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Language is properly said to function existentially—and thus to be existential language—whenever it is used to ask and answer our existential question, which is to say, the question that we as human beings are all always engaged in somehow asking and answering about how we are to understand ourselves together with others in the ultimate setting of our existence as parts of the encompassing whole. Language used to answer this existential question functions existentially—either directly or indirectly.

It functions so directly—and thus is direct existential language—whenever it is used to express a certain answer to our existential question, whether by confessing one's own self-understanding or by calling others to understand themselves in a certain way. It functions indirectly—and thus is indirect existential language—whenever it is used to explicate a certain answer to the existential question by explicating a certain self-understanding and the corresponding understanding of human existence, with its distinctive *credenda*—things to be believed—and *agenda*—things to be done.

Language functioning existentially in either of these ways necessarily implies not only the meaningfulness but also the validity of language functioning in the other way. Thus language that is directly existential, in that it is used to confess or to call for a certain self-understanding, necessarily implies that language that is indirectly existential, in that it is used to explicate the same answer to the existential question, is not only meaningful but also valid. Conversely, language that is indirectly existential, in that it is used to explicate a certain answer to the existential question, necessarily implies that language that is directly existential, in that it is used to confess or to call for the same self-understanding, is as valid as it is meaningful.

The basic unit of existential language, be it directly or indirectly existential, is the existential utterance. Thus a direct existential utterance may be said to be valid as well as meaningful if, and only if, the indirect existential utterance whose meaningfulness and validity it necessarily implies is not only meaningful but also valid—and, conversely, an indirect existential utterance may

be said to be not only meaningful but also valid if, and only if, the direct existential utterance whose meaningfulness and validity it necessarily implies is likewise valid as well as meaningful. Indirect existential utterances, however, are properly said to be existential *assertions*, i.e., existential utterances that make or imply a validity claim to be true and that therefore must be verifiable in some way if they are meaningful utterances.

But how, exactly, can existential assertions in this sense (including existential-historical assertions) be verified? The key to an answer to this question lies in recognizing that existential assertions (including existential-historical assertions) necessarily presuppose and imply both properly metaphysical and properly moral assertions. Therefore, if an existential assertion is true, this can only be because its necessary presuppositions and implications both metaphysical and moral are also true. Conversely, any true metaphysics and any true ethics necessarily implies the true answer to the existential question, even if it does not, and cannot, imply any of the many possible explicit formulations of that answer, including those of all the particular religions.

As for the question whether the properly theoretical language of theology and philosophy is also existential, the answer is affirmative, even though such language is still more indirectly existential than that used to explicate a self-understanding together with the understanding of human existence that it necessarily implies. Because theology and philosophy are both oriented, in their different ways, by the existential question, even they use language to ask and answer this question, albeit with the still higher degree of indirectness required of any form of critical reflection and proper theory.