

## **Naming/Meaning Distinction Delineated in the Context of The Essence/Existence Distinction**

*By Tennyson Samraj\**

*The epistemic nature of truth provides the basis of understanding the relationship between the naming/meaning distinction and the existence/essence distinction. Every word denotes a reductive reference and connotes a non-reductive meaning. Every word is associated with both intension/meaning and extension/ reference (Putnam). A noun is a naming word; like all words, it denotes a reference and connotes meaning. The distinction between naming and meaning with reference to nouns is necessary because nouns like all words, deal with both extension and intension. The essence/existence distinction defines why it is essential to separate naming from meaning. For naming and existence is an ontological matter; meaning and essence is an epistemic matter. What does a word or specifically a noun entail? It can ascribe (1) the identity of a person, place, or principle; (2) it can affirm the existence of something (material/concrete world); the subsistence of something (mathematical/abstract world), or the absistence of something (mental world, F.N. Findlay); or (3) it can define the essence of something as being an essential, accidental, or emergent property. The central thrust of my paper is to discuss why words/ nouns can be understood as either defining the identity and existence of something or defining the meaning and essence of something. There are no nouns/words without reference or meaning. When we see something, what conjures in our mind is either the existence of that thing or the essence of that thing. Naming deals with the specificity and existence of something, while meaning deals with the universality and essence of something. Naming puts emphasis on what is reductive, and meaning puts emphasis on what is non-reductive. Naming and meaning like existence and essence are intertwined because the truth of existence (including subsistence and assistance) and the truth of essence are inseparable, if truth is an epistemic matter. Essence/ existence distinction is fundamental to what exists, subsists or absists in understanding the relationship of the naming/meaning distinction.*

### **Introduction: Epistemic Nature of Truth**

To delineate the naming/meaning distinction in the context of the essence/existence distinction is to understand the epistemic nature of truth. What is epistemic is related to what is ontological; however, what is ontological is not necessarily related to what is epistemic. What there is to know is an ontological matter but what we know of what there is an epistemic matter. What exists is a reductive given, what we know of what exists is a non-reductive given. Reality and what we know about reality are separate and distinct. We do not have access to reality as is; we only have access to reality as we know it. The basis for understanding the relationship between what there is and what we claim to know about what is there, is to understand the

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relationship between essence and existence. The essence/existence distinction provides the basis for understanding the naming/meaning distinction. Hence, essence is explicable, and its explicability is possible because words are meaning-determinate and the world of existence is essence-explicable. Naming is necessary, and what exists is nameable,<sup>1</sup> because what exists entails essence/existence distinction—hence the epistemic nature of truth. What must be asked is whether essence/ existence distinction is an ontological given or an epistemic given. Can we talk about essence independent of existence, subsistence or absistence? Do all objects require existence, e. g. does Pegasus need to be alive to be considered as a being? Plato's argued that what exists is only a 'copy' of the essence, Alexius Meinong argued that the essence of objects can be discussed independent of existence<sup>2</sup>--as objects without a being.

A noun is a naming word<sup>3</sup>. Nouns as words are directed to either the 'is' of identity and existence or to the 'is' of meaning and essence. Naming deals with the 'is' of identity and existence, and meaning deals with the 'is' intension and essence. What is the relationship between essence and meaning? Is meaning related to establishing the 'is' existence, or is meaning related to establishing the 'is' essence? But before we make any claims about essence, we must begin by making ontological commitments. Science and mathematics are the basis for ontological commitments. Science is interested in what there is<sup>4</sup> along with mathematical claims such as *all* or *some*—considered abstract (non-physical) ontological commitments<sup>5</sup>. These quantifications are the basis for ontological commitments. Ontological commitments can be made related to the existence (material world), subsistence (mathematical world) or absistence (mental world or mode of non-being) of something<sup>6</sup> Once we make ontological commitments, we can begin making claims about essence.

Claims related to essence can be understood as being an essential, accidental, or emergent property. We know that the universe is composed of 118 elements distinguished from each other by the number of protons processed by each. Each element is composed of protons and neutrons, which in turn are made up of Up and Down quarks. So basically, the whole universe at the quantum level is composed of

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<sup>1</sup>Virgil C. Aldrich, "Mr. Quine on Meaning, Naming, and Purporting to Name". *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (Feb., 1955), 20.

<sup>2</sup>Reinhardt Grossmann, "Meinong's Doctrine of the Assusersein of the Pure Objects" Mar., 1974, Vol. 8, No. 1, Symposia Paper Read at the Meeting of the Western Division of the American Philosophical Association in St. Louis, Missouri, April 27-29, 1974 (Mar., 1974), pp. 67 Denoting an object but not having a being—just as a thought in one's mind--F.N. Findley.

<sup>3</sup>It's definition means "name" <https://www.bibme.org/blog/grammar/what-is-a-noun/>.

<sup>4</sup>Hilary Putnam on Quine & Ontology [https://www.google.com/search?q=putnam+on+quine&rlz=1C1CHBF\\_enCA1024CA1024&oq=putnam+on+quine&gs\\_lcrp=EgZjaHJvbWUyBggAEEUYOdIBDzM5NzcyNTM1NjFqMGoxNagCALACAA&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8#fpstate=ive&vld=cid:a06c8fd2,vid:AhHIVEN839s](https://www.google.com/search?q=putnam+on+quine&rlz=1C1CHBF_enCA1024CA1024&oq=putnam+on+quine&gs_lcrp=EgZjaHJvbWUyBggAEEUYOdIBDzM5NzcyNTM1NjFqMGoxNagCALACAA&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8#fpstate=ive&vld=cid:a06c8fd2,vid:AhHIVEN839s).

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Reinhardt Grossmann, "Meinong's Doctrine of the Assusersein of the Pure Objects" Mar., 1974, Vol. 8, No. 1, Symposia Paper Read at the Meeting of the Western Division of the American Philosophical Association in St. Louis, Missouri, April 27-29, 1974 (Mar., 1974), pp. 67 Denoting an object but not having a being—just as a thought in one's mind--F.N. Findley.

Up and Down Quarks based on its spin<sup>7</sup>. When we talk about the essence, we define the nature of reality. Essence is understanding the nature of reality, which is made possible because the nature of the mind that allows us to connect the essence/existence distinction with the naming/meaning distinction.

### **The Relationship between the Essence/Existence and Naming/Meaning Distinction**

To understand the relationship between the naming/meaning distinction and the essence/existence distinction is to highlight the nature of language. Language, in particular words, helps us define the relationship between reality and the nature of reality. Hence, there is a relationship between words and the world of reality. Words both denote reference and connote meaning because words deal with both existence and essence. Words, in general, can be about being or non-being depending on whether one is talking about existence, subsistence, or absistence<sup>8</sup>. We can talk about the material world of existence, we can talk about the mathematical world of subsistence, or we can talk about the mental world of absistence.<sup>9</sup> While it is easy to talk about being in the material world; it is also possible to talk of non-being in the mental world as in Pegasus as a non-actualized being<sup>10</sup>, while also entertaining the idea of a round-square as an unactualizable impossibility. What is there—everything<sup>11</sup>, that is-- there is what there is<sup>12</sup> There is a relationship between words and the world. When a word, like a noun, is created, we notice that it can invoke either the existence or the essence of something. Sensing the existence of the world is an empirical given, ascribing essence to what exists is an epistemic given.

What is the relationship between the 'is' of identity and the 'is' of composition in understanding the 'is' of essence and existence? How much of essence is related to what is reductive, and how much essence is related to what is non-reductive? How much of essence is equated with extension, and how much of essence is related to intension (meaning). We can assume that essence precedes existence but never know what the essence is. Speaking about what is reductive, we must note that secondary qualities have no place nor location; while what caused it not only has a place and location but is also a reductive given. In other words, reality as it is has a place or location, but reality as we perceive it does not have a place or location. That is why it is argued that we cannot know objective reality objectively; we can know objective reality only subjectively So, what we call an objective match between

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<sup>7</sup>A proton is composed of two Up quarks and one Down quark while a neutron is composed of two Down quarks and one Up quark. <https://www.sjsu.edu/faculty/watkins/Upquarkspin.htm>. <https://byjus.com/physics/quark/>.

<sup>8</sup>Reinhardt Grossmann, "Meinong's Doctrine of the Assusersein of the Pure Objects" Mar., 1974, Vol. 8, No. 1, Symposia Paper Read at the Meeting of the Western Division of the American Philosophical Association in St. Louis, Missouri, April 27-29, 1974 (Mar., 1974), pp. 67 <https://plato.Stanford.edu/entries/meinong/#ObjTheOntBeyBeiNonBei>. (denotes being an object but not having a being—just as a thought in one's mind. F.N. Findley

<sup>9</sup>All creative ideas exist as non-entities in mind.

<sup>10</sup>Willard Van Orman Quine –On What there Is. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wx9RJFBcb00>.

<sup>11</sup>Willard V. Quine *The Review of Metaphysics*, Vol. 2, No. 5 (Sep., 1948), 21.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid. 22.

perception and reality is nothing but a subjective match between perceivers and not an objective match between perception and reality. How much of essence needs to be reductive for it to have meaning? While secondary qualities have no place or location, we can reduce secondary qualities to some reductive origin—for example, color as an electromagnetic ray. Secondary qualities like memory, ideas, intentionality, creativity, or subjectivity have no place or location.

How do we define the essence of what it means to be human? This depends on whether mental states are considered as being reductive or non-reductive. If pain states are reducible to C-fibre firing, then only the stimulation of C-fibre firing can be understood as pain states.<sup>13</sup> Is naming reductive? How much of naming deals with *a posteriori necessity*<sup>15</sup>? A reductive explanation of consciousness—where mental states are understood as (1) a neural state, (2) an emergent property, or (3) a quantum phenomena, reduces consciousness to some type of pan-psychism. As long as we attempt to understand consciousness to be reductive, it is hard to define the essence of consciousness. For only when consciousness is understood as being non-reductive, can we understand mathematics, morals, and metaphysical realities such as essence.

### **Truth of Existence vs. Truth of Essence: Determinacy of Meaning and the Explicability of Essence**

Understanding the relationship between the naming/meaning distinction and the essence/existence distinction is to establish the truth of existence and the truth of essence. What does a Word/Noun try to establish? Is it to establish the truth of existence or the truth of essence? Words connect the world of reality<sup>16</sup> and the world of essence. Essence is what connects words with the world. So, the truth of existence cannot be separated from the truth of essence. Essence and existence are intertwined. While we can affirm existence without knowing what the essence is, we cannot affirm essence without reference to some form of existence (material world), subsistence (mathematical world), or absistence (mental world). In the paper it is argued that we cannot talk about essence without its connection to some type of being—be it existence, subsistence or absistence. Nor can we talk about existence without its connection to some aspect of essence—be it essential, accidental or emergent. What differentiates one atom from another is the number of protons in each atom. So, the identity of an atom is strictly based on the number of protons in each atom. We can try to understand the 'is' of essence at the atomic level, but at the sub-atomic level, every chance of being distinctively reductive is lost when we realise that every proton and neutron is made up of Up and Down quarks.<sup>17</sup> It would be difficult to distinguish one thing

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<sup>13</sup>Saul A. Kripke "Naming and Necessity" in *Philosophy of Mind*, David Chalmers, (New York: 2002) 331.

<sup>15</sup>Saul A. Kripke "Naming and Necessity" in *Philosophy of Mind*, David Chalmers, (New York: 2002) 331.

<sup>16</sup>John Hospers *An Introduction to Philosophical Analysis* (New York: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1997) vi, 7.

<sup>17</sup>A quark is a type of elementary particle and a fundamental constituent of matter. <https://byjus.com/physics/quark/>.

from another if the 'is' of composition is exactly the same. Gold and iron are different only because of the number of protons in the atom, but if protons and neutrons are all made up of Up and Down quarks, then there is no difference between gold and iron. How then, does one define essence if essence at the reductive level is made of the same cosmic stuff. How much of the 'is' of identity is essential to define the 'is' of existence and the 'is' of essence. What is the relationship between the 'is' of identity, the 'is' of composition, the 'is' of existence, the 'is' of essence and the 'is' of necessity/contingency?

Is a noun a name for the truth of existence or a title for the truth of essence? What defines existence and what defines essence? Quine's notion of the confusion between name and naming<sup>18</sup>, led him to argue for the indeterminacy of meaning<sup>19</sup>, especially in the context of his naturalized epistemology<sup>20</sup>. However, traditional analysis of knowledge allows for the existence/essence distinction because of which we can argue that naming/meaning distinction. The two ways to defuse the confusion between naming and meaning is to (1) understand the naming/meaning distinction in the context of the essence/existence distinction, and (2) understand the being/non-being distinction in the context of existence, subsistence, and absistence distinction. A noun is a naming word. Noun means name<sup>21</sup>. Is knowledge about what exists or about the essence of what exists. Every word has two aspects—reference and meaning. Nouns, like words, have references but also deal with quiddity (inherent nature or essence)<sup>22</sup>. If every word pertains to some entity, then every word defines in some form the truth of essence or the truth of existence. A word can be about truth, about essence, or about identity. For instance, the word Toyota can be about the existence of a car, the essence of a car, or the model of the car. But what exactly does a noun capture-- its truth, its essence, or its identity? How much of the word defines identity and existence, and how much defines essence and meaning? How do we establish the truth/veracity of meaning when there is no universal semantics? We can establish the existence of an entity, but it is not easy to establish the essence of an entity. It is easy to define essence if essence precedes existence. The idea for its existence is the reason for creating what exists. However, if an entity does not have a beginning, it is hard to understand its essence because there is no distinction between essence and existence. That is why, while it is easy to establish the truth of existence--being or non-being, it is hard to establish the truth of essence; even harder to establish the essence of something related to subsistence or absistence.

The determinacy of meaning is the basis of communicating the essence of what exists. There are three ways we can communicate meaning associated with essence. (1) meaning associated with symbols like hieroglyphics, (2) meaning associated with words like in language, and (3) meaning associated with sign language like braille.

<sup>18</sup>Virgil C. Aldrich, "Mr. Quine on Meaning, Naming, and Purporting to Name". *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (Feb., 1955), 21.

<sup>19</sup>Quine, W. V. 1970. "On the Reasons for Indeterminacy of Translation." *The Journal of Philosophy* 67 (6): 181.

<sup>20</sup>Quine rejected both analyticity and synonymy in his naturalized epistemology. —circularity of analyticity and synonymy does not define anything. For Quine all epistemic facts should be reduced to empirical facts.

<sup>21</sup>What is a Noun? <https://www.bibme.org/blog/grammar/what-is-a-noun/>.

<sup>22</sup>Quiddity—noun, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/quiddity>.

Determinacy of meaning is necessary even though we cannot establish universal semantics. Determinacy of the meaning is the basis of communicating essence. Multiplicity of meaning and the indeterminacy of translation makes it hard to understand the science of semantics. However, the multiplicity of meaning and the elusive nature of essence do not negate the meaning associated with words. While meaning deals with the 'is' of intention and essence, naming deals with the 'is' of identity and existence. The epistemic nature of truth provides the basis for understanding the relationship between the essence/ existence and naming/meaning distinction.

The explicability of essence is best defined in the context of how we understand the universe came into existence. There are three options related to how we understand the universe came into existence. (1) If the universe's beginning involves an intelligent beginning, then we can argue that essence precedes existence. (2) If the universe's beginning involves an unintelligent beginning, then we can define essence from what we know about reality. (3) If the universe has no beginning, as Sartre would argue, then we cannot make an ontological split between essence and existence, as such it would be difficult to make the essence/ existence distinction. As such, if the universe did not have a beginning then there was never a time the universe did not exist.<sup>25</sup> The universe exists without cause, without purpose, and without meaning.<sup>26</sup> These options clearly define our understanding of the existence/ essence distinction as an epistemic matter. Naming is related to establishing the 'is' of existence, while meaning is related to establishing the 'is' of essence.

### **Naming and Meaning in the Context of Being: Existence, Subsistence and Absistence**

When we define something, we either define the existence of something or the essence of something. We are cognizant of essence and know that essence precedes existence, if what exists has a beginning. With reference to the universe we can assume that the universe had a beginning or assume that the universe does not have a beginning. If the universe has a beginning we can assume that essence precedes existence, if it does not then we cannot make an ontological distinction between essence and existence. The best way to address the essence/existence distinction is to understand the naming/meaning distinction in the context of the types of being, namely, existence, subsistence, and absistence.

The first aspect of dealing with the naming/meaning distinction deals with existence. What exists can be named or is nameable—what there is to be named.<sup>27</sup> Names are ascribed to what exists (reference)<sup>28</sup>, and meaning (essence) is ascribed to names, which leads us to conversations about what exists. The central question

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<sup>25</sup>Jean Paul Sartre. Being and Nothingness, 29.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

<sup>27</sup>Virgil C. Aldrich *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (Feb., 1955), 20.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid 18.

of all conversation is about what there is<sup>29</sup> and the nature of what there is. We cannot separate naming and meaning. Naming is directed to the existence of something, and meaning is directed to the essence of something. It is the meaning associated with naming that makes communication possible<sup>30</sup>. Naming without meaning would be gibberish. Meaning independent of naming would make conversation devoid of any reference or reality. That is why naming is related to extension, and meaning is related to intension.<sup>31</sup>

Kripke argued that once we name or identify something, only that entity is that entity. For instance, if we say water is H<sub>2</sub>O, only H<sub>2</sub>O can be water in all possible worlds. Here, identity and essence are connected. But if identity is not part of the essence, then essence can be understood independently of identity. For instance, a table's essence can be understood independently of the material used to make it. We can say the same thing about water if identity is not associated with essence. If elsewhere in the universe something like water sustains life but it is XYZ<sup>32</sup>, then it also can be considered as water if identity is not related to essence.

The second aspect of the naming/meaning distinction deals with subsistence. Mathematics is an excellent example of what subsists. Here, the names given and the meanings ascribed to these realities are unique. Here, it is essential to note that the language of the mind is different than the language used to communicate thought. Symbols in the mind are different than symbols on paper. For instance, symbols for multiplication, division, subtraction, and addition on paper are different than the symbols in the mind that we all possess which Fodor called mental language—often called *mentalese*<sup>33</sup>. The difference between numbers and numerals will highlight something important. Numerals like Roman numerals are symbols on paper. However, numbers are concepts that subsist in the mind of the conceiver. We understand numbers as having no beginning nor end. There is no such thing as the birth or death of numbers. This is a good example of the need for an immortal God in whose mind these concepts exist. Since numbers seem eternal, there must be an infinite mind in whose mind such realities exist. Numbers subsist only in the mind. And if numbers have no beginning nor end, then there must be an eternal mind in whose mind such realities exist.

The third aspect of the naming/meaning distinction deals with absistence. Here, objects of imagination like Pegasus are objects only in the mind. How does one deal with the essence/existence distinction with reference to absistence. Naming and meaning attached to objects in the mind when understood in the context of essence/existence distinction, poses some challenges. For instance, is identity related to the truth of essence or the truth of existence? If most of the inventions begin in the mind, how do we address the naming/meaning distinction? It appears we can name all inventions even if there is no being attached to the object like Pegasus. Just as we

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<sup>29</sup>Quine, W. V. 1970. "On the Reasons for Indeterminacy of Translation." *The Journal of Philosophy* 67 (6): 178-183.

<sup>30</sup>John Hospers *An Introduction to Philosophical Analysis* (New York: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1997) 7.

<sup>31</sup>Hilary Putnam *The meaning of "meaning"* in David Chalmers, *Philosophy of Mind*, 581.

<sup>32</sup>John Campbell, "Extension and Psychic State: Twin Earth Revisited". *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition*, Jul., 1982, Vol. 42, No. 1 (Jul., 1982), 67.

<sup>33</sup><https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/language-thought/> Jerry Fedor, *The Language of Thought*, (Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1975).

cannot say Pegasus does not exist when in thought and speech, it does exist<sup>34</sup>. Similarly, we can think and talk about contradictions in the world of absence, such as round squares, even though there is nothing related to in the world of existence.<sup>35</sup>

### **Naming and Meaning in the Context of Essence: Essential or Accidental**

Defining the 'is' of existence is different than defining the 'is' of essence. While the 'is' identity defines the 'is' of existence, the 'is' of essence defines the 'is' of whatness or the nature of something—considered as essential or accidental/potential. What all beings share in common is existence; what differentiates one from the other is essence. So, when we walk into a room, everything we observe exists; however, as soon as we say 'what exists,' everything becomes different. What differentiates each from each other is essence. It seems that way. But when we look at what each thing that exists consists of, we realize that it is exactly made of the same stuff. Everything that exists consists of atoms; every atom is made of protons and neutrons, and every proton and neutron is composed of Up and Down quarks. So, in reality, everything is made up of quarks—Up and Down quarks, depending on their spin<sup>36</sup>. The question is how does something common in each become different in terms of essence. Is it the number of protons, its biology, its DNA structure, its utility, its design, its sentience, its intelligence, or its disposition?

Truth as an epistemic matter makes the explicability of essence inevitable, and the explicability of the essence is necessary if we are engaged in communication even though essence is elusive. Why is essence elusive? Essence is what something is. What constitutes the essential characteristic of something is a challenge. For instance, the essence of a table can be defined strictly in terms of its use. So, a big stool can be used as a table and can be a table. On the other hand, the essence of God can be defined in terms of the type of existence, namely a necessary or eternal being. God by definition is a necessary being. As such, a necessary being cannot be thought not to exist<sup>37</sup>. Is the naming of God important or the meaning of God important? If God is defined as a creator-- is God being a creator an essential or accidental characteristic of God?<sup>38</sup> If God is God because of creation then what was God before creation. Naming is an ontological/existential matter, but meaning is an epistemic/metaphysical matter. Essence is a non-reductive explanation for what is. If essence precedes existence as in having an intelligent cause, then it is easy to note the given essence. This is true even if we have no contact with the intelligent cause; we can assume that essence precedes existence. However, if there is an unintelligent cause ascribed to any given thing, then it is very difficult to ascribe an essence --like the beginning of the universe ascribed to a big bang. We cannot ascribe any intelligent essence if its

<sup>34</sup>Willard V. Quine "On What There Is" *The Review of Metaphysics*, Vol. 2, No. 5 (Sep., 1948), 22.

<sup>35</sup>file:///C:/Users/tsamraj/Downloads/Meinong's%20General%20Theory%20of%20Objects.html.

<sup>36</sup>A proton is composed of two Up quarks and one Down quark while a neutron is composed of two Down quarks and one Up quark. <https://www.sjsu.edu/faculty/watkins/Upquarkspin.htm>.

<sup>37</sup>Anslem, *Proslogion* Chapter III 94. trans. Jasper Hopkins and Herbert Richardson *Proslogion* (Minneapolis: The Author J. Banning Press, 2000).

<sup>38</sup>If God is God because of creation, then what was God before Creation.



beginning or cause was unintelligent. Essence is a meaningful concept only if essence precedes existence. That is why an eternal mind is understood as necessary if essence precedes existence in a platonic sense. What is the essence of a steam engine? Does its use in a locomotive change the nature of its essence? Is the use of a steam engine as a locomotive engine an accidental characteristic of its essence? An engine is a power source, but its power source can be steam, gasoline, and gas, while the essence remains the same. When does identity become a given, and what is the relationship of identity to both existence and essence?

### Challenges Related to the Determinacy of Meaning and Essence

There are two challenges –one related to the determinacy of meaning and the other to the explicability of essence. The first challenge deals with the determinacy of meaning. According to Quine, the indeterminacy of meaning<sup>39</sup> is related to the indeterminacy of translation<sup>40</sup> and the confusion between name and naming<sup>41</sup>. Since there are no universal semantics, it is difficult to translate what the author had in mind. That is because words have different or multiple meanings attached to it. As such, indeterminacy of meaning cannot mean being devoid of meaning. Meanings are multiple, not devoid of meaning. If that were the case, none of us could be sure that we could communicate anything. All communication is made possible through meaning-driven conversation. We may have duplicity or confusion of meaning, but there is never an absence of meaning. Equivocation happens when we confuse several meanings of a word. It is when we use a single word several times in a sentence to mean several different things. As such, meaning-indeterminacy does not mean words are meaning-indeterminate, naming and meaning are an epistemic given, not an ontological given, and as such, non-reductive.

"Words are meaning-determining information encoded by the words of a natural language of meaning." Communication is possible because of meaning. Without meaning, we cannot have a meaningful conversation. Without meaning, all language would be gibberish. Quine cannot argue for the death of meaning without ascribing meaning to what he is claiming. Meaning is a fundamental part of human language.<sup>42</sup> Meaning provides for communication. Meaning is the message conveyed by words, sentences, and symbols in a given context.<sup>43</sup> As such, semantics, in short, is the study of different kinds of meaning for different kinds of words. Language is a necessity only because we want to communicate to others what we are thinking about, trying to explain to someone what one knows (of what there is to know) until the other knows what one knows as one knows it. So, meaning is central to communication. For someone to communicate what is known in both the context of making the other

<sup>39</sup>Quine, W. V. 1960. *Word and Object*. US, MA: MIT Press. 23

<sup>40</sup>Quine, W. V. 1970. "On the Reasons for Indeterminacy of Translation." *The Journal of Philosophy* 67 (6): 178-183

<sup>41</sup>Virgil C. Aldrich, "Mr. Quine on Meaning, Naming, and Purporting to Name". *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (Feb., 1955), 21

<sup>42</sup>Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.

<sup>43</sup>Richard Nordquist, Meaning Semantics. <https://www.thoughtco.com/meaning-semantics-term-1691373>.

know what one knows the way it is known and the way the world is, is a feat. Understanding the world as we see it and communicating what is known is not an easy task. Language is required only because we want to communicate what we know about reality to others of what is known of reality.

There are two types of meaning—Semantic meaning deals with content, while pragmatic meaning deals with context.<sup>44</sup> To begin with, words/nouns define the relationship between the mind and the world.<sup>45</sup> The question is, what is the relationship between words and world of reality? Understanding the relationship between reality and what we know about reality provides the basis for delineating the naming/meaning distinction in the context of the essence/existence distinction. Words are used to communicate to each other about reality and the nature of reality."<sup>46</sup> Every word, especially nouns, both denote and connote meaning<sup>47</sup>. Words are jam-packed with meaning. They are not meaning indeterminate—they are meaning-ridden -- as such, what is indeterminate is *which* meaning a given word expresses<sup>48</sup>. Indeterminacy of meaning is related to the multiplicity/duplicity of meaning, not the death of meaning or being devoid of meaning. Quine's example of the word scholars use to argue for the indeterminacy of meaning is *Gavagai*. *Gavagai* could mean rabbit or express rabbit parts. How does the multiplicity of meaning for a word imply that there is no meaning when it simply purports multiple meanings? Just because there are two possible meanings does not entail that there is no meaning communicated. Words can be directed to the truth of its existence or the truth of its essence. So, the question is not the **indeterminacy of meaning** but the **multiplicity of meaning**. Indeterminacy of meaning must be understood in the context of the multiplicity of meaning, not the death of meaning or being devoid of meaning.

The second challenge deals with the explicability of essence. Swinburne argued for essence-inexplicability<sup>49</sup> because factual necessity is inexplicable<sup>50</sup>. However, what must be noted is that essence is explicable though elusive. The inexplicability of essence does not mean there is no essence, essence is an epistemic given (not an ontological given), making communication possible. Essence is explicable when we define what we perceive essence to be, especially when defining essence of things that are not of our own making. Essence is the inherent nature or essence of an object. Literally its whatness/or isness. But it is not written on entities. It is an epistemic matter. The essence/existence distinction can be traced to Plato when he argued that essence precedes existence if things have a beginning. The world of ideas precedes the world of existence. In fact, to Plato what we see is only a copy of the idea or essence. So, all beings that have a beginning have their beginning in the beginning as ideas or essence. Essence itself can be understood as something that is an essential part of its being or an accidental part of its being. For instance, the

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<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

<sup>45</sup>What is the meaning of meaning [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fgacYGfP\\_a4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fgacYGfP_a4).

<sup>46</sup>Word Meaning <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/word-meaning/>.

<sup>47</sup>The words *connote* and *denote* both describe the relationships between words and their meanings. Words can be defined as nouns are as verbs.

<sup>48</sup>Colin McGinn, [https://www.colinmcginn.net/difficulties-with-indeterminacy/?utm\\_source=rss&utm\\_medium=rss&utm\\_campaign=difficulties-with-indeterminacy](https://www.colinmcginn.net/difficulties-with-indeterminacy/?utm_source=rss&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=difficulties-with-indeterminacy).

<sup>49</sup>Richard Swinburne, *The existence of God* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004) 78-79.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

essence of a table is its utility. Having four legs is an accidental part of its essence. We can have a round table with just one leg. Essence precedes existence only if beings have a beginning. However, if beings do not have a beginning, existence precedes essence, as Sartre would argue. Sartre argued that there was never a time when the world did not exist—it has always existed without cause, purpose, or reason<sup>51</sup>. If that is the case, then we can insert essence into what exists. So, as humans, what we create or invent is such that we can argue that essence precedes existence. However, the world as we see it and know it, is basically our understanding of how the world is. But if we are talking about beings that do not have a beginning as in the case of God, when we cannot make an ontological split between essence and existence, it becomes even harder to decipher its essence. That is why Swinburne argued that the essence or the factual necessity of God is inexplicable<sup>52</sup>. That is why, while the *de dicto* essence of God is explicable, the *de re* essence of God is inexplicable.<sup>53</sup> As such, no proof that can guarantee belief in God, because the essence of God cannot be a reductive given. God is immortal, humans are free and humans have a self are a self-evident truths, but they are an either/or<sup>54</sup> matter hence, we must choose to believe or disbelieve in God, freedom and the self. Only in the human race are there are believers and non-believers.

The determinism of meaning must be understood in the context of the explicability of essence—in that we cannot create a word without thinking about essence of some sought. Naming and meaning without reference to both essence or existence is impossible. That is why naming deals with the existence of something and meaning deals with the essence of something. Explicability of essence simply means defining what is intentional. Essence is a non-reductive explanation of what exists. Essence can never be a reductive given. As such, we can say that meaning-indeterminacy does not mean words are meaning-indeterminate. Naming and meaning are an epistemic given, not an ontological given, and as such, non-reductive. Similarly, the inexplicability of essence does not mean the world is essence-inexplicable, essence is an epistemic given, not an ontological given, making communication possible. As such, every word is directed towards the *essence* or the *existence* of something. If it is directed towards *essence*, then it is related to meaning; if it is directed towards *existence*, it is related to identity.

## Conclusion

The essence/existence distinction is fundamental to what exists, subsists or absists in understanding the relationship of the naming/meaning distinction. However, the essence/existence distinction is possible only if there is an intelligent beginning for everything that exists, subsists or absists. For instance if the universe does not have a beginning then it would be hard to make the ontological distinction between essence/existence. But regardless of all the difficulties involved in essence/ existence

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<sup>51</sup>Jean Paul Sartre. *Being and Nothingness* 29.

<sup>52</sup>Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004) 78-79, 95.

<sup>53</sup>Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004) 95.

<sup>54</sup>Soren Keirkegaard, *Either/Or*

distinction we cannot communicate thought without understanding the relationship between the essence/existence distinction to the naming/meaning distinction. As such, we should be able to talk about essence not only in terms what exists but also about what subsists and what absists, because all objects in the mind have essence not only for concrete objects (like tables) and abstract objects (like numbers) but also contradictions like round squares. When we understanding the relationship between the naming/meaning distinction and the essence/existence distinction we understand the relationship between words and the world of reality. Words both denote reference and connote meaning because words deal with both existence and essence. Words, in general, can be about being or non-being depending on whether one is talking about existence, subsistence, or absistence. We can talk about the material world of existence, we can talk about the mathematical world of subsistence, or we can talk about the mental world of absistence. Based on the three types of reality, namely existence, subsistence, and absistence, we can understand that (1) naming deals with the specificity and truth of existence; and (2) meaning deals with universality and the truth of essence.

Determinacy of meaning is necessary, even though it is hard to establish universal semantics. Determinacy of the meaning is the basis of communicating essence. The explicability of essence is best understood in the context of how we understand the universe came into existence. (1) If the beginning of the universe involved an intelligent cause, then we can argue that essence precedes existence. (2) If the beginning of the universe involved an unintelligent cause, then we can define essence from what we know about reality. (3) If the universe has no beginning, as Sartre would argue, then it would be difficult to define essence because we cannot make an ontological split between essence and existence, as such it would be difficult to make the essence/existence distinction.

Meaning-determinacy and essence-explicability poses a challenge because it not an ontological given, it is an epistemic matter. Meaning-indeterminacy does not mean words are meaning-indeterminate. What is indeterminate is which meaning is being used not that words are devoid of meaning. Words have multiple meanings, however it is non-reductive. Similarly, the challenge associated with the explicability of essence does not mean there is no essence; essence is an epistemic given, not an ontological given, as such a non-reductive given, making communication possible. As such, every word is directed towards the *existence* or *essence* of something. If it is directed towards *existence*, it is related to identity, if it is directed towards *essence*, then it is related to meaning. Words used to communicate the world of thought require some essence-determinate words explaining the essence of what exists.

Meaning-determinacy is an epistemic task though essence-explicability is a non-reductive matter. Essence-explicability is foundational if one is to communicate thought. Ontological claims have relevance only when associated with epistemic claims. The only challenge when communicating thought is whether words are directed toward meaning and essence or towards identity and existence. The relationship between the naming/meaning and the essence/existence distinction provides the basis for both the determinacy of meaning and the explicability of essence, thus, establishing the truth of essence and the truth of existence. To argue that names relate to only identity and is devoid of meaning would make communication

impossible. Naming/meaning distinction is an epistemic given and the essence/existence distinction is a ontological given.

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