The second is to apply Wittgensteinian methods to read and occasionally amend Thomas. The division between mode one and two is fluid. One can—and many do—hold that, because there is substantial agreement between Wittgenstein and

¹⁹⁷ John Haldane, “Analytical Thomism: A Prefatory Note,” ed. Sherwood J. B. Sugden, *Monist* 80, no. 4 (1997): 486, <https://doi.org/10.5840/monist199780428>.

¹⁹⁸ For an articulation of this case, see, for example: Stephen Theron, “The Resistance of Thomism to Analytical and Other Patronage,” *The Monist* 80, no. 4 (1997): 611–18.

¹⁹⁹ I would add a fifth, smaller category, perhaps less well-represented in analytic departments of theology and philosophy, Phenomenological (or Lublin) Thomism. This school can be distinguished from Transcendental Thomism primarily by its Husserlian rather than Kantian or Heideggerian approach. The most prominent example of this school is Karol Wojtyla, later Pope Saint John Paul II. See: Pope John Paul II, *The Acting Person*, *Analecta Husserliana* ; Vol.10 (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1979); Richard Colledge, “Thomism and Contemporary Phenomenological Realism: Toward a Renewed Engagement,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 95, no. 3 (June 24, 2021): 411–32, <https://doi.org/10.5840/acpq2021526225>.

Thomas, using Wittgenstein to explicate Thomas is helpful in bringing Thomistic thought to contemporary audiences. Such Thomists may point to similarities between Thomas and Wittgenstein on conceptual meanings or the capacity to express thoughts in language.

Wittgenstein-influenced Thomists such as Anthony Kenny and Brian Davies generally hold the first mode. For Kenny, post-moderns such as Wittgenstein are moving philosophy past Cartesian modernism back towards figures like Thomas, again moving beyond Gilson's Cartesian machine.²⁰⁰ The similarity of Aquinas and Wittgenstein, particularly on the nature of mind has been a major concern throughout Kenny's work.²⁰¹ Kenny notes that: "Many [analytic Thomists] have been heavily influenced by Wittgenstein, who like Aquinas stands at the opposite pole of philosophy from the Cartesian tradition which sees epistemology as the basic philosophical discipline and private consciousness as the fundamental datum of epistemology."²⁰² Kenny sees a similar sensitivity to human dispositions (*habitus*) in Thomas as he finds in Wittgenstein and Gilbert Ryle.²⁰³ He reads Wittgenstein as revitalizing many of the philosophical methods abandoned by modernity: "If Wittgenstein was right, philosophy had been on a wrong track since the time of Descartes and should alter course in a way that would make it more sympathetic to medieval preoccupations."²⁰⁴

²⁰⁰ Recent scholarship has questioned how "Cartesian" Descartes really was. For the purpose of this argument, whether Wittgenstein is reacting to Descartes's authentic thought or a historical misinterpretation of Descartes is interesting, though not particularly relevant to the present discussion. See: Jean-Luc Marion, *On Descartes' Passive Thought: The Myth of Cartesian Dualism*, trans. Christina M. Gschwandtner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018).

²⁰¹ John Haldane traces this trajectory of Kenny's thought beginning in his first published work to his more recent publications. John Haldane, "Kenny and Aquinas on the Metaphysics of Mind," in *Mind, Method, and Morality: Essays in Honour of Anthony Kenny* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 125; Anthony Kenny, "Aquinas and Wittgenstein," *The Downside Review* 77, no. 249 (July 1, 1959): 217–35, <https://doi.org/10.1177/001258065907724902>.

²⁰² Kenny, "Aquinas Medalist's Address," 24.

²⁰³ Anthony Kenny, *Aquinas, Past Masters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 22.

²⁰⁴ Kenny, 28.

Brian Davies, Herbert McCabe's posthumous editor, makes a similar argument to Kenny that the pre-modern Thomas has a great deal in common with Wittgenstein's reaction against modernism: "The birth of analytical philosophy of mind was in fact a rebirth. For if we go back further than Descartes, to the Middle Ages, we find that philosophy of mind and epistemology are no less distinct in the medieval tradition than in the tradition stemming from Wittgenstein."²⁰⁵ For Davies, Thomas is the great exemplar of the Medieval tradition. Though Wittgensteinian Analytic Thomism also draws distinctions between Thomas and Wittgenstein, on the whole they find broad and helpful similarities between the pre-modern Thomas and the post-modern Wittgenstein.²⁰⁶

Those adopting the second mode of Wittgensteinian Thomism begin with the first and on the basis of it seek to amend, extend, or substantially clarify Thomas's thought in light of new philosophical tools and challenges. As critics of Grammatical Thomism have noted, Grammatical Thomism is methodologically similar to Transcendental Thomism insofar as it explores Thomas through a self-consciously contemporary lens applying new philosophical methods in concert with Thomas, or, critics might charge, corruption of Thomas. Two great students of Wittgenstein who were also influential on Kenny, Peter Geach and Elizabeth Anscombe, are sometimes credited with establishing Analytic Thomism.²⁰⁷ Though their work, for the most part, does not comment on Thomas directly, it does employ recognizably

²⁰⁵ Anthony Kenny, *Aquinas on Mind* (London: Routledge, 1994), 19.

²⁰⁶ See, for example, Kenny's worries about Thomas's theory of the immateriality of mind. Haldane, "Kenny and Aquinas on the Metaphysics of Mind," 132; Anthony Kenny, "Cognitive Scientism," in *Wittgenstein and Analytic Philosophy*, ed. Hans-Johann Glock and John Hyman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 250–62.

²⁰⁷ John Haldane, "Introduction: Analytical Thomism and Faithful Reason," in *Faithful Reason: Essays Catholic and Philosophical* (London: Routledge, 2004), xii.

Thomist and Wittgensteinian influences.²⁰⁸ Anscombe and Geach are often more implicitly Thomistic and Wittgensteinian than explicit.²⁰⁹ Post-Liberal Theology is surely Wittgensteinian and sometimes draws on Thomas but is not Thomism *per se*.²¹⁰

The distinction between Grammatical Thomism and Analytic Thomism more broadly, though somewhat fluid, is premised on the efficacy of a Wittgensteinian style of Grammatical Analysis to affirm that Thomas's fundamental positions are correct while offering corrections and modifications. Grammatical Thomism remains rooted in exposition of Thomas's thought but is not beholden to Thomas in all his particulars. Grammatical Thomism, though holding more closely to Thomas's texts than approaches such as those of Anscombe or Geach is not an historical project. Anthony Kenny notes in the foreword to Herbert McCabe's *On Aquinas* that while McCabe was allergic to being defined by any school, he was a great student of both Thomas and Wittgenstein. McCabe's reading of Thomas is "as he admits, in a sense more linguistic than the historical Aquinas was."²¹¹ Neither McCabe nor Burrell set out to establish a grammatical movement of Thomism; in both cases, they are more linguistic than Thomas

²⁰⁸ Their co-authored book, *Three Philosophers*, is one notable exception. G. E. M. Anscombe and P. T. Geach, *Three Philosophers* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1961).

²⁰⁹ For example, John Schwenkler helpfully unearths the influence of Thomas in Anscombe's account of the causal role of practical knowledge in her *Intention*. See: John Schwenkler, *Anscombe's Intention: A Guide* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 157–61, 172–79; G. E. M. Anscombe, *Intention*, 2nd ed (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2000).

²¹⁰ John Wright and Robert Cathey include Burrell with Stanley Hauerwas and George Lindbeck as a Post-Liberal Theologian, though this is a minority report. John W. Wright, ed., *Postliberal Theology and the Church Catholic: Conversations with George Lindbeck, David Burrell, and Stanley Hauerwas* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic, 2012); Robert Andrew Cathey, *God in Postliberal Perspectives: Between Realism and Non-Realism*, *Transcending Boundaries in Philosophy and Theology* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2009).

²¹¹ Anthony Kenny, "Foreword," in *On Aquinas*, by Herbert McCabe, ed. Brian Davies (London: Continuum, 2008), ix.

had the tools to be.²¹² Both found the new tools to be efficacious much as Thomas did with Aristotle.

For McCabe, the analytic tools available to twentieth, and presumably twenty-first, century thinkers are superior to their thirteenth century equivalents, especially with regard to linguistic analysis. These tools allow for friendly amendments to Thomas. What these thinkers have in common, and what McCabe says of himself, is that they “start from the language end instead of, as Aquinas does, starting from the thought end.”²¹³ Otherwise put, “we [sic] analyse understanding and thinking in terms of human communication whereas *Aquinas* [sic] analyses communication in terms of understanding and thinking.”²¹⁴ Underlying these points of disagreement is the fundamental point of agreement for Thomas, Wittgenstein, and McCabe that, as rational animals, human beings are also necessarily linguistic animals. McCabe views his friendly disagreement with Thomas as a way of proving Thomas more fundamentally right. The degree of McCabe’s corrective partly depends on how social one’s reading of Thomas’s epistemology is, itself a matter of debate.²¹⁵

David Burrell likewise sees his reading of Thomas as genuinely in keeping with the thought of Thomas but guided by Heidegger and Wittgenstein.²¹⁶ Burrell takes up Wittgenstein’s “self-discipline” against the bewitchments of language. This theme of self-discipline and philosophy/theology as a way of life becomes a clearer focus of Burrell’s later

²¹² As a matter of history, O’Callaghan is probably correct that “For St. Thomas, the consideration of institutionalized representations like writing and speaking, painting and sculpting, and so on, is intrinsically different from the consideration of concepts, precisely because of the fault line between how a concept is a ‘likeness’ and how words, paintings, sculptures, and so on, are ‘institutionalized signs.’” O’Callaghan, *Thomist Realism and the Linguistic Turn*, 278.

²¹³ McCabe, *On Aquinas*, 133.

²¹⁴ McCabe, 133.

²¹⁵ For a brief discussion, see: O’Callaghan, *Thomist Realism and the Linguistic Turn*, 284–86.

²¹⁶ David B. Burrell, *Analogy and Philosophical Language* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2016), 4.

work. He describes this evocatively as “living one’s way into [a language].”²¹⁷ Burrell is more forceful than McCabe in drawing parallels between the logical discussions of Thomas’s time and twentieth century logic, particularly Wittgenstein.²¹⁸ Burrell also stays closer to the texts, whereas McCabe is given to greater paraphrase and summary, though Burrell does credit McCabe with helping inspire his approach.²¹⁹ In both thinkers, their grammatical approach holds that Thomas is sensitive to the particular demands of God talk and that a Wittgensteinian grammatical approach further refocuses, develops, and clarifies a fundamentally Thomistic approach.

2.3 Grammatical Thomists and the Existence of God

McCabe and Burrell’s grammatical approach to Thomas comes out clearly in reading Thomas’s Five Ways (ST I.2.3) and the predication of perfection terms of God. McCabe and Burrell read the Five Ways as an investigation into the language of God and, by extension, the sort of practices one undertakes to talk about God. Thomas begins his investigation of the existence of God by invoking perhaps the most difficult piece of revealed language of God, “I am who I am” or “I am what I am” or “I will be what I will be” (Ex 3:14). I will return to this point in chapter five.

McCabe observes that “to assert that God exists is to claim the right and need to carry on an activity, to be engaged in research.”²²⁰ Neither McCabe nor Burrell understands the

²¹⁷ Burrell, *Exercises in Religious Understanding*, 174.

²¹⁸ David B. Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, ed. Mary Budde Ragan, Third Edition (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2016), xvii.

²¹⁹ He particularly credits McCabe’s 1954 essay on categories in Aquinas. Burrell, xvii; Herbert McCabe, “Categories,” in *Aquinas: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Anthony Kenny, Modern Studies in Philosophy (London: Macmillan, 1970), 54–92.

²²⁰ Herbert McCabe, “Creation,” in *God Matters* (London: Continuum, 2010), 2.

Five Ways to be proofs in the traditional sense but rather a statement of the logic of creation. Burrell refers through much of his work to the “Christian Distinction” of a creator God as opposed to a god within the world.²²¹ God outside the world cannot be bound by the grammar rules of the world. This is the great difficulty of God talk.

McCabe likens proving the existence of God to proving the validity of a science; it is a way of venturing into the unknown using a skillset.²²² The answers of a science are always set within the context of the science itself. So too any understanding of God that would be answer to the question of existence is bound to the human way of speaking about God. It remains with a language that is not equipped to hold it. Burrell expresses the point a bit differently. He juxtaposes claims within a language versus validating a language itself: “The fact that language obtains is reflected only in performance.”²²³ Languages are livable or not. The rules of a language like those of a science are not self-validating but validated in practice. Extending the McCabe scientific metaphor, to responsibly use scientific data requires understanding the methodology of the science in question, the ways in which the particular discourse functions: so too claims about God or creation require a sense of the discourse to be used responsibly. Burrell provocatively argues that realizing the limits of one’s language is the license to speak.²²⁴

The Grammatical approach is particularly sensitive to how one uses being and perfection language of God. Burrell argues in great detail and McCabe in a more limited way,

²²¹ Robert Sokolowski, *The God of Faith and Reason: Foundations of Christian Theology* (Washington, D.C: Catholic University of America Press, 1995); David B. Burrell, “The Christian Distinction Celebrated and Expanded,” in *Faith and Freedom: An Interfaith Perspective* (Malden, Mass: Blackwell Pub, 2004), 217–33.

²²² McCabe, “Creation,” 2.

²²³ Burrell, *Aquinas*, 56.

²²⁴ Burrell, *Exercises in Religious Understanding*, 129–31.

that perfection statements about God are “formal features.” A formal feature is, roughly speaking, what can be shown but not said in Wittgenstein’s terms. They are the rules for talking about God, not substantial predications about God. Given the Wittgensteinian union of essence and grammar, saying that these perfection terms are “formal features” about the language of God is not to render them useless. The Wittgensteinian reading insists that such predicates do not escape language—one remains in language in acknowledging its weakness.

For the Wittgensteinian, grammar and metaphysics are united: “*Essence* is expressed in grammar” and, indeed, theology is grammatical (PI 371, 373). This is in opposition to most traditional readings of Thomas which conceive of Thomas’s discussion of how humans talk about God as a related but distinct project from the metaphysical project of God’s being and its relationship to the being of creation. For the grammatical Thomist, even if one holds that human beings are able to speak about God and the nature of the world as a result of participation in divine being through analogical language, one must still explore the grammar of participation, analogy, and being. In other words, metaphysics is no escape from grammar. Furthermore, the grammar of those terms is in use, thus metaphysics and grammar cannot be separated from skillful linguistic practice. I will take up this point in greater detail in the next chapter.

Both McCabe and Burrell focus on the challenges of God language’s grammar. The language humans use is not well-suited to talking about God, as Thomas himself articulates in a question on whether we can name God: “Because we know and name God from creatures, the names we attribute to God signify what belongs to material creatures, of which knowledge is natural to us” (ST I.13.1. ad 2). Human beings can talk about God because of what we know about creatures. Contrary to some critics of Grammatical Thomism who will be

discussed in the next chapter, this is not a strictly negative approach to God. It is negative insofar as humans cannot know what God is. Yet humans speak about God, make judgements, and act according to imperfect conceptions of God using this creaturely-derived language. The grammatical account does not seek to limit but to accurately characterize, which often means chastening metaphysical overreaches and redrawing forgotten connections between metaphysical language and language of everyday use. As Wittgenstein observes, pictures, often metaphysical pictures, have a way of holding minds captive (PI 115). The grammatical Thomist finds a similar sensibility in Thomas but a less articulate way of expressing it.

2.4 Controversies Surrounding Grammatical Thomism

There are two interrelated sets of controversies surrounding Grammatical Thomism: definitional and substantial. Substantial objections to Grammatical Thomism include objections to Wittgenstein more generally: I defend Wittgenstein in the next two chapters.²²⁵ This section focuses primarily on definition questions, though they are not altogether separable from substantial objections. The term “Grammatical Thomism” is contentious, and the definition presented above varies to a greater or lesser extent from some other definitions of Grammatical Thomism. In this section, I will briefly review alternative accounts of Grammatical Thomism. Gorazd Andrejč, Simon Hewitt, Fergus Kerr, and Stephen Mulhall have recently attempted to define Grammatical Thomism or resist such a definition. Mulhall begins his *Great Riddle* by attempting to distinguish Grammatical Thomism from the fruitful interaction between Wittgensteinian Philosophy and Thomist thought in Analytic Thomism of

²²⁵ For example, Cunningham objects that Wittgenstein “collapses ideality into reality and reality into an ideality.” Conor Cunningham, “Language: Wittgenstein after Theology,” in *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology*, ed. John Milbank, Graham Ward, and Catherine Pickstock (London: Routledge, 1999), 64.

the sort described by Kenny. Mulhall takes the term “Grammatical Thomism” from its chief detractor, Francesca Murphy. He identifies Grammatical Thomism as a thoroughgoing grammatical interpretation of Thomas’s *Summa Theologiae* as opposed to the more eclectic use of Wittgenstein in Analytic Thomism.²²⁶ David Burrell most exemplifies this approach for Mulhall with his careful grammatical reading of the *Summa*, especially in his earlier work, *Analogy and Philosophical Language* and *Aquinas: God and Action*. Mulhall does not treat Burrell’s *Exercises in Religious Understanding* nor his later work, which moves both to issues of interreligious dialogue and develops the theme of philosophy and theology as exercises of understanding, drawing both on his grammatical methodology and also an adapted Lonerganian method. Though engaging with him less, Mulhall sees Herbert McCabe as another Grammatical Thomist. He briefly names Victor Preller as an inspiration for the Grammatical Thomist project and Fergus Kerr as a contributor to the grammatical project. Burrell himself cites Preller as an inspiration for his work, notably through breaking down the distinction between philosophy and theology through a “participatory metaphysics”.²²⁷ Preller draws inspiration from Transcendental Thomism and its “dynamic” interpretation of the intellect.²²⁸

Rowan Williams’s work, particularly his recent *Edge of Words* and *Christ the Heart of Creation*, bears clear Wittgensteinian and Thomistic influences and some resemblance to

²²⁶ Stephen Mulhall, *The Great Riddle: Wittgenstein and Nonsense, Theology and Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 1–2.

²²⁷ Burrell, “Religious Life and Understanding,” 131.

²²⁸ Victor Preller, *Divine Science and the Science of God: A Reformulation of Thomas Aquinas* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1967), 42–43.

Grammatical Thomism, as Mulhall argues.²²⁹ Williams admits that he is, among other things, both loosely Wittgensteinian and a Thomist.²³⁰ Williams takes Natural Theology to be a grammatical project: his lectures examine the grammar of how one “goes on” talking about God while recognizing the limits of the human ability to speak about God.²³¹ In a phrase resonant with Burrell, Williams reads Thomas’s Five Ways as a way of reordering what cause means when applied to creation and creator in that it might be useful to see “the whole enterprise of reconfigured natural theology as a method, perhaps even a skill. Natural theology is a practice—or at least outlines possible practices which bring us to the point at which we run out of things to say in the discourse we started with but recognize that this running-out is not simply an ending.”²³² One continues to practice the language of God, changing the game as one moves along.

Mulhall reflects on the resonances between his work and Williams’s.²³³ He identifies that a main tension between his own account and that of Williams is the distinction between riddles and Great Riddles. He writes: “[Williams’s] interest in riddles seems exclusively directed to that use of them in which it is in principle possible to construct an answer to them,

²²⁹ Rowan Williams, *The Edge of Words: God and the Habits of Language* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014); Rowan Williams, *Christ, the Heart of Creation* (London: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2018); Rowan Williams, “Wittgenstein, Kierkegaard, and Chalcedon,” in *Wittgenstein, Religion, and Ethics: New Perspectives from Philosophy and Theology*, ed. Mikel Burley (New York: Bloomsbury, 2018); D. Michael Cox, “Grammar and Glory: Eastern Orthodoxy, the ‘Resolute’ Wittgenstein, and the Theology of Rowan Williams” (University of Dayton, 2015), https://etd.ohiolink.edu/pg_10?0::NO:10:P10_ACCESSION_NUM:dayton1430397550#abstract-files.

²³⁰ Rowan Williams, “Response to Kerr, Hedley, Pickstock, Ward and Soskice: Response to Kerr, Hedley, Pickstock, Ward and Soskice,” *Modern Theology* 31, no. 4 (October 2015): 630–36, <https://doi.org/10.1111/moth.12190>.

²³¹ Williams, *The Edge of Words*, 3.

²³² Williams, 16–17.

²³³ Mulhall, *The Great Riddle*, 128; Stephen Mulhall, “Riddles, Nonsense and Religious Language,” in *Wittgenstein, Religion, and Ethics: New Perspectives from Philosophy and Theology*, ed. Mikel Burley (New York: Bloomsbury, 2018), 138–46.

and thereby maintain the possibility of intelligible, truthful discourse about reality employing the relevant riddle phrases. Whereas I argue that it is internal to the riddle phrases that are central to talk about God that the possibility of assigning a sense to them is excluded a priori.”²³⁴ The distinction between Mulhall and Williams may be less stark if one considers what it is to enact a Great Riddle or attempt to do so. Williams is not a Grammatical Thomist insofar as his work on language is occasionally rather than self-consciously Thomist, though it bears remarkable affinities with Grammatical Thomism.

For Simon Hewitt, Herbert McCabe and David Burrell are the two figures most associated with Grammatical Thomism, though he goes on to argue for the inclusion of Brian Davies and, in what might come as a shock given his published criticisms, Fergus Kerr. In practice, Hewitt’s Grammatical Thomism draws overwhelmingly from McCabe.²³⁵ Hewitt characterizes Grammatical Thomism as a therapeutic approach to the first part of the *Summa* drawing from the later Wittgenstein. This approach maintains that there is a language-independent God, and that “progress” can be made in our understanding of God within limits.²³⁶ One must, of course, affirm the existence of a language-independent God as a language-dependent human and, thus, within a language—a point Hewitt seems ambiguous about.

For Hewitt, the assertion “God exists” is not simply nonsense but rather has “assertoric force” in the concrete circumstances of the language user’s life. One may have a

²³⁴ Mulhall, “Riddles, Nonsense and Religious Language,” 141.

²³⁵ Insole takes McCabe and Brian Davies as anti-realists. Christopher J. Insole, *The Realist Hope: A Critique of Anti-Realist Approaches in Contemporary Philosophical Theology*, Heythrop Studies in Contemporary Philosophy, Religion, & Theology (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006).

²³⁶ Simon Hewitt, “Grammatical Thomism,” *Religious Studies*, February 28, 2019, 3, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412518000896>.

practical understanding of how to use the expression. What God talk lacks for Hewitt's Grammatical Thomist is reference, "since the considerations which give rise to the word's use ensure that its referent lies outside any intelligible category of being."²³⁷ Yet these non-referential statements remain sensible. Hewitt argues that Stephen Mulhall falls outside of Grammatical Thomism because he takes a resolute reading of nonsense in the *Tractatus*. He does not offer a substantial critique of Mulhall beyond arguing that Mulhall misreads McCabe asserting with evident dismay that Mulhall's interpretation would have McCabe "gleefully talking nonsense."²³⁸ (Which, presumably, is better than morosely talking nonsense.) He cites as particular evidence of tension between Mulhall and McCabe's Thomism, McCabe's stated aim of avoiding "nonsense" in a sermon on prayer.²³⁹ The theme of the passage cited is that nonsense is being deluded into thinking that the concepts humans use about God are, in fact, God: "Theology is a difficult and very rewarding occupation but for the most part it is not concerned with trying to say what God is but in trying to stop us talking nonsense, trying to stop people making God in their own images, to stop us from mistaking our concepts and images and words for the mystery towards which they point."²⁴⁰ The theological task is primarily negative, to avoid saying silly, perhaps even idolatrous, things about God. Mulhall's project and the acknowledgement of riddle language aims at precisely this task.

Gorazd Andrejč in his *Wittgenstein and Interreligious Disagreements* comments on Grammatical Thomism (or "Wittgensteinian Thomism" as he calls it) through Burrell, whose later work is deeply engaged in the project of dialogue between Islam, Christianity, and

²³⁷ Hewitt, 6.

²³⁸ Hewitt, 4.

²³⁹ Herbert McCabe, "Praying as We Ought," in *God Still Matters* (London: Continuum, 2010), 216.

²⁴⁰ Herbert McCabe, *God Still Matters* (London: Continuum, 2010), 216.

Judaism. Andrejč includes McCabe, Burrell and Kerr as the central figures of Wittgensteinian Thomism.²⁴¹ Andrejč rightly argues that, for Burrell, reading Thomas and Wittgenstein together is a transformative practice more than a theoretical commitment. This point will be explored at length in the subsequent chapter on prudence. He likewise rightly argues that Grammatical Thomism rejects fundamental theology and natural law of the *Aeterni Patris*-type Thomism discussed above: “If Wittgensteinian Thomists are right, Aquinas is actually presupposing the theological context of the belief in creation when introducing the Five Ways.”²⁴² Perhaps a better way to put this is that there are no strictly philosophical contexts inhabited by human beings.

Andrejč critiques Mulhall’s reading of Wittgenstein as nonsensicalist throughout early and late Wittgenstein. *Pace* Mulhall, Andrejč argues “the changes in Wittgenstein’s approach to philosophy, that is a development towards a fully grammatical investigation of language in the later- Wittgensteinian sense, have to be taken into account when trying to understand what happened to the nonsensicalist conception of religious language in the transition from the early to the later Wittgenstein’s work.”²⁴³ Though having important theological and philosophical implications, the issue Andrejč raises is primarily one of Wittgenstein interpretation, which is the topic of my next two chapters.

Fergus Kerr objects to counting Herbert McCabe and David Burrell among the Grammatical Thomists, as well as the utility of the category more generally. Kerr contends

²⁴¹ Hewitt, “Grammatical Thomism,” 2; Murphy, *God Is Not a Story*; Mulhall, *The Great Riddle*, 44; Gorazd Andrejč, *Wittgenstein and Interreligious Disagreement* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2016), 181, <https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-49823-6>.

²⁴² Andrejč, *Wittgenstein and Interreligious Disagreement*, 182.

²⁴³ Andrejč, 36.

that, for both McCabe and Burrell, their grammatical approach is not principally Wittgensteinian. Kerr sets a high bar for a proper Wittgensteinian, especially among theologians. He finds quasi- or imperfect- Wittgensteinianism in Rowan Williams, Nicholas Lash, Hans Frei, and George Lindbeck, though it is unclear what a theological Wittgensteinianism would look like given that Wittgenstein makes few if any substantial theological claims.²⁴⁴ A theological methodology would surely require something in addition to Wittgensteinian philosophical method even if it was deeply informed by such a method. In Burrell's case, Kerr attributes his methodology to Ralph McInerny and Lonergan far more than Wittgenstein: "For Burrell indeed, as he says, Aquinas is practicing logical skills developed in twelfth century 'speculative grammar'. If Burrell's Thomas goes in for grammatical analysis in questions about the divinity it has nothing much to do with Wittgenstein."²⁴⁵ Burrell's frequent citation of Wittgenstein throughout his corpus and the claims from other prominent theologians, most notably Stanley Hauerwas, that Burrell's influence shaped him in a decisively Wittgensteinian direction, would seem to indicate that Wittgenstein's influence is more than "nothing much" in Burrell's thought.²⁴⁶

In McCabe's case, Kerr argues that McCabe's logical/grammatical reading of Thomas comes from reading Thomas directly. McCabe and Burrell draw on Wittgenstein frequently in their writings, either indicating agreement between Aquinas and Wittgenstein or showing how Wittgenstein helps elucidate a particular point either in Thomas or expanding on Thomas.

²⁴⁴ Fergus Kerr, "A Conspicuous Absence? Wittgenstein and Heidegger," *Modern Theology* 31, no. 4 (2015): 586–92, <https://doi.org/10.1111/moth.12185>; Kerr, "The Reception of Wittgenstein's Philosophy by Theologians"; Fergus Kerr, *Theology after Wittgenstein*, Second (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997).

²⁴⁵ Kerr, "Comment: Grammatical Thomism?," 527.

²⁴⁶ Stanley Hauerwas, "The End of Religious Pluralism: A Tribute to David Burrell CSC," in *The State of the University: Academic Knowledge and the Knowledge of God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

Denys Turner rightly observes: “Much of the sheer energy of [McCabe’s] own writing was motivated by a Wittgensteinian goal of conceptual therapy, sorely needed in a field in which, to be fair, the distinction between the sublime and the ridiculous is in the nature of the case unusually difficult to detect.”²⁴⁷ While Kerr is right to highlight other important sources of inspiration for both McCabe and Burrell, most notably Lonergan, their work supports no other conclusion than a strong Wittgensteinian grammatical influence. If anything, their work demonstrates that one can simultaneously be a Wittgensteinian and a Thomist—valuing the tradition through its ongoing development.

Behind the disagreements between the various types of Thomism lie substantial philosophical disagreements. For Thomism as a living rather than historical project, the question whether Thomas is primarily Platonist or Aristotelian is closely related to one’s opinion about the relative merits of the two approaches. If Thomism is a project worth continuing, it should not include serious philosophical errors and so one would be inclined to read Thomas such that one could affirm his philosophical commitments. So too for accommodationist Thomism that seeks to incorporate post-Cartesian insights into Thomist thought. Gilson contends and Murphy affirms that anything touched by the Cartesian machine, which includes Grammatical and Transcendental Thomism, reduces reality to mere story, an implicit anti-realism. As Hewitt and Andrejč’s criticism of Mulhall make clear, the particulars of how one reads Wittgenstein is also key to how one evaluates a Grammatical Thomist approach. At the beginning of the chapter, I noted that Thomas adopts Aristotle primarily because Aristotle’s philosophy struck him as adding greatly to his intellectual

²⁴⁷ Denys Turner, “Forward,” in *Faith Within Reason*, by Herbert McCabe, ed. Brian Davies (London: Bloomsbury, 2007), vii.

efforts. In the following three chapters, I will argue that Wittgenstein, and in particular a riddling reading of Wittgenstein, is similarly helpful for the Grammatical Thomist coming to grips with spiritual pedagogy.

3.0 Realism and Wittgensteinian Grammar

In the previous chapter, I defended Wittgensteinian, Grammatical Thomism as a faithful development of the Thomist tradition. The argument of the previous chapter compared the incorporation of Wittgensteinian insights into a Thomist approach with Thomas's own use of Aristotle. Thomas's incorporation of Aristotle allowed Thomas to incorporate philosophical tools which he took to be more productive than the inherited Platonism of his contemporaries. Put simply, Aristotle could be incorporated into Thomas's theology and philosophy because Aristotle was a very good philosopher whose insights allowed for stronger arguments than were previously available. The Grammatical Thomist's argument for the incorporation of Wittgensteinian grammar makes the same claim. This claim faces the criticism that Wittgensteinian philosophy bars the way to reality and, thus, debases Thomism.

Rather than beginning with the hard case of spiritual pedagogy, I begin by developing Wittgenstein's account of language more generally. If my approach is correct, skillful use of everyday language provides the basis for extended uses including religious language. The first chapter argues that spiritual pedagogy stretches from being at home in the concrete to transcendent mystery. An account of the language of spiritual pedagogy must assume a similar range from the quotidian to the divine. Building on this chapter, I take up Wittgensteinian approaches to religious language in the next chapter. Second, Wittgenstein is critiqued as an anti-realist or an idealist by both philosophers and theologians. My account of Wittgenstein's grammar attempts to show that both these charges are misguided.

Wittgenstein stands accused of discarding metaphysics and replacing it with mere talk about talk. Detractors—and occasionally supporters—see him as engaging in

“antiphilosophy” or a radically deflationist account of philosophy.²⁴⁸ Wittgenstein is said to avoid—or possibly eviscerate—the hard questions of philosophy and, by extension, the hard questions of theology as well. Following on these critiques, he is charged with replacing a careful analysis of being with a superficial investigation of grammar. These misreadings have semblances of truth insofar as Wittgenstein argues for limited metaphysics and language within grammar that is both arbitrary and adaptable.²⁴⁹ He admits to being arbitrary in some respects (Z 358).²⁵⁰ For Wittgenstein, grammar describes the system of rules that define a language and determine what propositions make sense. This system of rules corresponds with a way of being in the world, a form of life (*Lebensform*). These forms of life are various but not arbitrary. Grammar is the medium through which one comes to meaningfully engage with a world independent of the knower.²⁵¹ Stanley Cavell rightly argues, “the limits of language”, a phrase often turned against Wittgenstein, are the possibility of language arising as it does in the human form of life.²⁵² Using grammar is part of an activity, a form of life with a particular shape and, thus, limits (PI 23). For example, the cultivated forms of life of the ascetics,

²⁴⁸ To take two relatively recent examples, Alain Badiou claims Wittgenstein’s anti-philosophy is a challenge to philosophy that must be resisted. By contrast, Paul Horwich endorses what he takes to be Wittgenstein’s radically deflationary account of philosophy. Alain Badiou, *Wittgenstein’s Anti-Philosophy*, trans. Bruno Bosteels (London: Verso Books, 2011); Paul Horwich, *Wittgenstein’s Metaphilosophy, Wittgenstein’s Metaphilosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

²⁴⁹ Wittgenstein attempts to avoid both a metaphysics of depth and an empiricist myth of the given. Wittgenstein himself notes: “Not empiricism and yet realism in philosophy, that is the hardest thing” (RFM VI-23). Philosophers of religion and theologians are more likely to critique Wittgenstein as anti-realist than as anti-empiricist or anti-positivist. Therefore, I shall focus on the critique from anti-realism.

²⁵⁰ Theologians, catholic theologians in particular, frame this sort of objection in terms of a denial of substance. A substance, that is an independently existing object in the world, is apprehended by the agent intellect through sensed particulars. Substances are taken to be fixed, and purposefully created, as opposed to arbitrarily identified by grammar.

²⁵¹ These two misreadings arise from a global misreading, that is treating Wittgenstein’s philosophy as a set of theses and arguments rather than an investigation. Wittgenstein “sketches landscapes” in his later work and invites others to journey with him (PI Preface).

²⁵² Stanley Cavell, “Availability of Wittgenstein’s Later Philosophy,” in *Must We Mean What We Say?: A Book of Essays*, Updated ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 52–58.

discussed in chapter one, are accompanied by grammatical developments. Wittgenstein's realism is that of the human form of life as a communal form of life interacting with the world.

Wittgenstein is a realist insofar as he holds that human language makes meaningful claims about the world and the *use* of language answers to reality.²⁵³ Reality makes claims within grammar, but grammar does not correlate with reality but represents reality.²⁵⁴ Human beings are free to organize grammar for their statements about reality, provided those rules are useful within the human form of life. Rule-governed organization does not make the world a particular way: human categorization does not create reality but does represent it. This distinction is key to understanding the later Wittgenstein. For example, reality dictates whether the statement "There is a book on my desk" is true or false. Wittgenstein distinguishes between statements like "there is a book on my desk" and "books are bound paper suitable for printing text and images." The first is true or false depending on the reality of my desk. The second is neither true nor false but is a way of identifying reality. Similarly, that one has different concepts for book and pamphlet is not a claim about reality. One could imagine a language where there is no general term nor even concept of book but only the terms hardback and paperback or perhaps a series of more specific terms. A publisher may

²⁵³ Realism and anti-realism are comparative rather than absolute terms. One can be a realist about certain types of entities and not others. For example, Thomas Aquinas was a realist about individual entities but not about universals. As various authors have noted, Thomas Aquinas is antirealist about natural kinds when compared to Plato, yet Thomas has been recruited as a partisan in pro-realist argument since at least the early twentieth century. In the case of Wittgenstein, Dreyfus and Taylor take Wittgenstein to be a realist along with Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty by reframing the realist/antirealist divide in terms of engagement with reality versus disengaged or mediated epistemology in the representationalist tradition of Descartes. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Charles Taylor, *Retrieving Realism* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2015); John Haldane, "Aquinas and Realism" (Lumen Christi Institute, University of Chicago, October 30, 2013), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8MnS6A7mzwE>.

²⁵⁴ See: P. M. S. Hacker, *Insight and Illusion: Themes in the Philosophy of Wittgenstein*, 3rd ed., Anthem Studies in Wittgenstein (London: Anthem Press, 2021), 186–88.

have such a fine-grained set of terms. The statement “there is a hardback on my desk” is made true or false by reality. That a hardback is “bound paper suitable for printing text and images set between hard covers” is not. Mind-independent reality, that a book or hardback is on my desk, is mediated by the categories of the mind, the identification of a book or a hardback.

Objections arise from idealist and realist directions to Wittgenstein’s separation of the represented and the means of representation. Wittgenstein asks, “But is it an adequate answer to the scepticism [sic] of the idealist, or the assurances of the realist, to say that ‘There are physical objects’ is nonsense?” For them after all it is not nonsense. It would, however, be an answer to say: this assertion, or its opposite is a misfiring attempt to express what can’t be expressed like that” (OC 37). That “physical objects are spatial” is not a claim about reality in the same way that a “book is bound paper suitable for printing text and images” is not a claim about reality. The same superficial form of proposition employed in both is used to make claims about reality in other instances. The realist and the idealist labor under the bewitchments of language. Wittgenstein’s investigation shows that “physical objects are spatial” is a fruitless and deceptive starting point because it mistakes a rule in a language game with a fundamental truth about the world.

Wittgenstein’s particular realism, or “realistic” philosophy to invoke Cora Diamond’s term, begins with human beings’ form of life. Human beings acting with one another in the world in a multitude of activities or language games gives rise to language and grounds it in reality. Claims about the truth or falsity of object in the external world or the inner states of individuals, such as pain, both arise from the human form of life active in the world. There is

no getting behind this starting point of human language to ask, “are there physical objects?”²⁵⁵ One is already engaged in the activity of language to ask the question.²⁵⁶

This chapter proceeds in four parts. The first part clarifies one of the most misinterpreted aspects of Wittgenstein’s thought: the status of grammar, particularly the freedom of grammar. The second discusses Wittgenstein’s grammatical approach to language as a descriptive rather than prescriptive exercise. Grammar, as such, does not correspond nor fail to correspond to reality. There are a multitude of grammars with various degrees of relation. The third part argues that, though grammar does not attempt to correspond to reality as such, the forms of life and activities anchor grammar in reality by use within the human form of life. Grammar articulates essences and criteria through which one interacts with the world. Grammar changes as one’s activities change. I will return to this point in chapter six when I explore the role of the spiritual pedagogue in shaping students’ grammar through activities. The final section of the chapter challenges the perception that Wittgenstein offers a common sensical “metaphysics of the stone age” which has long since been surpassed.²⁵⁷ The section argues that Wittgensteinian philosophy remains a live option by offering a brief Wittgensteinian response to Bertrand Russell, Saul Kripke, and Timothy Williamson’s influential critiques.

²⁵⁵ Lonergan’s priority of understanding over being discussed in the previous chapter makes a very similar point.

²⁵⁶ Here I am following Adrian Moore’s argument that the question of transcendental idealism is disallowed by Wittgenstein. See: A. W. Moore, “Wittgenstein and Transcendental Idealism,” in *Wittgenstein and His Interpreters*, ed. Guy Kahane, Edward Kanterian, and Oskari Kuusela (Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2007), 174–99, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470690963.ch7>.

²⁵⁷ Russell cited by: Jager Ronald, *The Development of Bertrand Russell’s Philosophy* (Oxford: Routledge, 2013), 175.

3.1 Rules do not correspond nor fail to correspond to reality

The distinction between speaking within a grammar and undertaking a grammatical investigation is central to the realism of Wittgenstein's approach. Grammar itself is a body of rules for making true and false statements.²⁵⁸ The rules of grammar specify what falls under various concepts and how concepts can be combined to form sensible propositions. The rules of grammar are not themselves candidates for truth and falsity. Grammar rules allow for representation as opposed to being themselves represented. When useful, they allow one to make claims about the world, but the grammar rules do not make the claims true or false; the world does. Grammar rules themselves do not make claims about the world and, therefore, cannot be true or false. Having a rule for identifying apples does not necessarily imply that apples exist in the world. In a world without apples, such a rule might find little use, but the usefulness of a rule is distinct from the question of truth.

Useful rules are pre-reflexively presumed to be realist. The rules of grammar are employed for world directed purposes. When one utilizes the grammar rules concerning tables, in most cases the speaker presumes 'table' is a useful concept representing things in the world about which the speaker is concerned. Everyday speech occurs within a grammar and is pre-reflectively realist, insofar as the term realist may be pre-reflective. Worries about realism require a reflective stance. Consider the shopkeeper example (PI 1). In the successful exchange, both the customer and the shopkeeper deal in claims about reality without actively reflecting on the realism of their exchange. The customer refers to a type of object in the world, red apples, and asks for five. The customer is content with buying apples and the

²⁵⁸ "To grammar belongs everything antecedent to truth." Hacker, *Insight and Illusion*, 185.

shopkeeper with selling them; no further theorization required. Consider two types of unsuccessful exchange. The first type is straightforward—namely unsuccessful exchanges within the same language game. The shopkeeper may respond that he does not have five red apples in the shop. Again, this is a claim about the world. The second type is more problematic—unsuccessful exchanges across language games. Imagine that, upon asking for the five red apples, the shopkeeper presents three tubs of peanut butter, or, worse still, responds by doing a little dance. Initially, one might look for a failure of the first type. For example, maybe the note asking for the apples was unclear or the shopkeeper's eyesight is poor. The exchange might be saved with larger or clearer script. If these and like possibilities are excluded, one moves from a problem in the world as to why the exchange was unsuccessful to a problem of representation. The problem is not whether or not the shop has five red apples but a prior problem of the inability to represent five red apples. Realizing communication has failed, customer and shopkeeper have cause to reflect on their means of communicating and the way in which their grammar failed to provide the expected utility.

Surveying through grammatical investigation is not about reality directly. In my extended shopkeeper example, the turn towards grammar occurred precisely because language seemed to be losing a useful grip on reality. Within a grammar, language concerns the truth and falsity of the reality as articulated by that language. Grammatical investigation does not concern truth and falsity but the rules or criteria. As discussed above, grammatical investigation differs from traditional metaphysical investigations insofar as metaphysics aims

to explore the deep structures of reality.²⁵⁹ The statements of traditional metaphysics aspire to articulate truth. For example, a metaphysician's answer to the question of the one and the many or the nature of forms makes truth claims on reality. A grammatical investigation of the one and the many describes the rules for talking about such things; it makes no truth claim about reality as such. Wittgenstein's complaint against much of metaphysics is precisely that it confuses the rules for making true and false statements with true and false statements themselves. The rules are taken to say something profound about reality. As noted above, much of traditional metaphysics takes itself to justify language and its relationship with reality rather than to survey language. Herein lies the bewitchment of language.

Consider how one might go about solving the failed shopping trip of the second type. The shopkeeper and the customer do not have a shared way of representing five red apples. The traditional metaphysical approach would be one of correlation. Metaphysics secures correlation with the reality of the world and the structures of description. Wittgenstein does not deny that there is a relationship between useful grammar and the world. That relationship is on view in the given activity. Wittgenstein famously argues "*Essence [Wesen]* is expressed in grammar" (PI 371).

Consider Newtonian versus Relativistic physics, which are both grammars insofar as they provide rules for defining objects and phenomena. Newton and Einstein refer to different

²⁵⁹ Irad Kimhi rightly argues that Wittgenstein's grammatical approach resonates with the very beginnings of metaphysics in Parmenides. "Philosophical logic, so understood, is a first-personal [sic] engagement from *within* the activity of thinking, one which allows the articulation and comprehension of thinking to emerge from out of itself. The personal, so understood, *is* the logical." Traditional metaphysics understood as investigating the deep structures of reality as distinct from grammar is only one branch of the metaphysical tradition. Certain modern, non-foundational conceptions of metaphysics do not run contrary to Wittgenstein's caution: for example, Adrian Moore's definition of metaphysics as "the most general attempt to make sense of things." Irad Kimhi, *Thinking and Being* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2018), 1; A. W. Moore, *The Evolution of Modern Metaphysics: Making Sense of Things*, *The Evolution of Modern Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 1, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139029223>.

objects in the world. At the risk of oversimplification, Newton holds that there are forces acting on objects, whereas Einstein's theory has objects responding to their local spacetime. The criteria for gravity differ between Newton and Einstein.²⁶⁰ For Newton, gravity is a force arising from a mass acting at a distance; for Einstein, it's a curvature of space time around a mass.

There are different criteria in Newton versus Einstein, that is different references in the world as well as different predictions to be verified or falsified. While both theories are useful in a wide range of cases, Einstein's theory is more useful in a great many cases, though more mathematically cumbersome. To take an historically important example, Einstein's theory explains how the light of stars bends around the sun, a phenomenon known as gravitational lensing.²⁶¹ This particular use helped solidify its preeminence over Newton's theory. Though Newton predicted that light bends around massive gravity, his theory predicted only half of the actual lensing effect. Put in grammatical terms, the grammar of Newtonian light rays requires them to behave in certain predictable ways. For Wittgenstein, nonsense is what falls outside of language, beyond the rules of the game²⁶²: "To say 'This combination of words has no sense' excludes it from the sphere of language, and thereby

²⁶⁰ The evolution of scientific theory requires an evolution of grammar in articulating criteria. See: Hans-Johann Glock, "Concepts, Conceptual Schemes and Grammar," *Philosophia* 37, no. 4 (May 29, 2009): 653–88, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11406-009-9200-x>.

²⁶¹ Abraham Pais, *Subtle Is the Lord: The Science and the Life of Albert Einstein* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 303–6.

²⁶² Here I follow Cora Diamond's reading of nonsense. "Anything that is nonsense is so merely because some determination of meaning has not been made; it is not nonsense as a logical result of determinations that have been made." Cora Diamond, "What Nonsense Might Be," in *The Realistic Spirit: Wittgenstein, Philosophy, and the Mind* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1995), 106.

bounds the domain of language” (PI 499).²⁶³ Light bending in the way observed runs contrary to what Newton’s theory predicts. One response would be to look for an empirical reason for light bending as observed that nonetheless fits within the existing theory. In the absence of an empirical explanation through which one stays within the rules, one is confronted with a definition that does not obtain in reality. Newton’s grammar is not useful for this particular observed phenomenon. The observed gravitational lensing is nonsense within the particular game of light and gravity devised by Newton but sensible within other games.²⁶⁴ Within the grammar rules of everyday spatial awareness, one can speak of light bending, albeit in a vague way. Thus, one can articulate the potential limits of Newton’s grammar and the demands of a novel observation within another grammar. But within the more specialized and precise grammar of Newton, it is not that the statements made about this are false but that no sensible statements can be made.

By contrast, Einstein’s grammar can make sensible statements about light bending that are true or false depending on their reference to the world. The grammar accommodates formulating such statements. Einstein’s theory is not useful in all instances. It does not function well on extremely small scales, and its predictions are similar to Newton’s on everyday human scales but much more difficult to formulate. It is important to note that these

²⁶³ There is a debate in the Wittgenstein scholarship on grammar and what constitutes nonsense. Take two opposing views: Peter Hacker sees nonsense as a logically defective character, whereas James Conant sees nonsense as logical capacity remaining disengaged. The exchange between Conant and Gustafsson is helpful and makes reference to Hacker’s position. See: James Conant, “Reply to Gustafsson: Wittgenstein on the Relation of Sign to Symbol,” in *The Logical Alien: Conant and His Critics*, ed. Sophia Miguens (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2020); Martin Gustafsson, “Wittgenstein on Using Language and Playing Chess: The Breakdown of an Analogy and Its Consequences,” in *The Logical Alien: Conant and His Critics*, ed. Sophia Miguens (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2020); P.M.S. Hacker, “Wittgenstein, Carnap and the New American Wittgensteinians,” *The Philosophical Quarterly* 53, no. 210 (January 2003): 01–23, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9213.00292>.

²⁶⁴ Some propositions—such as “this is a round square” or “if p then q/ not q/ therefore p”—seem to fall outside of all coherent grammars. I will take up this form of nonsense in the next chapter.

competing theories are being measured within grammars, albeit not the grammars of the given theories. The criteria presented in the grammar of a theory allows one to identify what accords with a theory and what is articulable within a theory (PI 353).²⁶⁵ Newton's physics as a grammar sets the criteria or rules for picking out objects or phenomena in the world. There are certain cases when Newton's rules do not pick out objects (or the movement of objects) in the world, but Einstein's do.

Newton and Einstein developed new grammars when developing their new theories, new ways of representation that were more useful than what came before. Grammar is not the same as theory, but major theoretical change also creates new grammar. Einstein does not render Newton's theory false but does provide a more useful set of concepts in some cases. As implied grammars, neither Newton's nor Einstein's theory is itself reality, though both represent reality. For Wittgenstein, science discovers new facts about the world, but facts are articulated within a grammar. Wittgenstein himself made modest scientific progress as a researcher in aeronautics.²⁶⁶ Science risks falling into the temptation of traditional metaphysics in viewing its own mode of representation as, in fact, a deeper reality to be investigated. If Wittgenstein is cautious about science, it is only to the extent that science risks falling into its own metaphysical traps arising from the utility of particular theories. The fact that a particular theory is extraordinarily useful does not imply that the theory itself, as a grammar, is true. The rules of grammar cannot be true or false but only useful or useless. Progress in knowledge of the world through scientific investigation and the refinement of

²⁶⁵ For an overview on Wittgenstein and philosophy of science, see: Vasso Kindi, "Wittgenstein and Philosophy of Science," in *A Companion to Wittgenstein*, ed. Hans-Johann Glock and John Hyman (Milton: John Wiley & Sons, 2017), 587–602.

²⁶⁶ See: Ian Lemco, "Wittgenstein's Aeronautical Investigation," *Notes and Records of the Royal Society of London* 61, no. 1 (2007): 39–51.

theory is admirable. Wittgenstein cautions that theory is grammar. To investigate a grammar as though it was itself reality is not only fruitless but confused.

3.2 Philosophical Non-interference and Description

Wittgenstein writes that: “Philosophy must not interfere in any way with the actual use of language, so it can in the end only describe it. For it cannot justify it either. It leaves everything as it is” (PI 124). The language that arises out of the human form of life is already realistic, prior to any philosophical interventions (at least for the most part). Wittgenstein cautions against two venerable philosophical ambitions. The first is for philosophy to improve language such that it better conforms to reality, often through greater systemization.²⁶⁷ The second and related ambition is for philosophy to justify language on grounds of systematization or conformity to reality, or typically both. For Wittgenstein, philosophy’s modest ambition is to describe how language functions. This is not a normative ambition. Philosophy does not have a privileged access to reality lacking in ordinary language, and philosophy’s systematic ambitions can thwart the proper functioning of regular language.

If philosophy does have a privilege, it is only insofar as it brings to light what is already happening in language. Philosophy aims for “an overview (*übersehen*) of the use of our words” so that they may become “surveyable” (*Übersichtlichkeit*) (PI 122). To survey language through grammatical investigation is not to offer a comprehensive systemization nor a guarantee of conformity with reality. Grammatical investigation describes the rules of a language—the various intelligible connections drawn in a language. They also describe a

²⁶⁷ For example, Aristotle distinguishes between properly philosophical dialectic and rhetoric (1359b10). Rhetorical speech is suitable for politics, whereas dialectic is universal in scope but understood only by philosophers.

form of living with those rules (PI 7, 19). An overview of language helps avoid the “craving for generality” that afflicts much of philosophy (BB 18). Surveying language is not to dig deeper into reality but to articulate the rules or grammar by which a language functions, the intermediate connections of language as opposed to a foundational account of language starting from basic units. Though one speaks of grammar substantively out of convenience, grammars are not self-standing forms but embedded in language and forms of life.

As part of the process of surveying, Wittgenstein identifies a wide variety of ways in which language is used according to shared rules, a wide variety of “language games” to use his preferred term (PI 23). For example, the linguistic practices required for negotiating a bank loan, commanding a battleship, and writing a libretto overlap in part and differ in part (PI 65). While all three forms of language may have some similar rules, the language of command on a battleship would not succeed in writing a compelling play or receiving a loan. Language is contextual. Wittgenstein’s project distinguishes how language is used in these and many other contexts. These three disparate examples are not clear and discrete language games. Games have soft edges where one game cannot be exhaustively distinguished from another. It may also be the case that what is identified as one game can be analyzed as several interrelated games. Language games are not discrete, natural kinds but tools for description. Their investigation is plural, in part, because analysis of language games occurs within other language games without ever reaching a final or ultimate language game. The same languages can be usefully divided in various ways.

The plurality of language is irreducible for Wittgenstein and the imprecision of demarcating language games reflects this. Part of this imprecision is that language games change—sometimes in the middle. Like children’s ball games, one can make up language

games as one plays (PI 83). Language games can be playful as spontaneous creations out of previous language games. Such language creation demonstrates a fluidity with previous games such that innovation can coexist with spontaneity.²⁶⁸ This process of language creation is particularly important for riddling language, a point I will return to in the fifth chapter.

Any conceivable language game, however, seems to include certain logical rules.²⁶⁹ It is difficult to conceive of a language game that functions without noncontradiction or if-then statements. Within human life, there are certain words and grammars that seem universally useful.²⁷⁰ There is a metaphysical temptation to probe into the plurality of languages, expecting to find the deep essence of language common to them all—for example, logical or some other metaphysical depth found in common features. One is tempted to see these common features as new facts about the world. Articulating the structures of language is in service of understanding what it is that is “already in plain view” rather than attempting to learn something new (PI 89).

For Wittgenstein, the particularities of language-as-used ground it in reality. Though human languages have certain universal features, these features cannot be distilled into a universal or ideal language (PI 81). An ideal language would have no purchase, distanced as it would be from the human form of life in which language arises. Wittgenstein’s descriptive,

²⁶⁸ Stephen Mulhall, *Inheritance and Originality: Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Kierkegaard* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), 64–66.

²⁶⁹ Indeed, Wittgenstein has been accused of Transcendental Idealism on these grounds. See: Moore, “Wittgenstein and Transcendental Idealism”; David Bloor, “The Question of Linguistic Idealism Revisited,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Wittgenstein*, ed. David G. Stern and Hans Sluga, 2nd ed., Cambridge Companions to Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 332–60, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316341285.013>; G. E. M. Anscombe, “The Question of Linguistic Idealism,” in *From Parmenides to Wittgenstein: The Collected Philosophical Papers of G.E.M. Anscombe*, vol. 1, 3 vols. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981), 112–34.

²⁷⁰ Wittgenstein distinguished between “2” corresponding to reality and “2” by which he means counting more generally, which as a rule human beings cannot do without. See, LFM 247–49.

philosophical non-interference abandons the ambition to arrive at a universal account of language to avoid truncating language into an idealization that fails to account for the reality of language as it is used. I will return to this point at the end of the chapter when discussing Timothy Williamson's modal logic as metaphysics.

In addition to resisting a universal logic as the basis of language, Wittgenstein resists ostension as the foundation for language. This simple and seemingly realistic picture is of language pointing to objects in the world independent of language. Wittgenstein begins the *Philosophical Investigations* articulating the shortcomings of this common understanding. It seems intuitive that, when I point to "this", an object in the world is marked out. Yet "this" is a contextual word and depends on the particular game one is playing with it (PI 6). Take the limited diversity of the three language games discussed above (negotiating a bank loan, commanding a battleship, and writing a libretto). In all three cases, the meaning of ostension changes depending on the game, though these games are all played or used realistically.

As noted above, Wittgenstein offers the example of a customer who hands a shopkeeper a note marked "five red apples" (PI 1). Wittgenstein narrates the process by which this note communicates the customer's request to the shopkeeper who in turn fulfills it. The shopkeeper opens the drawer labeled 'apples'. He checks the color chart to identify red. Then he counts using the number words one to five. For each number word, the shopkeeper retrieves an apple from the marked drawer, corresponding to red on the chart. Wittgenstein concludes, "It is in this and similar ways that one operates with words." The explanation of language is in the activities associated with it.

Wittgenstein avoids the mistake of searching in vain for something extraordinary about language or else that one might find an extraordinary foundation upon which language

might function securely: “We are under the illusion that what is peculiar, profound and essential to us in our investigation resides in it trying to grasp the incomparable essence of language” (PI 97). Instead, for Wittgenstein, philosophy surveys language, exploring how it functions in ways that are already open to view. Philosophical demands for language to be pristine or profound and to be secured against all possible illusion are themselves sources of confusion.

Consider vagueness. Following Frege, much of the analytic tradition of philosophy seeks unambiguous boundaries of concepts such that one can know precisely when a concept obtains and when it does not. This ideal of exactness holds across language. By contrast, Wittgenstein takes exactness to be game specific (PI 88). There is no universal ideal of exactness, no high degree of precision in definition that can rid language of vagueness. Exactitude is context and purpose dependent. To return to an earlier example, ‘book’ may be a sufficiently exact term for the language game of the average reader. The research librarian responsible for hundreds of thousands of books has a different purpose from picking out things in the world to read. She must worry about how to store and conserve books efficiently and so a more exact taxonomy of books is required. The generic concept ‘book’ is not exact enough for her purposes. Wittgenstein focuses on language precisely because language already realistically represents the world insofar as language users are living and acting in the world. Wittgenstein’s philosophical therapy dissipates the problem of profundity rather than solving it.

3.3 Grammar structures are anchored in human life and activities

Wittgenstein’s fundamental contention *pace* traditional metaphysics is that the criteria for truth and falsity cannot themselves be true and false. More broadly, the criteria for any

concept cannot be true or false. As noted above, truth and falsity function only within grammar. A grammatical investigation explores the conditions of truth and falsity.

Wittgenstein notes that: “Grammar is not accountable to any reality. It is grammatical rules that determine meaning (constitute it) and so they themselves are not answerable to any meaning and to that extent are arbitrary” (PG 184). Arbitrary does not entail anti-realist nor idealist. While grammar is arbitrary, its use and origins are not.

Consider measurement, an example that Wittgenstein himself uses. The length of a given unit of measurement is arbitrary but can be applied meaningfully. From 1799 to 1960, the meter was defined by a stick housed in Paris. Therefore, the sense of a meter seems like it is an empirical matter. If this were the case, it would be deeply problematic for Wittgenstein in that essence would be an empirical question. A metaphysical question, “what is the essence of a meter?”, would have the seemingly empirical answer: “the length of the meter stick in Paris.” Wittgenstein argues that “There is *one* thing of which one can state neither that it is 1 metre long, nor that it is not 1 metre long, and that is the standard metre in Paris” (PI 50). This somewhat cryptic remark becomes intelligible when one understands the meter in the context of the act of measuring.

Wittgenstein’s contention in both the limited case of the essence of the meter stick and in the case of essence more broadly is that *establishing* a measure (or essence) and *using* a measure (or essence) are distinct. Establishing a measure is an act of grammar formation, whereas using a measure is an act in accordance with grammar. Wittgenstein argues that this is the case with the meter stick. Is it true that the meter stick is a meter long? While the temptation is to say yes, this is a misunderstanding. For a proposition to be true, it must make a sensible claim that the world is thus and so. Establishing a system of measure does not make

a claim about the world, though it enables making claims about the world. To repeat Wittgenstein's central claim, grammar rules are not true or false but are the precondition for making true or false statements. A system of measurement is a clearly arbitrary grammar that nonetheless enables true and false statements about the world.

The meter stick is a perfectly ordinary object that happens to play a particular role in the measurement game. But *using* the meter is non-arbitrary. The act of measuring is a rule-bound interaction with reality within a human form of life. Using the rules, one can determine whether or not that building is four meters high. The truth or falsity of the claim about the height of the building is non-arbitrary. The building really is or is not that height.

The arbitrariness of the rules allows them to change, not on the grounds of truth or falsity but on the grounds of usefulness. Since 1960, the essence of a meter has changed as the standards for precision of increased.²⁷¹ As such, the Paris meter stick can now be said as a matter of fact to be approximately a meter long, precisely because it no longer has the same function in grammar. The current rule for the length of a meter is the distance travelled by light in a vacuum for the duration of 1/299,792,458 seconds. Because of a change in the measurement game, this new rule for the length of a meter plays the role the meter stick once did. The new meter is more useful in some circumstances. Within grammar, correspondence to reality is specified. Like the case of Newton versus Einstein, the two grammars of the meter substantially overlap in use. Whilst the second grammar can be used more precisely than the

²⁷¹ Gustafsson helpfully articulates the evolving rules of use. He rightly critiques Hacker's more stringent rules of correctness. Gustafsson observes: "like rules of logical syntax, grammatical rules are not in the business of proscribing anything, since they are constitutive of the very entities whose employment they capture." Gustafsson, "Wittgenstein on Using Language and Playing Chess: The Breakdown of an Analogy and Its Consequences," 218; Cora Diamond, "Logical Syntax in Wittgenstein's Tractatus," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 55, no. 218 (January 2005): 78–89, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0031-8094.2005.00386.x>.

former in very specific circumstances, this increased precision does not falsify the previous grammar as such. The new meter is not an abstract ideal of precision. The human act of measurement remains vague to a point and so too the grammar of measurement.

If grammar does not correspond to reality, one might conclude on these grounds that Wittgenstein is anti-realist. Grammar itself is neither realist nor anti-realist nor idealist. Grammar is useful to various degrees and its realism is found in its utility in formulating statements that can be confirmed or denied by reality. As a purely speculative exercise, there could be many grammars that may have nothing to do with reality insofar as they do not allow for the formulation of propositions that can be judged true or false. Fanciful grammars may be a speculative possibility but, for Wittgenstein, grammars do not arise from idle speculation. They are not abstract, idealized constructions. Language games emerge from and are used within forms of life (PI 19, 23). Grammars are not chosen or developed at random but come about because of the demands of the world on speakers. Therefore, while grammar does not correspond to reality as such, the fitness of grammar does. Wittgenstein is a realist insofar as useful grammars make claims about the world. The capacity to adapt grammars, like the move from Newton to Einstein, allows for developing realism. One's forms of life and grammars can change to offer more useful, and by extension more fitted to the real, ways of identifying truth and falsity at least in some domains. Grammar's lack of fixity, its lack of correspondence to reality as such, allows for forms of human life adapting to reality. Wittgenstein's realism is in the, sometimes changing, use of grammar rather than in grammar itself.

At a first order of analysis, the arbitrariness of grammar may be likened to the arbitrariness of driving rules. Whether one comes from a country that drives on the right or

the left-hand side of the road is an arbitrary rule. So too with the rules around traffic flow, signage, and speed. Different jurisdictions have a variety of such rules that facilitate the movement of people and things from one place to another. To this extent, the rules are arbitrary. Despite my American predilection for right-hand driving, both right- and left-hand driving are equally useful when consistently applied. Neither is “joint carving” of reality in a way the other is not. Neither better captures the way the world is than the other. Yet the rules of the road are not wholly arbitrary. Rules of the road lacking the equivalent of right- or left-hand driving rules are likely to lead to crashes. All useful rules of the road would seem to have a certain similar characteristic regarding the avoidance of crashes by regulating side of the road by direction being travelled. Though the rules of the road remain arbitrary in their particulars and a wide variety of rules might allow for safe driving, useful rules are not wholly arbitrary.

Just as measurement is non-arbitrary despite the arbitrariness of the length of a meter, so too the particulars of a given community’s grammar may be arbitrary yet premised on the human form of life. Wittgenstein considers a traveler going to an unknown country with an unknown language (PI 206). The language and customs of this new place and these new people may be initially opaque to the traveler. Yet after time and interaction, the language and customs of this new people become more and more comprehensible. Wittgenstein claims this is because of a common human form of life (PI 241). By virtue of being a human being and living in a human community, all human beings share common ways of being in the world.²⁷²

²⁷² Kerr pithily summarizes: “...the only a priori in Wittgenstein’s philosophical vision of human life: our *Lebensformen*.” Kerr, *Theology after Wittgenstein*, 105.

The human way of being in the world can align with disparate grammars. On the Chicago Subway, the “L”, the grammar of announcements was shifted temporarily about a decade ago. Prior to arriving at a station, the driver would announce “doors open on your right/left”. Patrons wishing to alight would duly queue either to the right or left of the train as appropriate. The announcement changed to “door open on the right/left in the direction of travel”. On the level of grammatical investigation, there is a shift between the old L announcement and the new: the rules of the language game shift. The first announcement “doors open on your right” seems confused only under the most literal-minded or idealized reading. The driver of the train does not know what direction I am facing, and the various riders are facing a variety of directions. Some are facing the sides of the train, which would make the doors to the right and left the emergencies doors that lead between the cars of the train. No one going to these doors does so because of the announcement’s instruction but for a host of other reasons. Especially late in the evening, more than a few riders are facing the floor or ceiling of the train. Yet these announcements were perfectly clear to riders. Part of the criteria for identifying “the door on your right” is spatial orientation based on movement—here is an intermediate connection surveyable by grammatical investigation. The criterion is premised on human locomotion, often referred to as “relative direction”—right and left are relative to a forward orientation of one’s locomotion. In the case of the subway, the train’s locomotion substitutes for an individual’s locomotion. My left is left relative to the motion of the train. As a rider, my motion is the train’s motion for the purposes of the game. No one explained this to passengers, yet it was tacitly but near universally understood.

The newer announcement picks out the proper exit door by different criteria. Identifying “doors open on the left in the direction of travel” requires a similar awareness of

which direction the train is moving as the previous announcement. A web of sensible connections relating human locomotion and train locomotion are required in the old L announcement but not in the newer L announcements. Yet one's spatial awareness is still required to follow the new announcements. In the case of the two types of announcements, the "door on your left" and the "door on the left in the direction of travel" have different senses (*Sinn*) but a very similar meaning (*Bedeutung*). The "door on your left" and the "door on the left in the direction of travel" are verified or falsified by the same state of affairs within the Chicago transit form of life, which itself depends on the particulars of spatial awareness in the human form of life.

Human ways of being in the world are themselves formed by the world itself. Wittgenstein offers the example of measuring cheese (PI 142). The grammar of weights and measures presumes a certain stability in the objects being measured. If, for example, cheese "suddenly grew and shrank with no obvious cause," the grammar of measurement and, with it, exchange would no longer be useful and would require significant changes. Though grammars are arbitrary and subject to contingency in their formation, they arise from human beings and human community in the world. Human beings only have human grammars—grammar is arbitrary but within the domain of human lifeforms.²⁷³ What "makes a word a word" is its place in what human beings and communities do with words.²⁷⁴ If the traveler were to travel to an unknown country of the bat people or perhaps some even more exotic lifeform, it might be the case that no common form of life exists and, thus, that bat people grammar and human

²⁷³ Stanley Cavell, "Declining Decline: Wittgenstein as a Philosopher of Culture," *Inquiry* 31, no. 3 (1988): 254–55, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00201748808602153>.

²⁷⁴ Mulhall, *Inheritance and Originality*, 75.

grammar cannot be bridged.²⁷⁵ Though in the absence of bat people, speculating as to mutual comprehensibility is probably an idle pursuit.²⁷⁶ Human beings can learn one another's grammars because human beings can live together and coordinate their activities.

3.4 Understanding

A theme throughout the *Philosophical Investigations* is the capacity for human beings to understand "at a stroke" [*mit einem Schlage*] aspects of their fellow human beings and their world (PI 138, 139, 191). At a stroke, one understands that the sun is setting on the horizon, that the answer to the equation is three, or that my friend is quite upset. My friend, at a stroke, might recognize my concern and sympathy. In understanding comes capacity to know what ought to happen next, to know the next move in the game. Yet one is not born understanding, nor can such understanding be taken for granted. The fact that human beings can live in community, coordinating their actions, does not mean they always do. Counterexamples abound. Wittgenstein's account of language and life with language is an account of skillfulness or second nature in more classical terms.²⁷⁷

The *Investigations* begins with what Wittgenstein takes to be St. Augustine's inadequate account of a child coming to understand the adults around him speaking (PI 1). Augustine's child is lonely in his attempt to wrestle understanding from speech around him

²⁷⁵ Thomas Nagel, "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?," *The Philosophical Review* 84, no. 4 (October 1974): 435–50.

²⁷⁶ I am not making an argument as to the possibility of absolute representation. It might be the case that bat people and humans are representing the same reality. For more on absolute representation see: Adrian W. Moore, *Points of View* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

²⁷⁷ I am following McDowell's broadly Wittgensteinian and Aristotelian account of second nature or *Bildung*. Second nature is the means by which one develops philosophical norms. He takes this as the alternative to philosophy attempting to bridge dualistic divides. The correct cultivated norms alleviate the need to bridge dualisms. Though he does not develop his account in this direction, McDowell's account of second nature and *Bildung* provides a bridge back to ancient *paideia* and with it the sort of spiritual development discussed in the first chapter. John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1994), chaps. 4–5.

trying to recognize the things which the adults recognize. By contrast, Wittgenstein conceives of the various games that make up human language and life as participatory. They are to be played not watched. Without playing, one will never properly learn the rules. Wittgenstein observes the close relationship between knowledge and action: “The grammar of the word ‘know’ is evidentially closely related to the grammar of the word ‘can’, ‘is able to’. But also closely related to that of the word ‘understand’. (To have ‘mastered’ a technique.)” (PI 150). As one plays the game, one comes to understand the rules.

Adults typically learn through explanation using what they already know. Speaking within a grammar, one can explain novel things, as long as those novel things are expressible within the rules of the grammar, that is to say within the bounds of sense. As noted above, sometime one game slips into another and a third game is created while playing. To know the rules of both original games does not necessarily explain the third. Wittgenstein cautions that explanation is not foundational: it eventually stops in practice (PI 217). Truth claims are elucidated by exploring forms of life, the practice of living with words in predictable ways: “I want to say: it is characteristic of our language that the foundation on which it grows consists in steady ways of living, regular ways of acting” (PO 397).²⁷⁸ To understand, in the first instance, is to partake in a particular form of living with words.

In learning a language, training is prior to explanation. Wittgenstein writes: “[T]he teaching of language is not explaining, but training (*Abrichten*)” (PI 5) and “Any explanation has its foundation in training. (Educators ought to remember this.)” (Z 419, RPP II 327).

²⁷⁸ The text reproduced in *Philosophical Occasions* is “*Ursache und Wirkung: Intuitives Erfassen*”. For a discussion, see: Jocelyn Benoist, “Our Life with Truth,” in *Language, Form(s) of Life, and Logic: Investigations after Wittgenstein*, ed. Christian Georg Martin, On Wittgenstein, Volume 4 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018), 155–72.

Explanation explains *within* language. While a fluent language user may transition from one grammar to another related grammar through explanation, translation presumes understanding. It presumes skillful language use in the language of origin and destination. The expert language user may transition from the Imperial to the Metric system by way of explanation, but learning to measure in the first place is a matter of training—this is what I do when I measure because it is what people who measure things do. But one cannot explain a radically different form of measurement or other sufficiently dissimilar rules. “I cannot describe how (in general) to employ rules, except by teaching you, training you to employ rules” (Z 318, RPP II 413).

In German, the typical word for training human beings is *Ausbildung*. Wittgenstein uses a word more commonly associated with the training of animals, particularly dogs: *Abrichtung*.²⁷⁹ *Ausbildung* is also the word for apprenticeship which usually includes both explanation and hands-on training, whereas the *Abrichtung* of animals excludes explanation. If Wittgenstein is correct that “Any explanation has its foundation in training”, to avoid circularity, this training would be *Abrichtung* rather than *Ausbildung*.

Imagine an apprenticeship, for example, teaching plumbing to an adult who speaks the same language, as opposed to Wittgenstein’s builders (PI 5-6). The expert plumber explains the technique required to fix the pipes while demonstrating the technique and perhaps later narrating the student’s movements. The student slowly becomes comfortable with the various skills required, the feel of the instruments, the sound of the water flowing, and so on.

²⁷⁹ Norm Friesen unnecessarily ascribes Wittgenstein’s word choice to pessimism. Norm Friesen, “Training and Abrichtung: Wittgenstein as a Tragic Philosopher of Education,” *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 49, no. 1 (January 2, 2017): 68–77, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2016.1182415>.

Explanations become more meaningful to the plumbing student as her associations with the various trained activities become stronger. Eventually, the student and expert plumber share in the same grammar and activity of plumbing.

Before one can learn plumbing or other skills one learns in an internship, one requires certain skills upon which human explanation relies. Wittgenstein offers object permanence as an example of a world picture required before explanation can proceed (OC 314). The scene Wittgenstein depicts of a student in a classroom questioning object permanence is a bit absurd. Does that table in the classroom still exist when I'm not there to see it? (OC 314) Though there is disagreement as to precisely when and in what stages humans develop object permanence, it is almost always in the first years of life and required for subsequent development. The interactions of human beings with infants train infants to believe that the table in the classroom, or nursery in the first instance, is there regardless of anyone looking at it. For the teacher, the question of the permanence of objects cannot be a real question. The human form of life and human interactions occur in a world where objects do not appear and disappear.²⁸⁰ Like the cheese maintains the same weight which makes measurement useful in the shop, object permanence is useful across the wide variety of human interactions. The student is playing a different language game or working by different criteria (OC 315). The infant is trained, *Abrichtung*, into object permanence which is presumed in any subsequent explanation. Very young children seem to learn object permanence at least in part through literal, pre-linguistic games such as peekaboo. There is no *Ausbildung* for the student who refuses object permanence because of her lack of an *Abrichtung*.

²⁸⁰ Virtual particles notwithstanding.

Object permanence is not chosen at random from among the possible training conditions for human language games. Wittgenstein offers a further example, the student of history who doubts that the earth really has such a temporal extent or is real in the first place (OC 316). Certain questions fall outside the grammar of the game of history and so too certain questions fall outside the more widely applicable grammar of object permanence.

Wittgenstein notes that the game that precludes disappearing objects or the temporal extension of the earth allowing for history is not of one's choosing (OC 317). That objects do not appear and disappear without cause may sound like an empirical proposition, but it functions as a rule. It is a rule without any apparent alternative given state of the world and of human beings.

Wittgenstein resists philosophical accounts of foundations. Wittgenstein quotes Goethe's *Faust*, "In the beginning was the deed" (OC 402). Insofar as there can be a foundation, it is in the interactions of human beings with the world and the games that seem to have no alternative, like object permanence, as opposed to many other games that seem to be dispensable or to have alternatives. Even basic competencies like object permanence are at least partially social. As Cavell rightly observes, any series of why questions seeking explanation ultimately arrives at a how one was trained. "This is what I do."²⁸¹ To go on as a human being, that is to understand, required mastering the grammar of a world in which objects persist unless there is some cause for them to disappear.

²⁸¹ Cavell, *Claim of Reason*, 125.

Understanding is skillfully playing the game. Insofar as there are a wide variety of games, there are a wide variety of ways of understanding (PI 531, 532).²⁸² Some are shared by nearly everyone, like object permanence: some are shared by relatively few, like the finer points of measuring the speed of light. Understanding is a coping with reality through grammar but in such a way that grammar can be adapted to new ways of skillfully coping with reality.

3.5 Critiques of Wittgenstein as an outmoded anti-realist

Though a cautious admirer and supporter of Wittgenstein's early work, Russell came to see Wittgenstein's later work as lacking in rigor and seriousness. Bertrand Russell laments what he takes to be "common sense" metaphysics to be "the metaphysics of the stone-age."²⁸³ Russell concludes that Wittgenstein's later work, notably the *Philosophical Investigations*, is both lazy and false; if it were true, it would be only "a slight help to lexicographers, and at worst, an idle tea-table amusement."²⁸⁴ Russell considered Wittgenstein's later work to be outmoded upon arrival. According to Scott Soames's influential telling, Saul Kripke's celebrated *Naming and Necessity* cast Wittgenstein into the history of philosophy as opposed to its vital present.²⁸⁵ In this final section, I argue that Russell, Soames, and other similar judgements are premature by sketching a Wittgensteinian response to theories meant to surpass him. I do not take my arguments in this section to be definitive vindications of the

²⁸² See: P. M. S. Hacker and Gordon P. Baker, *Wittgenstein: Understanding and Meaning Part I*, extensively revised edition, vol. 1, *Analytical Commentary on the Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Blackwell Pub, 2005), 380–85.

²⁸³ Ronald, *The Development of Bertrand Russell's Philosophy*, 175.

²⁸⁴ Bertrand Russell, *My Philosophical Development* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1959), 216–17.

²⁸⁵ Scott Soames, *Philosophical Analysis in the Twentieth Century, Volume 1: The Dawn of Analysis* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), <https://www.degruyter.com/princetonup/view/title/511934>; Scott Soames, *Philosophical Analysis in the Twentieth Century, Volume 2: The Age of Meaning* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

Wittgenstein approach. More modestly, I hold that Wittgenstein remains a live philosophical option that can plausibly respond to criticisms as opposed to being a stone aged set piece.

For anyone hoping for the philosophical equivalent of a scientific breakthrough, that is some new philosophical theory that makes new, substantial discoveries about the world and opens new horizons of research, Wittgenstein's conclusions that language already works well and has no metaphysical depths to discover come as a great disappointment. There is no perfect grammar, logic, nor metaphysics to be found. The search for them leads only to confusion, according to Wittgenstein. An upshot of leaving language alone is that our stone aged forebearers also had realistic language long before Thales started considering water.²⁸⁶ Attempts to bring metaphysics into the space age broadly took the form of improvement in logical techniques in philosophy, the elision of philosophy and science, or both.

W.V.O. Quine is a prominent representative of the elision of science and philosophy and the hope for progress in such an elision.²⁸⁷ For Quine, there is no metaphysical foundation required for natural science except that which science ongoingly provides. In this at least, Quine avoids some of the bewitchments of metaphysical foundationalist language that concerned Wittgenstein. Quine does not hold that any particular scientific theory is definitive, but that empirical science is constantly improving. Current science and, thus, current naturalism are provisional and subject to some future science. The progress of science drives

²⁸⁶ Russell anticipates in part Michael Dummett's influential reading of Wittgenstein as realist in his early period and anti-realist in his later period. For an overview of debates around Wittgenstein as a realist and the relationship between early and late Wittgenstein, see: Michael Dummett, *The Logical Basis of Metaphysics*, William James Lectures 1976 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), chaps. 14–15; Alice Crary, "Introduction," in *The New Wittgenstein*, ed. Alice Crary and Rupert Read (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2000), 1–18.

²⁸⁷ As noted in the previous chapter, some twentieth century Thomists held that science is in some sense prior to and informs metaphysics. This movement is known as River Forest Thomism and Laval Thomism after the two centers of such thought.

the progress of philosophy. Science based on empirical data is *a posteriori*.²⁸⁸ Language itself is fully amenable to scientific investigation and reducible to observation of language in action. In other words, he is a behaviorist. Quine writes: “There is nothing in linguistic meaning beyond what is to be gleaned from overt behavior in observable circumstances.”²⁸⁹ There is no *a priori* meaning nor sense since observable circumstances are the ultimate foundation for meaning. Wittgenstein is occasionally cast as a behaviorist, especially in his argument against private language. The criteria for psychological states include behavior, which is open to empirical inquiry. For Wittgenstein, while introspection in the Cartesian tradition is clearly wrong, so too is the assumption that the psychological is reducible to the observable (RPP I 287). Though philosophers may disagree with the extent of the entanglement between science and philosophy in Quine, that empirical results deeply inform metaphysical and other philosophical studies is widely accepted. Some form of scientific imprimatur on metaphysics as a guarantee of realism is an attractive idea in that it offers the hope that metaphysics might advance as science and technology has.

While Wittgenstein takes grammar to be necessary for science, grammar is not itself scientific. This is not to say that sciences do not have proper grammars. As discussed above, Newton and Einstein both have grammars. These grammars arise from the lifeform of the scientists, a specialized and cultivated form of life, to be sure, interacting with a particular subset of reality. Certain grammars and theories are more useful than others. The practices and results of the scientists may progress such that the scientific grammar useful in the age of

²⁸⁸ Quine and Wittgenstein are generally (though not universally) taken to be antithetical. See, for example, Andrew Lugg, “Quine, Wittgenstein and ‘The Abyss of the Transcendental,’” in *Quine and His Place in History*, ed. Gary Kemp and Frederique Janssen-Lauret (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 189–209, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/oxford/detail.action?docID=4098284>.

²⁸⁹ W. V. Quine, *Pursuit of Truth*, Rev. ed (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1992), 38.

early telescopes is less useful in the age of space telescopes. Such improved instrumentation allows for a more skillful and useful interaction with reality. This progress comes into philosophy only insofar as the languages being surveyed change. Philosophy does not arbitrate whether the propagation of light through ether or space time is a more successful description of reality, but simply explores the grammars of the two terms and their various relations.

Scott Soames's influential history of analytic philosophy takes one of Quine's most prominent students, Saul Kripke, to represent a turning point for philosophy away from, among other things, Wittgenstein's influence.²⁹⁰ Saul Kripke's *Naming and Necessity* argues for metaphysical realism in semantics.²⁹¹ As discussed above, for Wittgenstein, an object is picked out in the world by useful but arbitrary grammatical criteria. Kripke objects to this descriptivism and develops a theory of rigid designation which is incompatible with arbitrary grammar. A rigid designator is context invariant and designates an object or type across all

²⁹⁰ Soames criticizes Wittgenstein for a multitude of sins: "(i) the identification of the philosophical with (a subset of) the necessary and the a priori, (ii) the further identification of these with the analytic, (iii) the conception of meaning as essentially transparent, (iv) the closely related deflationary conception of philosophy and philosophical analysis, and (v) the unwaveringly informal and antitheoretical approach to the study of meaning." Soames holds that "no philosophical advance of the twentieth century is more significant, more far-reaching, and destined to be more long lasting than the success achieved in distinguishing logical consequence, logical truth, necessary truth, and apriori truth from one another, and in understanding the special character of each." Soames's critiques are in part critiques of the reception of Wittgenstein, though supposedly derived from the man himself. Wittgenstein only mentions the analytic once in post-1929 writings and then to distinguish the analytic from the *a priori* making the first two critiques unsound (PG 404). Critiques three to five deserve greater attention and are premised on his preferred theory of meaning which in Soames's telling redeems philosophy from the sins of Wittgenstein and his followers. Soames takes Kripke's contributions to be particularly valuable in developing this. Soames, *Philosophical Analysis in the Twentieth Century, Volume 2*, 60; Soames, *Philosophical Analysis in the Twentieth Century, Volume 1*, xii; Scott Soames, *Beyond Rigidity: The Unfinished Semantic Agenda of Naming and Necessity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

²⁹¹ Hilary Putnam was another influential voice in this debate with famously shifting opinions. Hilary Putnam, "Wittgenstein and Realism," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 16, no. 1 (February 1, 2008): 3–16, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09672550701809370>; Hilary Putnam, "Meaning and Reference," *The Journal of Philosophy* 70, no. 19 (1973): 699–711, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2025079>; Hilary Putnam, "What Is 'Realism'?", *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 76 (1975): 177–94.

possible worlds.²⁹² The essence and referent of water or any other natural kind or proper noun are the same in every possible world. Kripke's theory does not necessarily assume the existence of other worlds.²⁹³

The discovery of what constitutes a single object or kind is an empirical question. To take the standard example from both Frege and Kripke, consider the morning star, Phosphorus and the evening star, Hesperus. On the basis of descriptive criteria, two separate objects seem to be identified, i.e., a bright object in the sky that shows up in the morning and another that shows up in the evening. After carefully scrutinizing the movement of these two bright objects, astronomers discovered both sets of criteria describe the same object, namely the planet Venus. Kripke argues that Hesperus = Phosphorus = Venus though not known *a priori* is necessarily true. In any possible world that contains Hesperus, it will be the case that Hesperus = Phosphorus = Venus. That Hesperus is Phosphorus is a necessary claim about reality that is an *a posteriori necessity* which astronomical investigation discovered. Though Kripke distinguishes between proper names and natural kinds, something similar can be said about natural kind terms, like animals or plants. In my own home region, the male American Goldfinch changes from bright yellow in the summer to a dull olive in the winter. Early settlers in the region described two birds, a yellow bird and a dull olive bird.²⁹⁴ Ornithology

²⁹² I use "type" and "universal" interchangeably, though this is controversial. Though the terms type and universal are largely co-extensive, relations such as "next to" fall under types in some accounts but not under universals. I restrict my usage to cases that are uncontroversially both types and universals.

²⁹³ Though David Lewis, another great student of Quine, makes such a claim.

²⁹⁴ This is the story told by bird watchers in the Youngstown, Ohio area. I have not found documents substantiating this history. The philosophical utility of this story does depend on its historical accuracy. Given the significant color variation of the birds across seasons, the story is plausible.

discovered that the dull olive bird is the same species as the bright yellow bird after molting. This too is necessary *a posteriori* based on present scientific theory.²⁹⁵

Kripke acknowledges that, just as the ancient astronomer was wrong to distinguish Hesperus from Phosphorus and the early settler to distinguish the gold from the olive finch, so too current essential claims could be similarly misguided. His claim is that *if* Hesperus is Phosphorus is true then it is necessarily true and *a posteriori*. The conditional is important. As a matter of language usage, one is limited by currently available explanation. As Wittgenstein notes, “the meaning of a word is what the explanation of its meaning explains” (PI 560). In explaining the meaning of American Goldfinch or Venus, one gives criteria for use of the words.

Knowing that Hesperus is Phosphorus arises within a certain shared human activity, namely Astronomy.²⁹⁶ Wittgenstein has no qualms accepting the truth claims of particular sciences with their particular grammars. The rules for identifying Hesperus/Phosphorus/Venus may include determining the orbit of an object. To call a planet the same planet may require tracing it along its orbit. An arbitrary but useful grammar can take this form and, in the case of astronomy, does as astronomers track the movement of the various bodies orbiting the sun and identify them in part by their orbits. The grammar of bird identification can likewise include continuity. That Hesperus is Phosphorus or winter olive Goldfinch is summer yellow Goldfinch is premised on the particulars of the activities (and,

²⁹⁵ Kripke argues with regard to natural kind claims such as gold has “atomic number 79” that “the present scientific theory is such that it is part of the nature of gold as we have it to be an element with atomic number 79. It will therefore be necessary and not contingent that gold be an element with atomic number 79.” He makes similar claims about animal species as natural kinds, specifically cats. Saul A. Kripke, *Naming and Necessity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), 125.

²⁹⁶ Kripke rejects both scientism and materialism and holds that his theory of rigid designation is compatible with a religious worldview.

thus, forms of life) in which they are identified and discussed. American Goldfinches have four identified subspecies with different sizes, ranges, and colorations. Are the original American Goldfinches necessary *a posteriori* or the subspecies? This depends on the context in which one asks the question including the type of activity.²⁹⁷

Unlike the question of Hesperus/Phosphorus/Venus, which is/are proper names, with the distinction between American Goldfinch and subspecies comes the vexing issue of natural kinds. Is Animal, Bird, Goldfinch, American Goldfinch, or a subspecies thereof properly joint carving of reality? Perhaps they all are, how could one decide such a question? Would all their designations then be necessary *a posteriori*? All offer a useful distinction depending on who is asking and for what purpose. One possibility is to argue that the finest grained account, the subspecies, is the natural kind, because they are identified with the best scientific techniques available, though this moves towards Quine's subordination of metaphysics to science. Alternatively, one could argue that the entire list are natural kinds which are necessarily true and *a posteriori*. This too seems problematic insofar as it offers a higher metaphysical status to the present best categorization system for free. *A posteriori* claims of necessity are, in fact, falsifiable. Though it is currently the best account of male American Goldfinches that they are olive in the winter and yellow in the summer, a new taxonomy *could* upend this schema. Whether or not coloration is essential to the species is itself

²⁹⁷ Meghan Sullivan offers an intriguing amendment to Kripke with regard to religious uses. Sullivan argues one can establish direct reference by "deference": "[A] name word 'n' refers to an object o in the mouth of speaker S because (i) S intends to defer to whatever the referent of the word is for some other speaker (or speakers) and (ii) S stands in a causal chain of reference by deference that terminates with either a direct baptism of o or a successful definite description of o." So long as I can refer to someone else's successful reference, my own reference is secure. The amendment seems equally vulnerable to the "best account" critique I offer, insofar as the best one can do is intend to refer as one with the best account refers. Securing one's reference by another's successful reference does seem to offer a significant role for spiritual pedagogues. Meghan Sullivan, "The Semantic Problem of Hiddenness," in *Hidden Divinity and Religious Belief*, ed. Adam Green and Eleonore Stump (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 42.

contingent on the theory used to identify the species. To argue that the American Goldfinch male is olive in the winter and yellow in the summer is necessarily true and *a posteriori* except if it is disproven scientifically seems to be an odd claim to make about all possible worlds. It would appear to be the same claim as: one's current, best conceptual scheme is true in all possible worlds until it is surpassed by the next version of said scheme, which will then be the true and necessary one.

As discussed in the above metaphor of the rules of the road, the rules of grammar for the identification of Goldfinches are arbitrary in a limited sense. They are useful because of some underlying reality. If Goldfinches also exist in the universe next door, they may be identified differently, perhaps under two or three different concepts. In the next-door universe, the sentient creatures may have a different relationship with 'bird' making this alternate schema preferable and possibly more joint carving. Though without a neutral third position, one cannot adequately arbitrate which schema is more joint carving beyond increased utility. In both this and the other universe, Goldfinch is a contingent concept within a grammar and form of life answering to reality through a utility in human life here and alien life in the universe next door.

Rigid designation attempts to move behind or beyond the activity and its grammar yet is dependent on the human activity of identification, which can and often does change. This sort of rigidity is remarkably flexible and contextual in fact. Put another way, one can see rigid designation as a kind of accomplishment. Such designation cannot merely be stipulative lest Hesperus and Phosphorus be designated as different things or Venus and Mercury be designated as the same thing. The human being who rigid designates must have a stable insight into reality that cannot be subsequently gainsaid if rigid designation is to be a

meaningful exercise. If further evidence arises else a further refinement of practice such that one reconsiders a rigid designation, then it was not a rigid designation in the first place. The accomplishment of rigid designation may be rather like a record in the *Guinness Book of World Records*: it designates the best account of an object currently available but is always liable to being surpassed. It may be the case that certain records will always stand, but no general standards are available to know which records are permanent and which are temporary. Insofar as one makes a case for a record standing, it is a particular case. Rigid designation is an assertion that a certain record will stand, but it has only the human activity that established the designation to provide an account of why it should be permanent. Human activities, forms of life, and grammars change. There is no stable evidence for rigidity. In the absence of being able to articulate a threshold after which a best account becomes a stable account, rigid designations are indistinguishable from best accounts. A best account is premised on the best methods available.

Timothy Williamson offers an even stronger logical realism than Kripke, one that is diametrically opposed to Wittgenstein's autonomous grammar. Though his theory is probably too technical to be widely adopted in theology and, unlike Kripke, Williamson is probably inimical to such adoption, he gives powerful voice to the worry that Wittgenstein and "conceptual" philosophers following after Wittgenstein are simply talking about words not reality. Indeed, he is openly critical of "some disciples of the later Wittgenstein" for their being "self-righteous."²⁹⁸ Ironically, his *Modal Logic as Metaphysics* begins with the early Wittgenstein, specifically his seemingly modal claims:

²⁹⁸ Timothy Williamson, *The Philosophy of Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 8.

It is obvious that an imagined world, however different it may be from the real one, must have *something*—a form—in common with it. (TLP 2.022)
Objects are just what constitute this unalterable form. (2.023)
Objects are what is unalterable and subsistent; their configuration is what is changing and unstable. (2.0271)

Williamson stipulates a reading of object here, circumventing the manifold interpretive controversies: “Since our main aim is not Wittgenstein exegesis, we will read it interchangeably with ‘thing’ on the liberal reading already used (see also TLP 2.01). Then the passages convey the claim that it is necessary what there is, contingent how it is.”²⁹⁹ While the early Wittgenstein argues that these metaphysical statements are nonsensical and the later Wittgenstein takes metaphysical state to be grammatical (as discussed above), Williamson takes them to be real and necessary. The question is *how* they are real and necessary, what is their modality. Logical forms are real and metaphysically necessary. Williamson presents technically impressive mechanisms to account for the various modalities. The philosopher must somehow overcome language to get to reality. Implicit in Williamson’s argument and also implicitly against Wittgenstein is that the philosopher must fix language.³⁰⁰

While he defends the traditional armchair philosopher against the collapse of philosophy into science, unlike Quine, Williamson takes philosophical method to be largely *a priori* and science to be *a posteriori*. Despite this, both science and philosophy are concerned with the same reality and investigate it through systematic methods. Philosophy is defined by its method and chooses to investigate what reality is most amenable to its method.³⁰¹ Philosophy does not have a special, conceptual domain. He laments that, for much of the

²⁹⁹ Timothy Williamson, *Modal Logic as Metaphysics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 1–2, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199552078.001.0001>.

³⁰⁰ Williamson, *The Philosophy of Philosophy*, 41.

³⁰¹ Williamson, 3.

twentieth century under the influence of Wittgenstein, “Confused and obscure ideas of conceptual truth create the illusion of a special domain of philosophical investigation.”³⁰² For Williamson, the fuzzy realm of conceptual truth is a fanciful one, though it only bears a passing resemblance to Wittgenstein’s understanding of concepts.³⁰³ As shown above, within a grammar, concepts are about the world, not about language. In Wittgensteinian terms, the difference between Williamson and Wittgenstein is the reality of grammatical rules themselves.

Modal metaphysics is meant to satisfy the “craving for generality” (BB 17) that Wittgenstein is determined to resist. The confusion is thinking that grammar rules are substantial, rather than the forms of life underlying grammar rules. Wittgenstein offers the image of the philosopher wearing a pair of glasses (PI 103). These glasses represent an ideal through which the philosopher orders the world and representations of the world. As Diamond observes, “Because [the philosopher] is convinced that all thought *must* have this order, he is convinced that he is able to see it in the reality of our actual thought and talk, even though the ways we think and speak do not (to what he takes to be a superficial view) appear to exhibit such an order.”³⁰⁴ The danger of such systematic metaphysical thinking is that one loses track of the particulars of reality in the name of order.³⁰⁵ Though sensible statements about the particular are made through rules, no system of rules exhausts the particular. More useful rules better capture the particular than less useful rules. To exhaust the particular would be to

³⁰² Williamson, 5.

³⁰³ For a thorough critique of Williamson on this point, see: P. M. S. Hacker, review of *A Philosopher of Philosophy*, by Timothy Williamson, *The Philosophical Quarterly* 59, no. 235 (2009): 337–48.

³⁰⁴ Cora Diamond, “Realism and the Realistic Spirit,” in *The Realistic Spirit: Wittgenstein, Philosophy, and the Mind* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1991), 43.

³⁰⁵ Diamond considers Wittgenstein’s image of the mouse coming from the grey rags (PI 52) to distinguish metaphysical framework from attentiveness. Diamond, 47.

arrive at the definitive set of rules beyond which further revision would be pointless. The particular's strain at rules occasions the creation of new, often more useful, rules. In chapter five, I will return to strained and broken rules as generative of new religious language.

Though grammatical investigation is not intended to make discoveries about the world, in the wide variety of language games, Wittgenstein points to the particularity of language games. The descriptive nature of Wittgenstein's philosophy and its refusal to fix ordinary language that is mostly unbroken resists the temptation for generality and idealization. Wittgenstein memorably observes that "We want to walk: so we need *friction*. Back to the rough ground!" (PI 107). The rough ground is reality does not meet idealized expectations. Yet human beings live in the world of such rough ground, the ongoing and constructive challenge of the particular. Within the diversity of language games, one can speak truly of reality. The realism of Wittgenstein and his grammatical method is a realism of the human form of life and human communities coping with reality.

In chapter two, I argued that Wittgenstein's philosophy could be both fruitfully integrated with and amend Thomas's thought. I took this to be the project of Grammatical Thomism. A major objection to such a project is the perception that Wittgenstein's thought is anti-realist. In this chapter, I argued that Wittgenstein's grammatical approach is a way of approaching reality, contrary to criticisms of Wittgenstein as an outmoded anti-realist. The activities of living in the world and in community ground one's encounter with reality. Having discussed Wittgensteinian grammar in general, the next chapter focuses on Wittgensteinian grammar and religious language.

4.0 Wittgensteinian Philosophy of Religion

The previous chapter argued for Wittgenstein's particular form of realism or realistic language in quotidian speech. I turn now to the realm of religious language.³⁰⁶ Wittgenstein's remarks on religion are scattered throughout his work—his is not a systematic treatment of religion.³⁰⁷ Wittgenstein's various writings along with reports from his students and friends make clear that religion was a significant concern for him and that he saw the world from “a religious point of view.”³⁰⁸ Scholars have taken Wittgenstein's few explicitly religious texts in a variety of sometimes contradictory directions.

Given Wittgenstein's fascinating but limited engagement with religious language coupled with arguments about the continuities between different stages of his thinking, it is no surprise that Wittgensteinian philosophy of religion developed in a variety of contrary and even contradictory directions. Given the slow emergence of Wittgenstein's writings after his death, particularly his writings touching on religion, early Wittgensteinian philosophy of religion arose without the benefit of many of Wittgenstein's comments on religion.³⁰⁹ The breadth of the Wittgensteinian philosophy of religion literature is such that I cannot hope to offer a comprehensive treatment but merely to sketch two major trends on the way to articulating my own approach. The first major trend is that religion is another form of

³⁰⁶ I use the term “religion” in a modern sense. “*Religio*” from Roman antiquity through Thomas Aquinas was a virtue of binding oneself to God, especially through the proper ceremonial actions. Religion was a form of justice between divinity and humanity (ST II-II.81).

³⁰⁷ I also leave to one side the enormous question of Wittgenstein's own religious orientation and struggles. There seems to be ample evidence that Wittgenstein was engaged with religious questions but what, if any, stable conclusions he reached is far less clear.

³⁰⁸ Rush Rhees, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Personal Recollections* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981), 94.

³⁰⁹ Phillips partly attributes the rise of fideistic Wittgensteinian philosophy of religion lack of the relevant texts. D. Z. Phillips, “Nielsen's Skeptical Strategies,” in *Wittgensteinian Fideism?*, by Kai Nielsen and D. Z. Phillips (London: SCM Press, 2005), 75.

grammar, though a form with special characteristics vis-à-vis other grammars. The second trend is that Wittgenstein excludes religious language from reasonable or meaningful discussion. If religious language is meaningful, it is as a proxy for some other phenomenon, for example a proxy for certain primitive emotions evoked by ritual. This chapter will argue that both the exclusion of religious language on rational grounds and the domestication of religious language as another kind of grammar are untenable. The next chapter argues that a riddling understanding of religious language preserves the place of religion in human life while refusing either to explain religion as emerging from some other phenomena or else to section off religious language and life from the rest of human existence. A riddle approach rightly understands religious language and life as both central and mysterious in a way consonant with the spiritual pedagogy tradition explored in chapter one.

4.1 Wittgensteinian Fideism?

Wittgenstein's most extensive treatment of religious belief as such comes through the student notes of his lectures on the topic. Wittgenstein begins these lectures with the example of an Austrian general that Wittgenstein takes to be typical of statements of religious belief and, importantly, religious disagreement: "an Austrian general said to someone, 'I shall think of you after my death, if that should be possible.' We can imagine one group would find this ludicrous, another who wouldn't" (LRB 53). Religious disagreements are commonplace yet seem to function differently from other sorts of disagreements. Wittgenstein argues that when one person holds a religious belief, say, "life after death", and another does not hold such a belief, the two are not contradicting one another. Claims about eternal life are unlike quotidian empirical claims. For example, the claim "the front door is open" is contradicted by

my friend's claim that "the front door is closed." With regard to the door, either I am correct or my friend is, but with regard to eternal life this seems not to be the case.

Belief in life after death is not an empirical claim like the status of the front door. If life after death were another form of being within the universe, it may be open to empirical investigation at least in principle. But the claim about life after death is only an empirical claim if it is the claim that one goes from a corporeal life to a different sort of corporeal or some detectable spiritual life within this universe: if, for example, one could observe the souls of the dead orbiting around the planet Jupiter. This is not the sort of claim Wittgenstein takes the generals to be making. A claim about life after death, and still more about the last judgement, seems to fall outside what can possibly be investigated by empirical means.³¹⁰ Herein lies the difficulty of contradicting such a belief—it is not clear what evidence one would present in favor of or opposition to a religious belief that would be counted as evidence by one who holds the belief and one who does not.³¹¹ Religious people practice particular forms of life in which their beliefs are embedded. The Austrian general may take different actions on the battlefield when anticipating reward or punishment after death than the next general down the battleline who believes in an absolute finality to death. Minimally, religious belief and unbelief motivate behavior and cultivate forms of life.

The existence or non-existence of life after death is not a question that can be posed in or answered by science in the modern sense. Wittgenstein finds the attempt to arbitrate religious questions through science to be ridiculous because it fundamentally misunderstands

³¹⁰ The Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed requires only that the resurrection of the dead and last judgement be empirically verifiable at some future point and with the added complication of how the end of time is to be understood relative to quotidian time.

³¹¹ In chapter six, I turn to the case of a spiritual pedagogue discussing the will of God with her students, such that they come to an agreement about what God's will for the individual might be.

the nature of religious belief. Religion is not a proto science nor a competitor to science but a mode of making claims about the world as a whole.³¹² Given the sharp distinction Wittgenstein draws and, with it, the placement of religion seemingly beyond critique, at least beyond critique that is not specifically religious critique, Wittgenstein is often read as fideistic.

From an atheistic perspective, Kai Nielsen develops an influential reading of Wittgensteinian philosophy of religion, though not necessarily Wittgenstein himself, as fideistic insofar as religious beliefs seem to be immune from rational critique.³¹³ Nielsen criticizes what he takes to be the broadly Wittgensteinian argument that “There is no Archimedean point in terms of which a philosopher (or for that matter anyone else) can relevantly criticize whole modes of discourse or, what comes to the same things, ways of life, for each mode of discourse has its own specific criteria of rationality/irrationality, intelligibility/unintelligibility and reality/unreality.”³¹⁴ Nielsen’s critique is directed at Peter Winch’s Wittgensteinian approach to social science generally and the study of indigenous religion particularly.³¹⁵

³¹² Burley offers a helpful reading of Wittgenstein’s remarks on Frazer, which distinguish a proto-scientific understanding of religion from Wittgenstein’s own interpretation. Mikel Burley, *Contemplating Religious Forms of Life: Wittgenstein and D.Z. Phillips* (New York: Continuum, 2012), chap. 1.

³¹³ Nielsen’s critique was directed at what he saw as mis-readings of Wittgenstein rather than at Wittgenstein himself. Nielsen concludes that Wittgenstein did not develop a philosophy of religion. Wittgensteinian philosophy of religion is a product of his followers drawing on various aspects of his thought. Nielsen targeted a diverse array of Wittgensteinian philosophers as fideists including Peter Winch, Norman Malcolm, Peter Geach, and Stanley Cavell. He is most known for his dialogue with D.Z. Phillips, though Phillips was not among his first targets nor was Rush Rhees. Kai Nielsen, “Wittgensteinian Fideism,” *Philosophy* 42, no. 161 (July 1967): 193–94, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0031819100001285>.

³¹⁴ Nielsen, 193.

³¹⁵ Peter Winch, *The Idea of a Social Science and Its Relation to Philosophy*, Routledge classics ed., Routledge Classics (London: Routledge, 2008); Peter Winch, “Understanding a Primitive Society,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 1, no. 4 (1964): 307–24; Nielsen, “Wittgensteinian Fideism,” 198–201.

Winch's discussion of religious language is part of his wider critique of the social sciences. Taking J.S. Mill as a paradigmatic figure, Winch holds that the social sciences, partly in imitation of the physical sciences, pursue their task by reduction and generalization. For Mill, the explanations of social science and history are built upon the mechanisms of individual psychology. Though social practices and history development are complex, they are reducible to more basic units of explanation. Thus, the investment patterns of City (of London) Bankers might be explained by certain tendencies of human psychology. The ambition of the social sciences, as Winch describes it, is to develop explanations of social behavior from empirical data much as one would develop physical theory from observing the movement of objects in space, for example. Such methodology extends to religious human behaviors. The religious rituals of indigenous peoples, or high-status dwellers in major world cities, is a matter of reductive empirical explanation. One's explanations improve as one collects more data.

Winch's critique is not of empirical method *per se* but of the identification of what is being measured. As discussed in the previous chapter, the criterion for identity, the rules for language are located within forms of life. Even rules as seemingly perspective neutral as metric measurement are understandable only within forms of life requiring measurement. Winch's point can be seen in contemporary problems in training AI systems. AI systems have the capacity to pick out regular patterns in massive amounts of data from satellite photos to credit card transactions. They do so by using a non-human grammar. The opportunity of AI is that AI picks out patterns that human beings cannot or cannot efficiently. A challenge for AI systems is identifying patterns that have explanatory value. Correlation, even in massive data

sets, does not necessarily yield explanation.³¹⁶ Constructing AI systems to answer human questions remains difficult for a similar reason as that of social sciences. When one translates questions from a particular human grammar into the constrained grammar of either AI or a social science, and increasingly AI used for social science research, there is a shift or loss of meaning through changing criteria for identification.

Social science goes astray when it does not carefully interrogate its criteria for identification. Winch applies this critique to the analysis of the indigenous religion of the Azande people in north central Africa by E.E. Evans-Pritchard.³¹⁷ The conceptual difficulty concerns the status of magic. He takes his own scientific approach to be in accord with “objective reality” in contradistinction to Azande magic, which does not correspond to reality. Winch objects that the meaning of magic is understandable only from within the Azande form of life and the rules of their language. Winch seems implicitly to hold that language is essentially a set of rules. The problem that he identifies is using the wrong rules with regard to magic.³¹⁸ Magic is not inferior science but a different game altogether. As discussed in the previous chapter, grammar is the means by which one identifies reality. Azande magic and

³¹⁶ Erik Larson poses the problem of AI and identification in terms of C.S. Pierce. Computers are poor at abduction, that is the framing of the criteria for a question. AI systems can consistently generate novel connections but very often these novel connections are also useless at answering meaningful questions. One could translate this abductive concern in terms of Wittgensteinian grammatical investigation. If Cheryl Misak is correct, Wittgenstein may have been influenced by Pierce and his abductive method. Erik J. Larson, *The Myth of Artificial Intelligence: Why Computers Can't Think the Way We Do* (Cambridge, Mass: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2021); Cheryl Misak, “The Subterranean Influence of Pragmatism on the Vienna Circle: Peirce, Ramsey, Wittgenstein,” *Journal for the History of Analytical Philosophy* 4, no. 5 (June 1, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.15173/jhap.v4i5.2946>; C. J. Misak, *Cambridge Pragmatism: From Peirce and James to Ramsey and Wittgenstein* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

³¹⁷ See: Winch, “Understanding a Primitive Society.”

³¹⁸ Stephen Mulhall, “Wittgenstein’s Temple: Three Styles of Philosophical Architecture,” in *D.Z. Phillips’ Contemplative Philosophy of Religion: Questions and Responses*, ed. Andy F. Sanders (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2007), 15–16.

Evans-Pritchard's scientific method are picking out different realities according to different rules.

One might counter that modern medicine developed through biology and chemistry is more useful than magic. Such an objection risks question begging because the standard of usefulness is different between modern medicine and magic. Narrowly, one might argue that using magic to heal the hunter's broken leg will be less useful than using modern medicine. To pose the question narrowly is to assume medicine's grammar. Though magic may be invoked in cases where medicine or other modern technical skills may also be invoked, magic is not ineffective medicine. Magic makes wider claims about the nature of the world and human beings' place in the world. To set medicine against magic is to truncate magic, which includes a whole cultural system, a whole form of common life. Given the distinctions between medicine and magic, to claim that the two are contradictory is not clear cut. Many traditional cultures accommodate medicine and traditional magical healing practices.

Nielsen objects to the magic/medicine distinction as drawn above. If magic is about healing an individual, it is testable and would be found wanting compared to medicine. If magic is not about healing a person nor indeed about any particular testable claim about reality, it is difficult to know what it is about. Nielsen argues that religious claims are in the same way hived off beyond critique.

Nielsen takes such a fideistic position to be a live option, albeit not his own position as an atheist, which he takes to be the rationally superior position.³¹⁹ One can consistently hold that religious discourse is separate from all other discourse and bound to different standards of

³¹⁹ Kai Nielsen, "D.Z. Phillips on the Foolishness of Wittgensteinian Fideism," in *Wittgensteinian Fideism?*, by Kai Nielsen and D. Z. Phillips (London: SCM Press, 2005), 62.

evidence and inference. The idea of a separate religious discourse is objectionable to many religious thinkers. For example, the Christian philosopher William Alston treats fideism far more harshly than Nielsen. He argues that “truth”, “reality”, and “existence” seem to lose their meaning in religious language when hived off from the rest of human discourse.³²⁰ For Alston and Nielsen, Wittgenstein’s two generals have no rational means to convince one another of the correctness or incorrectness of belief in life after death; each is operating within his own mode of discourse. Each general’s discourse is sufficiently closed to escape rational critique.

Though himself an object of Kai Nielsen’s critique, Stanley Cavell argues that human forms of life, and with them, human grammars are interrelated.³²¹ Cavell rightly interprets Wittgenstein that forms of life contain both vertical and horizontal dimensions. The horizontal sense is the range of different forms of life available to human beings, whereas the vertical is the distinction between forms of life of different species. One cannot understand what a lion or a bat are saying because of their radically different forms of life (PPF 327).³²² The horizontal distinctions between forms of life, while significant, are of a different order than the vertical. The human being whose lifestyle and background is further from my own is still far more similar to me, and far more understandable, than the squirrel sitting in my garden.

³²⁰ Alston’s example of Jesus’s resurrection differs from the example of the generals insofar as the resurrection as reported in scripture would be empirically verifiable to at least a small group of witnesses, though not to subsequent believers. Wittgenstein speculates that only “love” believes in the Resurrection (CV 33). Though the resurrection as a bodily event would be empirically verifiable to a select few, even if its broad significance might not be. William P. Alston, “Religious Language,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 225–26.

³²¹ Cavell, “Declining Decline,” 255.

³²² Nagel, “What Is It Like to Be a Bat?”

Humans frequently engage in conversations of partial understanding across horizontally different forms of life.

The Wittgensteinian impulse to leave ordinary language alone applies to generals debating life after death. As sometimes happens, it may be the case that one person convinces the other of her religious beliefs. Nothing in a Wittgensteinian approach to religious language precludes religious discussion, including certain forms of critical engagement—the precise forms are of as much, if not more, interest to the spiritual pedagogue as to the religious skeptic.

Religion does not set out to make empirical claims about the world.³²³ To say that religious language is immune from such empirical critique is merely to acknowledge the particular claims religion makes. It does not offer a blanket absolution against all critique or a fideistic distancing of religious discourse from all other forms of human discourse. To offer a parallel example, one cannot justly criticize an article in a chemistry journal for lack of scansion, nor criticize a poem about an elixir of love for statistical weakness. Both the poem and the chemistry journal are open to criticism proper to their types of discourse. Trivially, both poem and chemistry article are immune to a vast array of criticisms by virtue of being their respective types of discourse. This sort of poetic or chemical “fideism” is simply a recognition of the claims of the various discourses. Wittgenstein criticizes religious beliefs in various places in his work, for example, his critique of St. Paul as pretentious compared to the

³²³ Mikel Burley helpfully distinguishes two ways in which religious language might be distinct from other sorts and, in a sense, fideistic. The first he calls the “non-interference principle”, which he takes to be benign, the second more problematic version form is the “incomprehensibility principle.” Phillips argues his sense of religious grammar escapes both. Mikel Burley, “Wittgenstein and the Study of Religion: Beyond Fideism and Atheism,” in *Wittgenstein, Religion, and Ethics: New Perspectives from Philosophy and Theology*, ed. Mikel Burley (New York: Bloomsbury, 2018), 49–76.

Gospels is a form of religious critique (CV 30), though Wittgenstein notes this is not an objection from metaphysical principles but one from the “smell” (*Geruchsin*) of Paul’s presentation. Wittgenstein objects to what he takes to be Paul’s pride relative to the humility of the Gospels. Such a critique does not distance religious from other forms of human discourse but sees them as intimately intertwined. Human rhetoric and disposition have religious import. The smell assessment may or may not be a strong or successful critique. Either way, it is a live critique insofar as it avoids the conceptual error of conflating the scientific with the religious. One can offer any number of critiques of non-empirical critiques of religion. As discussed in the first chapter, there are many critiques of religious authority. Most of these critiques cannot be dismissed as narrowly empirical. Distinguishing religious claims from empirical claims does not make religion immune from objections that religion is morally corrupting or contrary to individual liberty. While conceptual errors may arise in other forms, exposing such conceptual errors requires careful attention to the various grammars at play to ensure that objections actually hit their targets.

4.2 Alternate Grammar or Emotion

If my characterization of Wittgensteinian religious language is correct, Wittgenstein is not fideistic. Religious language is different from other sorts of language, but not so distinct as to be immune from discussion and critique. There are, broadly, two Wittgenstein-inspired schools of interpretation of religious language.³²⁴ On the one hand, there are those who treat religious language as language with a particular sort of grammar such, as Rush Rhees, Peter

³²⁴ Wittgenstein scholarship is full of various divisions of Wittgenstein’s thought. For example, Andrejč, discussed in chapter two, argues there are four Wittgensteinian conceptions of religion “grammaticalist, instinctivist, existentialist, and nonsensicalist.” I take my two-fold distinction to be heuristic rather than a comprehensive or ultimately defensible account of Wittgenstein’s thought on religion or the subsequent scholarship. See: Andrejč, *Wittgenstein and Interreligious Disagreement*.

Winch, discussed above, and, most importantly, D.Z. Phillips. On the other hand, there are those, such as Bede Rundle, Anthony Kenny, and Brian Clack, who treat religious language as ungrammatical nonsense. As will become clear in the next chapter, I am in partial sympathy with both camps, though neither of these two approaches does justice to religious self-understanding nor to the developmental aspect of religion as a spiritual exercise both individually and communally.

Following his teacher Rush Rhees, D.Z. Phillips takes religious language to be an ordinary form of language with its own particular grammar. Phillips's influential early work attempts to offer a grammar of prayer. The basic method is straightforward. Prayer is a common form of human speech that has certain recognizable and regular features. The philosopher examines the activity of prayer, and more broadly the activity of religion, to determine the grammar of prayer and religion.³²⁵ For Phillips, philosophy has no role in saying whether prayer or religion more generally is good or bad, true or false because grammars as such are neither true nor false—as discussed in the previous chapter. Philosophy does not test for religious meaningfulness but simply describes grammar. The philosopher exercises a contemplative neutrality motivated by disinterested wonder—she describes the grammar of disputes such as those between believer and unbeliever but does not pick winners and losers.³²⁶

One need not accept a grammar to find it intelligible or a worthy subject of investigation. In Phillips's work on prayer, the problems that motivate prayer, for example,

³²⁵ D. Z. Phillips, *The Concept of Prayer* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965).

³²⁶ For Phillip's reflections on the role of philosophy, see especially: D. Z. Phillips, *Philosophy's Cool Place* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), <https://www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.7591/9781501729454/html>.

are intelligible even to those who do not pray. Prayer as an activity is publicly observable. Anyone can see prayerful gatherings at the mosque, church, or temple. The atheist may see the kind of person the prayerful believer is through her actions.³²⁷ The believer may come to understand the grammar of the atheist's deepest commitments in a similar way.

Pace Nielsen, whose later critiques are more directed at Phillips than Wittgenstein, Phillips argues religious language can be critiqued like other language on the grounds of being nonsensical or a number of other moral, political and social grounds. As with Winch, noted above, only a limited form of critique arising from conceptual confusion is ruled out by Phillips. Throughout his work, Phillips affirms that religious concepts are accessible to non-religious people.³²⁸ For example, the expectation that God can be observed like other beings "can be shown to be confused" whether such a view is held by a believer or nonbeliever.³²⁹ For Phillips, religious beliefs can be judged if they stray into conflict with what is already known in other spheres. One who claims that ongoing evolution is false on religious grounds can rightly be critiqued in Phillips's view insofar as religion is straying into biology.

Religious beliefs are not subject to rational norms outside the religious sphere. There is no common rational basis for both biology and religion such that one can have a hybrid

³²⁷ Bloemendaal helpfully clarifies that, though Phillips casts himself as following a line of thought already present in Wittgenstein, "Wittgenstein never actually says that philosophy does not provide a foundation for prayer." The starkness of the distinction between the religious and the secular, including the distinction of philosophy and theology, is better attributed to Rush Rhees than Wittgenstein directly. P. F. Bloemendaal, *Grammars of Faith: A Critical Evaluation of D.Z. Phillips's Philosophy of Religion*, Studies in Philosophical Theology 31 (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 123.

³²⁸ Even in his early work, Phillips argues that religious concepts "are not cut off from the common experience of human life." Phillips, *The Concept of Prayer*, 40.

³²⁹ D. Z. Phillips, *Belief, Change and Forms of Life* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986), 13.

religious/biological investigation.³³⁰ The standards of evaluation within religion are *sui generis*.³³¹ However, Phillips argues, along similar lines to Cavell as noted above, that religious language is related to other language in human forms of life.³³² Phillips holds a line where religion is at once sufficiently related to other forms of human life to be open to critique through commonalities of shared forms of life, yet sufficiently distinct to escape critiques arising from mistaking religious concepts for concepts such as proto-scientific concepts.³³³ Phillips, like Winch, was keen to show that religious concepts are distinct from other concepts. Phillips admits that his pre-1970 work overemphasizes the distinctiveness of language games while failing to sufficiently treat the relationships between religious language games and other language games. Religious grammar has its own internal rational rules that are not shared by other language games, but religion falls within a human life of various language games. Though even in his early work, Phillips is clear that religion is set within the normal activities of daily life: “Religious concepts, however, are not technical concepts; they are not cut off from the common experience of human life: joy and sorrow, hope and despair.”³³⁴ Phillips’s mature position is more precise but remains consonant with his early position.

³³⁰ Stephen Jay Gould’s influential “Non-overlapping magisteria (NOMA)” account of science and religion draws the same distinction. Stephen Jay Gould, *Rocks of Ages: Science and Religion in the Fullness of Life* (London: Vintage, 2002).

³³¹ Phillips holds that the binary of realism and non-realism in religious matters is itself confused given the distinctive nature of meaning in religious grammar. D. Z. Phillips, “On Really Believing,” in *Is God Real?*, ed. Joseph Runzo, Library of Philosophy and Religion (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1993), 85–108.

³³² See: D. Z. Phillips, “Wittgenstein and Religion: Some Fashionable Criticisms,” in *Wittgensteinian Fideism?* (London: SCM Press, 2005), 39–52.

³³³ D. Z. Phillips, “Religious Beliefs and Language-Games,” in *Wittgenstein and Religion* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1993), <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/oxford/detail.action?docID=1040064>; Phillips, “Wittgenstein and Religion: Some Fashionable Criticisms.”

³³⁴ Phillips, *The Concept of Prayer*, 40.

For Phillips, philosophy itself is made possible because of the relationship between language games; the possibility of talking about talking shows a unity to discourse.³³⁵ For the philosopher to evaluate a given concept, she must already understand and speak the language. Mutual understanding, albeit imperfect, constitutes a common discourse. Phillips's "cool place" of philosophy, which he takes to be an authentic reading of Wittgenstein (CV 2), is a neutral place of contemplation that crosses language games and makes claims about reality in a broadly Socratic manner. Phillips offers a strong reading of Wittgenstein's principle of philosophical non-interference (discussed in the previous chapter). Not only does philosophy fail to provide authoritative answers to disputed questions, but it does not wade into such questions except to clarify the concepts involved. Contemplation requires acute attentiveness to the world through diverse linguistic practices and forms of life. The philosopher attends *qua* philosopher as a neutral observer without a particular ethical or spiritual stance. The philosopher's understanding does not come from practical exertion in a particular form of life, except perhaps the particular life of the philosopher. This neutrality guards what Phillips takes to be a relativizing tendency of philosopher taking partisan positions. It avoids theist philosophers arguing for a certain perspective and, indeed, form of life relative to atheist philosophers. Similarly, it avoids philosophers of one moral persuasion arguing from a particular perspective relative to those of the other. Phillips worries these conflicting positions lead to despairing of an answer whereas the contemplative position of the philosopher in her "cool place" provides conceptual clarity. Phillips vigorously critiques therapeutic

³³⁵ Phillips, *Philosophy's Cool Place*, 7; D. Z. Phillips, "Locating Philosophy's Cool Place - A Reply to Stephen Mulhall," in *D.Z. Phillips' Contemplative Philosophy of Religion: Questions and Responses*, ed. Andy F. Sanders (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2007), 29–54.

Wittgensteinian philosophers such as Cora Diamond, James Conant, and Stanley Cavell.³³⁶ To engage in conceptual therapy is to take a stance, at least provisionally. Wittgensteinians abandon the cool place for the heat of what Cora Diamond calls the “realistic spirit”.³³⁷ In Kierkegaardian terms, the ironic Johannes Climacus may be a philosopher, but Anti-Climacus is not. Conant argues that the philosopher has no cool place available to her. Undertaking a grammatical investigation has a starting point, the heat of a position.³³⁸

Phillips is undoubtedly correct that religious communities operate with their own language games. One can fruitfully conceptualize the spirituality of the Desert Fathers and Mothers, the Carmelites, or the Catholic Worker movement as particular language games. The process of induction into these communities is a coming to adopt a new way of life. The novice learns to speak and to live as the abbot. I will discuss the process of training in greater detail in chapter six with the aid of Thomas Aquinas’s account of virtues, both acquired and infused. One can make training claims about any linguistic community. One is trained into the

³³⁶ Diamond makes the connection between logic and ethics a central theme of her most recent collection of essays, though this theme is present throughout her work. Cora Diamond, *Reading Wittgenstein with Anscombe, Going On to Ethics* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2019).

³³⁷ Neutrality is a kind of fantasy. Diamond develops the point with respect to a neutral realism: “Realism in philosophy, the hardest thing, is open-eyedly giving up the quest for such an elucidation, the demand that a philosophical account of what I mean make clear how it is fixed, out of all the possible continuations, out of some real semantic space, *which* I mean. Open-eyedly: that is, not just stopping, but with an understanding of the quest as dependent on fantasy.” Diamond, “Realism and the Realistic Spirit,” 69.

³³⁸ This disagreement about therapeutic readings includes disputes about the proper reading of Kierkegaard. Conant holds that Kierkegaard’s Johannes Climacus, the non-Christian philosopher discussed in the introduction, holds a position untenable on philosophical grounds. Philosophy simply fails when it tries to grasp religion. By contrast, though Phillips acknowledges the religious motives of Kierkegaard the author, he takes Climacus to inhabit a philosophically tenable cool place. Phillips, *Philosophy’s Cool Place*, 13–40; James Conant, “Putting Two and Two Together: Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein and the Point of View for Their Work as Authors,” in *Philosophy and the Grammar of Religious Belief*, ed. Timothy Tessin and Mario von der Ruhr, Claremont Studies in the Philosophy of Religion (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1995), 248–331, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-23867-5_11.

monastery and the football team. Phillips rightly notes that one can make some sense of both sorts of forms of life, even if one shares in neither.

The demands of religious language strain at Phillips's neutral stance insofar as the neutral party attempts to encapsulate mystery and, thus, render it manageable.³³⁹ In his *A Concept of Prayer*, Phillips explores Job's experience before the whirlwind in establishing the grammatical convention of mystery, yet such an interpretation seems to overlook the implications for grammar of Job's encounter with God. Phillips writes: "One can say that Job now understands something that he did not understand previously, but one cannot describe the knowledge he arrives at as knowledge *about* anything, since what he comes to see is that he *does not know*."³⁴⁰ Phillips takes this unknowing to be a matter of principle such that it could not be remedied were Job a bit cleverer. Job learns something about himself, namely his limitations before God. Trivially, one learns something about oneself and one's limitations coming up against any intractable problem. Phillips holds that the self-knowledge acquired from prayer is different in kind from other forms of self-knowledge. He gives various examples of the distinction track along the lines of grace and nature, where grace is conceived of as coming from outside the sphere of the comprehensible world yet active in one's life. Thus, God's forgiveness of sins is distinct from seeking to offer reparations for one's moral fault. The former is a conceptual black box, the latter is explicable. Lack of understanding is the form of understanding proper to prayer.

³³⁹ Burley rightly notes that Phillips's own writings betray a certain warmth for certain Christian contemplative traditions that seems to conflict with his own cool, contemplative ideal of philosophy. Burley, *Contemplating Religious Forms of Life*, 164–65.

³⁴⁰ Phillips, *The Concept of Prayer*, 61.

Phillips returns to Job twenty-three years later addressing theodicy.³⁴¹ Phillips invokes the story of Job against those who would explain God's moral goodness such as Richard Swinburne. Phillips argues that many philosophers of religion seek to "tidy up" reality. The account seems broadly consistent with his earlier reading of Job. One does not come to an account of divine justice reflecting on Job's experience. God is mysterious. Rather one comes to self-knowledge developed around the untidy, unaccountable aspects of reality. To use a crude metaphor, if reality in relationship with God is a map, this map will always have blank spots. One errs if one tries to fill in the blanks by claiming an understanding of divine justice. But Phillips resists a wider critique. For Phillips, theodicy is not a defeater for the claim that God is good. It is an inadequate reading of the covenant between God and humanity as a contract, a limited reading that Phillips takes Job's unsuccessful comforters to be following. The image of tidying up is too constrained to do justice to the book of Job.³⁴² Rather than merely marking out blank spots on an otherwise understandable map, Job's encounter with the whirlwind is a redrawing of a map and an acknowledgement that the new map is also inadequate.

At the beginning of the book of Job, Job spoke what was correct religious grammar as one "who feared God and turned away from evil" (Job 1:1). Job prayed and offered sacrifices to God on his behalf and on behalf of his family who may have sinned against God. Phillips

³⁴¹ Domestication of divine grammar can be seen more clearly in Phillips's later extended work on the problem of evil, as Schönbaumfeld rightly observes. D. Z. Phillips, *The Problem of Evil and the Problem of God* (London: SCM Press, 2004); Genia Schönbaumfeld, "On the Very Idea of a Theodicy," in *Wittgenstein, Religion, and Ethics: New Perspectives from Philosophy and Theology*, ed. Mikel Burley (New York: Bloomsbury, 2018), 100–103.

³⁴² Wittgenstein cryptically remarks, "You can't hear God speak to someone else, you can hear him only if you are being addressed"—that is a grammatical remark" (Z 717). This seems to suggest that the God's grammar cannot be publicly evaluated. See: David B. Burrell, *Deconstructing Theodicy: Why Job Has Nothing to Say to the Puzzle Suffering* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Brazos Press, 2008), 49.

claims that “to know how to use [religious] language is to know God.”³⁴³ Job knew how to use religious language. He knew how to pray as well. His form of life was unquestionably religious and in keeping with the dominant theological thinking of his day.

Job’s interlocutors throughout the book speak with correct religious grammar and give voice to a theological consensus. Their various religiously grammatical remarks, though having a logic to them, consistently ring hollow. The expositions of the various interlocutors have an almost Socratic character. The third speaker, Zophar the Naamathite offers an eloquent articulation of the mystery of God not altogether dissimilar from Phillips, albeit in a more poetic register. Addressing Job, Zophar says:

Can you find out the deep things of God?
Can you find out the limit of the Almighty?
It is higher than the heaven—what can you do?
Deeper than Sheol—what can you know?
Its measure is longer than the earth,
and broader than the sea. (Job 11:7-9)

The clear implication of Zophar’s speech is that God is unknowable and Job’s fate is in God’s hands. Zophar’s account has an undeniable coherence. If one take God to be both mysterious and all powerful, that coherence may be simply that to make claims about God is to speak nonsense (TLP 6.432). Job reacts with bitterness to Zophar’s theological truisms: “But I [Job] have understanding as well as you; I am not inferior to you” (Job 12:3). David Burrell notes that Job’s response to Zophar in counseling the wisdom of silence is Wittgensteinian *avant la lettre*:³⁴⁴

But I [Job] would speak to the Almighty,
and desire to argue my case with God.
As for you, you whitewash with lies;

³⁴³ Phillips, *The Concept of Prayer*, 50.

³⁴⁴ Burrell, *Deconstructing Theodicy*, 33.

all of you are worthless physicians.
If only you would keep silent,
that would be your wisdom! (Job 13:3-5)

Job recognizes the inadequacy of his interlocutors' interventions. Near the end of the story, Job says to God, "I have uttered what I did not understand; things too wonderful for me, which I did not know" (Job 42:3). One can point to various other passages in scripture and tradition that speak to the fragility and inadequacy of the language of religion.

Phillips rightly argues that Job encourages believers not to expect an "explanatory answer" from God.³⁴⁵ However, Phillips does not go further in taking God's critique of Job as a radical failure of religious language itself. For Phillips, lack of "explanatory answer" is part of the grammar of religious language rather than a claim that religious language is inadequate to its own task. Phillips's reading domesticates theophany, such as God speaking to Job from the whirlwind.

Thomas's commentary on Job, in which Thomas is keen to vindicate Job, makes a helpful distinction for the three ways in which Job speaks—three language games, to use a more Wittgensteinian idiom.³⁴⁶ The first is from the senses "*affectum sensualitatis*" (JB chapter 39). Thomas attributes his complaints to a form of speech, a particular rhetorical mode. The second is through human deliberation "*deliberationem rationis humanae*", when he speaks to his friends. The third is by inspiration from the person of God, "*inspirationem divinam dum ex persona domini*". Thomas makes a significant distinction between the second and third. Thomas argues that Job's lack of understanding is not culpable. Pride before God is

³⁴⁵ Phillips, *The Concept of Prayer*, 100.

³⁴⁶ Stump helpfully reads Thomas's commentary as shifting the question of Job from one of suffering to one of understanding providence. Job is vindicated as having a better understanding of providence than his interlocutors. Eleonore Stump, "Aquinas on the Sufferings of Job," in *Reasoned Faith: Essays in Philosophical Theology in Honor of Norman Kretzmann*, ed. Eleonore Stump (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 328–58.

culpable. Often what appears as pride in Job is merely “shallowness” [*levitate*] or thoughtlessness of speech. This thoughtlessness is exposed as God from the whirlwind recounts the greatness of divine wisdom and power compared to that of human beings. Thomas writes that “Job reproves the words which he had said according to human reason.” Job’s “foolishness” is speaking beyond his knowledge. Thomas concludes that Job has progressed through his experience: “[Job] truly has grown both from his suffering and from divine revelation. The more one considers the justice of God, the more he sees his own fault” (JB chapter 42). His fault is in overestimating his own capacity to understand the justice of God.

The wisdom Job gains seems to involve him in a process of continual reconsideration. God lays out surpassing majesty from the whirlwind, a stark distinction between divine and human power and understanding. The point of the division is precisely that it cannot be domesticated. While Phillips is surely correct that there is a grammar of “mystery”, such grammar itself is inadequate to convey the mystery of God. The purchase of the story of Job as Thomas rightly highlights is Job’s recognition of his own foolishness, the foolishness of human understanding. He is foolish before God even when his human reasoning is without fault. His pride is in failing to recognize the inadequacy of his reason before God.

In both the history of theological development and the history of spirituality, the religious is in constant dialogue with the non-religious for modes of expression. The scriptures themselves borrow idioms from their surrounding cultures—there is no purely religious speech. Phillips would not deny such an evolution of grammar. Nevertheless,

Phillips's claim that "to know how to use [religious] language is to know God"³⁴⁷ seems too inadequate to address the way in which experiences like Job's drive changes in religious grammar and subvert religious grammar from within—a possibility Thomas seemed to entertain in his own reading of Job. A nearly ubiquitous claim in Christian spirituality is to avoid divided loyalties, to turn completely to God. Though spoken about in borrowed terms, God's claim is unlike any other's claim. Yet this singlehearted devotion to God is taken as a point of arrival after a long struggle. Most believers, if the self-understanding of the believing communities is to be trusted, struggle to be motivated and even to articulate their motives on purely religious grounds. Their activities vacillate between the religious and the non-religious or else inhabit some middle space. How can one understand the grammar of the father of the demoniac boy asking Jesus, "I believe, help my unbelief!" (Mark 9:24) The father is in the space between religious and non-religious grammars. One could argue that these concerns are for the theologian rather than the philosopher, except that they speak to the extent of the religious, which is the purview of the philosopher.

4.3 Religious Nonsense

The alternative group of positions taken by philosophers such as Brian Clack, Anthony Kenny, and Bede Rundle are broadly that religious language is nonsensical. Religious language violates rules of grammar and, thus, cannot make sensible claims, even if these claims are internal to a particular form of life as Phillips holds. As nonsense, religious speech should not be taken at face value, indeed, cannot be taken at face value when one becomes

³⁴⁷ Phillips, *The Concept of Prayer*, 50.

aware that it is nonsense, though religious nonsense may be understood in other terms, such as emotional expression.

Rundle makes the intriguing complaint that religious language does not go far enough in understanding the otherness of God—the domestication complaint finds sympathetic hearing from both the skeptical and the pious. He highlights a concern that also preoccupies much of the apophatic theological tradition: “God is not of this world, but that is not going to stop us speaking of him as if he were.”³⁴⁸ God is not a nonsense word—it has uses in various theological systems—but the usage patterns of God are inconsistent, if not outright contradictions. This is true in the discourse of religious believers as well as in authoritative sources such as the scriptures.

Rundle adopts Hume’s spatial metaphor of the remoteness of God, that God is outside space and time.³⁴⁹ Hume argues that God is “so remote and incomprehensible” that “we have no authority to ascribe to him any attribute or perfection.”³⁵⁰ *Pace* Hume and Rundle, Chalcedonian Christian belief is of a hidden God rather than a remote God. Nevertheless, whether remote or hidden, God is *non aliud*, not another thing. This highlights the theologically difficult issue of understanding God’s essence and various virtues, for example, divine mercy. If God is thoroughgoingly other, how can one meaningfully speak of divine attributes in human terms without complete equivocation?

As discussed in the first chapter, the Christian tradition holds that there are criteria to discern God’s intentions to a limited degree and with the help of grace. One tactic taken to

³⁴⁸ Bede Rundle, *Why There Is Something Rather than Nothing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 11.

³⁴⁹ Rundle, 17.

³⁵⁰ David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Oxford Scholarly Editions Online (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 109, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/actrade/9780199266340.book.1>.

account for such language is using psychological concepts with regard to God. God is understood as a particularly other mind. One could make a similar move in discussing how God is “at work” or any number of other common descriptions of God and God’s action. The Christian tradition claims that one not only comes to know the will of God but also enacts God’s will and in so doing participates in God’s action.³⁵¹ Psychological language would seem to be apposite when discussing coordinated action. Yet this seems to run counter to God’s being *non aliud*. The use of such psychological concepts is clearly limited in God’s case.

Rundle complains that one has criteria for other minds, their beliefs and intentions. If the normal criteria for psychological concepts and concepts of coordination do not apply to God, then neither does the grammar. Without the help of this human grammar, applying psychological concepts to God is nonsense. One is left without criteria for the use of the concepts. More generally, one has criteria for how the various attributes applied to God function when applied to human beings. Rundle argues that traditional recourse to analogy, at least proportional analogy, does not alleviate this difficulty: “Analogy of proportionality is thought unhelpful if it presents us with too many unknowns, but enough may be known for it to be clear that an analogy does not hold.”³⁵² Likewise, applying grammars appropriate to human or natural activities to God has too many unknowns.

Both Rundle and Kenny argue that attributes of God are unintelligible and of no communicative value. One might argue that narrative claims about God, or perhaps god, are sensible provided God is treated as another being in the universe—Aristotle’s unmoved

³⁵¹ Williams, *Christ, the Heart of Creation*, 239.

³⁵² Rundle, *Why There Is Something Rather than Nothing*, 17.

mover as the first and best being within the universe may be sensible, but such a being is not the God of Abrahamic religion.³⁵³ Claims of God as outside the universe or creator of the universe seem to defy sense. Famously, God's self-definition in Exodus 3:14, "I AM WHO I AM [sic]" or, more precisely, "I will be what I will be" ('ehyeh 'ăšer 'ehyeh), resists grammatical clarification, as do many accounts of theophany and divine attributes.³⁵⁴ Such nonsensical language extends from the scriptures to spiritual and theological writings, many of which follow from Exodus 3:14. Thomas begins his five demonstrations, Five Ways, for the existence of God starting from Exodus 3:14, "*ego sum qui sum*", as the most appropriate name of God because it was revealed (ST I.2.3 *sed contra*).³⁵⁵ Thomas's own naming of God follows from this revealed name.

Rundle and Kenny highlight Thomas's celebrated and reviled understanding of God, *Ipsium Esse Subsistens*, as a particularly well-defined example of nonsense.³⁵⁶ For both, God-talk defies grammar by taking existence to define essence. Kenny takes aim at Thomas's "Fourth Way", the most Platonic of his demonstrations of the existence of God.³⁵⁷ The proof

³⁵³ Aristotle, "Metaphysics," in *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), bk. XII; Sokolowski, *The God of Faith and Reason*; Burrell, "The Christian Distinction Celebrated and Expanded."

³⁵⁴ "To be" has no present tense in ancient (or modern) Hebrew. "I am who am" comes from the Greek translation. There are a range of theories as to the origins of "'ehyeh 'ăšer 'ehyeh", including Hebrew wordplay and the liturgical epithet of the name "El". The name revealed by God obscures far more than it clarifies. Even when understood within an historical or linguistic context, it remains a deeply puzzling description.

³⁵⁵ See: Janet Soskice, "Aquinas and Augustine on Creation and God as 'Eternal Being,'" *New Blackfriars* 95, no. 1056 (2014): 196–98; Matthew Levering, *Scripture and Metaphysics: Aquinas and the Renewal of Trinitarian Theology*, Challenges in Contemporary Theology (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), chap. 2.

³⁵⁶ Anthony Kenny, *Five Ways: St Thomas Aquinas' Proofs of God's Existence* (London: Routledge, 2003), 94; Rundle, *Why There Is Something Rather than Nothing*, 10–12, 195–124; Mulhall, *The Great Riddle*, 6–7.

³⁵⁷ The Platonic influence in this demonstration is generally, though not universally, accepted. For an alternative reading, see Feser. The degree to which Thomas is Aristotelian or Platonic more generally remains a controversial question beyond my present scope. Kenny recognized the importance of Exodus 3:14 for Thomas's metaphysics more generally but not with regard to the Five Ways. Edward Feser, *Five Proofs of the Existence of God* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2017); Anthony Kenny, *Aquinas on Being* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), 123.

is premised on there being a most perfect essence of qualities in which various beings exhibiting that quality participate. To take Plato's central example from book six of the *Republic*, there is a form of the good in which all beings participate to a greater or lesser extent. Things are knowable and existent because of the form of the good in which they participate.³⁵⁸ Thomas shifts the central term of participation from goodness to being in demonstration four, though he will speak of participation in divine goodness and other divine attributes elsewhere. While the extent of Thomas's Platonism is the subject of fierce debate, as was discussed briefly in chapter two, at least for the purposes of the fourth demonstration, Thomas utilizes degrees of Platonic participation to claim there is a maximal being who is existence (and, indeed, goodness and all other perfections), rather than participating in being. This is the point at which, Kenny argues, Thomas slips into nonsense.

One can say a "rock is". This does not tell us about the rock other than that it exists; further description is required to speak of the essence or qualities of a rock, for example the "rock is solid". Similarly, one can say, "the philosopher king is." Yet again, further description is required to say anything about the essence of the philosopher king. Predicating existence of philosopher king or rock does not predicate a shared, defining quality of both.³⁵⁹ "Is" is not an attribute both philosopher king and rock share. In the case of God, "God is" or more precisely "God is being" is a statement of both essence and existence. "God is being" and "God is good" both describe God, which is not the case for any other being. The category

³⁵⁸ Plato takes goodness to be superior to being, whereas Thomas takes both goodness and being to be God. "[Y]ou should also say that not only do the objects of knowledge owe their being to the good, but their meaning is also due to it although the good is not being, but superior to it in rank and power." Plato, G. M. A. Grube, and C. D. C. Reeve, *Republic*, 2nd ed. (Hackett, 2011), Stephanus 509b.

³⁵⁹ Thomas holds that all created beings participate in divine being (*ens*) (ST I.45.5.ad1). See: John Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas: From Finite Being to Uncreated Being* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2000), 110–24.

of description is inseparable from the category of existence for God. For all beings except God, existence and essence are separate. For God, essence and existence are the same: “God is is” or, simply “God is”.³⁶⁰ The typical grammar of predication is overturned in the case of God as to be itself subsisting, *Ipsum Esse Subsistens*.³⁶¹ It is at best unclear what claim is actually being made.³⁶²

Even if religious language is nonsense, it is widely used. Such language is not useless—and thus rarely used—nonsense like “the duck bowdlerized brightly”, which seems to serve no purpose other than the philosopher’s occasional example. Religious language’s ongoing use implies that it serves some purpose, and that purpose cannot be concerning God or the world. Brian Clack argues that the later Wittgenstein in particular is a religious expressivist. Religious claims are not claims about supernatural realities but speech arising from emotional reactions to the world. Religious language makes sense when one understands it to be about the desires and attitudes of religious language users as opposed to being about God. Religion properly understood is about life regulation as opposed to claims about reality or some realm beyond reality. “They are expressive in character: predestination is a ‘sigh’; talk of a creation is an expression of wonder at the beauty of the world; and so on.”³⁶³

Drawing heavily on Wittgenstein’s reactions to Frazer’s *Golden Bough*, Clack takes

³⁶⁰ “The notion of *Ipsum Esse Subsistens*, therefore, so far from being a profound metaphysical analysis of the divine nature, turns out to be the Platonic Idea of a predicate which is at best uninformative and at worst unintelligible.” Kenny, *Five Ways: St Thomas Aquinas’ Proofs of God’s Existence*, 95.

³⁶¹ Among the upshots of Thomas’s *Ipsum Esse Subsistens*, his distinction between God’s essence and all other created essences is that all created essences somehow participate in God’s essence for their existence. Thus, the Christian conception of God’s action is both intimately connected with created action and non-competitive with created action. Rowan Williams rightly argues that Christology develops a ‘grammar’ of createdness. See: Williams, *Christ, the Heart of Creation*, 6.

³⁶² In chapter five, I will argue this is a riddling claim within the broader riddle of creation.

³⁶³ Brian R. Clack, *An Introduction to Wittgenstein’s Philosophy of Religion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 57.

Wittgenstein to offer modern religion as a “homeopathic magic”.³⁶⁴ This may best be illustrated by the alternative: instead of homeopathic magic, imagine expecting a religious ritual observance to be effective, be it the scapegoat ritual observed in the Jerusalem Temple, a rain dance, or sacrifice to household gods. Clack, following a suggestion from Rush Rhees, argues that religious rituals contain grammatical confusion similar to metaphysical confusions.³⁶⁵ The surface grammar of a religious claim or ritual may indicate a causal efficacy that the deep grammar does not. For example, the identification of a scapegoat with sin is a confusion, reifying abstract nouns.³⁶⁶ Clack understands Wittgenstein as saying that, while the emotional and moral content of religion is unobjectionable, any claim beyond this narrow realm is a “false picture” of religion open to rational critique. For Clack, religion is explained by a deep grammar that naturalizes religion and implies atheism.³⁶⁷ Clack’s naturalization of religion also makes religion sensible, albeit not on its own terms but on emotional terms, as opposed to nonsense which would not be explainable in the same way.

Both schools of Wittgensteinian interpretation of religious language fall short of religious language as it is used. That religious language is an alternate grammar must be true to some extent, though this hardly concedes much given the variety of language games. The degree of difference such that religious language is, if not immune, at least insulated from some critique, gives rise to concerns about fideism, even if these concerns are not ultimately justified. The greater concern with treating religious language as another grammar is the

³⁶⁴ James George Frazer, *Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* (Oxford University Press, 1994).

³⁶⁵ Rush Rhees, “Wittgenstein on Language and Ritual,” in *Rush Rhees on Religion and Philosophy*, ed. D. Z. Phillips (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 65–96.

³⁶⁶ Clack, *An Introduction to Wittgenstein’s Philosophy of Religion*, 21, 39, 107; Brian R. Clack, *Wittgenstein, Frazer, and Religion* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), 120.

³⁶⁷ Clack, *An Introduction to Wittgenstein’s Philosophy of Religion*, 127.

domestication of the radicality and self-subversion of religious language. Mystery that can be contained within a discrete grammar is hardly worth the name. Religious grammar is subject to constant upheaval and self-emptying. The alternate set of claims that religious language is nonsensical certainly avoids domestication but does so in such a way that it also renders religious life unintelligible. The expressivist solution makes religious life intelligible by other means without taking religious language itself seriously. The difficulty for the religious believer is to keep talking about what she cannot in principle talk about. In the next chapter, I will argue that a riddling approach to religious language preserves the integrity of religious life and speech while refusing to domesticate mystery.

5.0 Riddle Language

In the previous chapter, I offered a critical appraisal of two of the major strands of Wittgensteinian interpretation of religious language: first, that religious languages are their own language games with their own quite peculiar standards of truth and falsity, and second, that religious language is incoherent. Neither approach to religious language is satisfactory. The former distorts the mystery inherent to many religious uses of language while the latter does not account for the sensible, at times even systematic, uses of religious language except by making religious language about something other than religion. In this chapter, I explore and further develop a third, riddling, way arising from Cora Diamond and, more recently, Stephen Mulhall's work. The riddling approach draws elements from the other two while both respecting mystery and intelligible uses of religious language. The interplay between mystery and intelligible use typifies authoritative spiritual pedagogy, as will be explored in the next chapter.

In the introduction and first chapter, I introduced riddles and explored their importance in ancient literature including scripture and through much of the Christian spiritual pedagogy tradition. As I argued in the first chapter, not all riddles are easily recognizable. Some riddles appear to be straightforward descriptions or questions. What distinguishes a riddle is that it does not make sense, the superficial appearance of description or question sometimes conceals a lack of sense. For example, as discussed in the first chapter, the Gospel imperative to "be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect" is a riddle, or minimally assumes a riddle, that can be mistaken for a straightforward imperative. A live, that is unsolved, riddle does not describe because one cannot answer *how* it describes and, by extension, *how* it commands. Nor does it pose a particular question about the world, but perhaps raises a question about

itself, namely its own sense or intelligibility. A riddle only promises to make sense. A solved riddle does make sense, but in being solved ceases to be a riddle. Riddles are intelligible when one knows how the answer to a given riddle solves that riddle. Understanding the internal connections between riddle and answer is what makes a solved riddle sensible, sense being constituted by these connections, as explored in chapter two.

As briefly discussed in the introduction, spiritual pedagogy, the stewardship of mystery in Paul's terms, is not concerned with typical riddles but with great riddles. Great riddles have no conceivable solution. The promise of riddles is premised on their source. In the introduction, the promise of the child's clock riddle was grounded in trust of her mother whose riddle it was. Typically, the promise of a solution to a riddle lies in the teller or the originator of the riddle. Though spiritual pedagogues pose great riddles, unlike the mother's riddle, they do not possess the solution. Great riddles are stewarded by pedagogues, not owned. They are God's riddles and God promises a solution. Though *how* such a solution could be offered cannot itself be conceived but is caught up in the great riddle.

The first section of the chapter will introduce Anselm and his proofs as riddling within the context of and as a conclusion to perfect being ontology. Anselm's *Proslogion* is the primary focus of Cora Diamond's account and of philosophical attention more generally for its claim that God is that of which nothing greater can be conceived. I argue that the *Monologion* is self-consciously riddling.³⁶⁸ This section draws out the riddling speech of the *Monologion* and the similarities between the *Proslogion* and *Monologion*. The second part of

³⁶⁸ In an appendix to her "Riddles and Anselm's Riddle", Diamond briefly notes Anselm's self-conscious understanding of riddle language with regard to the Trinity but does not develop this point. I attempt to articulate and expand upon Diamond's suggestion.

the chapter considers Norman Malcolm's reading of Anselm and its relationship with the approaches to religious language in the previous chapter. The third part of the chapter takes up Diamond's reading of the *Proslogion* as a great riddle and the distinction between relative and absolute goods. The final part of the chapter argues that riddles can be put into action while remaining riddles. Riddles can be reimagined into a quasi-solution that is actionable, much like mathematical conjectures can be usefully employed. I argue that practices coming from riddles are a form of domestication that suspend but do not solve great riddles—the meaning of the riddle remains promissory. In the next chapter, I will argue that spiritual pedagogy in part consists of moving between suspended and active great riddles.

5.1 The Riddle of Anselm's *Monologion* and *Proslogion*

Anselm offers two related proofs for the existence of God in his extensive *Monologion* and briefer *Proslogion*. Of the two, the *Proslogion* has received far greater philosophical attention, though this has more to do with the brevity of its argument and provocative rhetoric around existence as a careful reading of the *Monologion* raises issues of similar philosophical interest as the *Proslogion*, especially with respect to riddles. Anselm begins both the *Proslogion* and *Monologion* as exercises of spiritual pedagogy. Both were written when Anselm was Prior of the monastery of Bec and arose at the request of the brothers of the monastery, who sought instruction from Anselm. This pastoral motivation should not diminish the texts' philosophical interest.³⁶⁹ The *Monologion* directs its argument towards one who has not reflected on the divine nature “either because he has not heard or because he does

³⁶⁹ G. R. Evans, *Anselm and Talking about God* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 15–16.

not believe” (Monologion 1).³⁷⁰ The *Proslogion* begins in belief and in prayer: “For I do not seek to understand in order to believe; I believe in order to understand” (Proslogion 1). The *Proslogion* is a dialogue whereas the *Monologion* is a monologue.³⁷¹ The two texts offer more similar arguments than is often acknowledged.³⁷²

The *Proslogion* is a work of faith, but faith motivating philosophy:³⁷³ *Fides quarens intellectum* (Faith seeking understanding).³⁷⁴ Yet Anselm also argues against the “fool”, who would deny God—he likely takes the image of the fool from the Psalms (53:1). The *Monologion* assumes a reasonable person who does not know God, perhaps not a fool but certainly not a wise person. Later in his life, Anselm characterized the two texts as having the same purpose: namely as explorations of the divine nature excluding the incarnation and

³⁷⁰ Hereafter cited parenthetically. Anselm, *Monologion and Proslogion: With the Replies of Gaunilo and Anselm*, trans. Thomas Williams (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1996); Anselm, *Proslogion*, Library of Latin texts (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2010), <https://solo.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/permalink/f/n28kah/oxfaleph020386442>; Anselm, *Monologion*, Library of Latin texts (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2010), <https://solo.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/permalink/f/n28kah/oxfaleph020386097>.

³⁷¹ “I named the first *Monologion*, which means a speech made to oneself, and the second *Proslogion*, which means a speech made to another.” (Proslogion, Prologue)

³⁷² For example, the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* limits discussion of the *Monologion* to the first four chapters without engaging the remaining sixty-one. Charles Hartshorn’s influential account of Anselm’s proof spared only a dismissive sentence for the *Monologion*. Some commentators such as Brian Davies and Gene Fendt rightly read the two works together. G. R. Evans laments that, since the time of Thomas Aquinas, study of Anselm has been “a patchy and piecemeal business”, with sections of his work extracted out of their proper context. Mining Anselm for narrow arguments while losing sight of his broader thought may continue in contemporary scholarship but is not limited to it. Thomas Williams, “Saint Anselm,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Winter 2020 (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2020), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2020/entries/anselm/>; Charles Hartshorne, *Anselm’s Discovery: A Re-Examination of the Ontological Proof for God’s Existence*, Open Court Library of Philosophy (La Salle, Ill: Open Court, 1965); Brian Davies, “Anselm and the Ontological Argument,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Anselm*, ed. Brian Davies and Brian Leftow, 1st ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 158, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CCOL0521807468.008>; Gene Fendt, “The Relation of Monologion and Proslogion,” *The Heythrop Journal* 46, no. 2 (2005): 149–66, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2265.2005.00255.x>; Evans, *Anselm and Talking about God*, 2.

³⁷³ See: Davies, “Anselm and the Ontological Argument.”

³⁷⁴ Dominic Doyle rightly argues that the *Proslogion* is a work of spiritual pedagogy. Dominic F. Doyle, “The Mystagogic Structure of Anselm’s Proslogion,” *The Heythrop Journal* 57, no. 2 (March 1, 2016): 282–92, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2265.2011.00724.x>.

apart from the authority of scripture.³⁷⁵ Anselm's accounts contain a tension. On the one hand, he holds that, through a rational argument, one comes to know about God in a way that is compelling and transformative. The fool ought to repent his foolishness. On the other hand, in both texts, properly speaking, God cannot be conceived. In both cases, Anselm guides his readers on a journey of understanding that runs into a great riddle. Anselm's own position as guide is as one who firmly believes in God as the creator who grants the power of speech and understanding to human beings by virtue of their creation, even to human beings who deny God.

The *Monologion* begins his argument for the existence of God from the existence of goods broadly conceived.³⁷⁶ Anselm takes as a premise that even if someone denies the existence of God, such a person cannot deny the existence of goods. That, for example, food or shelter are good is self-evident to Anselm and his assumed interlocutors. His argument proceeds from the existence of goods to the existence of a highest good, namely God. For goodness to be measured such that one thinks that something is as a good, or as better or worse than something else, there must be a standard of goodness with which to judge other goods. Anselm considers why the swiftness of a horse is considered a good, but the swiftness of a robber is considered bad. Swiftness itself cannot be goodness, but rather swiftness is judged by a higher standard, utility, such that in this case a swift horse is useful, and a swift robber is not. Utility would itself be judged by a yet higher standard and this method would continue to articulate ever higher goods to judge the lower goods. The higher is also more

³⁷⁵ Anselm, *Epistolae de Incarnatione Verbi*, 1094, chap. 6.

³⁷⁶ Anselm received criticism from his mentor and predecessor as Abbot and Archbishop, Lanfranc, for grounding his account in reasoning about the good without reference to scripture or tradition. See, Evans, *Anselm and Talking about God*, 16–17.

general with the highest goods being universal, though it is unclear how one might come to understanding the higher goods except through the lower. One can more easily articulate standards for what makes cars good than what makes all forms of transportation good, still less all forms of movement. The empirical criteria for utility become more and more tenuous as they become more general.

Anselm's hierarchy of good reasoning must eventually terminate on pain of infinite regress in a being whose nature is these highest goods, which are also universal. Anselm terminates the chain in God whose nature is, he argues, necessarily the same as the highest goods. Nothing could be "more necessary" [*quid magis necessarium*]³⁷⁷ than God's nature being the same as the nature of these perfections (Monologion 16).³⁷⁸ This is unlike creaturely perfections. In grounding perfections in God, such that God not only acts according to the demands of justice as creatures do, but is justice as constitutive of the divine nature, Anselm shifts the grammar of perfection terms away from empirical criteria. In his reading of Thomas, Burrell refers to such uses of perfection terms as "absolute", "that is, *without indicating how* these perfections are possessed. [emphasis added]"³⁷⁹ God's perfection is not subject to context or other specifications but universal. The absolute use of terms at the end of

³⁷⁷ In addition to chapter 16, Anselm invokes "more necessary" in chapters 12 and 53 to make related arguments. In chapter 12, he argues that the utterances of God which created the world necessarily arise from the supreme essence of God, "what could be seen to be any more necessary than this: the utterance of the supreme essence is nothing other than the supreme essence?" In chapter 53, he asks "what is more necessary than that the Father and the Son and the love of each is one supreme essence?" The implication being, nothing could be more necessary.

³⁷⁸ The above citation concerns the good of justice, though the argument seems to apply equally to other goods. Norman Malcolm, who will be discussed below, distinguishes the *Monologion* and *Proslogion* as arguments about the existence and necessary existence of God respectively. Anselm's use of 'necessary' in the *Monologion* is curious if one takes necessity to be a binary. While the text is not altogether clear on this point, the line of argument that higher goods are more necessary than lower would seem to terminate in God being most necessary. Thus, the distinction between the *Monologion* and *Proslogion* on the basis of existence versus necessary existence may not be well founded.

³⁷⁹ Burrell, *Aquinas*, 73; Burrell, *Analogy and Philosophical Language*, 132; Mulhall, *The Great Riddle*, 82–84.

the chain of perfections is unlike all relative uses. Burrell's description appears apt for Anselm as well.

Anselm's overarching conclusion set out early in the *Monologion* is that: "It follows, therefore, that all other things are good through something other than what they themselves are, and he alone is good through himself. Now no good that exists through another is equal to or greater than that good who is good through himself" (Monologion 1). The highest good, that is perfection, is self-sufficiently good. Anselm applies the same argument to the highest existence: "He *must* therefore be [*Quare necesse est eam esse*] living, wise, powerful and all-powerful, true, just, happy, eternal; and whatever similarly *it is absolutely better to be than not to be* [*et quidquid similiter absolute melius est quam non ipsum*]" [emphasis added] (Monologion 15). The highest being holds the lower beings in existence and possesses self-sufficient existence. Though his argument from goodness and existence seem to demonstrate the need for a highest, self-sufficient good/existence, this establishes remarkably little by way of positive predications of God and then only with serious qualifications.

The *Monologion* heavily qualifies predications of attributes of God that seem to undermine the possibility of predicating of God in a way that makes sense. He is sensitive to the fact that humans lack criteria for absolute goods. For example, Anselm questions whether God is a substance in the same way that other substances are. The criteria for divine substance differ from all other types. He argues from divine simplicity, immutability, and independence that divine substance is unlike all other substances and takes from this what might be called a grammar rule for predicating substance of God, albeit a vague rule. "Accordingly, if any word is ever applied to him [God] in common with others, it must undoubtedly be understood to have a very different meaning" (Monologion 26). The three attributes—simplicity,

immutability, and independence—follow from divine perfections falling at the self-sufficient terminus of chains of perfection. At the end of the chain of existence and goodness, the goodness and existence of God are understood negatively as that existence and goodness not found in creatures. Anselm further clarifies that for God, whose substance is not subject to accidents, substance is equivalent to essence, which is untrue of all other beings (*Monologion* 79). Anselm carries on predicating substance of God on the grounds that God exists in the highest degree. The highest degree of substance/existence/goodness is defined negatively as unlike creaturely substance because it is self-standing.

Anselm invokes riddle language [*aenigmate*] in the context of his extended discussion of the Trinity, especially in chapter sixty-five. Anselm's argument for God as Trinity begins with God as Creator Spirit (*Monologion* 28-29). The *Monologion* defends various doctrines of the Trinity on rational grounds. The Trinity is in Anselm's telling the conclusion of the argument from perfections. As such, there is no reason to limit Anselm's conclusions about predicating attributes of God only to predications of God as Trinity. Throughout this extended discussion, he makes no clear distinction between what is known by faith in the Trinity and what can be known by reason.³⁸⁰ Though falling within his discussion of the Trinity, Anselm's invocation of riddle language seems to apply to predications of God more generally insofar as a riddle emerges at the end of a rational investigation of the attributes of God, as opposed to an investigation of revealed truth.

³⁸⁰ Given the ambiguity of the text, I take this interpretation to be both plausible and philosophically interesting though not decisive. It has the benefit of greater coherence with the *Proslogion*. An alternative interpretation is that Anselm assumes a graced reason or partially relies on revelation in his account. Anselm does not explicitly appeal to special grace or revelation in this section and precludes such recourse at the beginning of the *Monologion*.

Following from the necessarily negative conclusions of the chain of goodness leading back to God, Anselm argues that knowledge of God is necessarily mediated. Anselm argues that in the very process of establishing higher and higher being, the sense of these higher predications is not the sense of the lower: “But how could one reply [*responderi poterit*] to the point that was made earlier in this very discussion: that the supreme essence is so much above and beyond every other nature that even if sometimes words are applied to him that are common to other natures, their meanings are in no way common? [*sensus nullatenus sit communis*]” (Monologion 65). One cannot conceive how the words that are applied to other creatures might properly be applied to God. While this is clearly true for the claim that God is one essence and three persons, it might also be true of God’s goodness relatively to creaturely goodness.

Anselm distinguishes between speaking “properly” versus “in riddles”: “After all, we often say many things that we do not properly [*proprie*] express as they really are; rather, we signify through some other thing what we are either unwilling or unable to express properly [*proprie*], as when we speak in *riddles* [*aenigmata*]” [emphasis added] (Monologion 65). Unfortunately, Anselm gives no indication what other things one speaks of in riddles, though it is apparently a significant category of expression. Predicates as applied to God do not share a common sense with predicates applied to other beings. This is not a worry about erring in the details, but a fundamental concern about the quality of predicating of God. Anselm continues this line of reasoning arguing that God cannot be described except by some likeness: “So this is how it is the case *both* that his nature is ineffable, because words can in no way express him as he is [*quia per verba sicuti est nullatenus valet intimari*], and that if reason can teach us to form any judgment about him through some other thing, as in a riddle

[*aenigmatē*], that judgment is not false [*falsum non est*]” (Monologion 65). On the one hand, one is making inferences about the divine nature. On the other, the divine nature, “because words can in no way express him as he is”, remains unknown. The riddle relies on created natures, which one can know. What remains a riddle is *how* these created natures relate to the divine nature.

Anselm does not solve the problem of human beings’ riddle knowledge of God except to propose that beings who are more like God are in a better position to understand God. Anselm likens this riddling to a mirror. “We often do not see something properly as the thing itself actually is, but through some likeness or image, as when we look at someone's face in a mirror. In this way we do indeed both say and not say, or both see and not see, one and the same thing” (Monologion 65). The mirror both reflects and distorts. The quality of the image depends on the quality of the mirror. Anselm observes that, in a mirror, “we do not say or see [the thing reflected] through its own distinctive character [*proprietas*]” (Monologion 65). This mirrored image may not be false, but neither is it an adequate reflection of the character of the thing reflected such that it can be true. Brian Leftow rightly argues that chapter sixty-five complicates the perfect being ontology that seems to be the argument at the beginning of the *Monologion*.³⁸¹ His worry is that Anselm’s God is without attributes, and he attempts to

³⁸¹ Katherin Rogers reads Anselm as having a strong doctrine of participation, allowing for univocal predication between God and creatures. She writes: “Anselm will insist that we are capable of offering definitions of the terms which we use of God and of creatures such that a single definition correctly applies to both uses.” Hinton offers a compelling response to Rogers that the plain reading of “different signification” precludes a univocal reading. Brian Leftow, “Anselm’s Perfect-Being Theology,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Anselm*, ed. Brian Davies and Brian Leftow (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 132–56, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CCOL0521807468.007>; Katherin A. Rogers, *The Neoplatonic Metaphysics and Epistemology of Anselm of Canterbury* (Lewiston, N.Y: Edwin Mellen Press, 1997), 206; Timothy Hinton, “The Priority of the Via Negativa in Anselm’s Monologion,” *Philosophy and Theology* 20, no. 1 (2008): 3–27, <https://doi.org/10.5840/philtheol2008201/21>.

reconstruct what can be correctly predicated of God for Anselm, thus recovering a consistent perfect being ontology. For Leftow, the riddle is a problem rather than an opening.

For Anselm, mirroring is possible only because of human beings' creation in God's image. Human beings exist through the divine Word who created them and take on a certain likeness by virtue of their creation (Monologion 31). The creative Word of God is the norm according to which created things are modelled. Human self-knowledge models, however imperfectly, how they think about God. "For whatever among created things is shown to be more like him must be more excellent by nature. Hence, because of its greater likeness such a thing gives more help to the investigating mind in coming closer to the supreme truth, and because of its more excellent created essence it more fully teaches what that mind ought to believe about the Creator" (Monologion 66).

Predications of God are not merely imprecise, but also do not properly belong to God. The human mirror, even when highly polished, cannot reflect the divine except in human likeness. One cannot speak of the proper nature of God except through likenesses: "For all the words that seem applicable to that [divine] nature do not show him to me through his distinctive character [*per proprietatem*] so much as they hint [*innuunt*] at him through some likeness [*similitudinem*]" (Monologion 65).³⁸² Anselm's writing predates to debates around analogy and univocity; it would be anachronistic to recruit him to one side or another.³⁸³ The

³⁸² Lynch argues that Anselm is extending Augustine's argument in the *De Trinitate* that human beings know God through an image or similitude of God within the human being. Anselm's fool is taken to be someone who refuses the similitude. Reginald M. Lynch, "Image, Necessity, and Trinitarian Psychology in Anselm and Augustine," *Theological Studies* 82, no. 2 (June 1, 2021): 332–50, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00405639211013573>.

³⁸³ Debates about analogy go back at least as far as Aristotle but were largely dormant during Anselm's time. Analogy became a major source of controversy in the fourteenth century, see: E. Jennifer Ashworth, "Medieval Theories of Analogy," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Fall 2017 (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2017), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2017/entries/analogy-medieval/>.

most literal translation of Anselm is that the human likeness “nods toward” [*in + nuo*] the divine nature. Though one could see this as a predecessor to analogy language, and Anselm does employ analogies, he has no theory of analogy. Anselm describes predication about God as riddles. The mirroring of the human of the divine is to a greater or lesser degree depending on the love of God expressed by the human being (Monologion 67-68). Similitude was both the means of human beings coming to knowledge of God and a moral challenge.³⁸⁴

Anselm’s argument here is consonant with the broader tradition of spiritual ascent discussed in chapter one. Given Anselm’s monastic background, this is unsurprising.³⁸⁵ This spiritual ascent argument of increasing conformity of creatures to their creator is combined with his argument that there must be a relation between creator and creatures: “every essence is like the supreme essence to the extent that it exists” (Monologion 66). This is promissory since one cannot articulate how this relation functions except in riddles. The essences of those who love God, and are loved by God, are more alike than others, though he cannot articulate how except to argue that the human essence is ordered to love which is higher than itself (Monologion 69). Anselm is struggling to articulate the logical implications of human beings mirroring God in the spiritual life while maintaining the ineffability of God.

Towards the conclusion of the *Monologion*, Anselm comes to the end of time and the promise of eternal happiness (Monologion 70-72). The riddle of knowing God is part of an

³⁸⁴ Evans notes Anselm’s use of “similitudes” in exhorting his monks. G. R. Evans, “Anselm’s Life, Works, and Immediate Influence,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Anselm*, ed. Brian Davies and Brian Leftow, 1st ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 15, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CCOL0521807468.002>.

³⁸⁵ Kallenberg reads Anselm’s wider work through his practice of prayer. His conclusion is broadly that training in the practice of prayer aids in understanding Anselm’s work and Anselm’s work is meant to lead one to prayer, though Kallenberg seems to underestimate the degree to which prayer leads Anselm towards the acknowledgement of what he does not know. Human practice will not make TWTWGCBC sensible. See: Brad J. Kallenberg, “Praying for Understanding: Reading Anselm Through Wittgenstein,” *Modern Theology* 20, no. 4 (2004): 527–46, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0025.2004.00266.x>.

eschatological promise for Anselm: “Therefore, nothing is truer than this: that every rational soul, if it strives to love and desire the supreme happiness as it ought, at some time perceives him so as to enjoy him. Thus, what it now sees as if ‘in a mirror, in a riddle [*aenigmate*],’ it will then see ‘face to face’” (Monologion 70). Anselm quotes First Corinthians 13:12, discussed in both the introduction and chapter one, where Paul contrasts partial knowledge now “in a mirror with a dim picture [or riddle] [*ainigmati*]” with the full knowledge of God to come at the end of time.³⁸⁶ Paul commends the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love, of which the greatest is love, as one lives with the riddle and awaits full knowledge. Anselm exhorts his readers to the love of God for their eternal salvation. The account of the *Monologion* that began with perfect being ontology founded upon goodness in creatures, leads to a promise of things to come and knowledge to be had.

In the *Monologion*’s final chapter, Anselm relates the recognition of God as supreme essence with worship: “Surely everyone who says that God exists (whether one God or more than one) understands him to be nothing other than a substance that he thinks human beings ought to worship because of his preeminent dignity, and to entreat in any pressing need, beyond every nature that is not God” (Monologion 80). God, who is creator, is by virtue of

³⁸⁶ In his *De Trinitate* XV chapters 8-10, Augustine offers an extensive treatment of Paul’s use of *ainigmati* in this verse. F. Asiedu argues that Anselm was heavily influenced by Augustine in general and the *De Trinitate* in particular. Thomas takes up Augustine’s discussion (ST I.12.2). Thomas argues for the impossibility of seeing God through created similitude both as correct and as the correct reading of Augustine. Thomas also discusses mirrors in Paul in his commentary on the first chapter of John’s Gospel (1:6-8) in addition to his commentary on First Corinthians (13:12-13). In the commentary on John, Thomas contrasts the mirror of knowledge of God through faith with a direct heavenly vision. In his commentary on 1 Corinthians, Thomas takes the mirror image to be an image of how one comes to see God through creatures: “In as much as we know the invisible things of God through creatures, we are said to see through a mirror. Inasmuch as those invisible things are secrets to us, we see in an enigma.” This is contrasted with seeing God face to face in heaven. F. B. A. Asiedu, *From Augustine to Anselm: The Influence of De Trinitate on the Monologion*, Instrumenta Patristica et Mediaevalia 62 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012); Raymond F. Collins and Daniel J. Harrington, *First Corinthians*, Sacra Pagina Series, vol. 7 (Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 1999), 487.

the act of creation also the supreme help to creatures. As discussed above, the capacity to know God even as a riddle, is premised on one's mirroring of God. This mirroring is intellectual and moral. It is active and receptive. One mirrors through action and thought. Going to God with one's needs as a dependent creature is not only the result of Anselm's deliberations about the nature of God, but it is the condition which enables such deliberations. The mirror that is human nature needs to reflect God and to empty itself (*kenosis*), or better still, to acknowledge its own incompleteness in acting as a mirror. To understand, even dimly, who God is entails approaching God in one's need.

Commentators differ on the relationship between the *Monologion* and the *Proslogion*. Anselm's stated aim in the *Proslogion* is to offer a single argument as proof for the existence of God excluding some of the complexity of his earlier work, though with greater consonance to his earlier work than is often acknowledged by commentators.³⁸⁷ In the standard reading of the *Proslogion*, this argument is that God is not merely the highest conceivable being, as seems to be Anselm's argument at the beginning of *Monologion* but that God is that than which nothing greater can be conceived (TTWNGCBC). The *Proslogion*'s central argument is remarkably compact: "So even the fool must admit that something than which nothing greater can be thought exists at least in his understanding, since he understands this when he hears it, and whatever is understood exists in the understanding. And surely that than which a greater cannot be thought cannot exist only in the understanding. For if it exists only in the

³⁸⁷ The range of commentary on the *Proslogion* is vast, perhaps the most notable interpretations being those of Kant and Karl Barth. For an "audit trail" of the range of *Proslogion* interpretation see: Ian Logan, *Reading Anselm's Proslogion: The History of Anselm's Argument and Its Significance Today*, Ashgate New Critical Thinking in Religion, Theology, and Biblical Studies (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009); Karl Barth, *Anselm: Fides Quaerens Intellectum: Anselm's Proof of the Existence of God in the Context of His Theological Scheme* (London: SCM, 1960).

understanding, it can be thought to exist in reality as well, which is greater” (Proslogion 2).³⁸⁸ God being the greatest conceivable thing cannot be thought not to exist. The argument here tracks the argument of the *Monologion* insofar as the maximal perfection of an attribute, in this case existence, is beyond conception.³⁸⁹ Central to the argument of the *Monologion*, and likewise the *Proslogion*, is that perfections must be self-standing: “God is whatever it is better to be than not to be; and he, as the only self-existent being, creates all things from nothing” (Proslogion 5). God’s necessary existence like God’s goodness is the terminus of the chain. The *Proslogion* culminates in a Trinitarian reflection and happiness with God for eternity (Proslogion 24-26).³⁹⁰ Like the *Monologion*, the *Proslogion* ends by reflecting on the need for God. Knowledge of and joy in God are Anselm’s prayer: “O Lord, by your Son you command us—or rather, you counsel us—to ask, and you promise that we will receive” (Proslogion 26). Until this promise is fulfilled, Anselm continues his task of pondering and speaking of God. Anselm ends in an activity undertaken on the promise of knowledge and joy.

When, in the *Monologion*, Anselm attempts to predicate positively of God, these predications are found to be unlike creaturely predications such that the relationship between the two cannot be conceived. One is left with riddling divine predicates that Anselm claims not to be false. But he cannot understand or show how they might be true, because if they are true then they are true in a different manner from how creaturely predications of the same attributes are true. Insofar as there is a shape to these predications, it is gleaned from

³⁸⁸ Ian Logan helpfully reviews the vexed translation history of the *Proslogion*. Ian Logan, “‘Whoever Understands This...’: On Translating the Proslogion,” *New Blackfriars* 89, no. 1023 (2008): 560–74.

³⁸⁹ Possibly anticipating his argument on “absolute” perfections, Burrell argues that Anselm’s “greater than” must be in respect to some domain, otherwise it “remains inescapably vague.” Burrell, *Exercises in Religious Understanding*, 68.

³⁹⁰ Gavin R. Ortland, *Anselm’s Pursuit of Joy: A Commentary on the Proslogion* (Washington: CUA Press, 2020), chap. 5.

inadequate creaturely predication, and demands the mirroring of divine perfections—albeit darkly to borrow Pauline language. Divine attributes are the terminus of a chain of perfections, that can only be spoken about using the language of the lower links of the chain. It is sensible to speak of the terminus because of the beginning links, even if the terminus itself is a riddle.

5.2 Malcolm's Reading of Anselm

Along with Kant, Norman Malcolm holds that existence is not a perfection, but he clarifies that Anselm's argument is rather that "the logical impossibility of nonexistence is a perfection."³⁹¹ (Malcolm was a target of Kai Nielsen, discussed in the previous chapter.) To exist is not a perfection but to exist *necessarily* is. Malcolm summarizes what he takes to be Anselm's argument in *Proslogion* three. God's existence as that which nothing greater can be conceived is wholly independent of other beings. There is no contingency to God's existence because God is only dependent on God. Existing necessarily is constitutive of the idea of God. Thus, the idea of God's not existing is incoherent, to be God is to exist necessarily. So too God cannot cease to exist: "Thus God's existence is either impossible or necessary. It can be the former only if the concept of such a being is self-contradictory or in some way logically absurd. Assuming that this is not so, it follows that He necessarily exists."³⁹² All God's properties are necessary properties because there is no contingency in God, therefore God's existence as a property of God is also necessary. If Malcolm's reading is correct, it would require Anselm to have considerably revised his argument between the *Monologion* and

³⁹¹ Norman Malcolm, "Anselm's Ontological Arguments," *The Philosophical Review* 69, no. 1 (1960): 46, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2182266>.

³⁹² Malcolm, 50.

Proslogion, which is unlikely given Anselm's argument that God's properties are necessary in the *Monologion* discussed above, though the textual evidence is not decisive.

The upshot of Anselm's proof for Malcolm, especially for one seeking to use it to persuade, is that God's necessary existence is a rule of Abrahamic, monotheist language games. The necessary existence of God does not extend to other language games. As an exercise in faith seeking understanding, the necessity of God's existence is already a rule of the language of faith. The proof is an exploration of what is already implicit in the language of faith and, by extension, communities of faith. Malcolm writes: "I am sure there cannot be a deep understanding of that concept [of an infinite being] without an understanding of the phenomena of human life that give rise to it."³⁹³ On one level, Malcolm is surely correct that concepts are best understood within the forms of life that give rise to the context. As discussed in chapter three, even notionally objective concepts like gravity are rooted in forms of life. Though across human forms of life, one should be able to communicate about some concept of gravity or some similar concept, given that all human beings on Earth live with objects falling. The difficulty is whether the concept of God is limited to a particular form of life without purchase in other human forms of life. Malcolm's text is unclear how insular religious language games are.

Malcolm's argument raises an enduring interpretive question as to the intended audience of Anselm's proof. As far as his first readers are concerned, Anselm offers an argument for the existence of God as "faith seeking understanding" addressed to those who already affirm the existence of God and are committed to a religious form of life, though he

³⁹³ Malcolm, 60.

sets himself against one who does not seem to share that faith, the “fool” who would deny the existence of God. The argument runs that “even the fool must admit that something than which nothing greater can be thought exists at least in his understanding” (Proslogion 2). To convince the fool requires some normative grounds because such a person would not have the same emotional attachment to faith commitments such that an understanding would be required to avoid, for example, intellectual or emotional distress.

As an empirical matter, Malcolm is correct at least in that certain people with particular religious backgrounds and formative experiences are more likely to be worried about the existence of God, and furthermore that such people have particular criteria for speaking about God. Many modern, well educated people side with Anselm’s fool, though for those within the religious language game of the proof as Malcolm conceives it, this should be of little concern.³⁹⁴ For Malcolm, Anselm’s fool who does not share the religious language game can follow Anselm’s argument as a piece of logic, though without being religiously moved by it.³⁹⁵ As seen in the *Monologion* particularly, though also in the *Proslogion*, Anselm holds that a relationship with God aids in speaking of God, though he does not claim that such a relationship is required to feel the force of the proof, except in the metaphysical sense that anyone who reads the proof would be in relationship with God by virtue of being created and thus given the capacity of speech and understanding by God through the unfolding of created, natural processes.

³⁹⁴ Mulhall partly rehabilitates Malcolm noting that, even for Malcolm religious, language has some logical connections with other discourse and that Malcolm’s distinction between logical and religious significance is a distinction between levels of understanding. Though one could be forgiven for reading Malcolm less sympathetically than Mulhall, these distinctions, though present, are hardly prominent and appreciating them requires careful reading. Mulhall, *The Great Riddle*, 16.

³⁹⁵ Malcolm, “Anselm’s Ontological Arguments,” 60.

5.3 Diamond's Anselm

Cora Diamond proposes Anselm's *Proslogion* as an example of a riddle and, as noted above, briefly mentions the *Monologion* as riddling. She argues that the answer to the riddle of the *Proslogion*, TTWNGCBC, is not specifiable in advance and resists attempts at sense making.³⁹⁶ In part, Diamond follows—but largely critiques—Norman Malcolm's earlier, controversial Wittgensteinian defense of Anselm. Kant famously objected to Anselm's proof in the *Proslogion* that existence is not a type of perfection; thus, existing is not more perfect than not existing.³⁹⁷ Though it would be a contradiction for the most perfect being to have more faults than some less perfect being, Kant sees no contradiction in holding that the most perfect being might not exist.³⁹⁸ Non-existence is not culpable. Diamond argues that the point of Anselm's argument is that it must fail as a proof—it cannot make sense. If Cora Diamond is right, then Kant's critique of Anselm fails. Diamond offers an influential reading of Anselm's articulation of God as TTWNGCBC as a great riddle. Such a riddle cannot make sense, but it can be usefully employed in the proper context. Riddles can establish auxiliary connections and disconnections. One can rule out answers to the riddle: for example, that God is dependent on some other being. To say that God is independent is primarily to say what God is not and, based on this negative, what God is.

³⁹⁶ Cora Diamond, "Riddles and Anselm's Riddle," in *The Realistic Spirit: Wittgenstein, Philosophy, and the Mind* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995), 268.

³⁹⁷ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood, The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 551–89.

³⁹⁸ Writing from a quasi-Wittgensteinian perspective, Elizabeth Anscombe argues that Anselm does not posit existence as a perfection. G. E. M. Anscombe, "Why Anselm's Proof in the *Proslogion* Is Not an Ontological Argument," *Thoreau Quarterly* 17 (1985): 32–40; G. E. M. Anscombe, "Russelm or Anselm?," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 43, no. 173 (October 1993): 500–504.

Diamond concedes the empirical point that some people are interested in riddle questions and others are not, but she resists Malcolm's claim that Anselm's proof of the necessary existence of God is limited to a particular set of language games. While it may be the case that religious language games specify as a rule that God necessarily exists, such specifications do not give *carte blanche* to say anything. Grammatical analysis includes clarifying those instances where a language misinterprets its own idioms leading to confusion. Thus, a language game, whether religious or not, may have embedded within it a confusion which can be brought to light through grammatical analysis.

As discussed in chapter three, the role of grammatical analysis is to clarify the functioning of language and the confusions embedded in language. Malcolm's solution stipulates peculiarity, what others might call a confusion, in certain language games. The sense of God language is internally consistent to those holding the proper form of life. As Mulhall rightly argues, Malcolm's distinction amounts to a strong distinction between faith, neatly contained within certain forms of language games, and reason with its more universal appeal.³⁹⁹ Kai Nielsen's criticism of Wittgensteinian fideism is directed towards Malcolm's position and others like it. As discussed in the previous chapter, religious language is self-subverting such that Malcolm's claims of internal consistency do not accurately represent religious language.

Anselm's subversion of perfect being ontology, at the beginning of the *Monologion*, to the riddle of divine predication by the end, is a form of grammatical analysis *avant la lettre* insofar as he acknowledged the confusion in his own language game. Though Anselm clearly

³⁹⁹ Mulhall, *The Great Riddle*, 15.

affirms the importance of developing the spirituality of individuals and community within language games, his universal conclusion, in both the *Monologion* and *Proslogion*, is negative. One cannot *properly* predicate attributes of God; God is beyond what can be conceived.

Diamond's grammatical analysis distinguishes between sensible descriptions and riddles that may superficially appear as descriptions. The Sphinx famously asks: "What goes on four legs in the morning, two legs at noon, and three legs in the evening?"⁴⁰⁰ The temptation is to read this phrase as a description. The riddle asks one to pick out an object in the world that fulfills the three requirements laid out. One could easily construct a description following a similar pattern. For example, what has two wings, at least one engine, and flies. The answer is, of course, an airplane.⁴⁰¹ The connections required to link two wings, at least one engine, and flying to an airplane are already present in our current use of language. The phrase is a description because one knows both how and, thus, by what it is satisfied—the fit between the description and the object is nearly automatic to competent language users, one understands "at a stroke" to borrow Wittgenstein's language. A description exploits pre-existing connections.

By contrast, a riddle phrase has no automatic connection to an object. Diamond draws on Wittgenstein's philosophy of mathematics, particularly his understanding of proofs, to argue that descriptions are only descriptions when one knows *how* the description describes an object. Wittgenstein writes: "A mathematical proof must be perspicuous.' Only a structure

⁴⁰⁰ There are several ancient versions of this riddle, notably: Apollodorus, *The Library*, trans. James George Frazer, vol. 1, Loeb Classical Library 121 (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2014), 347–49, <http://www.loebclassics.com/view/LCL121/1921/volume.xml>.

⁴⁰¹ With all due deference to glider pilots, whose airplanes lack engines but usually require planes with engines to tow the gliders allowing them to fly...unless a cliff is nearby.

whose reproduction is an easy task is called a ‘proof’. It must be possible to decide with certainty whether we really have the same proof twice over, or not. The proof must be a configuration whose exact reproduction can be certain. Or again: we must be sure we can exactly reproduce what is essential to the proof” (RFM III-1). One must know how the proof functions such that one knows both what one is proving and when one is offering an equivalent proof. As described in chapter three, language is sensible because of various rules and their accompanying practices. A competent language user makes sensible statements by conforming to these rules. Through conformity to the rules, descriptions describe. In everyday speech, one’s descriptions reference objects in a way intelligible to a linguistic community by conformity to the rules of a particular, shared language game. Outside the rules, one’s speech lacks sense, and without sense also lacks reference or meaning.

Diamond understands nonsense negatively: “*Anything* that is nonsense is so merely because some determination of meaning has not been made; it is *not* nonsense as a logical result of determinations that *have* been made.”⁴⁰² Diamond’s understanding of nonsense comes from a strict reading of the context principle. Gottlob Frege offers the classic formulation of the principle: “The meaning of a word must be inquired after in propositional context, not in isolation.”⁴⁰³ A proposition cannot be somewhat sensible because it has sensible parts, because it lacks a sufficient context. “Is good” or “has three legs” are sensible only as part of a full proposition. As Warren Goldfarb puts it: “The upshot of Diamond’s

⁴⁰² Diamond, “What Nonsense Might Be,” 106.

⁴⁰³ Wittgenstein offers an alternative formulation (TLP 3.3). Gottlob Frege, *The Foundations of Arithmetic; A Logical-Mathematical Investigation into the Concept of Number 1884*, trans. Dale Jaquette (London: Routledge, 2016), 17.

reading of the context principle is that there is no independent purchase on the things we refer to except through the sentences in which the referring is done.”⁴⁰⁴

Diamond’s account of riddling language, and its relevance even as nonsense, arises from her “resolute” or “therapeutic” reading of the *Tractatus*. The resolute reading of nonsense is contrasted with the substantial reading. In the substantial reading, certain statements can be nonsensical but can nonetheless show or otherwise convey a truth that cannot be said. Thus, certain nonsense is substantial as opposed to vacuous nonsense.⁴⁰⁵ According to the resolute reading, Wittgenstein does not distinguish between two kinds of nonsense. If one cannot account for *how* something is sensible, then it is simply nonsense without further specification.

Take two examples of nonsense: “Everything happens for a reason” is just as much nonsense as “the cat’s voltage damply reconsidered”. The second is uncontroversial nonsense, whereas the first seems sensible and is frequently invoked. “Everything happens for a reason” seems to make a claim about all the happenings in the world. Though often invoked because of some particular happening, usually a tragic one, the statement itself cannot be verified nor falsified by any particular event or events. It is most often the case that appeals to the reason for everything are occasioned by something seemingly unreasonable happening. Wittgenstein

⁴⁰⁴ Warren Goldfarb, “Metaphysics and Nonsense: On Cora Diamond’s The Realistic Spirit,” *Journal of Philosophical Research* 22 (1997): 59, https://doi.org/10.5840/jpr_1997_16.

⁴⁰⁵ There are a variety of positions beyond substantial and resolute, as well as a variety of positions within those categories of interpretation. The interpretation of the TLP, particularly the end of the TLP, is a matter of intense and ongoing controversy. Peter Hacker is the most prominent critic of the resolute reading. Among his arguments against such a reading is the centrality of the saying/showing distinction in TLP. Some nonsense, particularly the nonsense that constitutes TLP itself (TLP 6.54), shows what cannot be said. For an overview of the resolute reading and the “Tractatus Wars”, see: Silver Bronzo, “The Resolute Reading and Its Critics. An Introduction to the Literature,” *Wittgenstein-Studien* 3, no. 1 (2012): 45–80, <https://doi.org/10.1515/wgst.2012.45>; P. M. S. Hacker, “Was He Trying to Whistle It?,” in *The New Wittgenstein*, ed. Alice Crary and Rupert Read (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2000), 353–88.

argues that “The sense of the world must lie outside the world” (TLP 6.41).⁴⁰⁶ “Everything happens for a reason” is a statement about the sense of the world. One might soften the statement to some sensible context, but that would fundamentally change “everything” to “some things”. As Diamond reads Wittgenstein, “that nothing that could be said would be what we wanted, that the very fact that some proposition was intelligible was enough to show that it was beside the point.”⁴⁰⁷

Psychologically, a sentence such as “Everything happens for a reason” resembles sensible sentences. The person using such an expression is *trying* to express something. One is far more likely to attempt to express something by saying “Everything happens for a reason” than “the cat’s voltage damply reconsidered”. In both cases, no meaning can satisfactorily be given to either of these propositions. No facts seem to validate nor repudiate either proposition, though one can keep on looking. Only a lack of assigned meaning is satisfactory, which neither pictures nor points beyond language. If “Everything happens for a reason” is useful, it is useful as a riddle which promises sense but does not, in fact, make

⁴⁰⁶ According to one reading of TLP, sensible propositions are those which can be pictured such that one can picture a world in which A is true and in which not A is true. Such determinations only take place within a world not about a world. For example, according to Anscombe interpretation a good world is unable to be pictured, only accidents can be pictured. G. E. M. Anscombe, *An Introduction to Wittgenstein’s Tractatus* (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1959), 170–71.

⁴⁰⁷ Cora Diamond, “The Tractatus and The Limits of Sense,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Wittgenstein* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 260, <http://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199287505.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199287505-e-12>.

sense. The promise is that connections may be established to indicate how “Everything happens for a reason” is sensible.⁴⁰⁸

Riddles may superficially be phrased as descriptions, but they do not conform to the rules that allow for description. A riddle is a phrase which lacks the connections to be sensible. It becomes sensible only if one comes to practice rules required for it to be intelligible. A riddle requiring a novel way of proceeding differs from a typical question. For a sensible question, the answer may not be readily apparent, but once the answer is supplied, it becomes clear how it is the answer. A riddle is not properly solved until one understands *how* the answer solved the riddle. For some riddles, one can be helped along to find the rules required. For example, the answer to the Sphinx’s riddle is a human being. One understands four, two, and three legs as means of locomotion: crawling on all fours, walking on two legs, walking with the assistance of a cane. The facts of human locomotion may be perfectly plain yet the riddle unsolved. The key insight is seeing the means of human locomotion (legs, arms, canes) as the same type of thing. One requires a new concept under which these human locomotive engines fit. Similarly, a human lifespan must be connected to the length of a day.

Imagine trying to explain the solution of this riddle to a child. Without answering the riddle directly, one could point to arms, legs, and a cane. This pointing might make the rule, required to solve the riddle, plain to the child. So too, one might suggest a parallel between morning and birth, midnight and death. Through such clues, which narrow the conceptual

⁴⁰⁸ This reading is importantly different from the Expressivist reading of religious language discussed in the previous chapter, notably Clack’s reading. In the Expressivist reading, religious language was nonsense insofar as it could not refer to God. However, it was sensible when understood psychologically. The riddle approach acknowledges the psychological utility of religious language but does not reduce religious language to psychology. The promise of strictly religious meaning is held open as a promise, which spurs the creation of new language.

leaps required, the child may come to solve the riddle. Even if one simply told a child, or indeed an adult, the answer to the riddle, knowing the answer does not itself solve the riddle. Only knowing how the answer is the answer properly solves the riddle. The answer does not necessarily make a riddle clear. While knowing the answer may allow one to work backwards in filling out the rule, giving an account of how the riddle is a description, this is not always the case. Diamond elucidates riddles through Wittgenstein's philosophy of mathematics, specifically that an interesting, that is unsolved, mathematical question is one which does not admit of a systematic answer but requires an act of mathematical imagination (Z 696-7).

Consider first the case when one claims to have mathematical knowledge of a particular solution, say that any finite list of prime numbers must be incomplete, often known as "Euclid's theorem". Euclid proved this well over two thousand years ago. This is Euclid's collapse of the riddle, "the greatest prime number."⁴⁰⁹ The theorem is often expressed as proving that there are an infinite number of prime numbers, though both Euclid and Wittgenstein object to actual infinities. The proof itself does not require one to take a stance on potential versus actual infinities. For the purposes of this example, I take infinities to be potential rather than actual, though this distinction does not change the operation of the proof directly.

Many adolescents are introduced to Euclid's theorem that there is no greatest prime number as an example of a clear and important mathematical proof. Regrettably, given its elegance, only a subset of those adolescents actually understand or take the time to learn the proof. One can take on faith or authority in the mathematical establishment that Euclid and

⁴⁰⁹ Diamond, "Riddles and Anselm's Riddle," 276.

subsequent restatements of his result are correct. This is distinct from knowing the proof. As Wittgenstein notes, “If you want to know what is proven, look at the proof” (PG 369).⁴¹⁰ Simply accepting the teacher’s word is a failure to “look” carefully.

To properly understand that there can be no finite, complete list of primes requires understanding the proof. That is demonstrating how there must be an infinite number of primes through Euclid’s proof or some equivalent proof.⁴¹¹ That is an infinite number of numbers divisible only by one, trivially, and the number itself. Or as Euclid defined prime numbers, “A prime number is that which is measured by an unit alone.”⁴¹² Euclid’s proof relies upon the rules of prime numbers, in particular that any composite (non-prime) natural number (1, 2, 3...) can be written uniquely as the product of two or more prime numbers. For example, $9=3 \times 3$ or $20=5 \times 2 \times 2$. This rule is known as the “fundamental theorem of arithmetic” or the “unique factorization theorem”. To understand *how* there are an infinite number of prime numbers requires understanding the rules governing primes and the numbers produced by primes.

In his proof for an infinite number of primes, or, more properly, that there are more primes than can be found on any finite list, Euclid postulates an arbitrarily large finite series of primes plus one ($p_1, p_2, \dots, p_r+1$). P is the product of the list of primes $P=p_1p_2\dots p_r+1$. P is either a prime number itself, e.g. ($7=2 \times 3+1$) or a composite number, e.g. ($16=3 \times 5+1$). If P is prime, then P would be a greater prime than those included on the list and itself is not included on the list of prime numbers. If P is not prime, then it is divisible by some prime

⁴¹⁰ Diamond, 268.

⁴¹¹ Euclid, *Elements*, trans. Thomas Heath, Bk. IX Prop. 20, accessed October 24, 2021, <http://data.perseus.org/citations/urn:cts:greekLit:tlg1799.tlg001.perseus-eng1:9.prop.20>.

⁴¹² Euclid, Bk. VII Def 11.

number because of the fundamental theorem of arithmetic. This prime number cannot be on the original list because that would require it to divide one, which is impossible in the set of natural numbers. That is $P = p_1 p_2 \dots p_r = 1$. In either case, this and any other finite list of prime numbers is incomplete. Therefore, there being a greatest prime number is absurd.

Consider the proposition, or rather pseudo-proposition, “there exists a greatest prime number.” Euclid’s proof demands that this statement be rejected as nonsense. One might be tempted to claim that “there exists a greatest prime number” is sensible but false. It is nonsensical because the fundamental theorem of arithmetic is the rule governing what constitutes a number. Euclid proves that one cannot hold both the fundamental theorem of arithmetic and greatest prime number at the same time. The internal connections of the grammar of prime numbers preclude there being a greatest prime number.

Compare this prime number claim to the claim: “a blue hot air balloon is currently floating over Oxford”. This may be the case or not the case, true or false. In either event, the statement is sensible. The distinction lies in the internal connections in the grammars of hot air balloons and prime numbers respectively. With regard to hot air balloons, it is a matter of contingency whether the hot air balloon is floating over Oxford or Salamanca or Bologna. It would be nonsensical to claim “a blue hot air balloon is swimming across the Thames” because of the internal connections in the concept of hot air balloons with floating and not swimming. “Greatest prime number” is nonsensical rather than false because of the internal connections between the fundamental theorem of arithmetic. Diamond clarifies why one now rejects “greatest prime number”. It is “not because the phrase expresses something which

cannot be found or done.”⁴¹³ To accept that there is a greatest prime number would be to reject or collapse the rules governing the composition of numbers. Recall the discussion in chapter three that grammars are neither true nor false but more or less useful. As languages evolve, choices are made regarding which new rules to include or retain in order to preserve and enhance the usefulness of a language. Declaring something to be nonsense and, thus, removing it from the language is a determination that it falls outside the most useful set of grammar rules available. Allowing the greatest prime number to continue in the language comes at the unacceptably high cost of discarding useful and deeply interconnected rules. Discarding the fundamental theorem of arithmetic and related rules to save the greatest prime would have been sheer confusion. Within a language including the fundamental theorem of arithmetic, “greatest prime number” is sheer confusion.⁴¹⁴

Euclid’s proof clarifies the internal connection in the concept prime number such that speaking about a greatest prime number is nonsensical. Diamond observes that “greatest prime number” was not sensible at the beginning of the proof nor before the proof was undertaken. Greatest prime number was a conjecture. In searching for the solution, Euclid went in search of necessary connections to make “greatest prime number” sensible. In the end, the necessary connection with the fundamental theorem of arithmetic and other such necessary connections demonstrate that “greatest prime number” is nonsense.

⁴¹³ Diamond, “Riddles and Anselm’s Riddle,” 276.

⁴¹⁴ Diamond argues *pace* some readings of TLP and picture theory that certain sensible propositions can only be true and are path-guiding propositions. Thus, “there is no greatest prime number” can only be true without sensible contrary. The language of grammar rules from PI is both less controversial and more apt for the present purposes so I have chosen to avoid the unnecessary complications of picture theory. See: Cora Diamond, “Wittgenstein and What Can Only Be True,” in *Reading Wittgenstein with Anscombe, Going On to Ethics* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2019), 171–201, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvckq639>.

Prime numbers often come in pairs separated by only one number: more formally, with a prime gap of two, for example (3, 5), (101, 103). While it is known that there are an infinite number of prime numbers, it is unknown whether there are an infinite number of twin prime numbers. The first statement of the “Twin Prime Conjecture” is unknown but may also be traced back to Euclid. This remains an active area of mathematical investigation with various related questions about the frequency and possibly infinite extent of other sorts of primes. For example, are there infinitely many Mersenne Primes, i.e., primes in the form $2^n - 1$, e.g. $2^3 - 1 = 7$? Most interested mathematicians believe there are infinitely many twin primes but lack the proof to establish this. There are various related proofs regarding the distribution of prime numbers and their relationship that are suggestive about the Twin Prime Conjecture. For the avoidance of unnecessary technical detail, consider this relatively straightforward suggestion of infinite twin primes: the known distribution of twin primes up to around 10^{18} suggests but does not prove that there is no greatest set of twin primes.⁴¹⁵ As in natural theology so too in mathematics, the distinction between properties of extremely large sets and universal properties should not be forgotten. I will return to this point below.

With both the case of Euclid’s theorem and the Twin Prime Conjecture, what is at stake is not a trivial question but concerns the rules governing numbers: that there are infinitely many primes is internally related to the rules governing numbers such as the fundamental theorem of arithmetic. The interest in the Twin Prime Conjecture is not a curiosity, but a question about how numbers function. For example, if the conjecture is false

⁴¹⁵ For an overview of the state of research on the Twin Prime Conjecture, see: James Maynard, “The Twin Prime Conjecture,” *Japanese Journal of Mathematics* 14, no. 2 (September 1, 2019): 175–206, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11537-019-1837-z>.

then numbers may be ordered less randomly than has been assumed. The search continues to establish the Twin Prime Conjecture and, with it, to establish further rules for the interrelationships between numbers.

Consider the riddle “there exists a greatest pair of twin prime numbers.” Though most mathematicians concerned with primes believe that there are no greatest twin primes, this belief is premised on other results which seem to promise or suggest that “there is no finite set of twin prime numbers of which the greatest twin prime numbers are members” may be intelligible. This is a conjecture. Importantly, the connections that might render such a statement intelligible are unknown. One can imagine how “greatest pair of twin primes” might or, more likely, might not fit into language without having an adequate account. The internal connections of the grammar of primes are not yet known either to contradict or to require infinite twin primes. It may be the case that some additional rule or rules added to the existing rules of prime numbers provide sufficient connections to prove the conjecture. It may be the case that proving the conjecture requires reevaluating certain rules of how numbers are conceived. As in the previous case, one chooses rules based on their utility. Just as the greatest prime was discarded from the language because it conflicted with the fundamental theorem of arithmetic, in a similar way some conflict may force a choice between greatest twin prime and another rule or set of rules. Until sufficient clarity is achieved to force the choice, the necessary connections are merely promised and the form such necessary connections must take is not known until the connections are known. Until one succeeds in offering a proof, the sensibility of the statement to be proven is merely promised, hence it is a conjecture.

For the resolute reading, nonsense has its uses: the way things fail to make sense—the genealogy of nonsense can be useful.⁴¹⁶ The process of considering the *Tractatus* itself is therapeutic and formative by being plain nonsense.⁴¹⁷ That a language user makes use of a nonsense proposition is sensible, even though the propositions themselves are not sensible. In the case of the Twin Prime Conjecture, new rules and connections may eventually be discovered. The riddle may have a solution that is inspired by the various related findings about finite twin primes. It is the genealogy of conjecture, the various sensible statements suggestive of the conjecture that both make it an interesting problem and hold the promise of a solution. Anselm’s *Monologion* also gives a genealogy, since he traces uses of terms from their sensible contexts: from the swift horse is good to goodness as such. Though goodness as such is a riddle, the various lower goods provide an inadequate sketch of what it might be like to speak about the riddle.

Diamond claims “the derivation of riddle-conditions is the same sort of reasoning as that in a *reductio* proof.”⁴¹⁸ As discussed above, to solve a riddle requires finding the connections that allow the riddle to make sense. A solved riddle is much like a completed proof. A live riddle, by contrast is like a conjecture. There may be evidence that suggests something is sensible. In the case of both goodness and twin primes, one has a large set of finite cases. The discontinuity is between the suggestive finite cases and infinite or absolute

⁴¹⁶ Mulhall, *The Great Riddle*, 32–34; A. W. Moore, “Ineffability and Nonsense,” in *Language, World, and Limits: Essays in the Philosophy of Language and Metaphysics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 244–60.

⁴¹⁷ A similar divide exists in the interpretation of the *Philosophical Investigations*, with Peter Hacker representing the more traditional reading and the later Gordon Baker and Stanley Cavell taking a therapeutic approach. I take a moderate therapeutic approach. For an overview of Wittgenstein scholarship, see: Guy Kahane, Edward Kanterian, and Oskari Kuusela, “Introduction,” in *Wittgenstein and His Interpreters* (Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2007), 1–36, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470690963.ch10>.

⁴¹⁸ Diamond, “Riddles and Anselm’s Riddle,” 275.

cases. Mulhall describes these suggestive connections as “the outer shell of a necessary connection in a language we do not yet know how to speak.”⁴¹⁹ Crucially, the suggestion that a conjecture or riddle is the case admits of degrees, but suggestion is different in kind from proof. A large number of suggestions does not equal proof. The distinction between the two is a distinction between the “outer shell” of promised connections between, for example, infinitely many twin primes and established patterns of finite twin primes. One can rightly be regarded as an expert in the twin prime conjecture insofar as one can articulate the promissory connections between known finite patterns and the conjecture. Expert and novice both lack the logical space to establish the necessary internal connections between those finite patterns and a proof. Given the history of solving other proofs, it is likely that the expert is in a better position to discover the logical space to establish a proof, though this is not guaranteed. Great mathematical discoveries are often made by young mathematicians looking at conjectures with fresh eyes.

Diamond’s analysis is more apt when directed towards the *Monologion* than her intended target of the *Proslogion* insofar as the *Monologion* begins with quotidian goods. The shift between “swiftness in a horse is good” to “utility is good” to “God is good” disguises a shift in grammatical role much as “Three things can lie in this direction” and “Infinitely many things can lie in this direction” signals a shift in grammatical role. The first two predications of goodness are sensible, the third is not.

⁴¹⁹ Mulhall, *The Great Riddle*, 37.

5.4 Absolute Goods and Nonsense

Diamond's understanding of riddles raises the problem: why search for an answer to riddles? One may reasonably speculate as to the answers of riddles when one has the prospect of a solution. If God is in principle beyond human sensibility, unlike twin primes, why continue to speculate as to the solution to a riddle with no prospect of success, at least none outside of an eschatological future? Put in Anselm's terms, why continue to speculate about the end of the chain of goodness or evil once one has concluded that the terminus is nonsense?

For Wittgenstein, absolute good, or indeed any absolute value, is distinguished by its failure to make sense. Any characterization of the world as a whole or its meaning is not sensible because no criteria are available to distinguish such an absolute good except for the good itself, nor, importantly, in any matter of fact. Ultimate purposes, the meaning of life, the good life are all riddles without answer (TLP 6.4312). For resolute readings of TLP, the goal of the text is to move readers away from the mistaken belief that philosophy has ineffable subject matter. The end of the *Tractatus* seems to claim that certain types of propositions are in fact nonsensical. Ethical statements, for example, are not sensible in that they are not picturable (TLP 6.42). One cannot picture goodness as such.

Wittgenstein offers a clearer distinction between the sensible and the nonsensical absolute in the "Lecture on Ethics". Wittgenstein asks his listeners to consider the meaning of the expression "the absolutely right road." He writes: "I think it would be the road which *everybody* on seeing it would, *with logical necessity*, have to go, or be ashamed for not going" (LE 7). The question arises, how would one identify such a road? There are any number of finite measures for the correct road—for example, the quickest road, the safest road, the cheapest road, though it is unclear how any of these becomes absolute, especially since all of

these are contingent. An accident on the quickest road renders it slow, a pothole on the safest road renders it dangerous, and a regulatory decision on the cheapest road makes it expensive. If one stipulated rules for an optimal outcome, that would change the question from an absolute question to an empirical question. It is the distinction between the absolute and the empirical that distinguishes the ethical for Wittgenstein.

Wittgenstein moves to a more general case that Anselm is also interested in establishing, albeit in a more hierarchical formulation, namely “the absolute good” as a state of affairs. Wittgenstein speculates that “the absolute good” is that “which everybody, independent of his tastes and inclinations, would *necessarily* bring about or feel guilty for not bringing about” (LE 7). Again, it is difficult to imagine what might answer to this description for reasons similar to what was presented in the *Monologion*. In the *Monologion*, Anselm begins with particular goods, like swiftness in particular states of affairs. He moves from the particular to the more universal. Higher goods are not to be found in particular states of affairs. They are abstract. As an abstraction, one might accept “happiness” or “reason” or “justice” as an absolute good, but Wittgenstein’s question remains. Can there be a state of affairs that is absolutely good? The very abstractness of these candidates for absolute goodness precludes their being absolutely good states of affairs. The closest one might come are fairy tales, morality plays, and miracle stories, which trade realism and distracting contingency precisely for moral absolutes, a point to which I will return below.

In both cases, Wittgenstein wants his listeners to recognize the impossibility of understanding in empirical terms “absolute”: “And I want to say that such a state of affairs is a chimera. No state of affairs has, in itself, what I would like to call the coercive power of an absolute judge” (LE 7). For Wittgenstein, a pervasive danger with religious and ethical

language is “a certain characteristic misuse” that one takes these expressions to be “just similes” (LE 9). Religious terms seem to fit together neatly into a “great and elaborate allegory which represents [God] as a human being of great power whose grace we try to win” (LE 9). Such language does not withstand strict grammatical scrutiny. Wittgenstein writes: “a simile must be the simile for something. And if I can describe a fact by means of a simile I must also be able to drop the simile and to describe the facts without it.” Put otherwise, an account must be given of *how* the simile functions. “Now in our case as soon as we try to drop the simile and simply to state the facts which stand behind it, we find that there are no such facts. And so, what at first appeared to be a simile now seems to be mere nonsense” (LE 10). Wittgenstein argues that it is the ambition of religious and ethical language that leads it to nonsensicality: “I see now that these nonsensical expressions were not nonsensical because I had not yet found the correct expressions, but that their nonsensicality was their very essence. For all I wanted to do with them was just *to go beyond* the world and that is to say beyond significant language” (LE 11). In attempting to express the absolute, religious and ethical language becomes nonsensical. As nonsense, it serves its pervasive function, unbound to particular circumstances.

Mulhall retells the folk story collected by the Grimm Brothers of “The Fisherman and His Wife” (*Vom Fischer und seiner Frau*) to illustrate the difference between goodness and absolute goodness, between relative language and absolute language. In the story, the fisherman rescues a magic flounder. This flounder has the power to grant wishes. The fisherman’s wife sees an opportunity to improve her lot in life and asks the fisherman to make various requests of the flounder. At first, the requests seem reasonable, for example a better house. She proceeds through a series of requests, each greater than the last. Eventually

through this magical intervention, she becomes grander than queens and the pope. Having achieved the highest of human distinctions, she is still discontented. No condition in human society, no matter how exalted will satisfy her. What the world has to offer to human beings is not enough. Finally, she asks to outshine the sun and the moon. At this request, a great storm rises up. The world is thrown into disarray. Finally, the flounder returns the fisherman and his wife to their original, impoverished state. Mulhall observes: “But to find her final demand an intelligible endpoint of some comprehensible worldly process of moral deterioration, one must fail to see that wanting the world to conform to her will amounts to wanting it not to be a world at all.”⁴²⁰ No state of affairs will satisfy the wife’s absolute desire for self-aggrandizement.

The Fisherman and his Wife offers a negative image of the process of spiritual pedagogy. Anselm as a spiritual pedagogue himself traced this process in the *Monologion*. The *Monologion* moves from proximate goods to higher good to self-standing perfection rather than degradation. The argument moves from concrete, lower goods like the swift horse to higher and more abstract goods. Recall in chapter one, the hierarchy of spiritual teaching and ethical demands. Asceticism and good works are a path towards higher understanding but no guarantee. To take an important example within the tradition discussed in chapter one, discernment of the will of God concerns the absolute; it is not something human beings can achieve as discussed by various spiritual pedagogues, notably Anthony the Abbot. Discernment is not within the scope of human agency. The highest good is no longer a worldly good—though one approaches it through worldly goods. The highest good is an

⁴²⁰ Mulhall, 31.

eschatological, absolute good. For such a good to be realized and sensible, the world cannot remain as it is. The spiritual pedagogues in the first chapter hoped to dispose themselves to the gift of a world and of themselves changed. This change is often illustrated by the various hierarchical images of the spiritual life. The spiritual pedagogy tradition presumes that students wish to be transformed to the good. The fisherman's wife desires a world transformed around her and her narcissistic desires.⁴²¹

Mulhall makes the point more strongly than Diamond that there is no grammatically sensible way of taking Anselm's proof.⁴²² That religious language games are played in a particular way does not establish the intelligibility of this language. The resolute challenge to spiritual pedagogy is that the universality of great riddles means that these riddles find no final home in the monastery nor the ascetics' holy mountain. The great riddle remains for sage and novice. The expert has more religiously oriented language games, more specialized concepts available to her. Such language games in which one can be an expert are ways of talking around riddles by domestication. In his discussion of mirroring, Anselm argues that the person leading a virtuous life has a wider array of proximate connections to draw on when attempting to speak about ultimate good. Like the twin prime case, both expert (or, in this instance, abbot) and novice lack the logical space to establish the necessary internal connections between finite goodness and infinite goodness. The expert may have more conjectural evidence, but no amount of finite conjecture establishes an infinite proof. Human

⁴²¹ If the fisherman's wife were to inhabit the changed world spoken of by the spiritual pedagogues, by some supernatural gift, perhaps she could refuse and annihilate it, at least for herself. Perhaps she could refuse an absolute gift by refusing and failing to appreciate an array of relative gifts in her selfishness. In theological terms, this is the unanswered and probably unanswerable question of universal salvation. If the highest good is given such that it can be seen and understood, can it be refused? The question is unanswerable, at least in part because highest good is itself a riddle.

⁴²² Mulhall, *The Great Riddle*, 20.

goodness allows one to conjecture about divine goodness and for certain practical purposes one acts *as if* the conjectures are proven. A mark of spiritual authority is the ability to distinguish between domestications inspired by riddles and the great riddles themselves. If the mystery of God is a great riddle, the expert and the novice both have no prospect of a solution, though the expert does have the benefit of a wider array of proximate connections and a more intensive study of what has been revealed.

That neither novice nor sage understands the great riddle resists the fideistic objection of a Nielsen but also the connection between the riddle itself and a particular formational context. The great riddle retains its power on the holy mountain and in the city, though it is likely to receive more attention on the mountain. What makes posing a riddle sensible may be tied to a context: the great riddle itself is not as such. Mulhall clarifies: “Understanding the user of such forms of word then becomes a matter of understanding why someone might find assignments of significance to such propositions essentially unsatisfying.”⁴²³ One understands not the great riddle, but the user of the riddle. It may be the case that the monk on the holy mountain is more inclined to pose great riddles about God being greater than what one can conceive, but the riddle does not become sensible in such a context or to such a one. Anselm, a monk, Abbot, and Archbishop himself, acknowledges as much.

Thomas Aquinas agrees with Anselm that one can mirror God through a virtuous life and that, as a creature, one needs to mirror God. Thomas develops a subtle treatment of mirroring in his account of virtues, which I will turn to in the next chapter. Like Anselm, Thomas holds that human contemplation of God in this life ends in a riddle. Brian Davies

⁴²³ Mulhall, 29.

notes that Thomas's discussion of the contemplative life is remarkably opaque when compared to his typical lucidity.⁴²⁴ Such opacity is not merely a lacuna in his otherwise clear style. As noted in the introduction, Thomas invokes St. Paul on riddles in First Corinthians: "This contemplation will be perfect in the life to come, when we shall see God face to face, wherefore it will make us perfectly happy: whereas now the contemplation of the divine truth is competent to us imperfectly, namely through a glass and in a dark manner [*aenigmatē*] (1 Cor 13:12)" (ST II-II.180.4).

In the same question, Thomas argues that moral action belongs to the contemplative life dispositively rather than essentially (ST II-II.180.2). Right moral action does not achieve contemplation, moral virtues "do not pertain" to the contemplative life. Nevertheless, the contemplative life cannot be neatly separated from the activities of life but is "continuous" [*diuturna*] with it (ST II-II.180.8). The wrong moral dispositions and action can impede contemplation, "the moral virtues dispose one to the contemplative life by causing peace and cleanness of heart" (ST II-II.180.2.ad2). Though this goes beyond Thomas's text, the speaking and acting virtuously might be the basis for conjectures about God and God's will. Though the riddle of God remains intact, one's disposition to richer conjecture can increase and be taught. Teachers themselves are both active and contemplative (ST II-II 181.3). In the next chapter, I take up Thomas Aquinas's account of virtue, discernment, and teaching as respecting great riddles and developing increasingly rich conjecture.

⁴²⁴ Brian Davies, *Thomas Aquinas's Summa Theologiae: A Guide and Commentary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 287.

6.0 Prudence, Teaching, and Discernment in John Rawls, Thomas Aquinas, and Ignatius Loyola

In the introduction, two key spiritual pedagogy questions emerged, namely “who is God?” and the closely related practical question that is the subject of this chapter, “what would God have me (or us) do?” The first chapter located these questions in the history of Christian spiritual pedagogy. Chapters two through five developed a Wittgensteinian and Grammatical Thomist approach to these questions. This chapter is concerned with the second set of questions—practical questions of how one can teach and act according to God’s will or providence. The practical attempt at an answer to the second question through adapting one’s way of life informs attempts to answer the first. As described in chapter two, a hallmark of both the Grammatical Thomist approach, as well as Transcendental Thomism, is the priority of understanding over being. Chapters three, and to a lesser extent four and five, argued that such a priority is not a form of anti-realism but rather an interactive realism. Contemplation and action are interlinked. The practices that enable attempts at asking and answering the second question sustain attempts at asking and answering the first. This chapter offers a riddling and Grammatical Thomist reading of spiritual pedagogy as a prudential practice. The spiritual pedagogue helps students cultivate an attention to God as creator as a practical reality—learning to skillfully relate human prudence with divine providence and respecting the irreducible riddle of divine providence.

The chapter proceeds in four parts: The first section recapitulates critiques of spiritual pedagogy and the peculiarity of the language of spiritual pedagogy through John Rawls’s insightful critique. Rawls criticizes letting the answer to the second question (what would God have me/us do?) dominate other motivations. God’s will cannot be the highest good for Rawls

for reasons of both communication and morality. Rawls criticizes Thomas Aquinas and Ignatius Loyola, but his critique extends to all the spiritual pedagogues described in chapter one, because the riddles of spiritual pedagogy as mysteries are not evaluable by Rawls's standards public reason. The second section explores Thomas's early discussion of the primacy of God as teacher and the instrumentality of human teachers through the lens of primary and secondary use in Wittgenstein. Mastery of human teaching, the primary use of teacher in Wittgenstein's sense though the secondary in Thomas's, enables more skillful and expansive discussion of God as teacher. The third section considers teaching as a prudential act of counsel. The collaboration of human and divine in the virtue of prudence functions according to two rules (*duplex regula*) paralleling the relationship between God as teacher and the human being as teacher. In the final section, the prudential role of the spiritual teacher is illustrated through St. Ignatius of Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises* and the riddle of the greater glory of God—the criterion for what God would have me or us do. The teacher's role is not to answer this question directly but, first, to help the student see the question and its answer as riddling and, second, to continue acting and speaking through the riddle through rich conjecture.

6.1 Rawls on Overarching Goods and Authority

In his discussion of "Happiness and Dominant Ends" in *A Theory of Justice*, John Rawls criticizes two of the great spiritual pedagogues, Ignatius Loyola and Thomas Aquinas, for their claim that the glory of God or providence is the supreme ordering principle of human

action and, thus, the guiding principle for prudential judgements.⁴²⁵ In a reasonably accurate, though decontextualized, paraphrase of the opening “First Principle and Foundation” of Ignatius’s *Spiritual Exercises*, Rawls writes:

Loyola holds that the dominant end is serving God, and by this means saving our soul. He is consistent in recognizing that furthering the divine intentions is the sole criterion for balancing subordinate aims. It is for this reason alone that we should prefer health to sickness, riches to poverty, honor to dishonor, a long life to a short one, and, one might add, friendship and affection to hatred and animosity.⁴²⁶

Thomas comes in for similar criticism from Rawls insofar as Thomas orders the diversity of human activities to a single highest end, which serves as the criterion for the ultimate goodness of those activities.⁴²⁷ Though not mentioned, Jesus would seem to merit similar opprobrium from Rawls as the synoptic Gospels warn against gaining the whole world at the loss of one’s soul (Mk 8:36, Mt 16:26, Lk 9:25). The previous chapter laid out the hierarchy of goods in Anselm’s *Monologion*: Thomas, Ignatius, and Jesus are offering a more practical formulation of that same argument. The highest good or dominant end orders all lower goods and that highest good is God. As discussed in the last chapter, the highest good is a great riddle—certainly this is the case for Thomas and Ignatius.

⁴²⁵ Chapter two argued that Thomas is a spiritual teacher. For further readings of Thomas as a spiritual teacher, see: Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas, Volume 2*; Gilles M. Mongeau, *Embracing Wisdom: The Summa Theologiae as Spiritual Pedagogy* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2015).

⁴²⁶ John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, Rev. ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap, 1999), 485.

⁴²⁷ “Thus although Aquinas believes that the vision of God is the last end of all human knowledge and endeavor, he concedes play and amusements a place in our life. Nevertheless these pleasures are permitted only to the extent that the superordinate aim is thereby advanced, or at least not hindered.” Rawls, 485.

Rawls critiques Thomas and Ignatius on both moral and communicative grounds.⁴²⁸ Rawls's moral critique echoes many classical critiques of Christian asceticism as humanly stifling. For example, Edward Gibbon's claim that single-minded Christian asceticism is a "failure of nerve" and a rejection of the human.⁴²⁹ Rawls concurs that any single dominant end, whether religious or not, is contrary to human flourishing, which requires reflectively balancing various ends. To Ignatius, Thomas, and all those who hold that serving God should be the ordering principle of life, Rawls objects: "Although to subordinate all our aims to one end does not strictly speaking violate the principles of rational choice..., it still strikes us as irrational, or more likely as mad. The self is disfigured and put in the service of one of its ends for the sake of system [sic]."⁴³⁰ Rawls is correct that both Thomas and Ignatius conceive of God's glory as the highest possible end and that serving the highest end can require radical personal transformation. Rawls understands Thomas and Ignatius better than many sympathetic commentators insofar as he sees the radical and potentially destabilizing implications of striving for the greater glory of God.

Though the moral shortcomings of Christianity trouble Rawls and play an important part in his own life, as will be discussed below, communicative problems with God as the dominant end are his main concern in *A Theory of Justice*. Neither Ignatius nor Thomas are successful nor even aspirant system builders, if systems require predictable and

⁴²⁸ Even as an undergraduate, Rawls was critical of Thomas on the grounds that he "failed to distinguish between natural and personal relations." This distinction is central in Rawls' argument in favor of original sin and against the "naturalistic" tendency of Thomas. John Rawls, *A Brief Inquiry into the Meaning of Sin and Faith* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 115, 119.

⁴²⁹ Gibbon quoted by: Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert*, 12; Douglas Burton-Christie, "Simplicity, or the Terror of Belief: The Making and Unmaking of the Self in Early Christian Monasticism," *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 40, no. 4 (2005): 356.

⁴³⁰ Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 486.

communicable outcomes, as Rawls observes. “The extreme nature of dominant-end views is often concealed by the vagueness and ambiguity of the end proposed. Thus, if God is conceived (as surely he must be) as a moral being, then the end of serving him above all else is left unspecified to the extent that the divine intentions are not clear from revelation, or evident from natural reason.”⁴³¹ Rawls critiques dominant-end views for their ambiguity. Again, his critique might be rearticulated in riddle language. Recall from chapter one the great riddle: “Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.” The perfection of God is an articulation of the dominant-end. This is a great riddle because it is unknown *how* being perfect as God is might be accomplished.

Rawls argues that as a result of this unclarity, the dominant-end view only offers an apparent solution while in practice competing goods are weighed without clear hierarchy. God does not directly nor clearly communicate, which is theologically and philosophically problematic.⁴³² Rawls is articulating what Job already knew—though to a different end. Again, Rawls is astute in his observation that the practice of seeking after the dominant-end of the will of God does not lead to systematic and consistent results. Rather, one is left with incomplete and *ad hoc* solutions, what in the last chapter I referred to as conjectures.

For both Ignatius and Thomas, God is not a moral being *per se*, i.e., God is not subject to moral law extrinsic to God but is the formal source of morality—following the divine will is good by definition. Ignatius, Thomas, and most of the spiritual authorities discussed in chapter one would agree that the “divine intentions” are mysterious, though certain revealed

⁴³¹ Rawls, 485.

⁴³² In Kierkegaardian terms, Rawls takes “offense” at God’s lack of direct communication. Søren Kierkegaard, *Practice in Christianity*, ed. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Kierkegaard’s Writings 20 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 123.

moral precepts, no murder for example, are easy to apply in most, though not all, cases. The need for spiritual authority arises because of the need to articulate divine intentions without ever making those intentions truly clear—often the authority questions apparent clarity.

Though his mature theory excludes theology from public reason and God as the ultimate good, as a young man, Rawls seriously considered theological questions, especially during his final two years as an undergraduate. His undergraduate thesis includes a strong critique of Pelagianism in the context of which he begins to develop his idea of “moral arbitrariness”, which features in his later work.⁴³³ He even considered seminary after his military service. The Second World War shook his faith and began his rejection of Christianity. Rawls claims not to know why he lost his faith but relates a revealing story of spiritual pedagogy gone wrong: “One day a Lutheran Pastor came up and during his service gave a brief sermon in which he said that God aimed our bullets at the Japanese while God protected us from theirs.”⁴³⁴ The pastor seemed to have a precise opinion about divine intentions in the war and communicated them crisply. This sermon infuriated Rawls and he confronted the Pastor—a spiritual authority who was preaching a morally repugnant doctrine by Rawls’s lights. Surely God is not so vengeful and belligerent as to choose sides in war.⁴³⁵ His discontentment with spiritual authority grew as he read the history of the Church, its power relations with various states, and its role in the development of personal freedoms:

⁴³³ Eric Nelson traces the theological underpinnings of Rawls’s work, arguing that Rawls is a deeply anti-Pelagian thinker. This is in contrast to the Pelagian tendencies of most of the Lockian Social Contract Tradition. Though he does not comment on the history of spirituality as such, he would almost certainly side with Augustine over John Cassian in the debate about the role of asceticism in the spiritual life discussed in chapter one. See especially chapter 3: Nelson, *The Theology of Liberalism*.

⁴³⁴ John Rawls, “On My Religion,” in *A Brief Inquiry into the Meaning of Sin and Faith: With “on My Religion”* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2009), 262.

⁴³⁵ In the same paper, Rawls also discusses the broader horrors of the war as a challenge to faith, especially the Holocaust and discussions of divine punishment as contributing factors to his rejection of Christianity.

“These freedoms and liberties became fixed points of my moral and political opinions. Eventually they also became basic political elements of my view of constitutional democracy, realized in institutions by the separation of church and state.”⁴³⁶ Politically, a highest end is dangerous as it opens the possibility of sickness, poverty, dishonor, short-life, and hatred as necessary for the sake of the highest end, an end higher even than the freedoms of the individual.⁴³⁷

Rawls eventually concludes that Christianity is morally dangerous and should be rejected: “Christianity is a solitary religion: each is saved or damned individually, and we naturally focus on our own salvation to the point where nothing else might seem to matter.”⁴³⁸ There is a religious or post-religious resonance to Rawls’s work. *A Theory of Justice* ends by setting the ethical human place in society as a quasi-Kantian *sub specie aeternitatis*. “The perspective of eternity is not a perspective from a certain place beyond the world, nor the point of view of a transcendent being; rather it is a certain form of thought and feeling that rational persons can adopt within the world.”⁴³⁹ Rawls often describes this rational form of thought as prudential. Each individual is to make prudential judgements, and the social contract is premised on prudence.⁴⁴⁰ As Rawls argues: “Social justice is the principle of

⁴³⁶ Rawls, “On My Religion,” 265.

⁴³⁷ Spiritual pedagogues themselves are aware of the great dangers of spiritual teaching gone wrong. Teresa of Avila, though prizing good spiritual pedagogy, frequently laments poor spiritual direction, for example: “I have had a great deal of experience with learned men, and have also had experience with half-learned, fearful ones; these latter cost me dearly [sic].” Teresa of Avila, “The Interior Castle,” in *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodríguez, vol. 2 (Washington: ICS Publications, 1980), sec. V.1.8.

⁴³⁸ Rawls, “On My Religion,” 265.

⁴³⁹ Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 514.

⁴⁴⁰ Recall from chapter one, John Locke affirmed a contract or covenant with God on the grounds that God’s surpassing power could be understood. One entered into a covenant with God because God provided the best arrangement. Rawls, by contrast, believes the details of the covenantal offer are less than clear.

rational prudence applied to an aggregative conception of the welfare of the group.”⁴⁴¹

Prudential reasoning is communicable and not only respects but, through rational deliberation, in some sense constitutes individual liberties. Rawls concludes: “Purity of heart, if one could attain it, would be to see clearly and to act with grace and self-command from this point of view.”⁴⁴² Yet he would reject Kierkegaard’s contention, to which Ignatius and Thomas would be sympathetic, that “purity of heart is to will one thing.”⁴⁴³ Rather, purity of heart is to will many things but with a transparent rationale directing such choices. Rawls’s pure of heart are able to communicate their intentions and reasons with others similarly pure, whereas Kierkegaard’s purity of heart directed towards a mysterious God leads to obscurity rather than clarity from Rawls’s perspective. Rawls’s sense of rationality and the demands of justice are self-consciously Kantian, though grounded on the notionally empirical basis of the social contract of the original position rather than on transcendental idealism. Rawls’s stated aim was to preserve a Kantian ethical doctrine while discarding transcendental idealism.⁴⁴⁴ Ethics is to be both empirical and transparent.

Though Wittgenstein only merits two brief mentions in *A Theory of Justice*, Rawls’s earlier work was influenced by Wittgenstein as well as Norman Malcolm. Wittgenstein played an influential role in Rawls’s early intellectual formation as attested by his student papers and some of his published work. Both Stanley Cavell and Cora Diamond observe that Rawls’s

⁴⁴¹ Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 21.

⁴⁴² Rawls, 514.

⁴⁴³ Søren Kierkegaard, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 78; Alasdair C. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 165.

⁴⁴⁴ John Rawls, “The Basic Structure as Subject,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 14, no. 2 (1977): 159–65.

narrow sense of rules is manifest in the contractarian ethics of *A Theory of Justice*.⁴⁴⁵ One can read Rawls as working out of a prescriptivist understanding of Wittgenstein on rules. As argued in chapters three and four, Wittgenstein's aim was to overturn univocal and algorithmic ways of understanding meaning, not to create a new set of them.

The young Rawls took from Wittgenstein that the goal of philosophy was to “bring these things which we know in view.”⁴⁴⁶ Katrina Forrester observes, “Rawls's major departure [from Wittgenstein] was to say that additional devices—models of discussions and procedures for self-inquiry—were required to help us see what was already there and how we might change it.”⁴⁴⁷ Leaving language untouched, as Wittgenstein would have it, is not a possibility for a political philosopher like Rawls. Natural morality within communities was “already there” though historically and, thus, problematically conditioned. Nevertheless, morality was empirically accessible for those with requisite intellectual acuity, and those who can see moral structures can also shape the world in a more ethical direction. Rawls described society as a game with human-made rules in the early fifties, a description with great Wittgensteinian resonance.⁴⁴⁸ The free nation-state is one in which various forms of life are tolerated; a minimal agreement on rules is required for this to be the case, but this agreement ought not to be “on fundamentals” nor on things which are “in some religious sense most

⁴⁴⁵ Cavell, *Claim of Reason*, chap. 11; Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*, chap. 3; Cora Diamond, “Ethics, Imagination, and the Method of the Tractatus,” in *The New Wittgenstein*, ed. Alice Marguerite Crary and Rupert J. Read (London: Routledge, 2000), 149–73.

⁴⁴⁶ Katrina Forrester, *In the Shadow of Justice: Postwar Liberalism and the Remaking of Political Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 9; John Rawls, “Wittgenstein Investigations, Lexicon, Box 50” (John Rawls Archive, Undated). (As cited in Forrester)

⁴⁴⁷ Forrester, *In the Shadow of Justice*, 9.

⁴⁴⁸ John Rawls, “Society as a Game,” Pp.4– 6, Box 7, Folder 10” (John Rawls Archive, Undated). (As cited in Forrester 11)

important.”⁴⁴⁹ Religious values made for poor rules in Rawls’s game, because they cannot be communicated in an agreed, public way.

Rawls holds a univocal account of God’s reason. In Heideggerian terms, Rawls is an ontotheologian, explicitly in a few places and implicitly in many others. Rawls writes: “God’s reason, I believe, is the same as ours in that it recognizes the same inferences as valid and the same facts as true that we recognize as valid and true. Beyond that we may suppose that God’s reason is consistent with ours: so far as we can comprehend a case, God’s idea of reasonableness and ours yield the same judgment.”⁴⁵⁰ God’s reason is superior to humans’ insofar as God has all possible information and can recognize all possible inferences. However, for Rawls, nothing God knows is in principle unknowable by human beings because God’s reason and human reason are the same in kind and differ only in extent. It follows that in both theoretical and practical judgements, human beings and God ought to arrive at a similar rational conclusion given the same information.⁴⁵¹ From his earliest work—during which time he was a professed Christian—Rawls rejects mysticism as an affront to reason and the possibility of a communal and personal universe.⁴⁵² For Rawls, a human reflective process when properly undertaken should come to the same conclusion as the divine will insofar as the divine will is good. One should be able to understand how to be perfect as God is perfect. Entering into the mystery of God, into a new way of being and speaking, runs

⁴⁴⁹ John Rawls, “Difficult Moral Decisions, p. 7, Box 7, Folder 10” (John Rawls Archive, Undated). (As cited in Forrester 18)

⁴⁵⁰ Rawls, “On My Religion,” 268.

⁴⁵¹ “The divine practical reason will also connect with these facts [of a particular social situation], just as ours does; and this is so even if these facts are themselves the outcome of God’s creation. Given these facts as they undeniably are in our social world, the basic judgments of reasonableness must be the same, whether made by God’s reason or by ours.” Rawls, 268.

⁴⁵² Rawls, *A Brief Inquiry into the Meaning of Sin and Faith*, 126.

contrary to Rawls's vision of language, morality and rationality because such an end is incommensurable with other ends.⁴⁵³

Rawls's ideal of reflective equilibrium contrasts with a hierarchy of norms wherein one core norm provides a foundation and orders one's other norms. While Rawls acknowledges that citizens may have "comprehensive doctrines" of life, these are often morally problematic at an individual level and incommunicable in the public sphere. Though elements of such comprehensive doctrines can form part of an overlapping political consensus, public deliberations should take place according to public values and standards in accordance with equal liberty.

Though Rawls writes little about teaching, the purpose of teaching seems to be enabling individuals to achieve a reflective equilibrium in their deliberations. On these grounds, a child may be taught authoritatively in the course of developing moral and intellectual capacities.⁴⁵⁴ How far along the path towards an integrated worldview a child is to be brought before such an education becomes paternalistic is unclear—though the demands of equal justice require that the child's rational agency be respected as early as possible. Formation, as understood by the spiritual authorities discussed in chapter one, is almost certainly paternalistic in Rawls's view. Alasdair MacIntyre argues that it is really unified education that Rawls finds mad.⁴⁵⁵ Whether it is an Aristotelian education into a virtuous earthly city or a Thomist education into the city of God with its divine highest good, in either case, the child emerging into adulthood is only able to engage in the reason of the city after

⁴⁵³ There is an echo of the classical sense of the ordered soul, for example in Thomas or Aristotle where prudence orders the passions.

⁴⁵⁴ Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 405.

⁴⁵⁵ MacIntyre, *Whose Justice?*, 179.

long formation. The reason of these cities is a fullness aspired to, not a minimum to be reached. One is formed in the city so that one might speak meaningfully.

Possibly from his earlier religious formation, Rawls briefly references authoritative religious instruction, noting rather that “the theological parallel [to the authoritative teaching of children] is a special case which, in view of the principle of equal liberty, does not apply to the basic structure of society.”⁴⁵⁶ The basic structure of society is governed by public reason in which the individual can reflectively engage. For Rawls, religious reason and *a fortiori* religious teaching must be subordinate to this public reason. Public values are those values to which all citizens may appeal and partake at least in principle. The highest good, upheld by both Thomas and Ignatius, is neither a public value nor able to be interrogated by public standards insofar as those standards are univocal. Prudentially directing one’s life to an ultimate end, to the Kingdom of God, does not conform to canons of reason accepted by Rawls—it is not univocally meaningful. Rawls is correct insofar as the dominant end taught by Thomas and Ignatius will not fit within a univocal sense of reason or ethics. Teaching that God is the dominant end requires language that falls outside of Rawls’s public sphere. Having explored the severe restrictions on spiritual pedagogy imposed by univocal public speech arising in part from a narrow reading of Wittgenstein and a moral suspicion of spiritual teachers, the next section turns to Thomas’s description of the analogical relationship between God and human beings as teachers.

Spiritual pedagogy, at least in the tradition of Thomas and Ignatius, presumes that, to paraphrase the prophet Isaiah, God’s thoughts are not human thoughts, God’s ways are not

⁴⁵⁶ Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 409.

human ways. Approaching God is mystical insofar as God's ways are not human ways and are transformative of human ways.⁴⁵⁷ If, *pace* Rawls, God's reason is unlike human reason then communication between God and human beings falters. God is the ultimate end of human reasoning and action yet also inaccessible to human reason. Despite this, both Thomas and Ignatius claim that, with the help of God and other people, one can discern what concrete action better serves the divine will, that is the greater glory of God.

6.2 Aquinas on Teaching

The dominant end of human life as Thomas and Ignatius conceive it cannot be easily compartmentalized. Despite the demands of Rawls's public reason or other secular public spaces, there is no space through which the question "what would God have me/us do" does not resonate. Herbert McCabe pithily summarizes Thomas. The context of human living and *a fortiori* human teaching is created and ordered by God. This human context, where humans live and move, is close yet mysterious: "Aquinas thought that the point of human living cannot lie outside human living. I mean it cannot lie outside in the way that the point of a machine lies outside itself...I think it is true and very, very importantly true that the point of human living lies beyond itself, but not outside itself."⁴⁵⁸ In McCabe's terms, the point of human living though beyond the human is not outside the human. The riddle of God is within rather than outside human life. One does not go looking for the riddle of God in some, literally or metaphorically, far off place but encounters it simply by being human.

⁴⁵⁷ Within the comparative mysticism literature, traditional spiritual pedagogy might be considered a form of extrovertive mysticism. See: Stace, *The Teachings of the Mystics*, 15; James R. Horne, *The Moral Mystic*, SR Supplements 14 (Waterloo, Ont: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1983); James R. Horne, *Mysticism and Vocation*, Editions SR 18 (Waterloo, Ont: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1996).

⁴⁵⁸ McCabe, *On Aquinas*, 53.

In Wittgensteinian tones, McCabe likens human life to a game: “We are born as players of this game; we do not *decide* what shall be its aim and purpose. We *discover* these things.”⁴⁵⁹ The best way to learn the rules of the game is to play it with help from experienced players. As discussed in chapter three, we are trained (*Abrichtung*) into the various games we play. To extend the game metaphor beyond McCabe’s use, human beings are playing a game with God in creation. The real rules of the game are the rules as played—explicit rules are an approximation of the game, not a prescription for the game. McCabe notes that even the Decalogue is just an outline of the rules and precisely how to follow those rules is not always clear, as the rabbinical commentaries on the Decalogue and the Torah more generally make evident. Jesus is the only human being who plays the game perfectly. The saints play it well. Divine charity is the rule that regulates all the other rules. How to be charitable as God is charitable is a great riddle.

If life is a game, who can teach the rules, especially when the most important rules, like divine charity, are riddling? In chapter two, I argued that Thomas is himself a spiritual pedagogue. Early in his own career as a Master of the University of Paris, Thomas takes up the question of teaching in his *Questiones Disputatae de Veritate*, question eleven. On the occasions when he returns to the subject of teaching, Thomas remains remarkably consistent to this early account.⁴⁶⁰ Thomas’s teaching is linked deeply to spiritual and pastoral formation. Across his work is a special concern for the formation of Dominican priests, who

⁴⁵⁹ McCabe, 55.

⁴⁶⁰ The text arose from disputations and anticipated the *Prima Secundae* of the *Summa Theologiae*. Thomas revisits the theme of teaching in his first and third Quodlibets which date from his second regency (1268-1272) at the University of Paris. Much of the *Summa Theologiae* was also written in this period. The *de Veritate* was written during his first regency in Paris (1256-1259). His understanding of teaching is remarkably stable across these writings. See: Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas, Volume 1: The Person and His Work*, 62–66; Brian Davies, *Thomas Aquinas’s Quodlibetal Questions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

in turn engage in direct pastoral ministry and instruction. Thomas begins his question on teaching with the biblical prohibition on calling anyone “teacher” except God: “But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all students. And call no one your father on earth, for you have one Father—the one in heaven. Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Messiah” (Mt. 23:8-10). The image of God as teacher is ubiquitous in scripture and subsequent tradition. Thomas both affirms and qualifies the sense in which human beings are teachers.

In the first article, Thomas asks, “Can a man or only God teach and be called teacher?” He raises a number of objections, notably Augustine’s caution in the *De Magistro* that human beings generally teach with signs, which are useless if the person being taught is ignorant of the underlying reality referred to by the sign.⁴⁶¹ God and nature, by contrast, present reality directly and are thus properly considered teachers (DV 11.1).⁴⁶² A form of this objection is familiar from the realist debates discussed in chapter three, namely that grammatical approaches are concerned only with signs or language as opposed to reality. Human teachers seem to deal only in signs not with reality directly.

Thomas entertains the objection that the teacher of mere signs is not the true teacher, that the true teacher brings the student into direct contact with the truth. Certainly, Thomas holds that God can and does teach directly without the aid of human teachers. Thomas considers two opposing theories of coming to truth: one, direct divine inspiration such that one can only learn by some special act of God and, two, recollection reminiscent of Plato’s

⁴⁶¹ Thomas treats the question of teaching more briefly and metaphysically in the *Summa*: “We must therefore decide the question differently, by saying that the teacher causes knowledge in the learner, by reducing him from potentiality to act” (ST I.117.1)

⁴⁶² Thomas is in dialogue with Augustine’s account of teaching, see: Augustine, “The Teacher,” in *Against the Academicians: The Teacher*, trans. Peter King (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1995), 134–37.

Meno such that one, in fact, already knows.⁴⁶³ Learning is a real, timebound process, as is teaching. Thomas appeals to the Aristotelian potent/act distinction; human beings have capacities to learn that come into act under the right conditions, including both directly through God/nature and instrumentally through human teachers.

Thomas appeals to the example of a doctor healing the sick. The doctor's ministrations would be for naught in the absence of the body's own healing powers. On the other hand, often the body's powers are only actualized given the conditions provided for by the doctor.⁴⁶⁴ Therefore, the doctor might rightly be considered a healer. So too, in at least some circumstances, the teacher establishes the necessary conditions for learning. For Thomas the human teacher causes learning in an analogous way.⁴⁶⁵ The teacher cannot command learning but relies upon the learner's capacities and must make prudential judgements how best to communicate to a particular learner using the tools at her disposal. Progress is not guaranteed.

Thomas writes: "one person is said to teach another inasmuch as, by signs, he manifests to that other the reasoning process which he himself goes through by his own natural reason." Along similar lines, Wittgenstein's account of learning and teaching is as being drawn into a particular activity, a particular language game. Manifesting one's reasoning process by signs is drawing one's student into a language game (or games) and with it a form of life. The grounds given by the teacher are available to the student. "If I need a warrant for using a word, it must also be warrant for someone else" (PI 378). The teacher

⁴⁶³ See: Christoph Schönborn, "Die Autorität Des Lehrers Nach Thomas von Aquin," in *Christian Authority*, ed. G.R. Evans (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988).

⁴⁶⁴ Kierkegaard as Anti-Climacus uses a similar medical image for all Christian speech. Søren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death: A Christian Psychological Exposition for Upbuilding and Awakening*, ed. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Kierkegaard's Writings 19 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 5.

⁴⁶⁵ Burrell is particularly sensitive to the teacher as a cause of learning versus the causality of nature or God as teacher. Burrell, *Aquinas*, 191.

explains or at least models the rules of speaking. She gives the criteria for calling something ‘x’ or for judging action ‘a’ to be useful.⁴⁶⁶ These criteria need not be available to all other reasonable persons, as in the case of Rawlsian public reason, at least not without engaging in the particular form of life to some extent, as discussed in chapter three.

Chapter two described Lonergan’s account of the “inner word” as influential on subsequent grammatical readings of Thomas, most notably Burrell’s reading. The inner word is the process arising out of the practice of judging.⁴⁶⁷ Determining essences is not only simple apprehension but an act of judgement. Intellectual and ultimately philosophical skills are in the first instance know how rather than know that.⁴⁶⁸ Knowing is a practical skill. Recall the—admittedly controversial—Lonerganian reading that Thomas sees an internal connection of word meaning and explanation in chapter two. The practice of explaining is the meaning. Explanation is normative. Thomas’s insight, as interpreted by Lonergan, and Wittgenstein’s are complimentary insofar as the practice of explaining initiates the learner into a new practice, a new way of engaging the world and the people in it through her own capacities. As discussed in chapter two, agreement in criteria is agreement in forms of life. “An ‘inner process’ stands in need of outward criteria” (PI 580). Teaching makes interior processes public so that they might be interiorized. Teaching is the skill of drawing students into the process of knowing, that is at least in part into the teacher’s own language games and

⁴⁶⁶ In chapters three and four, Wittgenstein’s understanding of criteria was developed both in its general sense and with regard to the particular complications of religious usage. Hacker and Baker note that: “Criteria are determinants of meaning. They are grammatical or logical grounds for the truth of a proposition.” P. M. S. Hacker, *Wittgenstein: Meaning and Mind. Part I* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2019), 279.

⁴⁶⁷ Lonergan places the human knower at the center of his reading of Thomas, in contrast to the more common objectivist reading of the time, which viewed individual agency in intellection as a secondary concern. Lonergan, *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan. Vol. 2, Verbum*.

⁴⁶⁸ Burrell, *Exercises in Religious Understanding*, 2.

those of her community. Thomas, though not using the word in this context, suggests open-ended criteria by relativizing the teacher's explanation first to human forms of life and second to the riddle of divine life.

Thomas's theory of understanding is sometime seen as incompatible with Wittgenstein's because he seems to hold a theory of mental images. Anthony Kenny, following Lonergan, helpfully distinguishes between mental pictures in the internalist sense criticized by Wittgenstein and the likenesses of things held in the mind according to Thomas.⁴⁶⁹ Thomas's understanding of the role of the teacher lends further credence to Kenny's interpretation. The teacher does not, indeed cannot, share mental images with the student but, by means of language, the student can receive those ideas if she has the proper mental faculties and background knowledge. Thomas continues, "And thus, through the instrumentality, as it were, of what is told him, the natural reason of the pupil arrives at a knowledge of the things which he did not know" (DV 11.1). The pupil comes to understand the world in a new way through entering into the language games of the teacher. Correct teaching and explanation of words does not need to be comprehensive. The rules themselves are not strict. Explanation does not exhaust possible uses.

The instrumentality of the teacher varies depending on the knowledge being taught. Thomas distinguishes between teaching on the basis of self-evident principles and those based on opinion or faith. This follows from teaching as an invitation to a particular activity and use of language. For example, teaching mathematics is self-contained, requiring only first principles. By contrast, Astronomy relies upon knowledge of the sky, that is joint attention on

⁴⁶⁹ Kenny, *Aquinas on Mind*, 103.

the same object. Teaching about prayer requires joint attention on the activity of God: it is an activity involving three agents. I will return to this point in the final section on discernment. The various types of teaching, even those most concerned with revelation, should not be confused with the role of prophet or ecstatic. The instrumentality of the teacher Thomas considers in question eleven is importantly different from that of prophet or ecstatic, which he discussed in the subsequent questions.

The prophet teaches but not in the sense of manifesting her own process. Prophecy is an infused habit and then only insofar as inspiration continues to be given. The prophet's power comes quite clearly from God as a special grace and does not require the abilities of the prophet (DV 12), though even the prophets do not see God's essence and the knowledge of the prophet does not consist in deduction from first principles but is given as particulars.⁴⁷⁰ The intellectual agency of the prophet is minimal. She reports what God has revealed in particular. The prophet may receive a great riddle but receiving such a riddle does not entail being able to explain it. Rapture is likewise an unnatural state that is neither a habit nor a power. Thomas defines rapture as a qualified beatific vision of God's essence (DV 13). Even in these extraordinary experiences, Thomas is reluctant to concede that human beings can know God's essence. Any such enraptured knowledge is temporary and discounts bodily sensation.

⁴⁷⁰ "Now, God Himself is the principle in which we can know future contingents and other things which exceed natural knowledge and with which prophecy deals. Hence, since the prophets do not see God's essence, they cannot know the things which they see prophetically by a light which is a kind of habitual form inhering in them, but they have to be taught each thing individually. Thus it is that the prophetic light must not be a habit, but must exist in the soul of the prophet in the manner of a transient impression, as the light of the sun exists in the air." (DV 12.1).

Distinguishing prophecy and rapture from teaching provides two clarifications. First, it highlights Thomas's Aristotelianism insofar as human powers are fully engaged in knowing and teaching. God is also teacher in the cases of prophecy and ecstasy but more directly and with less involvement of human agency, whereas teaching in the non-prophetic and non-ecstatic sense requires both divine and human agencies without competition. Second, it highlights Thomas's extreme reluctance to allow for knowledge of God's essence in this life.⁴⁷¹

Though Thomas regards God's teaching as primary and human teaching as secondary in the order of being, insofar as both God and the human teacher are active in teaching, there is a danger of associating the two orders of activity too closely. Such a danger does not exist for the prophet nor the ecstatic since these roles are defined by passivity. The teacher has a know-how, which is instrumental to students learning. This is not so for prophet or ecstatic, except perhaps on the level of basic human communicative skills. In the order of knowing, one is more familiar with the activity of human teaching which provides the basis for understanding God as a teacher. The human agency of teaching provides the means to understand God as a teacher, yet one must avoid the temptation to regard teaching as definitional of God's essence whether implicitly or explicitly. One must avoid the sort of univocal predication Rawls, among others, would prefer. The affirmation that "God is a teacher", unlike "God is a warrior", raises few objections such that one is tempted to predicate teacher of God as one would with goodness. Goodness is a transcendental that stretches with

⁴⁷¹ Josef Pieper's reading of Thomas is particularly sensitive to Thomas's care around claims about the divine essence and the apophatic side of Thomas. See, for example: Josef Pieper, *The Silence of St. Thomas: Three Essays* (South Bend, Ind.: St. Augustine's Press, 1999).

relative ease across contexts; teacher is not. Both Thomas and Pseudo-Dionysius warn of unobjectionable metaphors, even scriptural ones, insofar as they are a temptation to anthropomorphizing God (ST I.1.9.ad3).⁴⁷² The literal truth of objectionable or merely limited metaphors such as “God is a fortress” are readily denied, not so with God as a teacher.

The ubiquitous image of God as teacher cannot be replaced by an explanation of the metaphor—to do so would be to falsely claim an understanding of God’s action. The picture of God as teacher in scripture and tradition is not discardable.⁴⁷³ God is revealed to be a teacher throughout scripture and tradition. Explaining how God is a teacher while discarding the term both blanches the meaning from these metaphors and assumes an unmerited understanding of divine action. God as teacher is non-literal and also necessary, because the picture of God as a teacher is partly constitutive of our understanding. The image of God as teacher, like many images of God, resists both domestication and dispensability.

Inverting Thomas’s terminology of primary and secondary, God as teacher is a secondary sense in Wittgenstein’s terms.⁴⁷⁴ Wittgenstein gives the example of the concepts of “fat” and “lean” in formulations like the “cat is fat” versus “today is Fat Tuesday” (PPF 274). Wittgenstein notes that treating “Fat Tuesday” as a metaphor that can be explained in alternative terms misses something in the formulation “Fat Tuesday.” This is rather like explaining a joke, which ruins the comedy in the web of associations invoked. When one is

⁴⁷² Pseudo-Dionysius, “Celestial Hierarchy,” chap. 2; Williams, *The Edge of Words*, 149.

⁴⁷³ Michael Cox offers a Wittgensteinian argument that a variety of images, such as the “body” of God, have a “non-literal and indispensable” role in Christian as well as Jewish practice. D. Michael Cox, “Neither Literal nor Metaphorical: Divine Body Traditions, Indispensable Pictures and Wittgensteinian ‘Secondary Sense,’” *Modern Theology* 31, no. 3 (2015): 456; Mulhall, *Inheritance and Originality*, 167–71.

⁴⁷⁴ McCabe, *God Still Matters*, 59.

fluent in the various primary means of the “fat”, the secondary meaning becomes richer and more expressive though never reducible to some univocal expression.

Secondary senses arise from mastery of primary senses. The connection between the two is not systematic but imaginative and, at times, spontaneous. The greater one’s mastery of the language of human teaching the richer one’s description of God as teacher, though one can never pin down God as teacher. As discussed in chapter four, Wittgenstein sharply distinguishes between relative valuations and absolute valuations. Like secondary senses, absolute senses also arise from primary sense.⁴⁷⁵ Relative valuations can be made sense of within the context of the world; absolute valuations cannot. One can clearly articulate the safety of her room but not her sense of ‘absolute safety’. Yet, if ‘absolute safety’ is to have any human significance, it arises by projecting or relating (to use Cavell’s and McCabe’s terms respectively) from ‘safe’ in its everyday, primary uses to an absolute use. *Pace* Rawls, there is no univocal triangulation or mapping possible between analogical or secondary uses as there may be with metaphorical use. God as absolute teacher cannot be finally defined by human teaching, nevertheless human teaching provides the way to speak of God as teacher. The habit of teaching and speaking of teaching allows the analogy of God as teacher to function. God as an absolute teacher is a great riddle. In the previous chapter, I argued that great riddles are not solvable but, like the twin primes, great riddles can be given conjectures

⁴⁷⁵ I follow Diamond’s claim that secondary senses have “certain logical resemblances” to absolute religious and ethical uses, namely that absolute sense is informed by primary sense. The literature on secondary sense is divided and Wittgenstein’s original texts are ambiguous as to the precise meaning and extent of secondary sense. Much of the literature focuses on the psychological importance of secondary sense. I make no further claims about secondary sense beyond Diamond’s limited claim. Cora Diamond, “Secondary Sense,” in *The Realistic Spirit: Wittgenstein, Philosophy, and the Mind* (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 1991); Michel ter Hark, “Wittgenstein on The Experience of Meaning and Secondary Use,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Wittgenstein*, ed. Oskari Kuusela and Marie McGinn, 1st ed., Oxford Handbooks in Philosophy (Oxford: University Press, 2011), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199287505.001.0001>.

in lieu of proper solutions. Such conjectures do not collapse the great riddles but allow one to go on speaking usefully. One speaks of God as teacher by way of conjecture. Conjectures based on experience of the primary sense allow one to draw richer conjectures, richer absolute uses.

A central feature of Aquinas's account of teaching and learning, not to mention Wittgenstein's, is habituation. Within the moral realm, one learns to be good by habituating good practices, typically in an environment filled with other virtuous people. Thomas held that education was necessary for right practical reasoning and right practical reasoning was necessary for education. The trajectory of learning moves from the specific to the general. The child learns the courtesies of interacting with adults oblivious to the importance of such norms in social trust. Through the process of learning, Thomas expects disparate good activities to begin to cohere. What seem like a variety of goods come to be regarded as hierarchically ordered under the dominant good. Within the habit of learning and teaching, one comes to understand the various meanings of the word. The act of teaching allows one to speak of God as the definitive teacher by projecting from familiar contexts to the divine without domesticating the divine. *Pace* Rawls, the subordination of other goods in this hierarchical understanding is not "for the sake of system." Cultivating a better understanding of the dominant good, though never an adequate or essential understanding, requires imaginative projection from familiar activities, which Thomas claims are governed by prudence. Having explored Thomas's early but detailed account of teaching, the chapter turns to the virtue of prudence and its related virtue of counsel that guides the activity of teaching.

6.3 Aquinas on Prudence

For Thomas Aquinas, as for Aristotle, the virtue of prudence orders all the other moral virtues and guides one's attention in exercise of the intellectual virtues. Prudence when combined with Christian charity orders the practical comportment of a human being towards God and is an imitation of God. Herbert McCabe rightly argues that, contrary to many legalistic readings of Thomas, the virtue of prudence is central to his moral teaching "and not just the human virtue of *prudentia*, but a sharing in divine *providentia* by which we are guided in the life of *caritas* (sharing in divine love)."⁴⁷⁶ As such, Thomas's understanding of prudence differs from Rawls's prudential reflection and from Aristotle insofar as God's providence is operative in the world but not an aspect of the world.

Thomas Aquinas speaks of two rules of human action (*duplex regula*) and thus two rules which govern prudence corresponding to human prudence and divine providence in which prudence shares. Nicholas Austin, SJ rightly observes the "singular importance" of the *duplex regula* in understanding Thomas's ethics because it encapsulated God's absolute moral order in concert with human beings' imperfect way of approximating this order.⁴⁷⁷ The first rule is the eternal law which is the divine will (and being) itself, the same will that causes all things to be and holds all things in existence. Articulated in the second part of the second part of the *Summa*, this rule implicitly refers back to the limits on understanding God with which the *Summa* begins and which are discussed in previous chapters. The first rule is unknowable to human beings except indirectly and imperfectly through natural reason and revelation (ST

⁴⁷⁶ McCabe, *On Aquinas*, 103.

⁴⁷⁷ Nicholas Austin, *Aquinas on Virtue: A Causal Reading* (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2018), 44–46.

I-II.19.4.ad3).⁴⁷⁸ No satisfactory articulation of the first rule is humanly possible yet, for Thomas; one intends to act according to this rule given the limits of one's capacities and understanding. The eternal law is at once the source of normativity for human reason and yet inaccessible except through human reason, often assisted by grace, and then only in a limited way.

The second rule, human reason, is, by contrast, proximate and homogeneous (ST I-II 71a6).⁴⁷⁹ In a Rawlsian account, the two rules would be different only in extent or completeness; for Thomas, they are different in kind. The second rule is an image of the first rule just as human beings are in the image of God, but the second rule is also the only access one has to the first rule.⁴⁸⁰ The same structure of the primary and secondary senses of teacher applies to these rules. One cannot speak of Eternal Law except by human means and, therefore, inadequately. In riddling language, the connection between the human and eternal law is a promissory one. The Eternal Law remains an aspiration after which, like all great riddles, one engages in, to quote Diamond, "the kind of groping search, of seeking for something not specifiable in advance, and which perhaps is not for anything that can intelligibly be described at all."⁴⁸¹ For Thomas, what makes speaking of or acting in

⁴⁷⁸ "Although the eternal law is unknown to us according as it is in the Divine Mind: nevertheless, it becomes known to us somewhat, either by natural reason which is derived therefrom as its proper image; or by some sort of additional revelation." (*licet lex aeterna sit nobis ignota secundum quod est in mente divina; innotescit tamen nobis aliquantulum vel per rationem naturalem, quae ab ea derivatur ut propria eius imago; vel per aliqualem revelationem superadditam.*) (ST I-II.19.4.ad3)

⁴⁷⁹ "Now there are two rules of the human will: one is proximate and homogeneous, viz., the human reason; the other is the first rule, viz., the eternal law, which is God's reason, so to speak." (*Regula autem voluntatis humanae est duplex, una proinqua et homogenea, scilicet ipsa humana ratio; alia vero est prima regula, scilicet lex aeterna, qua est quasi ratio Dei.*) (ST I-II 71a6)

⁴⁸⁰ The first rule in part legitimizes moral action. The point of emphasis of the eternal law is God as lawgiver in keeping with Medieval notions of legal legitimacy. Though the metaphysical implications are also important, the Eternal Law is the one act of God under several titles including providence and creation.

⁴⁸¹ Diamond, "Riddles and Anselm's Riddle," 268.

accordance with the Eternal Law possible even to some very limited extent is human nature in the image and likeness of God.

Humans are in the image of God in two related senses. The primary sense is by virtue of their creation and redemption. The secondary sense is by virtue of their willing to fulfill the end of their creations, the dominant end, i.e., God's will. In both senses, human beings as divine images participate in God's being. For Thomas, humans are always participating in God's being, though they may be unaware of this participation and act in ways contrary to it. Coming to and acting on this awareness requires a growth in the second sense of being in the divine image.

Human beings require counsel to inform their reason to conform to the Eternal Law (ST I-II 19.4).⁴⁸² Thomas writes: "[H]uman reason is unable to grasp the singular and contingent things which may occur, the result is that 'the thoughts of mortal men are fearful, and our counsels uncertain' (Wis. 9:14). Hence in the research of counsel, man requires to be directed by God who comprehends all things" (ST II-II.52.1.ad1). Being directed by God or taught by God in the sense articulated in the previous section on the *de Veritate* is reasonable according to God's reason and, thus, only analogously reasonable to humans, even those being directed.

⁴⁸² "Wherever a number of causes are subordinate to one another, the effect depends more on the first than on the second cause: since the second cause acts only in virtue of the first. Now it is from the eternal law, which is the Divine Reason, that human reason is the rule of the human will, from which the human derives its goodness...It is therefore evident that the goodness of the human will depends on the eternal law much more than on human reason: and when human reason fails we must have recourse to the Eternal Reason." (I-II 19.4)

Counsel, the virtue through which one teaches for Thomas, falls broadly into three categories.⁴⁸³ First is counsel as a gift of the Holy Spirit, which is an aspect of God's provident care of creation.⁴⁸⁴ Second is counsel between human beings which is a form of acquired or habituated prudence. Thomas argues that divine providence is analogous to and the final ordering principle of human prudence (ST I.22.1). Three combines one and two.⁴⁸⁵ One human being counsels another through both human reason and the gift of divine counsel (ST II-II.52.2.ad3). As noted above, Rawls resists this third type of counsel found in Thomas Aquinas, Ignatius Loyola, and many other great spiritual writers in the Christian tradition on the grounds that it is humanly disfiguring and incommunicable according to univocal reason. The claim to authority of such a teacher is contingent on her human prudence conforming to divine providence.⁴⁸⁶ The counsels of spiritual teachers insofar as they are divine are only partly understood by the teacher. Counsel *qua* human prudence is neither easily nor completely disentangleable from counsel *qua* divine gift because they are different in kind and, as such, non-competing. This third type of counsel is riddling.

⁴⁸³ The account here is a simplification of Aquinas's account insofar as it ignores the interplay between the gifts of wisdom and counsel and the intellectual virtues of wisdom and prudence, see ST I-II 68.4. This is related to the discussion at the end of the previous chapter on the relationship between the active and contemplative life. Thomas distinguishes between speculative and practical knowing. Speculative knowing is perfected by understanding and practical knowing by counsel. The contention of the Grammatical reading offered throughout that speculative knowing is grounded in the practical. See chapter two.

⁴⁸⁴ A recently baptized infant might be thought to possess infused prudence in the absence of acquired prudence, though it is difficult to conceive how such prudence might be exercised. Like most theological thought experiments concerning newly baptized infants, the infused prudence would function as is necessary for salvation.

⁴⁸⁵ The relationship between acquired and infused virtues in Thomas Aquinas is controversial. My tri-partite division of counsel is inspired by Josef Pieper and represents a plausible, though by no means definitive, interpretation of Thomas. Josef Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues: Prudence, Justice, Fortitude, Temperance* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1966); Pieper, *The Silence of St. Thomas*.

⁴⁸⁶ This is not to exclude the possibility of God using an unwilling actor for pedagogical purposes, but such a one would not be a teacher insofar as she did not intend to teach.

The spiritual pedagogue's role is to help her students recognize riddles and to continue to speak and live out of those riddles without collapsing them. Spiritual counsel is an aid in reordering the student towards becoming an image of God in the second sense above, a process of becoming truth rather than seeking after truth within one's prior framework.⁴⁸⁷ Both Thomas's account of prudence and Ignatius's account of discernment (or election) exhibit a quasi-systematic structure that proposes content from revelation and natural reason yet in such a way that the systematic structure itself exists within a riddle. The spiritual pedagogue cannot finally articulate where she is grounded other than trying to become truth like the student—the riddle invites an ongoing search for solutions.

Chapter five explored the riddles in Diamond's sense as failing to make sense in a particular place. Anselm's "that than which nothing greater can be conceived" is a nonsensical statement that nevertheless fits intelligibly into human life. The question has a place. As seen above, the divine primary teacher versus the human teacher, the danger adverted to by both Thomas and Pseudo-Dionysius is to see only similarity between God as teacher and human beings as teachers. A common danger which the spiritual pedagogue encounters is letting the place of the riddle obscure the fact that it is a riddle, collapsing the riddle into a univocal description. Thomas holds that providence rules prudence. The action of a creator God underlies even quotidian deliberations.

⁴⁸⁷ "Any therefore, Christianity understood, truth is obviously not to know the truth but to be the truth...For knowing the truth is something that entirely of itself accompanies being the truth, not the other way around." Kierkegaard, *Practice in Christianity*, 205.

6.4 The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola as Riddling Spiritual Pedagogy

In the first chapter, I explored various examples of authoritative spiritual pedagogy from the tradition. These teachers sought to aid their students in drawing closer to the mystery of God. St. Ignatius Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises* explicitly seek to aid exercitants in answering the question "what would God have me do?" I take the *Exercises* as a case study of spiritual pedagogy as riddling. The *Exercises* are a school of attention to the mystery of God active in one's life or cultivating an awareness of the riddle of God present where it had gone unnoticed. The point of arrival of the *Exercises*, finding God in all things, means growing into the recognition that one is unable to fully understand anything yet to act out of this graced awareness. The retreatant is under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and, secondarily, in Thomas's sense, under the director (offering counsel in the third sense developed above). In its fullest form, the retreat takes place over thirty days of silence devoted exclusively to prayer. The *Exercises* are meant to be of help at various stages in the spiritual life. Though elements of spiritual ascent are present, the structure of ascent is not as clear as in Pseudo-Dionysius or Ignatius's near contemporaries Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross.⁴⁸⁸ The *Exercises* presume a certain degree of spiritual progress and seek to cultivate a deeper spiritual life. They are programmatic more than descriptive. Within the program of the *Exercises*, the 'director', the preferred term for the Spiritual Pedagogue in discussions of the *Exercises*, plays an essential role, such that the text of the Exercises is intended for the director rather than the retreatant making the *Exercises*.

⁴⁸⁸ Ignatius' *Constitutions* have a clearer structure of spiritual ascent and compliment the *Exercises*. See: János Lukács, *Ignatian Formation: The Inspiration of the Constitutions* (Leominster: Gracewing Publishing, 2016).

The retreatant, under the guidance of a spiritual director, learns to discern the will of God by noticing one's deepest desires. The question of one's deepest desire and the answer of following God's will are riddling. The retreat director in conversation with the retreatant proposes meditations, which the retreatant undertakes during the day—typically three to five one-hour sessions, though the form is adaptable. The retreatant discusses her experience of prayer with the director who reflects on the experience with the retreatant, encourages various possibilities for further prayerful exploration, and proposes the next day's meditations on the basis of the previous day's experience.

Thematically, the point of departure of the *Exercises* is also the point of arrival—the human response to God at work in creation. The *Spiritual Exercises* begin with the “First Principle and Foundation”, which was paraphrased and critiqued by Rawls. Articulated in scholastic terms, it is the purpose of human life as Ignatius conceived it—namely “to praise, reverence and serve God” as creatures in the providential ordering of creation.⁴⁸⁹ The metaphysical statement of the Principle and Foundation is fundamentally personal and cosmic.⁴⁹⁰

The praise, reverence, and service of God is the purpose of each human being and the purpose of creation as a whole. Throughout the *Exercises*, Ignatius repeats the theme of the

⁴⁸⁹ “The human person is created to praise, reverence and serve God Our Lord, and by so doing to save his or her soul. The other things on the face of the earth are created for human beings in order to help them pursue the end for which they are created. It follows from this that one must use other created things in so far as they help towards one's end, and free oneself from them in so far as they are obstacles to one's end. To do this we need to make ourselves indifferent to all created things, provided the matter is subject to our free choice and there is no prohibition. Thus as far as we are concerned, we should not want health more than illness, wealth more than poverty, fame more than disgrace, a long life more than a short one, and similarly for all the rest, but we should desire and choose only what helps us more towards the end for which we are created.” Ignatius Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius: A Translation and Commentary*, trans. George E. Ganss (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1992), para. 23; Michael Ivens, *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises: Text and Commentary: A Handbook for Retreat Directors* (Leominster: Gracewing, 1998), 22–26.

⁴⁹⁰ Erich Przywara, *Deus Semper Maior*, vol. 1 (Wien: Herold, 1964), 48–49.

Principle and Foundation, advising retreatants “to ask God our Lord for the grace that all my intentions, actions, and operations may be ordered purely to the service and praise of the Divine majesty.”⁴⁹¹ The First Principle and Foundation is not primarily a description of God and the universe, but a criterion for action. Considered grammatically, the retreatant and the director discuss what constitutes “service and praise of the Divine majesty” given that the essence of that divine majesty is in principle unknowable. Ignatius’s First Principle and Foundation is not stated as a riddle but nevertheless functions as one. Part of the work of the *Exercises* is in fact to see it as a great riddle rather than a straightforward, univocal set of rules. The riddle posed is how to conform not only my understanding but all my actions to God’s will such that my actions are potentially a matter of indifference by relative measures yet of infinite importance in conforming to the divine will.

Director and student start with a received grammar of religious life. They begin with the commandments and other traditional formulations of the ethical and spiritual life, however both of these underdetermine action and themselves often point to the same riddle, for example the first commandment.⁴⁹² Like the Eternal Law of Aquinas, the retreatant and the director have an inadequate sense of what the Principle and Foundation requires.⁴⁹³ The

⁴⁹¹ Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises*, para. 46.

⁴⁹² See: Ex 20:1-17; Dt 5:4-21; Mt 22:37-38

⁴⁹³ Ignatius is prescriptive in his moral and doctrinal guidance with regard to the Church. He writes: “It is necessary that all matters about which we want to make an election should in themselves be indifferent or good, so that they function constructively within our Holy Mother the hierarchical Church, and are not bad or opposed to her.” He elaborates this guidance in his “Rules for Thinking with the Church.” However, this prescriptivism does nothing to dissipate the riddle insofar as Ignatius sees the Church as divinely instituted and imperfectly instantiated on earth and as a means to configure oneself to the Christ. For Ignatius’s one service of Christ is necessarily service in the Church broadly conceived. Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises*, paras. 352–370; Michael J. Buckley, “Ecclesial Mysticism in the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius,” *Theological Studies* 56, no. 3 (September 1995): 441–63.

Exercises are a means of seeking God's help in serving the divine will and disposing oneself to receive that help, which includes the ministrations of the director.

The first part of the *Exercises*, known as the "First Week", concentrates on acknowledging one's own sinfulness and need for God. The fundamental choice offered is between God and the world—between relative and absolute goods as discussed in chapter four. The First Week offers various formulations of this choice. It is the choice of accepting or rejecting the First Principle and Foundation to the limited extent that one can understand it.⁴⁹⁴ Ignatius frames this principally in moral terms; developing morally includes increasing one's awareness of the ethical import of one's actions and the difference between acting for God and for worldly ends alone. The retreatant in the first week is advised to ask God, first, "that I may feel an interior knowledge of my sins, and also an abhorrence of them. Second, that I may perceive the disorder in my actions, in order to detest them, amend myself and put myself in order. Third, that I may have knowledge of the worldly in order to detest it and rid myself of all that is worldly and vain."⁴⁹⁵ The first week cultivates an awareness of one's own limits and need for God.

Ignatius advises directors that retreatants should only move beyond the first week if they are "ready to dispose their future lives in the light of a retreat election."⁴⁹⁶ Ignatius uses the term "election" in the Thomistic sense of "*electio*." An *electio* presumes a basic "*intentio*" towards God, though the full implications of the *intentio* are unknown. Central to the election

⁴⁹⁴ The work of the First Week is similar to coming to despair for Kierkegaard as Anti-Climacus. Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death*, 26.

⁴⁹⁵ Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises*, para. 63.

⁴⁹⁶ Ignatius Loyola, "Selected Letters," in *St. Ignatius of Loyola Personal Writings*, ed. Joseph A. Munitiz and Philip Endean (London: Penguin Classics, 1997), 166.

is in Ignatius's words to "observe the intention of Christ our Lord."⁴⁹⁷ Moving from the first week of the *Exercises* to subsequent weeks is the move from whether to seek God's will to trying to put God's will into action. The movement between the first and subsequent weeks demarcates two modes of discernment of spirits.

As discussed in chapter one, discernment is the know-how of seeking the will of God in a particular situation. Religious forms of life dispose one to discernment but are not sufficient for discernment—discernment in the fullest sense is not a human achievement. Ignatius's account of this general spiritual practice and the particular case of an election parallel one another. The lower, or defective, forms of discernment are applications of traditional and authoritative precepts. The traditional religious grammar is treated as fully intelligible in such lower discernment. "Be just as your father in heaven is just" is domesticated into human terms. In these lower forms of discernment, little projection is made beyond the primary sense of justice, for example, in human discourse. The higher forms of discernment also emerge out of these precepts—the limits in applying precepts begin to show, the riddles emerge as riddles.

Consolation without cause, which characterizes the standard for the highest type of election and discernment of spirits, is a particular form of riddling. Ignatius offers two sets of rules for the discernment of spirits. Taken together, the rules offer a practical guide to the relationship between human prudence and divine providence. As a baseline for all these rules, as well as for the first week of the *Exercises*, is the moral law as revealed both in scripture, tradition, and natural reason. The home context for the concepts used in discernment is one's

⁴⁹⁷ Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises*, para. 135.

everyday prudential activities. Discernment of spirits makes the providential more explicit. The rules for the first week offer general principles to distinguish between consolation and desolation. Consolation leads to an increase in the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity, whereas desolation decreases them. Put otherwise, consolation is a sign that one is moving closer to God, desolation that one is moving away. Consolation is not coextensive with happiness or contentment, though is often manifest as such. One's ability to distinguish between consolation and desolation evolves as one grows in the spiritual life and often requires the aid of counsel both human and divine. The spiritual tradition of Christianity contains a great many accounts detailing the signs of consolation versus desolation (or equivalents), how to distinguish them from related emotional states, and the importance of a spiritual guide in making such distinctions.

The first week rules for the discernment of spirits largely contrasts goods versus evils as opposed to lesser and greater goods. The discernment whether or not to steal or murder, for example, takes no particular spiritual attentiveness. Natural prudence as well as explicit revelation prescribe and proscribe various actions. The requirements of the commandment against murder are clear as a matter of action or inaction in most cases, even when the grounds of the prohibition are rather less clear. The second week, by contrast, offers subtler guidelines of choices between goods.

As noted earlier, the highest type of discernment of spirits is based on consolation without prior cause. Ignatius writes, "When I say 'without cause' I mean without any previous perception or understanding of some object due to which consolation could come about

through the mediation of the person's own acts of understanding and will."⁴⁹⁸ Put in Wittgensteinian terminology, the highest type of consolation must not make sense. Such consolation is a great riddle that often invites an ongoing and profound response. Ignatius expects such consolation to emerge in the person who is devoted to God and actively seeking God's will. Consolation without cause is not necessarily mystical in the sense of a peak or extraordinary experience except insofar as it defies sense-making. The spiritual pedagogue, for her part, is to help her student interrogate consolations and desolations and make plain their causes or lack thereof.

For Ignatius, consolation without cause is a set of criteria around the providential riddle of the eternal law that regulates human prudence. Ignatius is enormously careful that consolation without cause should not be used merely to validate one's own deliberations. He writes:

the spiritual person to whom God gives this consolation must scrutinize the experience carefully and attentively, so as to distinguish the exact time of the actual consolation from the period following it...For during this second period it often happens, owing either to thinking based on conclusions drawn from the relations between our own concepts and judgements, or to the agency of the good or bad spirit, that we form various plans and opinions that are not directly given to us by God Our Lord. These therefore require to be examined with very great care before being given complete credence and put into practice.⁴⁹⁹

Ignatius cautions that one must carefully avoid eisegesis of consolation without cause. The plans and opinions arising subsequent to consolation, conjectures in the sense developed in chapter five, may be good and possibly according to the divine will. One must avoid the self-deception of conflating consolation without cause as a particular expression of providence

⁴⁹⁸ Loyola, para. 330.

⁴⁹⁹ Loyola, para. 336.

with the more typical operation of the two rules in prudential deliberation. Consolation without cause confronts the riddle directed through the failure of causal explanation, whereas in normal operations the riddle remains beneath the surface. The logic of the quotidian hides mystery more or less well.

The same priority on consolation without cause can be found in the election in the *Exercises*. While discernment of spirits is ongoing, election is set within the broader context of the *Exercises* and is usually directed towards significant life choices. Ignatius identifies three hierarchically ordered types of election, which are all oriented to the good but the higher taking precedence over the lower. The three times of election can be seen across a continuum from the lowest being, that which is most reliant on one's reasoning from authoritative premises to the highest as a mysterious and spontaneous receptivity to God's will, which is coherent with what has been authoritatively revealed though is underdetermined by reason and revelation. The lowest form of election, the "third time" is a process of deliberating as to the right course of action based upon one's best understanding of the divine will as revealed in various authoritative sources.⁵⁰⁰ This is discernment by working through the logic of conjectures, though it is incomplete. The second time of election weighs "consolations and desolations."⁵⁰¹ These consolations and desolations provide light and knowledge for discernment—thus this second type of discernment is still primarily receptive. The first time requires no deliberative process. God "moves and attracts the will in such a way that a devout person, without doubting or being about to doubt, carries out what was proposed."⁵⁰² Lack of

⁵⁰⁰ Loyola, para. 181.

⁵⁰¹ Loyola, para. 176.

⁵⁰² Loyola, para. 175.

doubt in this context does not mean exhaustive explanation, quite the reverse. Discernment of the first type is premised on consolation without cause. The movement and attraction of the will must not be accountable by other explanations to be an election of the first type. It must refuse to make sense such that it draws the devout person. It refuses to make sense in the place or genealogy of a major life decision.

The remainder of the second week and the third week of the *Exercises* consists in meditatively journeying with Christ through his life, death, and resurrection. The goal of this process is not accurate mental reconstruction of first century Palestine but engagement with Christ. The retreatant is encouraged to begin with the texts of scripture recommended in the Exercises and by the director, but not to be restrained by them. The retreatant is to enter into the scene, to apply her imagination so that the scenes are vibrant. Again, this is a form of conjecture inspired by the great riddle of encounter with Christ, quite literally picturing what relationship with Christ is like.⁵⁰³ One can go beyond the text and interact with the people in the scene. A common dynamic in the *Exercises* is to find oneself both embraced and challenged by Christ. From the standpoint of the *duplex regula*, Christ is the perfect coordination of the two laws: an intelligible human prudence in perfect harmony with divine providence beyond understanding. Journey with Christ in the exercises is a way of imaginatively habituating what it is to act with Christ, to see the world and be in the world with Christ. Christ is both accessible as humanly prudent and remains a riddle as provident.

⁵⁰³ This bears some resemblance to picturing creation, which entails a shift in language and reverential practice. Burrell, *Aquinas*, 156.

The last part in the *Exercises*, the “Contemplation to Attain Love” (*Contemplatio*), offers an affective rather than systematic account of the purpose of human life.⁵⁰⁴ One returns to the theme of the First Principle and Foundation in a way that one can inhabit if not understand it. Ignatius begins the contemplation noting, “love ought to find its expression in deeds more than in words.”⁵⁰⁵ The imaginative engagement with God that is the *Contemplatio*, and the whole of the *Exercises*, should lead to action. Actionability is an indicator of authenticity. The *Contemplatio* is the dominant end of human life as lived.

The *Contemplatio* asks the retreatant to imagine standing before God and the saints. Ignatius hopes that the retreatant will be moved by gratitude to God for the particular gifts in her life and the broader work of Creation and redemption.⁵⁰⁶ This culminates in the prayer of radical self-offering the *Suscipe* prayer: “Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my entire will...”⁵⁰⁷ Making this offering, one sees the world transformed. In a series of contemplations within the broader contemplation to attain love, the retreatant is asked to “see how God dwells in creations—in the elements, giving being, in the plants, causing growth, in the animals, producing sensation, and in humankind, granting the gift of understanding.”⁵⁰⁸ In other words, providence active in creation. The retreatant is then asked to consider how the divine action in all of creation includes God’s action for and in oneself. Through the process of the contemplation, one comes to an engagement with God’s

⁵⁰⁴ Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises*, paras. 230–237.

⁵⁰⁵ Loyola, para. 230.

⁵⁰⁶ Loyola, paras. 232–233.

⁵⁰⁷ “Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my entire will, all that I have and possess. You gave it all to me; to you Lord I give it all back. All is yours, dispose of it entirely according to your will. Give me the grace to love you, for that is enough for me.” Loyola, para. 234.

⁵⁰⁸ Loyola, para. 235.

free action in creation. This engagement is not a dissipation of mystery but a coming to act within mystery. The riddle is preserved, yet one's perspective on the riddle is changed—the conjectures surrounding the riddle are changed. In a Wittgensteinian vein, the facts of the world are unchanged, but the world is changed.

David Burrell describes a process similar to the transition between the First Principle and Foundation and the *Contemplatio* between the formulation of God as *Ipsum Esse Subsistens* and predicating perfections of God. Burrell notes: "Whatever is said about *being* is always elucidated in terms of acting or doing."⁵⁰⁹ Burrell's broader project is to demonstrate how the grammatical space left by the limits on understanding God yields positive, albeit severely limited, predication.⁵¹⁰ "One upshot, then, of stating that to be God is to be would be realizing that such a one is perfect. But that realization adds nothing to the original formula."⁵¹¹ This is equally true of the literal meaning of the First Principle and Foundation and the *Contemplatio*. The *Contemplatio* may be considered progress over against the First Principle only insofar as it is in action.⁵¹² As such, the *Contemplatio* is even more denaturing in the Rawlsian estimation than the First Principle. Though it is perhaps more communicable insofar as it can be seen happening—a person who sees God in all things acts in ways that are puzzling, riddling.

⁵⁰⁹ Burrell, *Exercises in Religious Understanding*, 104.

⁵¹⁰ Burrell, *Aquinas*, 8.

⁵¹¹ Burrell, *Exercises in Religious Understanding*, 106.

⁵¹² St. Teresa of Avila describes how active love of neighbor is evidence for love of God, though love of God remains mysterious. "The most certain sign, in my opinion, as to whether or not we are observing these two laws is whether we observe well the love of neighbor. We cannot know whether or not we love God, although there are strong indications for recognizing that we do love Him; but we can know whether we love our neighbor." There is a similar dynamic of progress in activity while remaining within the great riddle of God, as in Ignatius's *Contemplatio*. Avila, "The Interior Castle," sec. V.3.8.

The spiritual movement of the *Exercises* described by Ignatius is fundamentally a graced transformation operating through and in human beings. In another of his writings, Ignatius attempts to explain the relationship of human and divine means: “Although all this can be taught only by the unction of the Holy Spirit and by the prudence which God our Lord communicates to those who trust in his divine majesty, nevertheless the way can at least be opened by some suggestion which help and prepare for the effect that is to be produced by divine grace.”⁵¹³ The role of the director is to open ways for and with the Spirit. Riddle always circumscribes prescription, yet the counsels of the spiritual pedagogue help make concrete one’s response to encountering the mystery. The concreteness of spiritual pedagogy provides rough ground with sufficient traction to move in the great riddle.

⁵¹³ *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus and Their Complementary Norms* (Saint Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996), para. 414.

7.0 Conclusion

This thesis has attempted to provide a theoretical framework to characterize the fundamental tension in authoritative spiritual pedagogy. How can a human being speak with authority about God and God's will, given that God is in principle mysterious? In a more practical formulation: how can one understand and teach what it is to be perfect as one's heavenly father is perfect? The role of the spiritual pedagogue is to help individuals and communities grapple with the questions of who God is and what God wants of them. Despite spiritual pedagogy's importance as a form of speech in many communities, and its inherent philosophical and theological interest, remarkably little has been written about the claims and status of spiritual authority. The spiritual pedagogue does not possess the answers, at least not in a way that she can properly understand, but she does steward them, in Paul's language. To examine this question, this thesis drew on both a venerable tradition of sacred riddling, as well as a Wittgensteinian reading of Thomas Aquinas's metaphysics and account of virtues (so-called Grammatical Thomism). I argued that the spiritual pedagogue opens new possibilities of language and action by imaginatively projecting beyond well-trod ways of acting and speaking to novel attempts to answer great riddles. The spiritual pedagogue is steward of great riddles that are not her own. She draws on traditional conjectures for answering these riddles and continues the attempt to answer, knowing the riddle remains.

The thesis began by distinguishing spiritual pedagogy from other forms of teaching and authority in order to highlight its distinctive characteristics and tensions. The introduction framed the question of spiritual pedagogy through Søren Kierkegaard's compelling, though underdrawn, account of spiritual authority, and his intriguing, albeit only occasional, use of riddle language. Kierkegaard distinguished between knowledge of things divine and worldly,

between the authority of the apostle and of the genius. This is not a distinction in extent but in kind. Kierkegaard deploys this distinction as a powerful critique against most of what passed for spiritual pedagogy in his day—namely the institutional authority of the Danish State Church and more broadly, Church authority as social authority. Kierkegaard's critique is not against spiritual pedagogy as such. Spiritual authority is necessary, but easily and destructively conflated with social convention and institutional roles. Though critique of spiritual authority as an institutional role remains common and necessary, Kierkegaard's distinction of properly spiritual authority remains apposite in many ecclesial contexts.

For Kierkegaard, knowledge of God, upon which spiritual authority should be founded, is absolute paradox. Despite this, Kierkegaard keeps writing and attending church. Through his pseudonym Anti-Climacus, Kierkegaard argues that coming to know God and teach about God requires being transformed by God's call. One cannot remain a disinterested aesthete about knowledge of God. Philosophy, theology, and spirituality are all personally engaging and intertwined for Kierkegaard. To know God is to be formed by God in divine virtues, virtues which cannot be fully understood. To know God and teach with authority, as an Apostle does, is to live out the great riddle one teaches.

Kierkegaard's conception of spiritual pedagogy is compelling, but it is unsatisfying. Though Kierkegaard is right that revelation is timeless, spiritual pedagogues speak in time with expressions passed down through history. Spiritual pedagogy is self-subverting but also traditional. Kierkegaard gives little positive account of history, which in the case of Christianity he takes to be a virtue. The scholarship of those aspects of Kierkegaard's thought most concerned with spiritual authority are less studied than other aspects of his thought. Kierkegaard points in a helpful direction but can only take the account so far. Grammatical

Thomism incorporates many of the virtues of Kierkegaard's analysis, in part through Kierkegaard's influence on Wittgenstein. Grammatical Thomism adds to this the sense of tradition and practice of Thomas Aquinas. The riddling account of spiritual pedagogy developed through the thesis overcomes the limitations of Kierkegaard's conception both logically and historically.

The first chapter moved from Kierkegaard's largely ahistorical account of spiritual pedagogy to an historical sketch of spiritual pedagogy as an ecclesial tradition from the Apostle Paul to the early modern period. The chapter sets the stage for an historical reading of spiritual pedagogy by raising the distinction between modern and pre-modern challenges to spiritual authority. In the pre-modern period, the question of which spiritual authority was correct was hotly contested. One group's teacher was another group's heretic. Owing to changes in social construction and understanding in the modern period, most notably liberalism, the prior question arises of whether a spiritual authority is legitimate as a category of authority. The question becomes not whether so-and-so is a spiritual authority, but whether true spiritual authority exists. Both questions point to what justifies a spiritual authority, though the impact of the question is sharper in the modern formulation insofar as there is no presumption in favor of having a spiritual authority. Answering the modern question requires identifying the characteristics of spiritual authority and its relationship to other types of authority.

Through a roughly chronological reading of prominent spiritual pedagogues, the chapter developed three characteristics capturing the practice and problem of spiritual pedagogy. First, that spiritual teachers seek the improvement of those under their authority. Second, that spiritual authority is directed to and ultimately validated by what is in principle

mysterious. The spiritual pedagogue reaches for extended language and analogy by necessity rather than choice. Third, spiritual authority teaches an approach to mystery *within* a form of life that is *not exhausted by* that form of life. The subsequent chapters attempt to account for how the characteristics of authoritative spiritual pedagogy cohere and are concretely instructive while preserving the mystery.

The second chapter began the argument that Grammatical Thomism is an appropriate method to articulate authoritative spiritual pedagogy, starting with Thomas Aquinas's own status as a spiritual pedagogue. As Jean-Pierre Torrell rightly emphasizes, Thomas was a "spiritual master". His philosophical and theological accomplishments are rooted in his underlying spiritual pedagogy. Like any great mind, Thomas inspired the vast intellectual enterprise that is Thomism. Grammatical Thomists are both a small and internally diverse group of thinkers united by their use of Wittgensteinian grammar in order to make friendly amendments, or at least clarifications, to Thomas. Reading Thomas Aquinas through Wittgenstein is a controversial minority project among Thomists, especially in recent decades. The grammatical approach helps read Thomas as a spiritual pedagogue whose analysis of the language of God arises from reflection on his pedagogical project. Wittgensteinian approaches are used to complement Thomas's project. The chapter locates Grammatical Thomism within Thomas scholarship. Grammatical Thomism shares some conclusions with Transcendental Thomism and the opening provided by Bernard Lonergan's reading of Thomas. The use of Wittgenstein in Thomas scholarship and theology more generally is treated with suspicion because Wittgenstein's sensitivity to grammar and context is taken to be anti-realist. He is further accused of reducing metaphysics to mere talk about talk.

Given the gravity of the charges against Grammatical Thomism, chapters three and four addressed the criticism of Wittgensteinian anti-realism. These chapters argued that Wittgensteinian grammar, in its flexibility, is adaptively oriented towards reality, and also that it provides a better account of religious language than classical Thomism. Chapter three begins with grammar as a descriptive project. Grammar rules do not correspond to reality as such but allow for more or less useful speech about and interaction with the world. One is trained into a grammar and so trained into a skillful mode of being in the world that is open to ongoing adaptation. The final section argues that direct reference theories, most prominently Saul Kripke's work, presume training in a grammar and way of life. Wittgenstein's theory is more philosophically compelling than other realist theories.

Chapter four focused on Wittgenstein's treatment of religious language. The chapter lays out two main schools of Wittgensteinian philosophy of religion: the nonsense school and the particular language game school. The first school holds that religious language, including spiritual pedagogy, is nonsensical and therefore useless. The second school holds that religious language games are much like other language games. They are sensible for those within the religious community though make far less sense to those outside the relevant community. The chapter argues that while recognizing the logical and grammatical discontinuities of religious language, the first school unfairly discounts religious language. The second school attempts to distinguish religious language from other types but does not go far enough. By softening the impact of the Book of Job, D.Z. Phillips illustrates the inadequacy of the distinction in the particular language school account.

Chapter five presented riddle language as both a way of hybridizing the two Wittgensteinian accounts and as being rooted in the spiritual pedagogy tradition through

Anselm of Bec. Inspired by Wittgensteinian readings of *Proslogion*, the chapter begins by reading *Monologion* as a work of spiritual pedagogy self-conscious of the riddling character of speaking about God and the way to God. Building on Cora Diamond's and Stephen Mulhall's Wittgensteinian account of riddles, the chapter argues that the language of spiritual pedagogy is a type of robust conjectural language—a way of speaking around a riddle without solving the riddle. One creatively projects from familiar uses of language, creating new, conjectural uses as a way of attempting to solve the riddle. Conjecture, by definition, does not rise to the level of proof because it does not show how a statement is true. A tradition can develop a largely consistent set of conjecture attempting to solve the riddle and self-consciously recognizing the failure to solve the riddle. The chapter ends by reading Thomas's account of "inchoate beatitude" as riddling. Though Thomas resists equating the moral life to contemplation, he argues that the moral life disposes one to contemplation. The moral life provides material for conjecture as one is formed by great riddles.

The sixth chapter applied the riddle theory developed in the previous chapters to Thomas's account of teaching, especially through the virtues of prudence and counsel. The chapter begins by revisiting the tensions involved in spiritual teaching from a new angle. John Rawls's brief critique of spiritual pedagogy inadvertently highlights the riddling position of the spiritual pedagogue. The chapter contrasted Rawlsian prudential reflection—which must transparently manifest how such reflection *itself* functions—with prudence open to divine providence through the *duplex regula*, which is a riddle. The spiritual pedagogue teaches the rules of the conjecture seeking a solution to the great riddle, but only the riddle is fixed—not the rules for its interpretation. The chapter moves to Thomas's account of the spiritual pedagogue teaching with God. Thomas's counsel of the third type, i.e., the cooperation of

human habituation and the Holy Spirit, is riddling counsel. The human pedagogue and the Spirit jointly offer counsel, but the human pedagogue cannot account for the Spirit's action even when cooperating with the Spirit. The chapter concluded by applying this riddling model to Ignatius Loyola's discernment of spirits, in particular the spiritual pedagogue's role in identifying "consolation without cause" as evidence of the divine will. Such an identification requires both applying conjectures of spiritual pedagogy by going back to the figures discussed in chapter one *and* explicitly recognizing an unsolved riddle as evidence for the divine will within the context of spiritual exercises.

What I have demonstrated in and through my examination is that the pedagogue teaches conjectures around the riddle but does not collapse the riddle into a dead metaphor. The riddle of God's being, action, and call is respected, yet the pedagogue continues to speak, often eloquently and concretely, to communities and individuals seeking spiritual growth.

7.1 Where to Go from Here

In my early sketches of this thesis included a chapter on the metaphysics of riddles and engagement with riddles. As I began work on this chapter, it became clear that such an undertaking was too great to fit within the frame of this thesis. Implicit in spiritual pedagogy is an evolving structure of sense-making trying to cope with riddles that do not make sense. Adrian Moore observes that metaphysics, which he provisionally defines as "the most general attempt to make sense of things" includes self-reflection on one's own sense making.⁵¹⁴ Irad Kimhi makes a related but sharper, more provocative point: "Philosophical logic...is a first-personal engagement from *within* the activity of thinking, one which allows the articulation

⁵¹⁴ Moore, *The Evolution of Modern Metaphysics*, 1.

and comprehension of thinking to emerge from out of itself. The personal, so understood, *is* the logical.”⁵¹⁵ The logical structure of sense-making, that is metaphysics, is itself personal.

The encounter with and creative power of great riddles challenges closed philosophical systems. The philosophical interest of spiritual pedagogy raises a wider question: to what extent must philosophy itself be riddling soul craft? While philosophy as such does not hold ‘revealed’ great riddles, it does variously claim or suppress riddles of absolute values that arise and find their use in the context of human living. The goodness or badness of the universe is a philosophical riddle, for example. Disinterested philosophy is itself a stance on these riddles, a stance of collapse which is itself formative, even if unintentionally. Clarifying the riddling approach of spiritual pedagogy within the Christian tradition is a first step to finding philosophical analogues and, also, towards better articulating the relationship between riddling as philosophical and theological acts.

Erich Przywara’s metaphysics, particularly his *reductio in mysterium*, promises to be a productive dialogue partner with the riddling approach and a concrete way to begin to address the question of riddles and metaphysics.⁵¹⁶ Przywara’s metaphysics is founded upon the double mystery of God and humanity and the tension (*Spannung*) between them.⁵¹⁷ Spiritual pedagogy is one instance (of many) of this tension, though a particularly interesting one given its attempt to speak between these two mysteries. Przywara’s insistence that the dissimilarity of God and creatures is greater than any similarity can be read in dialogue with a

⁵¹⁵ Kimhi, *Thinking and Being*, 1.

⁵¹⁶ Genealogically, Przywara is an appropriate next step insofar as he influenced Lonergan, who partly opened the way for a grammatical approach to Thomas. Burrell himself notes this influence, see: David B. Burrell, “The Analogy of Being: Invention of the Antichrist or the Wisdom of God? – Edited by Thomas Joseph White, O.P.,” *Modern Theology* 28, no. 3 (2012): 578, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0025.2012.01769.x>.

⁵¹⁷ Erich Przywara, *Analogia Entis: Metaphysics- Original Structure and Universal Rhythm*, trans. John R. Betz and David Bentley Hart (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2014).

Wittgensteinian account of projecting words from the familiar to the transcendent. Przywara's analogy of service (*Dienst*) provides a parallel account of forms of life within creation to the account of riddles and prudence.

Przywara's is situated as both an inheritor of the Thomist tradition in dialogue with the phenomenological currents of his day.⁵¹⁸ Przywara and Heidegger work in similar intellectual cultures. A small but interesting literature relating Heidegger and Przywara can provide the beginnings of a dialogue between Przywara and Wittgenstein.⁵¹⁹ Przywara's metaphysical work reaches into questions of spirituality and by extension authority, particularly his work on Ignatius's *Spiritual Exercises*.⁵²⁰ Rowan Williams has briefly explored the relationship between Wittgenstein and Przywara on showing, though further connections are yet to be drawn.⁵²¹ Given the renewed interest in Przywara, it is likely that various avenues for dialogue will emerge in the coming years.

⁵¹⁸ Przywara wrote on an impressive array of thinkers, including Kant and Kierkegaard. Erich Przywara, *Kant Heute: Eine Sichtung, Kant Heute* (Munich: Von R. Oldenbourg, 1930), <https://www.degruyter.com/view/title/307015>; Erich Przywara, *Das Geheimnis Kierkegaards, Das Geheimnis Kierkegaards* (Munich: Von R. Oldenbourg, 1929), <https://www.degruyter.com/view/title/319362>.

⁵¹⁹ See, for example, Stephen Mulhall, *On Being in the World: Wittgenstein and Heidegger on Seeing Aspects* (Oxford: Routledge, 2014); Lee Braver, *Groundless Grounds: A Study of Wittgenstein and Heidegger* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2012), <https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/9780262016896.001.0001>.

⁵²⁰ Przywara, *Deus Semper Maior*.

⁵²¹ Williams, *Christ, the Heart of Creation*, 247.

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