Concept, Judgment, and Dogmatic Relativism

It is a central claim of Christianity that certain teachings formulated in the Mediterranean world two thousand years ago are divinely revealed. It is also a central claim that this revelation has been grasped and repeated ever since as the “same Gospel”—an achievement which heresies did not prevent and from which legitimate developments did not detract.

Traditionally, these two claims have been understood to demand the following explanation: the expressions used in formulating the original teachings have been understood within the main body of the Church with enough invariance, over all the intervening centuries and in widely different civilizations, to ensure that the “same doctrine” has been handed down.¹

This traditional thesis of Christian doctrinal self-identity over times and cultures, based on invariance of understanding, is flatly impossible if a position known as “dogmatic relativism,” a theological form of conceptual relativism, is true. Dogmatic relativism asserts that human understanding is so bound to historical conditions that as these change, the understanding of “the Gospel” changes with them, inevitably and profoundly.²

The purpose of the following essay is to present two mistakes about the concept and two mistakes about the judgment, so as to argue that dogmatic relativism depends upon the four mistakes. It will be shown that when none of them is made, relativism has nothing left to recommend it.

It is hoped that the results will be of interest not only to theologians but also to historians of ideas, whose discipline has been afflicted with hermeneutical methodologies guilty of the same mistakes.

Before embarking on the essay proper, the reader may find it useful to have a sample of the sort of historico-theological writing which the author rejects, but whose prevalence has led the author to examine its underlying assumptions about concept and judgment. The following sample is a free pastiche of sentences from Henri Bouillard, Avery Dulles, Bernard Lonergan, and others. It is not intended as a parade of horrors; indeed, many of the sentences, standing alone, would be true under a plausible interpretation. When put together, however, half-truths lead to untruths in an alarming manner.³

European man has long entertained a “classical” world-view, according to which there exists a universally valid form of mental cultivation, which includes a timelessly valid system of sound concepts. Those who have acquired these concepts through a classical education can dialogue with each other not only across cultures, supposedly, but even across the ages. An ally of scholastic philosophy, this classical world-view is now regarded as false. Heightened awareness of the historicality of human existence has pointed up the time-bound and culture-bound character of all conceptual systems. The ideal of a unique, standard, and
permanent conceptualization of Christian dogma must therefore be abandoned in favor of theological pluralism.

The history of dogma is itself a proof of this point. Divine revelation, as the Word of God, transcends all human words and concepts. It could not enter into currency among men in its purity but had to be "incarnated" in the historically-given conceptual systems of the men to whom God chose to reveal Himself. What these men produced, even what they produced under inspiration, such as the tenor of the New Testament, was not revelation itself but a human, historically conditioned expression of revelation.

This expression, even when phrased verbally in Greek, was articulated at a deeper level in Semitic thought-forms, concepts, and categories. As primitive Christianity was preached to the Greeks, the original Semitic concepts behind its terms were replaced by Greek, ontological concepts. Thus arose the Hellenized Christianity of the Greek Fathers. When the Gospel took root among the Latins, Roman juridical concepts were employed, resulting in the Christianity of the Latin West. The creative currents of the High Middle Ages produced yet another conceptual mutation, the Aristotelianized Christianity of the schoolmen, subsequently set in cement by the Council of Trent. An alternative medieval conceptualization, the Augustinian, helped to inspire the Reformers, only to be fossilized in its turn in the Protestant confessional dogmatics of the 17th century.

But new possibilities arose in the 19th and 20th centuries, when Christianity began to be synthesized with thought-forms emanating from the Enlightenment, such as German idealism, French personalism, vitalism, and existentialism. Today all of these exciting paradigms must continue to be explored, together with new conceptualizations in terms of process philosophy, Marxism, post-Freudian psychology. And outside the Western world, we look forward to the development of indigenous African theologies, articulated in terms of Bantu concepts, Latin American theologies, Asian theologies, etc.

In all of these developments, of course, the original biblical conceptualization(s) will continue to hold a place of honor. But this place cannot be that of a conceptual norm; it can only be that of a first and in many ways privileged expression. In particular, the mythical elements of the NT conceptual schemata may have to be purged away—or, if you prefer, replaced by modern man's own myths.

In any case, the self-identity of Christianity over time and space cannot be located on the conceptual level of propositional sameness; it must be found in common pre-conceptual affirmations, or in a common clan, or in a common response to the person of Jesus rather than to a set of eternal truths about Him.

Such writing, more or less pandemic these days, is annoying on many levels. Full of half-truths historically, it is dilettantish philosophically. Nevertheless, behind such writing, as back-up documentation, stand some impressive monuments of continental scholarship: the dogmengeschichtliche Forschung of Harnack and other German scholars, the French nouvelle théologie, the transcendental Thomism of Rahner, Coreth, and Lonergan, the Entmythologisierung of Bultmann, the Heideggerian hermeneutics of Gadamer, the biblical theology of the Kittel Wörterbuch, with its lexically mapped concepts and its Victorian heritage of diachronic linguistics.

Since this scholarship is vast, one may well wonder what a paper so small as this one can hope to contribute. The answer, if sound, is something rather radical. Vast intellectual programs rely upon slender taproots in logic and epistemology. Cut the root, and a very large growth withers away. Assumptions about the concept and the judgment lie at the taproot level. It is there, where the issue is narrow and the stakes tremendous, that the present essay intends to cut.
We may begin with the two mistakes about concepts. They both consist in confusing together several different entities to which the word 'concept' is often made to refer, with the result that properties and problems applicable to one of these entities are mistakenly applied to another.

Consider an expression like 'the concept of moral duty.' Sometimes we say things like this:

(1) Little Jimmy hasn't acquired the concept of moral duty yet.

At other times we say things like this:

(2) The concept of moral duty has a stormy history.

And sometimes again we say,

(3) Divine law is not part of the concept of moral duty in Kant.

It is easy to suppose that the recurrent phrase 'the concept of moral duty' has the same meaning in all three sayings. One supposes that it refers to the same entity or kind of entity. But what little Jimmy has not acquired, in (1), is some sort of psychological disposition: either an ability to speak in terms of duty (a grasp of the word) or else a "sense" of duty (a grasp of his obligations). This psychological entity has no possible history outside of Jimmy's own head. Its "history" would simply be its psychogenesis. The concept which does have a history on the world stage, a history of stormy debate according to (2), is not a psychological entity at all but something that circulates in the public domain—an object of knowledge rather than a tool of the knowing subject. Kant's particular idea of moral duty is also something in the public domain. So the entities referred to as "concepts" in (2) and (3) must be different in kind from the entity referred to in (1).

However, the concepts talked of in (2) and (3) must also be different from each other. Kant must have "had" the concept of moral duty before he could construct his professional, philosophical theory of it. If we identify his theory with his considered "judgment," then the concept talked about in (3) would seem to be the product of his judgment, while the concept talked about in (2) was a prerequisite for him to frame a judgment.

These differences are not likely to be unraveled until one takes the trouble to work out a list of the major uses of the term 'concept'—a list in which care is taken to distinguish "concepts" which are private, psychological entities from "concepts" which are public or objective entities, and to distinguish "concepts" which are prerequisites for the making of a judgment from "concepts" which are products of judgment. A preliminary effort at achieving such a list follows.

The Senses of 'Concept'

(A) my concept of \( x \) = a psychological entity, not directly an object of introspection, by virtue of which I am able to recognize an \( x \) or use correctly the words referring to an \( x \).
Let us refer to the entities so defined as A-concepts. They are theoretical entities posited by certain philosophers, and perhaps also by learning-theorists and neuropsychologists, as necessary conditions for intelligent experience of the world (and even for introspection). As things whereby consciousness-of-an-object is possible, the A-concepts are not themselves objects of consciousness. Kant's pure a priori concepts are obviously supposed to be of this sort; whether his schematized concepts are equally unavailable for introspection is less clear. The Thomistic species impressa would certainly be an A-concept. The verbum or species expressa, taken fundamentaliter and entitative, also seems to be an A-concept, while the same verbum, taken formaliter and objective as the image by which and in which the known object is grasped, seems to be one or another of the B-concepts, as I shall call them. Four kinds of B-concept follow, the first of which deals with mere words.

(B1) my concept of \( x' \) = the data of introspection which yield what would be my general definition of the word \( x' \); my grasp of its possible uses.

(B1') the concept of \( x' \) = the correct general definition of the word \( x' \).

(B1') my concept of \( x' \) = my general definition of the word \( x' \).

(B1'') my concept of \( x' \) = the data of (B1') the concept of \( x' \) = what \( x' \) means in the case and context at hand.

(B1'') my concept of \( x' \) = an expression of what I take \( x' \) to mean in this case.

Here we divide into two columns, with the psychological entity described on the left, the public entities on the right. The B1-concepts are the grasp of a word or other semantic vehicle. The scholastics called such things the conceptus vocis ut significantis or conceptus medius. In sense B1, the concept is a psychological entity, such as a network of associations, which is or can be an object of introspection. It is what a lexicographer would ask me and other speakers of the language to reflect upon and "express" for him: the fruit of my reflective/expressive effort is the B1'-concept, which the lexicographer may or may not wish to criticize. What he finally associates with the entry \( x' \) in his dictionary is, of course, the B1'-concept.

(B2) my concept of \( x' \) = the data of introspection which yield what I take \( x' \) to mean in this case.

(B2') the concept of \( x' \) = what \( x' \) means in the case and context at hand.

(B2') my concept of \( x' \) = an expression of what I take \( x' \) to mean in this case.

Words and other semantic vehicles are usually encountered in a given context, so as to yield a B2-concept, i.e., one's grasp of that which is "meant" by a word in a given case or context. A dictionary entry will often contain a few hints for this in the form of subentries, each conveying a distinct sense of the word or range of its likely referents. But in a given text or conversation, the exact sense or reference of a word or phrase is usually something that can be gathered only from the context itself. This sense or reference is no longer a word (typically) but a thing (res) to which the mind is led by the word in its context. Though English speaks here of the "understanding" or "interpreta-
tion" of the word, rather than of its concept, I include these B2-senses in the “concept” table because they are what the scholastics meant by conceptus ultimus.6

We turn now from words and other signs to things themselves.

(B3) my concept of \( x \) = the data of introspection which yield my sense of what an \( x \) is like.

(B3') the concept of \( x \) = the correct definition of the thing, \( x \), itself (for the purpose at hand).

(B3') my concept of \( x \) = an expression of my sense of what an \( x \) is like.

The B3-concepts have to do with things and what they are, their nature or essence. Essences, too, are picked out by definitions—but by “real” definitions rather than dictionary ones. A dictionary definition may discriminate the things named by the word ‘\( x \)’ (and its synonyms) from other things. But a real definition will establish the properties which a thing must have in order to count as an \( x \) for a given use or purpose. If the purpose at hand is ontological theory, the production and evaluation of such “real” definitions will be a philosophical task (and its product will be what I shall call, below, an E-concept). But it is perhaps too often forgotten by historians of dogma that most human purposes are not theoretical, and that a practical grasp of “what things are” is part of every normal person’s mental furniture. This kind of grasp is a B3-concept. In the left column, a B3-concept is a psychological entity, which the inquirer asks me to reflect upon and express for him. A B3’ concept is the fruit of my reflection, which the inquirer may or may not accept as adequate or defensible. A B3’-concept of an \( x \) is as much of the real definition of an \( x \) as everyday, pre- or meta-theoretical discussion requires. So whereas a B1’-concept is settled by facts about correct usage, a B3’-concept is settled by common experiences of things, arising out of common purposes pursued.7

(B4) my concept of \( x \) = the description under which I am now thinking of \( x \).

(B4') a concept of \( x \) = a description under which one may plausibly or defensibly think of \( x \).

(B4') a public expression of (B4), e.g., a sentence predicating of \( x \) the description in question.

The A-, B1-, B2-, and B3-concepts are supposed to be in one-to-one relation with their object; i.e., to each word or word-in-context and to each thing or kind-of-thing there corresponds just one such concept (at least for the purpose at hand). But with B4-concepts the case is different. They are in many-to-one relation with their object. A thing can be described, represented, or thought of in many different ways, each of which is allowed to count as a different B4-concept of it. Thus in scholastic usage, God was said to be man’s end when considered sub conceptu Bonitatis, while He was the object of faith when considered sub conceptu Primae Veritatis, and the object of metaphysical
demonstration under still another concept. In this B4-sense of 'concept,' Frege spoke of an object's Darstellungsweise or its Arten des Gegebenseins (modes of representation or manners of being-given). Then, since any such description of an object can be predicated of it, the B4-concepts mark a point of transition from "conceiving" to "judging," via "conceiving as."

Concepts in the A- and B-senses are all fixtures of classical, scholastic philosophy. The remaining senses are not.

(C) my concept of \(x\) = the first judgment on \(x\) which pops into my head when I hear the word \(x\) or another term I take to refer to \(x\); what is for me the salient fact about \(x\).

The C-sense of 'concept' presents a use which is informal and nonphilosophical. It has to do with off-the-cuff associations rather than definitions. In the summer of 1989, if you had asked the man on the street what his "concept" of China was, the C-sense of 'concept' is probably what he would have thought you were asking for, and he would have said something like, "It's the place where they're shooting all those students."

With sense (C) we have left behind the senses of 'concept' in which the term names a prerequisite (or definition of a prerequisite) to making a judgment. C-concepts are judgments, while D- and E-concepts, as we shall see, presuppose judgments.

(D) the concept of \(x\) = the total set of truths about \(x\); everything known or knowable about \(x\).

The D-concept presents an idea which has played an important role in the history of continental rationalism (Leibniz) and German idealism (especially Hegel). It arises with the idea that every truth about a thing belongs in its "concept." It is innocent enough to say that every truth about a thing is "an" understanding of it, and that all of the truths together contribute to "the" understanding of it, so long as "the understanding" is thought of as a set of B4-concepts. But when "the understanding" is identified instead with the B3-concept, and thus with the thing's "definition," matters take an odd turn. For then, since our "definition" of a thing is supposed to express its "essence," it follows that every fact about the thing—including every trait and bearing that makes it this individual rather than that one—has to be reckoned into its essence. But then the distinction between essential properties and accidental properties is abolished. When that happens, contingency is swallowed up by "intelligible necessity" and all factual truths become analytic.

Philosophers who reject such conclusions may speak of the total set of truths about a thing, but they will refuse to identify this set with the "concept" of it (thinking principally of the B3' sense of 'concept'), precisely because they
deny that every truth about a thing belongs in its definition. Moreover, traditional philosophers have generally liked to keep the word 'concept' restricted to entities which are constituents of judgments, prerequisites of judgments, or definitions of these constituents or prerequisites; so they have been doubly unwilling to accept things like D-concepts as genuine concepts, since D-concepts are obviously products, summaries, or sets of judgments, hence entities which depend upon judgments rather than entities which judgments depend upon.

(E) my concept of \( x \) = what I distinctively believe about \( x \).

(E') A's concept of \( x \) = A's recorded beliefs about \( x \), especially those considered most distinctive.

Last but not least are the E- and E'-concepts. Note that the symbol 'A', which occurs in the definiens and definiendum of (E'), is just a place-holder, for which one may substitute the name of an individual, the name of a culture, the name of a theory, the name of an epoch, etc. Thus one speaks of Luther's concept of faith, the Hellenistic concept of mind, the Japanese concept of honor, the Newtonian concept of inertia, the 18th-century concept of progress, etc. One means a batch of typical and distinctive beliefs held by the individual, or current in the culture, or adopted in the theory. So here again we have a sense of 'concept' which presupposes judgments. Needless to say, these E'-concepts are major objects of interest to exegetes, historians of ideas, and other scholars in the Geisteswissenschaften.8

For the convenience of the reader, a table of these senses is appended at the end of this essay.

The Mistakes

We may now state the two confusions about concepts which lie behind dogmatic relativism.

The first is a confusion between the understanding of words and the understanding of things that are understood through words. It arises when B1-concepts are confused with B2- or B3-concepts. Each B1-concept is a grasp of a word (or other symbol) in its various possibilities of use, that is, in its capacity to be applied to different things. Each such concept is part of a speaker's language competence, and each is specific to competence in the particular language in which the word occurs as a lexical item. Now it is extremely common for a lexical item of one language, such as the Greek word *aletheia*, to have a range of uses which only partly corresponds to the range of uses of a lexical item of another language, such as the Hebrew word *emet*. Both words are used to mean the truth of spoken claims, but the Hebrew *emet* is also used to mean the trustworthiness of the speaker, while the Greek word is not. Thus a Hebrew speaker's B1-concept of his word *emet* will differ in content from a Greek speaker's B1-concept of his word *aletheia*. 
Does it follow that the Greeks and the Hebrews had a different concept of truth? This has often been claimed, and it will seem to follow, if B1-concepts are allowed to be confused with B2- or B3-concepts, which reach to things. Merely linguistic differences will be misconstrued as differences in the perception of reality. That is, differing concepts of words will imply differing concepts of the things they mean. In this case, a difference between the range of uses to which the Greeks put aletheia and the range of uses to which the Hebrews put emet will imply differing concepts of truth itself. Hebrew truth will be interpersonal, the truth of promises, while Greek truth will be impersonal, the truth of propositions. Then, mere translation from Aramaic into Greek will transform the topics of Gospel preaching and not just the text of the sermon.

To see that this is a mistake, one need only take an example closer to our own experience. The English word ‘green’ has a range of uses which only partly corresponds to the range of the French word vert. Both words are used to pick out a part of the visible spectrum; but the English word ‘green’ is also used to pick out the inexperience of beginners, as in “a green recruit,” while the French word is not; at the same time, vert is used to describe “fresh” behavior, as when a child talks “fresh” to his mother, while the English word is not. Thus an English speaker’s B1-concept of his word ‘green’ will differ in content from a French speaker’s B1-concept of his word vert. Does it follow that the French and the English have different concepts of green, the color? Of course not. And in fact they do not.

This fact is empirically significant. The visible spectrum is a continuum, so that where one draws a boundary between “one color” and “another” is somewhat arbitrary. It is not surprising that there are languages with a color-word that refers to a slice of the spectrum different from the slice referred to by any color-word of English. The fact that vert refers to just the same slice as ‘green’ is thus important evidence that people can mean the same “thing” through words that would not mean the same in other uses. Therefore an understanding of the pattern of uses is different from an understanding of what is meant in a given use—a B1-concept is different from a B2-concept, and both are different again from an understanding of how the thing meant should be defined (a B3-concept). Confusing these things is thus a serious mistake.

This mistake goes hand in hand with a second one. As the first mistake folds the vagaries of words into the concepts of things, the second folds the vagaries of belief into the concepts of things. It arises when E-concepts are allowed to be confused with A- and B-concepts.

The A- and B-concepts are fundamental to the elementary human ability to discriminate objects and use words; when E-concepts are confused with them, a society’s beliefs become fundamental to the very discrimination of objects and to the very possibility of correct speech. Conflicting beliefs (e.g., of Hebrews and Hellenes) thereby become conflicting modes of fundamental human experience. The beliefs held by a society or stipulated in a theory acquire a specious a priori status and allegedly become determinants both of
what is real for that society or theory (determinants, that is, of what can be said to be and how it can be classified) and of what is grammatical for them (determinants of syntactical categories). And vice versa, the stated beliefs of a society, its customary classifications, and the grammar of its language all become clues to the deep-seated "concepts" which allegedly impose them. 9

Christianity has triumphed in several different cultures, each of which, prior to becoming Christian, had distinctive beliefs inconsistent with Christianity. It does not seem problematic to say that these latter beliefs were changed; certain beliefs were dropped, and certain new ones were accepted—individuals and groups change their beliefs all the time. So as long as the talk is of beliefs, matters of conversion and cultural change seem tolerably clear.

But "concepts" are another story. How does one go about changing a society's concepts? It seems distinctly odd to say that Christianity changed the concepts of the Greeks, the Syrians, the Ethiopians, the Goths. Now, so long as "concepts" are taken to be A- and B-concepts, it is not clear that Christianity had to change them; perhaps the new religion conquered simply by changing beliefs. But when E-concepts are confused with A- and B-concepts, this distinction can no longer be made, and conversion seems to require a deeper task, to require indeed the making of conceptual Semites. And if this latter is impossible, it becomes plausible to say that while Christianity converted the Greeks on a superficial level, on a more profound level the Greeks converted Christianity; they "reconceptualized" it; they turned it into a noncovenantal, nonhistoric, ontological religion of the sort required by their underlying "concepts."

Classical nonrelativistic theologians have a perfectly defensible response to such talk. They claim that Greek philosophy was a matter of beliefs, that various Greek ontological beliefs were simply consistent with primitive Christian beliefs, and that in the hands of the Greek Fathers a synthesis was formed in which a religion which remained covenantal, historical, and eschatological was simply enriched by ontological theses. 10 This classical view does every bit as much justice to the historical facts as the relativistic view. It is just the confusion of E-concepts with A- and B-concepts which renders the classical account unsatisfactory to the relativists.

It is just the same confusion, moreover, which leads the evidence for theological pluralism to be misconstrued as evidence for dogmatic relativism—a misconstruction which has been known to occur among critics of relativism as well as among its advocates. Theological pluralism is in fact the normal condition of the Church. The existence of a plurality of theological camps, tendencies, or schools appealing to different philosophies, or applying the same philosophy differently to theological questions, has almost always been acknowledged; whether it should be encouraged or deplored is what has been open to question. But welcome or not, theological pluralism has been tolerated to the extent that, precisely, the several acknowledged schools were each thought to be consistent with a common body of primary and uniformly understood doctrine. The pluralism was seen to be logically external to the doctrine, as competing explanations are logically external to a neutral description of the
facts to be explained, not internal to it, nor incompatible with the existence of a neutral description, as a case for dogmatic relativism would require.

* * *

It is time to turn to the topic of judgment. In order to say what the mistakes are this time, we shall need to clarify how the word 'judgment' is used, and we shall need to present two antagonistic theories about the structure of judgment.

The term 'judgment' is ambiguous in at least one of the ways in which we have seen 'concept' to be ambiguous. That is, it names a private, psychological occurrence sometimes, and it names an entity in the public domain sometimes. The two senses could be charted like this:

(J) someone's judgment = a psychological act or the cognate object of such an act.  
(S) someone's judgment = a sentence token uttered or written in some context to express (J).

We may call these the J-sense and the S-sense. We shall be using 'judgment' in both senses, because the latter throws light upon the former. It is the S-sense in which the thing called a "judgment" has a tangible structure—a grammatically determinable subject and predicate. This grammatical structure has an analog in the interior thing which is called a "judgment" in the J-sense—an analog traditionally thought of as some sort of "conceptual" structure. This interior structure has been the subject of controversy in the antagonist theories to which we shall be turning momentarily. But we have no way of getting at the interior structure except by looking at the structure of the sentence and discovering the semantic role of its parts. Hence the primacy, for our purposes, of the S-sense. For the sentence is the material, so to speak, in which the judgment becomes tangible. This is what we mean by saying that the sentence "expresses" the judgment. The J-judgment becomes the S-judgment: it becomes the sentence in being expressed. 11

More precisely, the judgment becomes a sentence token. A declarative sentence token is a linguistic "particular," the product of someone's speech-action on a unique occasion. If two or more of these sentence tokens have exactly the same grammar and vocabulary, they are said to be sentences of the same "type": 'The sky is blue' and 'The sky is blue' are two sentence tokens of the same sentence type. When such tokens appear in the mouths of different people, in different contexts, they can vary widely in meaning, despite the fact that they are of the same "type." For instance, a token of 'The sky is blue' can be said outdoors in order to contradict someone who thinks the sky is largely gray today, but another token of it can be said indoors, backstage, to criticize the painted set-design for what was supposed to be a scene set at nightfall. In suggesting, then, that the sentence token written or uttered by someone in some context "expresses" a judgment (or tries to), we are acknowledging that tokens can be of the same type and yet express different judgments.
This point is often made more informally. People say, “The same sentence can be used to express different judgments.” But it is better to be more precise. The same sentence type can express different judgments—yes, that is a normal feature of language and communication. But to say that the same sentence token can express different judgments—no, that is not normal. It is most unusual, arising only in a very special context, such as an allegory or a set-up for a double entendre.

For in normal contexts, the sentence token is so situated in its context as to have just one correct or valid line of interpretation, namely, the one judgment that the speaker or writer (the shaper of the context) happens to have in mind. If I am setting you up for a double entendre, however, or giving instruction through “figures,” I have two judgments in mind, and I am going to express them in a sentence whose context has been prepared to support both interpretations. So there are special contexts in which this one-token/one-judgment rule does not hold. But we shall not be dealing with such contexts. Thus, in what follows, we do not touch at all upon the problems of sensus plenior, typological exegesis, allegory, or spiritual interpretation. These problems do arise in connection with biblical sentences, especially Old Testament sentences; but they are not supposed to arise in connection with the sentences with which we are concerned in this essay—the sentences which express Church teachings (dogmatic formulae). Sentences expressing dogmas are supposed to be taken literally, and they have been carefully phrased to avoid any anticipated ambiguity. Obviously, then, they are intended to have just one correct line of interpretation. In fact, to violate this intention, to extend allegorical treatment to Church teachings, is to practice the common hermeneutic of ancient Gnosticism and not-so-ancient Modernism.  

Two Theories

When we ask about the structure of the judgment, we encounter two competing theories. The first assigns to the subject term and to the predicate term the same semantic function, namely, the expression of a concept. Hence arises the claim that the affirmative judgment is a linking of two concepts, that the negative judgment is a separation of two concepts, and that the truth of judgments is the inclusion (or noninclusion) of the predicate concept in the concept of the subject. Historically associated with late scholastic and early modern philosophers, this theory may be called “conceptualist.” It gains plausibility from the habit of using as “typical judgments” the four sorts of propositions used in syllogisms. ‘All men are mortal’ does seem to link the concept of mortality to the concept of man, while ‘No men are mortal’ would seem to divide or separate them.

The other theory of the judgment, which we may call “predicationist,” contends that subject and predicate terms serve different semantic functions. The role of the subject term is referential; it simply points to what the sentence is about. But the role of the predicate term is elucidative; it conveys something about the referent of the subject term. Thus the judgment as a whole applies
the sense of the predicate to the referent of the subject. In so doing, the judgment “contracts” or “fits” the predicate to that referent, so that what is used in a given judgment is not the entire B1-concept of the predicate but some relevant application thereof (a B2-concept). ‘The grass is green’ (said of its color) and ‘The wood is green’ (said of its lack of seasoning) use different senses of ‘green.’ This theory was known in the Middle Ages, and a number of its features have been rediscovered by Thomists, especially Frederick D. Wihelmsen, or reinvented by Frege, Russell, and other founders of the analytical approach to philosophizing.

So we have two theories of the judgment. The conceptualist theory makes the judgment a juxtaposition of two integral conceptual blocs, which are then linked or divided, so that the conceptual content or “sense” of the subject term is just as important as the sense of the predicate term. The predicationist theory makes the judgment an application of one and only one concept—that of the predicate in its relevant use—to the thing referred to by the subject term, so that the subject term plays a demonstrative or designative role rather than an elucidative one, with the result that its sense or concept is not directly at issue.

The Mistakes

The first mistake, quite simply, is the conceptualist theory itself. It is false. It arose from the ambiguity of “conceptus ultimus” in late scholastic authors. When such-and-such an author said that the predicate is contained in or agrees with the concept of the subject,” it made all the difference in the world whether he meant that the property picked out by the predicate is exemplified by the referent of the subject, or whether he meant that the sense of the predicate is contained in the sense of the subject. The former was the predicationist position, misleadingly stated; the latter was the conceptualist position embraced by Suárez. Inherited by Leibniz, the conceptualist position supported his inflation of B3-concepts into D-concepts and supported his ultimate conclusion that all true propositions are analytic.

To prove that the conceptualist theory is false, we may look at two important sorts of judgment for which it cannot account.

The first is the most basic judgment-form of all, the sort which Russell called “atomic.” ‘This is green’ is an example. Given a context in which the referent of ‘this’ is clear, ‘This is green’ expresses a complete judgment, whose logical form is disclosed by the functional notation, ‘Green (this)’ or ‘G(a).’ The conceptualist theory cannot account for such a judgment, because the subject term, ‘this’, has no concept. As a pure pointer, it has a grammatical function but no conceptual content in the usual sense. To be sure, the referent of ‘this’ will have a B3-concept, but that concept plays no role in the judgment at hand. Suppose the referent is a certain tuft of grass. Then this tuft itself, not its B3-concept, is that of which greenness is affirmed, just as it is the tuft itself, not its concept’s content, which verifies or falsifies the affirmation. If the conceptualist tries to evade this difficulty by alleging that the B3-concept
of this tuft is the "content" of 'this' in this particular judgment, and that greenness is included in this B3-concept, he is either confusing sense-data with B3-concepts or else committing himself to a Leibniz-like metaphysics by stretching B3-concepts into D-concepts. Rather than quarrel with those moves on epistemological or metaphysical grounds, I shall exhibit a sort of judgment which deprives the conceptualist of the opportunity to make them.

This new sort of judgment is the elementary quantified judgment. 'Something is green' is an example. Here the logical form is 'for some x: Green (x)' or '∃x (Gx)'. The subject term, 'something,' is a natural-language quantifier, not a categorical term, and hence again has no concept; it simply has a grammatical use, which is to make an indefinite reference. Predicationists can account for 'Something is green': it applies one and only one concept, that of 'green,' to the open referential range of 'something,' and it is true just in case an as yet unspecified item in that range is green. But the conceptualist theory, since no definite thing's B3-concept is in sight here at all, is deprived of its previous means of evasion. And if one suggests that 'Something is green' be taken as saying that some concept contains greenness, one is simply making a new assertion; for if the concepts containing greenness happened to be of nonexistent things, the new assertion would be true while nothing in fact was green. Thus conceptualism is shown to fail.

Let us now see whether the predicationist theory can account for those forms of judgment for which the conceptualist view at least seemed plausible. 'All men are mortal' seemed to link two concepts. Contemporary predicationists agree that two concepts are involved here, but they argue that a further factor determines whether they play the same semantic role, as conceptualism assumes, or play different ones.

Contemporary predicationists analyze 'All men are mortal' as saying that if anything is man, it is mortal. In other words, there are really two clauses here, 'x is man' and 'x is mortal,' joined by a relation of implication under a universal quantifier. ('Anything' is another natural-language quantifier, but one whose grammatical use is to refer to an entire range of items.) The predicate of the first clause is 'man,' while that of the second is 'mortal.' But whether both predicates function formaliter as elucidative concepts or whether they function differently, one as designative and the other as elucidative, depends on the nature of the implication joining the clauses.

If the implication is material, the Thomistic idea that the apparent subject, 'all men,' should be taken "materially" is correct. For on this option, the logical form is 'for all x: human (x) ⊃ mortal (x)' or '∀x (Hx ⊃ Mx)', where the hook, '⊃', represents the purely truth-functional connective called material implication. So taken, the point or force of 'All men are mortal' is to assert a merely factual connection between the men and the being-mortal. The predicate term in the antecedent, 'man,' is materialized: it simply delimits the set of things to which the other predicate, 'mortal,' will be applied. Thanks to the materiality of the implication, in other words, 'man' designates while 'mortal' elucidates; 'man' is used for its reference, while 'mortal' is used for its sense.
But if the implication is not material, we have a different situation. If we replace material implication with strict implication or with some form of entailment, we get a new reading of 'All men are mortal,' and the scholastics knew it. They spoke of a “formal” mode of speech. The judgment expressed will be to the effect that men as such are mortal, whereas the former reading (more normal outside of philosophical discussions), which the scholastics called “material,” expressed the judgment that the objects which happen to be men are in fact mortal.

These two predicationist options are available wherever the sentence is not an atomic or elementary quantified sentence. For in all but those two cases, the subject term (or what appears to be the subject term) itself is or includes a description. In ‘All men are mortal,’ the apparent subject, ‘all men,’ includes the descriptive term ‘men.’ In “The present king of Spain is a usurper,” the apparent subject, ‘the present king of Spain,’ is a definite description. When such a sentence is taken in the stronger way, formaliter, the “sense” of the apparent subject is made crucial, whereas when the sentence is taken in the normal way, materialiter, the “sense” of the apparent subject is ignored and only its “reference” matters.

The two options are both plausible accounts of ‘All men are mortal,’ and they have a decisive advantage over the conceptualist account. The first option reads ‘All men are mortal’ as being about Tom, Dick, and Harry, actual men of our experience, and not about the concept of man. Hence the judgment is merely factual and merely universal. It can be true in the present state of the world but false after the general resurrection, when we shall certainly continue to be men but shall cease to be mortal. This merely factual character is captured in the logical analysis by the use of material (rather than strict or necessary) implication. The second option comes into play if one wants to assert more, i.e., if one wants to assert a necessary or conceptual connection between being human and being mortal, so as to take the sentence formaliter. In the logical analysis, one inserts a necessity operator which turns the material implication into a strict one. Depending on where it is placed, one gets the de dicto claim that all possible men would be mortal—□∀x(\(Hx \supset Mx\))—or the de re claim that all actual men are essentially mortal—∀x □(\(Hx \supset Mx\)). Thus predicationist analysis brings to the study of syllogistic premises both a variety and a precision which conceptualism, in its vague talk of one thing’s being “of the concept” or “in the concept” of another, cannot match.

The conclusion which emerges from our discussion so far, then, is that conceptualism is a seriously mistaken theory of the judgment, reposing upon the mistaken view that subject and predicate terms play the same semantic role.

But the mistake in which we are more particularly interested in this essay is a second one. It is a consequence of the conceptualist theory, and we are now in a position to state what it is.

A revealed teaching is a revealed judgment, and a Christian’s assent to the teaching involves, among other things, a disposition to make the same judgment. So in order to assess whether Christianity has come down over the centuries and across cultural diversities with a “sameness” of teaching
(doctrines), it is necessary to state the conditions under which "sameness of judgment" is being preserved. Conceptualism has no resources to state these conditions except in terms of the "concept." It is forced to say that the judgment remains the same when, and only when, the concept of the subject remains the same and the concept of the predicate remains the same. This is already a misleading answer, and every confusion between one kind of concept and another renders it dangerously false.

Predicationism, by contrast, yields a clear account of what is essential if a judgment is to be preserved invariant from generation to generation. What must stay the same is simply the referent of the subject term and the relevant (that is, the actually used) sense of the predicate term. The subject term itself is replaceable; any term having the same reference may be substituted for it, regardless of the differences in sense. At the same time, other senses or usages of the predicate term are irrelevant; hence, if the predicate term is replaced by another, it is not required that the new term have all the same uses as the old—it merely needs to be a synonym of the old term in this context, for this purpose, as applied to this kind of subject. Thus it is easy to think of a context in which 'This lamp is too bright,' 'That thing is blinding,' and 'My aunt's favorite appliance is too glaring' are all expressions of essentially the same judgment. Similarly in theology, 'The Son of David walked in Galilee' and 'The Incarnate Word walked in Galilee'—despite the fact that their subject terms are drawn from different "theories" of Jesus—are essentially the same judgment, given only the co-referentiality in Jesus of 'the Son of David' and 'the Incarnate Word.'

By contrast, conceptualism fails to yield a helpful account of the conditions necessary for invariance. Conceptualism requires undifferentiated conceptual blocs to remain invariant behind both terms, subject and predicate, if the judgment is to remain the same. Mistakenly, any re-description of the subject may be held to alter the judgment, and a new predicate term may be held to have the same effect, even if it is a synonym of the old term (or a translation of it) in the context at hand, provided only that the new term's total range of usages is different from that of the old term. Thus conceptualism makes the permanence of the judgment depend upon an absence of historical change in B1- and E-concepts. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that conceptualist judgment theory was an ultraconservative obstacle to the thesis of doctrinal development before it became an ultraprogressive ally of dogmatic relativism; it could never account for the difference between the two.

With the four mistakes now diagnosed, we can show how dogmatic relativism emerged historically from them. We show this in eight points in the left-hand column. In a parallel column on the right, we exhibit eight alternative points in which the mistakes are avoided and the emergence of relativism is blocked.

(1) Assume that a judgment is a linking of two concepts, such that

(1') Assume that judgment is the application of one concept to one
'Christ is God,' for example, becomes a comparison of the concept of Christ with that of God or a finding that the concept of God is contained in the concept of Christ. *Praedicatum inest subjecto.*

On this assumption, the judgment always sets up a connection, 'A is B,' or 'A is not B,' where 'A' and 'B' stand for two concepts; and judgment theory takes one away from the realm of linguistic usage into the murkier realm of theoretical or abstract entities called concepts.

(2) The meaning of a judgment thus depends upon the force of the concepts composing it, and the force of a concept as such is determined by its intensional contents or "notes." Hence one concept can be equivalent to another only by identity of contents and can be nonequivalent to another only by way of contradiction. For example, the pagan concept of God is not the Hebrew concept of God, because the one does not contain, and the other does contain, the note "creator." Between containing "creator" and not containing "creator," there is a contradiction. Hence two concepts qua concepts can only be distinct specifically and they can only be equivalent where all their intensional contents are the same. As a result, two judgments cannot be the same unless their respective subject and predicate concepts are identical, and two judgments cannot be incompatible unless their subject concepts are identical.

(2') The meaning of a judgment depends upon the force of its terms, but the conditions for sameness of force are different for subjects and predicates. Two or more subject terms as subjects have the same essential force if and only if they have the same referent(s) in the context in question. Two or more predicate terms, as predicates, have the same force if and only if they express the same concept in the context in question. Conceptual sameness requires only partial identity of intensional contents; for in order for two predicates to express the same concept in a given judgment, it is not required that the entire dictionary entry should be the same for each term. It is only required that they be synonyms in the context, that is, that competent speakers of the language (or competent translators) agree that 't1' in this sentence has the same sense as 't2' would have in the same sentence and context (or its translation). Moreover, rival
beliefs about an object or kind need not enter into the definition of a term naming it nor into the definition of terms translating that name into other languages. Hence it cannot be assumed automatically that *theos*, used in a Greek sentence which means that the Prime Mover is God, expresses a different concept from *elohim*, used in a Hebrew sentence which means that Yahweh is God.

As a result, two judgments can be essentially the same provided only that their subject terms have the same reference and their predicates the same sense in the context; and two judgments can be incompatible provided only that their subjects are co-referential. Thus a pagan can say, "Your god is not the creator," and thereby succeed in having an argument with a Jew who says, "My God is the creator," even if their B1-concepts of 'God' and their beliefs about the deity are significantly different, because they at least succeed in referring to the same supposed entity. If their difference in belief or concept had the result that they were actually referring to different supposed entities, they could not be disagreeing with each other, because they would be talking about different things.

(3′) Truth is irreducible to meaning, at least in the case of judgments about real (or allegedly real) things. For such judgments, truth depends upon the existence of the subject's referent and its correspondence to the sense of the predicate. Permanence of truth in an undated judgment depends upon the permanence of the referent's being as it
(4) That the truth of judgments can be permanent, and that historically invariant judgments exist (key features of what Lonergan calls the "classical" world view) are points taken for granted, so long as one or the other of two assumptions is made: (a) that the ontological structure of the objects of experience imposes upon all minds the same concepts of these objects, or (b) that human mentality and its raw data are so uniform throughout the world and throughout history that even though concepts are formed by man, they are formed always and everywhere the same (end up containing the same notes). The abandonment of assumption (a) was the work of Kant. The abandonment of assumption (b) was the work of Romantics and historicists (including neo-Kantians like Cassirer) who drew inspiration from linguists like von Humboldt or Whorf and whose work derived its plausibility from documented differences in grammatical structure, between languages, and in systems of classification and belief, between cultures.

(5) Once both assumptions are either abandoned or placed in doubt, it becomes possible, at least, that the concepts formed by men of one culture is said to be, while permanence of the truth in a dated judgment depends simply upon the state of the referent at the time to which the judgment is pegged. The invariance of a judgment from age to age, etc., depends entirely upon keeping the same referent for the subject, the same sense for the predicate, and the same time-peg (or lack thereof).

(4') The permanent truth of judgments and the existence of historically invariant judgments can be established on grounds quite different from those of conceptualism (to wit, on the grounds of predicationalism), so that Lonergan's "classical" world view is largely a straw man.

The controversy over whether concepts are formed or imposed has been vitiated by failure to distinguish between the uses of 'concept.' It is quite possible that A-, B2-, and B3-concepts are imposed, while the others are obviously formed. Moreover, there is a crucial difference between those concepts which are definitions occurring in mathematics, science, philosophy, or other formal theories and those concepts which occur in nontheoretical, everyday, ordinary-language contexts. The explicit and often stipulative manner in which the former are "formed" has nothing to do with the manner in which the latter are "formed." 19

(5') The interesting question is whether conceptual differences exist in the ordinary-language contexts which are required, in different
or epoch differ importantly from those formed by men of another culture or epoch. Whether they do or not is a matter for geisteswissenschaftliche research.

(6) The tool of this research is to be the following procedure. One looks at the judgments which men of culture/epoch $C$ made; philology tells one superficially what they were and how they were expressed. Then, since every judgment is a pronouncement that the predicate-concept is contained in the subject-concept, one can map subject-concept $A$ in culture/epoch $C$ by gathering and comparing all the propositions in which the subject-term 'A' (or any of its obvious synonyms) occurs. The full concept $A$ in culture/epoch $C$ contains everything habitually or conventionally predicated of it in these judgments.

Hence arise the lexically mapped "concepts" of the Baur and Kittel dictionaries; hence the prominence of word-studies as a key technique of biblical theology, historical theology, and Dogmengeschichte. Hence, finally, the conceptual abyss between the Greek and Hebrew "conceptual systems." Then, when the problem arises of how to explain these conceptual diversities, a genetic explanation is sought through research into etymologies, which are held to reveal Grundbegriffe, or "originary understandings." Hence the strong pull of Heidegger's etymologies, in order to understand their disparate theoretical concepts and belief-systems. Whether such differences do exist, say, between ancient Greek ordinary language and ancient Hebrew ordinary language, or between either of those and modern Western ordinary language, is a purely empirical question, to be solved by consulting reliable dictionaries and translators.

(6') The conceptualist tool for cross-linguistic and cross-cultural research is transparently absurd. It depends upon the confusion of E-concepts with A- and B-concepts and hence of theoretical concepts with nontheoretical ones, etc. For this reason, the conceptualist research tool is just an elaborate procedure for begging the one and only interesting question. Look: we already know that belief-systems differ; we already know that constructed theories differ with respect to the assumptions used in them; the interesting question is whether the ordinary language required in culture/epoch $C_1$ in order to understand its beliefs and theories differs conceptually from the ordinary language required in culture/epoch $C_2$ in order to understand its beliefs and theories. To use the differences we already know about to prove the existence of the very difference we are asking about is simply to beg the question.

Hence the mass of scholarship upon which conceptual relativism and dogmatic relativism rely is a scholarship which blatantly assumes what it is supposed to prove.20

Moreover, insofar as concepts have anything to do with the mean-
logical speculations on biblical exegetes like Oepke, on Gadamer's hermeneutics, etc.

... of words, or of words-in-context, concepts cannot have much to do with etymologies, because the meaning of a word is a matter of usage, not of etymology; Aquinas already knew this (ST 1, q. 13, a. 2, ad 2).

Finally, what is the status of the interesting question itself? What kind of evidence could there be that a diversity in A- or B-concepts exists in ordinary-language contexts between cultures/epochs? I can only imagine two kinds.

First, we might encounter a frustrating inability to translate documents from $C_1$ into language understandable in $C_2$, no matter how many neologisms, loan-words, clumsy paraphrases, and explanatory footnotes we resorted to. Has that ever happened? Apparently not. Missionaries have succeeded in translating some or all of the Greek New Testament into hundreds of exotic languages spoken in exotic cultural contexts and have succeeded in making converts in those cultures. So what is the problem?

Secondly, suppose we have a newly discovered native culture. The work of translation seems to go smoothly enough and a number of natives have learned English. But suppose they keep making statements in English which seem to us to involve category mistakes or to be in some other way logically deviant. For example, suppose that one of our new converts to Christianity announces that God varies with the growth and contraction of the money supply, and suppose he cannot be made to understand why we consider this to be a misconception. Or suppose that the English-
(7) It follows that while ‘A is B’ may have been true for culture/epoch C, given the “conceptual universe” of that time, ‘A is B’ may be false or truth-valueless today, given the conceptual universe of our time. This problem, once discovered, is called the “historicity of truth,” or “die Geschichtlichkeit der Wahrheitserkenntnis,” or “the historical relativity of dogmatic formulae,” etc. It becomes “the great problem which modern man must face,” “the issue never yet confronted squarely by the Magisterium,” etc.

(8) Creative theology has a response to the problem, however. The sense of Chalcedon’s definition, for example, can be repriminated for the men of today by a twofold effort. (a) We must return to the original conceptual universe of the dogma (bypassing scholasticism) by historico-philological scholarship after the fashion of (6) above, so as to rediscover the original conceptual contents speaking natives simply cannot be taught any of our sciences, disciplines, or technologies. Then, clearly we would be dealing with a “difference of mentality” which could plausibly be taken as evidence for some deep-seated conceptual diversity. And has that ever happened? Again, apparently not. Even though there are hundreds of cultures which have never developed anything like Western philosophy or science, the natives of those cultures are today, all over the world, learning Aristotle, quantum mechanics, electrical engineering, etc. So what is the problem?

(7′) If $S_1$ is a time-pegged sentence of ancient language $L_1$, and has a translation $T[S_1]$ in a modern language $L_2$ which is considered accurate, then if $S_1$ was ever true in $L_1$, it is still true in $L_1$ and its translation $T[S_1]$ is true in $L_2$. A time-pegged sentence the referent of whose subject and the sense of whose predicate remains unaltered cannot have an accurate translation with a different truth value.

Hence there is no problem of the “historicity of truth.” The entire issue is a pseudo-problem.

(8′) If an old formula, ‘F(a)’, and a new formula, ‘G(b)’, are so related that the sense of ‘F’ is not the same as the sense ‘G’ in the context or the referent of ‘a’ is not really identical to the referent of ‘b’, then the two formulae simply cannot make the same affirmation. Bouillard’s analogie de la vérité is nonsense; its use in dogmatic contexts is hermeneutical gnosticism.
and linkages; and (b) we must make a creative search among contemporary concepts for those which will somehow capture in their own way the Chalcedonic conceptual ratios. The resulting updated formula will not be the 'A is B' of Chalcedon but a new formula, 'C is D', such that A:B::C:D. This is Henri Bouillard's analogie de la vérité. It is not excluded that the two formulae may be inconsistent in some one conceptual universe, e.g., Chalcedon's or today's or, indeed, that of some ahistorical scholasticism. But once the vain hope of some permanent, supra-historical system is abandoned, there is no problem of inconsistency, because the two formulae are not called upon to coexist in any one conceptual framework but rather to be transpositions of each other into different frameworks.

... Conclusion: The problematic developed in (1)-(8) disappears in (1′)-(8′). But points (1) through (8) depend upon confusions over the sense of 'concept' and upon the conceptualist theory of the judgment, which has been refuted by Thomists like F. D. Wilhelmsen and by the whole development of analytical philosophy from Frege to the present. Ergo the problematic developed in (1)-(8) is a pseudo-problematic. Its existence has everything to do with logico-linguistic mistakes in Suárez, Leibniz, Kant, and the neo-scholastic manuals—and nothing to do with the real needs of theology.

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Table of Senses of "Concept"

Private (Psychological) Senses

(A) my concept of $x$ = a psychological entity, not directly an object of introspection, by virtue of which I am able to recognize an $x$ or use correctly the word ‘$x$’ and other words referring to an $x$.

(B1) my concept of ‘$x$’ = the data of introspection which yield what would be my general definition of ‘$x$’ — my grasp of the word’s possible uses.

(B2) my concept of ‘$x$’ = the data of introspection which yield what I would take ‘$x$’ to mean in this case.

(B3) my concept of $x$ = the data of introspection which yield what would be my definition of the thing itself.

(B4) my concept of $x$ = the description under which I am now thinking of $x$.

(C) my concept of $x$ = the first judgment on $x$ which pops into my head when I hear ‘$x$’ or another term I take to refer to $x$; what is for me the salient fact about $x$.

(E) my concept of $x$ = the set of judgments I habitually make about $x$; what I believe about $x$.

Public (Objective) Senses

(B1') the concept of ‘$x$’ = the correct general definition of ‘$x$’.

(B1') my concept of ‘$x$’ = my general definition of ‘$x$’.

(B2') the concept of ‘$x$’ = what ‘$x$’ means in the case and context at hand.

(B2') my concept of ‘$x$’ = what I take ‘$x$’ to mean in this case.

(B3') the concept of $x$ = the correct definition of the thing, $x$, itself (for the purpose at hand).

(B3') my concept of $x$ = my definition of the thing, $x$, itself.

(B4') a concept of $x$ = a description under which one may plausibly or defensibly think of $x$.

(B4') a public expression of (B4), e.g., a sentence predicating of $x$ the description in question.

(C') the outward expression of (C).

(D) the concept of $x$ = the total set of truths about $x$; everything known or knowable about $x$.

(E') $A$’s concept of $x$ = $A$’s recorded beliefs about $x$, especially those considered most distinctive.
Notes

1 "The Church spread throughout the whole world," Irenaeus wrote, "carefully guards this kerygma she has received, together with the faith. She guards them as if she had only one house; she believes them as if she had only one heart and one soul, and in the same way she preaches and teaches and hands them on as if she had only one mouth. . . . Just as the sun, a creature of God, is one and the same over the whole earth, so the preaching of the truth appears everywhere and enlightens all who want to come to a knowledge of the truth" (Adv. Haer. I, 10, 2).

2 The term "dogmatic relativism" is taken from Pius XII’s encyclical Humani Generis and will be used here in the same sense. See Acta Apostolicae Sedis 42 (1950), especially pp. 565f. The relevant paragraphs are reprinted in Denzinger-Schônmetzer, Enchiridion symbolorum, 32nd edition (New York: Herder, 1963), numbers 3881-3883 (old numbers 2309-2312).

3 Since the specimen is intended to be merely representative and symptomatic, I have not thought it necessary to attribute each point made in the sample to its source. Those who have read around in recent theology will have no trouble recognizing what (and whom) it is a sample of.

4 A splendid discussion of Kant’s a priori concepts of the pure understanding is Thomas K. Swing, Kant’s Transcendental Logic (New Haven: Yale, 1969).

5 A classic and systematic presentation of Thomistic usage is Joannes a Sancto Thoma, Cursus philosophicus Thomisticus, ed. B. Reiser, 3 vols. (Rome: Marietti, 1930).

6 By way of anticipating a point to be made later, this “final understanding” of a term in context might turn out to be its sense, or might turn out to be its reference, or might need to be both; a major dispute in judgment theory turns upon this issue. The distinction between sense and reference has its roots in the medieval distinction between significatio and suppositio. For the modern discussion (and recovery) of the difference, see Gottlob Frege, “On Sense and Reference,” in Translations from the Philosophical Writings of Gottlob Frege, ed. Peter Geach and Max Black (Oxford, 1970), pp. 56-78.

7 In both kinds of definition, facts and experiences settle the matter only so far. Off at the end, there are decisions to be made. In the case of word-definitions, a lexicographer will try to make his decisions in such a way that all the standard uses are recognized and the further uses of the best authors are accepted, while vulgar, corrupt, or inexact uses are rejected. Thus decisions are involved, but because they leave all standard uses intact, they do not convert the dictionary into a book of stipulative definitions. A definition is felt to be stipulative only when it violates or excludes some standard use of the term defined. The introduction of stipulatively defined terms marks a profound transition; essentially, it is the transition from ordinary-language use to theory construction, a turn from B- to E-concepts, as we shall see. There is a similar passage from ordinary talk to theory in the case of real definitions. I have said that the elaboration of these definitions can be a philosophical task; but long before philosophy arises, the practical needs of everyday life require some understanding of what things are. What is a horse, for example? It is a four-footed animal good for riding.
What is a thief? It is one who takes the property of another. Neither of these definitions would pass Socratic inspection; but they were never meant to. They are beginnings—rough ones, perhaps, but good enough for many purposes. Thus, in the normal case, there is a fair stretch of agreement on real definitions before hard examples are posed, rival decisions made, stipulative turns taken, and explicit philosophical differences introduced.

In either case, it is worth noting that the passage to stipulative definition and to theory brings with it a pluralism of technical concepts, which we shall discuss below under the label "E-concepts." This pluralism breaks up the unity-in-vagueness or unity-in-incompleteness of B1-concepts, B3-concepts, and ordinary language.

What I have just said about the differences between ordinary-language contexts and theoretical contexts presupposes that there is a good sense of "theoretical" in which ordinary-language contexts are nontheoretical. I see no need to defend that presupposition, since it is implicitly conceded by everyone who feels the need to stipulate, formalize, or otherwise recede from "everyday" talk in order to theorize effectively. Now it may be the case that there is another good sense of "theoretical" in which all statements, no matter how ordinary, are theoretical (so that all seeing is seeing-as, and all formal theories are just "more theoretical" than informal discussions), as a number of philosophers seem to hold; but it is not clear that this less familiar sense of "theoretical" can be given a suitable definition which is free of confusion between different senses of "concept."

8 An extensive debate over relativism in the philosophy of science has turned upon the role of E-concepts in technical or formalized theories. Relativists such as Thomas S. Kuhn (The Structure of Scientific Revolutions [Chicago, 1962]) and Paul Feyerabend ("Against Method," Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science IV [Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1970]) hold that the E-concepts appear as definitions of the entities with which the theory deals. This position quickly leads to remarkable consequences. Recall that definitions are usually taken to be analytic. Notice that E-concepts would have to be stipulative definitions. They stipulate some disputable decision or belief about the definiendum. Hence if theoretical and technical concepts do appear as definitions in a theory, the disputable beliefs which they incorporate become "analytical statements" within that theory. This has the odd result that the belief is no longer falsifiable within the framework of that theory. At best, experiment might suggest that the whole theory is moot, in that no entities correspond to its definitions. From this, Kuhn and Feyerabend derive the further odd result that competing theories, embracing conflicting beliefs, are about different entities and so (on deeper reflection) are not really competing at all.

But it is highly doubtful whether scientific theories have in fact had this structure. It is more likely that conflicting beliefs introduced as E-concepts have played the role of auxiliary assumptions. After all, it was part of the "Newtonian concept" of mass that it was independent of velocity, and this belief came to be rejected in the "relativistic concept," where mass varies with velocity; so we have two E-concepts of mass, yet the intended reference of 'mass' is substantially the same in the two theories. Indeed, if it were not the same, Kuhn and Feyerabend would be correct in saying the two theories would be about different things and hence would not be rivals. But a 20th-century physicist does not say that what Newton meant by "mass" does not exist; he says that Newton was wrong about one of its properties. On this and many related points of importance, see Carl R. Kordig, The Justification of Scientific Change (Dordrecht-Holland: D. Reidel Publishing Co., 1971).

9 An important influence contributing to this confusion was a habit of German neo-Kantian thinkers—their habit of using the term Logik so broadly as to cover "die Erkenntnisbetätigung als solche in ihrer formalen Struktur." Problems of formal logic, of everyday, pre-scientific knowledge, of cognitive psychology, of philosophical epistemology, and of scientific method (including stipulative concept-formation), were thereby stewed together in one pot. See H. H. Bruun, Science, Values, and Politics in Max Weber's Methodology (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1972), p. 12.

10 Catholic theologians and historians of dogma will want to maintain, of course, two further things: (a) that the ontological theses actually used by the ancient Councils are not simply
consistent with primitive Christian beliefs but are also illuminative of their true depth, and
(b) that the concepts expressed in the Councils' dogmatic formulae themselves are B-concepts,
whereas the several theological systems explicating the formulae may employ technical
E-concepts. This classical way of distinguishing between faith and theology (i.e., between
fides quae as ordinary language and theology as theorization) is unavailable to the relativist
exactly because he has confused E-concepts with B-concepts. For the same reason, the rela-
tivist cannot distinguish between the relativity of theological conclusions (i.e., their being
relative to the system or school of theology in which they are deduced) and the alleged rela-
tivity of dogmatic formulae themselves. The long-ingrained habit of describing biblical texts
constitutive of the fides quae as Pauline "theology" or Johannine "theology" abets this confu-
sion.

11 A sentence so considered as to be making tangible this judgment rather than that one is
often called a "proposition" or a "statement." Statements and propositions are often
thought to be different in kind from sentences, more abstract. If they are thought to be
abstract entities based on linguistic entities (e.g., equivalence classes of sentences under a
synonymy relation, or ordered pairs whose first member is a sentence and whose second
member is an interpretation), I have no quarrel with the alleged difference. But if state-
ments and propositions are thought to be abstract entities independent of language alto-
gether, I do have a quarrel; but I shall not pursue it here.

12 I have discussed these matters in Marian Studies 28 (1977), pp. 81ff.

13 To put the matter scholastically, when a term is being used to express the subject of a judg-
ment, one's grasp of the term itself (conceptus medius) combines with the context to lead the
mind to a conceptus ultimus which is the term's "referent"; and thus the term is being taken
materialiter. But when a term is being used to express the predicate of a judgment, one's
grasp of the term and its context leads the mind to some determinate "sense" of the term as
conceptus ultimus. So understood, the term is being taken formaliter.

14 In other words, the B1-concept of 'green' is an analogical concept, as indeed are nearly all
B1-concepts of natural-language predicates. For the rise of analogical senses through the
contraction of a predicate to diverse subjects, see James F. Ross, "A New Theory of Anal-

15 See the Thomistic dictum that subjects are taken materialiter, while predicates are taken
formaliter (ST 1, q. 13, a. 12c). For Thomistic judgment theory and a vigorous critique of
conceptualism, see Frederick D. Wilhelmsen, Man's Knowledge of Reality (Englewood Cliffs:
Prentice-Hall, 1955); for analytical judgment theory, see the introductory sections of White-
head and Russell, Principia Mathematica, and the volleys exchanged in the debate between
Russell and P. F. Strawson over reference and definite descriptions; for a survey of both, see

16 This account goes back to Whitehead and Russell, Principia Mathematica (Cambridge, 1910);
a different account can be found in L. Goddard and R. Routley, The Logic of Significance

17 Scholastic discussion of the second or "formal" reading is found in commentaries on the
different ways in which propositions can be true "per se." For references in Cajetan and
Sylvester of Ferrara, see Sancti Thomae Aquinatis Opera Omnia, Leonine Edition, vol. 16,
Indices (Rome, 1948), p. 588, s. v. "per se." Contemporary analysis of the second reading
goes back to C. I. Lewis, who pioneered the work on strict implication and began the recov-
ery of modal logic.

18 This example assumes, of course, that the two sentences are being read materialiter. Indeed,
in these particular examples, the "formal" reading is either impossible or absurd. But other
cases are often ambiguous. Take, for example, this theological claim: "The Son of David is
the Messiah." Read *materialiter* as referring to Jesus of Nazareth, this is a highly informative, synthetic claim; but read *formaliter* as a truth about the Son of David as such, whoever he may be, the claim is arguably analytic in the context of standard Messianic hopes.

Clearly, if the sentence is to be read *formaliter*, there are much stricter constraints on how the apparent subject may be replaced or translated, if invariance is to be secured, precisely because the apparent subject of these formal readings is being strictly or "per se" connected to the apparent predicate, so that the judgment expressed is a very different thing from the judgment expressed by the material reading.

Beyond question, one of the greatest weaknesses (and dangers) of the conceptualist theory is its inability to distinguish sharply between these "material" and "formal" readings.

19 Recall that the B1′- and B3′-concepts, being native to nontheoretical, everyday language concepts, are "formed" simply by a reflective/expressive effort, and that the B1· and B3·-concepts are "formed" simply by comparison and criticism of such efforts. Hence in both cases the formed definition is merely an attempt to capture in words what we already have in our heads. That is why we respond to such definitions with a sense of recognition. See the fascinating remarks of R. M. Hare, "Philosophical Discoveries," in his *Essays on Philosophical Method* (Berkeley, 1972), pp. 19-37. But the passage from everyday usage to theory construction is often a passage from such "recognition" definitions to stipulative definitions. For this reason, what appear to be B-concepts in theoretical contexts may not be real B-concepts at all but E-concepts; they incorporate controvertible beliefs.