Instead of a Conclusion

§160. It would be in transparently poor taste to end a book of this nature, a book whose very title starts Towards..., with a list of definitive conclusions. Our science is nascent, rudimentary, unrecognized; and what the reader has been perusing has really been a manifesto calling for its creation, much more than it has been a survey, a gazetteer, or a guidebook. Even those points that now seem securely established may yet need to be fundamentally re-examined; much else is frankly tentative and provisional. The various worked examples, too, have been taken from quite a wide range of belief systems, where in most instances I can claim no particular expertise: I hope – although I am not certain – that I have avoided outright factual error, but I am well aware that my analyses will stand in need of correction and expansion by specialists. (The risk of humiliating oneself by straying into areas where one is not perfectly informed is, of course, present whenever one undertakes to discuss matters of general theory without remaining always at the level of pure generalization, and I therefore run it gladly; I could easily have sidestepped this danger if I had been willing to draw all my examples from certain narrow fields where I do indeed possess specialist knowledge, but I am not convinced that the book would thereby have been rendered more interesting, more readable, or more honest.) Instead of offering conclusions, therefore, I propose to spend a few pages outlining what I regard as the most promising directions for future research in the science of belief systems. To the extent that I have the opportunity and the ability, I intend to pursue some of these points myself; but real progress is most likely to be achieved if the work is undertaken collaboratively.

§161. Meaningful comparative research into certain belief systems can scarcely even begin, however, in view of the serious gaps that exist in the available evidence. I am not here referring to the lack of evidence for some belief systems’ esoteric content (§85): here the difficulty is in the nature of the case, and it will only ever be overcome if believers themselves decide to permit scientific students access to doctrines that are ordinarily restricted to initiates. (Such permission would be a great courtesy, and I am sure that any descriptive logician to whom it might be extended would do everything possible to avoid revealing confidences...
unnecessarily, but in many instances we understandably cannot expect it to be granted.) But, in the absence hitherto of any science of belief systems, the central documents that would provide evidence for particular belief systems’ propositional and affective content have frequently gone without critical editions or translations into foreign languages. The works of Michel Aflak and other founders and proponents of Baathism have not, in the main, been published in any language but Arabic: the possibility of understanding Baathism scientifically is thus very largely restricted to people who can read that language. Naturally, someone who intends to become a specialist on Baathism will probably already know Arabic (and, if not, can legitimately be expected to learn). But any such specialist who then wonders whether there are any useful parallels to be drawn with Marhaenisme, or Zviadism, or Eurasianism, or Integralism, or Kemalism will quite rapidly find that the linguistic barriers become insurmountable. The scope for useful comparative work is thus rather limited. If there are any moneyed patrons who would like to immortalize their names by making a substantial endowment to promote the science of belief systems, therefore, they could do considerably worse than to fund the publication of a series of uniform volumes in which representative documents from different belief systems would appear in English or German translation, together with the requisite historical notes and, ideally, a logical commentary.

§162. Further refinements to the basic techniques of descriptive logic seem likely to arise naturally, as more belief systems are reconstructed and as reconstructions are criticized and compared. It will be necessary to develop canons, or at least conventions, governing the ways in which the commonest steps and sequences are represented; and, while one may hope to do without an excessive flowering of neologisms, we shall probably find ourselves needing at least some new terminology to describe types and varieties of logical form without reference to the specific content. There is also a need for systematic thought and experiment on the matter of symbolic notation. More generally, we may hope that the continuing application of descriptive logic will yield a corpus of reconstructions that will allow us to begin framing theories as to the different modalities or styles of logic that may prevail under different sets of circumstances. We are probably still some way from being able to attempt a general typology of belief systems’ logical forms – even an incomplete one – that would permit descriptive logic to stand on all fours with comparative descriptive grammar (where the criteria for typological classification are relatively well developed): but that goal need not remain unattainable forever.