

Examining the Objective Essence of Language Through a Biblical Lens

0 Introduction – Language, the divine mind and scientism

In this paper, I explore what a theory of the essence of language might look like if we try to explain language by taking both the bible, particularly *Genesis* and the *Gospel of John*, and the natural sciences to be true. What exactly I mean by the essence of language will hopefully become clear as I proceed. In short, I think it might be reasonable on a biblical view to see the very core properties of language as objectively real. In other words, I will make the claim, given a biblical lens, that there is an objective essence of language that is pre-existent and resides in objective reality (i.e., the divine mind). Seen in this light, whatever makes “human language” language has not so much developed over time, but rather the biological mechanisms for interpreting and using the essence of language have developed over time. In addition, I argue that language specific structures have also evolved over time. From here it would seem that these mechanisms have been used to discover or make use of the core properties of language that are already baked into the reason of the universe. Put yet another way, the essence of language is contained, uncaused and eternal within the divine mind. This sort of explanation runs contrary to most modern secular theories of human language where knowledge develops over time and is completely subjective. This sort of approach is a huge departure from mainstream thinking in linguistics and my reasons for taking this line of inquiry deserve a few words of explanation at the outset.

First, it has become clear to me that some academic questions seem to lack a reasonable answer under the strict tether of modern scientific frameworks. I would point to consciousness as the best example of such a problem. While purely scientific theories of consciousness abound, *none* of them are directly explainable given what we know about how the brain works on a

biological level. We can certainly correlate what we might conceive of as properties of consciousness with certain brain functions¹, but no one has yet come up with a reasonable and testable theory as to how we go from neuronal function to the experience of self-aware consciousness and the feeling that the world is about something (i.e., the ‘hard problem’ of consciousness). There are those who think that the reason for this is that consciousness is simply not physical, going back as far as Descartes and even further. It seems to me that the only plausible explanation at this point is that consciousness lies outside the realm of the physical. Instead, it seems that consciousness might best be explained as metaphysical.² If this is true, it would certainly explain why we cannot find it using purely physical means. I believe that it is also possible that what language is at its most fundamental and essential level, and possibly its origins, may fall under this category. Even if this turns out not to be the case, I believe that asking the questions of what the essence of language is and what are its origins considering a biblical and modern scientific account combined would prove to be an interesting and illustrative endeavor.

I feel that taking a strictly materialist point of view with regards to explaining the nature of language might be limiting our view of the problem. The main stumbling block is *scientism*.³ *Scientism* is a term often used to criticize the mainstream idea that all questions concerning our reality and our universe can be answered within the materialist confines of science. Materialism says that what you can see and measure in nature is what you get and that is all there is to it. The use of the term scientism, particularly the *-ism* part, suggests that such a view is short-sighted. This approach is demonstrably circular in its reasoning, as a materialist simply states *a priori* that nothing outside of the physical universe can be so. If one starts with this assumption, then if there

¹ While there are a plethora of studies and meta-studies looking at this sort of thing, see Nani et al (2019) for an easy-to-read introduction.

² There are many scholars who have suggested just this. See Seager (1991), Pretner (2018) and Pradan (2019) to name just a few.

³ See Lennox (2019).

is some sort of meta-physical transcendent influence from outside that system, one would never find it, as their mind is already made up *not* to find it. It is for reasons like these that I think it is intellectually beneficial to begin to think outside of the materialist box. If for no other reason than to be theoretically (and empirically) open-minded.

All of this is not to say that a strict materialistic framework is not useful at times (perhaps most of the time). As a linguist, I find working within a strict materialist framework to be helpful and most of the time leads to analyses that are concrete and reflective of the objective truth they represent. The danger in allowing a hypothesis that falls outside of a strict framework like this, is that one can create a sort of “trash-can” effect, wherein, if one cannot come up with a materialist analysis of a given phenomenon, then one can always lay claim to a metaphysical explanation. In turn, one might miss a perfectly good materialist analysis that would have been found, if an appeal to metaphysical “forces” is made too quickly. It is not the point of this paper to enter a discussion about when to entertain such ideas, as I am not sure where to even begin answering that question. Rather, what I would like to do is loosen the materialistic chains that bind the discussion of explaining what language is at its objective core. I simply wish to explore what it would look like if explaining what language is had something to do with a creator God as depicted in the Old and New Testament, and that is what I endeavor to begin to do here. It should be noted that I am a theoretical linguist and not a theologian, evolutionary biologist, nor am I a philosopher. Accordingly, my views on these issues should be read with that in mind.

To re-iterate, in what follows I am merely asking, given certain assumptions, what a biblical view of language would look like considering an additional scientific framework. As a result of this analysis, I will be examining what a biblical view of language might lead us to think language is at its core. Perhaps a view of the essence of language as a *transcendent phenomenon*.

In short, my thesis is this: the abstract information that human language uses is objectively real. The “development” of human language is better seen as a human mental system that *discovered and employed* the abstract essence of language and developed a biological system to make use of that information. In what follows below, I examine in order Genesis 1, Genesis 2 and the prologue to the Gospel of John and attempt to explain what a theory of language looks like through the lens of these passages while keeping a modern scientific framework in mind.

1 Genesis 1: God speaks and the Imago Dei

1.1 The beginning – God Speaks

The obvious place to begin a discussion of a biblical view of language would be just there, the beginning. In Genesis 1, God speaks the world into existence.

“And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. ⁴ God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. ⁵ God called the light “day,” and the darkness he called “night.” And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day (Genesis 1:3-5)

In this paper, I do not take a purely literal view of Genesis. I tend to look at Genesis as *mythohistorical*. I take the view of William Lane Craig here, which stems from Thorkild Jacobson, that Genesis 1-11 use describe historical events and people, as evidenced by the genealogies, but these facts are couched in mythological style (see Craig 2021). In other words, while I view Genesis as having many of the properties of myth, I also adhere to the idea that the author was attempting to represent historical truth. What this means for my thesis here, is that I will not be

taking Genesis as strictly literal. In addition, I subscribe to an old earth view in line with modern evolutionary biology, with the rather large exception, namely that God can choose to interject himself into his creation at any point he wishes. If, however, one disagrees with me on these points, I do not think it will change the ultimate conclusions I will be making here. I will comment more on this in the concluding section.

Given the above statements, it should be clear I do not believe one needs to take a literal reading of the text wherein God is speaking as a human would, although I do not explicitly rule this out. Human speech requires human anatomy and physiology, as well as time and space to be like that of the world we live in. Utterances take place in time and space, and the physics of this universe, as they are, are necessary to complete this task. For example, speech is transmitted in time through the physical medium of air molecules. Since God is outside of time and space and is indeed the creator of these things, it is difficult to know in what manner God is “speaking” here. If God spoke the world into existence, and that existence includes the creation of time and space, then I would have to say that in Genesis God is not speaking as a human would. How then is God actually speaking? Unfortunately, the text does not provide much in the way of a clue here. For the moment I will assume that God is indeed speaking, but not adhere to any particular idea of how he actually does this. This is not to say that God cannot use human speech. When we look at the incarnation of God in Jesus, we see God speaking as a human would. However, at this point in the text, and given the genre of Genesis, one cannot be sure.

Even if God is not speaking as a human would at this point, we can still reasonably say that the text is attempting to get across the point that God indeed possesses the knowledge of language in some way. I acknowledge that attributing possession of knowledge to God is perhaps not quite correct. Maybe a better way to talk of this “knowledge” is by assuming that he is imbued with this

knowledge. In other words, the abstract information that makes up the basics of language and its use is simply part of the mind of God.⁴ Since God is, in an Aristotelian sense, eternal, uncaused, immutable, and non-contingent, it seems that the essence of language is objectively real and eternal in the mind of God. This is the first hint that perhaps the abstract essence of language is woven into the fabric of this world, just as other abstract concepts might be. I assume that the objective essence of language exists in the same way that mathematics or propositions might exist. Mathematical realism is the idea that mathematical entities exist apart from the observer in objective reality. Proponents of various kinds of this thinking include Plato, Aristotle, and Kurt Gödel. I will not be making a point-by-point comparison here, rather I am simply noting that abstract concepts as real objects apart from humans is a very ancient idea. Furthermore, I am suggesting that Genesis leads us to believe that at least some properties of language are as well.

At this point I would like to describe in more detail what I mean by the essence of language. When looking at language through a biblical lens, it becomes immediately apparent that perhaps some parts of human language are indeed *not* objectively real and pre-existent. For example, the syntactic structure of a given instantiation of a language. There is no reason, for example, to think that the syntax of Hindi is objectively real knowledge that exists “out there”. Instead, it makes more sense to me that things like this evolve over time through human interaction. In this way, the specific syntax of Hindi would be subjective and in the minds of men. The story of the Tower of Babel becomes particularly relevant here. We are told that the whole world had one language⁵ and God wished to confuse their language.

⁴ I think it is interesting to ask whether God created this abstract essence of language or whether the information itself is uncreated, and hence eternal. This, however, is beyond the scope of this paper and I will simply assume that the essence of language is simply part of God, uncaused, uncreated, and eternal. I do note, however, that I have not given a sufficient argument either way.

“5 But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower the people were building. 6 The LORD said, “If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. 7 Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other.”

8 So the LORD scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. 9 That is why it was called Babel—because there the LORD confused the language of the whole world. From there the LORD scattered them over the face of the whole earth.”

It is certainly possible that an all-powerful God could invent numerous languages beforehand, scatter people across the land, and assign each group a pre-determined language. If we look at the scientific data, however, it is more reasonable to assume that these languages developed over time. There is a wealth of scientific literature that shows that languages change over time. At least from my reading of the English translation of the Biblical text, I think this scientific explanation fits perfectly fine. We are told that God confused the language, not necessarily that he created new variations purposefully. From a purely biological standpoint, if one were to take a group of people and separate them into different groups, new languages would necessarily evolve overtime. It is in this way that I think it is best to view the specific structures of languages as subjective and existent in the human mind.

What I am arguing here is that when we look at the very existence of language and ask what that thing is through a biblical lens, it becomes apparent that some aspects of language seem to be pre-existent and eternal. Indeed, I am suggesting that these things are the very essence of language itself. I am also claiming that the essence of language is objectively real. In other words, the essence of language is as real as any physical phenomenon. What I have not yet done is suggest

what exactly are those aspects of language that are objectively pre-existent. I will explore this further in the next section. At times, I will refer to this objective essence with the term *divine knowledge*. The two terms are meant to be synonymous. In the following section, I explore what it means to be made in the image of God with respect to the nature of language.

1.2 Imago Dei

Getting back to the text of Genesis 1, God also speaks mankind into being in his own image.

“So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. Genesis 1:27”

What it means to be made in the image of God, or the *imago Dei*, is matter of some debate. Thomas Aquinas sees this image as containing a rational soul, including the intellect and will and separates us from non-human animals.⁶ In fact, what most definitions of the Imago Dei have in common is that of human rationality. Aquinas specifically states that this is only found in humans. In article 2, Aquinas asks whether the imago Dei can be found in irrational creatures. He suggests that a true image can only be found in rational creatures but does state that a “likeness” to God is be found in other creatures – which he calls a “trace”. If we look at the science of linguistics and ask whether we see human language outside of humans, it is my personal interpretation of the data that we do not. We do, however, see what I would call traces of language outside of humans. I do

⁶ See Montague (2014) for an extensive discussion on Aquinas’ views on the imago Dei. I borrow much of Montague’s explanation here.

not mean to totally equate Aquinas' use of the term trace and my own, but I do think that Aquinas leaves open the possibility of usage of the term this way, although perhaps unintentionally.

Non-human animal communication systems do have many properties in common with human language.⁷ For example, the signals in any communication system, including human language, have a pragmatic function, or functions. In short, the signals get something done in the real world. Whether that is a fiddler claw-waving its claw to mark its territory, or a human yelling at someone to “get away!”. There are specific properties that we only seem to find in human language. On the other hand, one might also be able to argue that we find the traces, or the beginnings of some of these properties outside of humans. A full discussion of this is well outside the scope of this paper. However, I will do my best to make a concise analysis here.

Among the properties that I would argue are unique to human language are that of true discreteness, true displacement and most importantly recursivity leading to infinite output (see Clark 1966 for a full discussion of the first two). Human language is truly discrete, in that its parts can be broken down further into smaller meaningful and/or functional parts. Sentences can be broken into words, words into morphemes, morphemes into phonemes, etc.). Furthermore, these parts can be recombined into an infinite number of new utterances. In short, there is no limit to the number of possible sentences that could exist. This is possible through the ability to concatenate phrases and the ability to recursively nest structures into other structures. For example, one can nest a sentence within another sentence. In the example below I have used brackets to indicate a complete sentence.

[Jim said that [Bill went home]].

⁷ See Hockett (1966) for a discussion of the design features of language that have been used to compare human language. As with all ideas, it has its limitations see for a brief discussion (Aitchison 1990).

In the above example, we see that the sentence *Bill went home* is nested within the larger sentence *Jim said that Bill went home*. Due to the property of recursion, I could then nest the larger sentence into an even larger one as shown below:

[Mary thinks that [Jim said that [Bill went home.]]]

We could potentially do this an infinite number of times. This is the very sort of thing that we *do not* see outside of human language. Human languages are systems that have a finite set of rules that can be used recursively to give an infinite number of outputs. The famous linguist Noam Chomsky was the first to really give any sort of in-depth discussion of this in the history of linguistics. He has firmly held throughout his work that only humans have this sort of ability. In fact, he wrote a book of the title *Why Only Us* (Berwick and Chomsky 2018) where he and Berwick attempt to explain why it is that we only see recursion in humans in an evolutionary framework.

Berwick and Chomsky's hold that human language is particular to humans and that the existence of recursion presents a challenge to Darwinian models of evolution that are based solely on gradual change. Their hypothesis is that a single genetic mutation that occurred approximately 80,000 years ago⁸ suddenly gave rise to the recursive ability in humans. They even go so far as to say that there could be no precursor to true human language. In short, one cannot gradually go from a finite system to a discrete infinite system. When referring to the almost statistical impossibility of human language even existing, they state, "...language is something like a snowflake, assuming its particular form by virtue of laws of nature – in this case principles of

⁸ Phillip Liberman has suggested that human physiology has only been capable to produce the speech sounds we have today as late as around 80,000 years ago.

computational efficiency...”. When looking at the nature of language through the Biblical lens, it seems that this sort of observation, certainly tips its hat to a transcendent cause.

Obviously, Chomsky’s approach is firmly based in evolutionary biology and does not refer to any such notion as an intelligent creator and sustainer of the universe. Put rather simply, in his view, a single mutation and a host of other almost impossible variables lined up at just the right time to produce language, against all odds. It seems to me, however, that if one pushes past the limits of scientism and entertains the idea that God can indeed intervene into time and space, as he is described as doing in the bible, the sudden occurrence of recursive abilities in mankind is quite explainable. Indeed, I would suggest that this ability is part of the *imago Dei* in that recursivity is part of God’s mind. Recursivity seems to be preexistent, and this is even more evident when we see that it is such a large part of the natural world. What happened 80,000 years ago then, if we take a Judeo-Christian idea of God, is that the intelligent designer decided to give man the genetic material to begin to speak in a truly human fashion. In other words, he gave man the mechanisms necessary to *use* recursivity. Obviously, there are volumes to say about this topic, but I will press on in hopes that I have at least approached the subject and related it to my thesis successfully.⁹

So, my claim is that things like recursion are part of the natural world, albeit an invisible part. They are part of the divine mind. Recursion then, is not so much a part of the human mind as a part of God’s mind. It exists as part of the fabric of reality and human beings evolved to make use of that sort of knowledge. There is a very real and difficult question that comes up here, namely *how* does this happen? What is the exact neurological mechanism that humans evolved to make use of abstract knowledge that is external to themselves?¹⁰ By what mechanism specifically? One

⁹ I am not the first to ask such questions like those above. Soskice (2016) explores the human capacity for speech with respect to the *Imago Dei*. While her main aim differs from mine considerably, she takes care to note that human speech is at least in part rooted in the rationality part of the *imago Dei*.

¹⁰ There is another possibility here, namely that humans are not necessarily making use of this external knowledge but are instead allowed to develop the ability to create recursive structures on their own. Seen in this light, humans would be seen as developing

could come up with all sorts of theories, such as the imago Dei is set up in such a way as to provide a sort of conduit between the human mind and divine linguistic knowledge. Over time, as planned by God, the human brain evolves to a place where it can biologically interface with this knowledge properly. While this sounds convincing, it is purely speculative, and this sort of speculating is far outside the realm of what I am currently able to approach here.

Moving on from comparisons to animals, I will continue with Aquinas' thoughts on the image of God. Aquinas borrows from Augustine, noting that humans are an imperfect manifestation of the imago Dei. This is obvious when looking at the moral character of humans, but I do think we can expand the use of this term to include language. First, this might explain why we must acquire a specific language at all, why language variation exists, and why all humans do not simply develop the exact same language. Also, we might expect that whatever system does evolve in humans to utilize the divine knowledge of language, to be lacking and imperfect. At the very least we would expect a human's use of the system to be imperfect. I think it is quite easy to make a case that this is true. While all humans come with an innate desire to acquire and use language, our mastery of it takes time and is never quite complete. Furthermore, we constantly make mistakes, and often find ourselves in the position where we cannot quite get our point across. Beyond that, it even seems that our internal representations of meaning are quite vague at times. It has also been shown that if a child misses the critical period of language acquisition, their language is never quite correct, if at all usable (see Curtiss 1977 for one such story, Genie). What this points to for me, is that while the objective essence of language must indeed be perfect, as it is the mind of God, we should expect our use of it to be imperfect because we are human and

enough to generate recursive structures on their own, in line with the imago Dei, rather than interacting with the imago Dei directly. This line of thought deserves more thought on my part, although I admit that I currently do not see a way to distinguish these ideas, and I am not certain we can look to the biblical text for these answers. Much thanks to Thomas Crisp for suggesting this sort of possibility. Any misunderstandings of his suggestions to me, are of course, my own.

because we need to learn a language in a cultural context, we should find variation; we find just that.

Moving forward, in Genesis 1:29-30, God creates mankind, and he speaks directly to them:

“God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground. (Genesis 1:29-30)”

From this, we must assume that mankind came with direct access to the divine knowledge of language.¹¹ It must be kept in mind that this sort of “speaking” need not be of a modern human sort. For me at least, it would be easy to see how God could have said this basic thing to humans using some metaphysical form of language. What is important, however, is that God already possess the knowledge of language and he passes this knowledge on to those he has created in his image. We must, therefore, conclude that language is *part of* God. Mankind was created in his image, and that image contains the abstract knowledge of language, or at the very least access to it.¹²

An important point must be made here regarding human language learning. We cannot tell from the text exactly how much time passed between the creation of man and God’s speaking to them. We simply cannot ascertain much about the initial evolution of any specific language from the text in Genesis. Keep in mind that I am assuming a non-literal 24-hour day here. If one had a literal six-day creation view, God both created and spoke to man on the sixth day. Under an old earth

¹¹ Regarding my previous acknowledgement of true human language being at only 80,000 years ago, one could certainly make a connection here that this part Genesis must have happened around that time. While this is indeed interesting, I will not explore that avenue here.

¹² Are we made in the image of God and ALK is in that image or does the image merely give us access to that knowledge?

view, God could have allowed a specific language to develop and generations to acquire the language. Under a young earth view, God might have simply passed a fully formed human language down to humans initially. Either way, it will be noted that humans after that, and up until now, are not born knowing any language. We need to culturally acquire the language we are born into.

In this section, I have suggested that Genesis 1, as coupled with a more scientific view of linguistics, suggests that there are at least some aspects of human language, such as recursion, that are pre-existent and part of the objective nature of reality (i.e., the divine mind). I also laid the groundwork for considering that the specific forms of today's languages are largely subjective in nature. I also suggested, that while we might find traces of human-like language properties in animals, language is a uniquely human thing. In the next section, I will explore what Genesis 2, in particular the creation of Adam, has to say about the nature of language.

2 Genesis 2: Adam and semantic externalism

In Genesis 2, we get an account of the Garden of Eden and the creation of Adam and Eve from the dust of the earth. It is here that we see mankind's first words, or at least we are given an account that words were indeed produced. It will be noted that I am not making a claim as to whether there were pre-Adamite humans or not. I am simply using this passage as the first bit of biblical evidence we have of actual use of speech by humans.

“Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the

man called each living creature, that was its name. ²⁰So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals. (Genesis 2:10-20)”

If we take this text as the only clue to what was happening linguistically at this point, the most we can say is that Adam had at the very least, reached the holophrastic phase of language development. In other words, he was at least able to produce one-word phrases and had the ability to name them (this of course is not the case as we will see shortly). From here, there are several things we could say about Adam’s state of mind at that time. First, his speech most likely had the well-known property of arbitrariness, with respect to communication systems. At this point, Adam had the ability to assign a symbol, a word (we are not told whether he spoke to them, wrote them, signed them, or thought them), to an entity in the real world. Let’s assume that Adam spoke these words using phonemes (basic speech sounds). It is a well-known fact in language, that the sounds we choose have no direct relationship to the things they represent, hence the symbols (speech sounds) have an arbitrary relationship to the object they name in the real world.

Perhaps more interestingly, this section of Genesis might be suggesting *semantic externalism* with respect to word meaning, at least for names of animals. When God asks Adam to name the animals, we are told that God creates the birds and animals out of the ground. God then brings these to Adam to see what he might name them. What this suggests is that God already knows the meanings of the words that Adam will eventually choose to name these animals and birds. Indeed, it would be difficult to imagine how God could not know the meaning of an animal and still create it. What this suggests to me is that the meanings of at least some words are *external* to the human mind. They are objectively real in this world. These meanings, if we can call them that, are part of the essence of language and part of the fabric of reality. The act of naming, or arbitrarily assigning

a sign to an object is a biological mechanism that interacts with the objective meaning. This sort of thinking is not necessarily limited to theological interpretations. There are philosophers who prescribe to what has been called *semantic externalism*.

Proponents of semantic externalism, such as Hillary Putnam, suggest that at least some properties of a words meaning are external to the mind. In fact, Putnam has been famously quoted as saying, “meaning just ain’t in the head”. One argument for semantic externalism comes in Putnam’s Twin Earth thought experiment (1975), which I will give a brief explanation of here. Imagine that there is a Twin Earth somewhere in another galaxy that is exactly like earth except for a few small differences. Crucially, one of those differences is the composition of water. On real Earth, water is H₂O. On Twin Earth, waters composition is much more complicated, and Putnam shortens the formula to xyz. Also, xyz and h₂O behave the same in every circumstance. The only difference is that they have a different make-up, which would be unknown to the casual observer. Now imagine two people identical in every way, one on real Earth and one on Twin Earth. Prior to gaining knowledge of the composition of water on either earth, both people would have the exact same mental states regarding both xyz water and H₂O water. The actual meaning of water (or *extension* to be more precise here¹³) differentiates the two substances. In short, “the extension of the term “water” is not a function of the psychological state of the speaker by itself. (pg. 141)” In other words, we do not completely create meaning subjectively in our heads. It is instead objectively “out there” in the real world, at least in some part.

While I believe that Putnam was not intending to suggest that the entirety of a words meaning is out there, I believe that Genesis suggests that the vast majority of a word’s meaning exists objectively. Given that Adam could simply name these things, we must assume that God has made

¹³ To be clear, Putnam was talking about the *extension* of a word as defined by the set of things a word refers to. I am broadening the use of meaning here to include more than this, as I relate it to Genesis.

us so that we can interact with the objective meaning or at least objects. All of this is not to say that human's do not add or take away from these objective meanings. Indeed, while a 1 foot by 1 foot end table might be considered an end table by two people, a 3 foot by 3 foot end table might be considered just a table to one person and still remain an end table for the other. Likewise, different cultures may have different inclusionary criteria for a given semantic idea, say love or beauty. What this shows is that meaning, biblically speaking, is not a one-way street from external to internal. Rather, the core meanings of these things (whatever that entails) exists independently of humans and humans have an extremely developed subjective ability to add to or take away from that objective meaning.¹⁴

Many theologians have held similar thoughts about semantic externalism throughout the centuries. Aquinas' view on semantics has been called *hyper-externalism* (Klima 2015). Klima suggests that for Aquinas, semantic content and internal mental content are tied together via the external essence of the thing in question. In Klima's words about Aquinas, "...the semantic content of a concept and of the corresponding term is but the nature of the thing encoded in the concept of the mind, which in this encoded form *informs the mind about the thing in its intentional being...*pg 133). As I read this, Aquinas is suggesting that the external essence of a thing (in the divine mind as I see it here) "calls out" as it were to the internal mind and defines itself. This is precisely the sort of clue to the essence of language that I think Genesis provides here.

Aquinas also argued that ideas are in the mind of God (Prima Pars, Q. 15), as did Augustine. If we take seriously this notion, the essence of language is a series of abstract forms in the mind of God. Seen in this light, the biblical narrative makes perfect sense. This also points to the possibility

¹⁴ As noted in the previous section, what I am claiming here is that humans have evolved to access the divine knowledge of language; here I am discussing meaning. It is also a reasonable hypothesis to conclude that humans develop meaning *in-line* with the divine mind. Further thought is necessary to attempt to distinguish between these hypotheses.

that not only word meaning exists independently from humans, but entire propositions must as well. If we then take seriously suggestions like those of Gottlieb Frege that syntactic structures feed semantic truth conditional meaning, we may even want to consider that structures themselves exist in the mind of God.

Moving on from pure meaning, I will now explore some other things about Adam at this time which are at least related to language use in some way. Adam's abilities tell us a wealth of things about his linguistic situation. He was conscious, had a theory of mind, had the appropriate neuroanatomy to process the linguistic event of naming, etc. If he spoke these words, then we can assume he had the anatomy and physiology necessary to accomplish the task. An interesting question at this point, however, would be what pool of sounds was Adam pulling from when he formed these names? Full-fledged languages have a limited set of sounds they use to create new words. What ones was he using? Those of God's "language"? What might those be? Unfortunately, we have no real clues here.

In addition, languages come with a multitude of rules for pronouncing sounds properly in certain positions and have several constraints that dictate how things can be put together. For example, Japanese does not allow onset consonant clusters in syllables, while Polish allows many consonants to cluster at the beginning of a syllable. If Adam spoke these names, where did he draw this knowledge from? If he did not speak these names, did he have a pronunciation in mind? Most, if not all, of these questions are simply not answerable given the text. One might guess, however, that this knowledge was given to Adam by God. Another possible answer is that somehow Adam was given access to the knowledge of the systems outside the garden, as many scholars believe there were already humans or humanoids outside the garden (e.g., Swamidass 2019).

All of this is mere speculation, and in fact outside the realm of my thesis, which is also admittedly quite speculative. What I am concerned with here, is the underlying essence of language. Genesis up to this point and including this passage, seems to point to the fact that the abstract essence of language is transcendent and in the mind of God. Given our analysis of initial Biblical reference to Adam, this would include at the very least, various aspects of meaning and propositional content. How Adam got to a state where he could use these sorts of things is unclear in my opinion.

Moving on to Genesis 2:23, we get our answer as to the question of whether Adam could speak or not. God has just made a female companion for Adam and Adam utters his first recorded words (that is not to say he did not speak before this, we do not know).

“This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called ‘woman,’ for she was taken out of man.”

What can we tell about Adam’s linguistic ability at this point? Perhaps the most obvious thing is that if we take the text to be a literal translation, Adam speaks in full and complete sentences. More than that he uses, conjunction and adjunct modifying clauses. If, however, we take a more mythological stance where we see this passage as conveying basically what Adam said, but not specifically, we do not then know what the linguistic particulars of his speech were – i.e., phonemes, word structure, word order, etc. What we do know, however, is that Adam did not seem to have acquired language in so much as he was given it. We also see that Adam can make direct use of *propositional knowledge*. In linguistics, we see a proposition as the meaning of a sentence in that can be true or false. In other words, the propositional meaning of a sentence includes the knowledge of how the world would need to be for a sentence to be true or false. It appears that

Adam already has access to this sort of meaning at this point in Genesis. Indeed, to utter any coherent sentence, he would have to have access to this sort of knowledge. As discussed above, it seems this passage suggests even further that information about propositions is contained within the mind of God and is available to those creatures, i.e. humans, that have the neurological and physical machinery to utilize it. The idea that propositions exist objectively in the mind of God was mentioned briefly above with regards to my reading of Aquinas. Leibniz discusses just this sort of thing in more detail. This will be looked at in more detail in section 3.

As I alluded to in the introduction, this paper is merely an attempt at scratching the surface of very detailed topic. In this section, I argued that Genesis 2 suggests that meaning and perhaps propositional content is external to humans and located in the divine mind. While there is much more to say Genesis with regards to the divine knowledge of language, I will leave this book for now and move on to The Gospel of John.

3 In the beginning was the Word – the logos and the objective rationality of language

It would be impossible for any discussion of human language and the bible to not include the prologue to the Gospel of John, as he quite literally uses the word “Word” when talking about God, in this case his incarnation in the third person of the trinity, Jesus.

“1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

²He was with God in the Beginning ³Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.”

The referent of Word, as John is using it here is Jesus. In what some believe is an attempt to merge Greek thought with Christian philosophy, the word he chose to refer to Jesus was the Greek word *logos* (Pepin 1987). Much ink has been spilled about the *logos*, and I am afraid I will not be adding anything new to it here. Even so, it is obvious that the *logos* relates directly to my thesis. Here the connection between God and language is direct and unambiguous. The Greek meaning of *logos*, broadly construed, is “reason”, although it can mean “word”, “speech” and a whole host of related things. Pepin (1987)’s concise discussion of the word suggests three principal meanings of the Greek word.

The first is the objective meaning which can be seen as the rational basis for something, such as numerical and logical explanations. Secondly, there is a subjective meaning, in particular the power or faculty of reasoning and/or thought. Finally, there is the expressive meaning. This sort of usage of the word relates directly to the thought or reasoning as expressed in physical speech or writing. I think what John had in mind in his gospel was the first type of meaning, the objective. The *logos* in John’s prologue refers to the objective rational basis of the universe. Whatever one’s theory of language might be, there is little doubt that it is rational on a fundamental level. In the vein of such thinkers as Plato and Descartes, Noam Chomsky, the father of modern generative grammar and much of linguistics we know today, was and is a rationalist. In essence, he believes that reason is a property of mind, and that knowledge is obtained rationally (Barman 2012). Chomsky and his followers have, over the years, used this way of thinking to unpack much of the internal structure of the linguistics system. If it requires a rational mind and rationality to deconstruct the working of language, then it stands to reason that language itself is a rational thing. Continuing along these lines, it is not hard to see how John’s prologue suggests that language, or at least the rational basis for language, are present in the *logos*.

Looking at John in conjunction with Genesis, as God speaks the world into existence, we can draw further conclusions about the nature of language. First, John claims that Jesus is not only the logos, but the logos is God. Without dipping our toes too deeply in the messy waters of the theology of the trinity, it is reasonable to assume that if the logos contains the objective essence of language, then it pre-existed the creation of the universe. In this way, the logos, and the essence language, are written into the fabric of reality.

I find it quite interesting that God choose to become flesh as the logos. As I stated above, within the logos must be the rational basis of language. I also briefly showed in section 2 that language is a uniquely human faculty. It seems only logical that the logos should become human flesh in order to be acquired by human souls in human flesh. Justin Martyr had a particularly interesting view on the logos in Christianity. One that I think could prove particularly useful here. Borrowing from middle Platonists, Martyr worked with the notion that the logos was the mediator between the ideal and real worlds. In the case of Jesus, Martyr saw him as the mediator between God and humanity. John McAlister explains the following with regards to Martyr's *logos Christology*:

“Justin appeals to the contemporary philosophical use of the term logos, generally regarded as the ultimate source of all human knowledge. He argues that the one and the same logos is known by both Christian believers and pagan philosophers; the latter, however, have only partial access to it through the mind, whereas Christians have full access to it, through the mind and in history, on account of its manifestation in Christ. The statement in the fourth gospel that the “word became flesh, and dwelt among us” (John 1: 14) plays a critically important role in Justin's thought. Justin allows that pre-

Christian secular philosophers, such as Heraclitus and Socrates, thus had partial access to the truth, because of the manner in which the logos is present in the world. (McAlister 2016).

If we take Martyr's definition of logos, the ultimate source of human knowledge, then surely the divine knowledge of language is located within the logos. Also, if a non-Christian's has access to the logos, then the divine knowledge of language is available to all, regardless of religion. In this way, the logos, the incarnate son of God, is the source of access for linguistic knowledge for all humans. And as I mentioned above, it seems fitting that the source of all human knowledge became flesh in part to bring abstract knowledge to those made of flesh. In this way, I believe that the biblical text suggests that the divine knowledge of language is existent in, or created by, The Father and *is made accessible to humans through The Son*. This, to me, seems to be the most reasonable account given the text.¹⁵

It is at this point that one begins to wonder where science fits into all of this talk of the logos. Personally, I see no conflict between noting, for example, that things like the evolution of vocal anatomy or language change over time, are studiable scientific phenomena, while simultaneously assuming that there are objective and divine underpinnings to the basic structure of language. In fact, assuming the logos gives a reason to think that language is rational and studiable at all.¹⁶

Working off the notion that the logos is the ultimate source of human knowledge, we might assume that this includes the knowledge of propositions and of truth conditional meaning as well.

¹⁵ This line of thinking may also be useful in explaining how it is that humans interact with the divine knowledge. This may also help us in distinguishing what I noted in previous footnotes about whether humans access the divine knowledge, or the develop their own knowledge in line with the divine knowledge.

¹⁶ One question that will require much further thought on my part is: Is it that Jesus is a conduit *and* the knowledge, or does the father have the knowledge and Jesus is just a conduit? My intuition is to say that both are true in some way.

This may provide further argumentation to augment my claim in the last section that these things are indeed part of the divine mind. I will revisit that idea here with respect to the logos.

There are certainly philosophers who have explicitly argued that propositions are objective real and outside of the minds of humans. G.W. Leibniz¹⁷ held that propositions are the bearers of truth and falsity. He also made a distinction between truths of *reasoning* and truths of *fact*. We could call them *necessary* and *contingent* truths, Leibniz himself implies. Truths of reasoning being truths that are necessary and noncontingent. Furthermore, the opposite of these truths is simply not obtainable. These truths can be broken down into simpler truths until its primitives are reached. These are necessary propositions, like the copula construction below.

Example: Jim is a man.

Necessary truths are true in all cases and are dependent on God's intellect.¹⁸ I think it may be possible to connect Leibniz' theory of necessary truth to the notion of the logos used in John's gospel, although this is not something Leibniz did directly that I am aware of. If Jesus is indeed the word made flesh, the logos, then it seems reasonable to assume that all necessary truths are part of that logos. In this way, propositional truth, broadly construed, would be pre-existent, non-contingent and eternal in the logos.

Contingent truths, however, are facts that are dependent. Unlike necessary truths, they are contingent because they could have been false. For example, if one were to say, *Jim fell down*. This is a contingent truth; in that we can imagine a possible world where this could be a false

¹⁷ I have borrowed much of Dwight Goodyear's explanation of Leibniz' thoughts here. See <https://philosophicaleggs.com/171-leibniz-on-propositions/>

¹⁸ There is much more to Leibniz' theory of truth that I will not mention here, such as hypothetical truths. I refer the reader to Muhit (2011) for an intuitive and thorough discussion.

statement. Given these definitions, I think it may be possible to say that only contingent truths exist in the mind of God, the logos, objectively. All contingent truths are just that, contingent on the state of affairs at any given time. This is not to say that God would not know these contingent truths, but rather what is available to the human at any given time, through the logos, are necessary truths. From there humans might use pragmatic and logical principles to obtain contingent truths.

In this section, I have argued that the logos contains the rationally basis for language and I provided further biblical evidence that things such as propositions are in the divine mind. Perhaps more interestingly, I noted that it seems only fitting that the incarnate Son of God came in the flesh to act as a conduit to access the divine knowledge by humans who are also in the flesh.

4 Conclusion

What I have attempted to do here is to explore what language is through a biblical lens at a fundamental level. I have tried to do this while keeping in mind a scientific framework. Admittedly, what I have done here is only a beginning and in large part extremely speculative. However, I think what can be taken away from this analysis, is that the biblical text strongly implies that the core properties of language are not purely subjective and in the mind of the human speaker. Instead, those properties, whatever they turn out to be, are pre-existent and in the mind of God.

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