

ELUCIDATING THE EUCHARIST

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At the beginning of the first of his *Lectures on Religious Belief* Wittgenstein talked about having seen the eucharist being carried in chromium steel during the First World War. ‘This’, we are told by student notes on the lecture, ‘struck him as ludicrous’ [19, 65]. Yet Wittgenstein’s purpose here is not to ridicule Catholic eucharistic belief or the practice out of which it arises and in turn influences. He has already drawn attention to another case, belief in an afterlife, in which some people will find a religious belief ludicrous and others will not. Later in the lectures, he speaks against any attempt to resolve these differences in attitude from an external perspective. Religious belief arises out of particular forms of life, and can only be understood if this is borne in mind.¹ Apart from the practice of a certain community, comported towards the world in characteristic ways, a doctrine may well appear insane, or even entirely incomprehensible.²

Catholic eucharistic belief and practice provide a particularly stark case of the disparity between external and internal perspectives. A person paying close attention to the eucharistic liturgy with no sense of its doctrinal context is likely to be baffled. She will report various things as having been done with bread and wine: gestures made with and towards them, genuflections, censings, elevations, and ultimately their consumption. She will, however, be entirely in the dark as to how these things might make sense. The intellectual justification offered by one of the faithful – ‘we believe the bread and wine to have been transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ’ – will be of no help. What could it possibly mean to say that bread and wine have become a human body and blood, given that there is no observable change? What are believers playing at in saying these things?

That the eucharist is perplexing from an external perspective is recognised within Catholic tradition: ‘*Praestet fides supplementum sensuum defectui*’. Yet the Catholic doesn’t simply claim that her words and actions around the eucharist are only comprehensible from the perspective of faith. She insists that certain amongst them are *true*. So, for example, ‘this is not bread’, said of the eucharist, is true, and conversely ‘this is bread’, said of the eucharist, is false. An adequate explication of eucharistic faith and practice needs to make sense both of the gulf between internal and external viewpoints on the eucharist and of the believer’s entitlement to assert as true certain propositions. It needs, moreover, to do so in a fashion that sits comfortably with the more general sacramental and christological context of eucharistic faith. The difficulty of satisfying these desiderata simultaneously has not always been appreciated. It is easy enough to secure the privilege of the internal perspective through espousing a form of practice-centred non-cognitivism, but that does not get us the truth of eucharistic doctrines. Truth might be secured by proposing that at the consecration God disguises a human body and blood as bread and wine,³ but this would be at the cost both of making God a deceiver and of sitting lightly to any sense in which the eucharist is a *sign*. A good account must do better than either of these.

The purpose of the present paper is to lay out an elucidation of eucharistic belief, drawing on and developing important work by Michael Dummett [7]. I have no aspiration, of course, to *explain* the eucharistic transformation – any philosophical engagement which removes the mystery from the Real Presence has missed its target – nor even to offer a metaphysical categorisation of the elements at various stages. More modestly, I intend to show how it could be the case that we speak truthfully

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of the eucharist, and to do so in a manner that recognises its christological context and is sensitive to the perplexity of external observers. This done, I will use my account as a basis for engagement with Aquinas' exposition of the doctrine of transubstantiation and with the modern revival in the recognition that sacraments are signs.

What follows is an exercise in what is increasingly called *philosophical theology*. My subject matter is a collection of logical and conceptual problems about a theological subject matter,⁴ and I address these as a philosopher. The paper is then in principle accessible to anyone regardless of their religious belief. Nonetheless to the extent that it addresses problems around beliefs particular to certain (predominantly Roman Catholic) strands in Christianity, it may well be of more interest to those situated in them. At no point, however, do I argue that the doctrine of the Real Presence is true.⁵ I simply intend to lay out a way of understanding it in which it is neither incomprehensible nor inconsistent. These are prerequisites for truth, but they are not sufficient for it. And the mainstream of Catholic tradition has held that there is no philosophical argument to be had here beyond consistency to truth: assent to the doctrine is a matter of faith, not of reason. How, then, might reason help us to understand how it could make sense to say that what appears to be bread is the Body of Christ?

1

Dummett's starting point in addressing this topic is to draw attention to the inscrutability of eucharistic transformation to empirical investigation as a profound problem,

The primary philosophical question is . . . how it is possible to deny propositions that pass all the normal tests for truth, namely that this is bread and wine, and affirm in their place propositions that pass none of these tests [7, 241].

That this is posed as a question about the very *possibility* of assertion and denial should be taken seriously. Dummett is, here as elsewhere, concerned with the theory of meaning. Proceeding from the Fregean identification of the sense of a declarative sentence⁶ (the thought expressed by it) with its truth conditions, Dummett's work on the philosophy of language has emphasised, on account of the public nature of meaning, that a grasp of these truth conditions must be capable of being manifested in the behaviour of language users.⁷ In particular, then, a grasp of the conditions under which 'this is bread' is true must be publicly manifestable. This is indeed the case if the usual business of empirical scrutiny will settle the matter; it is not obviously so if divine action can make it the case that the empirical methods, even carried to an ideal limit, could err. This, I take it, is something like Dummett's motivating worry in the paper (although this is not spelled out).

Quite apart from its not being explicitly formulated to address a concern about *meaning*, the doctrine of transubstantiation, as Dummett reads it, is judged by him to be unsatisfactory. On the one hand, it relies – in its appeal to the category of *accidents* – on the existence of what Dummett holds to be a 'curious category of entities, introduced into philosophy by Aristotle, particularized qualities' [7, 244]. On the other, even allowing that particularized qualities exist, the doctrine's proposal that the accidents of the bread and the wine continue to exist post-consecration as inhering in the dimensions of the formerly present bread and wine undermines the entire metaphysics of substance on which the proposal is based.⁸ Nor does Dummett resist the doctrine for solely, philosophical, as distinguished from theological, reasons. As he sees it, transubstantiation fails to postulate any interesting connection between the eucharist and the enduring accidents of the bread and the wine, and so cannot underwrite an adequate account of eucharistic practice – of the veneration and reservation of the elements, the significatory function of bread and wine, and so on.

This last worry seems to me the more significant, given that we want a philosophical engagement with questions about the eucharist to be accountable to religious practice.⁹ In due course I'll question whether it hits home as an objection against Aquinas on transubstantiation, but we should certainly take it to be a constraint on a satisfactory elucidation of the Real Presence that it not make it incidental the eucharistic presence is mediated by the species of bread and wine (using the Tridentine terminology so as not to beg metaphysical questions). Dummett's other worries about the thomistic

account have less force. In recent decades metaphysicians have taken a renewed interest in tropes, particularised qualities, [5][12] which look to be designated by noun-phrases such as ‘the weight of the truck’. Tropes have been invoked in theories of causation and material constitution, and look far less esoteric than Dummett supposes. Even free-floating tropes (not inhering in a substance, in scholastic terms) have been discussed, providing a close analogy to the post-consecration accidents of the bread and wine. Particularised qualities turn out to be more at home in contemporary philosophy than Dummett supposes.

Be that as it may, Dummett’s own approach addresses our question of the meaningfulness of eucharistic doctrine in a compelling fashion. We will now see how he proposes to improve on transubstantiation as an account of eucharistic presence. Consonant with a focus on the *practice* of eucharistic worship, indicative of Dummett’s background Wittgensteinianism [11], his starting point in seeking to preserve the intelligibility of eucharistic doctrine is a recognition that the eucharist is a sign. He has a degree of sympathy for the theory of transignification developed by some Catholic theologians in the mid 20th century. He writes,

I am afraid that I know this theory only in the version expounded at one time by Charles Davis, and cannot be sure that this is representative. In this version, at least, the fundamental idea, said to be derived from Heidegger, is that the character of an object depends upon our attitude towards it and the use we make of it: since we *treat* the consecrated elements as being the Body and Blood of Christ, that is what they *are*. [7, 248]

There are, however, problems with this view as it stands. First, it fails to distinguish between those sortal concepts the applicability of which is a matter of appropriate use by human beings (Dummett gives the example of *ash tray* as applied to a pyrex dish in his room) and those which seem independent of our practices: here Dummett instances two clearly relevant cases – *body* and *bread*; we will revisit the case of bread in due course. Second, transignification uncouples belief in the Real Presence from the wider structure of Christian faith and practice. On Davis’ account, one could accept that the eucharist is the Body of Christ (because it is treated as such by the relevant community) without believing in the Incarnation, or for that matter even believing that God exists. This is surely the wrong result: belief in the Real Presence is internal to a certain kind of Christian belief and practice, and cannot be separated from it conceptually. There has to be a certain sense in which Wittgenstein was *right* to regard the carrying of the eucharist in steel as ludicrous.

How then, for Dummett, is it intelligible that somebody could say both ‘this is the Body of Christ’ and ‘this is not bread’ of the eucharist? He wants to preserve the thought that being treated a certain way constitutes the elements as the eucharist. However, in order to escape the objections he has levelled at the transignificationists, Dummett insists that the elements must not only be treated as the Body and Blood of Christ, but treated as such in a suitably authorised fashion. In order to explicate what authorisation of the relevant type consists in, he has recourse to the notion of *deeming*. A person might, for example, be deemed to be somebody’s daughter - in virtue of this *deeming* they acquire the rights and obligations of a child, and indeed are truly the daughter of the person in question, yet our usual concept *daughter* remains unchanged and the facts about the daughter’s natural parentage, birth and upbringing are unaffected [7, 253]. Crucially, *deeming* can only take place with the authority of certain persons – in the case of *deeming* somebody to be a daughter the relevant legal authorities would be required to assent, but so would the parent or parents in question. You cannot deem somebody to be my daughter against my will.

Dummett’s proposal is that the *deeming* of the elements to be the Body and Blood of Christ constitutes them as such. The elements are deemed to be the Body and Blood of Christ, but are so deemed on divine authority, since the eucharist was instituted by Christ, who Christians believe to be God Incarnate. This appeal to divine *deeming* has several consequences favourable to Dummett. Because elucidation of the Real Presence involves an appeal to the Incarnation, eucharistic doctrine is situated within the wider structure of Christian belief. Similarly, assuming that the constitutive

moment of deeming with respect to the eucharist takes place at the institution narrative, our philosophical understanding of the eucharist points us towards liturgical practice, and indeed towards the historical roots of that practice in the actions of Jesus. Moreover because it is God who authorises the deeming there can be no question about whether the eucharist is *really* the Body of Christ, ‘there can be no gap between how God sees something and how it really is in itself’ [7, 255].¹⁰

We’ll turn to worries about Dummett’s view in a moment, engaging with them so as to arrive at a more satisfactory elucidation of the eucharist. First though, we should emphasise that the aim of the view is to deliver the truth of eucharistic doctrine in a context-independence fashion. It is simply true of the post-consecration Host that it is the Body of Christ, and conversely that it is not bread. This is so in virtue of the divine authorisation of the deeming. Similarly, that the consecration brings it about that what was bread is the Body of Christ is not dependent on the beliefs or attitudes towards the elements of the priest or congregation, nor is the ongoing presence of Christ in the eucharist. Although Dummett is not explicit on this point (he writes of ‘us’ deeming the bread to be the Body of Christ), it seems congruent with his approach to preserve the objectivity of the eucharistic presence after the fashion of Baber,

...marriage, money, boundaries, and the like are not ‘subjective’. They are the products of collective rather than individual intentionality and the institutions in which it is embodied. An individual cannot by his own initiative, through believing, wishing, or acting as if it were so, enter into or dissolve a marriage, acquire citizenship or increase the value of his portfolio. And, on the account proposed here, the presence of Christ in the Eucharist is likewise secured by the collective intentionality of an institution, viz. the Church. [3, 26]

It is the Church, following the command of Christ, Dummett may be imagined insisting, which deems the bread to be Christ’s Body. And there is nothing subjective about that.

2

Remember that Dummett’s initial question to eucharistic doctrine was from within the theory of meaning. How can it even be so much as intelligible to say of the eucharist that it is the Body of Christ and not bread, given that this has to be said in a public language, the meaning of expressions within which must be capable of public manifestation? It is not apparent that appeal to deeming in and of itself provides a basis for a satisfactory answer here. We want to understand how ‘this is the Body of Christ’, said of the eucharist, can be true and ‘this is bread’ false, given that there are publicly available conditions for the applicability of ‘bread’ and ‘body’, and that these contribute to the truth-conditions of sentences containing these expressions. Now, even if the bread is deemed to be the Body of Christ, it still looks as though the conditions for asserting ‘this is bread’ will be fulfilled, and those for asserting ‘this is the Body of Christ’ will not. On what basis then can we judge the former sentence to be false and the latter true?¹¹ How can our words ‘body’ and ‘bread’ be so much as used meaningfully in articulating eucharistic doctrine?

I think that a deeming-based account can supply satisfactory answers here. In order to do so it needs to pay attention to the context within which eucharistic deeming takes place and the purpose for which it is undertaken. Once again, then, we need to turn to religious practice.¹² The eucharist, in the understanding of Catholic believers, makes Christ present to them. It is furthermore a *meal*, not only commemorating the death of Christ¹³ but also pointing forward to the heavenly banquet.¹⁴ These two aspects of the eucharist, as a rendering-present and a meal, can be used to show how deeming can deliver the correct outcomes regarding truth without doing injury to a plausible theory of meaning. In what follows I will draw closely on the thought of another Wittgenstein-influenced philosopher of religion, and an under-valued one at that, Herbert McCabe [13, 116-129].¹⁵

There are two questions in need of an answer: (1) how could it be intelligible that what was bread is the Body of Christ?, and (2) how could it be intelligible that what was bread is no longer bread?¹⁶ McCabe thinks that we can make progress with (1) through reflecting on our understanding of bodies

and that we can make progress with (2) through reflecting on the nature and purpose of food. We will take each of these points in turn.

It is through our bodies that we are present one to another; ‘the human body is the best picture of the human soul’ [21, 281]. With this in mind, McCabe argues that Christ was more bodily after his resurrection than before [13, 125]. It is tempting to suspect that a fallacious inference is being made here. From the necessity of bodiliness to presence to the conclusion that to the extent that one is more present to others, one is more bodily, the mediating thought being that – as the gospel resurrection narratives attest – the post-resurrection Jesus is more capable of being present to others than was the pre-Easter Jesus. However, McCabe’s view is precisely that my body is to be *identified* with the extent of my stable presence in the world (I may temporarily extend my capacity for bodily action through using a tool, my body however is what lies in the background as the basis for that activity). The resurrection, then, transforms the nature of Jesus’ body, making him present to the community of believers as he was not previously, whilst his presence is recognisably bodily – confronted with him in the Upper Room, a disciple would still be prepared to say ‘there is a body’.

This openness to new manifestations of bodiliness looks to be contained within the concept *body*. We do not need to look as far as the claims of Christianity to find evidence for this. Imagine that somebody after an accident is fitted with a bionic arm. We would say that this is part of their body, and that the actions performed with the arm are bodily (we might perhaps want to make some kind of distinction, saying that the arm is not a natural part of their body, but that is another matter), and we would do this in spite of having initially acquired the use of the word ‘body’ through encounters with the natural bodies of animals. We can tell that we have not gone astray in our use here because of the regulatory function of the wider linguistic community – nobody steps in to correct our use – and because the extension of the application of ‘body’ to the bionic arm does not licence inferences to unwelcome conclusions, but rather helps us to reason and act in a world in which people sometimes have bionic arms.

The body of the Risen Christ is, according to Christian belief, capable of a more expansive presence than are natural human bodies without being undeserving of the application of ‘body’. A non-Christian can acknowledge that this *would* be the case were Christ, in fact, risen and so licence a counterfactual use of ‘body’ of a new kind, just as she takes bionic arms to licence actual uses of ‘body’ of an atypical kind. Similarly, once the more-than-natural nature of Christ’s risen body is taken into account, it becomes intelligible that an act of divinely authorised deeming could render that body present in hitherto unexpected places, and that this could be said to have happened without violence to the meaning of ‘body’. In particular, if the bread of the eucharist were deemed to be the Body of Christ, against the backdrop of beliefs that Christ is risen (and his body somehow more available) and that the deeming is authorised by a man who is God, then it is perfectly intelligible that we would call the eucharist Christ’s Body.¹⁷ This intelligibility, moreover, ought to be apparent to a non-Christian. She will, of course, deny that the eucharist is the Body of Christ, and do so understandably, but in order to so much as deny eucharistic doctrine it has to consist of intelligible thoughts. Attention to our use of ‘body’ secures intelligibility here, whilst tying the assertability of the claim that the eucharist is Christ’s Body both to the action of deeming and to belief in the Incarnation and the Resurrection.¹⁸

What, though, about the assertion that the eucharist is not bread? Surely here explication is a tougher call. McCabe emphasises that whatever one wishes to claim about what the eucharist is not, it is central to understanding its place in Christian life and symbolism to affirm that it is food, and that communicants are partaking of a meal:

It is not just that the common meal has become an obvious symbol of unity as in the ceremonial banquet or the drink in the bar, but this conscious ceremonial event has its roots in the bodily form itself. At every level from the milk I receive at my

mother's breast to the martini I receive from my host, food and drink is a communication of life. Food is a medium in which we communicate, come together, become more human. . . We may say that all eating and drinking is an attempt to reach towards the communication we will find only in Christ. [13, 127]

Food, on the operative understanding, is not simply a means of nourishment but rather a means of communication (for McCabe, 'the only more basic form of communication is in sexual union'). We share food together and in so doing signify things (think of a romantic meal, a birthday party, a dinner bought as an apology. . .) and facilitate conversation. It is unsurprising then that the eschatological restoration of human community is represented in Jewish and Christian scriptures as a banquet. The eucharist, which anticipates and aids progress towards this final destiny, and does so through bringing the believer into contact with the one who establishes the perfect community known as the Kingdom, fulfils this role of food *more* perfectly than does unconsecrated bread. So McCabe thinks that the eucharist is more properly called food than are the unconsecrated elements.

This much can be readily admitted with relatively little controversy, but might be thought not to address the burning question: for sure the eucharist is *food*, but is it *bread*? At this point it is worth revisiting a claim Dummett made about the word 'bread', that like 'body' and unlike 'ashtray', its applicability is independent of our practices of stipulation. There is something right about this; I cannot walk into my local supermarket, pick up a loaf of sliced white and determine that it will henceforth not be bread, and this is not simply because I lack the requisite authority. On the other hand, however, 'bread' is not a *natural* kind term; bread is a human artefact, and it would be quite wrong to apply the word 'bread' to a lump of doughy material with chemical constitution indiscernible from that of a loaf if it were discovered by a space probe on one of the moons of Jupiter. 'Bread' is, instead, a *functional* kind term: it applies to entities appropriately situated within human practices – of baking, feeding (making sandwiches, dipping. . .) and so on. The point regarding the eucharist is that the elements have, by the act of deeming, been removed from a context in which the practices characteristic of bread are operative into a new context, that of the eschatological future, in which they are no longer required to nourish or otherwise to play the characteristic functions of bread, but serve simply to communicate. The host is food, but it is no longer bread.

Is the thought, then, that the eucharist is no longer bread because it is no longer treated as bread? This might appear too swift for two reasons: first, the element was *made* as bread; second we can imagine bread being used solely for thoroughly untypical purposes without it ceasing to be appropriate to call it bread – bread is used to clean a bishop's hands at rites involving anointing with oil, but it is *bread* that is so used: the peculiar purpose for which it is employed make no difference to that. In combination these considerations could suggest that it is a sufficient condition for some entity's being bread that it be brought into being as bread, regardless of its subsequent use. Of course, this line of thought could go, bread remains a functional kind and it is important that bread be produced with the intention that it be bread, and that bread typically have the functions that it characteristically has in the community (of course, this can vary culturally and historically). In general, this is perfectly correct, but at this point the importance of the act of eucharistic deeming has to be reasserted. In assessing the intelligibility of the claim that the eucharist is not bread we should imagine a uniquely authoritative act of deeming which so decisively removes the bread from the possibility of its characteristic uses and so decisively establishes it with a new function that nothing in the natural properties or distinctive uses of bread would give us reason to anticipate that it is no longer correct to call the eucharist bread.¹⁹ In order for the non-Christian to understand what the doctrine of the Real Presence is asserting at this point, it is simply sufficient that she be able to contemplate a deeming of this sort, not believe that any such deeming happens. The proponent of the doctrine, on the other hand, will accept the reality of a sufficient decisive deeming in the light of her belief in the over-riding importance of the ends for which the bread is deemed to be the Body of Christ (namely the making present of the Risen Christ to his Church in anticipation of the heavenly banquet) and of the particular authority behind the deeming, issuing from the Incarnation. Once again, the acceptability (as distinguished from the intelligibility) of eucharistic doctrine can be seen

to be a product of Christian life and belief,²⁰ which is as it should be.

There will be tidying up to do here. For instance, some account might be desired of the continued, metaphorical, use of bread language about the eucharist ('bread of angels', 'the breaking of the bread'). My own instinct here is to be relaxed. Such language is not used to make assertions about the nature of the eucharist – here the explicit declarations of councils such as Trent are the exception rather than the rule in Christian eucharistic language. Instead words are being used to praise, to draw attention to the role of the Sacrament in the Christian picture of the world, to reassure the believer, and to perform numerous other non-assertoric speech acts. Merely to notice this is not, of course, to supply a get-out-of-jail-free card absolving the attentive philosophical theologian of the need to provide some account of the coherence of the believer's use of bread-language about the eucharist with her profession of belief in the real presence. However once due attention has been paid to the fact that this language does not purport to be assertoric, the worry that there is a *prima facie* problem disappears. Most of what believers say concerning the eucharist is not metaphysics, even of the lightweight sort in which we have been engaged here.

We now have an explication, call it the *Modified Deeming Explication*, of talk of eucharistic transformation (and thereby of eucharistic transformation itself): bread is deemed to be the Body of Christ with divine authorisation. The apparent unintelligibility of such deeming can be overcome by reflecting on bodies as the expanse of stable personal presence, the eucharist then being viewed as a focus of the abiding presence of the Risen Christ with the Church. Similarly, the apparent unintelligibility of the claim that the eucharist is not bread can be overcome by making a distinction between bread, as such, and food, in general and affirming that the eucharist is food whilst denying that it is bread, since it has been decisively set apart from the characteristic functions of bread and imbued with purposes belonging to the eschatological future. As with the assertion that the eucharist is the Body of Christ, the acceptability of the assertion that it is not bread will turn on one's situation within Christian life and practice. Recalling the dilemma with which we began, of the radically external and internal perspectives regarding the eucharist, we have a satisfactory reconciliation. The non-believer will (rightly, given her other commitments) think the doctrine of the real presence is false. She will, without explication, likely find the believer's assertions about the eucharist incomprehensible and at least suspect them of being nonsense. Even after explication, she is likely to be baffled by how believers act towards the eucharist. However, the intelligibility of eucharistic doctrine can be defended, and eucharistic doctrine explicated in such a fashion that the two parties can be seen to be engaged in a genuine disagreement about genuine thoughts. Yet the manner in which this is established reaffirms the importance of the internal/ external distinction for the *acceptance* of the doctrine of the real presence. For it is only from the perspective of Christian life and belief that it can be seen to be acceptable.

3

How much of a break is all this with Aquinas' account of transubstantiation, which has been uniquely influential on Catholic thinking about the eucharist? As we saw, Dummett took himself to be making decisive breaks with that account. I am more optimistic about the possibility of continuity between deeming-based accounts, including the Modified Deeming Explication, and Aquinas' position, if not that of some of his subsequent interpreters. That this is so is not a condition for the acceptability of deeming-based accounts. However important Aquinas' writings might be amongst religious communities affirming the Real Presence, they are not authoritative in the same sense as either scripture or official ecclesiastical teaching. Nevertheless, it is worth saying something brief about why I take there to be continuity, not least because it touches on wider issues of Aquinas interpretation likely to be of importance for the philosophy of religion, although what I say here will have to serve as a prelude to further work.

The main point on which I think there is more continuity than Dummett admits concerns the language of substance and accidents. In addition to this, I think that sense can be made from a

deeming-based perspective of Aquinas' view that the accidents of bread and wine continue to inhere post-consecration in the dimensions of the bread and wine. Since this latter view depends on the prior acceptability of talk of substance and accident, we shall address that matter first.

Remember that Dummett takes talk of accidents to be the result of a flawed metaphysics, committing us to a problematic category of individualised properties. Similarly he thinks that the notion of substance needed to underwrite thomist transubstantiation is indefensible, since he takes it to require a Lockean substratum underlying the properties of an entity and distinct from them [7, 245-6]. In both cases, commitment to the thomist doctrine is being understood as involving buying into a great deal of substantive metaphysics not already implicit in common sense and ordinary language. A reasonable person might well demur from such metaphysics. In common with many recent readers, then, Dummett takes Aquinas to be in possession of a revisionary, as opposed to a descriptive metaphysics [4] [16]. Once this move has been made, Aquinas appears to be proposing that there are esoteric metaphysical facts about the eucharist – described by Dummett by analogy with microphysics – in a manner that obscures rather than elucidates the Real Presence. But should Aquinas be read as a revisionary metaphysician?

We should not allow the unfamiliarity of Aquinas' terminology to distract us here (it is a commonplace observation that 'substance' and 'accident' mean something very different to speakers of modern English than did their Latin equivalents to medievals). Whilst the case cannot be made in the present paper, I think that it is reasonable to understand Aquinas – like Aristotle in the *Categories* and *Metaphysics* – as deploying metaphysical categories to organise and better understand the structure of the world as it is presented to us in ordinary thought and experience, rather than to investigate some more fundamental reality, possibly differing in important respects from the familiar world. If this is right then, adopting a more contemporary and language-orientated perspective, we can view substance-accident metaphysics in a deflationary light. To speak of some entity as a substance is just to say that there is an answer to the question 'what is it?' asked of it, given using a kind term which is a count noun. To speak of some entity as having a given accident is just to draw attention to there being an answer to a particular kind of 'how is it?' question.²¹

Once again, defending this is work for elsewhere. But it does sit comfortably with the account of transubstantiation in the *Summa Theologiae*. Here, whilst it is solely in virtue of divine action that the accidents of bread and wine persist after the consecration, that the accidents remain appears unremarkable and requires no metaphysical subtleties to affirm, 'It is evident to sense that all the accidents of the bread and wine remain after the consecration' (STh III, q75, a5). To say that the accidents remain just is to say that the eucharist looks white and round, is glutinous, contains so many calories, and so on. On substance, Aquinas is quite clear about the interchangeability of the question concerning the substance of the eucharist with a what-question concerning the eucharist. Thus, for example,

Christ's body cannot begin to be anew in this sacrament except by change of the substance of bread into itself. But what is changed into another thing, no longer remains after such change. Hence the conclusion is that, saving the truth of this sacrament, the substance of the bread cannot remain after the consecration. (STh III, q75, a 2, co.)

On both counts the Modified Deeming Explication concurs with the thomist theory, read as an application of descriptive metaphysics: after the consecration the substance of bread no longer exists, but the accidents of bread remain. But of what are these accidents properties? We've seen above that this question might be thought to be less in need of an answer than some have supposed, referencing the literature on free-floating tropes. Perhaps the blueness of the sky is a particular property that doesn't inhere in a substance: things just are such that the sky is blue, where neither 'things' nor the 'sky' should be thought of as designators. However Thomas is not of this opinion, and it is worth seeing whether peace can be made between the Modified Deeming Explication and Aquinas' own

attempt to reconcile his doctrine of transubstantiation with an Aristotelian aversion to uninstantiated properties. Dummett takes issue with Aquinas' move,

Aquinas proposes the . . . extraordinary theory that, among the persisting particularized qualities of the bread and wine that were formerly present, one of them, their dimension, as it were acts as a subject for the rest.

. . . Aquinas' theory involves that, after the consecration, the space formerly occupied by bread and wine now not only has a certain shape and size – a proposition with which we cannot quarrel – but also has a certain colour, a certain taste, a certain mass, and so forth; or, at least, that it as it were has them.

This, however, nullifies the entire theory. For, if it makes sense at all to ascribe such qualities – whether particularized or universal – to a region of space, then the same ascription must surely be made to the space occupied by the bread and wine before the consecration. [7, 244-5]

In actual fact Aquinas does not quite hold that the dimension of the elements acts as a subject for their former accidents post-consecration. He quite explicitly denies that the accidents inhere in a substance in anything like the usual way, if they can be said to have a subject at all it is the (no longer existent) bread which provides a 'resemblance of a subject' (STh III, q75, a 5, ad. 4). However the dimensions of the bread and wine serve to locate the other accidents, and so provide an answer to questions of the sort '*where* is it white/ *where* is there alcohol/ *where* is that roundness?', which we may want to ask even if eucharistic faith prevents us from asking more natural-sounding questions like '*where* is the white thing?'. The proponent of the Modified Deeming Explication can, indeed must, adopt the same approach: she is committed to there being no bread on the altar, since it has been deemed to be the Body of Christ, but the individual properties of the bread are still there (and '*there*' picks out just what Aquinas would have termed the bread's dimension).

Yet Dummett himself is not in obvious disagreement with the thomistic position as thus understood. He favours understanding the continuing existence of the properties of the bread and the wine in terms of the multi-levelled structure of reality disclosed by modern science. So, to speak about the persistence of nutritional content just is to say something about the existence of certain molecules in the matter of the host. Yet this in turn is really just to say that certain molecules are in a certain place – Dummett is not intending the word 'matter' in an Aristotelian sense. And this is, at least, highly congruent with the thomist view that the dimensions of the bread and wine are necessary to situate the accidents post-consecration, just so long as talk of 'dimension' is understood in a metaphysically deflationary fashion, as drawing our attention to the answers to certain '*where*' questions, rather than as theorising about an esoteric reality. In conclusion, then, if we understand thomistic metaphysics as descriptive rather than revisionary, then appeals to deeming might be read less as rivals to the doctrine of transubstantiation than as complements to it, making explicit in particular the role of signification in the eucharist.

4

The eucharist, whatever else it is, is a symbol. This much was certainly acknowledged by Aquinas, who begins his discussion of the sacraments by insisting that every sacrament is a sign (STh III, q. 60, a. 1). Yet it is a familiar truth that this insight was lost over the centuries, as the nature of the eucharist was subjected to increasing scrutiny and the object of increasing theoretical classification in the light of challenges to the doctrine of the Real Presence. Social and intellectual shifts gradually made the metaphysics to which the doctrine apparently committed Catholics seem untenable: on the one hand, as Dummett worried, is the claim that the eucharist is not bread even so much as intelligible?; on the other hand, a revived emphasis on practice made the metaphysics of the eucharist contained in the manuals seem strangely detached from the pew and the altar.

The Modified Deeming Explication, following Dummett, meets modern animadversions on both points. Attention to the practice of deeming and to the concepts of body and of bread provides us with a strategy for showing the person external to Christian practice, and reassuring the believer internal to it, that eucharistic doctrine is intelligible. Yet because this strategy makes essential appeal to communal acceptance of doctrinal claims concerning the Incarnation and Resurrection and to the nature of the eucharist as a symbolic meal, our understanding of the sacrament is brought down to earth, out of the metaphysics books and into the sanctuary.

This does not mean of course, that the doctrine of the Real Presence will be any more demanding of assent from those not on the inside of Christian practice and thought. Wittgenstein, had he been in possession of a deeming account, would still no doubt have found the carrying of the eucharist in chromium steel ridiculous. And yet progress will have been made: the non-believer can, on the basis of a deeming account, at least be clear that the believer is not talking nonsense, and thus be reassured that she is denying a genuine thought herself. She can also get a sense of how eucharistic belief fits into the broader structure of Christian thought and symbolism, to which she is external.

That it is not nonsense and that it ought to be approached through attention to Christian life: philosophy can say this much about eucharistic doctrine. Whether it is *true* is another matter altogether, and at this point philosophy must be silent.

NOTES

¹The *Investigations* terminology ‘form of life’ does not occur in the lectures, but is consonant with the view taken there [21]. I do not think that anything said in the *Lectures* entails the form of relativism subsequently called ‘Wittgensteinian fideism’. See here the discussions in [14].

²Of course it may be in a particular case that the doctrine in question just *is* insane or incomprehensible. The point is simply that we shouldn’t assume this to be so because it appears to be *from the outside*.

³My own view is that God could do no such thing, since there is no intelligible state of affairs consisting in a human body and blood being disguised as bread and wine. Nevertheless, it is a view that has been held of the eucharist, and boasts amongst its merits securing the robust (worldly, correspondence...) truth of ‘this is not bread’.

⁴In the broad sense of ‘logical’ whereby, for example, it is a logical problem how we can legitimately say of something that looks like bread that it is the Body of Christ.

⁵A note on usage: I use ‘Real Presence’ to designate the doctrine that after the consecration it is false to say that the Host is bread, and true to say that it is the Body of Christ (and *mutatis mutandi* for the wine). I use ‘transubstantiation’ to designate Aquinas’ explication of this in the *Summa Theologiae*.

⁶Which Frege took to be identical with that of the corresponding imperative and interrogative sentence, these differing in force from the declarative.

⁷See, e.g. [6] For a good overview of Dummett’s philosophy of language, see [18].

⁸For an overview of Aquinas’ metaphysics of the material world, including a discussion of transubstantiation, see [4], but see below for doubt about the claim that Aquinas is a revisionary metaphysician.

⁹This more practical orientation arises from the influence of Wittgenstein. On Wittgensteinian approaches to the eucharist see [11], and for another example Anscombe’s essay on transubstantiation [1]. On practice-orientation in philosophy of religion see [15].

¹⁰There are continuities here with Dummett’s sometime association of realism with theism, about which I have voiced concern elsewhere [10]. Note, however, that those concerns were rooted in the suggestion that God *qua* God can decide certain questions. Here, however, it is God *qua* human being, in Christ, to whom appeal is made, and my objections have no force.

¹¹In Arcadi’s classification, then, I’m looking to explicate a Roman transubstantiation view [2, 403]. I disagree with Arcadi’s claim that Dummett does not defend this kind of view. I think this issues from an expectation that the Roman transubstantiation theorist must be committed to a robust ‘metaphysical’ transformation, of the sort Dummett rejects in his paper. But this makes doctrine too much hostage to metaphysics (what if ‘robust’ metaphysics just isn’t possible?). Dummett has it that ‘this is bread’ is false and ‘this is the Body of Christ’ is true. This seems to me to capture what is intelligible regarding claims about substance, on which see below.

¹²Compare [8, 71]; note though that a deeming-based approach calls into question the absoluteness of the distinction Guzie draws between approaches to the eucharist that ask ‘what is it?’ and those that ask ‘what do we do with it?’.

¹³‘When we eat this bread and drink this cup we proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes’.

¹⁴These aspects are expressed well in the text often attributed to Aquinas:

‘O sacred banquet! in which Christ is received,
the memory of his Passion is renewed,
the mind is filled with grace,
and a pledge of future glory to us is given.’

Note that the Latin *convivium* makes the shared aspect of the meal more prominent than the English translation ‘banquet’.

¹⁵On McCabe as a philosopher of religion, see [9].

¹⁶Of course there are plenty of situations in which it is perfectly intelligible that what was once bread is no longer bread, namely those involving (in Aristotelian terms) ordinary substantial change – bread becomes mould, or is digested, or is baked into a bread and butter pudding. Eucharistic change, however, is not supposed to be of this sort (See STh III, q75, a3).

¹⁷The emphasis on the concept *body* here might cause readers to worry about whether the reasoning of this section can be transferred to the case of belief in the transformation of wine into Christ’s Blood. Here it is important to emphasize the Catholic understanding, taught by the Council of Trent, in which the whole Christ is present (‘body, blood, soul, and divinity’ under either species alone. The presence of Christ in the chalice, then, is just as much a matter of his body being present – which is, after all, the only way a human being can be present – as is the presence of Christ in the Host. Thanks to N for pressing this point in discussion.

¹⁸I am extremely uninterested in the kind of quasi-scholasticism which worries about the invocation of the Resurrection here on the basis that it calls into question whether the Last Supper was a eucharist. Quite apart from moving the emphasis away from where it belongs, namely eucharistic practice here and now, this line of questioning invariably seems to ignore two obvious answers: (a) the Last Supper was not a eucharist, but included a command to celebrate the eucharist (this line can be missed owing to the representationalist temptation to parse ‘this is my Body’ as a metaphysical assertion rather than, for example, a performative); (b) the Last Supper was a eucharist, in which the Risen Christ, not subject to the usual temporal bounds, became present.

¹⁹Which is not to say that it was not once bread. Compare Aquinas’ defence of transubstantiation against an annihilationist approach in STh III, q75, a4. It seems to me important for the religious significance of the eucharistic rite (particularly the offertory) that our food is genuinely made into eschatological food, not simply replaced by it.

²⁰Why ‘life and belief’ rather than simply ‘life’? I think that religious belief apart from religious practice is a philosopher’s abstraction, but this apart it seems to me, nobody is going to be brought to the point where the question of eucharistic presence

forces itself upon them apart from actual encounters with the eucharist. Here, belief in other Christian doctrines can break down barriers to their accepting the eucharist as what the liturgy claims it to be. But belief in those doctrines in turn seems integrally tied up with practical matters: isn't faith in the resurrection at least as much a matter of assent to the continuing presence of Christ with the community of faith as of, say, a positive evaluation of the resurrection narratives? c.f. Wittgenstein, 'It is love that believes the resurrection' [20, 33e]. Of course, Catholic tradition would want to assert the role of prevenient grace in these matters. I would simply add that any satisfactory elucidation of what talking of such grace involves will focus on the lived practice and experience of the faithful.

²¹Isn't this nominalism? No. It is to take at face value ordinary claims to the effect that, say, there *are* colours (after all there is the colour of that table of there), and to refuse to admit more recondite questions about whether there are *really* tables. There is an affinity here with 'easy' approaches to ontology [17].

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