This paper is intended, as its title makes clear, only as a contribution to a discussion between several participants; and it therefore makes no attempt to survey the field in a comprehensive way. I propose only to set out a few theses which may serve to stimulate thought about the relations between semantic studies and biblical theology.

1. Semantics and biblical theology are two subjects which have a certain degree of overlap but also a considerable degree of mutual independence.

   a. Semantics can be considered simply as a part of linguistic science, and it is quite possible to do semantic work on the Bible, as on other texts, without any involvement in theological decision-making. It may be thought that the degree of relatedness to theology will vary according to the nature of the subject under consideration. Thus little or no theological involvement is required for a study of, let us say, such semantic fields as the Hebrew terms for colours, or the names of animals — to take a fairly extreme example. This is not to say that these cannot have theological relevance—almost anything may potentially have some theological relevance—but that the understanding and description of the facts does not require theological insight or theological decisions in any significant degree. The matter may be otherwise when we study names of God, or terms like בָּרִית, Salaм, gaʿal, etc. One cannot expect these to be properly appreciated without a lively sensitivity to the structures and patterns of religious thinking in the Old Testament. Even such a sensitivity, however, may be something different from theological work in the full sense of the word; it may be provided by a study on the level of the history of religion rather than by one on the level of theology. Thus, in general, semantic study in the Old Testament field is not necessarily and entirely linked with theology, and it can be carried on by those who do not feel sympathy with the aims and methods of biblical theology (however that latter entity is defined or understood).
b. A similar independence can be asserted from the theological side. A discipline like the theology of the Old Testament should not consider itself tied to the results of semantic study in Hebrew terms or restricted to the areas which such semantic study can expect to cover. Some of the problems of any biblical theology, indeed, go beyond the limits of what any semantic study can reasonably be expected to achieve. For instance, one of the principal subjects which has engaged Old Testament theology has been the question of the centre of the Old Testament, the search to discover the core around which its structure is organized.\(^1\) A problem of this kind lies quite beyond the reach of what one may expect to decide through semantic investigation. The contours of Old Testament theology, as we shall farther see below, cannot be determined by patterns of meaning in the Hebrew language. Thus in general theological, as well as non-theological, considerations argue for the recognition of some independence between Hebrew semantics and biblical theology.

c. In fact however there is generally an overlap of two levels, the linguistic-semantic and the theological. The degree of their interdependence would seem to be a question for the latter to decide, rather than for the former; in other words, a theology of the Old Testament has to decide, as part of its own methodological considerations, in what way it relates itself to Hebrew semantic studies. The semantic studies have to be carried on in any case, as part of basic Hebrew scholarship, independent of their utility for theology. But in whatever way theology relates itself to semantic studies, it has to accept this basic principle: in so far as theology makes appeal to linguistic phenomena, in so far also is it bound to submit itself to the sort of tests and strictures imposed by the modern study of language.

2. Language and thought (or, language and culture—for our present purposes either term will suffice) are connected; but the connection is logically haphazard.

a. It was sometimes argued against the writer’s *The Semantics of Biblical Language* that it divorced language from thought (or culture). I would not however admit that any such separation is involved in my position, as argued in that book or elsewhere, except in a sense such as will be adumbrated here.\(^2\) Language is an entity which has

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\(^1\) On this see recently R. Smend, *Die Mitte des Alten Testaments* (Theologische Studien, 101, Zurich, 1970).

\(^2\) See particularly the writer’s retrospect over the semantic discussion since