THE ONTOLOGICAL RELATIVITY OF RELIGIOUS MEANING AND TRUTH*

Introduction

This paper is an exploratioin of the logic of inter-religious dialogue. The central concern is whether significant discourse is possible between different religious worlds. But unless we are first clear about the nature of religious worlds or worldviews, and have explicated the special type of radical difference which holds between different religious ontologies, the issues concerning the possibility of intelligible transformations between world religions remain eclipsed. Of course, this investigation is of special interest to philosophy of religion, and indeed to the enterprise of ontology in general. For the science of ontology includes the formal and systematic study of worldviews, whether they be religious or secular. Thus, we remain in the dark about the nature of religious thought, and of religious experience itself, until ontological light is shed on the nature of worldviews. And here I am most sympathetic with Professor Ninian Smart's suggestion that the philosophy of religion be best construed as "the philosophy of worldviews".[1] He rightly notes that this radical suggestion " lies something about religious studies", and he correctly sses that "what is needed is a sort of comparative systematics." It is precisely the aim of this paper to contribute towards the development of such comparative systematics.

This task is complicated by the fact that the term "ontology" is equivocal in sense. It means one thing in the context of contemporary analytical philosophy and another in the classical metaphysical tradition. In the former it is taken to be the study of "what there is", a study which is akin to the scientific investigation of *facts*, and originates from the post-Fregean logical language of thought. Quine is a good exemplar of this sense of "ontology"; for him it is a branch of Zoology which is essentially concerned with the logic of facts as this is formally disclosed in propositional logic and quantification theory. By contrast, and in the second sense, "ontology" is the science of the *kinds* of things there are, a formal science which is primarily concerned with the *categories of being*, with categorial structures which constitute worldviews, in short, the science of systems of sense and intelligibility. This classical sense of "ontology" originates from the Aristotelian logical language of thought. (The enterprise of ontology as it evolved from this logical tradition is fundamentally different from the post-Fregean programme.) Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz are some eminent exemplars of classical ontology. Their ontological concerns cannot, without gross distortion, be accommodated in the logical language of quantification. They were concerned with making *sense* of the world, with proposing that categorial scheme or worldview which renders the world and experience taken as a whole *intelligible*. Their metaphysical arguments were directed not at empirical facts but more fundamentally at establishing that worldview which made the *most sense* of the world. In this respect the enterprise of classical ontology is fundamentally different from the modern tradition which derives from Frege and Russell.

In effect, then the term "ontology" is *systematically ambiguous* between the two logical languages of thought. It makes all the difference in the world whether we philosophize or ontologize in one language or the other. It becomes crucial to systematically disambiguate our ontological concerns and to become quite self-conscious about which logical language we are speaking. If we confuse the two frameworks for ontology gross incoherence results. For example, the concept of "world" in the contemporary quantificational language is a *completely different* notion from the concept of "world" in the classical categorical language. In the former sense the world consists of an extensional totality of

facts, and different possible worlds consist of different sets of counter-facts. In the latter sense, however, a world consists of a categorial scheme or worldview which *defines* what is *intelligible* and makes sense, and hence what can count as a *possible* fact. Here, different possible worlds are different systems of intelligibility in which propositional content *itself* differs, so what *makes sense* in one world may not make sense in another. Different worlds have different categorial structures and are not merely different counterfactual situations. The difference between the world of Spinoza and Leibniz, or between the Christian world and the Hindu world, is a difference in categorial structure or worldview rather than different counterfactual situations.

In the light of this ambiguity in "ontology" it is desirable (explicitly) to mark the difference between the two languages of thought in order to avoid confusion and incoherence. Let us call the classical language of ontology *"categorial"* or *"intensional"* *ontology*, while the contemporary post-Fregean language of ontology will be called *"quantificational"* or *"extensional"*. It must be stressed that *all of the terms* of logic and ontology (fact, object, referent, sense, world, truth, argument, meaning etc.,) are systematically ambiguous between the two languages of thought. And needless to say this holds for religious thought as well as for the interpretation of religious experience. It makes a world of difference whether we "do" philosophy of religion in one logical language or the other. Religious "meaning", "truth", "affirmation" "belief", "argument", "rationality", "existence" etc., will mean one thing in quantificational ontology and another in categorial ontology. For example, "the ontological proof" of God's existence will get very different interpretations in the two languages. Thus, it is a critical question for philosophy of religion which language of thought is best suited for its concerns. The very *identity* of the discipline is in question.

Nevertheless, contemporary philosophers of religion, in the analytical tradition at least, have for the most part either adopted the Fregean quantificatioal language as their organon for interpreting religious thought and experience, or else they have resisted this pull, as the later Wittgenstein did, and moved to the rough ground of natural language to explore the "language game" of the religious forms of life. In both cases the classical alternative for metaphysical analysis has been either eclipsed, abandoned, or

forgotten. But it is *this* alternative, the categorial language of ontology, which provides the appropriate organon for the philosophy of worldviews. It is a thesis of this paper that quantificational ontology is *inherently* unsuited for the exploration of worldviews and the logic of transformations between religious worlds. It is through the categorial ontological language that the logic of interreligious dialogue becomes manifest. *And this is the language I shall develop and speak in the present paper.*[2]

The language of categorial ontology *is* in need of development. We are familiar enough with *ontological relativity* in the context of the language of quantificational ontology. Quine and others *have* already developed this form of extensional and referential relativity. The source of ontological relativity here is to be found in the alleged radical indeterminacy of the *referent* and of *reference*. The referent in extensional ontology is taken to be pre-conceptually given, descriptively indeterminate and thus perpetually open for reinterpretation. Any hypothesis concerning the referent remains conjecture and is necessarily *relative* to some theoretical framework. This form of referential indeterminacy and relativity is the ground for Quine's scepticism concerning radical translation. And if one were to extend this language of thought to questions of possible worlds and discourse between different worlds it would naturally take the form of the " possible worlds semantics " recently developed by such formal semanticists as Kripke, Lewis and Plantinga. But ontological relativity has not yet been clarified for the *categorial* language of thought. And this will be a primary objective of the present paper. For it is only in the light of the ontological relativity of religious meaning and truth that the real challenge for understanding the logic of discourse between religious worlds can be appreciated.

Preliminary Sketch

Thus, the first task of this paper, in explicating ontological relativity for the categorial language of thought, is to make clear the concept of a *religious world*. A religious world, like any worldview, consists of a particular categorial structure which determines what makes sense and is possible for that world. Different worlds have different sense structures, so what makes sense in one world fails to make sense in another. The categorial shape of the Hindu world, for example, is different from the

categorial configuration of the Christian world. The terms " saṁsāra " and " karma " make sense in the Hindu world, but not in the Christian world. Conversely, the notions of " original sin ", " salvation ", " the Christ " are intelligible in the Christian world but are out of place (not simply false) in the Hindu world. This means that *sense* (propositional content) is relative to a given world, so any term in natural language remains *indeterminate* in sense until its world-context is specified. Another way to put this is that any given term in ordinary language is systematically ambiguous with respect to its possible world interpretations. And systematic ambiguity indicates that the *alleged* single term is really a multiplicity of *different* terms. Thus, the *word* " I " is systematically ambiguous in sense (and reference) across different world-systems; it has different senses in the worlds of Spinoza, Hume, Descartes, Hobbes, Heidegger, as well as the world contexts of the Hindu or the Buddhist.

It is with the clarification of " worlds " in categorial ontology that the *relativity of sense* becomes intelligible. For such clarification reveals that a world is an integral, unified, monistic system of sense. And the implication is that there are *no common terms* between worlds. Furthermore, the categorial language of thought reveals that sense is *prior to* truth and reference; considerations of sense and intelligibility or understanding are prior to considerations of reference, truth, assertion and belief. " Meaning" in this philosophical language form is not given by truth-conditions (as in the quantificational language) but by sense conditions or categorial configuration. What makes sense is thereby a *candidate* for truth, and what fails to make sense is *neither true nor false*. Thus, it becomes clear that *reference and* truth are ontologically relative *because* of the relativity of sense. So there can be no common or identical sense, reference or truth between different worlds. Relations are constituted *within* a given world, not between worlds; there are no relations between worlds. Worlds are *radically incommensurable*.

Ontological relativity implies the radical incommensurability of worlds, and this challenges the possibility of a common univocal propositional *truth* between different religious worlds. But if there is *neither common sense nor truth between worlds* how is interreligious dialogue possible? More generally, how can there be *any* intelligible transformation (conversion, mutual understanding,

dialogue, translation, etc.) between different religious ontologies? This is the *transcendental problem for religious thought*. If different worlds are radically incommensurable, and if there is no common truth between worlds, then rational discourse between worlds seems to be precluded. For a necessary condition of such discourse is that there be *some common ground* between worlds. But equally, a necessary condition of *dialogue* between *different* worlds is that they be worlds apart. Thus, the possibility of rational discourse between religious worlds is threatened *both* by radical incommensurability or systematic ambiguity between worlds, *and* by reducing the radical differences between worlds by postulating some common ground between worlds in univocity of sense. Genuine dialogue between different religious worlds would be destroyed by both radical ambiguity and complete univocity. The resolution of the transcendental problem requires that some common ground between different worlds be excavated without falling into the reduction of *material* univocity. This paper aims at moving towards such a resolution.

Of course the transcendental problem requires a *transcendental solution*. For the "common ground" cannot be found *within* any given world, nor can it be found in the vacuous logical space *between* worlds either. The question of there being an *absolute truth* which holds for any possible world requires a *transcategorial* move to the pre-ontological conditions which make any world possible. But transcendental or absolute truth must be clearly distinguished from the relative truth which is constituted within a given world. Once a *world* is "affirmed" or "embraced" the *possibility* of relative or propositional truth arises. But this must not be confused with considerations of the *affirmation or truth of a world* as a whole. In the categorial language form *ontological commitment* is a matter of world-affirmation, and this consists of transcategorial acts which give rise to meaning and hence the possibility of truth.[3] It would be some sort of category mistake to raise questions about the truth of ontological commitments which made truth possible in the first place. In any case it is in the transcategorial condition of ontological commitment that one finds the essence of religious experience as well as the source of rational discourse between different religious worlds. The essence of religious experience is to be found precisely in those transformations to transcategorial, pre-ontological consciousness in which

ontological commitments are made. It is here that the logic of "ultimate concern" is to be addressed. For it is in the understanding of ontological commitment that the meaning of faith, religious truth, and belief are to be found. It is in ontological commitment that a world becomes alive with significance, and a life is kindled with meaning and value.

If this is so, if the essence of religious experience for any world is concerned with the transformation to transcategorial awareness in which all meaning and value arises, then the question of rational discourse between religious worlds becomes focused upon the logic of ontological commitment. What is the nature of such transcategorial acts ? How can there be absolute truth for any world ? What is involved in " choice " between different worlds ? Are there criteria for adjudication between different worlds ? Are there good reasons or arguments for making a commitment to one world over another ? And does the affirmation of one world mean the denial of all others ? Is the rationality of ontological commitment the same as the rationality which is constituted within a given world ? These are some of the questions we must be concerned with in addressing the transcendental problem of religious thought.

Once it becomes clear that *religious truth* is transcendental, transcategorial, pre-propositional and in a special sense "absolute" we are less likely to confuse it with *propositional truth* which is categorial, relative and constituted within a given world. The rationality of ontological commitment is of a different nature from the worldly propositional rationality with which we are more familiar. For example, the principle of excluded middle which governs propositional truth does not apply to ontological commitment. The *affirmation of a world* in ontological commitment is of a different type from the affirmation of a proposition within a given world. Thus, to say "Yes" to Jesus is not to affirm a proposition but to commit oneself to a form of life and to be reborn into a new world. And it becomes clear too, that to say "Yes" to Jesus is not tantamount to saying "No" to Lord Krishna or "No" to the Buddha, etc. For worlds do not stand within the categorial opposition of proposition where the law of excluded middle applies. Religious truth is concerned primarily with the *origin* of meaning and value, with the sort of meaning which gives significance to one's

life and makes sense of the world. Its primary interest is not in propositional truth and facts.

But this is not to say that " anything goes " in ontological commitment, that it is arbitrary, irrational, subjective (in a pejorative sense) and without standards and criteria. On the contrary, precisely *because* it is a matter of ultimate concern it is far too important to be reduced to the form of rationality which holds for propositional assertion and truth. The transcendental rationality of ontological commitment is of a different sort and is in need of clarification and explication. For it is evident that *ontologists do argue* with one another and their arguments are better or worse. Ontologists argue for the superiority and preferability of a *worldview* or categorial scheme, and their arguments do not take the form of propositional logic. Instead, the true ontologist is concerned with *making the most sense* of the world and experience as a whole. Ontological arguments are *sense-arguments*, for in the categorial language of thought *ontology is the science of sense and meaning*, the science of interpretation—" ontological hermeneutics ". When, for example, Spinoza presents his worldview, his discourse aims at showing that his categorial scheme makes the most sense of the world, renders experience most intelligible. And this is what is at issue when he argues that Descartes' worldview is incoherent; the incoherence here is an incoherence of intelligibility The same holds for such eminent ontologists as Leibniz, Berkeley, Hume, Plato, Whitehead, to name a few. Thus, once we overcome the mistake of reducing ontological (transcategorial) truth to propositional truth the way becomes clear for a closer look at the nature of metaphysical arguments and the logic of ontological commitment.

We may complete this preliminary sketch by directly focusing on the theme of the nature of discourse between religious worlds. In stressing that ontology is the *science* of interpretation and sense I am interested in distinguishing metaphysical-religious thought from both natural science and poetry. The science of ontology is unlike the natural and social sciences in not being primarily concerned with propositional truth and discovery of discrete facts. And it is unlike poetry and poetic discourse precisely in being a science which exhibits its unique form of rationality and truth. On the other hand, ontology is akin to

both—it is similar to factual science insofar as it is a rational enterprise and in the respect that scientific theory is a form of interpretation and making sense of the world. And it is akin to poetic discourse in the respect that poetry is an exploration of *transcategorial* sense. Poetry thrives on metaphor, and metaphor is precisely the middle way between radical ambiguity and complete univocity which leads to the resolution of the transcendental problem. It is through metaphor (functional category-mistakes) that the visionary and revisionary ontologist leads us from the world of *common sense* into the radically new ontological space of his proposed and recommended worldview. Thus, the creative vision of the innovative ontologist or religious revolutionary takes flight in metaphor and analogy and is in this respect metaphysical poetry.

Mataphor, then, is the vehicle of intelligible movement between different worlds. It is the key to understanding the nature of inter-religious dialogue. Any intelligible transformation between different religious worlds (conversion, understanding, ontological commitment, translatability, etc.) comes into focus in the light of metaphor. It becomes the *literal truth* in transcendental or trans-categorial awareness. And it seems that what began in ontological relativity ends in the " common " transcendental consciousness which is the absolute transcategorial ground of any possible religious world. In this consciousness it is legitimate and significant to ask— How many different religious worlds may I whole-heartedly embrace at the same time? It is not obvious that the reply must be—" One and only one;"

SECTION 1

Categorial Logic and the Transcendental Problem of Inter-Religious Dialogue

(*i*) *Is Rational Discourse Between Religious Worlds Possible ?*

A primary concern for religious understanding is whether genuine dialogue and communication is possible between different religious worlds. The world of the Hindu and the world of the Christian, for example, seem so radically different, not only in their metaphysical commitments but also in the most mundane details of practical religious life, that they appear to be incommensurable. What is intelligible in the Hindu religious conscio-

usness fails to make sense for the believing Christian. But if these two forms of religious life constitute different forms of intelligibility, different models for interpreting and making sense of the world and human experience, in short, different *languages*, then we may well wonder whether rational dialogue between different worls in possible. For such dialogue seems to presuppose that there must be shared meanings, common forms of intelligibility, common objects of reference, common facts, hence, shared ontological commitments. But such " common ground " is precisely what is in question between different ontological languages or worldviews. How can there be rational discourse between different religious worlds ?

And yet a *prima facie* " fact " of religious life appears to be the exchange that takes place between different religions. Hindus and Christians *talk* to one another and believe themselves to be communicating. Sometimes the profound transformation of religious conversion takes place and one is reborn into a new form of life, has entered a new reality. How are we to make sense of such religious phenomena in the light of the apparent incommensurability of different religious ontologies ?

Furthermore, it is often assumed in religious life that to be committed to one religion precludes commitment to another. Some people seem to think that one cannot be both a Christian and a Hindu at the same time. An obvious reason for this is the assumption that different religions are incompatible as regards commitment, belief, and truth. If, for example, I am a believing Christian I affirm the Christian worldview as true and this is taken to mean that other religious faiths are incoherent, unintelligible or false. And the obvious way to proceed with respect to non-believers would be to bring the truth to them and bring them to the truth.

Here again, the incommensurability thesis threatens the possibility of inter-religious dialogue. For incommensurability between different worlds entails not only that different worlds have nothing *materially* in common, no identities or similarities, but equally that there are no material *differences* or contrasts. No rational or intelligible relations would be possible between different worlds. So different worlds are *neither compatible nor incompatible*. The rational first principles of excluded-middle and non-contradiction together with the corollary principle of

bi-valence (that every proposition is either true or false) appear not to hold *between* different worlds. And if this is so then the very rationality of discourse between different religious languages is called into question. Is there a logic to inter-religious dialogue ? Is such dialogue possible ? This is the transcendental problem of religious thought.

(ii) *What is a religious world* ?

The formulation of the transcendental problem turns upon the thesis that different religious worlds are incommensurable. And this thesis can be properly grasped only when the concept of a religious world is explicated in the *categorial* language of thought. It was pointed out in the preliminary sketch that the concept of a world in the classical categorial sense differs fundamentally from the predominant current use of the term in analytical philosophy. When contemporary ontologists or logical theorists speak of " different possible world " they speak within the language of quantificational ontology and intend something quite different from the classical notion of different worlds. Formal semanticists, for example, who speak the quantificational language take different worlds to differ as to the *facts*, so that what is true in one world is false in another; the world consists of facts. The world in which the book is on the table, for example, is different from the possible world in which the book is *not* on the table. A different world is merely a counterfactual situation. The actual world is taken to be the totality of discrete facts, and different possible worlds consist of different possible counter-facts. One counter-fact is sufficient to differentiate different worlds. The very meaning of " possible " is essentially tied to the opposition between true/false, which in turn is connected with negation.

By contrast, in the categorial language of ontology a world consists of a categorial structure in which what is to count as a fact is itself radically revised. Intelligibility or predicability is determined by the mutual arrangements of basic *categories* which constitute a given world, so what makes sense in one world does not make sense in another. Sense is *defined* and *constituted* by a particular categorial scheme or ontological paradigm. The history of Western thought may be seen as a sequence of different ontological paradigms or languages which have been proposed or

recommended by different revisionary metaphysicians. The world of Plato, for example, differs in this respect from the world of Spinoza or Hume or Hobbes or Leibniz. Each of these ontologists proposes a different paradigm or language-form. Each presents a different way of *making sense* the world; and of course *of the the world itself* is reconstituted in each categorial scheme. [4]

Similarly, any given religion is constituted and determined by an ontology in this classical sense; different religious worlds involve different categorial structures, different language forms or ontological paradigms. For example, the categorial scheme of the Biblical tradition is radically different from that of Hindu scripture. What makes sense in the Hindu world does not make sense in the Christian world. The predicative possibilities differ in these two ontologies, and this means that *propositional* formation or content *itself* is different. What is category-correct in one world is *unintelligible*, not simply false, in another. What counts as an individual, in one world, indeed, the very status of being an individual, does not hold in the other. For in the Hindu ontology, the individual ego is not to be identified with the true Self, which is universal, undifferentiated, and beyond name and form. Existential status is taken to be bound in ignorance, and individuation is taken to be relatively valid. And the identity of an individual is *perpetual* in time, the latter being cyclical and beginningless. For this reason a person, taken as the individually existing ego, does not *begin* to exist with birth and case to be with death, but exist perpetually. This doctrine of existential status of the individual *requires* the doctrine of rebirth and reincarnation. The notions of *karma* and *samsāra* are mutually bound in this ontology, But these notions (and phenomena) are not only lacking in the Christian ontology but are *inconceivable*. They make sense and are possible only within the context of the Hindu categorial scheme or worldview.

On the other hand, the Christian ontology has a different categorial structure and reflects different sense commitments. A theistic ontology in which the realm of individual entities is created in time, having a definite duration existentially, and wholly other (categorially distinct) from Infinite Being or God, gives a very different meaning to the concept of an individual. An individual person, for example, is created at some point in time, and individuality remains in some way even after death.

However, in the Hindu ontology, the meaning and ultimate status of an individual is quite different. The notions of *karma* and *samsāra* and *reincarnation* do not make sense in the Christian ontology. It begins to become clear that all of the concepts and categories of the Hindu world—" time ", " individual ", " birth ", " death ", salvation ", " immortality ", " existence ", " person ", etc.,—are mutually defined within that paradigm. Likewise, the notions of original sin (as constitutive of finite beings) and of Christ-being (the unique Son of God) are out of place in the Hindu world. The Christ, as a being who is at once fully finite (individual) and fully infinite, has a transcategorial status which cannot arise in the Hindu categorial structure. And it begins to emerge here, too, that all the concepts and categories of the Christian worldview are mutually defined within the Christian ontological paradigm.[5]

(*iii*) *Logical Monism and the Organic Unity of Ontological Paradigms*

The radical incommensurability of different ontological paradigms takes on greater clarity when it is seen that in the categorial language a paradigm is a coherent *system* of sense which has "organic" internal unity. The organic unity of sense in a given categorial scheme becomes evident in the categorial language of thought which takes the form of logical monism. In logical monism no term *can* have sense in atomic isolation, for the sense of a term is a function of its place in particular monistic categorial scheme. And this stands in striking contrast to the quantificational language of thought which is necessarily bound to *logical atomism*.[6]

One consequence of the logical monism of ontological paradigms is that ceratin ontological features are *required* by a given paradigm while others are precluded. The internat monistic coherence of a paradigm necessitates certain concepts and categories, as we have seen with the Hindu paradigm. The concept of an individual, existential status, the meaning and structure of time, etc., were essentially tied to the notions of karma, samsāra, reincarnation and so on. All terms within that world are *mutually* definitive. Accordingly, it would be incoherent to introduce into that world items which were foreign and had meaning within another alien paradigm. Nevertheless, it is often the case that

different paradigms are confused within a given interpretation and this results in a deep incoherence — a global "category-mistake" — which may be called a "paradigm-crossing".[7] Thus, the Hindu ontology forms a systematic unity which repels elements from a Buddhist or Christian ontology, and Christian ontology repels ontological features which are essential to a Hindu world or a Buddhist world, and so on.

(iv)   *Sense and Understanding prior to Truth and Belief*

Furthermore, in speaking the categorial language it becomes clear that *meaning* is *logically prior* to considerations of *truth*. It is commonly assumed in contemporary post-Fregean theories of meaning that *meaning is determined by truth conditions*. Indeed, this is *required* in the quantificational language of thought. And since meaning is essentially tied to truth the distinction between sense and judgment can be easily confused. The confusion of the logic of sense with the logic of judgment is devastating for logical theory. But in the categorial language it is possible to mark this distinction clearly. For in classical theory of predication sense or meaning (predicability) is determined by the structure of a particular categorial scheme. A categorial scheme shows which categories, concepts or terms of the language it defines can be intelligibly predicated. It thereby prescribes which terms cannot be significantly co-predicated. The question whether two terms in a given language are predicable, i.e., may be used intelligibly together in a predication is *prior* to whether the predication is true or false, and prior to considerations of judgment, statement and assertion. The laws of predicability are laws of intelligibility, sense and understanding, while the laws of judgment or assertion deal with truth. Thus, for example, whether the predication in the sentence " The present King of France is wise " makes sense (is predicable or category-correct) is logically prior to whether it has a truth-value. A category-mistake is neither true nor false.

From the *categorial* point of view, then, ontology is primarily concerned with meaning, sense, intelligibility and understanding. It is only secondarily concerned with the *actual truth* of a given predication or proposition; ontology is the science of sense, not ruth. The determination of actual truth of a proposition *within* a given worldview) is the epistemological concern of the

logic of judgment, assertion and belief. This distiction is critical for our present discussion. For we shall see that my particular *truth commitments* (what I *affirm* to be true and believe) do not preclude my *sense commitments* (what I take to be intelligible). I may, for example, be a believing Christian and affirm particular propositions *within* that world, and may nevertheless enter the intelligibility structure of the Hindu world. I may *understand* the Hindu world, or any other possible ontology, without either affirming or denying it. And inter-religious dialogue, in the categorial language of thought, is primarily a matter of *mutual understanding* rather than the adjudication of truth, assertion, judgment and belief. The rationality of inter-religious discourse need not be seen as being primarily concerned with disagreements or agreements of fact and belief. It is primarly concerned with intelligibility, for different ontologies are different monistic systems of intelligibility or sense.

(v) *Categorial Truth as the Coherence of Sense*

It must be remembered that all of the terms of logical theory are systematically ambiguous between the two languages of thought. For the concept of " truth " in the quantificational language is completely different from " truth " in the categorial language. Incoherence results if we confuse the two notions. Truth in the atomic quantificational language is a matter of the *correspondence* between an atomic proposition and an atomic fact. But in the logical monism of the categorial language truth is a function of the *coherence of sense*. And since the sense of a particular categorial scheme forms a monistic unity, truth is a function of the organic coherence of the ontological paradigm *as a whole*. Thus, categorial truth, like sense, is monistic. There are no atomic propositions in the categorial language. The unit of truth is the categorial scheme taken as a whole.[8]

The remark of the previous topic, that sense is logically prior to truth, would be an example of a paradigm-crossing if " truth " were taken in the sense of the quantificational language. Rather, the intention of the remark is that *within* the categorial language, and with respect to *categorial* truth, considerations of intelligibility are prior to considerations of propositional judgment, assertion and truth. For although there is no *atomic* truth in the categorial language, particular assertions and judgments are

made *within* a given world. And in principle *within* a given world the distinction between sense and truth, between understandnig and judgment, always holds. But this must be clearly distinguished from considerations of the " truth " of a world as a whole. The latter notion of ' truth ' is called ' religious ' or ' transcategorial' truth, and this will be explicated in the next section. [9] Transcategorial truth, we shall see shortly, *coincides* with understanding; *to make sense is to be true.* Categorlial truth presupposes transcategorial truth.

(*vi*) *Are Different Ontological Paradigms Incompatible* ?

Having clarified the concept of a religious world, the monistic unity of ontological paradigms, and the priority of sense and understanding to truth, judgment and belief, the incommensurability thesis becomes more evident. On the one hand ontological paradigms have their inner integrity and coherence and systematic unity and on the other they seem to mutually preclude each other. This raises the question of the nature of "relations" between worlds. We saw earlier that if different worlds are incommensurable there are no rational or intelligible relations between them. They do not stand to one another as contrary or contradictory propositions stand. And they do not preclude or mutually exclude one another as logically contrary terms or concepts do, for example, as " wise " and " unwise " exclude each other and are yet bound in meaning. A more appropriate model of the " relaion " between different worlds is that of the *ambiguity* of a given term, the equivocality of a given concept. Equivocal terms are in some sense incommensurable, within a given world. If this analogy holds for different worlds, then it would seem to follow that the Hindu paradigm and the Christian paradigm are not inherently incompatible as possible worlds. On the level of *intelligibility* and understanding, if not on the level of truth, both worlds "co-exist". This point will be explored in the next section.

(*vii*) *The Ontological Relativity of Religious Meaning and Truth*

We are now in a position to explicitly state the thesis of ontological relativity of meaning and truth. It has been shown, in speaking the categorial language, that *sense* is relative to a given categorial scheme or ontological paradigm. And since the

possibility of truth depends upon sense, truth too is ontologically relative. The relativity thesis and the incommensurability thesis mutually presuppose each other; they are synonymous. Religious meaning is possible only relative to a given religious ontology. The meaning of a particular religious utterance (" Jesus Christ is our savior ", " Mediate on OM ", " Thou art that " ....) is relative to the ontological paradigm, ontology or language which is its original context. And since propositional possibilities themselves change with different worlds, truth too is relative to a given ontology. What makes sense and hence is either true or false in a given world does not hold in another. Thus, religious meaning and truth are " world-bound " and ontologically relative. As pointed out earlier this version of ontological relativity for the categorial language must not be confused with the version of ontological relativity which has been articulated for the quantificational language by Quine and others.

(viii) Radical Ambiguity and the Indeterminacy of Sense in Natural Language

Finally, the full force of the transcendental problem for inter-religious dialogue is felt in the recognition that *any* utterance in natural language is *radically indeterminate in sense*. Any term or sentence in natural language is systematically ambiguous between different ontological paradigms. It follows from the thesis of ontological relativity that there can be *no common sense* and *no common reference* between different worlds. Cross-reference is ruled out because there can be no common sense, no univocal terms between different worlds. And in the categorial language, *sense determines reference*; there can be no reference independent of sense, and certainly no referent apart from the categorial scheme. The term " Jesus Christ " for example, can be used referringly (in the primary literal sense) only within the language form or ontological paradigm of Christianity. There are no individuals in common between different worlds, no identity between worlds. Similarly, the term " I " would have different senses and hence different referents in the Hindu world, the Buddhist world, the Cartesian world, the Humean world, the world of Hobbes, etc.

Thus, the categorial understanding of a religious world rules out the possibility of "common ground" between different onto-

I. P. Q.—2

logies. The transcendental condition of the possibility of rational discourse between different religious worlds seems to be precluded by the radical ambiguity of sense in natural language. How, then, is inter-religious discourse possible ?

SECTION 2

The transcategorial resolution of the transcendental problem

(i) *Ontological Commitment and the Transcategorial Nature of Faith*

It is only when the radical differences between different religious worlds is appreciated, and the ontological relativity of meaning a truth acknowledged, that we are prepared for the *transcategorial* resolution of the transcendental problem. For in speaking the categorial language it becomes evident that there can be no categorial solution to the problem. The radical transformation to transcategorial consciousness *dissolves* the problem by revealing that in the logic of ontological commitment categorial differences make no difference. Categorial " common ground" is neither possible nor necessary for there to be rational discourse between different worlds.

The critical factor, then, is to clearly distinguish between the *categorial* logic of predication, assertion, judgment, belief and truth, on the one hand, and the *transcategorial* logic of the *affirmation of a world as a whole*. Transcategorial affirmation is called "ontological commitment". And such affirmation, judgment, truth is of a radically different nature from the propositional affirmation which holds *within* a given world. To confuse the logic that holds *within* a world with the logic which holds for a world taken as a whole is to make a " transcategorial " mistake. To affirm a world, to embrace a form of life, is not the same kind of thing as the affirmation of a proposition within a given world. The latter *presupposes* the former: categorial or propositional truth presupposes transcategorial truth or ontological commitment. Ontological commitment is a self-constitutive transcategorial act which is the *origin* of meaning, truth and value for a world taken as a whole.

The essential form of transcategorial logic is that it is *beyond* all dichotomies and contrary opposition. We have seen that the inner form of categorial logic is that it is constituted in either/

or opposition which reflects the formal oppositions of logical contrariety. It is this formal feature which is inherently lacking in transcategorial awareness. The dualities and distinctions which make sense in categorial consciousness fail to make sense in transcategorial rationality — the law of excluded middle does not and *cannot* apply. Thus, in order to understand the nature of ontological commitment the categorial distinctions between meaning and truth, between understanding and affirmation, between judgment and criteria or evidence for judgment, between act of consciousness and content of consciousness etc., must be transcended.

In affirming a world, in embracing a form of life, in "making" an ontological commitment *meaning is constituted*. The categorial distinction between sense and truth or understanding and assertion which was stressed earlier *cannot* be made for ontological commitment, for in transcategorial consciousness *understanding and truth are one*, the recognition of meaning and the affirmation of truth are indistinguishable, *ontological truth* is precisely the recognition of the intelligibility of a world, the implicit affirmation that a world is possible and makes sense. And ontological commitment is the self-constitutive affirmation in which the meaning of a given world originates. This critical feature of ontological commitment can be discerned only by realizing that in transcategorial consciousness there can be no distinction between the acts of consciousness and the content, no distinction between the epistemic and the ontic, no distinction between the ideal and the real. It is a *transcategorial* mistake to require of ontological commitment that it meet the alien standards of categorial logic, of the either/or rationality which holds for propositional truth, assertion, judgment, meaning and belief. By contrast, ontological commitment is transcategorial affirmation — it is a unique form of " judgment " in which the acknowledgement of a world as meaningful is the same as embracing that world as true. Ontological truth, then, is *hermeneutical* truth — an interpretive truth which makes sense.

But there can be no *independent* grounds or evidence or good reasons for such ontological " judgment ". The distinction between judgment and the evidence or grounds for the judgment is legitimate in categorial rationality, but has no place in ontological commitment. For ontological judgment or affirmation is

self-constitutive, self-definitive, self-evidential. Transcategorial affirmation *defines* what is to count as evidence, defines what is a good reason; it constitutes its own grounds. To call for *independent* criteria or authentication or validation here is to misunderstand the logic of ontological commitment. This is another transcategorial mistake.

It becomes clear that ontological commitment is *neither verifiable nor falsifiable*; it is beyond the *category* of corrigibility. It is self-authenticating in the faithful commitment of the *authentic person*. There can be no separation of the commitment and the authenticity of the one who makes the commitment. There can be no independent authority for it is self-authorizing. And in this unique transcategorial act there can be no distinction between the subjective and the objective. It is only when we move beyond the duality of categorial thought that we make room for genuine *faith*, for the deep structure of faith is *transcategorial belief or affirmation*. There can be no opposition or tension between categorial belief and true faith, for faith is precisely the ontological commitment which is the *origin* of meaning and value—the *ultimate* concern which defies the rationality of categorial thought. And there can be no conflict between faith and categorial reason, for the latter receives its light from the former. Faith has its *own* reason—the rationality of transcategorial affirmation.

(ii)   Ontological Truth and the Essence of Religious Experience

A number of questions naturally arise concerning ontological commitment and religious truth. If I am committed to a particular religious world, if I affirm a given world, does this preclude commitment to all other worlds ? If, for example, I am committed to the Christian world does this mean that I canot be a Hindu or a Buddhist ? Can I reside in different worlds at the same time ? What is the nature of adjudication betweem different worlds ? What does it mean to *choose* or embrace a world ? In general, does ontological commitment require that I find only one world intelligible and true and all others invalid ? Are there arguments for choosing one world over another ? What is the nature of metaphysical or ontological arguments ?

As before, the first point that must be stressed is that ontological affirmation must not be confused with the logic of cotegorial affirmation and choice. Affirmation and choice,

when made *within* a given world is governed by the law of excluded middle. To choose one thing is to exclude all alternatives. That is the nature of *categorial* choice and affirmation. But we have seen that ontological affirmation is of a different nature. To affirm a given world is to acknowledge that it makes sense. In transcategorial rationality to make sense is to be *ontologically true*, to be intelligible is to be possible and to be possible is to be *ontologically actual*. And ontological relativity shows that different worlds are *compossible*. From the point of view of intelligibility, it was noted earlier, different worlds " coexist ". And since ontological truth is precisely the recognition that a world makes sense, it follows that different ontologies are simultaneously true (in the transcategorial sense). Thus, in the logic of ontological commitment ontological truth is identical with intelligibilty of a world, the sense of a world entails that the world is possible, and *if a world is possible then it is actual*; in transcategorial logic there can be no differentiation between sense and truth, no dichotomy between the possible and the actual. These dualities make sense only in categorial logic. The consequence of this is that ontological commitment is a peculiar form of " choice ". In choosing to be a Christian I do not preclude my being a Hindu or a Buddhist, etc This was implicit in the earlier remark that different ontologies are neither compatible nor incompatible. This is so because a world purports to be all-inclusive that is its essence. From the categorial point of view each worldview views itself as encompassing all else, so there is nothing left over beyond the world for it to be compatible or incompatible with.

The generic form of any ontological proof was stated in the previous paragraph; to make sense is to be true, to be intelligible is to be, to understand is to affirm, to be a possible world is to be ontologically actual. In effect, this means that in transcategorial rationality *essence is existence*, and to be possibly true, (categorially) is to be actually true (transcategorially). Thus, in transcategorial awareness to affirm a particular world does not mean the denial of another. The question of adjudication between different worlds is based on the transcategorial mistake of reducing ontological commitment to categorial affirmation.

Once we overcome the transcategorial mistake of *reducing* the transcategorial to the categorial, the way is open for a

new appreciation of the nature of ontological *understanding*. For once it becomes clear that the distinction between sense and truth, understanding and judgment, possibility and actuality cannot be made in transcategorial awareness, understanding and intelligibility take on *ontological import*. We can no longer maintain that to understand a world is one thing, but to make a commitment to it is another, because to understand is to make an ontological judgment, affirmation, commitment. To recognize a world as intelligible is in some real sense to *reside* in it, and to embrace it. Thus, I may very will take myself to be a Christian and encounter the Hindu world or the Buddhist world as being intelligible. But what can it mean to *be* a Christian, to be committed to the Christian world, other than to find it intelligible and to live in its light ? To truly understand a world is to understand it as true. In transcategorial awareness to understand is to affirm. The question then becomes " Can more than one world *make sense* for me at the same time ?"

Of course this relocates the question of adjudication between different worlds. The original call for criteria of truth shifts to considerations of sense. It may be argued that in ontological commitment only one world can make sense, and a version of sense-absolutism replaces the absolutism of truth. From this point of view only one world can make sense, and all others are senseless. This position seems to have force especially since we have seen that ontological commitment is constitutive of sense.

It may be further argued, on this view, that there are better or worse ontological arguments for the preferability of one world over others. For certain ontologists appear to be giving arguments or reasons to show that their world makes *most sense*. This line of argument seems plausible since, as was pointed out earlier, the nature of ontological arguments is that they are *sense* arguments or hermeneutical arguments. And we have seen that sense arguments establish ontological truth. From this point of view the ontology which makes the most sense is the true world, the world which I ought to " choose " and to which I must commit myself. And this means that other worlds are in some degree incoherent or lacking in sense.

However plausible this absolutist line of argument may at first appear, upon closer examination it is found to rest on a transcategorial mistake. The categorial mentality is being again

imposed on transcategorial rationality. Metaphysical arguments—hermeneutical arguments, arguments making sense of the world—are *themselves* ontologically relative. Insofar as an argument can be given, or good reasons produced, they *must be* relative to some ontology and *subsequent* to some prior ontological commitment. There can be no independent arguments to *support* the preferability of ontological commitment. The transcategorial mistake of naive absolutism is that of assuming that ontological commitment can be authenticated in some external and independent way.

The true question for religious thought becomes—How can I be both free and authentic in my faithful commitment? And this brings us to the essence of religious experience. For it should now be clear that transcategorial awareness is inherently transparent and in this sense infinite. No particular ontology can be taken as privileged, as revealing the essence of Being. Transcendental awareness overflows the bounds of any particular worldview. The essence of religious experience, for any possible world, is to realize transcategorial or transcendental consciousness. The religious transformation to transcategorial consciousness is inevitable in any religious world; this is the encounter with Infinite Being. The Infinite Word can never be exhausted in any one ontological paradigm. If it could be it would not be Infinite. Spinoza recognized this when he pointed out that Infinite Substance can be adequately described in infinite languages. The Infinite Word remains perpetually open for interpretation and reconstitution in ontological commitment. From this point of view it is the naive absolutist who must be embarrassed for being in ontological bondage.

Authenticity of faith is found in that special form of ontological commitment which brings religious liberation. The true Christian, or Hindu or Buddhist is not the person who earnestly affirms a particular world and thereby denies others, but the person who, in transcategorial freedom, is liberated from ontological bondage. This is the free and authentic person who realizes that a particular worldview is not constitutive of Infinite Being but a vehicle or passage to Infinite Being. In this respect, the true Christian, the true Hindu and the true Buddhist, etc., are *transcategorially one and the same*. In Christianity, for example, the transcategorial move is centered in Christ-being, the one unique transcategorial being of the Christian ontology. In

the Hindu world the transcategorial move is centered in the realization that the true " I " or Self is Ātman. In Buddhism it comes with the enlightenment that there is no ego. In each world the essence of religious realization consists precisely in making the transcategorial move : to Christ-consciousness, to Krishna-consciousness, to Buddha-nature—Nirvāṇa. And what becomes clear is that in transcategorial consciousness categorial differences between different worlds evaporate. In transcategorial awareness there is only " one " world. And this is the essence of religious experience. Thus, the question—How many worlds can I embrace at the same time ?—dissolves in the transcategorial response : All and None. [10]

(iii) *How is Inter-religious Dialogue Possible ?*

Finally, we may again address the transcendental problem. The transparency of transcategorial consciousness is reflected in natural mundane consciousness and is the essence of natural language. It is manifested in natural language in the form of radical and systematic ambiguity of sense. We saw earlier that any utterance in natural language is a sense-formula which remains open to interpretation in some ontological context. It was this radical indeterminacy of sense that gave force to the transcendental problem. For the possibility of inter-religious dialogue seems to require some common ground, some common sense, between different ontologies. But now it should be clear that no categorial common ground is possible. And none is necessary for there to be rational discourse between religious worlds. On the contrary it is precisely the radical ambiguity of sense in natural language that is the necessary condition of intelligible movement between different religious worlds. For it is through metaphor that movement between worlds takes place. Metaphoric discourse must be understood in a transcategorial light. It is precisely the transcategorial ' link ' between radical ambiguity and radical univocity. Inter-religious dialogue turns on metaphor and metaphor is the vehicle of sense-transit between different ontologies. And the way is now clear for a transcategorial analysis of the nature of metaphor.

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NOTES

1. See Professor Smart's paper—" The Philosophy of Worldviews or Philosophy of Religion or Philosophy of Religions "—which is one of the lead papers of this symposium.

2. I simply state the thesis here. I do not attempt to " argue " for it. For in speaking the language of categorial ontology it speaks for itself. The appropriate form of justification here is to realize that in speaking the language the inner meaning of religious experience and the intended sense of religious thought becomes manifest. The reasons why the quantificational language is inherently unsuited for the expression of the philosophy of worldviews are presented in earlier papers. See "Formal Ontology and Movement Between Worlds " (*Philosophy East and West,* April 1976) and " Nāgārjuna, Aristotle and Frege on the Nature of Thought" in Nathan Katz ed. *Buddhist and Western Philosophy* (Sterling Press, New Delhi, 1979).

3. The term " ontological commitment " in the language of categorial ontology is, of course, quite different in sense from the term as it is used in the language of quantificational ontology. In the latter it is a matter of commitment to " what there is " where this is taken to mean the individuals in the domain of quantification. For Quine, to be is to be the value of a bound variable. And ontological import arises within the logic of facts. But ontological commitment in categorial ontology is a matter of the *origin* of meaning and value and is pre-propositional.

4. The concept of a world in the *categorial* language is systematically explicated in "Formal Ontology and Movement Between Worlds" *Philosophy East and West,* April 1976.

5. For a more detailed explication of the Hindu ontology and further explanation of why all the terms of the Hindu world make sense only in the context of the Hindu language form or categorial scheme see—" Comparative Ontology and the Interpretation of *Karma*"—*Indian Philosophical Quarterly*, January, 1979 (Poona, India).

6. I do not explain in this paper why the language of categorial ontology is necessarily committed to logical monism, nor why quantificational ontology is committed to logical atomism. This is explained in detail in "Nāgārjuna, Aristotle and Frege on the Nature of Thought"...in *Buddhist and Western Philosophy*, ed. Nathan Katz, Sterling Press (New Delhi, 1979).

7. It is important to distinguish clearly between " category mistakes " which take place *within* a given categorial scheme, and the special " global " form of incoherence which results when terms from different ontological paradigms are confused.

8. Categorial truth is truth *within* a particular ontology. Sense is prior to truth and determines what can be true. And since sense is monistic, truth, too, is monistic. What makes sense is *possible* and what is true is *actual*. This distinction holds within a given world. We shall see that it collapses when a world is taken as a whole.

9. For a systematic analysis of the distinction between relative and absolute truth (categorial and transcategorial) see — " Comparative Ontology : Relative and Absolute Truth " forthcoming, *Philosophy East and West.*

10. In the generic sense any authentic faithful ontological commitment counts as religious experience. The true scientist, of course, enters into his form of life with faith no less than the believing Hindu. And the ultimate and liberating transcategorial transformations are available within the practice of science too. In this sense the proper practice of science counts as religious life, as the worship and celebration of Infinite Being.