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HOW TO TELL WHETHER CHRISTIANS AND MUSLIMS WORSHIP THE SAME GOD

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Do Muslims and Christians worship the same God? We answer: *it depends.* To begin, we clear away some specious arguments surrounding this issue, to make room for the central question: What determines the reference of a name, and under what conditions do names shift reference? We'll introduce Gareth Evans's theory of reference, on which a name refers to the dominant source of information in that name's "dossier," and we then develop the theory's notion of *dominance*. We conclude that whether Muslims' use of "Allah" co-refers with Christians' use of "God" depends on *how much* weight is given to *what type* of information in the dossiers of these two names, and we offer a two-part test by which the reader can determine whether Muslim and Christian uses of the divine names co-refer: If Christianity were true and Islam false, might "Allah" still refer to God? And: If Islam were true and Christianity false, might "God" still refer to Allah? We explain the implications of your answers to those questions, and we close with a few reflections about what, in addition to reference, might be required for worship, and whether, from a Christian perspective, salvation turns on this issue.

Introduction

Do Muslims and Christians worship the same God? *It depends*. We propose, first, to clear away some specious arguments surrounding this issue: an argument from the premise that Christians and Muslims are both classical theists; another argument from the premise that, if Christians and Muslims don't worship the same God, then at least one group is engaged in absurdly misdirected worship; and a final argument alleging that since Christians and Muslims have genuine disagreements over what God is like, it follows that they must worship the same God. After that, we'll consider what we think is a better argument, drawing from historical facts about Muhammad's use of "Allah" together with Saul Kripke's causal picture of reference. But we'll raise objections to this argument that we consider decisive.

The good news is that we'll then be within reach of the philosophical issue at the center of the "Same God?" question. Sameness of worship requires sameness of reference. So answering our "Same God?" question requires reflecting on the nature and function of names. The central question is not "what is the semantic contribution of a proper name to

a sentence?" but rather "what determines the reference of a name, and when and how do name-using practices shift their referents?"

We'll introduce Gareth Evans's theory of reference, on which a name refers to the dominant source of information in that name's "dossier," the body of information about the referent compiled by users of the name. We then develop the theory's notion of *dominance*, providing examples of several common ways of weighting information in name-using practices. We conclude that whether Muslims' use of "Allah" co-refers with Christians' use of "God" depends on *how much* weight is given to *what type* of information in the dossiers of these two names, and we offer a two-part test by which the reader can determine whether Muslim and Christian uses of the divine names co-refer: if Christianity were true and Islam false, might "Allah" still refer to God? And: if Islam were true and Christianity false, might "God" still refer to Allah? We explain the implications of your answers to those questions, and we close with a few reflections about what, in addition to reference, might be required for worship, and whether, from a Christian perspective, salvation turns on this issue.

Superficially Plausible Recent Arguments, with Objections

Our "Same God?" question rose to prominence in late 2015 and early 2016 due to the troubles of Dr. Laryicia Hawkins, a tenured associate professor of political science at Wheaton College, who was forced to resign in large part because she answered the question affirmatively. In the wake of Wheaton's actions, several philosophers chimed in with arguments on both sides of the issue, but mainly in opposition to Wheaton's position. We examine a few of those here.

The opening salvo came from Francis Beckwith, who pointed out that, even though Christians and Muslims have different conceptions of God, it's nevertheless possible that they're talking of and worshiping the same God.[1] (His example: two people with quite different conceptions of Thomas Jefferson could still be speaking of the same man). We concur. But then he goes on to argue for the Same-God conclusion like so:

> What is known as classical theism was embraced by the greatest thinkers of the Abrahamic religions: St. Thomas Aquinas (Christian), Moses Maimonides (Jewish), and Avicenna (Muslim). Because, according to the classical theist, there can only in principle be one God, Christians, Jews, and Muslims who embrace classical theism must be worshipping the same God. It simply cannot be otherwise.[2]

We call Beckwith's reasoning "The Argument from Monotheism," and we believe it goes like so:

1. Christians, Muslims, and Jews are classical theists.

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[1]Beckwith, "Do Muslims and Christians Worship the Same God?"

[2]Beckwith, "Do Muslims and Christians Worship the Same God?"

2. If classical theism is true, there can be only one God.

3. Therefore, Christians, Muslims, and Jews worship the same God.

We're not convinced by this argument. Concerning premise (1), one may reasonably wonder whether *all* members of these religions really are classical theists worshiping the God of the philosophers in the way Avicenna, Maimonides, and Aquinas did, or even a sufficient number to ground the claim that Christians and Muslims worship the same God. Have all or even most or even ten thousand of these folks heard of divine simplicity, for example, let alone understood it, let alone endorsed it? It's a heavy hike from the prayer hall to the lecture hall, and few make it. Nevertheless, Beckwith's argument could easily be re-tooled to require only that Muslims, Jews, and Christians are *monotheists*—a far more plausible claim.

But, even with that fix, the main inference of Beckwith's argument is invalid, and a quick counterexample helps see why. Perhaps fans of Democritus, fans of Plato, and fans of Aristotle agree that *only one* of those three can be the greatest philosopher. It hardly follows that these three groups of fans celebrate *the same* philosopher as the greatest. Similarly, the fact that Muslims, Christians, and Jews all believe in *only one* God doesn't prove that they all worship *the same* God. It could be that some of them are wrong that the target of their worship is the God of classical theism, or even wrong that the target of their worship exists.

That brings us to a second argument, this one from Michael Rea. Rea reasons this way:

> On the assumption that there is exactly one God, then, saying that someone does not worship the same God as Christians do—as, for example, might be the case with someone who claims to worship a perfectly evil being—amounts to saying that they have not managed to worship any God at all . . . [that] they are so wrong about what God is like that the word "God" in their mouths is absolutely meaningless, or that they are inadvertently using the word "God" to refer to some other thing that they mistakenly believe to be divine—e.g., a mere human being, an animal or plant, [or] an inanimate object like a rock or a star.[3]

We call this "The Argument from Absurdly Misdirected Worship," and we take Rea to be reasoning like this:

4. If there's exactly one God, then if Christians and Muslims don't worship the same God, then either "God" is meaningless for at least one group, or "God" as used by at least one group refers to something like an animal, a rock, a star, etc.

5. There is exactly one God.

[3]Rea, "On Worshipping the Same God."

6. But "God" is *not* meaningless for at least one group, and for neither group does "God" refer to something like an animal, a rock, a star, etc.

7. So, Christians and Muslims worship the same God.

This argument finds its foothold only if we agree with Rea about the absurd dichotomy in (4) that is denied in (6). However, we think that Rea presents his readers with a *false* dichotomy. Even if there's exactly one God, and even if Christians and Muslims don't worship the same God, it needn't follow that at least one group is talking nonsense, or absurdly mis-referring. There's a third option not considered by Rea: it could be that "God" for one group is meaningful, but refers to nothing at all. Take, for example, "Zeus," which is a meaningful but empty name.[4] Zeus-worshipers did not worship the same God as Christians and Muslims. But it hardly follows that "Zeus" is meaningless, or that it refers to a rock, or a star, or an animal. There is no Zeus, despite the fact that "Zeus" is meaningful. The lesson is: to say that Muslims and Christians don't worship the same God is *not* to say that either group is talking nonsense, or worshiping a non-God. There are meaningful but empty names.

Finally, let us consider "The Argument from Disagreement," from Dale Tuggy.[5] He reasons as follows:

> In this "same god" dispute, a Christian, as such, ought not think of himself as a neutral observer. Rather, he's in the dispute *qua* Christian. So insofar as you're disputing with a Muslim about God, you are committed to the fact that they are referring to God, when making (what are in your view) false claims about him. Now many want to bring in Trinity theories here because they hold these to be the crowning achievement and beating heart of Christian belief. OK, then, we have this dispute:
>
> > Muslim: "Allah/God is not triune."
> >
> > Trinitarian Christian: "God is triune."
>
> Do you take this to be a *disagreement*? If so, then you think the Muslim is talking about the same God you, the Trinitarian Christian, are talking about.[6]

We interpret Tuggy's argument like so:

8. If Muslims and Christians genuinely disagree about God—for example, about whether God is triune—then they must be referring to the same God.

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[4]Consider for example how these two sentences differ in meaning (and truth value): "Zeus was the Greek god of thunder," and "Poseidon was the Greek god of thunder."

[5]Tuggy, "The 'Same God' Controversy and Christian Commitment." You can also find a brief statement of this argument in Sullivan ("Semantics for Blasphemy," 163), where she says: "For debates between Jews, Christians, and Muslims to be substantive, 'God,' 'Jesus,' 'Jehovah,' 'Allah,' and so on must corefer, even though speakers have quite different beliefs about the being that serves as their referent."

[6]Tuggy, "The 'Same God' Controversy and Christian Commitment."

9. Muslims and Christians genuinely disagree about God.

10. So, Muslims and Christians refer to the same God.[7]

We have the following reservations about premise (8) in this argument. The mere fact that two people disagree about a sentence of the form "*a* is *F*" does not guarantee that they're referring to the same thing, because it does not guarantee even that there *exists* some object to which they're both referring. Suppose, for example, that we disagree over whether Zeus—Greek god of thunder, son of Cronus and Rhea—suffered from Youngest Child Syndrome. It doesn't follow that there is some thing, Zeus, about which we disagree. There is no Zeus, and there never has been, so we cannot disagree *about him*. This serves as a counterexample to the general principle that lies behind and explains Tuggy's premise (8).

But perhaps you think there's something suspicious about using an empty name ("Zeus") for a counterexample to Tuggy's premise.[8] Perhaps Tuggy could retrench, and argue that: if Christians and Muslims genuinely disagree while using the same name ("God is Triune" against "God is not Triune"), and *that name is not empty for at least one of these groups*, then it's not empty for the other group, indeed the other group refers to the very same entity with that name. And, since Christians and Muslims insist that the divine name is not empty in their mouths, each group ought to accept that the other speaks of the same divine being.[9]

Unfortunately, even this revised principle is vulnerable to refutation by counterexample, since one and the same name can undergo *reference shift* over time—or across groups that use the same name in different ways—and disagreements can emerge with different uses of this one name. The following is based on actual events: a young girl was raised by loving, excellent parents loath to initiate her into the mythic Santa Claus cult that lately enshrouds Christmas like a toxic cloud. So, instead, they taught her many truths about Saint Nicholas, including the truth that over time he became known as "Santa Claus," and the truth that he died long ago. When she was four years old, this young girl overheard her cousins sharing various truths in the Santa Claus fiction, for example that Santa Claus would soon deliver presents for them. Our puzzled heroine piped

[7]Though this conclusion is about reference and not worship, one might think that, by proving co-reference, the largest hurdle to co-worship has been passed. If Christians and Muslims are talking about the same God, it's smooth sailing, one might think, to the conclusion that, on other occasions, they worship the same God.

[8]Maybe you're a sucker for baroque ontologies, and according to you "Zeus" refers to something that exists—e.g., an abstract object—but which is very much unlike what the Greeks took him for (e.g., concrete). The subsequent counterexample should assuage your concerns. In that case, even if "Santa Claus," as used by most children, refers on your view to an abstract object that could not possibly be jolly, elvish, etc., it does *not* do so in the mouths of children initiated into the practice that has preserved the name's reference to Saint Nicholas. This one name, used in two different ways, can be a vehicle for genuine disagreement, even though its reference varies in the two practices.

[9]We suspect this is what Tuggy was getting at with his talk of Christians engaging in this dispute *qua Christians*, that they are not "neutral observers," etc.

up: "But . . . Santa Claus is *dead*." Her cousins, with shock and urgency we can't convey, insisted through tears that Santa Claus is very much alive. Things got heated, looking and sounding every bit like a disagreement, and requiring the prompt attention of the girls' parents. Now, the girls were all using the same name, "Santa Claus." However, in our young heroine's mouth, "Santa Claus" referred to Saint Nicholas. Not so in her cousins' mouths. Despite the disagreement using the same name, they were not speaking of the same entity, due to the way "Santa Claus" has for some users shifted its reference over time, from a real entity to a creature of fiction.

(If you insist that this was not a *genuine* disagreement among the young girls, since they were not talking about the same entity, and that's just part of what you *mean* by "genuine disagreement," then Tuggy's argument becomes question begging. Premise (9) would, on this reading, trivially entail sameness of referent, and nobody unsure of Tuggy's conclusion should grant his premises. In other words, on this reading Tuggy's premise (9) is just another way of putting the issue at hand: with regard to Trinitarianism etc., are Christians and Muslims engaged in *genuine* disagreements? Sure, it looks and sounds like they're engaged in *genuine* disagreements, but the "Santa Claus" case above shows you that appearances can be deceiving. And so our task would become to determine whether what look and sound like *genuine* theological disagreements between Muslims and Christians really are, i.e., whether Christians and Muslims refer to the same God. That's our project below).

This sort of reference shift *may* be what's happening in the case of Christians and Muslims, for all Tuggy says. It could be that, though early Muslims inherited generic divine names—these days rendered as "God" and "Allah"—from their Jewish and Christian neighbors, the names, as they use them, have shifted reference. And so, despite their theological disagreement, Muslims and Christians may not speak of (or worship) the same God. We conclude that, even on its most charitable interpretation, Tuggy's premise (8) is false, and so his argument for the Same-God conclusion fails.

A Better, Kripkean Argument, with Objections

Saul Kripke is famous in part for arguing against descriptivism, the view that names are abbreviated or disguised definite descriptions. We agree with Kripke's four core objections to descriptivism. Names can't be abbreviated definite descriptions because: (i) names can, thinking counterfactually, pick out something different from the description associated with it,[10] and (ii) it's psychologically possible not to associate any

[10]Here's Kripke (*Naming and Necessity*, 75): "Suppose we do decide to pick out the reference of 'Hitler,' as the man who succeeded in having more Jews killed than anyone else managed to do in history. That is the way we pick out the reference of the name; but in another counterfactual situation where someone else would have gained this discredit, we wouldn't say that in that case that other man would have been Hitler."

definite description with a name that nevertheless refers,[11] and (iii) it's possible that, in the actual world, the name doesn't refer to whatever is picked out by the definite description,[12] and, finally, (iv) it's possible that the associated definite description doesn't refer to anything at all, though the name does.[13]

So, for Kripke, reference is not a purely psychological matter, i.e., not settled entirely by the conception associated with a name. He famously proposed an alternative view, on which historical and causal relations are also crucial to determining reference. According to the common interpretation of Kripke's causal "picture" of reference, names are introduced in something like a baptism ceremony—"I hereby dub thee . . ."—when reference is fixed by ostension or by description. After the baptism, names are passed on to other speakers, who form, as it were, links on a chain. These new speakers may change the spelling or sound of the name, and they may have quite different conceptions associated with the name. But, so long as those new speakers in this causal chain *intend* to use the name in the conventional way—i.e., the same way as those from whom they inherited the name—they *do* use the name in that way, and reference is preserved.[14]

The applicability of this causal picture of reference to the "Same God?" question is straightforward. As a matter of fact, Muhammad inherited

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[11]Kripke again (*Naming and Necessity*, 81): "the man in the street . . . may still use the name 'Feynman.' When asked he will say: well he's a physicist or something. He may not think that this picks out anyone uniquely. I still think he uses the name 'Feynman' as a name for Feynman."

[12]Kripke (*Naming and Necessity*, 83–84) asks us to imagine someone who uses the name "Gödel" to mean the man who proved the incompleteness of arithmetic. Suppose it turned out that Gödel was not in fact the author of the theorem, but he instead stole the work from a man, Schmidt, "whose body was found in Vienna under mysterious circumstances many years ago." Still, Kripke points out, the name "Gödel" would refer to Gödel, and not Schmidt.

[13]Kripke (*Naming and Necessity*, 86–87): "Suppose, to vary the example about Gödel, no one had discovered the incompleteness of arithmetic-perhaps the proof simply materialized by a random scattering of atoms on a piece of paper—the man Gödel being lucky enough to have been present when this improbable event occurred. Further, suppose arithmetic is in fact complete. . . . So even if the conditions are not satisfied by a unique object the name may still refer."

[14]See, for example, Kripke (*Naming and Necessity*, 79, 91ff.). Kripke is careful to say that he's not interested in providing a *theory* of reference, i.e., a set of necessary and sufficient conditions for reference (*Naming and Necessity*, 93, 96), in part because the notion of reference remains central but unanalyzed in his "picture" of reference, in part because of problems we'll look at below, and in part because he was, as he says, "sort of too lazy at the moment." What we give here in the text is a common interpretation of Kripke—or, perhaps better, an *extrapolation* of Kripke—on which reference of a name is determined by tracing a causal-historical chain of uses of that name—a name-using practice—and a speaker becomes a link on that chain if and only if he *intends* to use the name in the same way as those from whom he inherited the name. For examples of this unannounced extrapolation of Kripke's "picture" into a theory, see Sullivan "Semantics for Blasphemy" and Burgess "Madagascar Revisited." Soon, we'll raise objections to this common interpretation of Kripke, specifically to the sufficiency of that shared intention for reference preservation. But we hasten to add that Kripke himself stopped short of endorsing this common interpretation, though he does seem optimistic about the *necessity* of that shared intention for reference preservation (*Naming and Necessity*, 96).

the name "Allah" (or, rather, the name which we now spell "Allah") from surrounding Christians and Jews, and specifically its use to pick out the God of Abraham, the sole, maximally excellent creator of the world. He intended to use the name in the same way; he intended to refer to the same God that Christians and Jews referred to with "Allah." So, it looks like a Kripkean causal theory of reference would have it that Muhammad thereby entered that name-using practice tracing back to Abraham, a chain which dovetails with contemporary Christian use of "God," *even if* what Muhammad went on to say about "Allah" was largely or entirely false. And, in that case, "Allah" (as used by Muslims) and "God" (as used by Christians) refer to the same entity, opening the door for Muslims and Christians to worship the same God.

But there are problems with this common interpretation of Kripke, with this causal theory of reference described above. Namely: not just any historical chain of uses of a name will preserve reference, even when each link in the chain intends to use the name in the same way as the source of the name. Kripke himself was aware of the troubling case of "Santa Claus," which we discussed in the last section. He says, "There may be a causal chain from our use of the term 'Santa Claus' to a certain historical saint, but still the children, when they use this, by this time probably do not refer to that saint."[15] The reference of "Santa Claus" has shifted from the flesh-and-blood Saint Nicholas to the fictional jolly Nordic elf. And this is so even if every user of the name intended to use it in the conventional way. At some point in the past, the name-using practice went awry, and the chain broke that once connected "Santa Claus" to Saint Nicholas. There was a *reference shift*, from the real Saint Nicholas to fiction.

Kripke was also aware of an early objection from Gareth Evans[16] involving the name "Madagascar." This name seems to share its early lineage with that of our present-day name "Mogadishu," and it originally referred to that peninsular region of present-day Somalia. But, due to a misunderstanding of the locals on the part of Marco Polo (or his scribe), "Madagascar" came to refer to that large island off the eastern coast of Africa.[17] Again, we have a reference shift *despite* the intentions of each user of the name to share one name-using practice, and to preserve reference. Sometimes, the fact that *two names have the same origin* and also *were passed along by speakers with intentions to use them as their originators did* isn't enough to guarantee that the names refer to the same thing. And, so, this *may* have happened with Muslims' use of "Allah," for some or all of the stretch between Muhammad's religious experiences on the Mountain of Light and the present day.

Summing up, there is a superficially plausible argument for an affirmative answer to our "Same God?" question that is rooted in a Kripkean

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[15]Kripke, *Naming and Necessity*, 93.

[16]Evans, "The Causal Theory of Names," 195–196.

[17]For a detailed history of this case, see Burgess "Madagascar Revisited."

causal picture of reference. However, this argument relies on a controversial extrapolation of that Kripkean picture of reference, which Kripke himself was reluctant to endorse: namely, the claim that a shared intention on the part of each "link" in the causal chain to use the name in the conventional way is *sufficient* to preserve reference, i.e., to avoid reference shift. But since reference shifts can occur despite the best, most deferential intentions on the part of users of the name, that crucial premise in the argument is false, and so this argument cannot settle our "Same God?" question. Set it aside, then, along with the unsuccessful arguments from Beckwith, Rea, and Tuggy. In the following sections, we'll try our hand at answering the "Same God?" question. First, we'll lay out what we take to be the theoretical issue at the heart of our "Same God?" question. Then, we'll be in a position to apply that theoretical issue to the question at hand.

The Core Issue

We assume that sameness of worship requires sameness of reference: Muslims and Christians worship the same God only if they *refer* to the same God.[18] And, so, we take it that the central issue is *not* what the semantic contribution of a proper name is to a sentence; neither Millianism nor Fregeanism would settle our "Same God?" question. To answer that question, on Millianism, we'd still need to know whether the names "God" and "Allah" contribute the same object to sentences that feature them. And, to answer the "Same God?" question on Fregeanism, we'd similarly need to know whether the same object answers to the senses associated with "God" and "Allah."[19] We'd need to know, that is, on both views, what "God" (as used by Christians) and "Allah" (as used by Muslims) *refer* to. So, the central issue is how names acquire—and perhaps *shift*—their referents.

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[18]de Ridder and van Woudenberg ("Referring to, Believing in, and Worshipping the Same God," 59) agree: "Worship of God, we said, requires belief in God. And there can be no adequate belief in God unless there is reference to God." We're not sure whether worship requires belief. But it is an activity intended to be transferred to an object, by means of mental representations. And if Muslims and Christians aren't transferring their worship activity onto the same object—if those representations aren't co-referring—then they're not worshiping the same God. True, as we'll discuss below, perhaps God might *credit* worship directed elsewhere as worship directed to him (the way Christ credits charity done to others as charity done to him in Matthew 25). But this wouldn't change the fact that the worship was directed elsewhere. We thank an anonymous referee for encouraging us to think about this assumption more deeply; we agree it merits further thought, and more than we can give it here.

[19]For interesting suggestions that proper names function in a Millian way in some contexts and in a Fregean way in other contexts, see McKinsey ("Truths Containing Empty Names") and Tiedke ("Proper Names and the Fictional Uses"). McKinsey thinks that names *generally* refer directly, contributing only their referents to the meaning of a sentence, but that in cases of "epistemic distance" between the user of a name and the object named, proper names may function in a Fregean way. Tiedke holds a similar view of fictional discourse, and though she doesn't consider religious discourse, what Tiedke says about fiction *may* be extended to religious discourse.

As we said above, we agree with Kripke's criticisms of descriptivism: there's more to reference than "fit" between conception and object. Yet Kripke's causal picture has problems of its own: while *names* begin with a baptism, and are propagated causally from user to user as though by links on a chain, nevertheless *reference* can shift over the life of a name. The fact that two people use the same name does not guarantee that they refer to the same object. So, while Kripke provides a nice story of the lives of *names*, his picture is less satisfying when extrapolated into a theory of *reference*. Now, pinning down an exact, detailed theory of reference is beyond the scope of this paper. But we think the truth lies in the direction of Gareth Evans's theory of reference, introduced in his 1973 work, and further developed in his 1982 book, which unfortunately was left unfinished at his premature death.

Evans departs from Kripke in this: a name-using practice in a community links a name word with a body of information about its referent, a catalogue of characteristics, what Evans sometimes calls a *dossier*. Now, for Evans, a name does *not* refer to whatever answers to most (or a weighted most) of entries in this dossier—that would just be a species of descriptivism. And neither, *pace* Kripke, does a name refer to whatever was originally dubbed by that name, irrespective of the information in the name's dossier, or the source of that information. Rather, for Evans, a name refers to the object that is the *dominant source* of the information in the name's dossier. In this way, Evans's theory marries the insights of Kripke's causal picture of reference with the insights of descriptivism.

Think of it like this: a name-using practice is a bit like a file folder, labeled with the name word (at the baptism ceremony), and shared within a community. The community collects scraps of information about the object named, and adds that information to the folder. A simple descriptivism says that the name refers to whatever best fits the information within the folder. Problem: if *mis*information gets into the folder, on this view the name will implausibly shift reference. (If Schmidt but not Gödel proved the incompleteness of arithmetic, for example, this simple descriptivism would misidentify Schmidt as the referent of "Gödel.") A simple Kripkean theory would have it that the name refers to whatever was dubbed in that baptism ceremony, even if that object poorly fits the (mis)information in the folder, and even if the name shifts reference over time. (This simple Kripkean theory would implausibly identify Saint Nicholas as the referent of the modern child's use of "Santa Claus," since the name traces back to a dubbing of the saint). Evans's theory says that reference doesn't track with "fit," nor with dubbing, but rather with the *dominant source* of the information in the folder. (Since Gödel remains the dominant source of our information about him, even if crucial parts are *mis*information, "Gödel" refers to him).

Evans's theory has a nice explanation of reference shift. For example, "Madagascar" now names an island off the coast of Africa, and not a portion of the mainland, as it originally named. This is not because that island

best fits the body of information we associate with the name (that would be a kind of descriptivism), and not because that island was originally baptized as "Madagascar" (as a matter of historical fact, it wasn't). Rather, it's because that island became, through Marco Polo's error, the dominant causal source of the body of information we associate with "Madagascar," e.g., being a large island off the eastern coast of Africa, being home to fossas, panther chameleons, aye-ayes, etc. Evans also gives this, imaginary case of reference shift:

> Two babies are born, and their mothers bestow names upon them. A nurse inadvertently switches them and the error is never discovered. It will henceforth undeniably be the case that the man universally known as "Jack" is so called because a woman dubbed some other baby with the name.[20]

Here, too, a name ("Jack") refers to an object not because that object best fits the name's dossier (descriptivism), and not because that object was dubbed as "Jack" (*he* wasn't; his twin was, prior to the nurse's switch). Rather, that man becomes known as "Jack" because he becomes, over time, the dominant source of information in the name's dossier. Our file folder labeled "Jack" slowly fills up with information that traces back to *him*.[21]

And consider what Evans would say about a case of reference shift from fact to *fiction*. At one time, Saint Nicholas was the dominant source of information associated with the name "Santa Claus." But at some point—perhaps around the 1823 publication of the poem "The Night Before Christmas"—the dossier associated with "Santa Claus" came under heavy pollution by mythmakers and tale-spinners. In such a case, it would be wrong to interpret Evans's theory as entailing that the *mythmakers* are the sources of the fanciful information entering the name's dossier, so that the name refers to them. Rather, in the case of fiction, there is, strictly speaking, *no* object that is the causal source of the information. (That's what makes it fiction, and the name *empty*). Evans himself[22] briefly remarks on such cases: "Legend and fancy can create new characters, or add bodies of source-less material to other dossiers; restrictions on the causal

[20]Evans, "The Causal Theory of Names," 196.

[21]Consider also a case from Mark Sainsbury (*Reference without Referents*, 114–115): "I am on the ridge in full view of two conspicuous mountains, *c* and *d*. A local points to *c* and tells me that it is called Ammag. I take him to have pointed to *d*, a mountain just above which hovers the only cloud in the sky. I say 'There's a cloud above Ammag.' I manifestly intend to use 'Ammag' as they used it, and I intend to use 'Ammag' for *d*. The intentions are not compatible. Does this use count as one within their practice?" According to Sainsbury, if the local corrects me, and I defer to the local's correction, then I have manifested my intention to conform to the locals' name-using practice, and I have thereby joined that practice, referring to *c* and saying false things of it. However, if, after my utterance, all the locals are destroyed in an avalanche, and I make it to a new village and initiate those villagers into my use of "Ammag," then mountain *d* would come to be known as Ammag. In this case, the reference shift is due to the purging of the dossier, as it were, when the community that was using the name was (almost) completely destroyed. After the purge, the dossier is replenished with scraps of information about mountain *d*.

[22]Evans, "The Causal Theory of Names," 200.

relation would prevent the inventors of the legends turning out to be the sources of the beliefs their legends gave rise to." At a certain point—and it is vague when this happened—the information in the dossier of "Santa Claus" became largely source-less. So, the information ceased to have a *dominant* source, and therefore the name ceased to refer to anything.[23]

Thus, according to Evans's theory, whether Christians and Muslims refer to the same God with their uses of divine names will depend on whether the same object is the dominant source of information associated with each name-using practice. For our purposes, as will become clear, it is crucial that we focus on—and further develop—Evans's notion of *dominance*. What is it for an object to be the dominant source of information in a name's dossier? As Evans himself acknowledges,[24] dominance cannot be a simple function of the *amount* of information in the dossier. An object might contribute an enormous amount of information to a name's dossier, without thereby becoming the referent of the name, because the information contributed is peripheral and unimportant relative to other information in the dossier. For example, we might mistake a stranger for your colleague named "Jennifer," learn only that the stranger loves all the natural numbers, and thereby pollute the dossier for "Jennifer" with information like "She loves the number 1," "She loves the number 2," and so on, until these entries outnumber the entries originating from your actual colleague, Jennifer herself. We think it's obvious that "Jennifer" would not thereby come to name this stranger.[25]

So, dominance is not a function of amount of information in a dossier. What matters more is the *centrality* of the information to the conception of the object. As Evans says, "the believer's reasons for being interested in the item at all will weigh."[26] There are several different types of information that can be given priority in a name's dossier, depending on the name-user's reasons for being interested in the object. Next, we'll describe some common ways of weighting information in a name's dossier, and we'll come out the other side with a clearer understanding of Evans's *dominance*. Then, we'll apply that understanding to our "Same God?" question.

Dominance

Sometimes—rarely—we have reason to place maximal weight on some contingent attribute or feature of the object named. As Evans puts it, in

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[23]Meghan Sullivan ("Semantics for Blasphemy") cleverly applies Gareth Evans's picture of reference to explain the chief danger of blasphemy: polluting the dossier of a divine name with misinformation may well cause the name to shift its reference from a divine being to fiction, i.e., to nothing at all. So religious communities who desire to maintain linguistic contact with the divine do well to guard against blasphemy.

[24]Evans, "The Causal Theory of Names," 201.

[25]If we were to say to each other, on the basis of our new information, "Jennifer loves the number 493," we would say something—likely false—*of your colleague*, not something true of that stranger. This shows that "Jennifer" does not shift its reference to the stranger, despite its dossier being swamped by a large amount of information about that stranger.

[26]Evans, "The Causal Theory of Names," 201.

this way "a name is used with the over-riding intention of referring to something satisfying such and such a description."[27] An example from Keith Donnellan serves well:

> [T]he chairman of the local Teetotalers Union . . . has just been informed that a man is drinking a martini at their annual party. He responds by asking his informant, "Who is the man drinking a martini?" In asking the question the chairman does not have some particular person in mind about whom he asks the question; if no one is drinking a martini, if the information is wrong, no person can be singled out as the person about whom the question was asked. . . . [T]he attribute of being the man drinking a martini is all-important, because if it is the attribute of no one, the chairman's question has no straightforward answer.[28]

Donnellan dubs this an "attributive" use of the definite description. And we can see a similar "attributive" use of a name, if we imagine the chairman to have introduced a name on this occasion. Let's use "Marty Martini."

In this case, what first and foremost guides the name "Marty Martini," as it is sent out into the world, is some set of attributes. Those predicates are given maximal weight in the name's dossier, and are considered individually necessary and *jointly sufficient* for the proper application of the name. If there is a man drinking a martini at the party, he's Marty Martini. If there is no such man, then "Marty Martini" finds no target; it fails to refer. If someone were to claim "We've found the man drinking a martini at the annual party, but it turns out he's not Marty Martini" the proper response to such confusion would be "Oh, I thought we were just using 'Marty Martini' to name the man drinking a martini at the annual party."[29]

Far more commonly, names are not used in this "attributive" way; as we've seen, names don't always stick to the object that best fits the descriptive information in the dossier. And we have reason to grant names the flexibility to maintain their reference even if a large part of our descriptive information about their referents is erroneous. As Evans says: "Malicious rumours, or absurdly inflated claims, equally baseless, may circulate, and such misinformation may be all that ends up associated with the name in the minds of consumers [of the name]. Nevertheless, they have got hold of rumours and claims *about a particular man*."[30] So, again, fit is not the whole story of reference: typically, perfect fit is not sufficient, and neither is it necessary. The history connecting the object to the name-using practice is

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[27]Evans, "The Causal Theory of Names," 205.

[28]Donnellan, "Reference and Definite Descriptions," 287.

[29]A real-life example of a name used in a paradigmatically "attributive" way is "Jack the Ripper." The name was introduced with an overriding intention to refer to whomever committed all those heinous crimes. If it turned out that nobody committed the crimes—that they were a series of bizarre and tragic accidents, say—or that multiple criminals were involved, "Jack the Ripper" would find no referent. But it could never be that one man committed all those crimes in question, and yet "Jack the Ripper" did not refer to him.

[30]Evans, *The Varieties of Reference*, 385.

also important, such that it's possible for a name to refer even given a high degree of mismatch between conception and referent.

But there are limits. Even in our most common use of names, *some* core information is given maximal, *sine-qua-non* weight. In extreme cases, reference can fail due to *radical* incongruity between an object and our conception of it. To illustrate, consider this case from Evans:

> We learn for example from E. K. Chambers' *Arthur of Britain* that Arthur had a son Anir "whom legend has perhaps confused with his burial place." If Kripke's notion of reference fixing is such that those who said Anir was a burial place of Arthur might be denoting a person it seems that it has little to commend it.[31]

In other words, if we take "Anir" to name Arthur's burial place, and then we find out that in fact it was Arthur's son who was known as "Anir," the proper response is *not* to conclude that we'd been referring to his son all along, and saying falsely that *he* was the burial place of Arthur. Rather, due to the radical mismatch between our conception of a *son* of Arthur and the *burial place* of Arthur—due to a violation of that fundamental necessary condition for the name's application—we ought to conclude that our prior use of "Anir" referred to nothing at all, since the name traces back to his son, who is very much unlike a burial place.

Other examples may be supplied. Plausibly it's this eventual radically high degree of mismatch that explains the reference shift of "Santa Claus": the stories were so fantastic that we judged them to be source-less fiction about nobody, rather than misinformation about Saint Nicholas. This fundamental "degree of fit" requirement would also explain reference failure for "Jesus Christ," if it turned out, as at least one scholar had it, that there was no such Nazarene but only a hallucinogenic mushroom, the early Church being a clandestine sex-and-mushroom cult.[32]

It may also happen that we weight the information in a name's dossier so as to use the name *deferentially*. To use the name, that is, as Evans puts it, "with the *over-riding* intention to conform to the use made of them by some other person or persons," to the leaders of the name-using practice.[33] Tyler Burge's famous "arthritis" case nicely illustrates this type of deferential practice, and the lessons carry over to deferential uses of proper names.[34] Burge's imagined patient says "I have arthritis in my leg" and speaks falsely—even though his (mistaken) conception of arthritis allows for arthritis to exist outside the joints—because it is distinctive of our communal use of medical terms like "arthritis" to defer to the use of

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[31]Evans, "The Causal Theory of Names," 189.

[32]Allegro, *The Sacred Mushroom and the Cross*. Yes, sex and magic mushrooms. And you thought *contemporary* styles of worship were getting out of hand.

[33]Evans, "The Causal Theory of Names," 205.

[34]Burge, "Individualism and the Mental."

medical experts.[35] What goes here for the medical term also goes for the deferential use of proper names. When we use a name deferentially, it is as if we release the name into the world like an arrow from a bow, saying to ourselves as we line up our shot: "Whatever else this thing is, it is first and foremost what the experts say it is." That part of the dossier—the part containing the relevant information about those experts—is given greatest weight. This is why, for example, Burge's imagined patient continues to refer to arthritis, and speak falsely *of it*, despite how badly he's misconceived the condition.

Finally, we might weight the information in a name's dossier so as to use the name *demonstratively*. To use it, that is, with an overriding intention to refer to an object of acquaintance, e.g., *that* man or *that* moving object. In this way, the entries in the name's dossier featuring demonstratives are given greatest weight. When we use a name demonstratively, it is as if we say to ourselves as we aim, "Whatever else this thing is, it is first and foremost *this thing here* before me." One can draw a nice example of this demonstrative use of names from Donnellan:

> Suppose one is at a party and, seeing an interesting-looking person holding a martini glass, one asks, "Who is the man drinking a martini?" If it should turn out that there is only water in the glass, one has nevertheless asked a question about a particular person, a question that it is possible for someone to answer.[36]

Donellan calls this a "referential" use of a definite description. But suppose we introduce a name for this interesting-looking person: "Captain Martini." That name still refers to that person, even if it should turn out to be a woman drinking water and not a man with a martini, because what was given primary weight in the introduction of the name was the fact that Captain Martini is *this person here*, this object of acquaintance. Whatever else is true of Captain Martini—even if she's a teetotaling martini despiser—she's this person here.

To sum up, a name refers to the dominant source of information in its dossier, if there be any one dominant source. If, as in Evans's twin case, and in the case of "Madagascar," a new object begins to contribute information in a name's dossier, that new object may eventually become known as that name; that name may come to refer to it. If, as in the case of "Santa Claus," source-*less* information comes to dominate a dossier, the name becomes empty. Dominance is not a function of the sheer amount of information contributed; it's a function of how central or important the information is to our conception of the object. If it's an object of our acquaintance, we

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[35]When Burge imagines the patient is informed by his doctor that arthritis is an inflammation of the joints, "[t]he patient is surprised, but relinquishes his view and goes on to ask what might be wrong with his thigh." This response manifests his disposition to defer, and fuels our externalist intuitions in Burge's case, i.e., that the meaning of "arthritis" in the patient's mouth is given not by *his* mistaken conception (inside his skull), but by the larger communal linguistic practice (the shared dossier outside his skull).

[36]Donnellan, "Reference and Definite Descriptions," 287.

will likely use the name *demonstratively*, weighting heavily information in the dossier containing demonstratives. If it's an object we know only by description, and not by acquaintance, we may use the name *attributively*, with an overriding intention to refer to an object bearing the relevant attributes. If it's a subject of expertise, we will likely use the name *deferentially*, weighting heavily that part of the name's dossier with relevant information about experts. And, in all these uses, there will be some "degree of fit" requirement on the application of a name: reference fails in the event of a radical mismatch between information in a name's dossier and the source of that information.

Behold, name-ology is complicated. Fortunately, we can summarize all these lessons about *dominance* into one simple test. We can check whether some bit of information in a name's dossier is given *sine-qua-non* weight by asking "What if nothing in the world answered to *that* bit of the dossier? Could the name still refer?" Notice how we've already run this test a few times in this section: could "Marty Martini" refer to someone at the party without that person having drunk a martini? No. This shows that the information about what he's drunk was given *sine-qua-non* weight in the use of this name.[37] Could "Anir," supposing it names Arthur's burial place, have referred to his son? No. This shows that some information in the dossier—perhaps that the referent is *a hollowed-out patch of dirt*—inconsistent with being a human, is given *sine-qua-non* weight in the use of that name. Could Burge's arthritis man have arthritis in his thigh despite the assurance of the medical community that this is impossible? No. This shows that information about deference to medical experts was given *sine-qua-non* weight in the use of that medical term. Could "Captain Martini" fail to refer to *this person here* in the above example? No. That shows that certain demonstrative information was given *sine-qua-non* weight in the use of that name.

This test can help us determine whether two names—or two uses of one name by two groups—have the same referent. For example, take "Santa Claus," as used by present-day children, and the name "Saint Nicholas." We can check whether "Santa Claus," as used by children now, co-refers with the name "Saint Nicholas," by asking: what if nothing in the world answered to the information in our dossier for "Santa Claus," but something in the world answered perfectly to the information in our dossier for "Saint Nicholas?" Could "Santa Claus" refer to that thing? If the answer is "Yes," this shows that there's nothing in the dossier for "Santa Claus" that is given *sine-qua-non* weight, and yet is too radical of a mismatch with any information in the dossier for "Saint Nicholas" to allow reference. In that case the names might co-refer. If, on the other hand, the answer is "No," this shows that something in the dossier for "Santa Claus" is given *sine-*

[37]Could Marty Martini be a Republican? Sure he could. This shows that information about his political leanings was not given *sine-qua-non* weight in the dossier of his name. We leave it to the reader to provide similar pieces of information which are not given such weight in the subsequent examples.

qua-non weight, and is so radically incongruous with some information in the dossier for "Saint Nicholas" that the names cannot co-refer.

We believe the answer to this question is "No," because some crucial information in the present-day use of "Santa Claus"—information about being a jolly Nordic elf who delivers presents globally on Christmas—radically mismatches some information in the dossier for "Saint Nicholas"—e.g., that he was human, not an elf, that he's got no global delivery service, that he's *dead*, etc. That jolly Nordic elf information is so central to the contemporary use of "Santa Claus" that, even if Saint Nicholas is the source of much of the other information in the dossier of "Santa Claus," Saint Nicholas cannot be the dossier's *dominant* source, i.e., the referent of the name. Rather, the name has shifted its reference, in this case, to the source of that central, crucial (mythical) information, i.e., to fiction.

In the next section, we will apply these lessons to the question of whether Christians and Muslims worship the same God. We'll show how a few basic historical facts can combine with the test just described in order to help us answer our motivating question.

Do Christians and Muslims Worship the Same God?

As we argued above, a name refers to the dominant source of information in its dossier, if there be any one dominant source. Reference shift occurs when there is a shift in the dominant source of information in a name's dossier. And dominance is not a function of sheer amount of information, but rather the centrality or weight given to information in the dossier. "Santa Claus" shifted reference from Saint Nicholas to a fictional character because information contributed by mythmakers and tale spinners became *central* in the dossier. And we can prove this information became dominant by asking: "What if there were no jolly Nordic elf who delivers presents each Christmas, but there were a bishop of Myra who did such and such and is now dead? Might 'Santa Claus' refer to that bishop?" And all the children cry "No!" When they learn the true story, they conclude *there is no Santa Claus*; there is only some other guy, Saint Nicholas. This is how we demonstrate the reference shift.

We can reason in a similar way with respect to the divine-name-using practices of Christians and Muslims. As a matter of historical fact, there is no doubt that the use of "Allah" by Muslims traces back to—and branched off from—the divine-name-using practices of Jews and Christians, just as our practice of using "Santa Claus" traces back to and branches off from the use of names for Saint Nicholas. And what's distinctive about the use of "Allah" by Muslims is the information that Muslims have added to the dossier of "Allah," just as what's distinctive about the contemporary use of "Santa Claus" is the updated information in its dossier. From a Christian perspective, the information added by Muslims into the dossier of "Allah" does not trace back, ultimately, to God himself; the added information was spurious. So, from a Christian perspective, if that new information in the

dossier of "Allah" became *central*, then the dominant source of information in the dossier is no longer God, and so the name has shifted reference away from God, to fiction.

We can run the same test for dominance that we ran in the "Santa Claus" case. We ask ourselves: "What if there were no being answering to the Muslim conception associated with 'Allah,' but there were a being answering perfectly to the Christian conception associated with 'God'? Might 'Allah' still refer to that being?" If the answer is affirmative, then no reference shift has occurred; the information added by Muslims did not come to dominate the dossiers of divine names, to have *sine-qua-non* weight. If the answer is negative, however, then a reference shift has occurred. The information added by Muslims to the dossier of "Allah" was given *sine-qua-non* weight and so, assuming the Christian view of history is true, the dominant source of information in the dossier of "Allah" is no longer God. The name has shifted from God to fiction.

Now consider the matter from the Islamic view of history. From this perspective, Muslims' use of "Allah" traces back to Abraham, and the dominant source of information in the dossier is Allah himself. And, from the perspective of Islam, Christians' use of divine names has branched off this main-line use of divine names, and Christians have contributed some erroneous information to the dossier of "God," e.g., that God is Triune, that Jesus is the Son of God, etc. To test whether this new information came to dominate the dossier of "God" as used by Christians, we ask ourselves: "What if there were no being answering to the Christian conception associated with 'God,' but there were a being answering perfectly to the Muslim conception associated with 'Allah'? Might 'God,' as used by Christians, still refer to that being?" If the answer is affirmative, then no reference shift has occurred; the information added by Christians did not come to dominate the dossiers of divine names, to have *sine-qua-non* weight. If the answer is negative, however, then a reference shift has occurred. The information added by Christians to the dossier of "God" was given *sine-qua-non* weight and so, assuming an Islamic view of history, the dominant source of information in the dossier of "God" is no longer Allah. The name has shifted from Allah to fiction.

Recall from above that we think sameness of worship requires sameness of reference. And we are now in a position to make progress on the question of whether Muslims and Christians *refer* to the same God. This is a question about the use of the divine names, and such questions must be answered by the users of those names. We have addressed some questions to you, the reader, who grasps and uses these names. We now ask you to reflect on the practice of using "Allah" that is distinctive of Muslims, to reflect on the practice of using "God" that is distinctive of Christians, and to participate in these name-using practices a bit. You needn't be a member of these religious communities in order to grasp and participate in their name-using practices, just as you needn't celebrate Christmas or believe in Santa Claus in order to grasp and use the name "Santa Claus."

Let's begin by testing whether, from a Muslim perspective, "God" as used by Christians has shifted reference. To do so, spell out the whole story of Islam here: there's an omnipotent, omniscient creator of the world, who spoke to Abraham, sent Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad, etc., but this creator is *not* a Trinity, has begotten no Son, etc. For a moment, suppose all that is true. Might "God" still refer to that being?

Maybe your answer is "Yes." One explanation of an affirmative answer is that you're using the name "God" in an attributive way, giving some predicates in the dossier for "God" maximal weight, taking them to be individually necessary and *jointly sufficient* for the proper application of the name. This isn't some new, wild idea. You may recall that Thomas Aquinas often ends his arguments for God's existence with an inference from there being an entity with such-and-such impressive attributes, to a conclusion that "God" applies to that entity. For example, in his *Summa Theologica*, Aquinas says: "Therefore we cannot but postulate the existence of some being having of itself its own necessity, and not receiving it from another, but rather causing in others their necessity. This all men speak of as God," and soon after "Therefore some intelligent being exists by whom all natural things are directed to their end; and this being we call God."[38] Unless Aquinas thinks those attributes are *sufficient* for the application of "God," he's affirming the consequent in that last step, roughly: *there is something that is F; anything is God only if it is F; therefore this thing is God*. But affirming the consequent is a thing St. Thomas would never do. So it looks like Aquinas was using the generic divine name in an attributive fashion, taking some set of attributes to be sufficient for its application.

In his Vatican II declaration *Nostra Aetate*, Pope Paul VI said: "The Church regards with esteem also the Moslems. They adore the one God." He seems there to endorse the view that Muslims worship the same God that he does. And, in support or explanation of that position, he goes on to give what looks like a list of attributes included in the dossier for "Allah" that he takes to be sufficient for the application of "God": "living and subsisting in Himself; merciful and all-powerful, the Creator of heaven and earth, who has spoken to men."[39] So it seems as though Pope Paul VI, like Aquinas before him, used the generic divine name "God" in an attributive way.

Peter Geach goes so far as to say that "the term 'God' is not a proper name but a descriptive term: it is like 'Prime Minister' rather than 'Mr. Harold Wilson.'"[40] And Geach even gives an argument for this: "Our indication of this is the fact that one translates the word 'God,' as one translates the words 'Prime Minister,' into a foreign language, whereas 'Mr. Harold Wilson' would be merely transcribed or transliterated." But, he admits, this isn't a watertight (i.e., sound) argument, since occasionally

[38]Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I. Q2. A3.

[39]Pope Paul VI, *Nostra Aetate*.

[40]Geach, *God and the Soul*, 108–109.

proper names are indeed translated into new languages, and not merely transcribed or transliterated. Take "Deutschland," for example, which is translated into English as "Germany." Or take the Danish "Grønland," a proper name translated into English as "Greenland," and into Spanish as "Tierra Verde." But even if Geach's argument here fails, perhaps he's right that "God" functions much like names of offices or positions, and is used attributively, so that some set of attributes is considered sufficient for its application.

So, if you answered affirmatively to our question above, it may be because you use "God" as Thomas Aquinas, Pope Paul VI, Peter Geach, and others have used it, in this attributive way, and these attributes are, on the Muslim view, had by Allah.[41] But there are other possibilities. Perhaps you use the name deferentially, taking name-users such as Aquinas and Pope Paul VI to be experts. Or perhaps, less plausibly, you use the name demonstratively, and take yourself to have demonstrated, at some point in the past, with your use of "God," the same entity that Muslims call "Allah."[42]

On the other hand, perhaps you answered "No" to our question above. Perhaps, that is, you think that if there were nothing answering perfectly to the information in the dossier for "God," but there were something answering perfectly to the information in the dossier for "Allah," nevertheless "God" *could not* refer to that thing. This indicates that there is some information in the dossier for "God" that you give *sine-qua-non* weight, and which you take to be radically incongruous with some information in the dossier for "Allah." We'd venture to guess that this is some information constitutive of distinctively Christian doctrines, for example the Trinity, the Incarnation, the Crucifixion, or the Resurrection. According to you, then, this information has become central in the dossier for "God" as used by Christians. And so, according to you, *if Islam is true*, Allah could no longer be the dominant source of information in the dossier for "God," and there has been a reference shift in the Christian use of "God," from Allah to fiction.

Summing up so far: if you answered the question above affirmatively, then you think that, from the perspective of Islam, Christians and Muslims may well be referring to and worshiping the same God. So long as Allah remains the dominant source of information in the dossier for "God"—and the historical facts seem to bear this out, from the perspective of Islam—then Christians do refer to Allah when they use "God." However, if you answered the question negatively, then you think that, from the perspective of Islam, Christians are not referring to—and therefore not

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[41]It's an interesting question whether, as Geach thought, "God" functions in this way more like a title or an office rather than a typical proper name. And it might be interesting to ask Aquinas, Pope Paul VI, Geach, and others whether their answer to our question changes if, instead of a generic divine name like "God," we inquire about a personal divine name, such as "Yahweh."

[42]On this score, Geach (*God and the Soul*, 109) is doubtful: "'God' is a descriptive term; and in this life we know God not as an acquaintance whom we can name, but by description."

worshiping—the same deity that Muslims refer to and worship. (A third option is that you think the answer is unclear, and you say neither "yea" nor "nay." It's a borderline case, you might think: there is no determinate fact of this matter, at least none we're in a position to affirm).

Now let's turn to the Christian perspective. Has "Allah," as used by Muslims, shifted reference from God to fiction? To test this, spell out the whole story of Christianity here: there's an omnipotent, omniscient creator of the world, who spoke to Abraham, Moses, etc., and who so loved the world that He sent His only begotten Son, exists as a Trinity, etc. But no Person in this Trinity, nor any divine messenger, ever spoke to Muhammad. His experiences on the Mountain of Light were a hallucination, or a fabrication, etc. The Qur'an is not a revelation from God. For a moment, suppose all that is true. Might "Allah," as used by Muslims, still refer to that being?

Perhaps you answer affirmatively. As before, this is likely because you're using the name "Allah" in an attributive way, giving some predicates in the dossier for "Allah" maximal weight, taking them to be individually necessary and *jointly sufficient* for the proper application of the name. Perhaps, like Geach, you think of divine names—especially generic divine names like "God" and "Allah"—as operating much like abbreviated definite descriptions, pointing to a minimalistic "God of the Philosophers" sort of being, and anything meeting the description gets the name. But, again, there are other possibilities. Perhaps you use "Allah" deferentially, taking name-users who answer the question affirmatively to be experts, or perhaps you use the name demonstratively, and take yourself to have demonstrated, at some point in the past, with your use of "Allah," the same entity that Christians call "God."

On the other hand, perhaps you answer the question negatively, thinking that, if the Christian story is true, "Allah" could not refer to God. This shows that there is some information in the dossier for "Allah" that you take to be central, and which you take to be radically incongruous with the Christian conception of God. Likely you take this information to concern the Trinity, the Incarnation, the Crucifixion, or the Resurrection. Or *perhaps* your interpretation of some verses of the Qur'an lead you to believe that it's central to the conception associated with "Allah" that Allah is not *omni*benevolent, and you think this radically mismatches the Christian conception of God who loves the whole world (Jn. 3:16), who loves and dies for sinners (Rom. 5:8), etc.[43] According to you, then, information radically incongruous with the Christian conception of God has become dominant in the dossier for "Allah" as used by Muslims. And so, for you, if Christianity is true, there has been a reference shift in the Muslim use of "God," from God to fiction. (Again, a third option is to answer neither

[43]Read through the suwar of the Qur'an, and you'll find twenty or so descriptions of those Allah does not love, for example those given to excess (5:90, 7:55), the corrupt (2:205, 5:67), the sinners (3:57, 42:40), and the unbelievers (2:276, 3:32).

"yes" nor "no," and to say that the matter is a borderline case on a spectrum between clear cases of reference shifts and clear cases of reference preservation. On this option, there is no determinate fact of the matter, or at least none we're in a position to affirm.)

Let us say a brief word on the Muslim conception of "Allah" with regard to Trinitarianism, on the chance that it may impact your answer to our above question. While Trinitarianism and the Qur'an's commitment to God's Oneness appear incompatible, there is some debate about the language used in the Qur'an to reject the Christian conception of the Trinity. Miroslav Volf suggests that the Qur'an rejects a heretical conception of the Trinity, one that orthodox Christians should also reject.[44] For example, the first objection to Trinitarianism raised in the Qur'an is, "They do blaspheme who say: God is one of three in a Trinity: for there is no God except One God."[45] But this assertion, Volf points out, is consistent with *orthodox* Christian beliefs about the Trinity: to call God one of three in a Trinity would be to "slip into polytheism," which is clearly inconsistent with Christian doctrine. Similarly, the Qur'an asserts "that we worship none but God; that we associate no partners with him; that we erect not, from among ourselves, Lords and patrons other than God."[46] The Qur'an seems to be confronting a conception of God in which Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit are considered partners or associates of God. Here too we find no contradiction with orthodox Christianity. In sum, it may well be that the Qur'an fails to accurately characterize and engage Trinitarianism, and so no genuinely anti-Trinitarian information is found in the dossier of "Allah." This might incline some readers further toward an affirmative answer to our question above, and toward the view that, from a Christian perspective, there has been no reference shift in "Allah" from God to fiction.

Conclusion

So, do Muslims and Christians worship the same God? We've helped you discern whether, assuming Christianity is true, erroneous, source-less information has become dominant in the dossier of "Allah," in which case there's been a reference shift in "Allah" from God to fiction. And we've helped you discern whether, assuming Islam is true, erroneous, source-less information has become dominant in the dossier of "God," in which case there's been a reference shift in "God" from Allah to fiction.

You might think there's been a reference shift in both cases, or in one but not the other, or in neither case. If you think there's been a reference shift in both cases, then Christians and Muslims do not refer to—and, so, do not worship—the same God. If you think there's been a reference shift

[44]Volf, *Allah.*

[45]Volf, *Allah*, 132.

[46]Volf, *Allah*, 131.

in one case but not the other, then whether Christians and Muslims refer to and worship the same God will depend on whether you think Islam or Christianity is true. If you think there's been a reference shift in neither case, then the path is open, on your view, for Christians and Muslims to refer to, and perhaps *worship*, the same God.[47]

A complete answer to the question of worship would require discovering what conditions, in addition to reference, are required for worship, and whether Christians and Muslims both meet those conditions. That's a task best left to theologians on both sides. Here, we'll briefly sketch the outlines of such an answer. First, Islamic and Christian theologians would each have to discover what conditions could make an act of worship unacceptable: perhaps idolatry, half-heartedness, hypocrisy, arrogantly innovative styles of worship, the use of keytars, etc. Then, Christian theologians would have to decide whether Islamic forms of worship meet those conditions sometimes, always, or never. And Islamic theologians would have to do the same, with respect to Christian forms of worship. At the end of this inquiry, we'd be in a position to decide whether Muslims and Christians—given that they refer to the same God—manage to worship the same God sometimes, always, or never. Again, this is a task best left to theologians. But we'll go on the record as saying we'd be surprised if it turned out that—assuming they refer to the same God—Muslims and Christians *never* successfully worship the same God.

We close with one further reflection, on the connection between worship and salvation from a Christian perspective. Biblical evidence suggests that, even if Muslims aren't successfully referring to God when they worship, God may well still *accept* their worship, i.e., credit it to them as if they had worshiped him. For example, we learn in Matthew 25 that Jesus accepts charity done to "the least of these" as charity *done to him*. What goes with acts of charity not directed at God *may* also go with acts of worship not directed at God. Also, Christians should not rest complacent with their successful reference to God, since directing worship toward God is likely not sufficient for that worship to be accepted. As we suggested above, there are likely unacceptable forms of worship. And Matthew 7:22 tells us that even some who call upon Jesus as "Lord, Lord"—i.e., even some who successfully refer to Jesus with honor and deference—will be sent away from him, and Jesus will claim he never knew them, because they didn't do the will of the Father.[48] Appreciating the disconnect between worship and salvation could, as it were, lower the temperature of the discussion.

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[47]If you abstained from both of the questions, thinking that the answers are too unclear to say "yes" or "no," then, according to you, it's unclear (or indeterminate) whether Christians and Muslims worship the same God. If you abstained from one but not the other, then your answer to the "Same God?" question will depend on when you abstained, and which (if either) of the two religions you think is true.

[48]See also Isaiah 1:10–20.

From a Christian perspective at least, salvation may well not hinge on "worshiping the same God."[49]

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