

HOW CAN WE REFER TO GOD?

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Abstract

When we talk about objects in the world, we picture them as existent objects. However, unlike most names, if the word God refers, it does not do so in the same way, other names refer to a physical object. The term God has no image at the result of any causal interaction with God Himself. Nevertheless, we still use the word God in the same way we use any other name, thereby *prima facie* indicating that it does refer, even if it does so by a different mechanism than other titles. Since we have no image of God other than false images, how is it possible to refer to God? I affirm that the word *God* refers to through revelation and preserves its referential causal chain through inspiration and forms of life. Although we were not revealed the word of God as the writers of the Bible, through the activities of linguistic communities and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we can refer to God.

Keywords: reference, God, forms of life, causal chain, inspiration, revelation, communities, Holy Spirit, name

TABLE OF CONTENTS

SIGNATURES.....	2
ABSTRACT.....	3
LIST OF TABLES	5
INTRODUCTION	6
SECTION 1: GOD IS NONSENSE	8
SECTION 2: NO REFERENCE.....	10
SECTION 3: REVELATION	13
SECTION 4: THE CAUSAL THEORY OF REFERENCE.....	16
SECTION 5: DANGERS OF THE CAUSAL THEORY OF REFERNECE.....	18
SECTION 6: SEMANTIC INSPIRATION	25
SECTION 7: MECHANICAL TRANSLATION	28
SECTION 8: THE UNBELIEVERS PROBLEM	30
SECTION 9: FORMS OF LIFE AND SEMANTIC INSPIRATION	32
CONCLUSION.....	36
GRAPH: REFERENCE TO GOD	38
REFERENCES	39

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE 1	14
FIGURE 2	15
FIGURE 3	19
FIGURE 4	19
FIGURE 5	20
FIGURE 6	22
FIGURE 7	26
FIGURE 8	27
FIGURE 9	28
FIGURE 10	30
FIGURE 11	31
FIGURE 12	32
FIGURE 13	35
FIGURE 14: REFERENCE TO GOD	38

Introduction

Throughout history, people have used the word God to refer to God.¹ This has been controversial because God is known to be unnamable and ineffable. If God is considered unnamable and ineffable and has various names, then how can we be sure we are referring to Him in the first place (Smith, 2010)?

In our daily lives, we use words to refer to people and objects. Reference is the relationship between a name and an object. We can pass down references through the causal chain we hold with other people. Causal chains are links passed down from the relationship between a name and an object to one person to another. An example of reference and its causal chain is grass. Grass can be seen, felt, smelled, and touched. All these characteristics in our sensory experiences can affirm the experiencing we have with grass. When we hear that “the grass is green,” we get a representative image of the grass. I can use that sentence and pass down that causal chain to you so you can know that the grass is green. This allows for others to refer to grass and so on. However, when we want to refer to God as we do with grass seems troublesome since we do not have a sensory experience of God. One possible way we could refer to God is the way we associate with fictional characters like the Transformers.

When people talk about Transformers, they talk about them as if they were real. Transformers are fictional robots that are nonexistent objects people talk about. However, when compared to grass and people, a Transformer does not have the same sensory characteristics (Shook & Swan, 2009). One cannot physically touch or see a Transformer because it is fictional. This makes Transformers just be something that lives in our imagination that produces

¹ God’s name can change to a common noun to refer to a larger set as well. God, in modern times, is assumed to be referred to a single being and not a noun.

significant value for people's lives. To take God like the Transformers is not how religious users refer to Him. Religious users refer to God as if he was existent and not fictional. Perhaps another way we could refer to God is on how we associate with arithmetic.

Arithmetic is an abstract concept. Abstract concepts are objects that have no physical referents and exist as an idea. Arithmetic, or numbers, are given a representative image to talk about them. For example, to talk about the number one, we give it a representative image of # 1. Of course, we cannot physically experience numbers like how we experience grass, but we can experience numbers as a nonexistent object or as an idea that we can imagine. It is something that our senses cannot interact with as something physical. It is something we can use and measure. God, on the other hand, has a different quality than numbers. The word God does not seem to function as an abstract object like “# 1” because he is not a measure. Religious users acknowledge God as a sentient being that religious users interact with in various ways (Gen 1:2–6:27, 1 John 1:3, King James Version).

When we speak of God, it becomes a philosophical problem because the way we use His name appears to be more than the ordinary use of language. The philosophical question is that when we use the word God, there is no image to which we can refer too. Speaking of God also seems to fall between abstract and fiction. The term God has explicitly several properties which we communicate about Him that is different than how we talk of grass. These properties are as if He were real, living, and an interactive being. The puzzle now becomes how can we refer to God?²

² Assuming that God exists, the scope of this paper is meant to clarify the use of God in the Christian tradition.

In this paper, I will be taking the modern method that God is used as a proper name rather than a proper noun. A proper noun is a word given to an object to make it more definite as proper names refer to a single object. With that in mind, in the following sections, I will not be criticizing, but showing the following views cannot work for the method that I will be using on how we can refer to God. These views, however, are worthwhile to take into consideration as people use these methodologies to refer or speak of God.

Section 1: God is Nonsense

In this section, I will introduce two philosophers who think reference is problematic for God. The word God for Ludwig Wittgenstein and Michael Scott does not make sense, or it is fictional. In these two points of view, God is interpreted as nonsensical since he falls outside the use of ordinary language.

Meaning is representative and works through images. Philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (TLP) tells us that religious statements and the word God are nonsensical. Wittgenstein gives us the idea that for one to use words and language, it must be through images. For an object to be representational, it needs to have a picture and be external. For something to be referential, it must resort to something that is out in the world (Wittgenstein & Ogden, 2003). For example, “grass” is something that one can refer to as existent in the world. Compared to the word *love*, there is no real image like grass that we can refer to because we try to associate it to a red heart, to people who kiss, or people who admire each other. For Wittgenstein, if a person cannot tell us what the word refers to, then it is nonsense. That makes concepts such as love, happiness, and Transformers to be nonsensical. If we move beyond what we can suppose, then it falls within a limit of the world (Wittgenstein & Ogden, 2003, p.21).

Using Wittgenstein's philosophy, the word God becomes a problem. God, in this case, has no image to give a representation. Intuitively we could try to refer to Him like a cloud, a man with a big white beard, or even a dove, but those images that went through our heads are not God. In Wittgenstein's theory, God is nonsense because we cannot represent Him through objects in the world. What that means is that religion is just a kind of activity, but its assertions are nonsensical (Cabrera, 1989). Religious assertions are the limits of the use of our language in the world (Wittgenstein & Ogden, 2003, p.117). Religious statements such as God are nonsensical because they are more than we can understand (Clack, 2006). At the end of his *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein tells us that "what one cannot speak about, one must remain silent" (Wittgenstein & Ogden, 2003, p.155).

Moreover, meaning in fiction is not representative and works almost like an assertion. Twenty-first-century philosopher Michael Scott gives us a different answer on how we should approach God. Scott suggests that we should take claims and assertions about God as fiction. In his book, *Religious Language*, Scott states that the vision of modest fictionalism is the best answer to talk about God. Modest fictionalism is the application of a word as a quasi-speech act that a person can believe and participate in what is said, but not consider its context as an object in the world (Scott, 2013, p.193; Poidevin, 2019). In other words, it is only significant and referential in fiction. For example, in saying that "Transformers are cool," it is a fictitious statement that one does not need to justify or consider it a belief. Assertions are "like an assertion," so the speaker does not have to accept or believe its literal use; it is like acting (Scott, 2013, p.198; Poidevin, 2019, p.60).

With the perspective of modest fictionalism, the word God is a make-believe concept. Modest fictionalism in religious assertions can morally affirm religious claims without believing in them as a quasi-speech act. An example of modest fictionalism is considering the story of David and Goliath as make-belief. When Goliath died by a blow from a stone slung by David, it can be taken morally without believing in it. Likewise, for God, it can be taken in the context that it is just a fantasy statement that pretends to be claiming that it is a name for a real being. The word God is only true or false within the scope of fiction. It follows that “we should be religious fictionists” and consider the word God as nonsense since it is only “significant” in fiction (Scott, 2013, p.199).

The reference to the word God as images and as a quasi-speech act does not take into account the way people use the word in communities. Reference appears problematic to Wittgenstein and Scott since God is not physically visible. If we only depend on a single reference, then we would never understand who the word God refers. Perhaps removing all references would be a more plausible way of talking about religious claims of God.

Section 2: Without Reference

The previous section covered two ways in which religious statements with reference seem problematic. In this section, I will talk about two philosophers who think that the reference is not necessary for God. Wittgenstein, in his later work, *Philosophical Investigation (PI)*, aims to fix his earlier interpretation of the *TLP* and gives us a new way to address the way we use language. Mulhall, on the other hand, tells us the problem of religious assertions without reference.

Meaning is never representational, but instead is a function of language-games and forms of life. In *PI*, Wittgenstein gives us an approach to understanding language; one must focus on its

use. Language is like a tool we use to describe the meaning of what we are trying to say (Wittgenstein & Hacker, 2010, p.15). In comparison to the *TLP*, in the *PI*, there is no more extended representation of something in the world. Language-games are a medium of communication that refers to nothing.

Language-games are a “part of an activity, or a form of life” in our behavior patterns (Wittgenstein & Hacker, 2010, p.14). These language games consist of giving orders, singing, guessing riddles, translating, and praying (Wittgenstein & Hacker, 2010, p.15). An example of a modern language-game is memes. A meme can be a use of GIFs, images, words, videos, and actions to express fun or laughs. As the term “dank” or “cancerous” are language-games of approval and disapproval of how images or videos are disseminated on social networks. The meaning of these words is known on how we use them on social networks and within our cultures. There is no need for reference to understand what they mean. Language-games are the way we interact; if there are no language-games, then it is nonsensical.

Religious language-games allow us to use the word God. Religious language-games such as prayer, gospels, epistles, and parables are acts of religious speech that the community participates in. For example, in affirming a gospel such as “seeking that blessed hope, and the glorious appearance of the great God and our savior Jesus Christ” will be significant for others who address this affirmation as a way of life in the way they act within the community of believers (Titus 2:13, King James Version). Another example is prayer, in which people place their palms together, bow their heads, or hold their hands to pray. Religious statements and the way we interact with God are meanings reflected within a person’s lifestyle or forms of life (Miller, 1970).

Some language-games, such as riddles, necessarily function as meaningless assertions. We can address the problem of how we can talk about God and his judgments by the interpretation of the 21st-century philosopher Stephen Mulhall. Mulhall in *The Great Riddle* gives us an argument that some language-games, such as riddles, inevitably function as nonsense. Riddles, for Mulhall, are not decipherable but, at the same time, decipherable (Mulhall, 2015, p.104). For example, the Sphinx riddle says: “What has four legs in the morning, two at noon and three at night?” The answer to this riddle is man, as the Greek riddle says (Mulhall, 2015, p.118). However, understanding this riddle as a unique language-game that comes from us is nonsensical (Mulhall, 2015, p.118). The answer to the riddle, in a sense, has a hidden meaning that can be fruitful for human knowledge. Still, it depends on an external solution that can only be found from the outside and not only through approvals and disapprovals. Religious claims work the same way.

Religious language-games such as the Abrahamic riddle work as a meaningless statement. In religious language-games, we have no prior knowledge of what God is or how his language works. If we did, it would require a reference, and that is not what Wittgenstein’s language-games work. An example of this is the Abrahamic Riddle, in which God told Abraham to offer his son Isaac in sacrifice. Abraham goes on to kill his son, but then God goes on and stops him in the middle of the act and tells him that he has done enough to prove his loyalty even though he was about to sin (Mulhall, 2015, p.121). Abraham’s story creates a riddle as a paradox in which we cannot decipher. Abraham’s riddle is puzzling since we cannot personally know the reason why God told Abraham to murder and, at the same time, solve the puzzle by implying that God wanted to prove his faith just by looking at his actions. That is, if we are going to solve

this riddle, in a sense, we would need the reference to find the meaning. According to Mulhall, the uses of the word God and these types of religious riddles make no sense even though people and communities continue to use them (Mulhall, 2015, p.126).

Having no reference to give meaning to the word God poses problems for religious users since they cannot refer to God at all. It does not seem right to ignore reference. Language-games capture the meaning in use and show us that practices such as prayer have nothing to do with the way the Scriptures say or what God commands it to be. Although we can explain how the word God can be meaningful without reference, it still misses how we can talk about God Himself, which Mulhall tries to show us with riddles. It seems that the reference is still necessary to understand specific uses of language.

Section 3: Revelation

In the last sections, we had talked about how God is used with and without reference. In this next section, I will talk about how God refers through revelation.

To speak of God as an object such as grass, we need a relationship between His name and Himself. Assuming that God exists, He would refer to Himself. Referring to oneself can be done just as one refers to their name. Like me, “Layla” is used to refer to myself, and I could tell you that I am Layla. The way that I can associate myself is through baptism. Baptism is when someone places a name to a particular object to refer to that specific name. For our names, our parents baptized our names to refer to us. With their baptism, we can refer to ourselves by selecting ourselves as the object related to the name and also have others refer to us. With that, S1 or person 1 can say our name (Layla) and refer to me and so on. In a way, it models an introduced subject instead of an identified subject (Joel, 2017). For God, it can be done similarly.

Figure 1



God, Himself, has several other names like Jesus, YHWH, Jehovah, El Elyon, El Shaddai, Yahweh, Jehovah-Raah/Nissi/Rapha/Jireh/Shalom/Sabaoth, Adonai, Deus, etc. (Smith, 2010, p.96). If God referred to Himself with YHWH, what about all the other names He has? The other names that God has also referred to Him because God Himself also associated Himself with those names.

Based on the Christian doctrine, God baptized Himself and passed His name to the original writers of the Bible (John 17:6, King James Version). This allowed the writers to pass down His name through a causal chain in which we can refer back to Him. Furthermore, we can hypothesize that they are the proper names of God that God has used to refer to Himself. However, if that is the case, using the word God to refer to Him and any other name can be problematic. That is because God has more names than any other object that surrounds us.

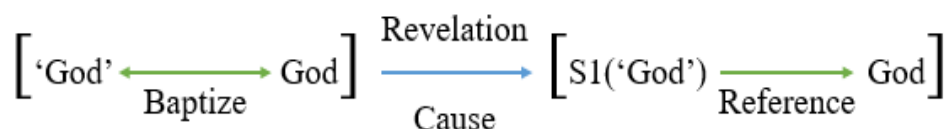
In comparison to our names, His name is unique. The difference is that God has a longer time in this world, and due to that, He has different names that refer to Him. God's name, YHWH, that has now been more known as *God*, has been used throughout many generations to refer to Him (Malachi 3:16, King James Version). God is also known to be referred with the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. These names are also used to refer to Him in

³ The green arrow is the reference, that means as my parents baptized me, "Layla," they will use that name to talk about me. The word itself will be emphasized with single quotations as the object or person will not. The blue arrow stands for the causal relationship, or whenever another person talks to another about the name, in this case, my parents talk about me to me, vice versa. S1, in this case, stands for the first-person speaker who receives the reference, it can be, or anyone else that is using "Layla" to refer back to me.

perichoresis (Utlely, 2012, p.10).⁴ God has various names, and my response for us to know that he was able to pass down his reference to the writers of the Bible that then was passed to us is through revelation.

Revelation is the idea that God used his divine powers to allow the writers of the bible to know his being. When God communicated with the writers of the Bible, God passed his name and reference to the writers through revelation (Utlely, 2012, p.39). That means they got his name directly from God himself and through a specific sensory experience as we do with grass. That means God Himself was the one who referred to Himself with God for writers to know his existence.

Figure 2



Revelation is the action that God used to communicate with His apostles. God revealed Himself through dreams, orally, visions, angels, a person's unique ability, miracles, by Jesus, or by the eternal voice of the Spirit in feelings, reason, conscience, etc. (1 Cor 14: 13–19; Job 33:14; Heb 1: 1; Acts 10:10; Dan 9; Gen 28:12; King James Version). These different revelations helped writers to know Him not through their own mindful experiences, but from God Himself. That allowed the writers to have a direct causal relationship so they could refer back to Him (1 Cor 11:23–26, King James Version).⁵

⁴ That is, God is referred to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit as one individual.

⁵ The Old Testament and New Testament writers varied as they were not revealed in the same way. That is because God revealed Himself through time and its historical space (Utlely, 2012, p.190). In this case, Peter did not have direct revelation as the rest, but a revelation through his actions and changed behavior in which God revealed Himself to him (Utlely, 2012, p.56). See 1 Corinthians 4:9, KJV. Revelation is then limited to the writers of the Bible as there are no more authors or writers that can add to the Bible's canon.

Therefore, this means that the standard mechanism of references, such as touch and externalities was not the source of the subject to the extent that writers could refer to God. My answer to that is that they were able to pass down God's reference to us was with the causal theory of reference.

Section 4: The Causal Theory of Reference

In the introduction, I mentioned that the reference is the relationship between a word and an object. When we use our names to talk about ourselves, we can pass that causal chain to others, and they can also do the same. That causal relationship is at the center of what Kripke calls the causal theory of reference.

Saul Kripke suggests that the meaning of a word or name works through baptisms or causal chains (Sullivan, 2016, p.8–9; Kripke, 1980). The causal theory of reference says that we can successfully use a name that we hear or learn without having to know the person who baptized it. Baptism is the first person to use and give a name to a particular object, such as our parents. The causal theory of the reference states that when we use a word or a name, a given object needs to be initially baptized to refer to it. One does not have to be the one who initially baptizes the name, but a name or word must have an initial baptism to have a reference.

The Causal Theory of Reference: my use of a name of N refers to the object O if and only if (a) directly baptize O with N, (b) my use of N is causally connected to an initial baptism of O with N by way of other uses of N in reference to O.

The causal theory of reference allows one to refer directly to that specific object without a pure description or concepts about the object but through its historical chains (Sullivan, 2016). That implies that no matter what we think or try to refer to, the historical position in which we currently are in determines the referent of the name. As a name is used, the causal link traces back to the object that the original user baptized to refer to it. That name can then have its unique connection to be used and transmitted to others through the communities. In other words, when people talk about me, my name is transmitted from person to person from time to time creates a causal link. If someone wants to know who is the original “Layla,” then they can do so by tracing back the causal chains they received back to my parents, who initially baptized me. People do not have to know me or know about me to talk about me, but there must be a causal connection for them to talk about me (Kripke, 1980).

These historical connections, however, become too large. The use of certain words or names can be so varied that determining reference can be problematic. Problems of reference can occur when one also looks up the upmost trends in social media. For example, if one were to look up #Megatron, two objects would appear, the Transformers and the Hip Hop Artist Nicki Minaj (Google Search: #Megatron). The use of the name “Megatron” is used to talk about the robot that is in the Transformers franchise. Megatron is has been known famously since 1984 through TV shows and various generations. One could infer that Megatron, in this case, is an object that its chain can causally go back to the 1984 robot. If you intend to refer to Megatron as I am referring to him, you can do it by the causal link that I just passed to you. However, as I pass you the causal link, let us suppose somehow a friend of yours comes by and easily confuses

Megatron with Nicki Minaj's song, "Megatron," that released in 2019. Your friend then tells you that the word Megatron does not refer to the robot but Nicki's song. You can be astute and say that Megatron is not a song, but a robot. This creates a problem for what we refer to, and in the same case, it can happen to God.

When we use the word God, use it to refer to many other names and objects that are not God. Names such as Kronos or Zeus are names that refer to God but not to the Abrahamic God (Smith, 2010, p.253–254). In the Christian tradition, the use of God is used to refer to Him in various names depending on the time the writers used to talk of Him. The link of the name is passed through other agents and to all who use it intending to refer to God as previous people did. As the use of the name expands, there is a historical connection between God and its uses. The problem is that the name God refers to one being even though there are other names for Him. However, given the way the causal theory of reference works, it is difficult to see how that can be done.

Section 5: Dangers of the Causal Theory of Reference

I will now detail three ways in which the causal theory of reference may pose problems that are known as a semantic drift. Semantic drift is when words or names stop referring to the things they are supposed to refer to. One way this can happen is when we have an instance of a semantic break. Here is my definition of a *semantic break*.

Semantic break: the name N undergoes a semantic break when (a) in t1, N is used to refer to the object O, and (b) in t2, N is no longer used at all, and (c) in t3, N is used to refer to another object T (Sullivan, 2016, p.10).

Consider the name Aurelia. Suppose there is a girl named Aurelia who lives in a Roman neighborhood. In that neighborhood, the name Aurelia refers to the girl. However, as the years' pass and the community disappears, along with the girl. The people who used that name to refer to her are no longer there to continue her causal chain. As time passes, new people populate that abandoned neighborhood. A new family then comes and has a daughter, and they decide to name her Aurelia.

Figure 3



In our history, the name Aurelia has suffered a semantic break: it used to refer to one person and now refers to another person. This is because the link between the name and its object has had a new baptism and no longer refers to Roman Aurelia, but a different girl.

The same can happen with God. We will assume in this example that the word God is used in a city in the Middle East. People in that city use the word God to refer to the Abrahamic God. As time passes and the people of that city disappear, the use of God stops. A few centuries later, other people move to that city and use the name God to refer to something different that is not the Abrahamic God. In this use of the word God, he has suffered a semantic break: the word is now used to refer to something else. This is because the link between the name and the object has had a new baptism and no longer refers to the Abrahamic God, but something else.

Figure 4

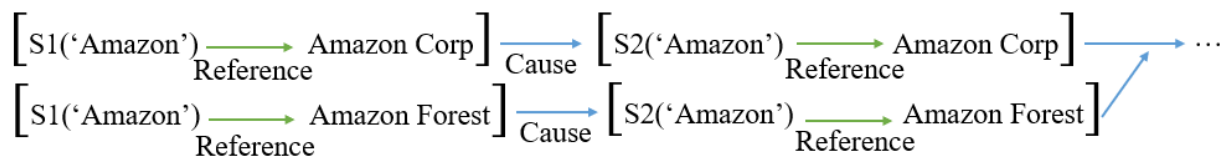


Another way in which a word can move its reference is through a *semantic shift*.

Semantic shift: Name N undergoes semantic shift when (a) in t1, N is used to refer to an object O, and (b) in t2, N is used to refer to both objects T and object O, and (c) in t3, N is mainly used to refer to object T instead of O (Sullivan, 2016, p.10).

Consider the word *Amazon*. Internationally, the word Amazon is used to talk about the company created by Jeff Bezos. Nevertheless, the word Amazon is also used to talk about the South American rainforest. This used to be the primary use of the word Amazon. Now the word is more commonly used to talk about the company instead of the rainforest.

Figure 5



In this case, the word Amazon has undergone a semantic shift: the most common use of the word is for the company instead of the rainforest. The term Amazon refers to two distinct objects, and the primary reference is now in the company of Bezos instead of the rainforest.

The same can happen with the name of God. People use the name of God to talk about the God of the Bible and can also be used to talk about another god (x). In this case, the name of God has two causal links, but only one has the primary reference. In this example, suppose that those who use the word God are in the United States, a place that primarily uses the name of God to refer to the Abrahamic God. The person who uses the word God to refer to a current god (x) comes from another place. The foreigner then moves to the United States and uses God for the

god (x) to the people of the United States. The use of God (x) is not the same as God in the United States in its dominant use. In this case, the word God has undergone a semantic shift: the most common method of the word is for the Abrahamic God instead of the god (x). The word God refers to two distinct objects, and the primary reference is now in the U.S. instead of the other place because of the location the foreigner moved to.

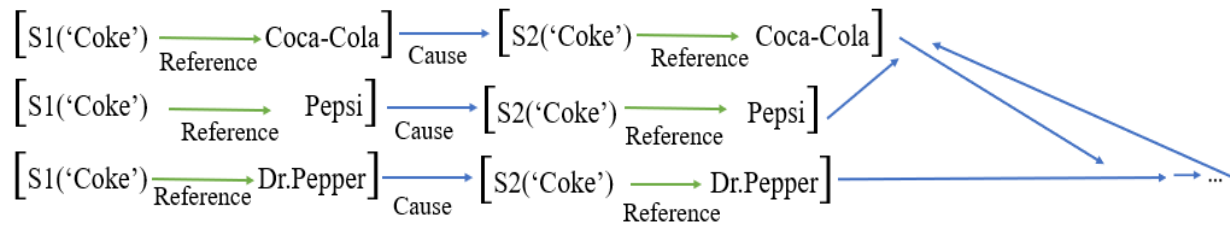
In addition, another way in which a word can change its reference use is through *semantic pollution*.

Semantic pollution: Name N undergoes semantic pollution when (a) in t1, N is used to refer to object O1, and (b) in t2, Name N is used to refer to both objects O1 and O2, and (c) in t3, N is also used to refer to the object O1 and O2 and O3. N no longer has a specific object to which it normally refers (Sullivan, 2016, p.11).

For semantic pollution, people can speak interchangeably of several objects to describe the same word. This causes pollution in the word and changes to what it should be. Consider the word *coke*. We will assume in this example that the word coke is used differently in three cities. The people of City 1 use the word coke to refer to Coca-Cola. People of City 2 use coke to talk about Pepsi, and people of City 3 use the same word to speak about Dr. Pepper. For all people and their communities, the word coke is mainly used in their communities. However, a person from City 2 arrives at City 1 and uses the word coke to talk about Pepsi. In City 1, however, coke is used to communicate about Coca-Cola. The person from City 2 had to change its primary use of the word to adapt to the City of 1. With that, the same happens when a person from City 2 meets the

other person from City 3 and again when a person from City 1 meets a person from 3 (vice versa). The word coke has suffered pollution because the primary use of the term has moved everywhere to see what the primary use is difficult to trace.

Figure 6



The word coke, in this case, refers to three different objects, and the primary reference is lost. In real life, the term coke refers to more than three objects. There are many types of soda bottles with the same word with all different forms of objects. Semantic pollution is based on the fact that the word has too many uses with the same name. It becomes challenging to distinguish what specific thing is being discussed even with widespread use.

The same can happen with God. We will assume in this example that the word God is used differently in three cities. The people of City 1 use the word God to refer to the Abrahamic God. In City 2, the name of God is used for godX and City 3, for godY. For all people and their communities, the God is mainly used to refer to their deities. However, a spokesman from City 2 arrives at City 1 and uses the word God to speak about godX. Still, since in City 1 God is used to talk about the Abrahamic God, the City 2 spokesperson has to change their primary use of the word God for person 1. With that, the same happens when the City 2 spokesperson meets City 3 spokesperson or the spokesperson of City1 to City 3 (vice versa). In this case, the name God has suffered pollution because the primary use of the name has been moved everywhere to see what the primary use is difficult to trace. The name of God refers to three different objects, and the

primary reference is lost. And, of course, today, people also use God to refer to many objects or beings and cause semantic pollution (Smith, 2010, p.266).

Another danger we can face with the causal theory of reference is Gareth Evans's approach towards Kripke's causal theory of reference. In the causal theory of reference, one cannot add their input on the way they use the name. For example, when someone uses the word "Megatron," that word was passed down as a causal chain to refer to the Transformer robot. With that, they cannot add in their input to what they think it or should refer to. The way they refer to Megatron is the same way they received the chain from. In contrast, Evans states that when a person passes their causal connection of a name (also known as the causal theory of names), the causal chain has a connection to and refers to what the new person is said of the name and not from where they received the chain. In other words, a name and an object have a causal connection to what the person interprets the object and name to be.

Evans believes that Kripke's causal theory of reference may be out of place because it needs to have sufficient and necessary conditions (Evans & Altham, 1973, p.198). An example of this would be when we hear a random name, and we suppose we know it. Let us say we pass by our friends and listen to them using the name Joe and they say that "Joe is a fool." They come and ask you if you have seen what Joe has done, but you have no idea who Joe is. You come by and say, "yes ... I heard what Joe said; he is a straight-up fool." In that case, Evans states that when we use an informal chain of the Joe, we mean that specific person that your friend speaks even though we have no idea who he is. For Kripke, he would have said that regardless of who Joe is, we can talk about him as long as we refer to our friend's reference. The problem is that we cannot be sure if our friend successfully referred to Joe in the first place.

On the contrary, Evans states that, since we did not know whom we were talking about, we were not referring to that person, Joe, but we did it in a manner that was different from what the friend was saying. It is not based on the first direct baptism of the person due to our intentions (Evans & Altham, 1973, p. 196). Our intentions of the name Joe have, in some sense, assigned the causal link on the person's intentions on that use of the name. We are deferentially talking about what our friend said who they think was a fool instead of the real person who had the initial baptism to be the fool. A more modern example of this could be the name of a child named Israel who may have an initial baptism problem with the object or location Israel. People use the kid's name, and someone can say, "Israel is nice," and another person could receive the causal link to be something else due to persons mislead utterance.

With these deviations in words and names, God could pose it too. The term God was known by the original writers of the Bible, who had the opportunity to know God personally. However, through times and generations, God has come to have several names that refer to him and has fallen more specifically in semantic pollution. That is, the word God can be used to speak of a non-divine being, a statue, and much more. Using Evans's theory of names, we can say that God can be problematic, depending on the person's intention. The causal link does not refer to God himself but to what the person thinks God is in his intentions associated with the use of God (Evans & Altham, 1973, p. 202). That is, a person can intend that God is not real and that his descriptions denote what it means for the people and not entirely on the causal history to what the original writers spoke of.

In using the causal theory of reference, we can only refer to God through passed down causal chains. With God being a divine being, we can infer that his name should not face

semantic pollution, shift, or break. However, regardless of that, God has been used throughout history with various names in which one cannot secure his casual reference back to the original writers of the Bible, which means that we need another mechanism to refer to Him securely.

Section 6: Semantic Inspiration

In the last section, I talked about how Saul Kripke's causal theory of reference can solve how we refer to God through our use. However, the causal theory of reference opened the door to several possible problems, such as semantic break, shift, and pollution. In this section, I will explore a way we can avoid these various problems of drift using semantic inspiration.

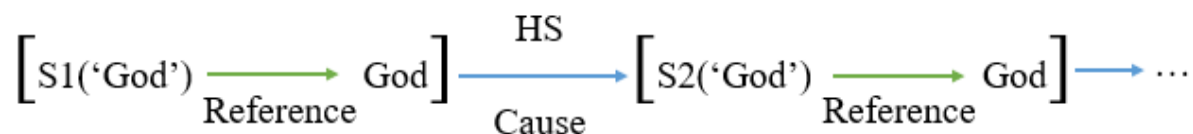
In Christian doctrine, it is known that God inspired the writers of the Bible to speak of and for Him (Utley, 2012, p.iv; Sullivan, 2016, p.16). By the inspiration received by God, they could use the word God to refer to Him and pass His causal chain of reference to other users. Inspiration is a unique way for religious users to have a relationship with the Holy Spirit, who inspired and guided the writers and religious users to be secured of their reference. With this idea, twenty-first century philosopher, Meghan Sullivan in *Semantic Problem of Hiddenness*, states that religious users could use God to talk about Him throughout time securely with the guidance of the Holy Spirit (Sullivan, 2016, p.16–17).

Inspiration is key to being able to speak and refer to the living God. If the users used the word God to refer to Him over time, that means that through causal chains, they could pass the reference of God to other people using the causal theory of reference. Sullivan tells us that inspiration is vital for a religious user to communicate referentially with God. Sullivan calls this semantic inspiration:

Semantic inspiration: a name N experiences semantic inspiration when (a) in t1, N is used to refer to the object O, and (b) in t2, through the will of the Holy Spirit, the causal chain is preserved of any semantic drift and (c) in t3, N can still be used to refer to O (Sullivan, 2016, p.16).

Semantic inspiration is a form of the causal theory of reference that helps us refer to God through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. In the causal theory of reference, it is said that one can refer to an object through baptisms or causal chains. These causal chains can remain safe from any drift as long as the Holy Spirit guides the causal chain from wrongness. In the Christian doctrine, the Holy Spirit is known to be a moral agent (Utley, 2012, p.9). The Holy Spirit helps us to talk about God among ourselves and how we use his name. That is, someone's use of God refers to God through the help of the Holy Spirit.

Figure 7

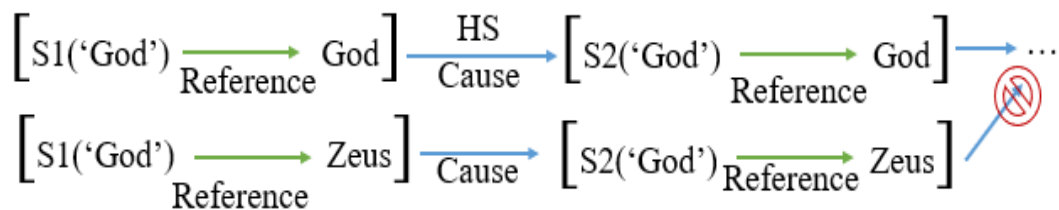


As we can see above, semantic inspiration only works if there is a causal chain of transmission for the use of the word God. For example, when the writers of the Bible used the name *YHWH* to refer to God, they could do so by the guidance of the Holy Spirit. That is, God Himself referred to Himself with God (and his various names). With the causal process of divine revelation, he passed that reference to the writers of the Bible. The writers of the Bible then, by the guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit, carried the reference of God to other people by the causal

chain that was passed down to them by the Holy Spirit. Later, those people could then pass the use of God to themselves and others with inspiration as well.

With semantic inspiration, we can solve the problems of semantic shift. Semantic inspiration can solve the problems of shift is by the guidance of the Holy Spirit through the religious user's causal influence on other users. For example, we have the name, Jehovah and Zeus. In this case, Jehovah refers to the Abrahamic God, and Zeus refers to the Greek god. Jehovah and Zeus, in this case, are two different objects. Nevertheless, by using semantic inspiration, that shift will not occur by the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the use of Jehovah. It would give us a differential recognition by knowing what God we are talking about.

Figure 8

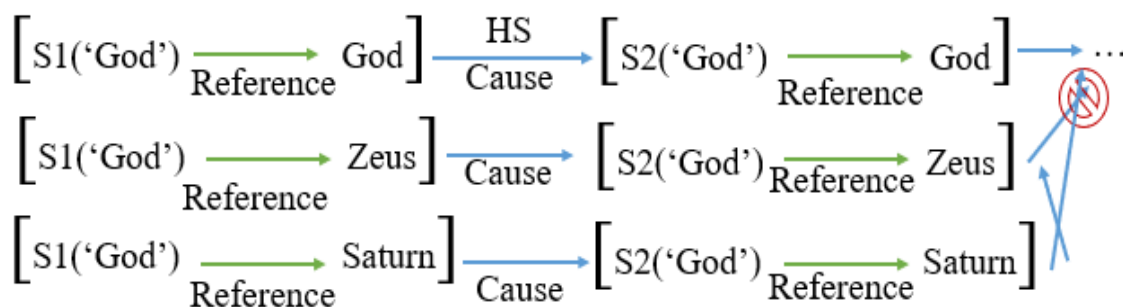


The same protection is not afforded to the reference of Zeus. The intervention of the Holy Spirit and semantic inspiration helps us to be sure that we are talking about God and not another object or being.

Semantic inspiration can also solve semantic pollution. Using the same example, it can become pollution as we add another object to refer to God. In this case, we can use Saturn as another referential chain that refers to God. In semantic pollution, based on the causal theory of reference, the use of the word is lost. However, by using the guidance of the Holy Spirit and inspiration, we can be sure that the use of the word God cannot be contaminated. Like semantic

shift, semantic inspiration intervenes that confusion occurs if there is an inspiration in a being and the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Figure 9



This means that when a person is using any of God's proper names to refer to Him, they can only do so through the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit. Although we can solve the problem of shift and semantic pollution, solving the problem of a semantic break with semantic inspiration would be more difficult. In a semantic break, the causal chain of the use of a word fades, and a new one begins to refer to another object with the same word. When using semantic inspiration, it is required to have a causal chain to be sure of whom we are referring to. If there is a break in use, then there is no causal chain for the inspiration to protect. If we cannot avoid a semantic break with the guidance of the holy spirit or inspiration with causal uses, how can we do it?

Section 7: Mechanical Translation

In the last section, I talked about how one can avoid the problems of shift and semantic pollution using semantic inspiration. Despite this use, semantic inspiration seems unable to prevent the difficulties of a semantic break because semantic inspiration requires one to have a causal chain between one person and another.

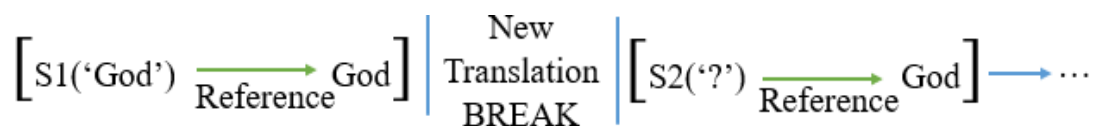
Semantic inspiration cannot solve the problem of a semantic break because when a causal chain is broken, a new one begins. A semantic break is when a causal chain is broken, and a new chain with the same name with a different object is used to talk about that new object (Sullivan, 2016, p.10). In this case, for God, a semantic break can be problematic from generation to generation. As long as there is no causal chain for God, there can be no semantic inspiration, and the use of God would be for something completely different.

If semantic inspiration cannot help us avoid semantic breaks, then it means that it cannot help us with the problems related to mechanical translations either. A mechanical translation is a translation that uses a software or an exact word translation from one speech-language to another. The words replaced precisely as one text is to another. One must not have a causal chain connecting the use of a word to refer to the object. One form of a mechanical translation is vertical translation. A vertical translation is an idea that the use of God from generation to generation can be assured that He is remembered as the God of the universe (Smith, 2010, p.274). This type of translation is known that over time, Biblical translators did not write with their intentions focused on the content of the Scripture, but mechanically translated word for word what the scripture said (Smith, 2010, p.320–321). In this case, God was only translated into a different language without any change to its use. The translation is the same as the original users of the Bible wrote it.

The problem with vertical translation is that it can have breaks. The break in the vertical translation begins to be an issue when one translates writing or words, and they are interpreted differently when a new person reads the translation (Smith, 2010, p.320–321). The scriptures and words before had a causal connection with the community that wrote and used the words. In a

break, when those people pass away, and another generation comes in. The word's reference to the original baptism can change even though it is used for the same words. For example, by using God in the old generation, one can refer to Jehovah. When that generation passes away, new people can get the old community's writings, and translations could refer to something completely different from God.

Figure 10



A more modern example of a mechanical translation is a Google translation. The causal chain that starts with a new use after a software such as Google translates. Google is a mechanical computer created by humans that has varied uses that can translate words and writings into several languages. Google, as we know, is not a living being like us. Google is a machine that only gives and writes what we want it to tell us. Google and the person who translates their writings or words only have a causal relationship with each other, but it deviates from giving a causal chain to someone else who reads Google's translation. For example, when someone has translated a word on Google translate, and someone other than the writer understands it, that person can now interpret or take the word to be something completely different. There is no causal connection with the use of that word from the person who wrote and the person who read it. The causal theory of reference is only based on the uses of words that have causal chains. Since Google does not have a causal chain of use, it also means that there cannot be a form of semantic inspiration present.

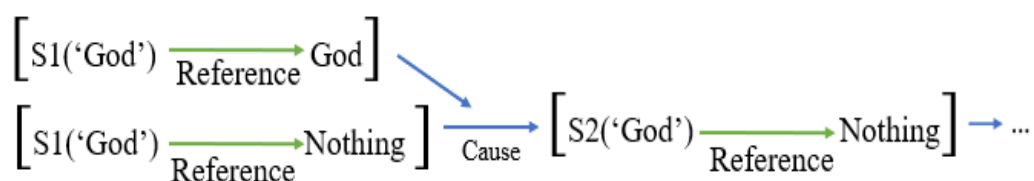
Section 8: The Unbeliever's Problem

Although semantic inspiration cannot completely solve the problems of a break, it also cannot solve the problem of the unbeliever. Like mechanical translation, the issue of the unbeliever can create a break.

Unbelievers state that the word God either has no reference or that God's reference is nothing. For a word to have its reference to be nothing would be a shift. That being, if someone passes the causal chain of God without inspiration to an unbeliever, then they can shift God to refer to nothing. An unbeliever can also baptize God to be whatever they please or can refuse to use the word at all.

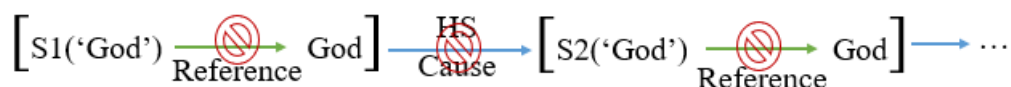
In this case, non-believers categorize the word as meaningless or absurd in their use. That is, when God is used through a non-believer, they will use it to write or say things they think make no sense. It would just be speaking nonsense. If that is the case, if non-believers are referring to nothing with their use, then it can pose problems. However, using semantic inspiration to refer to God would be able to avoid this problem of shift, and God would still have His reference. However, when the word God is not referable, it is different.

Figure 11



God, in this case, is not referable, and it does not allow one to speak of Him. That means that when a non-believer wants to talk about God, it is impossible. That means if a believer or someone with semantic inspiration would pass the causal chain to someone who does not use God or refer to Him whatsoever, then there will be a break.

Figure 12



Semantic inspiration cannot supply an answer for the unbeliever and their use of God. Semantic inspiration appears to work only for those who know the Holy Spirit and who have a causal chain to God. If they receive the reference of a non-believer, they could potentially lose that referential chain.

Semantic inspiration needs more clarity or another method to explain the problems of unbelievers and mechanical translation when there can be substantial amounts of breaks on the way one refers to God. The purpose of the causal theory of reference is to prevent one from having too much power on their causal reference. One way to solve these problems in addition to semantic inspiration is to return to Wittgenstein's language-games and forms of life.

Section 9: Forms of Life and Semantic Inspiration

In this section, I will explain how references and language-games work using semantic inspiration. From this point of view, we can combine the causal theory of reference with language games if we understand religious life forms as the mechanism by which semantic inspiration protects it against a semantic break. We can even see this as another central function of the church as the body of Christ: to continue with the ways of life and language games that protect against semantic drift.

Language-games for Wittgenstein is a form of life. A form of life consists of understanding religion or the way we use the word God through the expression or behaviors of the people. Wittgenstein resorted to the claim that the rules of religious language-game are set in theology (Wittgenstein & Hacker, 2010, p.123). The practices and uses of these words give the

meaning of the statements we make of God (Wittgenstein et al., 2006, p.94). This makes religious language not speculative, but something that a person lives for. With that, for one to understand the word God means requires one to be part of the religious activity to participate. This makes religious uses of language protected from any satire or any criticism. However, in using these forms of life, it does not allow a person like myself to refer to God (Wittgenstein & Hacker, 2010, p.55). That is because Wittgenstein never intended to give an exact definition of how we use language. Instead, he gave us a simple linguistic solution to the philosophical problems in which people used to get involved in giving an exact rule of how language should be used. The way Wittgenstein interpreted the word God would be something animal within us; Natural and biological (Graham, 2014, p.163).

Wittgenstein sees religion as a way of living. That is because it requires “that you have to change your life” (or the direction of your life) (Wittgenstein et al., 2006, p.61). Using the word God for Wittgenstein is a way to express ourselves. That is, “the way [we] use the word God does not show whom [we] mean- but rather, what [we] mean” (Wittgenstein et al., 2006, p.58). For Wittgenstein, the belief of God as a physical being is different from the way one uses God. God is like an attitude or something created by humans to help us in our faith and our lives. This is problematic for a religious believer and proves to be a gateway for the unbeliever. However, the concept of forms of life and the way we live when we use words play an essential role in what we refer to, especially from our various uses of culture and diversity.

Culture plays a significant role in what we refer to. For Wittgenstein, religious practice and culture are not theoretical. For example, when someone wants to learn to play chess, the way they learn and know how to play chess would require them to watch how other people play chess

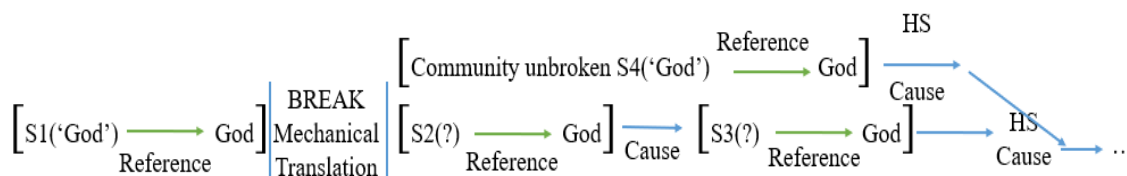
(Wittgenstein & Hacker, 2010, p.15). In the case of God, for one to know his use would be to follow the rules of language within the religious community. One example is such as not to use His name in vain or a derogatory way, prayer, and worship. Communities from past centuries since the times of the Abrahamic era have done similar practices, and now in modern days, the same concept and idea has remained the same. It has evolved as a causal transmission for culture in their language.

Cultural transmission is a causal connection in which people communicate with one another through communities and their forms of life. Taking the idea that we can talk about God within our culture is vital for one to have their reference. The way forms of life function allow a causal connection to a community that represents unity for all. For example, in the use of God, people of a church community, all assume they are talking about the same God and norms. Cultural transmission allows one to connect back to their past groups, such as the writers of the Bible, who had similar forms of life like they do now. However, even though culture has a causal connection, culture alone is not enough to secure reference.

Cultural transmission and community can act as break repairs. To solve the problem of breaks, we need to combine the idea of cultural transmission and semantic inspiration. For instance, we can assume we have a religious person named Joe, who goes to church daily and uses the word *God* in his congregation. Joe then, throughout the week, meets and suffers a semantic breakthrough mechanical translation or by talking to an unbeliever. Now Joe does not know what he is referring to. Joe must realign himself with his break by utilizing both semantic inspiration and forms of life. After a semantic break has occurred for a religious user such as Joe, the only way one can solve their reference and causal chain is going back to their community and

from there, receiving a causal chain that refers to God. With that, Joe can have an inspirational semantic shift in which reference to God can be fixed.

Figure 13



An inspirational semantic shift is where one can be confident that they can get their reference back as their unbroken community still exists and uses it. For Joe, the word *God* can be fixed as he returns to his unbroken community to repair the break. It can be set through a person's form of life and their communities, as the community has semantic inspiration. Through religious forms of life, one can be sure to what they are referring to as one stand as a member of that community. Communities are linked through practice. With the causal relationship in their culture and reference, they will be able to trace their reference back to God.

This brings to question how someone who is not a consistent member of the religious community is going to be able to refer to God once their causal link has been broken? In this case, those who are not consistent members of a religious community can pose several problems. For one, the inconsistent member could suffer many breaks and have their reference become lost. It can also be shifted or polluted as they move to various places and cultures.

It seems that at an individual level, there is no break for the user as they can always go back to fix their break with their unbroken community. However, on a larger scale where a community itself loses reference to God, there will be no one in which one can gain back their broken reference. The way this break can become havoc is whenever a large group or community

overall stops using the word God to refer back to God. This can happen as people stop caring and using God in their lives. The form of life the community had, can then be destroyed and lead to unrepairable breaks.

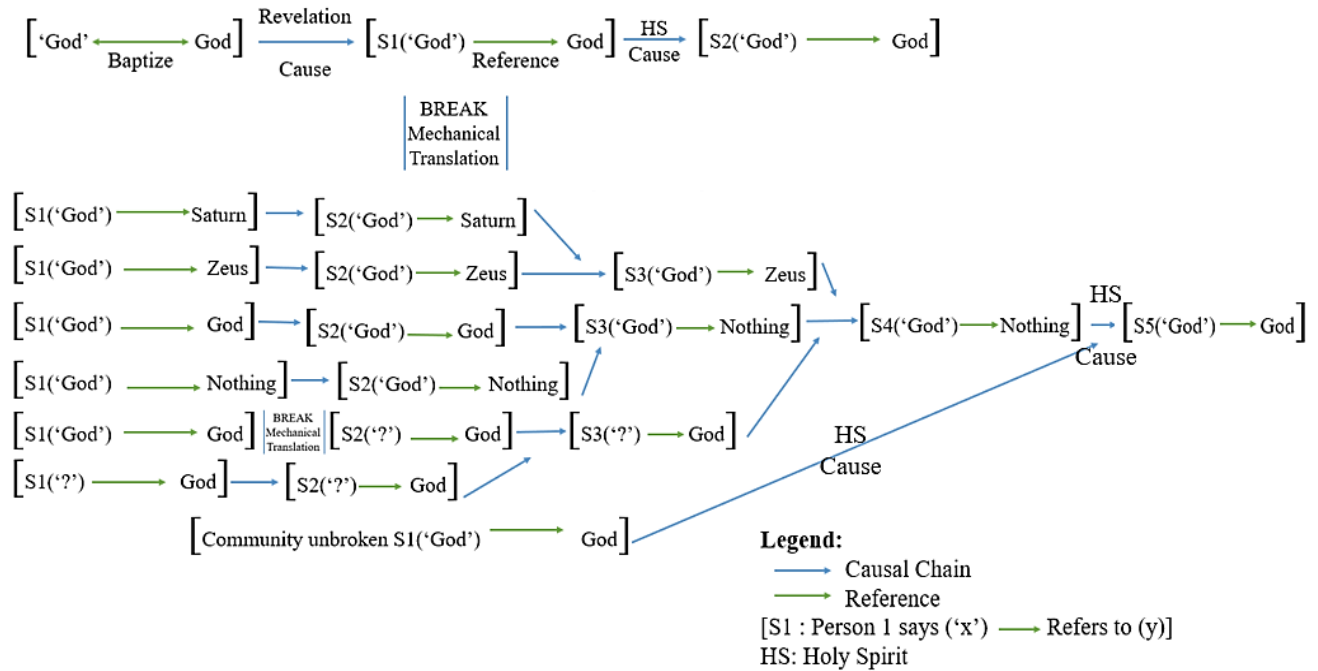
Communities can be destroyed, and so is the use of God. A person could always go back to church or their unbroken community and not really partake in the community itself. One would then not be taking part or be engaged in the form of life. This can create breaks as it diminishes the use of God. If we want to fix the break, we need strong communities. Now at days, the form of life of God has diminished as generations progress (Emba, 2019). Communities keep the causal theory of reference going and allows individuals to be able to repair their breaks. The church, in this case, is fundamental to the way we refer to God. If the church is lost, then the reference for God is lost too. The way they can fix their break and be sure of their reference will be through the causal chain that was passed down in their communities that have semantic inspiration. With that, we can solve the problem of breaks, shift, and pollution, and be able to refer to God securely.

Conclusion

To refer to God and to trace its causal chain back to Him requires semantic inspiration. In the introduction, I spoke about how God tends to be thought to be: abstract, real, or fictional. Ludwig Wittgenstein, in the *TLP* and Scott, gave us a way in which religious language is nonsensical because we cannot picture God. The best solution for this problem is to take God as fiction. Wittgenstein's later work in the *PI* states that religious assertions can be meaningful as we use it around us in activity. Mulhall states that religious claims are like riddles and need more than what we know (Mulhall, 2015, p.124). However, even though it has been argued that God is not

referable or nonsensical. A pathway in which we can refer to God is through Revelation. God revealed Himself to the writers of the Bible, who then were able to pass their causal chain to us through semantic inspiration.

Nevertheless, as time passed by, there has been many various way people have been referring to God. This has created a semantic drift to the way we talk about God. Yet, with semantic inspiration, we can use Kripke's causal theory of reference and Wittgenstein's concept of forms of life to be able to refer to God. Semantic inspiration allows us to use the Holy Spirit to guide our causal chain to God. This allows one to use God through expression and meaning as one passes the causal chain or continues to secure the chain throughout their uses and communities. Therefore, for one to refer to God, one can do it through the causal theory of reference alongside semantic inspiration and forms of life.

Graph: Reference to God*Figure 14: Reference to God*

Note. The chart starts with the word God being baptized by God Himself (left to right). Then through revelation, it is passed down to the writers (i.e., speaker 1), and with the guide of the Holy Spirit on its causal chain, it is passed down to others. In this example, a break occurs, and there can be multiple problems that can happen, which in the end, it can be fixed with an unbroken community that is still using God with the guide of the Holy Spirit.

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