1. Introduction

The problem of logical or conceptual form pertaining to meanings of religious expressions is often seen to culminate in the question of whether religious language is semantically autonomous or *sui generis*. Despite the way this claim of autonomy is formulated, it has been quite a popular conception that religious language entails its own “logic” or “grammar”, which is more or less independent of the conceptual rules or norms valid for other parts of natural language. On the other hand and contrary to the autonomy view, many contemporary philosophers of religion have emphasised promoting a special metaphysical or epistemological argument for a presentable-at-court semantics of religious language. This mainly theistic approach tries to give a proof for religious language in terms of common rationality and is at least as popular as the autonomy view. In this article I will argue, somewhat indirectly, for a rather critical response to both of these popular conceptions. Accordingly, if I am right, the predominant part of today’s philosophy of religion has been badly misplaced in its efforts to meet the challenges arising from mainstream philosophy. The majority of the contributions presented have had next to nothing to offer to warrant interest from the mainstream. In my view, the heart of the matter lies in the question: what is supposed to take precedence in philosophy of religion—logic and semantics or some other starting point? My own vantage point is semantic throughout; no specific metaphysical or epistemological argument is offered to support my views, although arguments of that sort are keenly acknowledged. Therefore, contrary to what has been mostly the case in contemporary philosophical discussions on religious issues, my argument is neither for an autonomous nor non-autonomous rationality of religious language but for tools for analysing them.

Since the alleged thesis of the autonomy of religious language implies the question of logical form, I will start by (1) introducing the background for a systematic examination of the problem of logical form. It turns out that the notion of *symbol meaning* involves a crucial problem in the context of logical form, especially for the demarcation between logical and non-logical terms. Next I will proceed by (2) illustrating a historical example concerning the logical form of primitive terms. My main task (3) will be to show that the logical form of religious discourse, at least on the first order level, can be better...
explicated with certain avantgarde logico-semantic tools than with surrendering to the temptation of the aforementioned popular tendency of drawing extreme fideistic conclusions. Finally, I will conclude my discussion by (4) hinting at some general methodological points relevant particularly to philosophy of religion. In this sense, I hope, the article will help to clarify acceptable guidelines for a systematic task in philosophy of religion.

2. Starting with the Logical Form of Symbol Meaning

It may sound a bit presumptuous to say that all the basic problems in philosophy remain the same. This saying as such is not true. Nevertheless, it is truly astonishing to realise how similar certain basic problems faced in the philosophical discussion during the Middle Ages are to those now. Notwithstanding that the similarity might sometimes prove to be superficial, if we examine certain historical details more closely, the basic problem on the logical level may still remain very much the same over time. I have in mind a certain specific problem which serves as a spectrum for a number of philosophical issues. Even when this problem was not discussed under the following heading during the Middle Ages, the name can nevertheless be correctly applied to scholastic discussions on meaning. The problem is that of a symbol meaning. Today this label is used as a common technical term, but I will take it here as implying the problem of meaning in its wider philosophical garments, specifically when it comes to the meaning of primitive sentences. We can take all symbol meanings as formal (as they are taken in the syntactical treatment of formal logic) but of course that does not solve their semantics. The semantical problem involved here starts with the straightforward question: What is meaning entailed by a non-logical symbol expression? Since the symbol meaning is supposed to be handled with a logical theory, it leads to another question: What is the underlying logic (logical form) of symbol meanings? Responding to this question brings us to what is called the analysis of symbol meaning within the framework of first order extensional logic.

It has been customary from ancient times to think that for an expression to have meaning, there has to be a connection between the expression and our ability to understand the expression. Therefore, what we seem to be after is conceivability in its most basic context. Surprisingly or not, regarding symbol meaning in terms of

1 In ‘symbol meaning’ is normally included all roles of symbols in formal logic; here, the meaning of non-logical constants and variables is primarily at stake.

2 In order to trace the philosophical problem of a symbol meaning we have to realise that not only non-logical constants and variables have the status of symbols in formal language but atomic expressions of natural language have this status as well. During the Middle Ages, Latin was usually taken as a formal language in this sense.